

Bring on the Winds!
*What you need to know to successfully incorporate
woodwinds and brass with your strings for a full orchestra*

By Daniel Sommerville

Associate Professor, Orchestra Conductor, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL
Sponsored by the College Orchestra Directors Association (CODA)

Synopsis: For high school orchestra conductors who are string specialists, who want to incorporate winds in the orchestra, but may be hesitant for lack of confidence in working with winds. The session is also for those who do now incorporate winds, but would like to learn more about working with them. Topics such as response time differences, intonation and tone issues, transposition issues, balancing and blending of winds, and brass and woodwinds in the orchestra culture will be addressed. There will be a high school symphony orchestra that will act as a demonstration ensemble for the various concepts.

This handout consists of two parts, the first related to the rationale and various administrative aspects of the incorporation of winds/percussion with strings, and the second focusing on the practical, in-rehearsal techniques and methods of working with winds and percussion. The workshop session at the Midwest Clinic will consist entirely of the second part, in the form of a demonstration of working with winds and percussion with strings, with the Westlake High School Orchestra (TX) as the lab orchestra. There will also be a brief period at the end of the session for questions.

Part One: Motivation and implementation of incorporating winds and percussion

The benefits of incorporating winds and percussion into your orchestra program are obvious, and include (1) the opportunity to play one of the greatest bodies of music repertoire—music for the symphony orchestra—spanning the late 18th century up to the present, and (2) the musical growth opportunities for both strings and winds as the student musicians deal with issues of blend, balance, intonation, etc. in a variety of textures and styles.

Despite the fact that at one time in America, school orchestras were much more the norm than school bands, at this time in our history the band programs are bigger and more prevalent than orchestra programs in the schools. So the winds will almost always come from the band program, making it essential to have the support of the band director. Band directors need to know that the involvement of wind and percussion player in the

orchestra creates a win-win situation for all parties: for the orchestra director, for obvious reasons as stated above; for the band director, because the absence of some of the top players in the band at times will strengthen the remaining players, as new opportunities for leadership emerge, and when the top players return, they come back with a new understanding about listening, leadership, style and ensemble (because of their soloist roles in the orchestra), and enrich the band accordingly; and most importantly, for the student, as orchestral opportunities expand the musical understanding and abilities of the students involved, and challenge their musicianship in new ways (for more on this, see Ray Ostwald's rationale for the symphony orchestra in the schools at the end of this handout). The orchestra director and the band director should support one another's programs: for example, the orchestra players could cheer on the marching band at their half time shows or competitions, and band members could act as ushers at orchestra concerts; also, the band director could be given the opportunity to conduct a piece on an orchestra concert.

Scheduling can be a big challenge. Most commonly, the band (or the top band) and the orchestra (or the top orchestra) will meet during the same period, and the orchestra director and band director will agree on a percentage of rehearsals that winds can be dismissed from band to be in orchestra. Generally, getting the winds 40% of the time seems to be optimal. Less than 30% is not ideal, as ensemble identity and development will be compromised. It takes awhile for the wind players to get accustomed to the orchestra culture, their new roles, and how to play with strings.

In larger programs, the top band, orchestra and choir will have their rehearsals and lunch periods over two periods around the noon hour. That way, if the band rehearses one of the hours and the orchestra the next, the orchestra can have the winds for at least half of the student's lunch hour, and not impact the band. This schedule is also good for working on choral/orchestral repertoire. The third option is to have the combined string/wind rehearsals before or after school, or in the evenings, certainly not a desirable solution for today's highly-programmed students (and their teachers!). Regardless of the scheduling challenges, orchestra directors who combine winds agree that it is a pursuit well worth the effort.

The number of concerts winds are used with strings, in high school programs that use them, vary from involvement on half of the concerts, up to involvement on all of the concerts the orchestra plays. Some directors like the 50-50 mix to insure enough time to deal with specific string issues and instruction, and to play a good amount of string orchestra repertoire. For larger, multiple-orchestra programs, such instruction happens at the lower- and intermediate- level orchestras, with the top level being a symphony orchestra the whole year.

Some programs have large band programs with an abundance of winds. If your string section is large enough, doubling the woodwinds is an option to involve more wind players. The benefit of this practice, in addition to providing opportunities for more students, is that the woodwinds will be able to balance better with a full brass section and large string sections. The drawback is that the experience is compromised for the

woodwind players, as they are no longer soloists (no longer one per part), so the accountability factor and blend/balance/intonation factors are not realistic, nor is the learning as effective.

