

Pitch is a B*\$%!

Improving Ensemble Intonation

The Midwest Clinic

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Slideshow



Handout



Resources



Music @ UCM



“An out of tune note is a wrong note.”

-Steve Peterson

Why Pitch?


1. It can always improve
 2. It's among the hardest aspects of ensemble musicianship to rehearse
 3. Better intonation makes every moment of every piece sound... better
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Before Rehearsal

Physical Preparation

- Environment
 - Hot vs. cold
 - Ambient noise
- Equipment
 - Issues: headjoint cork, mouthpieces, barrel, neck, bocal, reed, lead pipe, tuning slides, valves, timpani gauges, etc.
 - Mistakes: mouthpiece too far in, reed too hard/soft, stuck valve slides, etc.
 - Percussion usually @ A=442
- Harmony Director/Drone/Tuner
 - Pros & Cons
 - Tuning is aural, not ocular

Mental Preparation

- General Tendencies
 - Air speed/direction/temperature
 - Embouchure/headjoint angle/amount of mouthpiece
 - Individual students...
- Specific Tendencies
 - Register (i.e. clarinet throat tones, trumpet partials, etc.)
 - Tendency cheat sheets
 - Alternate fingering cheat sheets
- Opposing Tendencies
 - Flute/oboe higher vs. clarinets lower in crescendo
 -  trumpet (written F#)
alto sax (written C#)

- Harmony & Just Intonation
 - Why is it important?
 - When is it important?
 - Warm Ups
 - Slow/lyrical music
 - Sustained chords
 - Cadences
 - Just intonation cheat sheet
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During Rehearsal

Tuning Procedure

1. SILENCE - insist on this
2. LISTEN - like, *really*
3. AUDIATE - internalize/hum/sing
4. PLAY - *without* adjusting
5. DURATION - a few seconds only
6. COMPARE - intense, focused ears
7. ADJUST - strive for perfection
8. STOP - as soon as you're satisfied

Strategies/Techniques

1. LISTEN
 - Aural image vs. reality
 - Use knowledge of score, tendencies, musicians, etc.
2. Zoom In
 - Sustain/isolate/compare & contrast
 - Address: sharp, flat, or both?
3. Improve
 - SING!
 - Musical advice:
 - Direct listening
 - Adjust tone/balance
 - Know your role

- Technical advice:
 - General (i.e. air support, embouchure, voicing, etc.)
 - Specific (i.e. 3rd valve tuning slide, different fingering, etc.)
 - Pull out or push in
- 4. Zoom Out
 - Add sections/players
 - Keep matching/listening
 - Back into musical context

Directed Listening

- Situational advice; listen/tune...
 - down
 - in trios (L and R)
 - to an immovable reference (i.e. pitched percussion, piano)
 - to a solid reference (i.e. principal player in comfortable range)
 - intervallically (i.e. according to harmonic role)
 - other?
- Practice scenarios
 1. MS band - Anne McGinty: *The Red Balloon*
 2. HS band - Jennifer Jolley: *Ash*
 3. HS orchestra - Kevin Day/arr. Trentadue: *Ember Skies*

Conclusion

- Efficiency
 - When to address vs. ignore
 - How detailed to be or not to be
 - How to work quickly without losing pacing/interest
- Vulnerability
 - Willingness to ‘roll up our sleeves’
 - It’s OK to make mistakes
 - It’s never personal - always musical
 - Conform vs. compromise vs. collaborate
- Consistency
 - Takes time and patience