Efficient Rehearsal Techniques

Creating Opportunities for Success

by: William W. Gourley

This is the first article of a series regarding effective development of the ensemble

We have all marveled at the ensembles from smaller schools that earn straight Is at festival while performing music from the AA list. What is it that enables the class C band to masterfully play Holst, Reed and Gillingham? How does a class B orchestra perform Copeland, Beethoven and Dvorak? They do not have access to private instructors, their facilities are some of the worst in the area and their budget is not any better than the other schools in the area.

The reason these ensembles are able to masterfully perform this literature is the rehearsal is a carefully prepared lesson emphasizing skills development, refinement and growth, constant review, effective teaching methodology and creating a positive attitude by eliminating the road blocks to success. The successful teacher is constantly seeking ways to create opportunities for success in his or her students.

Lesson Preparation – Eliminating Road Blocks

A great performance is the result of diligent lesson preparation. The goal of our program is to present a concert. To successfully achieve that goal we must create instructional objectives that logically progress to the fulfillment of our goal. One cannot perform music unless one has developed musical skills. Tone production, intonation, rhythmic proficiency, technical facility, tonguing or bowing proficiency, understanding music symbols, phrasing and musicality must be mastered before we can expect the composition to be masterfully performed. We need to ask ourselves what does the music require of the musician and create a sequential pedagogical skills development curriculum to achieve these goals.

Musical skill acquisition should be the result of a long-term realistic plan from beginning band and orchestra to graduation. The key word is realistic. We must consider how much time is available to implement the curriculum. Does the beginning class meet twice a week or five times and for how many minutes? Are the classes designed as full band, like instrument or homogenous classes? How are the middle school/junior high and high school ensembles configured? These are factors we must consider before creating an "ideal" curriculum for the students. A good curriculum incorporates adequate time for expansion and review of the acquired skills.

Creating a curriculum does not have to be an agonizing process. For first year band or orchestra, establish the basic musical skills the students must have to perform beginning literature. Emphasize proper posture, tone production, pulse awareness, rhythm reading expectations, a few scales at a specific tempo (including the chromatic scale), ranges for
wind instruments or positions on strings, appropriate alternate fingerings and a few rudimental skills for percussion. Generally, your method book will determine these, but that is not the only teaching tool. We need to supplement the limitations of any method book with other sources and our own materials.

Each year should continually reinforce the basics and requirements of the year before while expanding the student musician’s skills through graduation. Remember to continually allow time for review of acquired skills as the curriculum progresses and maintain a logical sequential pattern. For instance, why not teach cut time before learning eighth notes. When you teach cut time first the students already understand the relationship of whole, half and quarter notes so you are introducing one new concept. Later, when you introduce eighth notes the students have mastered the concept of subdividing the pulse in cut time with quarter notes, now all they have to learn is a new symbol, the eighth note.

Regardless whether there has been a curriculum in place or not, how can we improve an ensemble’s music skills and performance within the short term? What are the skills the students need to build a better band or orchestra in sixty days?

Before we begin to develop lesson plans we need to assess the students’ capabilities. Teaching them rhythm patterns in eighth and sixteenth notes is useless if they cannot maintain a steady pulse and properly execute half and dotted quarter notes. Do you remember those education classes you had to take in college? You know, where they talked about Piaget, Gagne, Skinner and all those guys when we wanted to talk about Stravinsky, Brubeck, Dvorak, Grainger and Holst. Do you remember the term, pre-test, post-test? We need to know what the students know before we can design effective lesson plans. Where they should be or we expect them to be is irrelevant. We need to start where they are, not where we think they should be. Conductors get the privilege of starting where they want. Teachers must start where the students are.

Think back to your lessons on your principal instrument in college. How did you become a better performer during those four or five or ten years? Did you acquire your skills through the literature you played or did the literature you played reflect your acquired skills? You developed that wonderful tone by practicing long tones, breathing exercises, lip slurs or long bows that lasted forever. You gained technical facility through scales at the merciless ticking of a metronome not from a solo. Your rhythm skills developed as your private teacher banged away, ‘1, 2,3 ,4, 1," as you played the dotted eighth sixteenth pattern at the merciless ticking of a metronome. Over and over and ….. Well, you get the idea. Our musical performance abilities are the result of the musical skills we developed.

We create opportunities for success when we develop our student’s musical skills and then apply them to the literature. When they have sixteenth note runs in the music they play right by them, evenly, with relative ease, since they have practiced them regularly for weeks, months and years. If they have not developed the technical facility in that key the sixteenth note pattern will be uneven and out of control. And, the student cannot develop the expertise to play the passage well in the month before the concert. Fluidity, is
gained through diligent exacting work that cannot be accomplished in four to six weeks. When the student encounters the sixteenth note pattern and has the facility to play it with relative ease, he/she succeeds and gains a positive attitude about their abilities in music. That’s how that class B orchestra just blows by Copeland.