It is important for the orchestral winds and percussionists to forge their identity together as orchestra players, and to see themselves as partners with the strings. They have a dual role as band players and “orchestra winds.” The orchestra director must work hard to eradicate the criticism that might surface between members of one family of instruments and those of another (“Why can’t the woodwinds play in tune?” “Why do the string players need so much more practice time than we do?”). Because of a number of reasons—the earlier age for starting string lessons and orchestra as compared to winds, for example—the culture of the string orchestra is much different than that of the band. But the delightful challenge is the forging of a new entity that has the best of both traditions.

In a band, especially a large symphonic band, instrumentalists concern themselves with blending in with like instruments, and creating a pleasing mass of sound. In an orchestra, there is much more blending necessary between unlike instruments, and more accountability in phrasing and sustaining/projecting of tone, because of the soloistic nature and small-choir blend of the instrumentation. In fact, the style difference between band and orchestra can be quite significant. Also, moving from mostly flat keys to predominantly sharp keys can throw off inexperienced wind players. Scale exercises and chorales for the whole orchestra (with many in sharp keys) can help acclimate them. They will need to learn how to create the same resonance in the sharp keys they achieve in the flat keys. The ability to move between a group mentality and a solo mentality is crucial for a wind player playing in both band and orchestra. Also, strings react differently to the baton in certain situations, and winds need to get used to how the string players respond.

The selection of wind players for the orchestra can be an area of misunderstanding between band and orchestra directors, but it need not be. It is preferable that the orchestra director have input in choosing the wind players for the orchestra. The orchestra director should sit in on the band auditions, if those auditions are to determine orchestral placement. The orchestral winds need time to acclimate and forge their new identity, and if the personnel is changed every time the band has re-auditions or chair challenges, this can be most disruptive. Sometimes the first chair band player may not make the best orchestra player. For example, the first chair trumpet player may also be the lead trumpet of the jazz ensemble. He or she may not have the tonal concept of an orchestral trumpeter, or even have the interest to develop that concept. In such cases, the lack of blend that results can be quite disruptive and counterproductive. It is better to have a capable and interested player, even if he or she is second, third or fourth chair in the band. The criteria for selection should include the player’s ear, technique and accuracy, tone, and desire (not necessarily in that order). Some wind players get a taste of the wonderful world of orchestral music and really want to be a part of it. These are the ones to select and cultivate. After awhile, there will be a healthy curiosity about playing in the orchestra on the part of other wind players.

Dealing with transposition can create anxiety within both student and orchestra director. Here is how one high school orchestra director has successfully dealt with this challenge:

In dealing with transpositions, I have to get to know the wind players well before the first rehearsal to find out how skilled they are in doing transpositions. With some, I can trust them to have everything in place by the first rehearsal. At the other end of the spectrum, I simply write out the transposition, including shifting octaves if necessary, again, depending on the student's skills...and everything in between (i.e. penciling in SOME of the transposed notes and allowing the students to figure out the remainder; asking for assistance from a private teacher; finding appropriate instruments (C trumpet, A clarinet); setting students up in a midi-lab to input their part and learn to transpose their own parts, etc.). One important parameter: I have no time to waste in full rehearsal dealing with transpositions so I try to have all this done by the first rehearsal. (Joanne May, Glenbard East High School, Lombard, IL)

For programs that can afford it, it is highly desirable to have two C trumpets and two A clarinets in the instrument inventory. Indeed, serious trumpeters and clarinetists should be encouraged to acquire these instruments for themselves. It should be noted that some companies, like Luck's Music Library for instance, sells transposed parts to most standard orchestra repertoire. Please remember, though, that the ability to transpose is essential for any serious clarinetist, trumpeter or horn player who wants to become an orchestral musician. For those unsure of their "transposition chops", Elizabeth A.H. Green's book, *The Modern Conductor* (later editions), has an excellent chapter on transposition, as do most orchestration textbooks.

Physical placement of winds can sometimes be limited by your rehearsal or performance space. It is important to try to keep the same set up from rehearsals to concert. The woodwinds are located in two rows, centered behind the strings, but not too far back. In a typical string orchestra set up, it is desirable to have as much depth as width. But with the symphony orchestra, the strings may have to fan out more width-wise, so that the winds can be behind the second row of string players. The first row of woodwinds, left to right (as the conductor sees it) consists of flutes and oboes, and the second, clarinets and bassoons. The principal players always sit on the inside (center of each row) so they can be as close to each other as possible (forming a woodwind quartet). The brass and percussion placement can be more flexible. It works very well to have the "heavy brass" (trumpets, trombones and tuba) off to the conductor's right, at about one o'clock to two o'clock position, in one row (trumpets more at one o'clock and trombones/tuba next to them, fanning out to two o'clock). Principals should be next to each other (so the seating will be 3rd, 2nd, 1st trumpet/1st, 2nd, 3rd trombone, tuba). This placement is good from the standpoint that the brass can be placed back from the violas a bit, and their bells aren't pointing straight out to audience, but in to orchestra, thereby aiding overall balance. The tuba is also close to the double basses (if strings are situated in the traditional manner), potentially aiding intonation. The horns can be placed in front

