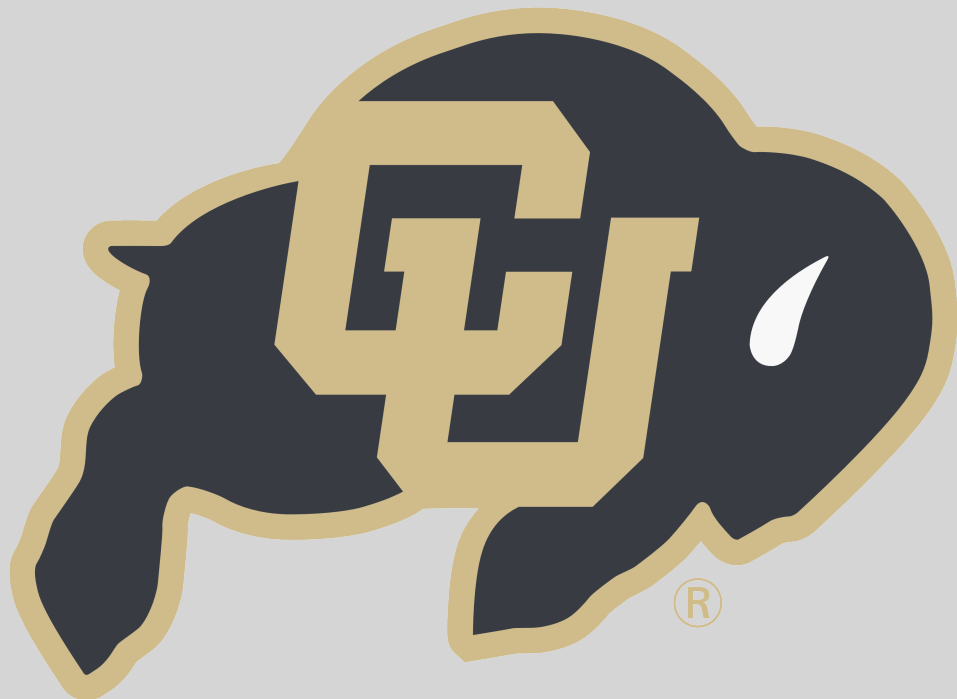


5 Concepts to Build Ensemble Awareness

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UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

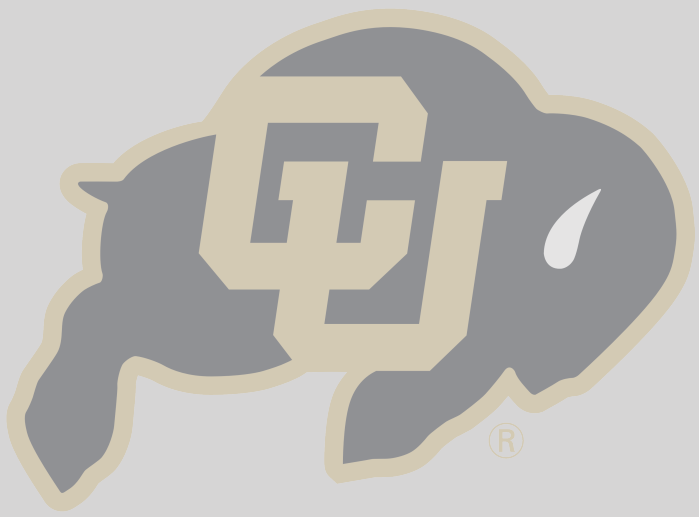


I believe that 2021-22 can be a music education renaissance...

**When we think about the
world's best
ensembles...**



Ensemble skills can be defined as the ability of individual musicians to engage their part with others to present a cohesive and convincing musical product.



EMPOWER AND ENGAGE STUDENTS USING THESE 5 CONCEPTS:

Care about your sound.

Evaluate how your sound is *interacting* with others.

Be *engaged* with the pulse/momentum of the music.

Search with your ears.

