

FLORIDA MUSIC EDUCATORS CONVENTION 2014

“Essentials of Performance Quality – The Assessment of Musical Detail”

**“UNDERSTANDING THE FBA CONCERT ASSESSMENT SHEET AND
SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS WITH YOUR MUSICIANS”**

**SPONSORED BY THE FLORIDA CHAPTER OF:
AMERICAN SCHOOL BAND DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION**

CLINICIANS:

Mr. Jason Duckett – Band Director – Bartram Trail High School

Mr. Ivan Wansley – Adjunct Faculty – Florida Southern College

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Room – TCC 17

Common sense should dictate that to achieve success in an assessment situation, one needs to have a strong understanding on the evaluative tool. Then of course the educator must focus on having the ability to express this understanding to their musicians.

BASIC FUNDAMENTALS:

- **TONE QUALITY** – “The character of the sound achieved in performance on an instrument” – “The quality of sound that distinguishes one instrument from another” Harvard Dictionary of Music

Tone is the basic of all fundamentals – the most important aspect of any performance and the most important basic fundamental for all musicians to accomplish.

“I do not teach adjustments, such as lip pressure or moving tuning slides, until after a student has learned how to use proper air support for the entire range of the instrument. Because a lack of proper air support and a poor tone color causes most gross intonation problems, I develop support first so I can tune up “good-tones,” rather than try to tune up “no tones!”
Richard Putzier

“Have your students “over blow” – put more air into the instrument than is really needed. It should make sense that the first job in achieving good tone is teaching the student how to use premium air – making sure the air is making it all the way through the instrument. This also assists with the development of strong embouchures and endurance. A body builder does not become stronger by simply lifting the same amount of weight every day.” Ivan Wansley

Building tone:

- Professional examples – demonstrated by you and/or the use of recordings – use solo recordings and full band recordings
- Pedagogy – take the necessary time to establish correct embouchures. What is the one characteristic of all wind player embouchures? Why are clarinet players not necessarily a good switch to oboe or bassoon versus a saxophone player? They should look natural.
- “We start with long notes, because they have more time to deal with tone. They can think about what they are going to do, and how to do so correctly.” Frank Battisti
- Tone and the percussion section – “I am very particular about what my percussionists do. I am like a hawk on my percussion, for instance, with the type of sticks they are using. I am very particular about the sounds that are coming from the percussion section.”
Richard Suddendorf
- It does help if students are able to purchase immediate and professional level instruments but a good professional can make a student level instrument sound pretty good. Why?
- Since new instruments are not always financially feasible, start with upgraded mouthpieces and/or reeds. Personally not a big supporter of expensive ligatures – a good strong rubber band accomplishes the same goal. Do have a few concerns with metal ones that can easily be overcome.
- Sing – mentioned under intonation also. We learn from professional singers who tend to sing with a “tall mouth.” Encourage the use of lots of air and breath support.

- INTONATION – “the degree to which pitch is accurately produced in performance, especially among the players in an ensemble” Harvard Dictionary of Music
- “Intonation is an ensemble thing – tuning is an individual thing” Ivan Wansley
- “Tune octaves across the ensemble” Charles Quarmby
- Go beyond tuning the standard “Concert B-flat or Concert F” – strive to have your band tune a Concert A – B and E. Do you know the clarinet needs to tune three areas? The clarinet needs to tune the upper, middle and lower parts.
- Using the “Treasury of Scales” to develop listening skills:
- Have the group “playing the scale” do so while rest of group listens – maybe “fingers” their individual parts. Then have entire group perform – making sure that we still hear the scale.
- The standard “play the scale in a round” exercise. So many bands the students are not listening for the other “entrances.”
- “Tuning the Band and Raising Pitch Consciousness” Dr. James Jurrens – RBC Publications – 1991 – Outstanding resource to help your musicians learn the tendencies of their individual instrument and also ways to fix them. Require the students to turn in a series of tuning charts. This book is a great resource for them to learn alternate fingerings and the other “tricks” to achieve better individual tuning.
- For ensemble tuning we learn the tendencies of different chords. For example with a major triad, the third needs to be tuned 14 cents flat while the fifth is tuned 2 cents sharp. Again make your students aware.
- Developing listening skills with beginners: 5 note aural “call and response.” Upon learning the first five notes presented in a beginning method book, use them to start develop listening skills
- Sing – yes sing. After you play the chorale – sing the chorale. Just do not play the Concert B-flat scale – sing the B-flat scale and all other scales. Include the arpeggio.
- BALANCE – Making sure all of the parts on the musical score are being realized.
- Balance to the melody BUT the majority of the time melodies will tend not to have any problems being heard. Why? Normally the melody is presented in sections that tend to have the stronger players.
- Make sure that we hear what is harmonizing the melody – do a simple chordal analysis – make a piano reduction score if needed. We must have the right amount of each “ingredient” to achieve a balanced sound. You must be aware of what is on the page. Many times that means we might need to re-score a chord to achieve the harmony the

composer desires. You really find out about a composer and/or arranger by how they are able to harmonize a melody. Clare Grundman is a perfect example.

