

Enhance Expression with Efficient Listening: Small Doses, Big Results

Introduction

Huge collection of great recordings
Teach to specific concepts, assisted by excerpts

Question - Expression and directors' dissatisfaction

All age groups
The causes vary
Lack of motivation
Lack of conceptualization
Limited technical development
Equipment limitations
Psychology of playing (Books by Bob Rotella, Tim Gallwey and Barry Green)

The use of listening excerpts combined with appropriate instruction can be used efficiently to draw more expressive playing from your students.

Arguments against listening, but....

Many teachers encourage the use of listening, especially jazz educators.
Evidence I have seen
Instant improvement
Kids request titles to search for later
Story about honor band trip/personal library of student
If done efficiently, not much time is needed. (Less than 5%)
Too much listening will lead to tolerance and indifference.

The case for listening (scenario)

My Genesis with Using Listening Excerpts

A story of educational benefits, and the pathway of errors and streamlining.

Basics for Efficient Listening

Amplification system
Bigger is better, but **Presonus Eris E3.5** studio monitors are good, & \$100
Storage/Retrieval method
iTunes (Apple Music App) or an external storage device
Spotify
Keep it close to workstation
Resource manual **Listening Excerpts to Develop Band Musicianship**, GIA Pub.
Many applicable excerpts for many rehearsal topics

3 Steps to Efficient Listening

1. Focus their attention.

2. Use gestures or verbal cues to pinpoint the focal moments.
3. After listening, discuss the physical or technical information.

Example of teaching a “lifting release.”

Examples of strategies I use regularly to draw expression from students and how listening helps.

The Shape of Air

Directors often say, “Tongue those notes.”

Describe the air

How much bounce of air?

Is there an accent?

Is it sustained?

BIG DEAL, how does the note end?

Examples: “A Hymn for Band”, “Country Gardens”, “Festive Overture”

Direction and Arrival, Closely Related

“A well-played phrase or line will have subtle crescendos and diminuendos.”

Often students fail to give shape to a phrase.

They lack a feeling of arrival in energetic pieces.

Or the feeling of resolution and release in a tender piece.

Instead of just saying, “There is a cresc.” You can speak of direction and arrival.

Don’t cresc. too soon. “Holst Suite in E-flat, Mvt. 1,” 3:22

Variations in Tone Color

Technical influences will need to be addressed

Embouchure

Equipment issues

Stick and mallet choices

Listening is better than words to develop students’ conceptualization.

Once they are hearing a difference, you can discuss the shape of the oral cavity, and the

air support needed to vary their tone color.

Example: “A Longford Legend” mvt. 2, :36

Approach Expression with the Audience in Mind

Punitive vs. positive

Contrasts

Dynamics

Timbres

Bring out the color notes in the harmony

Example: “Florentiner”

In Closing

We all fear losing time in rehearsals.

If you are organized and efficient, small doses will and can bring many benefits.

- Increased motivation

- Better conceptualization

- Goals for technical repetition

Listening to great recordings will motivate you as well as your students.