Obviously, this applies to all aspects of skill acquisition. Legato passages play with ease because of tone development and breath control. Rhythms are easily performed in the music because they have been learned and drilled as part of the curriculum. Tonguing and bowing concerns in the music are minimal because there has been long term, sequential development of these skills. Attacks, releases, tone, blend and balance just need minor adjustments in the music because they have been addressed constantly every time the ensemble plays, whether it was long tones, scales, rhythm studies or tonguing exercises. Instead of constantly running into problems, the student is equipped to enjoy the music making process. The roadblocks to success have been minimized, if not eliminated.

The next step in preparing our lessons is music selection. It is important to select concert material appropriate to the ensemble’s skill level, available instructional time and your rehearsal abilities.

Choosing literature that exceeds the ability of the ensemble throughout the entire composition is unrealistic. Use the 80-20 Rule. Many years ago I attended a clinic presented by Professor H. Robert Reynolds, the director of bands at The University of Michigan. He said the ensemble should be able to sight read 80% of any composition you intend to perform on a concert. As a young director I couldn’t believe he would set standards so low. Then, I started thinking about his words. He was absolutely right. Any of the ensemble literature I played, with few exceptions, I could sight read at least 80% of the work. Wind band, orchestral, quintet, musicals, jazz, whatever I only needed to "woodshed" between 5-20% of the piece. With the rare exception of a tour-de-force solo, I had the skills necessary to sight read at least 70% of the work. I just needed to work on the finesse of the music.

Don’t select music that will monopolize instructional time to learn. There needs to adequate rehearsal time to work on fundamentals. Each rehearsal must emphasize the development of tone, technique, ensemble precision, rhythm and intonation. We must not let the concert music interfere with the continued growth of musical skills. Remember, six weeks in school time is not six weeks in the real world. There are assemblies, school wide testing, full orchestra, field trips, snow days, vacation days. You get the picture. I always planned 20% less rehearsal time and considered the performance was one week before the actual performance. Even with the community band I conduct, the real dress rehearsal is two weeks before the concert, not the week before. There needs to be time for the musicians to get comfortable with the concert. Choose music that draws on the abilities of the students and encourages their application in performance.

Consider the keys in the music you select. Are the students prepared to play in them and have they acquired the skills to negotiate technical passages and play in tune in the key? If they will be required to play fast passages and are not fluent in the finger patterns for
the key, they will not be able to learn this in time for the concert without sacrificing musical presentation, at the least. If the ensemble has not worked intonation exercises or chorales in the key it will be difficult to correct suitable for the performance.

Determine the rhythmic sophistication of the composition. Are the rhythmic patterns consistent with the ensemble’s abilities? Has the ensemble developed a strong enough awareness of the subdivision of the pulse to properly place notes in slow tempos? Check for meters that may cause the students difficulty to be sure they are in their domain of mastery.

Other considerations are style, length, ranges, articulations, fingering, bowing or sticking demands. Choosing a piece with a great deal of slow legato playing can be beneficial if the ensemble is fairly adept at this style rhythmically and in sustained playing. If they aren’t you need to minimize this style until they have developed the skills needed. We need to improve through success, not by placing huge obstacles in the way that foster frustration. Passages that require fast tonguing or spiccato bowing will not play well in the concert if we have not prepared the students for these challenges and eliminate opportunities for failure. Excessive range will be a problem especially at the end of a selection or concert if embouchure development has not been consistently addressed. It is important to select music that compliments and refines the skills of the ensemble at its level of development.

Perhaps the most critical consideration when selecting concert music is your abilities to teach it. Do not confuse conducting the piece with teaching it. One of the reasons the school down the road can play more demanding literature successfully is the director has a large bag-of-tricks acquired through years of trial and error. I always equate teaching with a toolbox. When we first own a home we may have a screwdriver, pliers and a hammer. Every project around the house takes a long time. Over the years we convince our spouses we need the multi-socket wrench, power drill and screwdriver, a circular saw, you know, all that Tool Man stuff. Now, the jobs that used to take an hour only take ten minutes. It is the same for us as teachers. The more sophisticated the composition the more it will call upon efficient teaching skills. We must be careful to select literature we have the tools to teach.

