

Blurring the lines between ensemble basics and literature

a holistic approach to utilizing your rehearsal time

Replace the phrase "warm-up" with "ensemble basics"

ENSEMBLE BASICS:

- * You are always teaching, always developing concepts - right up to the very last performance.
- * The "why" and "how" are more important than the "what".
- * LESS IS MORE!!! Work to perfect a few important exercises rather than be average at several.

THE EXERCISES:

1. PURE SOUND EXERCISE

- * Why: develop the reflex of a perfect sound and perfect balance at all times.
- * How: pure, noiseless start/consistent middle/organized ending.

2. PURE ARTICULATION EXERCISE

- * Why: develop the reflex of articulating without disturbing the quality and consistency of sound.
- * How: students use 90% air and 10% tongue, constantly monitoring the quality of sound, use "dAH" articulation concept.

3. PURE INTERVAL EXERCISE

- * Why: develop the reflex of keeping sound consistent as fingers move.
- * How: Sing!!!, air flow is consistent, ears are engaged at all times, students "predict" sound of the next note so that adjustments become unnecessary.

4. MELODIC BLEND EXERCISE

- * Why: develop the reflex of adjusting blend, balance and temperament while playing melodic content.
- * How: Sing!!!, students alternate between being the melody or being the drone, adjusting constantly to what they hear.

5. HARMONIC TRAINING EXERCISE

- * Why: develop the reflex of understanding that balance is a multidimensional concept that they have to apply in all situations.
- * How: drones, drones and more drones! Sing all the time! The concepts of "tessitura balance" and "harmonic balance" must be clearly understood!

proc-ess

foundation exercises - overall concepts

INSTILL SUCCESS

Most of the exercises in this packet are achievable at an 85%+ success rate on the first try. Creating exercises and assignments that "instill success" from the start enable the performers to be confident and work on perfecting the remaining 15% with less stress and confusion.

NO EXERCISE IS TO "SMALL" TO LEAVE UNPERFECTED

The very first exercise is an exercise that most instrumentalists could perform within weeks of beginning on their instrument. However that same exercise is probably the most important of all. The idea of taking something very simple and perfecting every aspect of it is paramount to the success of the ensemble. The phrase heard around the band room should be: "Don't be bored, be picky!!"

ISOLATE SKILLS

The concept of isolating skills is a very powerful rehearsal tool. Exercises in this book are designed to target specific technical or musical concepts within a more complex phrase.

- * "Melodic Blend" exercises target the students' ability to adjust and blend with one another and the drone, without rhythmic challenges.
- * "Articulation Clarity" exercises eliminate the vertical challenges of a melodic phrase to target the consistency of rhythmic interpretation.

CREATE MUSICAL REFLEXES

Repetition of these exercises will create musical constants, or reflexes, for the musicians. The "Pure Sound" exercise will develop the ability to play with a consistent, warm sound, regardless of range or technical extremes. The "Pure Articulation" exercise will allow students to create articulation without disturbing the purity of their sound. The "Melodic Blend" and triad training exercises will teach students how to adjust and balance pitch and volume in many keys.

BE AWARE OF THE FEEDBACK LOOP

When working on a specific skill within an exercise be sure to give several reps with short commentary in between. The "loop" should look like this:

1. *Assign task and explain the primary concept*
2. *Perform excerpt*
3. *Give short and specific "critique" (pick one skill to detail and describe the solution not the problem)*
4. *Perform excerpt again*
5. *Give feedback only on the one skill from #3 (Don't pile on more concepts)*
6. *Repeat steps 2 through 5 several times*
7. *After several repetitions, spend time reflecting on the exercise as a whole*

A quick feedback loop allows students to spend more time performing than listening to instructions. (Don't talk too much!) You are always trying to avoid giving students too many different details to consider in their performance of each exercise. (You don't have to use all of the words!). For example: "Concentrate on how clear you can start each note" or "Work to match your sound, volume and pitch with the person on either side of you"

LESS IS MORE

There are essentially only 5 different types of exercises in the "foundations" packet and those 5 exercises make up the concepts laid out in the "applications" portion of the book as well. Those 5 exercises are the essentials to creating a clear and balanced ensemble sound. Focusing on trying to perfect a small number of exercises instead of covering so many exercises that you just continue to encourage bad habits.

