MidWest Band and Orchestra Clinic: In Honour of Our Mentors
Wednesday 19 December 2012

Making Ensemble Count: Strategies for a Curriculum-Based Approach to Performance

Presented by

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Making Ensemble Count: Strategies for a Curriculum-Based Approach to Performance

Making Ensemble Count discusses the importance of establishing educationally sound decision making processes with the planning of ensemble rehearsals, repertoire and performances. Applicable to rehearsals within all ensemble contexts, this clinic will demonstrate through practical application, with Clarendon Hills Middle School Symphonic Band, how the selection of repertoire and the use of creative rehearsal techniques can develop students as independent music makers. Through considered approaches to teaching and learning we can make ensemble count.

GOALS for INDEPENDENCE

Goal 1: to develop student ability to place their voice within an ensemble context with discernment of the balance of musical lines and timbre;

Goal 2: to develop students ability to make musical decisions, to shape phrases and breathe appropriately;

Goal 3: to develop the tone quality of the ensemble;

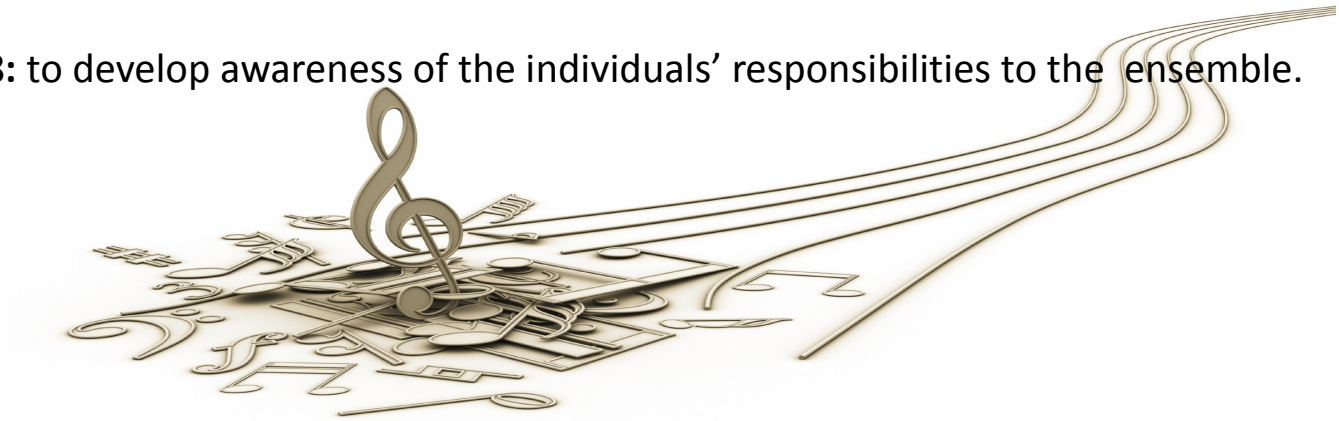
Goal 4: to develop a consciousness of good intonation and the skills to improve it;

Goal 5: to develop independent rhythmic literacy;

Goal 6: to develop the skill of precise playing;

Goal 7: to develop stylistic awareness and appropriate choice of articulation and release;

Goal 8: to develop awareness of the individuals' responsibilities to the ensemble.

