

Chamber Wind WORKS with High School Bands: Realistic Repertoire and Practical Applications

Thursday, December 21st, 2006

1:30-2:30p.m.

Williford Room, Chicago Hilton

A Midwest Clinic Presentation

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This session offers repertoire and ideas for expanding chamber wind activity within the high school band program. Musical excerpts of accessible repertoire for six to ten performers will be presented by the *University Chamber Winds* from Virginia Tech.

- I. Reviewing the merits**

- II. Why a “Chamber Winds” sampler ?**

- III. Implementation ideas (anecdotes & references included as pp. 2 – 4)**
 - A. Weekly Chamber Music Day(s) – in place of full band; (Snyder/Mikkelson/Love)**
 - B. Before-school “club”, once or twice weekly (Jackson)**
 - C. Pull-outs during full band—top students on their own (Garofalo, in *Blueprint...*)**
 - D. Seven-week course of study (Polancich)**
 - E. Full-year course of study (Brown)**
 - F. Full-year rotational pull-out model (Lattan)**
 - G. Engage student leaders, colleagues, community members, & composers!**
 - H. Advocacy: Expanding festival formats and/or repertoire**

Chamber Music Implementation Ideas for High School Bands

excerpt #1 – from a recent article manuscript (© Patrick F. Casey, 2006)

Promoting the chamber music opportunity: some practical school models

Including regular chamber music in a school band setting requires some creative scheduling, whether the primary combinations are trios, quartets, quintets, or larger combinations. Many outstanding presentations related to this challenge have been offered at the annual Midwest Clinic in Chicago. Worth special mention here is a session in 2004 by Lakota West High School band students and their director, Greg **Snyder**, from West Chester, Ohio. That year, with their band meeting five days weekly, every Wednesday was devoted to chamber music, where the entire band was divided into one-on-a-part small ensembles. Each ensemble worked independently, with occasional input from the music faculty roving from room to room.

Russel **Mikkelson** echoes the merits of this same approach in his recent essay, “Defining Success for High School Bands” (*The Instrumentalist*, March 2006): “As my views changed over time, I had my high school students play in chamber ensembles every Friday instead of as a full band. By reducing the rehearsal time for the full ensemble 20%, students actually made greater and more rapid progress. I worked harder to prepare for every rehearsal and became more efficient with the limited time available... Chamber rehearsals are a great opportunity for students to learn and grow musically, and these are well worth the relinquished rehearsal time of the full band or orchestra...”

Diana **Love**, band director at Blacksburg (VA) High School is making a sizeable investment in small ensembles. Her fall program includes a concert band of forty-seven (mostly freshmen) and a symphonic band of sixty-nine, each meeting one hour daily, as well as an eighty-piece marching band meeting as an after school elective three days each week. She arranges her symphonic band into small ensembles twice weekly in the fall—one day being a chamber music day of nine separate small ensembles, the other day dividing into three larger choirs of brass, woodwinds, and percussion. She is able to manage this alternate scheduling in part with the help of regular student teachers and a couple of volunteer community musicians. Several of the quartets, quintets, and sextets are largely self-coached. With the rehearsal hour adjacent to lunchtime, Dr. **Love** has achieved additional flexibility by alternating lunch shifts for some students. The band room, three adjacent practice rooms, and the auditorium accommodate five simultaneous chamber groups, and the staggered lunch structure opens up the possibility for all nine groups to meet each chamber music day. The students perform for each other during some rehearsals and at a popular public concert late in the fall.

In the early stages of this chamber program, Diana Love is reporting observable benefits, including a heightened listening awareness in full band rehearsals, and for many students, a new playing enthusiasm through their one-on-a-part experiences.

Elizabeth **Jackson**, during her years at Eden Prairie (MN) High School, created a year-round chamber music program for her interested students. Participation was optional, and students could choose to meet either once weekly or twice (Tuesdays and Thursdays) before school from 7:00a.m. to 7:45a.m. Students also had the option of forming their own ensemble, or letting the director assign them to a group from the pool of other interested students. The director would choose music for the groups at the start of the year, but then students were encouraged to locate music from the school’s extensive library as they gained momentum together. Recitals were scheduled at least once per semester. Other performance

venues included pre-concert music at their symphonic bands' events, school board meetings, community events, etc. The program quickly grew in popularity—with more than 100 students out of a 350-student band program electing to participate. An exceptional partnership was created with music education majors from the University of Minnesota serving as student coaches weekly during the first term of the year.

