THE BRIDGE TO MUSICAL INDEPENDENCE

CONDUCTED SMALL ENSEMBLES

A musically rich set of conducted chamber music exists for music teachers and conductors to develop in students musical independence, leadership abilities and both strength and sensitivity. At the same time, conductors themselves can improve their focus of gestures and subtlety of interpretive ideas.

What is conducted chamber music? It is about shared musical leadership. Music in which each musician plays an individual role but where there is also a role for a conductor to discreetly direct tempo and rubato, monitor balances and dynamics, and encourage articulation clarity while the music progresses. There is no set number which dictates when a piece stops being chamber music and becomes a conducted chamber ensemble. There are sextets which need a conductor and thirteen player ensembles which navigate music well without one.

What is a signal factor that determines whether the music is to be conducted? That the players need a minimal amount of external leadership to be free to express themselves. If they are concerned about staying together or making an entrance at the proper time, then their chances of true expression are low.

Conducted chamber music, when optimally approached:

Allows the musician playing to:
- create musical direction in the music with a minimum of conductor involvement
- be expressive in entrances and exits from the music by virtue of a conductor involved who provides security in these places
- experiments with rubato knowing that the conductor will help guide the rest of the ensemble through the changes in motion

Allows the conductor to:
- guide subtle changes of tempo and nuance with a minimum of gesture and effort
- explore spontaneous interpretive ideas
- respond to the ideas of players with a goal of creating a creative environment

What is the repertoire?

While there is a deep repertoire of great music, that which is playable by less experienced players is more limited.

Is there a definitive source to find music? In just the past few years a wonderful and essential source has been produced by Rodney Winther; his comprehensive volume: An Annotated Guide to Wind Chamber Music”. 2004 Warner Brothers; Miami Fl. This exhaustive 450 page book lists music, publishers and rates difficulty.
The steps in incorporating this music into a band program:

- identify the players who are already leaders and who “carry” their sections in the larger ensemble, now might be the time to give them some freedom to lead the music, not just a section

- determine repertoire that fits the available players
  - if the repertoire doesn’t match personnel exactly, are instrument substitutions/arranging musically valid? Yes and no……
  (the history of composers being unwilling to consider re-arrangements versus those engaging enthusiastically in the practice is long and colorful. As Quantz puts it so enigmatically “and then there is the matter of taste…..” The best sources for creating instrumental substitutions are by master composers who have written their own ossia parts in pieces or where later editions have changed instrumentation, or where the composer has completely re-arranged music (e.g. Beethoven arranges his Second Symphony for piano trio…….)

- Set up individual or paired meetings in which the player(s) is led through the music with an individual approach:
  - independent musical approaches you wish to see them develop.
  - address the continuous playing and mental focus required
  - develop both solo dynamics and solo sound

- First rehearsal two possible approaches:
  - Set the ensemble in a semi-circle not in rows
  - Work the piece by duets pairings – start the process by having one musician play with one other player, then increase the number, finally tutti. By starting the process as a chamber music listening/individual approach, the student begins to think less as a follower/joiner and more of a leader.

- later rehearsal approaches
  - ask players to critique what they hear
  - ask players to determine the composer’s articulation styles (how short? how gentle?) dynamics (what is “piano” here?) how much rubato? The conductor has to LEAD direct this discussion with energy and skill
conductor approaches:
- small is not just beautiful, but essential here – prepare gestures that are refined, intimae and encourage musicians to mutually lead
- You still have to LEAD - firmly set up the basics of tempo/energy and style/mood
- after large sections of music are under way in rehearsal, the conductor should minimize/stop tempo maintenance and conduct phrases and smaller musical gestures – players will then take leadership roles through their own playing

Thoughts on today’s repertoire:

Mendelssohn - Notturno op. 24: Music that becomes a larger band piece

Written by a 16 year old Mendelssohn, this gem was written as “harmoniemusik”, an expanded wind octet with added flute, contrabassoon and trumpet. The band director will recognize this from the full band arrangement by Greissel. Mendelssohn himself added a number of extra instruments to total 27. Using the John Boyd edition, players could perform it as the Notturno in one setting and those same people, could join the entire concert band in performing it at another time. Those small ensemble players bring the chamber experience to the larger group. Holst Military Suites emply the same smaller group OR larger group concept.

Jacob - Old Wine in New Bottles

This 12 player miniature classic employs folk like melodies, subtly colorful harmonies and is technically easier play. Separate movements allow for choices in how much music to perform.

Kukla – Folksongs for Winds

This octet sets folksongs from different origins (American, French, etc.) for an ob, cl, bsn, hn octet. Technically easy, tuneful and amiable music.

Washburn – Concertino

An opportunity for both brass and winds to play chamber music together. The two movements are set for woodwind and brass quintets, optimally played in a quasi-antiphonal set-up.
AN ABBREVIATED LIST OF PIECES OF MODERATE DIFFICULTY*

Works for 8

Steven Kukla   Folksongs for Winds 0222-2000  self-published
Brian Fennelly Empirical Rag 0222-2000 American Composer’s Alliance
Etienne Mehul Overture in F 1111(1)-121 Swanzy
Camille Saint-Saens Feuilllets d’album 1122-2000 Master’s Music
Gordon Jacob  Serenade 2222-0000 Boosey and Hawkes

Works for 9

Gabriele Faure  Premiere nocturne 1222(1)-2000 Master’s Music
Alphons Galman Intro. and Burlesque 11(EH)1Bscl2-2000 Edition Compusic
Claude Debussy/Sheen 3 from Children’s Corner 1111(1)-2000 Kalmus
Hovahness Tower Music 1111-2111 Broude Bros.

Works for 10

Ruth Gipps  Seascape 2222-2 Warner Bros
Darius Milhaud Dixtour 2222-2 Kalmus
Robert Washburn Concertino 1111-2211 Oxford
Vincent Persichetti Serenade 1111-2211 Elkan-Vogel

Works for 11

Malcolm Arnold Trevelyn Suite 3222-2 Faber
Otto Luening Mexican Serenades 2221-1000bass,perc Galaxy
Wm. Mayer Essay for Brass and Winds 1111-2211perc Galaxy

Works for 12

Max Reger  Serenade 2222-4000 Master’s Music
Gordon Jacob Old Wine in New Bottles 2222-2200 Oxford
Gordon Jacob More Old Wine 2222-2200 Oxford
Louis Jadin Symphonie 2022(cbs)-2210 Hofmeister
Carl Weber March (in C) 1222-2210 Musica Rara

*Source: An Annotated Guide to Wind Chamber Music; Rodney Winther;
2004 Warner Brothers; Miami Fl.

Presented at the MidWest Clinic on Friday December 18, 2009 at 2:30pm in room W190.
Presented by Mr. Charles Peltz and Mr. William Drury of the New England Conservatory of
Music, with the U.S. Naval Academy Band’s Chamber Winds.