

Mindful Musicianship

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Our musical integrity must be a part of all aspects of what we do. We form an internal musical image that is realized through our sonic awareness, critical listening, and rehearsal skills.

Forming an Internal Image of the Score

What we study and imagine MATTERS! Musical performances are the product of thoughtful score preparation that guides what we teach our students.

Thorough Score Study - Do your homework!

Sonic Awareness – how we imagine the “sound” of the ensemble affects our decisions.

Transparency of Sound

A string section by nature is transparent allowing featured winds to easily project. In the band world, supporting voices are often large in number and powerful in volume (ex: a full clarinet, saxophone, flute, or brass section). The larger the number of wind players on supporting material, the harder it is to hear layers or leading lines.

1. Alter dynamics.
2. Make decisions about blend and/or balance.
3. Misconceptions about the balance pyramid...
4. Realize that sometimes content in a score should be more felt than heard, especially when serving in a supporting role.
5. A *transparent* sound must be carefully planned. This does NOT happen by accident!

Resonant Sonority

String instruments resonate easily, as the vibration of the string is amplified by the wooden body. There is a considerable amount of sound "left over" after the musician has ceased his/her efforts to make it. The same *cannot* be said for woodwind and brass instruments - the sound stops when the air stops. What this can mean is that the band must work HARDER than a string section to create a truly resonant sound.

1. Note length – pay attention to the *ends* of notes and overall duration. Notes can easily be too dry and short when inappropriate.
2. Attacks – this is our consonant, but the vowel creates resonance. Get to the sustain of the sound (even if short).
3. Establish a true legato - bands often underachieve, especially when a passage is articulated rather than slurred. Plan breath decisions or stagger breathe to continue a legato sound. Phrase does not *necessarily* mean breath.
4. Shape ends of notes by working on the skill of diminuendo (or tapering the end).
5. *The Art of Wind Playing* by Arthur Weisberg, provides a fantastic resource and visual guide to illustrate these concepts.

Rehearsing the Score with Mindful Awareness

Your concept of the score must be CLEAR. Vague decisions on the part of the conductor lead to vague statements by the ensemble. Effective rehearsals are engaging, not passive!

Critical Listening

1. You must remain aware of great music making.
2. Listen to ensembles outside of your own discipline.
3. Observe role models with a score if possible.
4. Isolate often to hear inside the score.

Saying and doing are different things

Instruction alone (*saying*) does not necessarily lead to the student perceiving *how* to change (*doing*). Recognition is the first step to mastery. Until we can change the *perception* of our students, nothing will change in their performance.

Changing Perception Begins with YOU

1. The conductor must have a strong internal image of all aspects of the score.
2. Do not give up on a concept! Just because you have said it does not mean anything has changed.
3. Gradually increase your expectation of student achievement.
4. Do not become complacent in the sound you imagine from your students.
5. Provide strong examples of musicians to help develop characteristic tone.
6. You must be an expert in many areas of instrumental music - an impossibility.
Do not be afraid to ask colleagues for help!

Hard and Soft skills (from Daniel Coyle *The Little Book of Talent*)

1. Hard skills require consistency and precision (fundamentals).
2. Soft skills are flexible and vary by situation (musical decisions).
3. BOTH must be part of your rehearsal.

Complete Teaching Cycle

1. Instruction –Be concise and highly specific. Not too many instructions at once!
2. Model – Can be you or a student.
3. Evaluation – Students perform and you compare this to your internal image.
CRITICAL LISTENING IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE. If the performance does not match your internal image, *why* and *what* are you going to do about it?
4. Feedback - Highly specific information to further instruction. Feedback cannot be “good” or a synonym of “good” (unless you have reached the end of a teaching cycle and gotten exactly what you want). In a strong teaching cycle the feedback becomes the next instruction, continuing the cycle until improvement occurs.

Mindfulness Includes Holding Ourselves and Our Students Accountable!

1. This requires constant attention to what has already been achieved.
2. Have patience to repeat a concept as needed or create another way to address it.
3. Don’t underestimate the ensemble. Students will only be capable of concepts you present.

Elements of Thorough Score Study

1. Background of composer and piece.
2. Source material – if the material is not original what is the origin?
3. Text – even in an instrumental score, is there text for the source material?
4. Concrete/abstract elements – concrete elements cannot be changed (key, rhythm, meter, etc). Abstract elements await your informed decisions (use of rubato, how much ritard, points of arrival, relative dynamic levels, etc.).
5. Horizontal/vertical elements – horizontal elements contribute to the forward motion of the music (phrasing, gradual dynamic changes, note grouping, etc.). Vertical elements contribute to the alignment of the music (rhythmic placement/integrity, sudden dynamic changes, harmonic structure, etc.). THE VERTICAL ELEMENTS MUST BE IN PLACE TO MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HORIZONTAL ELEMENTS.
6. Macro to micro study – know the form and where the piece is the same or different. An immense amount of teaching material will be evident from just this idea. Gradually narrow down the scope of your study by sections of structure, by phrase, by individual part, by measure, by note, etc. During the rehearsal process, highlighting moments of change in a piece will make an enormous difference in the musical performance of the ensemble.
7. Phrasal analysis – what is the breakdown of musical phrases? When it is not the obvious 4 or 8 bar phrase, attention to unusual structure will help the ensemble complete a musical “sentence.”
8. Internal/external phrasing – external phrasing is the broad decision about the direction of a complete phrase. Internal phrasing includes decisions you make within smaller fragments of a phrase.
9. Pacing a piece – decisions of tempo relationships, dynamic contrasts, moments of sustain, altering balances or colors, etc. contribute to the overall expression of a piece (especially slow or repetitive pieces) to avoid being redundant.