

Surviving and Excelling In a Small School

The Midwest Clinic

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11:50 am-12:50 pm

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Basic Information

Macomb is a community of 18,000 people in the heart of the corn/soybean belt of west-central Illinois and is also the home of Western Illinois University. The main industry is agriculture; however Macomb is also the home of Bower Roller Bearing Corporation and a manufacturing facility of the Pella Window Corporation.

Macomb Senior High School has a school population of 560 students and shares its facilities with the junior high. The junior high and high school instrumental programs also jointly share the music facilities. The junior high and high school directors team-teach the sixth grade band. The junior high director conducts the seventh and eighth grade bands and the junior high jazz ensemble. The high school director teaches junior high lessons during the band periods. The high school director conducts the Concert Band, the Wind Symphony, the marching band, two jazz ensembles and two pep bands. The junior high director teaches lessons during the high school band periods.

Band Program Mission Statement

The mission of the band program of the Macomb Public Schools CUD #185 is to provide students in grades six through twelve with a comprehensive musical experience through performance in band.

General Philosophy

- Tone and musicality are stressed over technique.
- Phrasing is taught by modeling and rhythm is initially modeled but never taught by rote.
- When in doubt go slower, especially in beginning band. Try to review as you go and constantly reinforce rhythms, key signatures, and scales.
- Try to expose the students to quality recordings of the literature that you are playing after you have done the initial read through.
- Usually read through a sight reading selection under performance tempo with an emphasis on trying to build confidence and not frustration.
- Stress the importance of being able to play in every key and look for literature that reinforces a variety of keys.
- Have a discipline plan in place and strictly adhere to it during rehearsals. When I have the classroom procedures firmly in place, I often begin rehearsals with a joke or funny story. Whenever possible I try to inject humor into our rehearsals.
- I work out technical passages slowly and methodically. I often tell the students to make them tone exercises. Rehearse difficult passages as you would practice them on your own instrument.
- I start every rehearsal with exercises designed to reinforce proper playing techniques and musical basics.
- I always try to be thoroughly prepared for every rehearsal so that I can maximize every minute of rehearsal time.
- Have a counting system that works for a wide variety of time signatures and styles of music.

- Never forget the importance of unison studies and drills.

Curriculum

Nothing is more important than having a long range plan for your classes. It is important to delineate what things students at every level need to know to be successful. Twenty eight years ago, when I first arrived in Macomb, every Friday afternoon the junior high director and I got together to work out what things that we felt were the most essential things at each grade level that students needed to learn and master.

Briefly, these are the things that I feel should be part of any successful instrumental music curriculum.

Elementary

Always start with a balanced band in mind. I always test every student before lessons begin. I look at fingers, teeth, overbites, under bites, and actually test each student on multiple mouthpieces to find the best instrument for them. I insist on the total percussion approach. I limit the number of percussionists to at the most six. Students are required to learn keyboards as well as snare drum. It is good to have piano or violin prerequisites for percussion as well as A's in math. I also have them pass a coordination test during the selection process.

In the initial stages and throughout their band years, emphasize proper embouchure formation on every instrument!

Always teach every aspect of your elementary and intermediate program with the high school program in mind.

All students should be able to produce a characteristic sound on their instrument. Listen to each student individually every week even if it is only for two measures. Keep short accounts with the students.

Good posture, breathing, articulation, and hand position should be stressed daily from the very beginning.

Students should master music reading in whatever clef that they are playing and should be able to name, play, and if possible sing the notes they are learning.

Students should master the correct performance of all basic rhythms such as whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and dotted quarter notes. This should also include combinations of note and rest patterns. The foundation of your counting system should be instituted here.

I believe that the musical literature which is performed should reinforce elements that you are working on in your method book. Always be ready to supplement material from other sources if you don't think that the students have grasped a concept.

Consider your elementary band program to be the foundation of everything else in the total curriculum. Don't be in a hurry. Make sure that foundation is solid.

Intermediate Level (through junior high)

This level should be a continuation of all of the playing and musical fundamentals that were introduced in the elementary program.

Once the clarinets are able to play above the break, then the learning of scales and chromatics should begin. Chromatic scales can first be learned by using the fingering charts found in the method book that you use. Once the diatonic fingerings are learned then chromatic fingerings in the woodwinds can be introduced and reinforced.

Rhythmically, eighth and sixteenth note and rest patterns should be learned and drilled. Triplets and compound meters should be introduced if there is time. There needs to be lots of repetition and reinforcement!