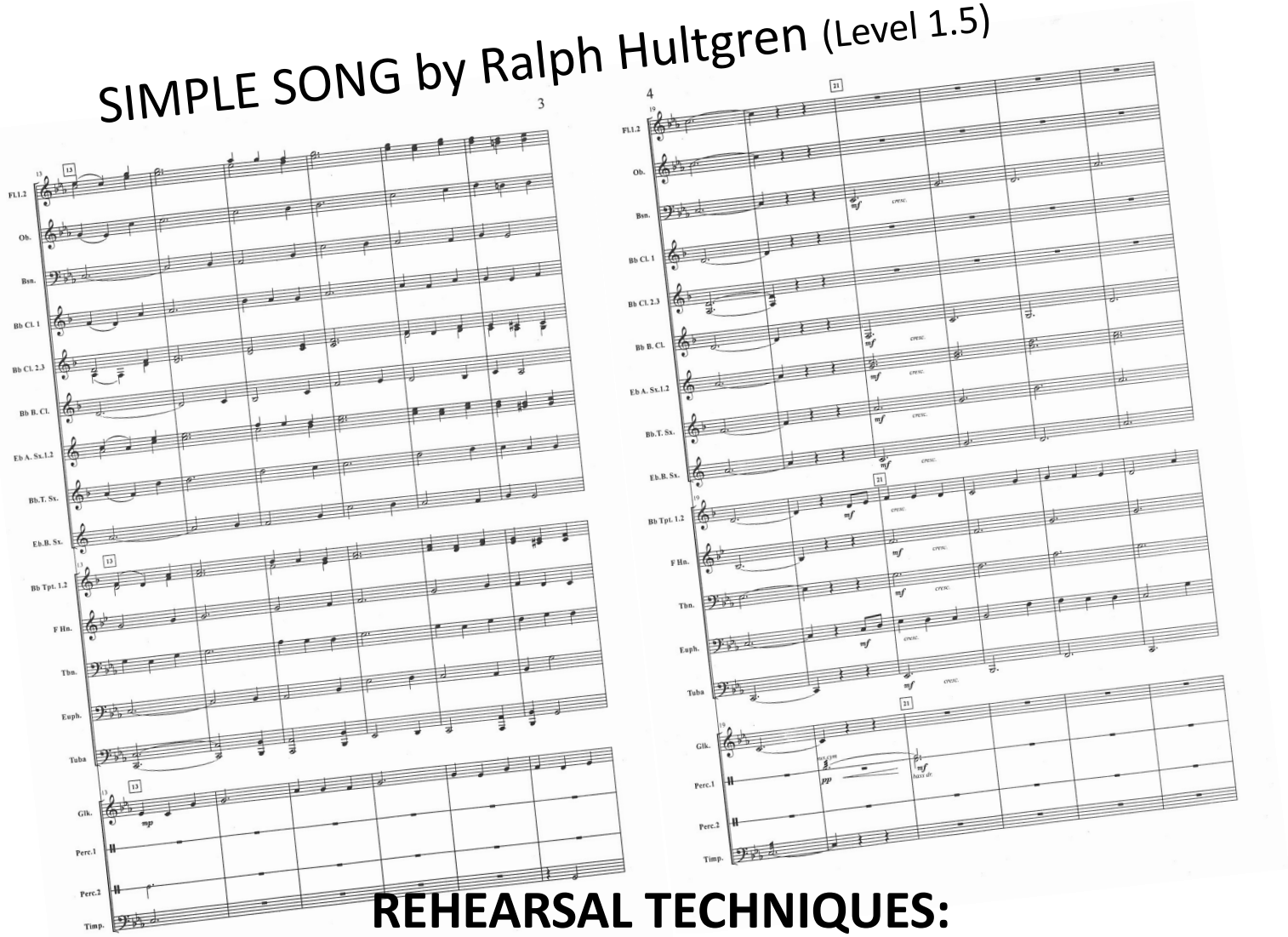


REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES:

CLOSE YOUR EYES, LISTEN TO THE ROOM ,YOU MAY BEGIN
WHO'S DRIVING? SENSITISING TO DIRECTION

- Silent focus at the start of the rehearsal makes for a greater application and concentration
- Emphasises breath, tidying attack and propelling air through the phrase
- Opens the ears and the opportunity for students to pay attention to tone production, intonation, blend and balance, and internal pulse without direct reference from the teacher
- Provides the opportunity for students to make their own musical decisions in dynamic phrasing
- Behavioural issues can be minimised as it sets a calm, meditative tone to the start of the rehearsal

