

Make Me a Match

Getting Kids on the Right Instruments from the Beginning

Erin Cole, Clinician

Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic
Thursday, December 20th, 2012
9:30am – 10:30am

Recruitment

- Visit elementary schools during the year. Bring students to perform – jazz band, flute choir, etc...
- Perform for the elementary students in the spring – Spring Recruitment Concert. I usually have our advanced band perform popular songs from the radio that the students will recognize and get them excited about joining the band! Talk to the students after the concert about how to go about joining the band. Tell them about the Instrument Selection Nights.
- Send a letter home to 5th grade parents about Joining the Band **(see attached letter)**
- “Early Bird” spring instrument testing
- Summer lessons to get students started early
- At the start of the school year, be visible in the hallways when the 6th grade class changes happen. Talk with students, ask them if they are joining band. RECRUIT!
- Hang “Join the Band” posters throughout the school. Music stores often times have free posters they will give you. Consider making your own posters as well.

Instrument Demonstration

- Have a time when all of the students meet in one place. I do our demonstration in the theater at our school.
- I use band directors, professional local musicians, and even advanced high school and college students to demonstrate the sounds of the instruments.
- Perform songs that will sell the instrument – play songs the students may recognize or sound “cool” on that particular instrument. Ex. Jaws on tuba, the pink panther on flute, lassus trombone, rhapsody in blue on clarinet, etc...
- This demonstration will allow for the students to hear what every instrument sounds like and which ones they are attracted to the most.
- Tell the students that there is not such thing as a girl or boy instrument.
- SELL YOUR PROGRAM! – Talk it up. Tell them about all the reasons they should join your program – ex. Field trips, performance opportunities, etc...
- Encourage all students to at least come to the band room and try the instruments. Some students may not even know they are interested in band until they actually come and try the different instruments.

Instrument Selection/Testing

- Select an instrument testing night in the Spring, one the week before school starts, and then more days the first 2 weeks of school if possible.
- I ask other band directors in the county to help with the instrument testing stations. In our district we help each out with one another’s instrument selection nights.
- I also ask high school band students to come to help out that night. Some students are assistants to the band directors running the different stations and some are greeters and handout forms to students and parents.
- Provide a form the students fill out as soon as they walk in the door to try instruments. The students will fill out this form indicating their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices of instruments. ***This form is included in this handout.***
- Students will then go to the different stations to try their instrument choices. The person conducting the instrument test will then mark on the form how she or he did on that particular instrument. (We use a scale of 1-5)
- After the student has tried all of his/her instrument choices, he/she will bring the form and sit with the head band director. The director can then inform the student and parents the instrument that is best suited for their child.

- It is important that the director choose an instrument for the student that he/she did well on, but is also excited about playing!
- Talk to the student and parent about the results of their instrument selection test and why it is you are suggesting a specific instrument.
- Having the parent there for this process makes things easier when it comes to suggesting an instrument the student was most successful on. The parent was actually there to see it!
- Motivation is key. Barring any type of physical issue, if the student is motivated to play a particular instrument he/she will be excited about playing, will practice and be successful!
- At this time I fill out the band permit/instrument assignment and supply list and go over it with the student and parents.
- Include music store brochures
- If the student is signing up in the spring, give them a form about taking summer lessons and precautions to take over the summer if getting an instrument early. This will help prevent students developing bad habits and instruments getting broken before school starts. Stress to the parent how beneficial summer lessons could be for their child.
- Go over with the parents the importance of renting or purchasing good quality instruments. Tell them they should steer away from purchasing an instrument at the same store they can buy peanut butter and tires.
- If the parent is concerned about cost, explain the school owned instrument options that you have available in your program.
- I am constantly monitoring my instrumentation as I go to make sure we are staying close to our target numbers.
- If numbers are low on some school owned instruments – horn, baritone, and tuba, don't panic. There will be time in the first few weeks to move students to those instruments if they are unable to rent or buy an instrument. That usually tends to work itself out.

Instrument Testing Tips for Each Instrument

- ❖ *Use mint flavored alcohol in a spray bottle and paper towels for the cleaning of the mouthpieces*

- **Flute (Erin Cole)** – you are looking for medium to thin lips and straight teeth. Check lips to make sure there is no cupid's bow or teardrop. Test students on a high and low sound on the head joint. Before having the student set the head joint on their lips, have them watch you as to how to correctly form the embouchure/aperture and correctly blow the air with a “pooh” syllable. I like to have students draw a line with their finger where their top and bottom lip connect and tell them to center that in the middle of the hole on the head joint, then roll back and blow the air across that hole. Help the student when setting the head joint and rolling it back before blowing the air. You want to make sure the head joint is not rolled back too far. Make a low sound with the flat of your palm against the end of the head joint, then make a high sound with the end of the head joint open.