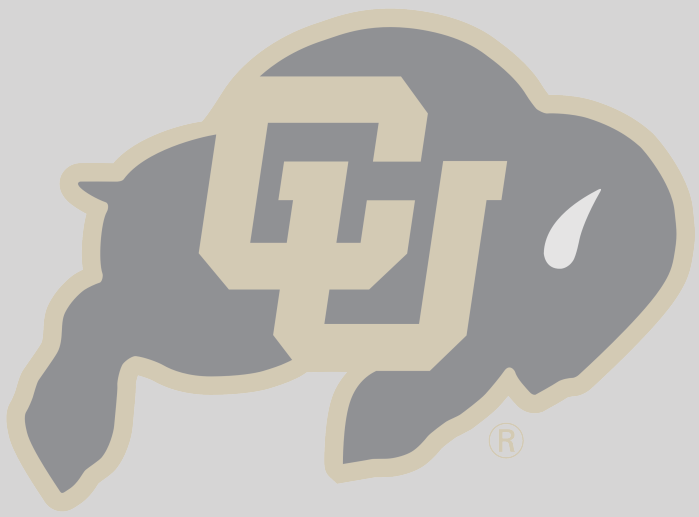
Be *musical*, always.

Care about your sound

- This applies to the 3rd clarinet that hasn't played in years or the music major tuba in the back of the room or the percussionist that uses the "yellow ones".
- With this guideline/demand... I have a wealth of differentiated feedback to give the students. Prerequisites? posture, embouchure, working instruments/reeds, **quality air support**, an aural image/modeling, etc...
- When a better sound is produced, much of what we are banging our head on the table trying to fix is achieved: Better intonation, articulation, balance, blend, technical passages, range issues, etc...
- There is NOT A REHEARSAL THAT GOES BY THAT I DO NOT TALK ABOUT QUALITY SOUND PRODUCTION.

Care about your sound

- Never play softer or **Louder** than you can with a beautiful tone.
- Younger musicians should develop a quality sound first, then expand their dynamic range - develop control.
- A great breath leads to great tone and sustained breath support yields sustained quality tone.



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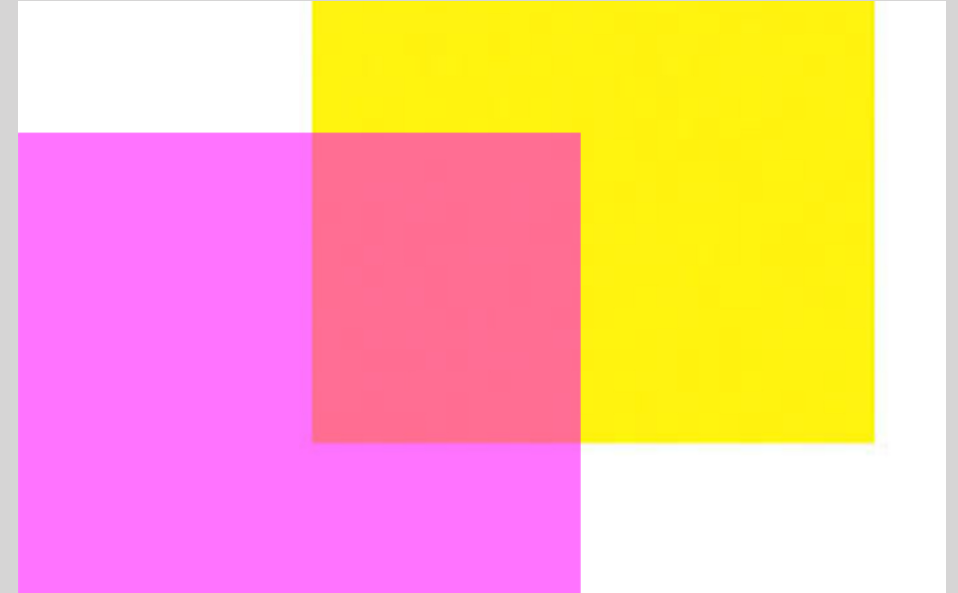
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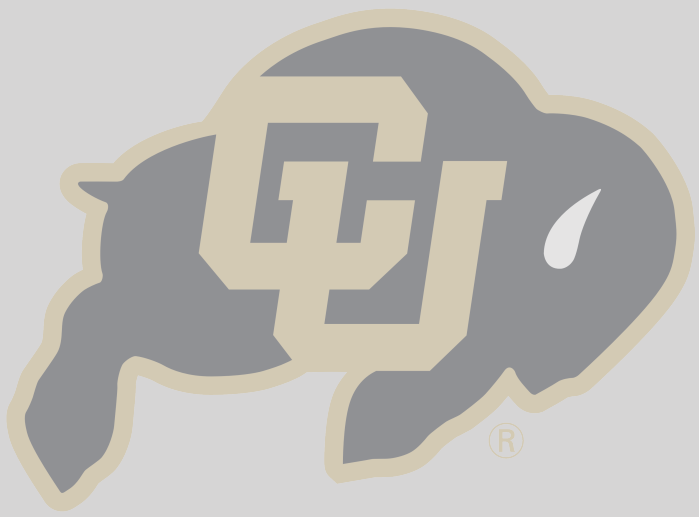
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Evaluate how your sound is *interacting* with others

- Once students are sensitized to working toward their best sound, we can get more in-depth on how our sounds are interacting.
- Have students *experience* what in-tune sounds like and feels like. It can be scary because a part of our sound is lost.
- Always give your students a direction/instrument/sound to listen for.
- Start with principal players (or accomplished players) and have other members add into the sound. Play something one on a part and add more into the passage. You are training their ears AND giving them a chance to attempt the passage (with air and fingers) before they play.