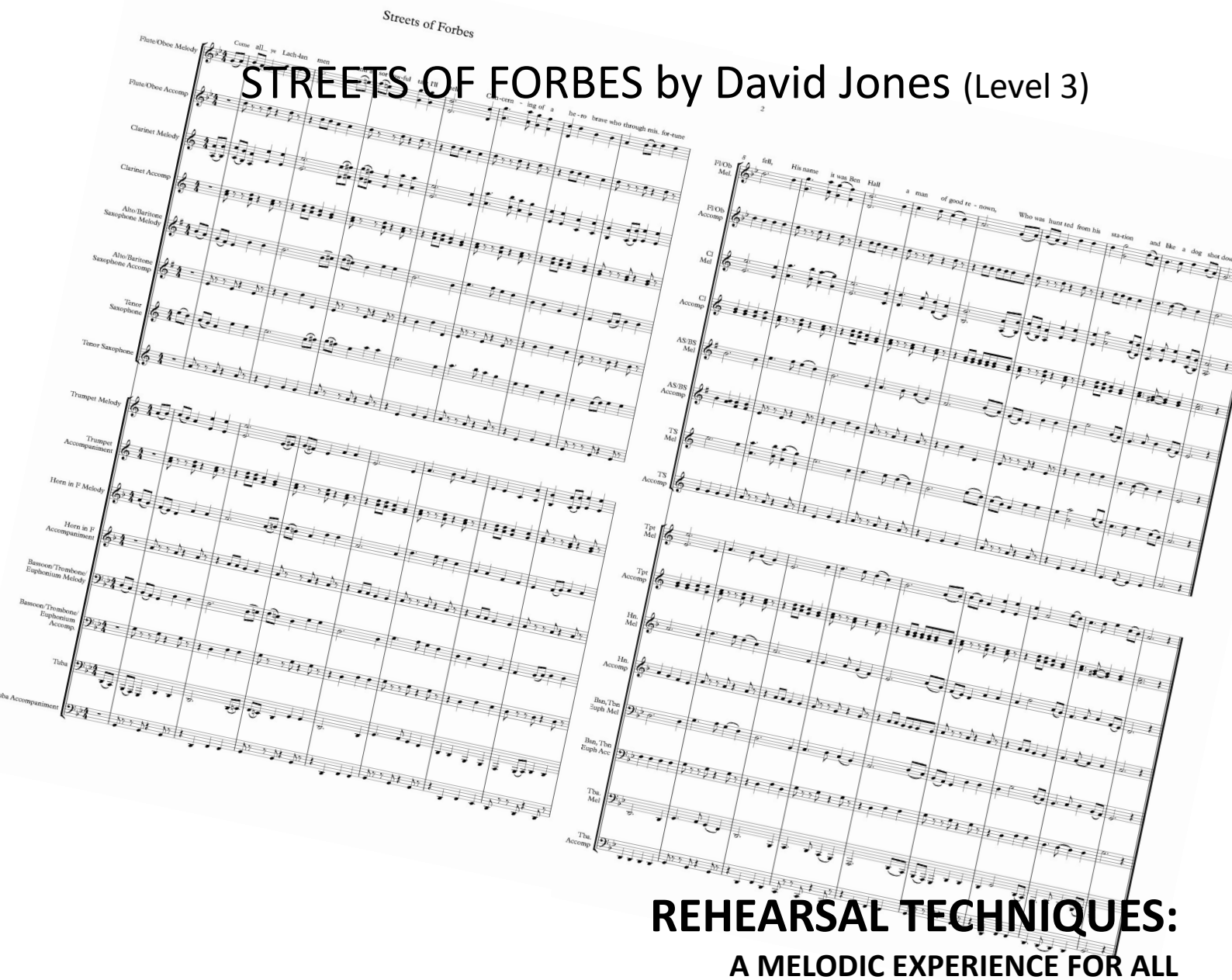
SIMPLE SONG by Ralph Hultgren (Level 1.5)



REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES:

PLAYING THE FRONT OF THE NOTE

- Assists precision in legato passages



STREETS OF FORBES by David Jones (Level 3)

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES:

A MELODIC EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

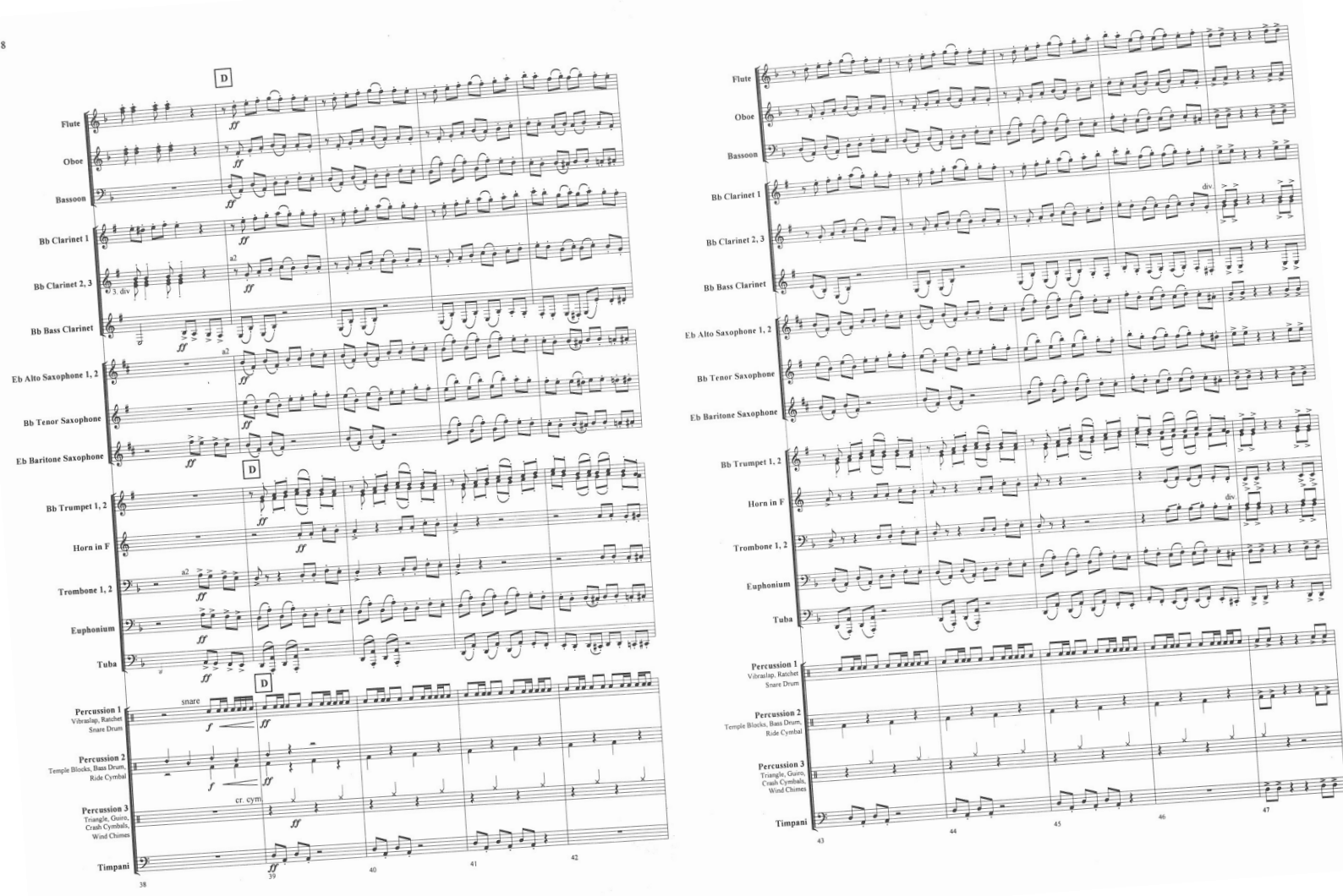
- All students have the opportunity to develop familiarity with the melody, its contour and phrasing
- Provides educators the opportunity to ask probing questions that challenge students to think about how music works; and to prompt discussions about the use of dynamics as an expressive tool
- Encourages students to make musical decisions, to shape phrases and breathe appropriately
- Knowledge gained can be transferred so that instruments playing a supporting role can develop an understanding of what they need to do to assist the shaping of the phrase
- Opportunities to analyse the phrasing and appropriate places for breath through the lyrics, and story telling

