

To Heck with the Judges... Let's Talk About the MUSIC

Paula Crider

Have you ever had one of those yucky, sucky days when all you wanted to do was bury your head under the covers and make the world go away? One of those *I-can't-believe-I-spent-that-much-on-my-Visa-bill-If-I-have-to-deal-with-one-more-parent-call-Why-on-earth-did-I-decide-to-play-that-piece-for-contest-and-where-did-those-extra-10-pounds-come-from?* kind of days?

The tension resulting from cramming 40 hours of job demands into a 24-hour day can be overwhelming, and we band directors tend to shoulder the weight of the world on a daily basis.

Compounding this ubiquitous state of band director stress-a-thon is the almost universal pandemic of spending waaaaay too much time worrying about what others might think of a performance. We become the Martha Stewarts of cleanliness, sweeping away faulty intonation, polishing tone qualities, and scrubbing technique until it sparkles. All this is done in the hope that on the day of performance, a panel of three judges won't find enough "wrong" to merit awarding anything but a first division rating...or first place, or whatever.

The blame lies not with well-intentioned adjudicators. Contest is a good thing when used correctly, but ultimately it should be about the students and the music. If these are your priorities, then, gentle reader, I submit that the opinion of judges really shouldn't matter.

When we focus solely upon making the music come to life; when we seek to unlock the secrets of the composer, and allow our students to enter that rare expressive realm that goes far beyond the notes; only then is it possible to transcend angst-ridden thoughts of whether or not someone else will approve. Once we inspire our students to play with a true musical understanding of phrase shape, nuance and what must occur "between the notes," these insights will bring the piece to life, making it alive with the possibility of being beautiful, exciting, passionate, angry, forceful, eloquent, uplifting, thought-provoking *ad infinitum*

...but above all, the music will become unalterably memorable. If this is the case, how could a judge NOT like it?

If you and your students perform to the best of your abilities, with true musical commitment, that is all that really matters. If someone doesn't like what you do, then it's time to call to mind that old Texas saying about the horse that one rode in on!

How do we go beyond the notes to that higher level of expressive music-making? Please find below a few thoughts that will be presented in my clinic at the TBA Convention/Clinic called "To Heck With the Judges...Let's Talk About the MUSIC".

Major Premise: All music (with the possible exception of the John Cage 4'33" of silence) is either moving towards a moment of greater intensity, or away from that moment.

Therefore, I have the following few suggestions:

(continued)

"To Heck With the Judges...Let's Talk About the MUSIC"

**presented by
Paula Crider**

**Sunday, July 22
at 2:30 p.m.**

To Heck with the Judges...Let's Talk About the MUSIC

- Form a clear idea of phrase direction in every measure of every piece. Locate moments of tension/release.

- Mark your score and have students mark parts to outline phrase shape.

- Teach your band to have a vocabulary of dynamics that will allow for shaping of phrases from the intense whisper of a *pianissimo* to the commanding energy of a *fortissimo*.

- Construct a dynamic intensity scale so that you may better plan the pacing of the piece.

- Tempo is everything...choose the correct tempos, and realize that tempo must sometimes be elastic in order for the piece to come to life.

- Teach students to listen so that they may intelligently blend and balance their parts to the musical whole.

- Practice conducting so that you may convey the music through expressive gesture. Sensitize your ensemble to respond to those gestures.

- Have an opinion about the interpretation of a piece before you ever step on the podium to read it with your students.

- Allow for and encourage student expressiveness.

- “Play” your band as expressively as you would your own instrument. There will always be more than one “right” answer as to how music may be interpreted. Listen to five great conductors in performance of any major orchestral literature, and you will hear five differing

interpretations. Some differences are quite subtle while others are remarkably contrasting. The practice of studying great performances will provide a tremendously inspiring education.

If you and your students perform to the best of your abilities, with true musical commitment, that is all that really matters.

Bottom Line: Take a chance, be expressive, give the music personality, energy, life...forget the judges...it's the music that matters. It's why we came to this crazy profession in the first place, isn't it?

Following a distinguished 33-year teaching career, Paula Crider retired from The University of Texas in 1999 with the title of Professor Emeritus. She has enjoyed the honor of serving as guest conductor, lecturer or adjudicator in over 30 states, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Australia. She has conducted 29 All-State Bands, taught at all levels, and continues to share her passion for the art of music making with students and directors throughout the U.S. and abroad. Ms. Crider holds the unique distinction of having been the first female in the state of Texas to serve as Director of Bands at a class 5A high school - Crockett High School in Austin.

In 1982 Ms. Crider joined the faculty of The University of Texas as Assistant Director of The Longhorn Bands and in 1995 she was named Director of Longhorn Bands. Highly acclaimed for its marching and musical excellence, the 380-member “Showband of the Southwest” enjoyed national acclaim under Crider’s leadership. Awards and honors include two “Eyes of Texas” awards for excellence at The University of Texas, the Tau Beta Sigma/Kappa Kappa Psi Outstanding Service to Music Award, the Sudler Legion of Merit, the TBA Meritorious Achievement Award and 2004 TBA Bandmaster of the Year. She is Immediate Past President of the National Band Association, serves on the Board of Directors of the American Bandmasters Association, and was a charter member of the Texas Music Adjudicators Association. Ms. Crider is a proud member of Phi Beta Mu, TBA, and TMEA.