- Explaining balance to our musicians: “To teach balance, I refer to a theater stage. For an oboe solo I might say, “Now your section should be in the background here. Back up, move more backstage because the oboist is out front.” John Williamson
- McBeth’s “Pyramid of Sound” – “Effective Performance of 20th Century Literature”
Southern Music – thought of as the Band Directors “Bible” for creating a good balanced and blended sound. Remember our ears hear high sounds easier than we do low sounds.” Never forget though, the “Pyramid” is not good for all compositions that you play – especially composers like Grainger and Persichetti. The “Pyramid” is a good start for the majority of literature that our bands will play.
- If we all parts play the same dynamic, how can we achieve a good balance? Refer to a drawing of the “Pyramid.” If we all play the same dynamic then we will achieve a “rectangle of sound.”
- All parts are important. “One of the problems we all have is morale in the third trumpet, second clarinet, etc. When we work on balance, I tell my third players, “It is time again for you to make the firsts sound better. You can do this by supporting them more, by being strong on your part.” They always get a kick out of that approach since they sometimes feel it means, “Well, you can make them sound better than they are.” Francis Marciniak
- “The reference point for pitch and balance must be the bottom of the band. The top of the band must never play louder than the bottom of the band will let it play. “Listen down.” Robert Allan
- Maintaining balance with a crescendo and decrescendo using the “Pyramid”
- BLEND – “place your sound inside of your neighbors sound. Then place those sounds inside of the low sounds.” Ivan Wansley
- What is Blending? “Blending means achieving a meshing of colors and a meshing of balance.” Larry Rachleff
- Teaching blend in rehearsal. “We try to have a section learn and understand how their section’s sound inside the sound of another section. I combine words like “horn-sax sound” to portray a certain tone color that is a combination of two instrument’s sounds. This means that one section’s or one instrument’s volume should not be dominating when they try to get a blend. The functional definition means that you play with a volume level that allows one to hear the other color.” Richard Floyd
- It is difficult to blend a particular’s instruments timbre if there are different concepts of what that particular instrument is supposed to sound like. Before blend can be achieved, a good characteristic tone quality must be achieved.

- When striving for better blend – shut your eyes and only use your ears. Hearing is our strongest sense when we cannot see.
- Let the different instrument groups know who they are performing with. Many times tenor saxophones double the trombone/euphonium part – alto sax doubles the French horn part. Make the musicians aware of this.
- For all of the concepts mentioned above and below – record your ensemble as much as possible. Have a quiet place where you can listen – have paper available to write down what you are hearing. Sometime we are so concerned about how we look as conductors that we turn our ears off.
- The use of small ensembles will really benefit the concepts of intonation – balance and blend. Strongly suggest that you maintain “standing” groups for the entire year – not just for participation at solo and ensemble. There are so many advantages beyond developing better musicians.
- BAND SONORITY – Sonority – “the combination of all sounds and timbres”
- Listen – listen – listen. Military bands – especially the D.C. groups – professional wind bands – The Dallas Winds – The Florida Wind Band – Chicago Symphony, etc. Never forget to achieve the correct band sonority – the sound must be developed from the bottom up. Do not be afraid to “layer” the different sounds – allows the younger musician to really be able to hear the different parts of the band. Listening to great recordings or bringing in professional musicians should be a regular activity. Even reach out to local colleges and universities.
- PHYSICAL ARTICULATION – the physical motion of the tongue. “More air – less tongue.” Ivan Wansley
- Four important ingredients for good articulation:
 - Good breath support – never forget these are “wind instruments” not “tongue instruments” – when there is a problem start with “more air and/or better breath support.”
 - Appropriate embouchure
 - Accurate fingers
 - Tongue – remember the tongue does not start the air – it interrupts the air for good articulation and releases the air to begin a note.
- For the clarinet – “top of the tip of the tongue to the bottom of the tip of the reed”
- It is a vertical motion for the clarinet – not a horizontal.