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES:

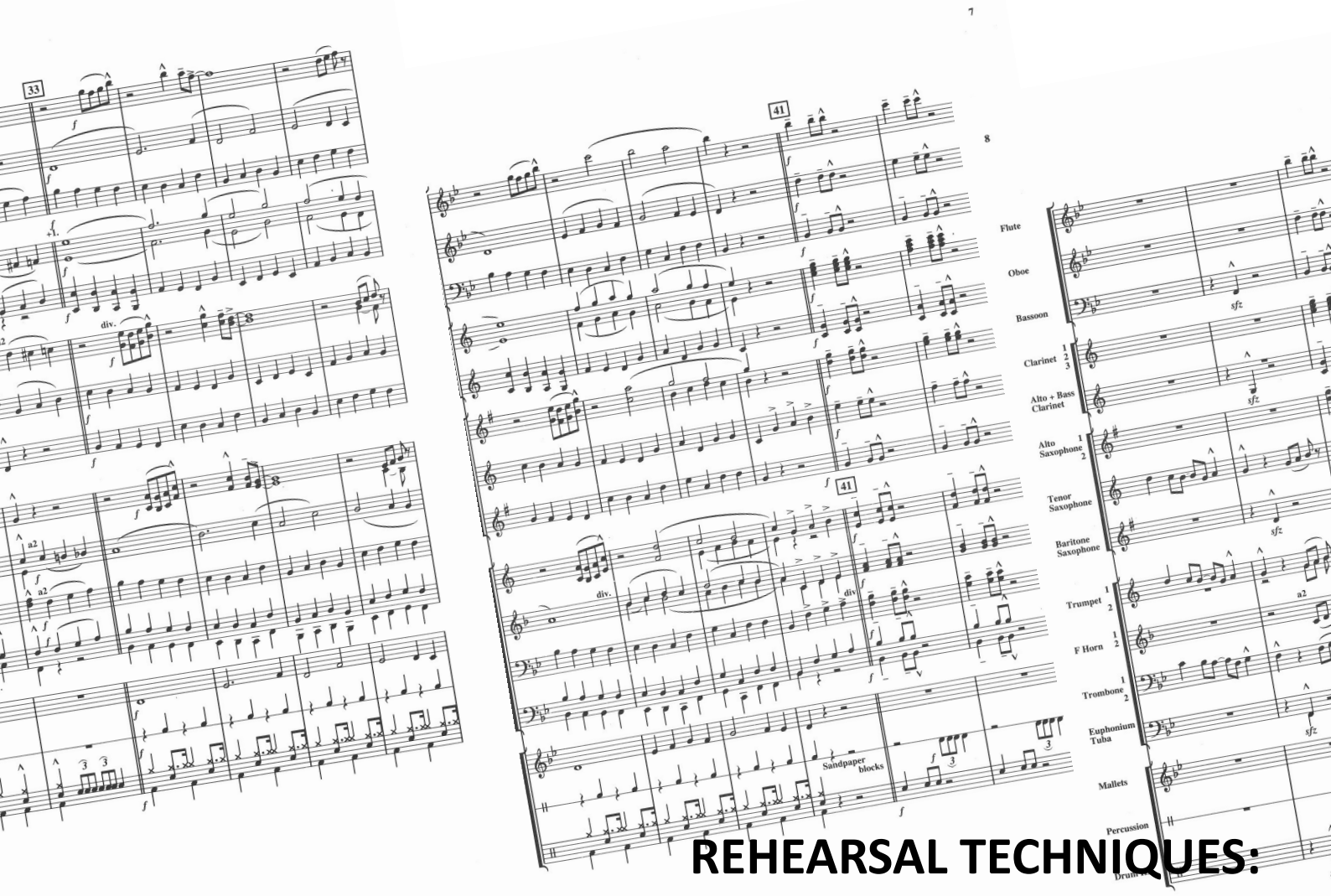
SHADOW PLAYING

- Solution for individuals to clean up more technical sections through a ‘silent’ practise technique
- Works on air flow, articulation skills and fingers without sound getting in the way
- Allows students to work independently from others when fixing technical challenges
- Encourages a systematic preparation for sight reading activities
- Refocusses concentration in rehearsal
- Saves tired chops and Internalises individual pulse

TOYS AWAKENING by David Jones (Level 2)



WALKABOUT by Ralph Hultgren (Level 2)



REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES:

TEAM CIRCLES - THE CHALLENGE

INVOLVING STUDENTS IN MAKING MUSICAL DECISIONS

- Variety in the set up creates a new learning environment and means more listening and less reliance on the teacher as the instigator of the music
- Develops section sound and blend
- Develops leadership skills within the ensemble
- Encourages listening and ear stretching across the ensemble
- Develops an understanding of the individual responsibility to contribute to the whole
- Encourages students to make the musical decisions and have the chance to articulate their thoughts
- Gives educators a chance to analyse student understanding of concepts discussed and to reflect upon teaching practices

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS IN SOCRATIC QUESTIONING:
Questioning techniques to draw out student responses, promote deeper listening and engage students in the learning process.

What do the clarinets need to do as a team here to be able to play in time?
How will the phrasing be shaped?
Listen to this section and tell me what part the cellos are playing here.
In this style, what does that symbol mean?
What are some ways we could fix this passage?
