

# Are You Studying Everything?

## You Must Be Prepared to Cover It All

Leland Sharrock

---

How many of us sat through a variety of music classes in college thinking, "I'll never use this information. Why should I learn how to teach the string instrument or voice—I'm going to direct a middle school band. Why am I analyzing Stravinsky when I'm going to teach 6<sup>th</sup> grade beginner band? Is a marching band class really necessary? Today, most middle school bands never march. I'm going to be a professional musician, so leave me alone and let me practice my orchestral excerpts. I'm going to get a job teaching private lessons, so I don't need to learn conducting and the other instruments. Why do I need these classes?" I'm sure most of us have asked these questions at sometime during our college years.

Here I am, 40 years later—retired...after starting a career as a professional musician and doing that for six years, then moving to nine years of teaching high school band, joining the fundraising business for five years, teaching high school band eight more years, then becoming a coordinator of the fine arts for two years, back to being an assistant in a high school for three years and becoming the head director for four more years. During this time period, I was

a private horn teacher, teaching beginning horn to the university level. Now, I am adjunct professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. What happened to my original goal and how did I survive all of these changes? After all, I was going to make my hometown of Broken Bow, Oklahoma proud by becoming a big time professional horn player.

It all started while I was in high school after hearing Philip Farkas (First hornist with Cleveland, Boston and Chicago Symphonies) perform at a state competition. That day changed my life and my goal was to become a student of his, polish my skills and go off into the professional world of performing. Everything seemed to be going my way. I had my masters degree in performance from Indiana University, was at the top of my game and ready for the big time. Then, the Vietnam War came along at which time my draft number also came up. Mr. Farkas was notified of an opening in the North American Air Defenses Band in Colorado Springs and recommended I audition for

the position. After spending three wonderful years in this band with outstanding musicians and performing concerts all over the U.S. and Canada, I auditioned and was accepted into the San Antonio Symphony.

Six months before I was discharged, a military dentist convinced me to replace my dental bridge which contained my front two teeth.

It was free, sounded

good to me and I would no longer have the embarrassing gold showing around my front teeth. This new bridge gradually shifted the mouthpiece to a new area and my playing was seriously damaged. Hanging in there for three years, knowing I wasn't playing my best and trying to audition for better paying orchestras, I had to accept that the future of making a living by playing horn wasn't going to happen.

Thank goodness I had earned a BME degree from Oklahoma State University in 1965 under Hiram Henry's direction. My life must now move in a new direction. Was I prepared to make this change?

**When the music coordinator retired, I was asked to take his place. Am I ready? Thank goodness, I did pay attention to some degree while studying music theory and history in college and it paid off.**

## Are You Studying Everything?

I had always known teaching would be something I would really enjoy if the professional playing didn't work out because I had great success teaching private horn lessons. My next nine years were wonderful and exciting. I started my teaching career at a great high school as the assistant band director and four years later moved into the head position at a 5A school. In addition to being a head director, I was teaching 25 horn lessons a week, playing jobs in the community, giving clinics, adjudicating UIL contests, trying to raise a family and conducting the district's honor orchestra. Playing in an orchestra for many years and taking those college string classes came in handy for the first time! After nine years of burning the candle at both ends, I burned out.

Where would a burned out band director go from here? Fundraising! Having been a band director, I knew the fundraising business forwards and backwards. Band directing had taught me the leadership skills I needed. I wasn't afraid to meet total strangers or speak to large groups. Those five years gave me a break, more money and a chance to re-evaluate my life, as well as make many new friends.

In 1986, I was asked to finish the year at a local 5A high school after the band director passed away suddenly in the fall. I was back teaching band and realized this is where I belong. The next year, I moved to a new 5A high school where I stayed as director of bands for eight years. When the music coordinator retired, I was asked to take his place. Am I ready? Thank goodness, I did pay attention to some degree while studying music theory and history in college and it paid off. After two years as the coordinator, along came Robin Hood and a \$3 million cut in the district's budget. My coordinator's position was eliminated. I landed (Praise the Lord) back on my feet as the assistant band director at still another great high school

in San Antonio. After three years, I was given the head director position and held it for the next four years.

I finished my career at age 60 with 27 years of wonderful experiences. I was worn out and ready to take it easy and enjoy life, teach a few horn lessons, do some clinics and judge. Life was good.

Nine months later, I got the call from the University of Texas at San Antonio. "Leland, one of our professors just resigned this is a week before school starts and we need you to teach his classes." I was excited, honored, and yet, scared to death.

At the present time, I'm in my second semester, working hard and trying to give those future music teachers my best and my personal lessons in life. I'm teaching classes I've never taught, reviewing what I studied 40 years ago, giving my students 40 years of experience and loving every minute!

My questions to the young music students who are in college at this time and to the teachers at the beginning of their careers are:

*"Are you studying and devouring everything you can get your hands on? Are you passionate about learning everything you can about music? In today's fast changing world, you must be prepared to cover it all. With budget cuts in many schools across this country, you may find yourself the band director, orchestra director, choral director, theory and history teacher, department chairman and in charge of parking lot A before school. We never know where life may lead us and the many changes we may face. If you become too specialized, the job you may be offered in the future could vanish because you were not prepared. Will you be prepared to make those changes when and if the time comes?"*