

***Marching Band/Concert Band: It's All Band***  
***Using Every Opportunity To Teach Good Fundamental Playing Skills***  
***Sponsored by The American Bandmasters Association***

Presentation Panel:

Roy C. Holder, Moderator, Lake Braddock Secondary School, Virginia, retired

Greg Bimm, Marion Catholic High School, Illinois

Joel Denton, Ooltewah High School, Tennessee

John Miller, American Fork High School, Utah

Andy Sealy, Hebron High School, Texas

Alfred Watkins, Lassiter High School, Georgia, retired

The intent of the presentation is to provide attendees with a wide variety of information relative to finding ways to keep music as a central focus of school band programs as they perform in various arenas. The panel is composed of experienced teachers who believe strongly in the importance of this goal. Working in a wide variety of schools demographically, economically and size wise the panel has successfully led various ensemble to several Midwest Concert performances and BOA Grand Nationals Finalist appearances and Championships. It is our hope that due to the variety of experiences represented everyone in attendance will find ideas that relate to their current teaching situation.

A perspective on what we do:

Being a band director is unlike teaching music in any other medium. Orchestra, choir and other music teachers for sure have to recruit, encourage and discipline students while teaching important music skills and even helping fund their programs, but pep rallies, parades, football games and other such expectations are unique to the band world. Keeping a music-centered focus in the midst of all these extra demands can be a challenge. The fact that these extra performance opportunities can also be a plus in terms of exposure and community support does not eliminate the concern that these expectations can easily divert time and energy from our primary purpose – teaching music. It, therefore, becomes extremely important that we make a concerted effort to not be side-tracked and to use every opportunity... concert band, marching band, jazz band, small ensembles... to develop a love of music and teach great music skills to our students. To me, that means developing a set of values that can be applied, regardless of the performance situation, to everything from warmups and skill development to music selection. There is a tremendous amount of pedagogical information and quality literature from classical transcriptions to original band works to Broadway and movie scores to jazz and even popular music that we can draw on as we attempt to meet our primary obligation to our students. Encouraging them to be good people, teaching them commitment and leadership skills, etc., are all great things. However, other activities can claim that they also do these. I think we do it better, but that does not change that our top priority is teaching music, just like the Spanish teacher is responsible for teaching Spanish. Otherwise, do we really belong in the curricular program on par with English and Math or are can the case be made that we are better described as part of the extra-curricular competitive program of the school?

Some questions we might ask as we consider the selection of materials to be played in every situation:

1. Do our daily warmup activities, skill development exercises, music selections and approach to performance encourage development of great individual and ensemble sounds?
2. Is the approach to scales, warmups and skill development exercises focused, monitored, purposeful and appropriate? (ex. Everyone needs scales, but the jazz band probably needs to add blues scales and such.)
3. Do the daily warmup and music selection present students the opportunity to develop their pitch sensitivity in all ranges appropriate to their current playing experience?
4. Do the daily skill development program and music selection challenge every student to work on important technical development relative to their current playing experience?
5. Do the daily skill development program and music selection challenge every student to develop a variety of articulations and increase their understanding of musical styles?
6. Is the warmup and exercise program developmental or stagnant? (The same exercise in Aug and Feb??)
7. Does the selection of music being performed, regardless of the setting, allow EVERY student to play enough that they develop strength and confidence? (We learn to play by playing.)
8. Do the warmup activities and music selected for every ensemble help students understand their responsibilities in terms of blend, balance, texture, melody, harmony, and accompaniment in various scoring situations?
9. Does music selection in every ensemble require EVERY section to learn and develop? (People complain because they don't have great tubas and then include little that challenges them.)
10. Does the music selection for every ensemble allow for not only technical development, but encourage students to develop important musical skills like dynamic contrast, phrasing, interpretation, and development of musical line?
11. While varieties in the scoring and style of our selections can be helpful to enhance audience interest, are our musical settings truly developmental or simply episodic with little connection of musical elements?
12. Is the music selected for every ensemble truly worthy of the amount of time that will be required to prepare it to a sophisticated level?
13. Is the rehearsal approach for every ensemble such that students understand that striving for musical excellence and enjoying the process are the goal, not just "getting it right" for the conductor or the score sheet?
14. Are the musical selections for every ensemble intriguing to the audience – will they actually stay and listen? As stated in the preface, we perform in a wide variety of settings, and while we might like to musically enlighten an audience, they will learn nothing if they won't sit through the concert or marching band performance or do they get up and go to the concession stand rather than listen to the band at halftime? We DO NOT need to perform trite, pointless music. However, there IS great literature that can appeal to a wide range of audiences. Sure, the concert band might perform something difficult for the audience to hear – followed by something entertaining. The marching band, often being our best ambassador to the largest portion of our community, might want to try to find ways to intrigue the very people whose support we may need when scheduling, budgets, fund raising and such are important issues while still meeting the musical needs of the students.

And what about competition and getting credit on the score sheet, you ask? If the score sheet does not encourage and adjudicators reward the performance of great music and the pursuit of teaching outstanding music performance skills, then both are inherently wrong and it is our responsibility to work to improve the situation. Regardless of the performance venue, instilling a love of music and encouraging fine music performance skills must be priorities. Obviously, in marching band we must do this while dealing with the visual elements. However, if we ignore our responsibility to teach music due to chasing other elements or trying to outsmart the score sheet, we do it at our own peril. Teaching music in every situation is, without doubt, challenging. But it is what we were hired to do. It is what keeps us in the curriculum. It is what our students can enjoy, forever. Almost sixty years after I started playing in my little elementary school band, I still enjoy playing (attempting to play is more accurate) my old tuba and I never miss an opportunity to go to a rehearsal and help someone. However, as much as I enjoyed all my years with the marching band, I do not strap on my sousaphone and march in the homecoming parade.

Roy C. Holder  
Chairman, School Bands Committee  
American Bandmasters Association

In addition to the committee and the American Bandmasters Association, many important educators and organizations have expressed an interest in the importance of keeping music as a central focus of what we do.

Scott Casagrande, President, National Band Association writes: The balance of our priorities as music educators is delicate and requires our constant attention and maintenance. .... How does marching band fit into that delicate balance? Same as concert band. .... Are we performing the best possible music with our students? Are we wasting one of the golden opportunities to introduce them to artistic music that will stay with them the rest of their lives?

Dr. Joe Allison says, "One of the core values of the [Marching Roundtable](http://marchingroundtable.com) is keeping marching activities within the context of the concert band instructional curricula. A large portion of the Podcast Series and the Academy curriculum speaks directly to pedagogy. Though legally a for profit business, tuition fees go directly back into research and curriculum development." This academic resource includes information and curricula on teaching, assessing, and risk management and is not directly associated with or influenced by private companies.

<http://marchingroundtableacademy.com>

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When asked about music selection one well known leader replied, "I have come to believe that if my grandmother doesn't like it the audience probably won't understand it."

Play great music. Play it well. Other things might be easier, but none is more rewarding to you or your students.