6/8 should be taught first with the eighth note getting the beat. Emphasize how the eighth note values relate to quarter notes, dotted quarter notes, etc. Play the passage or exercise with correct values slowly at first, then faster and faster gradually switching into two. At this time you can explain that when you do 6/8 in two, the dotted quarter note gets the beat. Keep counting it in 6 and feeling it in two. Then you have a solid system to teach sixteenth notes in 6/8. Later on this system transfers nicely to 3/8, 5/8, 7/8, 12/8, etc.

I teach cut time in much the same way I teach 6/8. We begin by playing the exercise or passage in 4/4. Gradually I increase the tempo until I can no longer conduct it in four. Then I switch into two and at the end of the exercise or passage I explain what I just did. I explain that we should count this in four and feel it in two. I talk about how beats one and three are on the downbeats and the two and four are on the upbeats. Eventually I go over the standard way to count cut time. This gives the students two ways to deal with tricky rhythms in cut time.

As range and endurance demands increase, make sure that brass and woodwind players continue to have flat chins.

(When I taught junior high, I tried to expose the students to B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat, C, and F concert scales. I also put a lot of emphasis on chromatic scales and chromatic fingerings when the primary fingerings were solid.)

High School

Again, high school should be a continuation of all of the foundational elements that have come before. It is always easy to go too fast or reach too far.

Emphasis should be placed upon having the students become fluent in every key.

When time permits, make sure that the students can play all twelve major scales first one octave and then two octaves. After major scales are mastered, begin teaching minor scales and their relationship to the major scales.

Major and minor arpeggios are also important, especially as they relate to harmonic relationships in the music that is being performed. Once a basic knowledge of chords is in place, you can start emphasizing what to do with the color notes in chords.

Tuning - I rarely use the tuner. When I do, I try to make sure that the students' instruments are set to the correct length. Then it is up to the students to adjust their pitch by using the beat-less tuning method described in the Ed Lisk book, The Creative Director. We go slowly through the scales stopping on out of tune notes and then we discuss the intonation tendencies of the problem notes and how they apply to every instrument in the band. We always tune down to the lowest note and concentrate on there being no beats with our neighbor on either side. When unisons, octaves and fifths are in good shape, we discuss what to do with major thirds and minor thirds.

You need to have the sound that you want your band to have in your head. Listen a lot to recordings and performances of famous groups and determine the sound that you like the best. I personally love the sound of the old University of Michigan recordings with William D. Revelli and the University of Illinois recordings with James Keene.

Compound and mixed meters should be introduced and performed. If students are going to pursue a career in music or play in college, they need to leave your program with a foundation that will enable them to be successful.

In the ensemble setting, common articulation patterns need to be addressed. Exercises for velocity should also be covered. It is not necessary to hit all of these things every day; however, all of these elements should be touched on regularly. It is even possible to teach multiple tonguing in the ensemble setting.

Try to hit all of the above during the warm-up. Make long tones, scales, articulations, tonguing, and lip slurs part of your warm-up every day. Switch it up to keep things from getting boring. This can be done in the first ten to fifteen minutes of every rehearsal. You can lengthen or shorten the warm-up as time dictates. Keep hitting the basics! **If you don't stress and work on the basics, who will?**

Make chord work and the playing of chorales a part of your regular routine as well. Work for that rich, warm, in tune band sound. There is nothing like the sound of a great wind band! Talk about tone a lot. Never stop emphasizing the characteristic, centered tone. **Remember, you can't play in tune unless you first play in tone!**

Literature

The literature that you choose will be what shapes your band program. I always try to have one piece on every program that stretches the musical and technical limits of the group. If the selections that you choose are all the same, then your band won't grow musically or rhythmically. I also try to find a lyrical piece that will train the students to sing their sound. Selecting the music that is just right for where the band happens to be is an art and is often just a trial and error process. You also need to ask yourself not only will the piece work, but is it worth the instructional time it will take to work it up.

Here are some of my favorite pieces by grade level that my bands have played.

Grade I

Saddles and Sabres- Eric Osterling

Trumpet Voluntary-Kjos

Medallion Overture- Kjos

Farnadol-Bizet (the old Essential Elements or Yamaha Series). This is a stiff grade I.

Grade II-III

Prospect- Pierre LaPlante

March on the Kings Highway- Pierre LaPlante (Grade I in 4/4 and Grade II in cut time.)

