

Pondering the Plight Presented by the Presence of Pesky Problems of Pitch

Dr. Gary Garner

Dr. Gary Garner will present “Pondering the Plight Presented by the Presence of Pesky Problems of Pitch” at the TBA Convention/Clinic on Sunday, July 22 at 3:45 p.m. followed by a demonstration session at 5:00 p.m. This comprehensive clinic will address many aspects of pitch. He will cover members of the woodwind and brass families with specifics pertaining to tuning methods and procedures. The following are a few areas Dr. Garner will cover in his presentation:

The Basics

- Sound is vibration; the faster the vibration, the higher the pitch and vice-versa.
- Students must be able to recognize “in tune.”
- The instrument must be warmed up before tuning.
- Pitch is dependent on sound tone production—proper embouchure and correct use of air.
- Keep good equipment in good condition.

Points on Tuners

- Great for learning the intonation pattern of the instrument and for making comparison, BUT...not the last word.
- Tuners are good for training the ear.
- Tuner hookups can be a great help.

Choice of a Tuning Note

- No one note is best for all, but concert F comes closest, alto sax being a notable exception.
- If tuning with a tuner, establish the pitch before looking at the tuner.

Intonation in Ensemble

Three Concerns are:

1. Unisons/Octaves
2. Melodic (every note in tune with the preceding note)
3. Harmonic (correct intervallic relationships)

Often these come into direct conflict.

The Three-Note Chorale

- Students are not confined to playing the same few notes day after day; they can cover the entire range of the instrument.
- Complete attention can be devoted to matters of tone and pitch without concerns of rhythm and technique, and without the need to look at the music.
- Parts can be arranged as the director wishes.
- Students can easily “hear” the pitch before playing it.

Developing Aural Acuity

- Singing
- Promoting individual accountability
- Keeping everyone engaged in making judgments about pitch
- Using a tuning CD or *TuneUp Systems*, possibly along with a tuner and hookup
- There are many software programs designed for ear training. The “Play by Ear” exercises in *SmartMusic™* are excellent.

Rehearsal Strategies

- Recognition, diagnosis, and cure
- Play each line separately and identify problems.
- Correct the problem note, then start at the beginning of the phrase and hold the notes when you come to it.

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(more Rehearsal Strategies)

- Put back in context.
- Never assume that a correction is permanent.
- Record the rehearsal; try to pick out each part and make notes on problem areas.
- When tuning two players, exchange short notes and ask them (or other members of the ensemble) who is higher and who is lower.
- Have one player hold a steady tone while the other lips the pitch down, then gradually bring it up until a unison is achieved.
- Play a problem passage in a series of wind ensembles, one on a part (eliminate anonymity), or every other player (odds and evens).
- In tuning chords, start with the root, then add the 5th, then the 3rd.
- In the upper woodwinds, the responsibility of the clarinets should be to be able to match one another. The responsibility of the flutes and oboes is to match the clarinets. Likewise, the bassoon and baritone sax should match the bass clarinets.

Just or Equal?

- David Doty in *The Just Intonation Primer* said, “Equal temperament was not adopted because it sounded better, despite two hundred years of cultural conditioning.”
- *Harvard Dictionary*, first edition: “In equal temperament no interval other than the octave is acoustically correct or pure, The deviation of the fifth (2 cents) is too small to be noticed at all. With the thirds, the difference is considerable greater, the well-tempered third (400 cents) being 14 cents (one-eighth of a semitone) larger than the pure third (386 cents). However, our ear has become completely accustomed to this ‘error’ and the advantage of the system far outweigh its flaws.
- Equal/Just Comparisons (in cents):

| | Equal | Just | |
|------|-------|------|---------|
| M3 | 400 | 386 | (A=436) |
| P5 | 700 | 702 | (A=441) |
| m3 | 300 | 316 | (A=444) |
| dom7 | 1000 | 929 | (A=433) |

Dr. Gary Garner retired in 2002 after 39 years as Director of Bands at West Texas State University. He holds a bachelor's degree from Texas Tech and a Master of Music and DMA from the University of Southern California.

He began his teaching career in Lubbock at Hutchinson Jr. High School and at Monterey High School. From there he went to the University of Southern California as marching band director for four years before accepting a position at WTAMU. During his tenure at WTAMU, the Symphonic Band performed twice at Carnegie Hall, twice before the College Band Directors National Association, and a record ten times at the Texas Music Educators Association convention.

Among the awards and honors Dr. Garner has received are the WTAMU Faculty Excellence Award, WTAMU Phoenix Club award for teaching excellence, Minnie Piper Stevens Award, Texas Bandmaster of the Year, Bohumil Makovsky Award for outstanding service to college bands, Gene Hemmle Award as outstanding music alumnus from Texas Tech, Phi Beta Mu National Bandmaster of the Year, and Honorary Life Member of TBA.