

MPA for Dummies: The Concert MPA Performance
Lee Ponder Friday, January 11, 2013 10:30 AM

Initial Planning and Preparation:

What school holidays or field trips occur in the 30 days just prior to your MPA?

How will this affect your rehearsal schedule?

Are there sports conflicts?

Would you be allowed to schedule a field trip during the school day to another auditorium for a two-hour rehearsal?

ASK FOR HELP

Musical Choices:

Three pieces by the same composer, in the same key and at the same tempo is the ultimate in poor choices.

Consider your band's strengths and weaknesses. If you don't have good clarinets, don't play literature that features that section.

Playing the hardest literature for your band might be ok when your main audience is your parents, but probably not for MPA. Consider literature that will challenge your band but also show their best attributes. If your band doesn't have great technique, giving them a technical selection for MPA is not a good idea.

The selections should challenge the students, but it should be something with which they can have their best performance.

Try to program a selection that is on the FBA list as "recommended literature".

ASK FOR HELP

Score Preparation:

Use three original scores.

Use large numbers for each measure (some adjudicators don't see as well as you do!!).

Thoughtful marking of any cuts, dynamic or tempo changes you have made in the music will be helpful.

Use separate envelopes for each set of scores and print your school name and classification on outside of each.

Stage Preparation:

The Stage Diagram should be ready for the set up crew before you leave your school.

Podium/Conductor's Stand: Be sure you know what is on stage and what you want to use. Is the podium different from yours? Will that bother you?

Percussion Instruments:

What is the condition and tuning of the Timpani? Does the pedal on the chimes work differently from yours?

Does the bass drum "Boom" or does it "Thump"? Many bands have suffered because of a badly played bass drum. I have to hope it was because the students had not played one like the one on stage before this performance.

See other bands play at the site if possible.

You may need to see the equipment that will be on stage so you can decide what to bring. You may also need to talk to the Host Director about large equipment you wish to bring and how to bring it into the performance site.

Student Preparation:

Many marching bands do at least one "run through" when the performance is near. Concert Bands should do the same. If attendance at a "Pre MPA" is not possible, the director can create a "Pre MPA" experience for the students so that they will know the procedure. The auditorium or the band room can be used. Set a time and date when you can have some "Judges" to give your band a "Pre MPA" performance. Take the students through the MPA experience mentally.

Think about preparing your students and parents for the rating.

Taking the Stage:

PERCUSSION

After the site crew puts the chairs in place, you may wish to have the percussion section enter the stage. Every student should be responsible for a part of the percussion set up. Some percussion sections need to rehearse their entrance and setting up on stage. The set up needs to be as close as possible to the set up used in your band room.

PERCUSSION (continued)

Having the timpani, bass drum, cymbals, mallets, or other instruments on the “wrong side” of the stage can change the band sound from the standpoint of the students and the director. No one needs the French Horn soloist distracted by the cymbal crash right behind him/her when it has been on the other side of the band for four weeks.

Some students may need to play a few notes to see how the instrument sounds, if they have not brought their own. Timpani should be tuned without using a mallet. A pitch pipe for reference pitch is preferable to the orchestra bells.

Percussionists should also make sure all stands and music is in position for first selection. A minimum amount of movement on stage is best. Very little talking should be necessary.

BAND

Before the band enters the stage, the director may wish to go on stage and review the set up. Be sure to check that players on the ends of rows do not have their backs to the audience.

Many bands enter the stage row by row. (Quietly)

If the band enters the stage more like a symphony orchestra, it should be professional, quiet and deliberate.

Some bands remain standing until director or student leader sits the band together. Whatever a director chooses to do, it should look orderly and confident.

Warm Up On Stage:

Individual students (except timpani) should not need to “Play a few notes” on the stage.

Many directors feel the need to play something on the stage prior to the performance. Care should be taken with this idea. Many of us play chorales in our band room because they expose all our problems. This stage is not a good place for that. A chord is less dangerous. A single note might be a better choice. Whatever is done should be rehearsed so as not to surprise the students.

During The Performance:

Directors should acknowledge the audience between musical selections.
Have the band stand after the last piece to acknowledge the audience response together.

Adjusting Between Selections:

Sometimes, during the first selection, the director may notice a tuning or balance problem. A word or two to the right student or section sometimes helps fix a balance problem. Huge tuning changes between selections are usually a bad idea. Checking pitch of a few players may help, if done in a confident manner. Be sure the students think the problem is solved. Be confident.

Leaving the stage:

Know in advance which side you will exit.
Directors should plan to have the band leave the stage in an orderly manner.

Interpreting Your Rating

Listen to your recording before you comment on anything.

Most of us have so much invested in that performance that we need to listen again to the recording about two weeks after MPA. Many times, after this second listen, I have stopped wondering why the rating wasn't higher and began wondering why it wasn't lower.

Successful Use of Your Results:

Any comment to anyone that denigrates the adjudicators diminishes the authenticity of the ratings. Complaining about judges having given low ratings will make your band think that high ratings are a matter of chance. Your student's attitude will be a reflection of what you think about the experience. If you let them think you were rated unfairly, they will. It won't help you prepare for next year.

Approaching the adjudicator about the rating at the MPA is not a great idea. Instead, get someone else to listen to your recording with you and listen to the adjudicator comments. Then make a plan to improve your band. That is a successful outcome for MPA.

Whatever the rating, it is only an opinion. If the MPA is done correctly, there will be suggestions for improvement. Concentrate on the suggestions. ASK FOR HELP.

Some Final Thoughts....

You can do that? Yes you can if it doesn't break any rules.

Instrument Substitutions:

Bassoon;

Try tenor sax , trombone, muted trombone.

Oboe;

Muted trumpet is the substitution I have seen most.

French Horn;

Also Saxophone and euphonium has been successful.

Restacking chords:

If too many people in your band are scored to play the third of a major chord, you have to fix that. If the third is being played by clarinets and it is their second line G, G#, A or Bb, you have to fix that.

Rewriting Parts:

Put weak clarinets on the bass clarinet part.

In sixteenth note passages have some people play eighth notes.

Mental Preparation:

Take the students through the MPA experience mentally.