

# **Composing with my junior high/ middle school band during rehearsal? YES YOU CAN!**

## **Presentation at the 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Midwest Clinic**

**Wednesday, December 20, 2017 from 1:45-2:15 p.m.  
McCormick's Place W180**

- I. Two common questions:
  - A. "I've got a student in my band who has been composing? I don't know how to help him. Do you have any suggestions or could you look at their work?"
  - B. "Where do your ideas come from?"
  - C. Re-creation and Improvisation have largely dominated school music experiences.
  - D. Planned creation – or *composing* – has been another story.
  - E. Young composers must summon incredible courage.
  
- II. Inspiration and Execution
  - A. There are two dimensions: What has been outwardly expressed (vocally, on an instrument on paper) and being experimented with, and what is yet to be discovered.
  - B. The filters of previous experience and the composer's long-term knowledge will allow discovery of new ideas that complete an incomplete form, and the idea happens during transition.
  - C. The filters and these emerging moments create a new filter and help a composer develop their own compositional grammar.
  
- III. Why Composing Makes Sense
  - A. Improvisation and the recreation of music in our ensembles is an important part of who we are in instrumental music.
  - B. While the student owns a fleeting moment with an improvised solo, or contributes to the recreation of another's music, don't we owe them an opportunity to express their own ideas in written form?
  - C. Beyond that, wouldn't engaging with concepts and elements within the music we are studying reinforce reading and performing skills?
  
- IV. Composition as a Teaching Tool
  - A. Process rather than product
    - Rules are good to have. Watch them find a way around them.
  - B. How can a young composer capture an emerging moment?
    - Improvise, record, transcribe, revise & grow!

- C. Write for chamber groups first!
  - The worst thing that could happen?
- V. Ideas for teaching composition using Junior High/Middle School Band Repertoire
  - A. *Irish Jig for Young Feet* by Travis J. Weller (FJH Music, Grade 2)
    - 1. Provide students an introductory composition opportunity to write and perform music in 6/8 meter.
    - 2. Open discussion and explore antecedent and consequent phrases in melodic statements.
  - B. *Palo Duro Sunrise* by Jack Wilds (FJH Music, Grade 1.5)
    - 1. Engage students in a composition exercise working within specific guidelines (e.g. A set pentatonic scale, 8 measures in length).
    - 2. Introduce pentatonic scales and identify different music styles in which they are used.
  - C. *El Cid* by Scott Watson (Alfred Music, Grade 1.5)
    - 1. Engage students in a collaborative chamber group exercise.
    - 2. Introduce concept of ostinato and explore how it can be used.
    - 3. Allow percussion to make choices for orchestration.
  - D. *Unraveling* by Andrew Boysen Jr. (Kjos Music, Grade 3)
    - 1. Engage students in a composition exercise exploring a different and unique melodic language.
    - 2. Create a different emotional state through melodic language.
  - E. *Friends of Freedom* by Timothy Loest (FJH Music, Grade 2)
    - 1. Engage students in analysis and composing in a familiar form
    - 2. Allow students to assume different roles in a collaborative process (What happens when the horns write the trio melody?)
  - F.
    - 1. Arrange a trio of a folk song or Christmas Carol
      - A. Take the show on the road and get caroling!
    - 2. Write to an emotional state – What “sounds happy”?, What sounds like “I hate Mondays and the trumpets are out of tune?”
    - 3. Write in the absence of rule – “What sounds good to you?”

**Contact Information**

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