- **Clarinet (Jeremy Trimmer)** – Check for protruding top teeth, an overbite or under bite, long fingers with enough padding that will be able to cover the holes. Mouthpiece test – student should be able to keep chin flat, set the correct embouchure without puffing the cheeks, and sustain a good tone on the mouthpiece. Ask them if they have ever put on a chapstick. They'll say yes and then I have them set their lips against their teeth as if they are putting it on. Then, I have them press only their bottom lip against (and slightly over) their bottom teeth. *Sometimes I have them place their finger in their mouth so that their top teeth are touching their fingernail while it rests on their bottom lip. I'm demonstrating the entire time. Once we have that, I'll place the mouthpiece in their mouth to the correct amount, have them wrap their lips around it like they are saying the syllable "eww" (being sure to keep the bottom lip against and slightly over the bottom teeth). Also do a few basic finger exercises with them to see that they can move fingers independently from one another. I have the students play on the mouthpiece and barrel and we are shooting for a F to F# on the mouthpiece/barrel. I also generally put a mouthpiece "patch" on the mouthpiece to help them get their teeth down. If I need to, I ask them if it is ok for me to touch their chin to help them. If they are struggling, I'll pull their chin down some while they have the mouthpiece in their mouth and push the mouthpiece up against the teeth to create that wedge so their bottom lip can do the work. Pushing up the mouthpiece onto the teeth is pretty critical I have found. They generally can pop out a F# off the bat with that. Once they can get it (generally after a few tries and telling them to blow a faster stream of air for 5 seconds), I'll have them hold the mouthpiece/barrel and play steady (hopefully) tones for 3-5 seconds. I tell them to keep the angle the same as I had it and to push it up against the top teeth while keeping the bottom lip/jaw snug on the bottom. Once they got this, I'll attach the body of the clarinet (turned about 180 degrees) to the barrel and they continue to blow as I play simple songs. I do notes below and above the break. I try to get up to a high C above the staff as they play on the mouthpiece/barrel. I also use Vandoren 2.5 reeds first and go to 2's if they are having a difficult time on the 2.5

- **Saxophone (Jeremy Trimmer)** – look for the same physical characteristics as clarinet, but student can get away with slightly uneven teeth. Mouthpiece test – make sure student can set embouchure correctly without rolling bottom top and bottom lip in too far. Top teeth on mouthpiece and a thin pillow of lip on bottom teeth. It is very similar to clarinet, but the bottom lip is over the teeth a little more. Check the size of their hands to make sure they will be able to wrap around the body of the alto sax. I generally have them play the clarinet first and then do saxophone immediately next or vice versa. That way I can compare and contrast it. I ALWAYS use 3 or 3.5 reeds on the saxophone. Sometimes...even thicker if my numbers are getting too high on the sax. I also use the mouthpiece AND neck and we are going for a concert Ab. Once they get it, I'll attach the sax body. They hold the saxophone neck and blow like before while I do some fingerings on the top half of the sax with my right hand. Sometimes I'll let them do it while having a neck strap on.
- **Trumpet (Suzanne Scott)**– Look for even teeth, medium to thin lips, and all 3 fingers on the right hand working well. Have the student buzz on the mouthpiece. Students should be able to buzz a second line G. If a student can not do that, then he/she may be more successful on a bigger mouthpiece. Also test the student to see if he/she can get two partials (concert F and Bb). It is also a good idea to have the student match pitch singing with the director.
- **Horn (Suzanne Scott)**– Look for even teeth, flat chin, and all three fingers on the left hand working well. Do a matching pitch singing or humming test. Also have student do a mouthpiece test and make sure 2/3 of the top lip is a comfortable fit. . Test the student to see if he/she can get two partials (concert F and Bb)
- **Low Brass (Suzanne Scott)** - Look for medium to full lips, even teeth are not quite as important, and long enough arms for trombone. Do a mouthpiece test. Students should be able to buzz an F for trombone and baritone and a low buzz for tuba. . Also test the student to see if he/she can get two partials (concert F and Bb)

- **Percussion (Jamil Faddol)** - First, determine if the student is mature enough and capable of being a percussionist in your program. Keep in mind that it takes patience, the ability to stand still, and the willingness to learn all aspects of percussion to be a percussionist in your band. If the student cannot remain calm and still during instrument testing, chances are he or she will not be a successful young percussionist. I will also ask the student if he/she plays or has played piano. Use a practice pad and play rhythms to the students asking them to play back exactly what they heard you play. Do a matching pitch singing or humming test to get an idea of how the student would do on timpani. Give the student a score on each exercise. Here are some sample exercises:

Example #1



Example #2



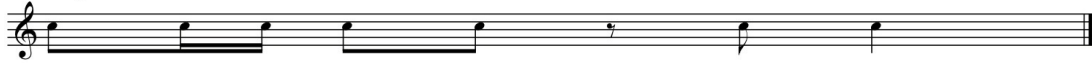
Example #3



Example #4



Example #5



Please Remember – The right match is KEY!

- Playing an instrument that is not compatible can cause frustration and then the possibility of the student wanting to quit.
- Check for any major physical limitations that would totally prohibit a student from playing a particular instrument
- The director needs to be the one that is guiding the student towards the right instrument. It is a very fine balance of the student doing well on the instrument test, finding an instrument the student is excited about playing, and also maintaining the desired instrumentation for your band.

Your students are signed up and on instruments – Now what?

- Consider having a **Band Carnival** – Many programs in our district have a Saturday Band Carnival for their students. Most times the high school band program hosts the event. This usually takes place the first weekend after starting in the class. The day is designed to help the students get started. The students are in section master classes in the morning. Band directors in the county are hired to come in and teach the individual sections how to assemble the instrument, hand position, make mouthpiece/head joint sounds, and learn the first few notes. This is all done in the morning from 9:30am-11:30am. They have a lunch break, games outside (inflatables, jumpy ball, funnel cakes, etc...) and then a show and tell concert at the end of the afternoon for the other students and parents. Each section gets to show what they learned in their master class that day.

Special Thanks:

Jeremy Trimmer

*Lost Mountain Middle School Band Director
Clarinet and Saxophone Testing*

Suzanne Scott

*Lost Mountain Middle School Assistant Band Director
Brass Testing*

Jamil Facdol

*Griffin Middle School Band Director
Percussion Testing*

Please feel free to contact me if you have any question or would like a copy of this power point.

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