

Warm-Ups: What Are They Good For?

Randy Vaughn

Now that I have your attention, as you start your preparation for contest this spring, it is important that we understand the purpose of our warm-ups or daily drills.

We can get into a rut and find ourselves doing the routine without understanding the reason or purpose for doing a particular exercise.

One of the biggest misconceptions and missed opportunities with our daily drill is in our approach to Remington exercises. This is a great exercise for improving tone and expanding the range of our ensemble. If we are not careful we can get into a mindset where we just play the exercise without thought or purpose. So, what is the purpose of Remington? Well, there are obviously many skills to address when doing these exercises, but to me the number one goal is to make the notes off the “F” concert sound as good as the “F”. Sounds simple, but to do that requires a lot of time and effort. With less mature ensembles it may be helpful to play this exercise whole note to whole note with a whole rest, before attempting to play in half notes. It is also important to do this exercise not only descending, but ascending as well. This allows you to work tone in the ranges that will be utilized in your contest music.

So what are the problems that this exercise can address, and what

can we, as directors, do to fix those problems?

- Tone in higher ranges tends to be brighter, thinner, louder and forced, or as we might say, out of focus. So by doing ascending intervals, we remind students to remain relaxed and soft in the upper body. Remember, tension is the destroyer of a great sound. Sometimes, something as simple as telling students to try and make their best sound by listening and striving for a clear tone will make a big improvement. There will be times when the students will need additional information. One example would be to use same air and vowel sound as they ascend. It may help the higher brass to use a taller vowel sound in the mouth so the higher notes don't sound thin and pinched.

- The second problem is the tone in the lower register tends to be weak, not centered and grainy. Again the descending intervals exercise can work wonders for these problems. Have students hold their face still, use fast steady air with firm corners and soft lips. Think of blowing air farther through the instrument and reach deeper in body as you breathe when descending. It is very, very important that each and every note move and sound alike. The only thing that changes is the pitch, not the tone or resonance.

Good tone quality needs to be developed by a daily program of some type of tonal exercise; whether it be block F, interval studies, long tones, scales or a chorale. There are no shortcuts to having a band that sounds great in all ranges. It is hard work but can be very rewarding when you hear the results. For me, Remington is one of the best ways to expand range and develop a clear, beautiful resonant sound.

Students must sit properly and use correct breathing fundamentals to achieve optimum results. When breathing, it is important to breathe in rhythm and not hold the air in the body before the start of the note. The posture should be natural, with the body physically soft and still. Some sort of breathing exercise to start rehearsal can do wonders for the sound of your band. There are many ways to do a breathing exercise. It can be as simple as having students breathe in for four beats and out four beats while sitting or standing. Then, vary the counts in and out to whatever you want. Just be sure this is done with a natural feel and no movement in the upper part of the body. The air is always moving in or out. This exercise tends to get the students focused to start the rehearsal. So what we hope to achieve is a beautiful, clear, resonant sound on each note, where the beginning,

Warm-Ups: What Are They Good For?

middle and end of the notes all have the same energy and timbre with no decay and no bumps at start. As if that were not enough, next we want to have the students fit their sounds into each other as they play this exercise: that is, match the volume of those around you. This allows for a unified, clearer, balanced ensemble sound.

Hopefully some of this information will be helpful to you and your band as you prepare for having a successful spring.

Growing up, Randy Vaughn was a student of Harold VanWinkle, Norvel Howell and Ted Raven in Clovis, New Mexico. He is a 1968 graduate of West Texas State University with a Bachelor of Music Education. While at WTSU, he studied with Dr. Gary Garner and later in his career, received instruction from Eddie Green at the University of Houston.

Mr. Vaughn's band directing experiences include positions at Klein High School and Strack Intermediate School (Klein ISD), Hereford High School and Stanton Junior High School (Hereford ISD) and Claude High School (Claude ISD). Bands under his direction have been recognized statewide and nationally for their musical excellence earning 32 UIL sweepstakes awards. Other top honors received at prestigious festivals include the Bands of America Grand Nationals in Indianapolis, the Texas 5A State Marching Band Competition and the Texas 5A

Honor Band competition, and the Bands of America National Concert Band Festival in Chicago. His bands have held performances at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. and Carnegie Hall in New York City.

In 2002, Mr. Vaughn was awarded the Lifetime Meritorious Achievement Award by the TBA. Mr. Vaughn's professional affiliations include TMEA, Phi Beta Mu, TMAA and is a past president of the TBA. Mr. Vaughn retired in 2001 after 34 years in the Texas public schools. He maintains a busy schedule as clinician, guest conductor and adjudicator across the United States.