I'm sorry that I didn't have more time to go back over this level of literature!

Grade III-IV

Tunbridge Overture- James Ployhar

Chesford Portrait- Swearingen –Barnhouse

In All Its Glory- Swearingen – Barnhouse (Great 6/8 section and introduction to 32nd notes.)

Overture for Winds- Charles Carter

Symphonic Overture- Charles Carter

Rhythm of the Winds- Frank Erickson

Cajun Folk Songs-Frank Tichelli

Sundance- Frank Tichelli

Festivo- Vaclav Nellybel

On A Hymnsong of Lowell Mason- David Holsinger

On A Hymnsong of Philip Bliss- David Holsinger

Russian Masters Suite- Philip Gordon

Spanish Masters Suite- Philip Gordon

Aquarium- Jan Van Der Roost

Rikudim-Johan DeMeij
Rejouissance-James Curnow
Rondo for Winds and Percussion- John Edmondson
Salvation is Created-Tschenokoff/Houseknect- Kjos
The Blue and the Gray- Clare Grundman
An American Civil War Fantasy- Jerry Billik
Elegy for a Young American- LoPresti
Pageant- Vincent Persichetti
Chorale and Shaker Dance- John Zdechlik
Amazing Grace- Frank Tichelli
Amazing Grace-William Himes
Courtly Airs and Dances- Ron Nelson
With Quiet Courage- Larry Daehn
Yosemite Autumn- Mark Camphouse

Grade V-VI

La Fiesta Mexicana- H. Owen Reed
Tocatta Marziale- Vaughan Williams
American Overture for Band- Joseph Wilcox Jenkins
Festivo- Edward Gregson
El Camino Real- Alfred Reed
Hounds of Spring- Alfred Reed
Armenian Dances Part I-Alfred Reed
October- Eric Whitacre
Symphonic Dance #3-Clifton Williams
Sketches on a Tudor Psalm- Fisher Tull
Colonial Song- Percy Aldrich Grainger
Lincolnshire Posy- Percy Grainger
Irish Tune from County Derry-Percy Grainger
Shepherd's Hey- Percy Grainger
Lord of the Rings- Johann DeMeij
Symphony for Band- Vincent Persichetti
Children's March- Percy Grainger
Celebrations- John Zdechlik
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night-Elliot DelBorgo
Concerto for Four Solo Percussionists and Wind Ensemble- David Gillingham
Mother Earth a Fanfare-David Maslanka
Whatsoever Things-Mark Camphouse
Zion-Dan Welcher (The hardest piece we have ever played. I loved it!)

Marches

Fairest of the Fair- John Philip Sousa
Gallant Seventh-John Philip Sousa
Corcoran Cadets- John Philip Sousa
The Pathfinder of Panama- John Philip Sousa
The Washington Post- John Philip Sousa
Black Horse Troop- John Philip Sousa
Naval Sea Cadets- Oliviodoti
His Honor- Henry Fillmore
The Klaxon- Henry Fillmore
Eagle Squadron- Alford
The Mad Major- Alford

The British Eighth- Zo Elliot
Glory-John Cadavas
Military Escort- Harold Bennett
The Orange Bowl- Henry Fillmore
Florentiner- Fuck/Fennell

Three Year Rotation Selections

First Suite in E flat for Military Band- Gustav Holst
Second Suite in F for Military Band- Gustav Holst
English Folk Song Suite-Ralph Vaughan Williams

Favorite Sayings:

Inch by inch it's a cinch, by the yard it's always hard. (Unknown)

Music is either singing or dancing. (Igor Stravinsky)

Practice slowly to learn quickly and practice quickly to learn slowly. (Itzhak Perlman)

Methods and Resources for the High School Band Curriculum

The Creative Director – Ed Lisk- Meredith Music Publications

Foundations for Superior Performance by Richard Williams and Jeff King-Kjos

Fourteen Weeks to a Better Band- Roger Maxwell (Jr. High Version 2nd Band)-Barhouse

101 Rhythmic Rest Patterns- Grover Yaus- Belwin

Basics in Rhythm- Garwood Whaley-Meredith Music Publications

Sixteen Chorales by J.S. Bach arranged by Mayhew Lake- G. Schirmer

Teaching Music Through Performance In Band

Compiled and Edited by Richard Miles

Published by GIA Publications Inc.

Highly Recommended Reading!

The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle

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