Finally, we need to study the score as we make our lesson plans. Determine the skills required to perform the piece and include them in the fundamental development of the ensemble. Anticipate problem areas and incorporate them into the development portion of your rehearsal. There may be an awkward rhythm, difficult interval for brasses, a tricky bowing, isolate these and teach the concepts as part of the skills process. Mark the score for entrances, meters, tempos, melodies and counter melodies and isolated effects. Those little triangle effects, or cymbal crashes can hide in the score and the musicians can never now where they are. Determine the phrasing and practice conducting beginnings, endings, transitions, meter changes and phrases with a metronome. Studying on your own with a metronome will expose tempo deviations in a rehearsal immediately. You will be accustomed to the proper speed and you feel the change. Not knowing how you want to phrase until the third week is a waste of rehearsal time. The musicians will have become
accustomed to improper or no phrasing at all. Retraining them is difficult at best. Your knowledge of the score makes playing the music a lot easier for the ensemble.

Efficient Rehearsal Techniques, Part 2

by: William W. Gourley

This is the second in a series.

Having assessed the ensemble’s abilities, selected appropriate literature and developed a curriculum for the ensemble it is time to create our “Road Map” for success, lesson plans. Carefully created lesson plans enable you to chart a course for the students’ musical growth and assist you in monitoring your instruction.

Before we go on we must consider what needs to be accomplished in the time we have with the students in rehearsal. If we think back to our college days and develop lesson plans similar to our practice sessions while in college we gain insight into how we became better musicians. Every practice session included time on tone development, technique, rhythm reading, tuning and practice on the literature for our ensembles and private lessons. We need to remember the bulk of our practice was spent on fundamentals, not practicing our band or orchestra music. We need to carry this principal, with some modification, over into our teaching.

Fundamentals

*A laborer works with his hands. A craftsman works with his hands and his head. An artist works with his hands, his head and his heart.* Or, in the words of Louis “Sachmo” Armstrong, “There ain’t no use havin’ music in your head if you can’t get it past your pucker.”

Fundamentals are the foundation upon which we build our musical palaces. This is where we give the students the tools for success by eliminating roadblocks. The basics: posture, proper bow position, breath support, tone production, technique, rhythm reading, pulse awareness and tuning must be taught and reinforced regularly. Generally, 30-40% of the rehearsal should be devoted to fundamentals.

Tone

Tone is the most important skill in musical performance. All the right notes, terrific technique and flawless rhythm are useless if the audience cannot stand the sound from the ensemble. Therefore, tone must be the first thing addressed every day. A series of exercises that reinforce breath control and embouchure or bow position, speed and pressure development need to anchor every rehearsal.
Begin with slurred long tones at a mezzo forte or mezzo piano dynamic staying in the mid and lower range of the instruments to reinforce an open and relaxed sound and refocus the breath support. These exercises can be equated with the stretching athletes use to begin their workout. It is important to incorporate rests into the initial warm up so the students’ embouchures do not start to fatigue. Generally, slur 12-16 seconds with 3-4 seconds rest between each slur. Strings need to concentrate on long bow exercises keeping the bow perpendicular to the string and halfway between the bridge and fingerboard.

Next, an exercise that incorporates lip slurs for the brasses and arpeggios for the strings and woodwinds should be incorporated, again in a mf or mp dynamic. These will enhance brass flexibility, woodwind finger coordination and strings will develop smooth string changes and finger placement on the fingerboard. Keeping the clarinets working around the break while playing arpeggios will help their fluidity in this part of the instrument. Lip slurs should stay in the lower and middle ranges of the brasses and gradually expand the range as the students gain proficiency. Strings need to master first through third position and gradually work higher on the fingerboard. It is important to play slowly and emphasize smooth transitions from note to note while playing the lip slurs and arpeggios so they don’t “pop”.

Long tones played with a crescendo and decrescendo can be used occasionally to build embouchure, breath control or bow speed The students need to be encouraged to listen carefully to avoid having the soprano voices dominate the tone quality as the ensemble crescendos and to maintain a steady pitch. Also, students have a tendency to decrescendo quicker than they crescendo. Encouraging them to match the length of the crescendo and decrescendo will create a greater awareness and control of the bow or air stream.

(For more information on tone you can visit the newsletter archives at our web site www.marshallmusic.com and read, “It doesn’t sound good because it doesn’t sound good” from the November, 2002 newsletter.)

**Technique**

A major roadblock musicians encounter is an inability to get around the notes. Fingers do not move evenly throughout scale patterns, blips occur when strings and woodwinds need to lift or place more than one finger at a time or articulation is inconsistent. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard the Eb Major eighth note run in Sleigh Ride garbled because the fingers just don’t lift evenly. Technical facility is another of those everyday activities that we are always seeking to improve.

