

## **ORCHESTRAL INSIGHTS: ANYTHING GOES**

**Reynard Burns**

**ASTA Strings Alive in 2005**

Friday February 25, 2005

From rehearsal warm-up to performance, the sky's the limit. The incorporation of assorted musical styles and the use of inventive rehearsal techniques can enhance your orchestral program and develop stronger, more skilled players.

Conductors of public school orchestra's are already pretty creative. Inspiring string players and orchestra members presents many challenges that require ingenuity and creativity. This session is intended to present a variety of approaches and techniques that have been found to be useful in getting the instructional points across to your students. The approaches presented represent some of the many possible ways to run your rehearsal and program.

In any situation, rehearsal or performance, it is desirable to keep as many players involved for as much time as possible. This can be done through actual playing or listening. Recognizing aural cues and understanding setting and following the style can also keep players mentally and musically involved.

### **What is the purpose of the orchestra rehearsal and performance?**

1. To develop a musical group to its fullest potential *or*
2. To provide the school and community with a good performance *or*
3. To develop an appreciation of orchestral music in particular *or*
4. To develop a strong orchestral program.

The rehearsal should be as exciting for you, the conductor, as it is for the orchestra member or player. All of these approaches are presented under the pretense that the rehearsal is for improving each section of the orchestra and the entire group. Improving each player's proficiency and musicianship as well as improving the overall performance are constant goals. The daily goals are more specific and address the specific techniques needed for a specific work.

Rehearsal goals:

1. Rhythmic skill development.
2. Aural (listening) skill improvement.
3. Intonation improvement.
4. Technique development:
  - a) Dexterity
  - b) Speed
  - c) Tone quality
  - d) Blending
  - e) Cohesion – section and group

## **The Rehearsal:**

### Rehearsal mechanics:

- Save announcements for the end of the rehearsal if there is no other time.
- Establish a consistent regimen of starting to actually rehearse when the bell rings.
- Designated responsible students can take attendance.
- Try tuning from low to high. This allows for overtones to kick in to the process.
- Select a warm-up that accomplishes a lot in a small amount of time. (Addresses Intonation, bowing, dexterity.)

### Intonation:

Include intonation practice in your routine  
Using frequency beats in explaining tuning unisons  
Intervals  
Harmonic structure  
(Function Choral-Steve Melilo stormworks.com)

### Music preparation:

- Orchestra music in lessons or technique building,
- Through created orchestral excerpts that pinpoint trouble spots in the music.
- Use of jazzy warm-up lines that present swing rhythms, blues scales, bass lines, as well as alternative bowing styles.  
Obtain or create something short enough to be memorized so players can focus on bowing, listening, eye contact.

### Seating:

- Rotational seating in rehearsal – gives every player a perspective of playing from any location in the section. Eye contact becomes very important. It sounds different from different places.
- Seating a strong player and a weaker player together on the same stand builds a stronger section.
- Seating for performance - seating strictly by audition results with strongest in the front and weakest left in the back could make the rear of the section sloppy.  
Seating players in the section to yield the best performance may be hard to

accept

- by some students but it accomplishes the desired musical effect.
- Change the location of sections. Place them in non-traditional locations. They may hear parts they never heard before.

### Auditions:

Live or taped, solo or group, one audition for everything or multiple auditions addressing specific pieces?

Rehearsal variations:

- Change the dynamic.
- Change or vary the tempo.
- Divide the group.
- Change the rhythm.
- Take a passage and change the style. They get to work on the passage with a different slant.
- Define what it is you are looking for musically. (color, mood, effect.) Use an analogy they may grasp better.

The roaming conductor:

- Walk around during rehearsal
- Stand behind or within a section
- Provide cues only from the podium
- Demonstrate

### **Music Selection:**

The music selected is appealing, exciting, and challenging without being overwhelming. The students are taught the aspects of an original work or arrangement that makes it worth playing.

Selection of music can be critical to the success of the orchestra. Music of the classics has a lasting appeal and can provide a musical approach to technique development.