Who should we be listening for?

MAKING WARM UPS RELEVANT:
Why do a warm up? What are we trying to accomplish in a warm up?
Use scales interestingly – playing rhythms on scale degrees, in thirds, in rounds – promote counting, get fingers moving, and get focus into our classroom; 1; 1 2 1; 1 2 3 2 1 etc; Ed Lisk techniques using the circle of 4ths
Why did I choose that scale and those rhythms and articulations? What does this do for students?
Use Chorales or Unison Playing:

TUNING EXERCISES:
How do we teach student to hear in and out of tune-ness?
Pass the tuning note around the band, so that students can compare their note to the previous one and make alterations as needed to develop their ear;
All play - one section stays - all play - another section…..

TONE DEVELOPMENT:
Developing individual and ensemble tone through Long Unison Tones; Singing unison; Singing in parts; Unison playing

PLAYING TOGETHER:
Subdivision:
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &
1 & 2 & 3 & 4
1 & 2 & 3 &..... Feel the silence
Rhythmic Activities: Clapping; Counting out loud; Sizzling; Note-Naming: say note names and play fingers at the same time
Shadow playing

ARTICULATION:
Verbalising articulation doo, da, dut, Legato, Marcato, Staccato; matching note length to each other through listening

DYNAMICS:
Increasing and decreasing over an 8 count, or relevant to the passage
What is loud? What is soft? How are these words relative to the number of instruments playing?
How do dynamics contribute to the expression of the music?

WATCH THE CONDUCTOR:
Teaching students to respond to non verbal gestures - counting out loud to rubato conducting; Playing a scale in four with the conductor making tempo and dynamic alterations; playing a scale to differing time signatures, or use a piece learned from memory
What musical skills are built in participating in this activity?