As we all know, scales are the building blocks of music and before we can expect to realize the composer’s art, we must possess adequate technical facility. Fluidity is the result of long-term practice and cannot be adequately realized in the three or four weeks prior to a performance. The fingers need to have eyes and ears of their own. You know from your own practice that, over time, your ears developed the ability to identify a tonality and your fingers followed along creating a sort of musical intuition. We need to include the major, minor and chromatic scales and intervals every day to enable students to “automatically” play technical passages.
There are some considerations that need to be mentioned here. Be pragmatic in your teaching. For example: once you gain facility on the BbM/gm scale, move to the EbM/cm or FM/dm. When you do this you are just changing one fingering from the learned scale BbM/cm (adding or removing a flat) thereby creating fewer obstacles for the student. That’s a lot easier than going from BbM to CM. This method also allows you to familiarize the students with the circle of fifths. When you first introduce a scale play it slow enough that students can play each note evenly and in tune. Then, gradually increase the tempo throughout the year. Remember that once you learn BbM/gm you still need to keep it under their fingers, as you introduce new scales.

A final thought, all technical passages in music do not start on the root. Play scales beginning on all the scale degrees (every mode). Vary your articulations when you play scales. Slurring is a great way to continue to develop tone while you work on technique.

Tonguing and bowing styles are generally overlooked in the warm-up. Every rehearsal needs to incorporate a short exercise that continues to push the student to achieve faster and clearer tonguing or mastery of basic bowings. However, tonguing and bowing are more than developing quick articulation. Work on legato, staccato and basic bowing techniques as the students gain proficiency on scales. Be careful not to introduce a new articulation with a new scale. Try to attack one challenge at a time.

**Rhythm and Sight Reading**

Rhythm reading and sight reading go hand in hand. Rhythm reading can be done on alternating days with chorale work. It is important to go from simple reading to more complex. Always practice rhythms to a pulse. This does not have to be a metronome. Using an electric keyboard or putting on a tape or CD of Spyro Gyra, Santana, or whatever, and performing rhythms over these will build a feeling for pulse and proper note placement.

Concept then theory. Teach the rhythm first without symbols. Have the students echo you performing a rhythm, then show them the symbols and counting. How did you learn to read in first grade? You were taught the symbols for words with which you were familiar. Dog, cat, sit, sat; you get the idea. Gradually, you used the theories you learned in reading to figure out strange words. Apply this same concept to your rhythm reading development.

Just as it is necessary to continually review scales, we must continue to review the most basic of rhythms. And don’t forget to include note values that receive more than one pulse. Too often this gets neglected in the pursuit of eighth and sixteenth note patterns and students forget to hold half notes and whole notes long enough. Also, include rests in your rhythm exercises. Once the students are comfortable with a pattern substitute a rest for one of the values. Again, teachers wrongly assume that if a student understands playing a pattern without rests they can play the same pattern with rests.
Gradually expand your rhythm reading with unison studies and from there include simple music with independent parts.

**Tuning**

By now, having done tone studies, scales, tonguing/bowing and perhaps some rhythm exercises the instruments should be warmed up *and embouchures* set to efficiently tune. During the warm up, students should be encouraged to make adjustments to match pitch and only minor adjustments will be necessary when they tune. Unlike the winds strings should tune at the beginning of the rehearsal.

There are many theories on what notes to use while tuning and which instrument the ensemble should use as a reference. They all seem to work adequately. It just depends on your preference.

There is agreement on one factor of tuning, though, and that is the value of singing. Whether it is a middle school ensemble or a university marching band, the groups that incorporate singing are able to play better in tune. Singing the tuning note first, singing intervals to a fixed pitch, alternating playing and singing scales in intervals, singing chords, chorales or harmonic progressions are just a few of the variations I have witnessed over the years. Singing is the most efficient tool we can use in developing student musicianship.

*(Additional articles on the value of singing can be found in the newsletter archives on our web site, “Steps to Musical Understanding: The Singing Instrumentalist,” by Dr. Max Plank and “Programming for the Standards,” by Dr. Mitchell Robinson)*

**Chorales**

As mentioned, chorales can be alternated with rhythm studies. Ideally, chorales should be short, in comfortable ranges, with homophonic movement so students can concentrate on tone, intonation, breath support, bow control, ensemble unity and phrasing. As we did with scales, work through chorales in sequential keys. I liked to work on a chorale in EbM/cm first. Once that was perfected, when I moved to BbM/gm or AbM/fm I was only introducing one new note to tune. The students still have a majority of the tonalities from EbM/cm in their ears reinforcing the old tonalities along with introducing new ones.