- 5 and 9 note articulation bursts

TECHNICAL PREPARATION

- **NOTE ACCUARY** – scales are so important. “You learn 12 and get 3 for free.” You need to make them a priority. Do not learn just the all-state pattern – that is muscle memory – not knowing the major scales. Suggestion by Ed Lisk how to learn a major scale:
 - A. Look at the scale written out and say the name of the notes while doing the fingerings
 - B. Play the scale while looking at the notes
 - C. Say the name of the notes and do the fingerings without looking at the scale
 - D. Play the scale without looking at the scale.
 - E. Make sure the students know the name of the notes – not “3rd position.” The challenge will be the notes above and below the treble and bass clefs.
- **RHYTHMIC ACCUARY** – strive to count every day from the very beginning. Have the students compose 8 bars for a selected time signature and write in the counts. Have 2 students write their 8 bars on the board – everyone counts and claps. Teach them the vocabulary.
 - A. Use a metronome from the beginning – from the beginner’s first whole note to the more difficult rhythmic challenges performed by our high school bands. Again you should strive to count something different every day and then perform.
 - B. Eight basic one beat patterns in when the quarter note equals one and the half note equals one.
 - C. Basic two beat patterns in 4/4 or 2/2
 - D. Basic three patterns when the Eighth note equals one – 3/8 – 6/8 – 9/8
 - E. Learn the language – show them what they are going to encounter the majority of the time
 - F. Do not say “Cut Time” – compare a measure of 2/4 and 2/2
 - G. **“WE DO NOT REST IN MUSIC – WE EXECUTE OR PERFORM SILENCE!”** One of the biggest problems all ensembles have rhythmically is executing the “rest.” Teach them from the beginning that they are “silent notes” – not “rests.” What does rest mean before you got into music? You did not have to think – but you do during silence in music. Suggestions on how to count rests!
 - H. **“101 Rhythmic Rest Patterns”** – Fussell Book – All-State Sight Reading Books – **“Contemporary Rhythm and Meter Studies”** Del Borgo – method books have a rhythm section. Again use a metronome.
 - I. Sub-divide from the beginning – at least as soon as they learn 8th notes.
 - J. Simplify the rhythm – composers could make it a lot easier at times.
- **PRECISION** – accuracy – this is related to rhythmic feeling and the ability to sub-divide. In many ways related to technique.

- **ENTRANCES** – the beginning of the note – remember the tongue does not start the note – it releases the air. Need to have a good shape to the beginning of the note. In reality how much time do we spend on entrances or the “release of the air?”
- **RELEASES** – the majority of the time you do not stop the air with the tongue – “put the lid over the pipe.” A professional singer many times will release a note by “taking a breath.” Bands tend to clip phrases. Million dollar tip – “if you do not say it that way we tend not to play it that way.” Ivan Wansley
- **INTREPERTIVE ARTICULATION** – what does it mean when a note has an accent – marcato accent – a tenuto marking – or a staccato? Nuance realization. Adds a different “flavor” to the note. It is like when we add seasoning to the food we eat. Gives music its unique “style” – found under musical effect. Remember a Mozart staccato is different than a Stravinsky staccato. Interpretive Articulation is directed related to Interpretation found under musical effect also.
- **CLARITY OF ARTICULATION** – “same distance between all articulated notes.” Do not allow the piccolo decide the unified “note length.” Probably the tuba will not be a good example either. Use a flute – clarinet – trumpet. Have one player perform an articulated passage – just a few bars. Have another player who is playing the same articulation play – compare the two. Clarity of Articulation is directed related to precision. Line things up “vertically.”
- **TECHNIQUE** – developed through the practice of major scales – chromatic scales – arpeggios – thirds and other interval patterns. Klose book is great for the clarinet – Arbans for brass – Rubank Advanced Methods – Rose studies for the clarinet – any other method book. They must also be able to read the language. Teach them the rhythmic vocabulary.
- **STABILITY OF PULSE** – not only should you use a metronome when working with the band but also when you are doing private preparation. Find out the places that you slow down – speed up. Be aware of natural tendencies – loud means faster – soft means slower.
- **DYNAMICS OBSERVED** – I personally feel we place too much emphasis on dynamics too early in the process. Please understand, I know how important dynamics are BUT if you are playing the correct dynamic with a bad tone quality – as an adjudicator you will not receive credit for the dynamic level. I simply will not be able to get past the fact the tone is so bad – the ensemble intonation is so bad – the balance, blend and band sonority is so bad. Again dynamics are important but if you are only talking about dynamics – you are missing what is important on the score. Have a priority list – dynamics in my opinion are not in the top 10 of things we need to take care of as we prepare for performance assessment.
 - A. Dynamics are relative – not literal.
 - B. We must “shade” dynamics to achieve appropriate balance
 - C. The key to play soft is to feel like you are playing loud