STUDENT CONDUCTORS:
Have students learn the conducting pattern, feel the time required to get from beat to beat; or move arms as the music takes them, have them feel the music and put it into a internal feeling.
Which intelligences are we appealing to?

SILENT REHEARSAL:
How does this engage students? What kind of learning is this?

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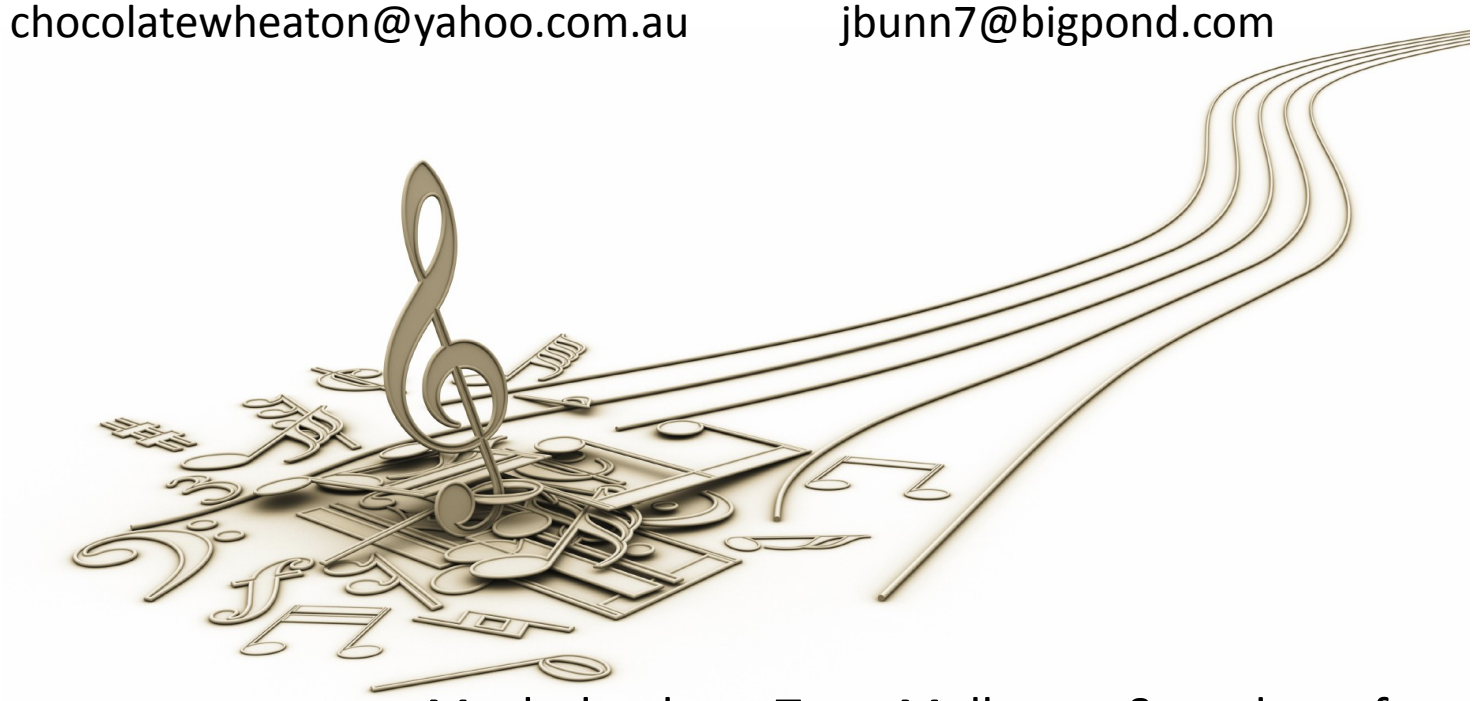

Much thanks to Terry Melbourn & students from Clarendon Hills Middle School Symphonic Band, IL

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