**Other Considerations**

In your score study look for material to include in the fundamentals portion of the rehearsal. Look for problems that the students will encounter and teach these concepts before the students see them in the music. In other words, eliminate the roadblocks to success. Look for challenging technical spots (alternate woodwind fingering passages for example), rhythmic challenges, or potential bowing and articulation problems and include strategies to address these in the warm up. Select chorales that are in the same key as your music to enhance tone and intonation.
Percussionists need to be developed throughout the warm up procedure. While the ensemble is working on tone the percussionists can be going through a fundamental warm up of their own including single stroke dexterity exercises, rolls, flams, paradiddles etc. in time with the ensemble. Scales can be played on mallets, rhythm studies should be played on all of the basic instruments and chorales should be played on mallets. And, they should sing along with the ensemble. Eventually they will need to tune a timpani.

Finally, and most critically, demand performance expectations in the warm up. Attacks, releases, unity of movement, blend and balance need to be paramount in every aspect of the ensemble’s playing. Not addressing these issues while the students are warming up will create poor performance habits that will carry over to the literature. Remember, you are warming up the brain as well. While playing scales insist the principals of quality ensemble performance practices are followed. Balance, blend, precision and ensemble unity should not be sacrificed in the pursuit of technical fluency.

Part 3 will discuss lesson plans, rehearsal schedules and rehearsing.

Efficient Rehearsal Techniques, Part 3
by: William W. Gourley

Having assessed the students’ abilities, created a sequential skills building curriculum and selected appropriate literature for the ensemble consistent with their skills, as well as enhance and expand their acquisition of skills and studied scores, you are ready to create lesson plans.

Warm-up Skills Development 30-50%

The amount of time devoted to warm-up varies according to the technical proficiency of the ensemble, the mood of the students that day, and proximity to the concert date. Younger, less experienced players need more time in the rehearsal to develop their skills and may need 50% or more of the rehearsal devoted to warm-up and skills building. Obviously, this will require creativity to prevent the process from becoming tedious and alienating the students. The use of synthesized accompaniment, CDs, “games” and quick pacing of instruction will be necessary to keep the students engaged. To avoid monotony you can scatter certain aspects of the skills development process throughout the rehearsal. Rhythm studies, scales in intervals, and new concepts can be placed in the middle or end of a rehearsal. More advanced ensembles will generally require less warm-up and skill building time depending on the concept(s) being learned that day. And, as the ensemble approaches the concert date, warm-up and skills reinforcement will occupy less time in the rehearsal.

Plan ahead to eliminate the “Roadblocks to Success”. Incorporate developmental material that will enhance the skills needed to perform the music you are playing. If a
composition is in AbM with technical passages, find warm-up material that will work on this separate from the music. Look for challenging or new rhythmic figures in the music and isolate them in the warm-up. Play chorales in the key of the music you will be playing to help the students “tune” their ears. Try to place these into your warm-up a week before the students will encounter them in the music. Then they will already possess the technique to play these passages and gain a more positive attitude regarding their abilities and the ensemble. There is no motivator like success.

Remember to constantly review and refine the students’ skills. Keep the first scales, rhythms and musical concepts the students learned incorporated into the warm-up. The adage, “If you don’t use it, you’ll lose it.” applies to music, too. In the beginning of the year the class may have played the BbM scale in eighth notes at mm=82. As the year progresses increase the tempo on previously learned scales like BbM, while introducing new scales at the slower tempos.

The warm-up has six objectives:

• We need to get a room full of students, each with their unique set of experiences, to focus their attentions on a single ensemble whose mission is to play music. We need to create a focus before we begin rehearsing the literature.

• The warm-up is like an athlete’s stretching exercises before competing. The student musician needs to carefully begin reacquainting his/her body with proper posture, hand position, bow placement, breath support, etc., through the warm-up process.

• During the warm-up ensemble members are reactivating the brain, ears and eyes to respond to the various aspects of music making. Watching the conductor for attacks, style, releases, listening for proper tone, blend and balance help to create a focus in the students for the rigors of performing the music.

• The warm-up is where students continue to refine acquired skills. We increase the tempos for learned scales, refine tone, tonguing, bowing, rhythms, ensemble precision, finesse tone in extreme ranges, etc.

• The warm-up is where students learn new skills. We teach a new bowing, note, alternate fingering, scale, style, rhythm or a concept that will appear in the concert music.