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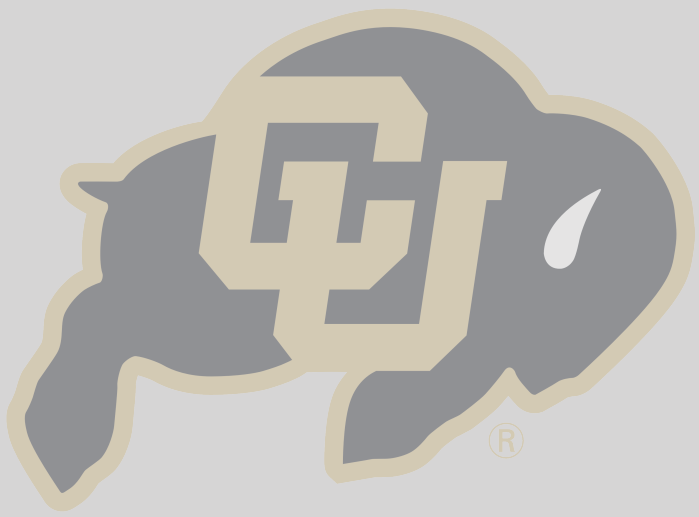
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- Students can keep tempo/pulse if we expect them to.
- I tend to ask questions of who is in charge of the tempo at that moment. Once their ears are sensitized, they can place their music with them.
- Rehearse from off the podium and around the group. This causes them to rehearse more with their ears than their eyes.
- Once your students take ownership, this frees you to be more expressive with your conducting and make small adjustments.
- Perhaps two rehearsals every week you “coach” from off the podium and they are in charge of pulse.





Care about your sound.

Evaluate how your sound is *interacting* with others.

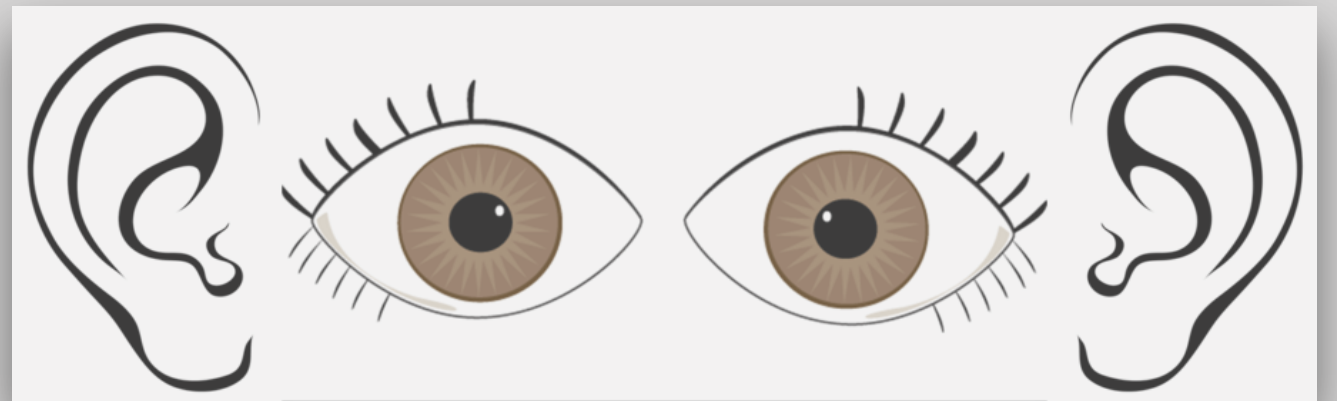
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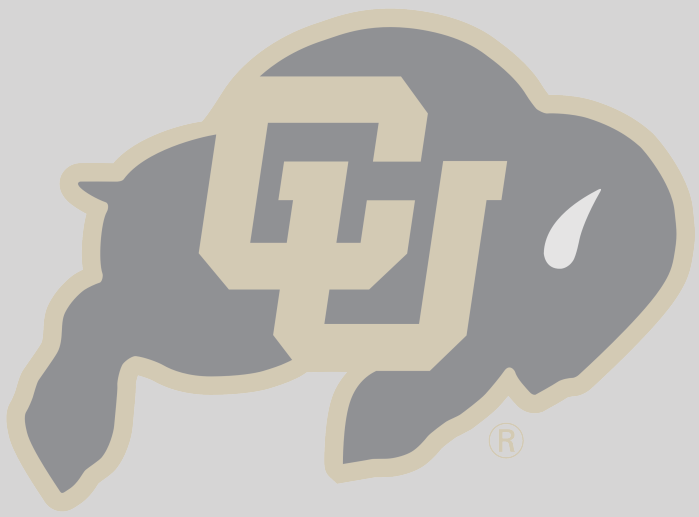
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Search with your ears