- **TRANSITIONS** - your responsibility as the conductor. Again use the metronome. Remember we prepare things in music unless the term subito is there. Transitions can mean a tempo change – a meter change – with the meter change is it primary beat to primary beat – quarter to dotted quarter – does the 8th note remain the same. Never forget find the common denominator.
- **PHRASING** – I feel the term “phrasing” is a technical preparation along with a musical effect. We must speak in complete sentences but that does not mean the phrase has an effect. Did you ever have teacher or a current colleague that speaks in a mono-tone? The odds are they speak in complete sentences though. Again if “we do not say it that way – we do not tend to play it that way.”
- **TEMPO** – can also be under technical preparation. Use a metronome – stay true to the composer’s markings. Do not allow egos take charge here. Just because the individual or ensemble can play something faster does not mean it makes it technically or musically correct.

MUSICAL EFFECT – this is the toughest area to explain and to teach. I mentioned the term mono-tone above. I do hope we realize that speaking in a mono-tone is not creating musical effect. The better musician that we are, the easier it will be for us to express this to our ensembles. We become better musicians by listening to professional recordings – attending live professional concerts – playing in local community bands and/or orchestras. I do not suggest that we simply crescendo for 4 measures and decrescendo for 4 measures and call that “expression.” Expression is found in the harmony which builds intensity. Is the chord consonant or dissonant? Remember dissonance does not allow us to relax – what is the quality of the chord – major – minor – augmented – diminished? Same for “shaping of line” – do we want to speak in a mono-tone? We do seek out high points in the phrase – sometimes to go the end of the phrase before we relax. Again the better musician you are the better your group’s music effect will be. Never forget though – music normally has motion – it is going somewhere – going to the cadence point.

OTHER WANSLEYISM AS AN ADJUDICATOR: Maybe a few concerns also.

March Style – “detached” - “prepare an accent with silence” - Mr. Quarmby taught me that as a young conductor. “Contrasts on strain repeats of the march” – Mr. Joseph Kreines. Recommend standard march form is used by all level groups when possible: 4 bar intro – 16 bar 1st and 2nd strains – 32 bar trio. If you do not earn an “A” on the march – the odds are you are not going to receive an overall superior. **“Bennett Band Book”** is a wonderful resource. Larry Clark has done a nice job with bringing this book back. There are of course numerous marches that do not follow the “standard” march set-up that are quality.

Quality of the short note – a note is too short if we do not have a good tone and if all of the harmony is not realized vertically. Remember tone is the most important thing in any musical performance. Play the chord as a whole note – dotted half note – half note – quarter note – eighth note. Compare – the only difference should be the length of the note – not the quality of the note. The quality of the short note is something that definitely distinguishes a good band from a “good band.”

Play the march as a chorale and then play the chorale in “march” style. We miss so much of the harmony when listening to a march. In reality this can apply to any style of music. This relates to the quality of the short note. It is very important to really check the balance of major chord areas – at cadence points, etc. Many times the composer and/or arranger shows us a major triad but has very few musicians playing the third of the chord.

Please strive to not program the same composer more than once on any assessment performance. There is entirely too much quality literature available to us.

Become a better conductor – remember the wind conductor shows the musician how to move their air. Do not be afraid to attend a conducting workshop/symposium. Visually it is your responsibility to become the music. Remember though when the group is playing fast and loud – they do not need to look up and see you conducting in a “fast and loud manner.” They need you to be very precise and small – not frantic. When the group is playing slow and soft is when we need to possibly conduct bigger – reminding them we want you to use all of this air.

Become a better musician - strive to find an adult/community band to perform with. In reality as your musicianship grows – your conducting skills will grow. I would like to personally invite all of you to come and perform with the Hollingsworth Winds. The next concert is Monday, May 12, in the Branscomb Auditorium on the campus of Florida Southern College. You can find out about the rehearsals by joining us on Facebook – “Hollingsworth Winds” – in December we had band directors from 7 different counties. Of course there are numerous other ensembles like the Hollingsworth Winds for you to perform with. All rehearsals this spring will be on Sunday afternoon besides one.

Of course technology allows us to have great recordings at any given moment. I encourage you however to attend live performances whenever possible. Of course that is easier for some than others. If you are using recordings to help you make musical decisions, please listen to a variety of recordings. Be prepared before you listen to professional recordings. Use technology to help the band tune also – Peterson tuners – drone sounds that allow us to lower the third, etc.

We have very few “downbeats” in music.

