

Play More Talk Less
by *Elliot Del Borgo*

Play more, talk less—a simple prescription for a more efficient and productive rehearsal. After having watched hundreds (maybe thousands) of band and orchestra rehearsals, I am frequently perplexed by the excessive amount of explanation, direction, effusive background material and sometimes completely extraneous information given verbally by conductors.

Ours is an aural and expressive art whose meaning is conveyed by sound (by the players) and gesture (by the conductor). It defies description in words. Remember your sophomore music literature texts? Yet conductors waste huge amounts of time talking from the podium when the kids should be doing the thing they came to rehearsal for—playing. Students get better by playing, not listening; and the more they play, the better they will get.

Of course, there are times during a rehearsal when it is necessary to stop and correct. These should be as infrequent as possible (holler about what's wrong, but continue to play. They will get the message; especially if your scream of pain is accompanied by a laser-like glare!) When you do stop the group, be quick and precise by noting what is wrong and give a clear, brief instruction as to how to make it right. No threats, recriminations or cries of sabotage (they probably didn't err on purpose) and no "down the line" purges. They are a waste of time and breed ill-will in the group. Better to play the difficult passage six times by all the clarinets, rather than have six players stumble through individually in front of their friends.

Playing without too many steps also gives the students a good idea of the "whole" piece. They learn to sense the rise and fall of tension and the overall architecture of the work as structured by the composer. Frequent complete playing, also allows the players to pace themselves so they can be ready to maximize their effort at the critical points of greatest drama.

Let the kids play. They will enjoy the rehearsals more and their skills will improve with increased use.

If you simply must share your vast knowledge, write an article.

Elliot Del Borgo holds a B.S. degree from the State University of New York, an Ed. M. degree from Temple University, and a M. M. degree from the Philadelphia Conservatory where he studied theory and composition. Mr. Del Borgo has taught instrumental music in the Philadelphia Public Schools and is currently Professor of Music at the Crane School of Music, where he has held teaching and administrative positions since 1965. An award-winning member of ASCAP, he is a frequent consultant, clinician, lecturer, and adjudicator and is a widely known conductor of bands and orchestras.

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