- This skill begins most often in the warmup. I start asking questions directing their listening so they HAVE to pay attention.
- I use more questions during the rehearsal:
 - What did you hear?
 - Did you like that?
 - Who are you playing with?
 - How could that be better?
 - Are we together?
 - Who was the first instrument to enter?
 - Is that as much shape as we can make?
- Silent rehearsal? Students rehearse themselves?





Care about your sound.

Evaluate how your sound is *interacting* with others.

Be *engaged* with the pulse/momentum of the music.

Search with your ears.

Be *musical*, always.

Be *MUSICAL*, always

- Music is NOT what comes *after the technique*, it is what develops *while* the technique grows.
- There will always be something else “to fix”. Rehearse *through* the music to tackle technical issues. Rehearsing only technique is safe because it’s tangible.
- If I find myself not being able to talk about music, it means I don’t know the score as well as I should. I speak with VIVID language which yields gesture, which yields rehearsal techniques.
- Listen to great ensembles, watch great musicians, commit to going to live music (support the return), record your group, get feedback, take a chance on something you believe in, score study more.



What Next??

“Are we only listening for what is going wrong? Or are we listening for what the music could be?”

Psychology of the ensemble

- Carefully think about the sequencing of rehearsal. (Where to start, difficulty)
- Students should experience success MULTIPLE times during the rehearsal.
 - If students are struggling: REMOVE DIFFICULTY. choose easier music, go slower, air and finger passages, sing challenging intervals, put a passage in a more comfortable range, play rhythm on a repeated note, practice with a metronome, slowly add more difficult concepts into the music, practice WITH the musical phrase incorporated.
- Give the students A CHANCE to succeed.
- When your students practice or the ensemble rehearses with success in mind, concepts are retained and we can *continually move forward*.
 - We become frustrated with practice when we don't remove enough of the difficulty. BUILD YOURSELF UP, don't knock yourself down.

Self-reflective questions:

- How do you structure your rehearsals? Macro-micro-macro, Review-challenge-review, Start in the middle of a piece or in a section that returns?
- Are you talking about tone/sound production EVERY REHEARSAL?
 - Then, how varied is that instruction/imagery?
 - Are you modeling? Playing sound examples?
- Are you giving feedback to every section every rehearsal?
 - Then, how varied is that feedback?
- Are you getting off of the podium and engaging your students every rehearsal?
- Are your students feeling success MULTIPLE times a rehearsal?
 - If not, dial back the difficulty, vary the feedback, have them try it again
- Are you talking about MUSIC every rehearsal?
 - Do they have an idea of how they can be more musical?
 - Is most of the music at a level to where your students can actually conquer the technique and work on music?
- Are you helping them understand what they can be doing on each repetition to be better?
- Are you giving your students the CHANCE to play, succeed, and implement change?
- Are you engaging your students with questions about music?

With younger students (and older students as well), of course, we can't just say 'Be musical' and expect them to do it. I can't say 'Care about your sound' and they automatically get better, and I can't tell them blindly to 'Search with their ears' and expect them to hear everything that's going on.

As with everything we do as teachers, we need to create lessons and environments that engage our students and allow them to EXPERIENCE the skills we want them to grow.

... imagine an ensemble and year's worth of musicians that are challenged every day to CARE, EVALUATE, INTERACT, ENGAGE, SEARCH, and be MUSICAL.

We can incorporate these strategies in an engaging, meaningful, caring, and challenging way to help all our students develop ensemble and musical skills.

It will make both your students and YOUR rehearsal experience more satisfying.

THIS... is the renaissance.

Thank you!

Questions?



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