

Help Me Help You: Useful Tips for Making the Most of Your Time with a Guest Conductor, Clinician or Composer

Dr. Rodney C. Schueller
Texas State University-San Marcos

Dr. Jeffrey D. Gershman
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dr. Frank Ticheli
University of Southern California

I. **General Information for the Expecting Host**

A. **Selecting the Right Person for Your Ensemble(s)**

1. Is the potential clinician's background and experience a good fit for what you hope to accomplish?
2. What are the potential clinician's professional responsibilities?
3. Will all student musicians in your program be a part of this experience?
4. Is the potential clinician's personality and teaching style a good fit for your ensemble?
5. What are *your* musical goals for this event?
6. Once you've made your selection, book the clinician as early as possible to avoid schedule conflicts.
7. The initial contact when the clinician arrives is important—can *you* be there?

B. **Travel and Schedule Details**

1. Mode of transportation—driving or flying?
2. If the clinician is driving, provide clear, concise directions and take care of parking issues.
3. If the clinician is flying, you are responsible for their transport to and from the airport as well as during the stay.
4. Design an itinerary for your guest, even if it is somewhat fluid.

C. **Expenses and Fee**

1. What expenses need to be covered?
 - a. Transportation
 - (1) Mileage, if driving.
 - (2) The cost of a plane ticket and airport parking, if flying.
 - b. Lodging
 - c. Meals
2. Discussing the fee
 - a. The clinician's fee should be discussed in the initial conversations.
 - (1) Does the clinician have a set fee or is it negotiable?
3. Payment
 - a. While payment is preferred at the conclusion of the event, we *all* deal with accounting departments.
 - b. If the clinician will be paid and reimbursed after the conclusion of the event, be honest and give your best estimate for payment processing.

II. The Guest Conductor

A. Honor Band and All-State Events: Pre-Event Planning

1. Selection of literature is critical.
 - a. Send the guest conductor programs from the past several years.
 - b. Offer your own feedback.
 - (1) Which pieces in the past were successful?
 - (2) What do you project the strengths of the ensemble to be?
2. Folder disbursement and part assignments
 - a. If at all possible, prepare and distribute the music folders well in advance of the event.
 - b. Consult the guest conductor on part assignment preferences and use of auxiliary instruments.
3. Securing necessary instruments
 - a. Secure all percussion instruments required in the literature.
 - b. Secure any necessary auxiliary instruments.
4. Create a detailed schedule of the entire event.
 - a. How much total rehearsal time is available for the full ensemble?
 - b. If there are sectionals, when and where will they be held and who will conduct them?
 - c. How much rehearsal will there be on the day of the performance?
 - d. Will the ensemble get to rehearse in the performance space?
 - e. Is there a final warmup area prior to moving on stage?
 - f. What will be the concert dress for the guest conductor and the students?
5. Program information
 - a. Brief guest conductor biography
 - b. Names of participating students and directors
 - c. Accurate names of works to be performed

B. Effective Event Management

1. Prepare rehearsal and performance spaces
 - a. Chairs and stands
 - (1) Pre-arrange for a guest conductor to send a seating chart.
 - b. Tuner and metronome
 - c. A good podium and conductor's stand
 - d. Audio playback equipment
 - e. A white board or chalk board
 - f. A microphone to address the audience at the concert.
2. Emergencies
 - a. Access to a copier for missing music
 - b. Available instrument repair or replacement
3. Guest conductor courtesies
 - a. Give a brief introduction of the guest conductor to the students.
 - b. Create student stand placards.
 - c. Have a liaison for the guest conductor that will handle all pre-rehearsal and post-rehearsal announcements and facilitate any unexpected logistical problems.
 - d. Bottled water is greatly appreciated.
 - e. Arrange for a room for the guest conductor to rest between the final rehearsal and the concert.

III. The Guest Clinician

A. Clinician for Your Marching Band

1. Define your clinic desires clearly prior to arrival.
 - a. Marching technique/execution
 - b. Form development and cleaning
 - c. Music execution
 - d. General effect in specific areas
 - e. All of the above!
2. Can you provide materials prior to arrival? (Optional)
 - a. Electronic files of drill and/or music
 - b. A VHS or DVD of a rehearsal or a performance
3. Wrap-up discussion with staff after rehearsal
 - a. Often this is the most important part of the clinic
 - b. What can we do from this point forward to improve?
 - c. What areas need the most attention?

B. Clinician for Your Concert Ensemble

1. What to provide prior to your clinician's arrival?
 - a. Complete schedule for the ensemble(s) clinic
 - b. List of literature being rehearsed! If the clinician cannot locate scores, can you provide a copy in advance? The clinician wants to be prepared!
 - c. Defined role for the clinician (i.e. conduct rehearsal, comments–taped or in the rehearsal itself, written critique, etc.)
2. Timing—know *when* to have a clinician for your ensemble(s).
 - a. Communicate in advance your point in the preparation process
 - b. Do not have a clinician out too early—it may not be the best use of time when a great deal of learning is still taking place.
 - c. Do not have a clinician out too late—it is difficult to work in suggestions late in the process.
3. Wrap-up discussion with staff after rehearsal
 - a. Often this is the most important part of the clinic
 - b. What can we do from this point forward to improve?
 - c. What areas need the most attention?

C. Accepting Constructive Criticism

1. I cannot believe I did not hear/see that! There is no need to apologize or make excuses. Often we are so close to the process that we simply miss things. That is *why* you have others in to work with your ensemble.
2. How do you handle an unprofessional moment by your clinician?
3. The clinician wants us to make this change one week prior to contest?! As a clinician, I only make *suggestions*.
4. In the moment, how do you handle inappropriate behavior on the part of one or some of your students? How do you deal with students who are tardy to a rehearsal?
5. What if you are guilty of over-programming? As a clinician, I have often said: *Any one of these pieces would be fine for this ensemble. However, all of them combined asks too much of these players at this point in their development.*

IV. **The Guest Composer**

A. **Fear Should Not Be an Issue**

1. One of the most **terrifying** experiences in our teaching/conducting careers can be leading our ensemble with the composer in the room. Get over it!!! Don't let fear prevent you from exploring the thrills and challenges of working with a living composer.

B. **Making a Deeper Connection to the Music**

1. A guest composer can bring some of the most exciting and rewarding experiences a student will ever have. Students are reminded of the intimate connection between the creative and the re-creative acts.

C. **Making a Wise Choice**

1. Don't invite just any composer. Musical quality must always be the first priority. Don't squander this opportunity on anyone but the best composers. Invite composers whose music speaks to you in meaningful ways.

D. **The Composer/Conductor**

1. In some cases, the guest composer may also be an accomplished conductor. If so, invite the composer to conduct his/her music with your band! The composer's personal insights can energize and inspire students in tremendous ways.

E. **The Pre-Concert Lecture**

1. A pre-concert lecture by a composer is a terrific idea. Many composers are quite comfortable with this concept, and there is no question the music about to be performed will have a greater impact if the composer is allowed to give insight prior to the concert.

V. **Conclusion**

A. **Final Thoughts**

1. No matter their area of specialty, clinicians have the utmost respect for the directors with the courage and dedication to seek out assistance so that they and their students can make even more inspiring music.
2. Clinicians are excited about being with students. Clinicians are just as honored and excited to be part of your event as the participating directors and students.