

Marching Band at Claudia Taylor Johnson High School What We Like and What Works For Us...

Jarrett Lipman, Phi Beta Mu Young Bandmaster of the Year 2014. Lipman and the C.T.Johnson HS staff presented three clinics at this summer's convention to standing room only crowds.

"What We Like and What Works for Us" is designed to share a few of the exercises and concepts that we use for Claudia Taylor Johnson High School's Marching Band. Most of our techniques reflect current trends; many are variations on a theme. These are the practices we execute on a daily basis that we continue to adjust and refine...and the techniques we find that work for us, we like! I also want to share a bit about our approach to seeking out role models which has made a huge impact on our program over the last six years.

When Johnson opened in the fall of 2008, we began the process of seeking out role models who experienced success in their various fields and have continued this process through to the present day. We define success as an end product that we can take pride in... in other words, if Alan Sharps and I can sit and watch it or listen to it, and like the way it sounds and looks, we feel we have achieved success. This attitude applies to those schools we study as well, and it is not necessarily connected to competitive achievements or accolades.

Alan Sharps and I opened the band department together in 2008 as the band directors. Jordan Stern (2012-present) and Manny Maldonado (2008-12) rounded out

our team. Alan moved to Texas in 1997 after teaching in the public schools in Miami, Florida and Virginia Beach, Virginia. During my final semester at Mason Gross, Rutgers University, I moved to San Antonio (fall of 2007) in order to complete my



Cindy Lansford presented the Phi Beta Mu Young Bandmaster of the Year Award to Jarrett Lipman at this summer's convention

student teaching at Ronald Reagan HS. While at Rutgers, we studied the videos and recordings of many programs in Texas including L.D. Bell, Spring, Westfield, and Ronald Reagan when they came onto the scene. I was enamored by how these programs could produce concert groups and marching bands that so closely resembled Drum Corps.

Excited by this prospect, I contacted Mark Chambers at Reagan HS to request an opportunity to come to student teach. Following Reagan from 2002-06 and listening to the impressively creative arrangements, the incorporation of

electronics on the field, and the visual ideas that people still copy to this day, I saw they were clearly something different and fresh. At the same time, I was also inspired by listening to Westfield, Spring, and Winston Churchill who have their own distinctive styles.

I share this history to illustrate how I have developed an eclectic style in "what I like." Alan Sharp's experiences mirror my own. In pursuit of mentors and role models, I have pulled from many different camps and thought processes in an effort to discover what I like and how to transfer that style to students.

Our process has been to respect what our role models do well, learn from that, and invest as much effort as possible into shaping it into a final product that our kids enjoy, and take pride in our endeavors. We have found one constant across the board from each role model we study: **an extraordinarily high standard.** Each school we have studied holds their students accountable for learning their music, invests energy into producing a marching show that is interesting and technically challenging, and expects a great deal from their students in terms of both individual preparation and commitment to good ensemble fundamentals.

*“Breathe to play,
not just to live...”*

-Tom Bennett

DAILY DRILL

So what are some of the elements of our daily drill?

For us, we look at marching band and concert band as two entirely different genres of music—the same perspective we use for orchestra and jazz.

While we approach the technique of playing the instruments with the same standard of excellence, we don't necessarily want our end Marching Band product to sound like a Wind Ensemble on the field. I love Concert Band and Wind Ensemble. I want our Marching Band to have the elements of beauty and lyricism of a Wind Ensemble, but also want it to have the power and excitement of a Drum and Bugle Corps. Thus, we work on exercises that build *quality* of sound and some that develop *quantity* of sound.

Although we approach each ensemble a bit differently, below are some common principals we use across all of our groups. Before each and every rep, performers will have a game-plan:

1. When am I going to breathe?
2. How do I want to sound?
3. How loud do I want to play?

Three levels of Listening

1. **Individual goals** - How well do I play my individual part in tone, in tune, and in time?

2. **Section goals** - How well am I BALANCING to each player in my section, and matching their style, energy, articulations? How should my section sound? How am I working to maintain that sound and texture?

3. **Ensemble goals** - How well can I hear all of the instruments in the band? How do I want the band to sound? How do I think it should sound and what am I doing to achieve that sound? This can be a challenge outdoors for sonic and spatial reasons.

Our daily musical diet for all of our ensembles will include some variation on the following:

◆ **Breathing** - For breathing exercises, our primary purpose is to ensure what we do in the exercises transfers directly to the instrument. We will mix things up each day, including:

1. Through the nose, through the mouth; “OH” syllable on intake, “HO” syllable on exhale
2. Air flow exercises/calm air blowing through the instrument
 - Brass players mouthpiece inside the mouth behind the teeth; valves down/trombones 7th
 - Woodwinds flow air through the horn
3. Volume of air exercises - (work sustained air for 4-8-12 counts at FF)
 - Brass blowing into the horn, mouthpiece on the face
 - Woodwinds blowing air into the horn
4. The art of the “recovery breath,” maintaining the consistent sound, 8th and 16th note breaths
5. Articulation, mouthpiece on the chin, all blow air through a “Tu” syllable

◆ **Singing to Be Musical; Singing to Center Pitch** (Content by Alan Sharps)