of the trumpets and trombones (their bells facing back to the trumpets and trombones, facilitating good ensemble among the brass) or behind clarinets and bassoons, depending on the space, or even on the music. The horns traditionally are the “swing man” between the woodwinds and the brass. In some pieces, they are treated more as brass instruments and scored often with the heavy brass. In others, they may blend more with the woodwinds, particularly bassoons. Another seating for horns is over at the 1-2 o’clock position, but in two rows, first row 2nd 1st , second 4th 3rd (the first horn always sits farthest to the right [as the conductor sees them], so the other horns can hear his sound). With this placement, the trumpets can sometimes be put behind the last row of woodwinds (especially if it is a piece where trumpets play often in tandem with timpani, like Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven), and the low brass (if used) fanned out to their left (conductor’s right). Percussion is usually placed to the woodwinds’ right (conductor’s left), behind first and second violins. Sometimes the timpani are placed behind the woodwinds, in the center, so as to be closer to the brass.

(Part Two, next page)

Part Two: Working with winds and percussion in the full symphony orchestra rehearsal

In addition to the musical examples, below, the demonstration will also include excerpts from Dvorak's *Carneval Overture* and Copland's "Buckaroo Holiday" from *Rodeo*, featuring the Westlake High School Symphony Orchestra, of Austin, Texas, James C. Edwards, conductor.

1. Tone

a. Woodwind—quirky registers

Two musical staves illustrating 'quirky registers' for woodwinds. The top staff is labeled '(Bad registers)' and shows notes for Flute, Oboe, Bb Clarinet, and Bassoon. The bottom staff is labeled '(Good registers)' and shows notes for Flute, Oboe, Bb Clarinet, and Bassoon. Both staves are in a key with two flats and a common time signature.

Tendencies:

Two musical staves illustrating tendencies for woodwinds. The top staff shows Oboe and Flute. The bottom staff shows Bassoon and Clarinet "throat tones". The notation includes slurs and accents to indicate specific tendencies.

b. Woodwind dual tonal concepts—solo timbre (lively, expressive, vibrato, brighter) and blending timbre (dark, straight tone, woodwind choir)

Musical notation illustrating woodwind dual tonal concepts. The staff shows notes for WW Tone, Flute, Oboe, Bb Clarinet, and Bassoon. The notation includes a key signature of one sharp and a common time signature.

c. Brass—orchestral timbre vs. jazz/marching band timbre

Bb Trumpets Horns in F Trombones, Tuba

2. Intonation

a. Tendencies with dynamic changes—woodwinds, brass

Flute 1 and 2 Oboe 1 and 2 Bb Clar. 1 and 2 Bassoon 1 and 2

Bb Trumpets Horns in F Trombones, Tuba

b. Procedure for tuning *tutti* chords

Strings Violin I, divisi Violin II, divisi Viola, divisi Cello, divisi Double bass

(Carneval: C, first two chords)

c. Tuning melodies in octaves

(Carneval, 5 after G)

3. Articulation/breathing

a. Speed of articulation for woodwind and brass instruments

Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violins



Trumpets, Horns



Trombones, Bassoons




Trumpets and Trombones, *Allegro*




b. Clarity of articulation for woodwind and brass


Oboe, Clarinet




Flute




Bassoon



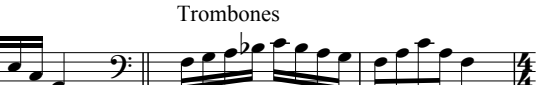
Trumpets



Trumpets, Horns



Trombones



c. Differences of brass articulation between jazz and orchestral (see above)

d. Differences in breath capacity in the woodwinds (in student musicians)

Flute, Oboe



e. Brass accuracy—challenges

Horn (open notes on F side) Horn (open notes on Bb side)

4. Response time differences:

Reasons for brass and WW to lag behind the strings a little (these are not excuses, though!)