CONSTANT STUDENT FEEDBACK

Students should be actively engaged in the rehearsal process at all times. Encouraging the entire group to give feedback at the end of an excerpt is a great way to share the responsibility of the process. Asking: "What did you hear in the performance of that exercise?" Two simple rules help to encourage mass participation on feedback:

1. Anyone can be chosen at any time, regardless of the experience level
2. Feedback should include (in this order) a positive comment and one area of improvement.

Encourage the students in their commentary to be aware of the feedback loop and to think in terms of isolating skills.

MODELING

One of the most effective rehearsal techniques is modeling. Choosing an individual or small group to perform exercises or excerpts allows students to hear concepts more clearly. It also is a great way to engage the entire ensemble through listening and providing feedback.

Modeling can be done by students of all experience levels. Having the most experienced/most talented performer model an exercise inspires younger performers. However, when younger performers play an exercise for the entire group it encodes confidence in the younger players as they "step up" to perform for the entire group while allowing them to receive valuable feedback.

USE OF DRONES

Use of Equal and Just Tempered drones are a very powerful listening tool for your students. The Yamaha Harmony Director (Yamaha HD-200) is a great resource for creating drones in all keys quickly.

Below each exercise description are details on settings for drone use. Have students sing each exercise often with drone sounding. Students should let their ears guide them through the exercises.

BE PROUD OF THE PROCESS

At the end of the day knowing that you and your students stuck to a plan to create the best version of your ensemble sound and clarity is the ultimate accomplishment. Be proud of what you did knowing that you didn't rush and worked together to create "your sound". Celebrate the small victories along the way!

1 - Pure Sound Exercise

F just - F/C drone

1 - Lesson Plan:

This exercise is the foundation of all exercises. Students should concentrate on:

- * creating a pure, noiseless start to the sound
- * keep a constant air stream and vowel sound
- * creating a clear and focused ending to the sound

Ultimately creating a fundamental reflex of "my sound is always clear and calm no matter what part of my range I am performing in". With drone sounding, have students sing exercise on "dAH". Work for relaxed vocal sound and light articulation. After several repetitions transition to performing on instruments. Use of modeling here can be a great way to establish "best possible sound". Pick a very experienced student to perform for the entire group and encourage students to give feedback.

5 - Harmonic Training (F Major)

F just - F/C drone

Triad by "Tessitura Balance"

Triad by "Harmonic Balance"

Simple Triad

The musical score is divided into three sections, each with a vertical line separating it from the next. The first section, 'Triad by "Tessitura Balance"', shows various instruments playing notes that are distributed across the staff to achieve a balanced sound. The second section, 'Triad by "Harmonic Balance"', features notes that are more closely grouped together. The third section, 'Simple Triad', shows a standard chord structure. The instruments listed on the left are Fl. (Flute), B♭ Cl. 1 (Clarinet 1), B♭ Cl. 2/3 (Clarinet 2/3), B. Cl. (Clarinet), A. Sx. (Alto Saxophone), T. Sx. (Tenor Saxophone), B. Sx. (Baritone Saxophone), B♭ Tpt. 1 (Trumpet 1), B♭ Tpt. 2/3 (Trumpet 2/3), Mello. (Mellophone), Euph. 1/2 (Euphonium 1/2), Euph. 3 (Euphonium 3), and Tuba. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

5 - Lesson Plan:

These three exercises help create listening skills and reflexes that can be translated to any chord in the literature being performed. Detailed concepts for each are included on the following pages.

1. Sing all exercises often and always before playing
2. Use a drone often (The Yamaha Harmony Director is particularly great at demonstrating to students what an altered third and fifth will sound like).
3. Use small groups as demonstrations so students can easily hear clarity or discrepancies.