• The warm-up sets the stage, preparing the musician for the actual rehearsal of the concert music. All of the skills reviewed and learned in the warm-up should carry over to the performance of music. That is why every detail must be adhered to in the warm-up. Carelessness here will transfer to a sloppy performance of the concert literature. The more focused and exacting the warm-up the better the ensemble will play the concert material. They go hand-in-hand. The ensemble must labor intensely to acquire the craftsmanship necessary to artfully recreate the composer’s art.
Lesson Plans

Monday

Warm-ups A, C, D

Ensemble Drill

Sec. 2 DbM & bbm

Sec. 3 chromatics F-Bb

Sec. 8 3rds AbM, fm

FM & dm

Tonguing mm=96 CM & am

Tune

Choral 23

Tuesday

Warm-ups A, B, E

Ensemble Drill

Sec. 2 GM & em

Sec. 8 Nos. 5&6 EbM & cm

AbM & fm

Tonguing mm=96 FM & dm

Tune

Rhythm studies

Wednesday

Warm-ups A, C, F
Ensemble Drill

Sec. 2 DbM & bbm

Sec. 3 chromatics Bb-F

Sec. 8 3rds CM & am

FM & dm

Tonguing mm=96 EbM 7 cm

Tune

Choral 8

Thursday

Warm-ups A, B, D

Ensemble Drill

Sec. 2 GM & em

Sec. 8 Nos. 5&6 BbM & gm

CM & am

Tonguing mm=96 AbM & fm

Tune

Site Read (Rhythm Studies)

Friday

Warm-ups A, C, E

Ensemble Drill

Sec. 2 DbM & bbm

GM & em

Sec. 3 chromatics Bb-F
Sec. 8 Thirds BbM & gm

CM & am

Tonguing mm=96 BbM & gm

Tune

**Warm-ups**

*Warm-ups A-F* are a series of long tones and lip slurs I have written to build embouchure, breath support, flexibility, range and woodwind facility.

**Ensemble Drill** is the Fussell Ensemble Drill Studies. Section 2 is major and minor scales with arpeggios. Section 3 is octave chromatic scales. F-Bb means the ensemble plays one octave chromatic scales on each scale degree from F-Bb. Section 8 includes scales in thirds, and scale forms that begin on each degree of the scale. In this case #5 ascends and #6 descends so I combine them to maximize rehearsal time. This book includes chord progressions for tuning, scales in intervals, scales in various patterns and rhythm studies. As you study the lesson plans above, notice how concepts are reinforced throughout the lessons. The scales are rotated throughout the week in intervals, forms and tonguing to keep the various finger patterns “under their fingers”.

**Tonguing exercises** are two patterns I use to scales to enhance facility.

**Rhythm studies** include basic patterns and gradually expand into unison studies, etudes and simple sight reading music. As the students progress into the reading of unison studies and simple literature, apply your sight reading procedures and evaluate their performance and then have them play the exercise again incorporating your brief comments.

**Tuning** can be done in a variety of ways but should always include singing. It should include unison pitches and chords as well.

**Chorales** should be kept simple with homophonic movement in comfortable ranges and appropriate keys with which the students have become familiar as discussed in part 2 of the August 2003 newsletter.

**Pulse awareness** is enhanced when the warm-up is accompanied by a steady pulse. I utilized a metronome set at the division or subdivision of the pulse (mm=160 for scales played at mm=80) to help students properly place notes rhythmically. When hooked up to a PA system, the metronome can be turned down to allow the students to internalize the pulse and turned up as they begin to fluctuate from the pulse. I used this the entire warm-up through the tonguing exercises. The same pulse awareness can be developed through the use of the accompaniments on electronic keyboards or CDs. Teaching rhythms over...
Sanatana’s, *Oye Como Va* or John Denver’s, *Thank God, I’m a Country Boy* can be very effective and a lot of fun. And, a lot less annoying than a ticking metronome.

Performance quality playing must be the expectation throughout the warm-up procedure. The principals of ensemble excellence: tonal beauty, balance and blend, unity of movement, rhythmic precision, phrasing, attacks, releases and posture must be meticulously monitored. You are warming-up the brain as well during the warm-up through reinforcing the proper performance practices required to perform the literature.

A well designed warm-up that includes expanding and refining the fundamentals of music making is the most important aspect of a successful music program. With these skills students are able to master the music in the folders with relative ease. This encourages an attitude of success through achievement and music becomes a rewarding experience encouraging ongoing participation.

*Part 4 will discuss the rehearsal schedule and the preparation of the literature.*

---

**Efficient Rehearsal Techniques, Part 4**  
*by: William W. Gourley*

The first three installments of this series dealt with developing the skills necessary to successfully perform the literature we put in the folders. Having assessed the ensemble’s strengths and weaknesses and created strategies to develop fundamental music making skills, it is time to apply these talents to the literature.