- Reacting to sound of strings, which may take awhile to get to them, depending on the acoustical environment (regardless, such reaction will ALWAYS make them late)
- Not ready with breath and embouchure
- Not proactive enough—tending to follow and not initiate
- Need time to adjust to your conducting—you can help them by demonstrating, through singing, where you want them to play with your beat
- Not getting the “lay of the land” rhythmically before their entrance
- Dragging long notes or rushing short ones (for all instrumentalists)

(Carneval, beginning)

(Carneval, E)

(Buckaroo Holiday, 1-past reh. 2; reh. 15-16)

5. Balance

- a. Brass in classical music (18th, early 19th c), identify glory parts for them

(Carneval, 5 to 16 after reh. H)

- b. Strings must be instructed to listen to woodwinds when the latter has the main voice, or solo

(Carneval, Andantino after J/I)

- c. All players must know their individual role in the texture—at the very least, know who has the main voice of a passage

(Carneval, 17 after K-L, also 11 after R for 8 mm.)

6. Wind projection—stand placement; how the instrument is held; developing tone and playing with true legato (not the same as merely playing louder!)

(Carneval, 5 to 12 after H)

7. Blending unlike instruments and creating new colors

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Horns in F and Cellos. The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of eight measures. The Horns part is in the upper staff, and the Cellos part is in the lower staff. Both parts are marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Horns part begins with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a half note Bb4. The Cellos part begins with a quarter note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, Bb2, and C3, then a half note Bb2. The score is a piano reduction of a larger orchestral work.

8. Working with percussionists

- Appreciate their particular challenges—they each play so many different instr’s with different techniques and response times
- Three important aspects—precision, dynamics and tone (a section can have the first two, but still not sound good—need proper training in techniques and tonal concepts—hire percussion major from a local college to work with them, as you would with other sections)
- Issues you (in collaboration with principal percussionist) decide on:
 - a. Mallets used—on timpani, xylophone, etc.—for timpani, use softer mallets for parts that include lots of rolls, where ubiquitous nature of timpani must be felt, and harder for parts that have intricate rhythms that need to be clear
 - b. Damped or let vibrate? (Cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, etc.)
 - c. Cymbal size, type to use (e.g. thinner, smaller splashier cymbals for colorful French, Spanish; thicker, larger darker cymbals for German, English)

(Carneval, beginning)

I would like to thank the following people who gave me valuable input, especially in the writing of Part One of this handout:

Krista Halvorson, Orchestra Director, Wheaton-Warrenville (IL) South and Wheaton North High Schools

Julie Lawrence-Loucas, Orchestra Director, Geneva (IL) Community High School

Mark Liu, Orchestra Director, Waubonsie High School, Naperville, IL

Joseph Malmquist, Orchestra Director, Schaumburg (IL) High School
Joanne May, Orchestra Director, Glenbard East High School, Lombard, IL
Ray Ostwald, Orchestra Director, York High School, Elmhurst, IL
Wheaton College Conservatory of Music (IL) students (reflections on their high school experiences in orchestra with winds):

May Chang (violinist)
Jill Musick (violinist)
Rachel Ringeisen (violinist)
Tamara Sanchez-Kapostasy (trombonist)

Thanks to the Westlake High School Symphony Orchestra, James C. Edwards, conductor, for their valuable contribution to this session.

Reflections by Ray Ostwald, Orchestra Director, York High School, Elmhurst, IL, on the importance of the symphony orchestra in the high school music curriculum:

Ideally, a comprehensive high school music department offers bands, choirs, string and full orchestras, jazz, theory and opportunities for non-prerequisite courses (beginning piano, guitar, beginning strings, music appreciation, etc.).

When an adult or professional musician says “orchestra,” we mean strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion together. This terminology should be taught all along the K-12 journey, and put into practice as soon as feasible. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, many American high schools, following the European tradition, simply had a choir and an orchestra, and orchestra meant full symphonic orchestra. Band sometimes came decades later to the schools.

Most collegiate and professional wind performers strive to play in a great orchestra. Many of the greatest or most powerful choral works involve full orchestra with choir (Requiems, masses, cantatas, etc.). Wind, string or voice concerto or aria performers ultimately hope to perform accompanied by a full orchestra. Operas, as well as a majority of classic musical theater shows, require a full symphonic pit orchestra. The symphony orchestra can be the musical/artistic centerpiece of a comprehensive high school or collegiate music department, Public perception may highlight marching band, pep band or other ensembles for the less globally aware public, but if music department colleagues and students are collaborating in the ways above, those “in the know” will see the symphony orchestra as a cornerstone.

Samuel Adler: “The [symphony] orchestra is certainly one of the noblest creations of Western civilization.”