

A Basic Festival/Contest Preparation Check List ✓

Don Sumwalt

As we forge through the winter months, our attention is turning toward upcoming spring festivals and contests. It is very easy to overlook some obvious tasks that can make the festival go smoothly. With so much energy being put into the rehearsal of music, we forget to do a few basic organizational tasks that can make or break your patience and overall sanity. Here are a few items to keep in mind:

✓ Make sure to have your school instruments checked for proper playing condition. This is a very important even if the instrument seems to be working properly. Periodic adjustment of instruments, especially woodwinds, can clear up intonation problems that you may be having. An instrument that is properly regulated can clear up many intonation problems so that you can spend more time working on intonation problems that the player is creating, not the instrument.

✓ Order school wind instrument accessories early. If you know you have school instruments that need a new mouthpiece, order early so the student can have time to adjust to the feel and characteristics of

the mouthpiece. Check to see if the woodwinds need new ligatures or neck straps. Check brass instruments to see if they need additional lubricants for valves and slides. Check your supply of reeds; breaking the last reed the student has is a classic pre-performance accident before the band is to perform at festival.

✓ Check your percussion equipment. Make sure that all drum heads are in good shape and order replacement heads early to make sure that they have time to “break in” before performance day. Inspect your mallets for any cracks. During peak performance seasons, mallets and sticks can wear out and need to be replaced. Check your inventory of auxiliary percussion instruments for missing mallets. It is very easy to find your auxiliary instruments are broken or you are missing something that you will need for your performance. Inspect your percussion instruments to see if they need to be tuned.

✓ Order judges’ scores early. Due to copyright laws, you cannot submit photocopied scores for judges to use. Most publishers offer extra scores, but they can take a long time to receive. Get

your judges’ folders made early and make sure to always number you scores.

✓ Make sure to tell your students to have extra supplies. It is always expected by students that the band director will have that extra reed, valve oil, or pair of drumsticks the day of contest. Make sure to have your students get their own supplies—teach them the music and the personal responsibility for their instrument supplies.

✓ Check your uniforms for proper fitting and cleaning. Most bands will wear either a concert uniform or their marching band uniform. Regardless of the type, the uniforms need to be checked for proper fit and cleaning if necessary. Have your band booster parents help with fittings and cleaning tasks. The more help with this task, the better.

✓ Determine if you are going to use your percussion instruments or the instruments provided by the festival host. The festival host may not have the complete set of timpani, extra xylophone, or gong that you have at your school. Check to see if you need to make arrangements to bring your instruments. At times, instruments that are strange to the player can

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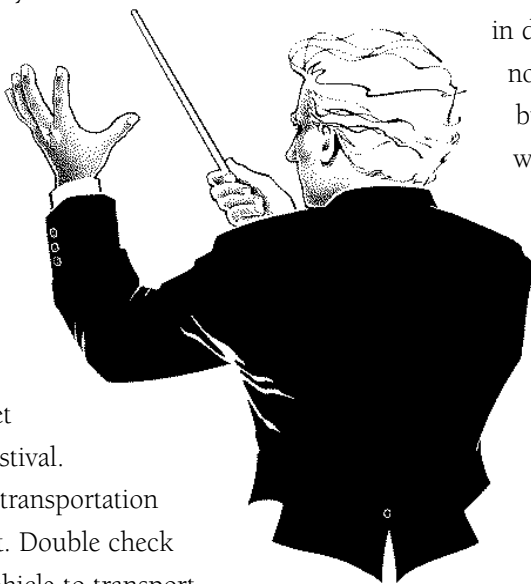
throw them off in performance, and possibly the entire ensemble as well.

✓ Make a seating arrangement chart for the festival host. Draw out a seating arrangement listing the chairs and stands needed for your group. Make sure you list the number of chairs and stands by row as well as the total the numbers for all rows combined.

It is always better for the host to make sure to have enough equipment before performance day instead of finding out they cannot meet your needs the day of the festival.

✓ Make arrangements for transportation of musicians and equipment. Double check the need to have an extra vehicle to transport equipment and uniforms. Make sure to give all drivers directions and itineraries of what will be happening the day of the festival. Take along cell phones or two-way radios to have communication between vehicles.

✓ Get copies of the festival itinerary to all students and their parents. Make sure they know all the particulars about the festival: when, where, equipment needed, etc. By keeping everyone informed, there is less of a chance of a misunderstanding the day of the festival.



✓ Practice in a different rehearsal area before you go to the festival. This is a good way to keep developing the listening habits of your band. By rehearsing in a different room, the students start to concentrate more on what they hear to make adjustments in dynamics and intonation. If you normally perform in a room with built in risers, practice in a room where the band all sits on the same level. The differences in the sound of the ensemble will benefit the listening skills of you and your ensemble. Dynamics and articulations that sounded fine in your band room may be too harsh or almost non-existent in another room.

This is only a basic list of items to be concerned about. You may need to add other items to your list depending if you have an overnight stay, special transportation of students from another activity during the day of the festival, or special considerations concerning extra equipment needed for the festival. By going through a basic checklist, both you and your ensemble will feel more at ease and be able to perform to your maximum potential on festival day. Remember, it's all in the details.

This article was first published on www.banddirector.com.

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