Rehearsal - Concert Music 50 – 70%

Now that the students have carefully warmed–up, they are ready to apply their skills to the music. Part 3 discussed the warm-up portion of the rehearsal generally occupies 30-50% of the period.

**Rehearsal Schedule**

Feb. 7-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Holst</th>
<th>1st mov. Beg. – D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sousa</td>
<td>intro &amp; 1st strain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Grainger</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holst</td>
<td>1st mov. All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sousa</td>
<td>beg – trio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Sousa</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holst</td>
<td>2nd mov beg – 10 before E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Orch. Winds</td>
<td>Jazz Band 7:00 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grainger</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holst</td>
<td>mov 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Holst</td>
<td>mov 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sousa</td>
<td>beg – trio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Tour</td>
<td>Grainger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scales 
DbM & bbm 
GM & em 

Feb. 20 Scale Test 
DbM & bbm 
GM & em 

Feb. 27 Playing Test 

March 4 Concert 7:30 p.m. concert uniform 

March 8 Festival 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Dexter HS 

March 22 Jazz Band Concert 7:00 p.m. Middle School 

As educators, we must remember that our students have very busy schedules. Generally, they are the most involved members of the student body and need to budget time efficiently. When students open a folder containing six to ten pieces of music the task of preparing that music for rehearsal can be overwhelming. They do not have the time to devote to learning all the music so they must guess what you will be working on the next day. This can become an exercise in futility. They either pick the wrong music or not everyone in the ensemble is at the same level of preparation on any one selection. Providing a rehearsal schedule will make rehearsals much more efficient. 

Give the students the rehearsal schedule Wednesday or Thursday of the previous week. The students will be able to better budget their time and prepare adequately for
rehearsals. If a student has mastered the material for Monday’s rehearsal, he/she can focus on Wednesday’s where there may be some challenges for the student. Include information regarding extra rehearsals, sectionals, jazz band, fiddle club, pep band and up-coming performances, tests and the pedagogical concepts being taught for the week.

The rehearsal schedule will bring focus to your rehearsals and help you in tracking your progress. It is too easy to become focused on a couple challenging selections or sections and not devote enough time to less demanding material. Continuity is critical for all of us but especially for student musicians. If we aren’t careful in reviewing material that we have worked on in a timely fashion the skills will be greatly diminished when we finally get back to it. The rehearsal schedule will help avoid this. Notice how selections are rotated on the schedule so each selection has the opportunity to be in the prime learning period, just after the warm up, and at the end of the period where you focus on overall musical presentation.

Concert Music

New Material 30-40% of the total class period

The warm-up has brought unity and focus to the ensemble so now is the time to work on the new or challenging material assigned for the day. If you look at Monday on the rehearsal schedule example, the goal for the day is to perfect the beginning to letter “D” of Holst’s, Second Suite for Military Band in F. Notice the lesson plans for Monday, includes the FM and dm scales in the warm-up and Chorale 23 in FM preparing the ensemble’s fingers and ears for the Holst.

The Sousa is next, and the ensemble will begin perfecting the introduction and first strain. It is preferable to have a selection here that students have a bit more familiarity with and is less demanding than the first concert selection. By now you are two thirds into the class period and they are starting to fatigue mentally.

Previously Learned Material 20-30% of the total class period

I remember attending a clinic by the Airmen of Note, the Air Force’s Jazz Band. The lead saxophonist mentioned the importance of playing through the music for the group to get the style and not stopping to “dig out” spots. We need to transfer this wisdom to our rehearsals.

The Graingher is a selection the students have worked on and is close to performance ready. The group is in the last 20% of the class period and has exhausted a great deal of its ability to work on minutia. This is where you increase the energy flow in the class and let the students play. Focus on the forest and not the trees. Allow the ensemble to play through the selection to gain a better understanding of the overall musical presentation. Within reason, allow them to play over mistakes taking a macro approach. Listen less for mistakes and more for musicality. Try to reserve stops for correcting balance, tone, style
or phrasing concerns. This allows the students to get a better ensemble feel for continuity and ends the rehearsal on a positive note.

At times it might be preferable to put some review material just after the warm-up. For instance, if you did a lot of “digging” on a section of music the day before it may be beneficial to focus on that section first. This may only be four to eight measures or it could be several spots in a particular selection that will need to have daily review to maintain muscle memory and enhance technical proficiency.

