

# Senior Adults as Beginners: This is Serious Fun!

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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/Quinlan 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](http://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.