

# **Awakening the Unlimited Potential of Young Musicians**

## **"An Alternative Approach: Stimulate your ensemble to perform at the highest level"**

**2005 Midwest Clinic**

### **Dr. Jean Montès**

Director of Orchestral Studies and Coordinator of Strings  
Virginia Commonwealth University - Richmond, VA  
[jmontes@vcu.edu](mailto:jmontes@vcu.edu)

#### **Objective:**

This session will provide ensemble directors with practical strategies that engage and challenge young musicians, ultimately leading to superior performances. Is technical ability enough? An alternative, balanced approach may be the answer...

Superior technical ability in student ensembles is *not* the key ingredient for amazing performances. **All ensembles, from beginning to advanced, can employ effective strategies that guarantee incredible, exciting performances.** Instilling self-confidence, a high degree of motivation and cohesion among students are the techniques that this session will provide the ED.

For the last 10 years I have experienced successful performances with ensembles at various levels from elementary to professional by preparing the ensemble holistically. The following methods and techniques enable students individually and ensembles as a whole to see themselves as great musicians who have a unique story to tell.

We will discuss three key strategies that, when implemented as a cohesive whole, will lead to truly successful performances: Assessment, Challenge & Expectation.

#### **Strategies:**

##### **1. Assessment**

- Is essential in order to instill self-confidence from the beginning
- Must be carefully organized & executed to encourage success for all
- Must encourage a new level of "student self-awareness"
- Types of Assessment
  - Auditions
  - Excerpt tests
  - Post-performance self-assessment

##### **2. Challenge**

- Constant and increasing challenge is essential for both the Director and the Students
  - This is achieved by:
    - Repertoire Selection
      - *Three levels of repertoire in each performance*
      - *Develop familiarity with reliable sources for finding new repertoire at each level*
    - Rehearsal Preparation
      - *Be knowledgeable about the composer, the form and harmonic structure of the piece*
      - *Make interpretation decisions based on performance practices and style of the period*
      - *Make decisions about phrasing and articulation*
      - *Make decisions on breath and bowings decisions*
      - *Effective rehearsal pacing by being aware of how much time you have for rehearsal and plan every minute*
    - Regular Assignments
      - *Have clear expectation for the next rehearsal*
      - *What to practice is only important if you know how to practice. Be clear and concise.*
    - Ongoing Personal Development
      - *Be Curious*
      - *Always make time for research (Summer Months)*
      - *Develop a four year repertoire plan*
      - *Collaborate with others in the field to generate more performance opportunities for your students.*

### 3. Expectations

- Expect more than you believe is possible
  - It is quite common that ensembles are unable to reach their full potential because their director simply do not believe they can.
- Growth and confidence in performance
  - Demand nothing but the best during the entire learning process
    - From sight reading the first day to the performance
- Total trust, support, and constructive honest feedback
  - Despite the all the challenges you will encounter remain positive
  - Remember why you chose this career
  - Remember those who inspired you
  - Make every attempt to motivate and inspire your students the same way you have been inspired.

### 4. Rewards

- Positive Feedback in classroom and in rehearsals,

- Post Concert gatherings
- Orchestra awards
- Make recordings of the ensemble available after each performances
- Develop “musician of the month” program within your ensemble
- Provide tickets to professional performances
- Student with most hours of practice receives CDs etc...

## **Final Thought**

Our students are only limited by our own limitations. Be accountable and honest to yourself and your own integrity first.

## **Keys to successful performance:**

1. Instilling self-confidence in your players
2. Instilling a high degree of motivation
3. Cohesion among students (working towards a unity of expression)

## **Tips**

1. Share your experience & expertise with your colleagues
2. Listen to a new piece once a week
3. Make time to receive student feedback (As simple as on notes cards)
4. Attend performances
5. Record your rehearsals (Audio or Video)
6. Record your concerts and review them for feedback on adjustments you can make in the future
7. Bring other educators and performers to your classroom at list twice a year.
8. Take your students to inspiring performances at least twice a year
9. Provide free CDs to your deserving students once a month
10. Develop a culture of listening to great recordings of the type of pieces you are learning with your ensemble.
11. Celebrate both small and big achievements
12. Prepare, prepare, prepare.

**Dr. Jean Montès**, An accomplished conductor, educator, clinician, lecturer, and performer, Jean Montès is passionate about challenging and stimulating audiences and musicians alike. He is currently the Director of Orchestral Studies and Coordinator of Strings at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) where he conducts the Virginia Commonwealth University Symphony Orchestra (VCUSO). In addition to his conducting duties Montès supervises student teachers, coaches Chamber Music, String Master Class and teaches string pedagogy and conducting.

Growing up in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, Montès studied the cello at the Holy Trinity School of Music. He left Haiti to pursue his bachelor's degree in cello performance at Duquesne

University in Pittsburgh, PA. He earned his Masters of Music Education at the University of Akron in Ohio. He holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts in orchestral conducting from the University of Iowa.

Montès has developed outstanding orchestras and orchestra programs throughout his career, working with musicians of all ages. His recent positions include Artistic Director of the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies, Music Director of Cedar Rapids Youth Symphonies, Director of the St. Ambrose University Orchestra in Davenport, Iowa and Orchestra Director of the Kaukauna School District in Wisconsin. He is also a sought after guest conductor who collaborates with orchestras of all levels in the United States and in Haiti.

A musician who embraces the cultural and artistic diversity of the world, he is one who brings the highest level of dedication and enthusiasm to his life profession and all those he serves.

**This clinic is sponsored by:  
The Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Music**