Creating Opportunities for Success

**Fix problems before they occur.** In part two (August issue) I discussed finding potential performance problems and teaching these concepts during the warm-up period. Alternate fingerings, difficult rhythms, tonguing or bowing difficulties, new notes, etc. can be taught in the warm-up weeks before the students will encounter them in the music. A difficult passage in a composition can be worked on before you read the entire piece in order to give the students some preparation so the ensemble will not fall apart when the piece is read.

**Back to front.** Rehearse the last rehearsal number/letter or section to the end of the piece. Then begin at the second to the last rehearsal number/letter or section. This decreases the frustration of running into unfamiliar passages and condenses the learning. Many of the concepts introduced in a composition are recapped at the end and this allows you to teach them efficiently. Another benefit is the end is often the most exciting part of a composition and allows you to create a feeling of excitement for the work. It is similar to the promos we see for movies. I am not suggesting you work the entire composition in this manner, however.

**Rehearse difficult sections first.** Work on the awkward rhythms, technical problems, etc. in a phrase first, then play the phrase or composition. This reduces the frustration factor in students because they can play right by these spots.

**Hit the highlights.** Rehearse difficult passages often. You do not need to play through the entire composition every time you pull it out of the folder. Once you have “wood shedded” a particular section, review it for 3-5 minutes a day to keep those technique problems learned and refined.

**Take notes.** Keep a note pad handy or a piece of paper in the score. Make quick notations during and after the rehearsal to remind you of things that need attention at the next rehearsal.

**General Thoughts**

**Environment.** Does the rehearsal room convey the message that it is a place of order? If possible, have the room set up neatly. Have music playing while the students enter the class. This is a good way to passively teach music history. Just place the composer’s name of the music playing on a time line above the dry erase/chalk board depicting historical milestones. I always reserved Fridays for jazz.
Write the rehearsal sequence on the board or an overhead projector and expect the students to place things in order on the stand so they can move from one event to the other. Nothing kills rehearsal efficiency more than waiting for someone to dig through a folder filled with six months of handouts and unreturned music to find the guiro part.

Announcements are on the rehearsal schedule and the dry erase/chalk board. Try to minimize if not eliminate discussing announcements. You can point to them during long tones or highlight them. Of course there are times when it is necessary to discuss things in detail but, generally, make the students responsible and do not make announcements at the beginning of the rehearsal. Get the ensemble focused on music first. Save announcements for the end of the rehearsal or short sound bites between exercises or music selections. The less said the better.

Always work as if the concert is tomorrow. I tell my groups that we need to rehearse as if the president just announced he was coming to town tomorrow and his favorite composition is Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and everyone knows we only get one rehearsal. Still, we would want it to be as good as we can get it in one rehearsal so we would maximize every millisecond in the rehearsal. This does not imply that having a good laugh during rehearsal is not an efficient use of time. It is a great tension reliever and tension is the demon that interferes with great music making and enjoyment.

Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. Praise, praise, praise. One of the things that never ceases to amaze me is when I stop a group in a rehearsal for the first time and proclaim, “That’s it!” Invariably, someone will say, “Then why did you stop us?” If the only time we stop is to correct something, how is the group going to know when it sounds right? Tell them what was good and have them play it again so they get it in their heads and ears.

Be flexible. Do not become obsessed with your rehearsal schedule. If something is going particularly well in a rehearsal, go with the flow. Don’t fight momentum. Conversely, if things just aren’t clicking that day on a certain exercise or section of music move on and avoid frustrating the group. This will give you an opportunity to create different strategies to teach the concept. There are days when the planets align in our favor and times when they don’t. Mondays and Fridays seem to have a dynamic all their own and learning to channel vibes from these days can pay great rewards. Mondays have the nasty habit of coming after two days off school and students need a delicate balance between refocusing and not over-doing new material. Fridays have the nasty habit of coming before two days off and there is a vitality in the school that, depending on the ensemble’s maturity, encourages more recapping of the week’s lessons, listening more for macro concerns and addressing fewer micro problems than you would Tuesday through Thursday.

This four part series has addressed creating a strategy to help students achieve a successful music making experience in your class. Through assessing the ability level of the ensemble, creating a curriculum that emphasizes skills acquisition and review, careful selection of appropriate literature, anticipating performance problems and addressing them in a pedagogical development warm-up, we create opportunities for success by eliminating roadblocks.
Although the musical benefits are obvious, the greatest benefit of Creating Opportunities for Success is the fostering of a positive attitude in the students. Mastering the basic fundamental music skills of tone, intonation, rhythm, technique and phrasing enables them to more easily perform the music in the folders successfully, creating a positive attitude gained through achievement. And, nothing encourages community support and continued participation in our ensembles more than success in performance.