Senior Adults as Beginners: This is Serious Fun!

Linda A. Hartley
University of Dayton
Midwest Clinic, December 19, 2003

Benefits for Senior Adults
• Use it or lose it theory:
  – Seniors can greatly cut their risk of dementia by 69% through engaging in playing a musical instrument several times a week.
    (6/19/03 New England Journal of Medicine)
• Physical
  – Exercising fingers, hands, arms, other muscles can aid in physical health.
• Social
  – Strong social connections help older people stay healthier and live longer.
• Seniors involved in arts programs are generally happier and healthier.

Concept of New Horizons Organizations
• For senior adults, ages 50 and up
• Entry point for those who have never played an instrument
• Re-entry point for those who played long ago
• Non-threatening, non-competitive atmosphere
• Creating music, friendships, and memories

New Horizons Organizations
• History of New Horizons Bands:
  – 1991 Eastman School of Music, Dr. Roy Ernst, founder
  – Grant: NAMM
  – Began with graduate assistants trained to work with senior adults
  – Program grew rapidly
What’s out there now?

• New Horizons Bands and Strings
  – Approximately 90
  – United States and Canada
    AB, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IA, IL, IN,
    KS, MD, MI, MO, NC, NM, NS, NY,
    OH, OK, ON, OR, PA, SD, TX, VA, WA, WI

• IL, Alton  Halpin Music
• IL, Bourbonnais  King Music, Inc./Nazarene U
• IL, Chicago  Sherwood Conservatory of Music
• IL, Ft. Sheridan  Sally Bowers
• IL, Lisle  Benedictine University/Quinan and Fabish
• IL, Winnetka  Music Institute of Chicago
• IL, Winnetka  North Shore New Horizons Band

Senior adults ripe for instrumental music activity

• Most are retired - they have the time
• Many can afford to purchase instruments
• Enjoyment of music
• They want to see the front of the conductor
• Need for social activity & something to look forward to

Going camping

• Senior adult band camps:
  – Attracts seniors from NHBs all over the United States and Canada
  – All times of year, usually according to climate conditions
  – Often utilize several conductors
  – Concentrated rehearsals
  – Exploration time (sightseeing tours, local events, socials)
  – Lasting friendships
  – Next camps:
    March 14-20, 2004 - New Horizons at Cambria, California
    September 19-23, 2004 - New Horizons at Chautauqua, NY

Other models

• Similar concept, different ways:
  – No age limitations
  – Beginners only
  – Small groups or large groups only
  – Senior centers
  – Intergenerational
Starting a senior adult beginning ensemble
• Request a free planning guide, video, and other materials/free consultation
  www.newhorizonsband.com
• Recruiting:
  – Newspaper ads, radio stations, local community organizations, churches, senior
    publications (eventually, word of mouth)
• Models to include:
  – Music dealers
  – Community centers
  – Schools
  – Universities/Colleges

Then what?
• Find teachers:
  – Retired directors
  – Music stores
  – University students
• Rehearsal space:
  – Handicap accessible
  – Available equipment: stands/chairs/percussion
  – Parking
  – Space for social gatherings

Large and small ensembles
• Seniors enjoy being a part of a group
• Instruction in large group ensembles is essential
• Some will want to explore small ensembles:
  – Chamber groups
  – Dixieland
  – Jazz ensemble
  – Polka bands

Ability levels will vary
• Beginners, re-entries, long ago professionals
• Create opportunities for all to be challenged and feel
  accomplished
• Example:
  – Beginning group meets separately
  – Advanced group meets separately
  – Combined group on level 1 music

Organization -
the director can’t do it all!
• Committees:
  – Publicity
  – Social
  – Library
  – Gig getters
  – Rehearsal set up/equipment movers
  – Steering committee
  – Webmaster

Budget considerations - what does it cost?
• Expenses:
  – Personnel (director, teachers)
  – Music
  – Advertisements, brochures, programs
  – Shirts, hats
• Income:
  – Tuition
  – Gigs
  – Donations
  – Grants

Teaching techniques for senior adult learners
• Hearing (“where are we?”)
  – Adjust volume and speed of speaking voice
  – Speak directionally
  – Stay in front
  – Sectionals
• Eyes (bifocals, trifocals)
  – Enlarge music; big print
  – Stand height adjustment
  – Seating arrangements
Teaching senior adults

- Physical limitations
  - Comfortable seating
  - Good lighting
  - Choose instruments carefully
    - Arthritis
    - Teeth
    - Facial muscles
    - Strength (arms, hands)
  - Take breaks
  - Let them be your guide

Compared to school beginners

- Senior adults:
  - Positive attitudes toward learning
  - Appreciative toward their teachers
  - Adult sense of humor!
  - Grasp concepts quickly, such as phrasing, expression, swing style
  - Arrive early to rehearsals and performances
  - Willing to help
  - Rehearsals are very rewarding

Performances - where to play?

- Purpose: set goals; publicity; income
- Choose audiences and venues carefully:
  - Parades (flat bed truck is a must!)
  - Senior centers (special events)
  - Community events
  - State MEAs
  - Outdoor festivals (hats, water, sunscreen!)
  - School concerts

Intergenerational opportunities

- Concerts with grandchildren
- Concerts with elementary school ensembles
- Ensembles that include all ages
- Examples:
  - Jazz ensemble: MS, College, NHB members
  - Combined concert with college ensemble
Why form a senior adult ensemble?

• Director’s point of view:
  – Opportunity to teach (with appreciation!)
  – Create venue for lifelong learning
  – Formulate friendships

• Participants’ point of view:
  – Advance appreciation for music and musicians
  – Feeling of pride and accomplishment
  – Social outlet

• University/College:
  – Gives future educators teaching opportunities
  – Community outreach/public relations

Who else benefits?

**National Association of Music Merchants:**

• Recent NAMM study found that over a five year period, NHB participants spent an average of $3,600 US a piece on instruments, accessories and published music.