

# Warm Ups & Rehearsal Strategies That Build Better Musicianship

## - *The Ears Have It!*

### Midwest International Band & Orchestra Clinic, 2018

Chicago, USA

Thursday 20th December, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

McCormick Place West Room W184

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Matthew Flinders Anglican College Wind Symphony (Australia) - John Thomas, conductor

### CLINIC REPERTOIRE

*With Thine Eyes* ~ arr. Rob McWilliams (Alfred's Music)

*Excelsior* ~ Brian Hogg (Brolga Music)

*Rehearsals are for teaching the art of listening* – Frederick Fennell

*I believe in shifting responsibility to the students. Their list (producing a good sound, counting, playing in tune, etc.) is a long list. When students are aware of the big picture you can build on an ever-increasing base of knowledge and experience.* – Craig Kirchhoff

*Listening skills have to be taught, & that means there has to be an opportunity for students to show the teacher that they are listening. If you don't ask questions, you'll never know.* - Frank Battisti

### OVERALL CORE VALUES FOR REHEARSAL

- Key elements from conductor are passion/inspiration & listening/responding by leading a shared understanding of conductor's view of the composer's intent
- Establish an optimum process, and an optimum product will result and will continue to develop and improve your ensemble!
- Rehearsals are where players learn each other's parts
- Student listening and awareness are the most important attributes they bring to the rehearsal process

### WHAT GREAT ENSEMBLES & ENSEMBLE MUSICIANS DO

- Have optimum posture / breathe together & play together
- Feel & subdivide pulse internally
- Players are acutely aware of each other - "listen with their eyes," "watch with their ears"
- Have a keen sense of "fine pitch intuition"
- Listen louder than they play

## **WHAT GREAT ENSEMBLE TEACHERS DO**

- Have a studied point of view on the music's expressive intent beyond the "surface" objective elements — this drives the rehearsal process and gestural technique
- Emulate great posture and require same from players
- Breathe with the ensemble — breath motivates the gesture (and guides the sound quality, weight, etc.)
- Teach students to internalise pulse & subdivide
- Teach students to understand and read (decode) music notation at sight
- Compel and guide students to listen and evaluate/adjust based on what students hear rather than just the conductor's own listening and dictated directions
- Change listening perspective — conductor and players (change seating, etc.)
- Use positive language (how to improve outcome) rather than negative descriptions
- Emphasise the collaborative nature of music-making (minimal use of the "I" or "me" words!)
- Use clear & meaningful gestures and require appropriate responses in sound
- Ask questions so that students evaluate and generate possible answers/solutions

## **COUNTERPRODUCTIVE REHEARSAL BEHAVIOURS BY ENSEMBLE TEACHERS**

- Always counting off to get started
- Teaching rhythm only by rote
- Using conducting gestures that primarily communicate beat/pulse rather than musical/ expressive intent
- Never letting ensemble play and pay attention to internal pulse without conducting
- Inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal communication
- Always providing all answers and directions for desired change to ensemble issues

## **COMMON REHEARSAL ISSUES THAT ENHANCED LISTENING SKILLS IMPROVE**

- Tone quality, tonal balance, and intonation
- Part balance (melody/accompaniment, etc.)
- Precision, accuracy of rhythm
- Steadiness of pulse (dragging, rushing, uneven, etc.)
- Note length and shape
- Style of articulation & release
- Phrasing and shaping the musical line
- Appropriateness of percussion dynamics and tone
- Contextual understanding of the composition structure (as appropriate to level) and player's role within that