When interviewed about the chamber program's educational impact, **Jackson** summarized, "...excellent experience for the gifted student who will benefit from a greater musical and technical challenge; also tremendously beneficial for the less gifted child who may find himself sitting next to a stronger player in a small group, learning by example from his peers, and finally being able to hear himself play." Regarding "do's and don'ts", Jackson continued: "I believe that kids should be allowed to discover their own musical voice in situations like this - so I would not recommend that each ensemble be 100% supervised, coached or conducted. Give the kids a chance to make their own musical decisions. However, do not just set them up and let them go. Check in on them frequently and help nudge them back on track if necessary. Also, market the program--your kids deserve the recognition! Give awards for attendance and participation (a pin and a certificate go a long way), put up posters for recitals, write news updates for parent letters, create a link on your school website, and so forth...."

excerpt #2 – from Casey, Patrick F. “Chamber Music within the School Band Program,”
National Band Association Journal, fall 2002, pp. 46-47.

.... Robert **Garofalo**, in his text, *A Blueprint for Band* (Meredith Music Publications, 1983), recommends allowing advanced students to rehearse quartets and quintets on their own during selected full band rehearsals. In addition to giving those students seated at the top of their sections an additional challenge of chamber music, the effect can be positive on the rest of their peers, reinforcing the importance of musical leadership from *all* section members.

Roland **Polancich** shared a chamber music plan from his experiences teaching high school band in a 1993 article titled “Using Chamber Music Beyond Contest Season” (*The Instrumentalist*, December 1993). He recommends involving students in a seven-week chamber music experience annually as part of their band requirements. In his school, **Polancich** requires this of the top ensemble, and makes it an optional activity for the second group. He allows the students the opportunity to first sign up in groupings, informing them of the director's right to make personnel adjustments based on instrumentation or ability considerations. The groups should remain one-on-a-part, small enough to perform without a conductor. A student leader should be designated for each group, searching the library for music, handling rehearsal space details, and representing the ensemble. During that seven weeks, students are coached once weekly inside or outside of band class, whichever can be realistically scheduled. The suggested rehearsal layout:

WEEK #1: Read two or three pieces. --students bring a couple, coach brings some;

WEEK #2: Decide on a single piece to pursue, agreeing also on basic musical concepts within the piece and identifying individual and ensemble challenges.

Have the students involved in researching the composer and the composition for program notes.

WEEK #3: Drill technical sections.

WEEK #4: Shifts from technical to musical, working on balance, phrasing, etc.

WEEK #5: Research of the work and the composer should be concluded by this point. The rehearsal should focus on polishing their performance, with each student demonstrating clear understandings of their musical roles within the piece.

WEEK #6: Continuity rehearsal: Play the piece at least three times without stopping.

WEEK #7: Recital! --either in class or as a public performance.

Michael **Brown**, in a 1998 article titled “Chamber Music for Better Bands” (*Teaching Music*, April 1998) also suggests dividing one’s *entire* band into chamber groups that would rehearse throughout the year on a regular basis. Care must be taken in repertoire selection and in matching ability levels within each group. Two rehearsal schemes: (1) once weekly after school, or (2) once weekly during the school band period, with the suggestion of hiring part-time assistants with band booster funding. Of course, each of these scenarios requires facilities and instructional resources. The first instance means an every day after school instructional commitment by at band director. If weekly coached rehearsals cannot be scheduled for each chamber ensemble, consider once every other week. Brown concludes his article with this experienced perspective: “The development of a chamber music-enhanced band program requires a healthy dose of organization, flexibility, and salesmanship by the director. The hard work is getting the program started. Once the students have gotten a taste of joys of chamber music, however, it may very well become self-perpetuating.” (p. 72)

James **Lattan**, in an article titled “Chamber Music for Every Instrumentalist,” provides a fabulous model for scheduling chamber music year-round for every student in school band. Essentially, each band student is excused from another subject once weekly (a different class every week on a seven-week rotation) to attend a chamber music lesson. This well-presented model may be adaptable to a variety of school schedules. (See *Music Educators Journal*, March 2001, pp. 45-53.)

Selected References for a broader scope of Wind Chamber Music

Books

Secrist-Schemedes, Barbera. *Wind Chamber Music for Two to Sixteen Winds: An Annotated Guide*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2002.

Winther, Rodney. *An Annotated Guide to Wind Chamber Music for Six to Eighteen Players*. Miami: Warner Brothers Publications, 2004.

Web sites

<http://www.geocities.com/CincyCAE/> (check out “Advocacy and Humor” link)

--web site of the Chamber Arts Ensemble (Cincinnati, OH)

<http://faculty.washington.edu/gerhart/dwqbibliography/>

--annotated bibliography of double wind quintet music by Cathy Gerhart (Univ. of Washington)