Finding music that fits your group:

1. Is it playable by your group?
2. Do you select an original or an arrangement?
3. Does the arrangement follow the original closely enough to give the flavor of the original? Dvorak New World 1<sup>st</sup> movement
4. Does the work provide sufficient participation and interest for all sections of the orchestra? Violas, basses, percussion, brass.
5. What is the reasoning behind selecting a work? Does it present a challenge in a specific technique, i.e. dexterity, blend, rhythm, counting, dynamics, or combination of techniques?

### **Technology in rehearsal and performance:**

- Yamaha silent strings (violin, cello)
- Accompaniment track
- Incorporate effects.

**Exposure to the orchestra (string) sound:**

Provide exposure to professional musicians and performances.

If your school is located in or near an urban area, take advantage of local orchestras to expose the students to what a professional group sounds and looks like. Attending a rehearsal can provide as much if not more exposure than attending the performance. Besides being less costly, students will get a chance to see and hear what goes into the preparation. Pointing out how a section leader determines bowings or how balance and bowings are treated may clarify what you have been trying to get across in your rehearsal. Sometimes these orchestras will hold a meet the musician or orchestra session before or after the rehearsal or performance. A simple statement by the performer can be an eye opener for student and a reminder to the teacher how important something like instrument quality can be.

Alert your students to broadcasts by professional groups. Give some background on the selections, orchestra, composers on the program.

Recording programs featuring non-classical performances can show versatility of strings. PBS is a good source. If possible, record the program for latter viewing by your students. It's even more effective if you can catch a performance of one of the selections you are playing.

**Guest Musicians and Outreach Programs:**

Go to web sites of various artists to obtain contact information. They will usually respond via email themselves. Sometimes information can be provided by the agent. If they do not respond right away, allow time for them to get back to you. They may be on tour. If you can arrange for a workshop, master class, or other visitation, see how flexible they are in providing a program that meets your needs. Questions to ask the intended musician:

1. Can they run a workshop that shows specific techniques? (Bowling, sound production, shifting, improvisation)
2. Will they incorporate your music in their workshop so there is some relevance for the students?
3. Can they provide music that can be used by you and your students?
4. Can they provide PR material for distribution that will provide background info and other info?
5. What is the cost? How much are you getting for your investment? How many sessions, performances, etc.?

Arrange music to fit your group:

Sometimes you find a great orchestral work but sections are too difficult for your strings. Rewrite those sections to make them more playable without losing the flavor of the piece.

Brahms Academic Festival,

Find sources of music not listed in traditional catalogs.

Theme and Variations (tnv.com, good source of actual film scores, John Waxman.)

International Opus – good source of multi ethnic music.

Disney Music

Music Rental

Jazz, rock, new age, calypso, Celtic, country, and even hip-hop, have all shown how adaptable strings can be. The Canadian group Barrage, Turtle Island String Quartet, Dave Matthews, Mariachi groups, John Blake, Randy Sabien, MiriBen Ari, and Regina Carter are but a few of the performers of today using strings today. Their music is accessible for public use and many of these performers are available for residency and outreach programs.

Composers such as John Williams, Hans Zimmer, Alan Melkin, James Horner, William Grant Still, Leonard Bernstein, have written orchestral and string music that has reached a wide audience of young and old. These and other composers have given a big boost to an awareness of the expanse of string and orchestral performance capabilities.

Chip Davis and the Mannheim Steamroller have provided yet another twist to orchestral sounds.

Attend workshops to expand your own knowledge:

1. Wisconsin Suzuki clinic.
2. TISQ workshops. Jazz in July.
3. IAJE Conference.
4. NYSSMA Conference.

## **WEB SITES FOR INFORMATION REGARDING REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES AS WELL AS BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM:**

**Efficient Rehearsal Techniques Creating Opportunities for Success**

<http://www.marshallmusic.com/>

AMEA/ASTA with NSOA Fall In-service Conference

[http://www.arkmea.org/insvc/session\\_descriptions.htm](http://www.arkmea.org/insvc/session_descriptions.htm)

Additional Links can be found on

[www.freeflightmusic.com](http://www.freeflightmusic.com)

Original scores for movie soundtracks

<http://www.tnv.net/programsuggestions.html>

Music of various ethnic composers

[www.internationalopus.com](http://www.internationalopus.com)