- Sing to learn musicality and phrasing ideas
- Singing is the gateway to listening with more detail, need to hear the pitch to be able to tune on horn
- Incorporates and reinforces breathing, voice hard wired to ears and brain to directly transfer pitch
- Awareness of diatonic and chromatic intervals, learn interval names and what they sound like
- Establish understanding of a tonic pitch and its relationship to other scale degrees using Solfeggio Syllables (F=Do, G=Re, A=Mi... etc.)
- Sing interval exercises, music on note names, chorales, and passages from your music
- Develop students' ability to hear themselves in tune against a drone or moving from interval to interval
- For brass players, sing then transfer to Lip Vibrations on the mouthpiece only to improve accuracy

◆ **Lip Vibrations for Brass (Using BERP preferably)**

- Base lip off humming or singing, use a constant pitch or drone to begin with
- Important to make sure lip vibrations sound correct and vibrate correct pitch
- Train kids what the correct “sound” is—an efficient, full sound that is musical

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- Important to monitor these closely as vibrating the incorrect pitch will fight the instrument
- Ensure that band members are always vibrating the correct pitches
- Vibrate an exercise, then transfer it to playing, always make the connection

◆ *Long Tones - Do Daily*

1. Normal Johnson Routine and “The Cadets” will include 3-4 long tone exercises at tempos 68-96
2. “Remington” Interval Exercises: *Remington Down*, *Remington Ascending*, *Rotating Remington*
 - Learn to play intervals in tune, and not allow sound to shift
 - Ask kids to be aware of what intervals they are playing
 - Can do from different notes: Normal Concert F, Low Bb, High Bb
3. Goals...
 - Long tones should be full, resonant, and steady; brass players keep lips flexible
 - Default dynamic at Johnson is MF (MF different strength depending upon indoor or outdoor)
 - Long tones bring together all elements of the brass triangle, and go slow enough to allow band members to assess how they feel and how they sound
 - Focus on the front/start of the note, the body of the sound, and the quality/approach to the release
 - Work follow through and consistent air
 - Above all, work to sustain and establish both the sound of the individual and the sound of the section
 - Can work ensemble during this time, but more focus on awareness of self and neighbors

CT Johnson band students served as a demonstration group for convention clinics



◆ *Long Tones/Smooth Sounds/Range Extension - Do Daily*

- Normal Johnson Routine will include F Descending and F Ascending Exercises. (See Joe Dixon’s brass web site for procedures and structures of these exercises.)
- Two-note drill, half notes connected, quarter notes, 8th notes
- Subdivisions of the exercises welcome
- Brass will work chromatics in the lower register of the horn
- Sustained long tones in the upper register
- With range, be cautious not to move too quickly; need to play on notes that don’t sound “good” and work to gain control, especially of all the notes you will play in your marching show or concert music

◆ *Lip Flexibility/Technique*

- Basic Lip Flexibilities (1-5-1) (5-1-5) are important
- Normal Johnson Routine includes exercises that combine flexibility and technique
- “The Cadets” Drum Corps utilizes many exercises developed each year by Brass Caption Head Gino Cipriani to combine multiple elements that will build a stronger player and be efficient with time during fundamentals. Work to develop something in your program that addresses the needs of your ensemble.
- Activate all three parts of the tone triangle, air embouchure and aperture/tongue placement
- Woodwinds learn to control tone and volume of notes in different registers
- Pitch Bends for the brass are a great way to build control. Work to bend single down half a step, then up half a step to gain greater control of the center of the note.

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MORE OF WHAT WORKS FOR US...

◆ *Chorale*

- Simple chorales develop sonority, voice leading, and musicality
- “Patterson Chorale” or any Bach Chorale will work
- Compose your own chorale to meet the needs of your group
- Have band members sing, buzz, note-name, etc.

◆ *Articulation*

- Multiple ways to approach, important that band members have a strong vocabulary on how to define the fronts and releases of their notes
- We work to separate style from note length; i.e. “Legato” is a style, where as a “Tenuto” is a length (not a perfect science, sometimes we will cross...)
- An infinite number of ways to articulate, work to develop a system that allows students to understand specifically what you are looking for—the “Articulation Series” is a helpful tool in unifying approach to articulation but is only the start
- Do a lot of articulation exercises with the mouth-piece on the chin, listening to them blow air through an aperture using a “Tu” syllable
- Develop articulation exercises that address issues in your marching show and concert band music and will build strengths
- Need to address multiple tonguing with your players if applicable for their instrument

◆ *Volume Control*

- If you want to play loud with control, you need to practice playing loud with control
- It will take time for your band members to develop control at big volumes; continue to encourage them to “open up” their sound, while remaining efficient
- Can approach volume through chord progressions, long tones, crescendo/decrescendo exercises
- Volume building outdoors requires patience

VISUAL

In the visual realm, we are fortunate to have Aaron Barnes leading our visual program. He marched with “The Cadets” from 2002-04 and has instructed the “Crossmen” and “Boston Crusaders” since aging out. Below are some thoughts on what we do each day to prepare our students:

◆ *Visual Thoughts and Exercises*

Content by Aaron Barnes - Visual Caption Head

- **Use Checkpoints.** We build our technique around the pulse, creating a picture of what we want them to look like on the downbeat and upbeat as they move.
- **Keep it Simple.** Marching is unintuitive, so we simplify our explanations so that the technique is easy to teach and to understand.
- **Go Slow.** Students don’t enter the program with a marching or movement background. We start every year from the beginning and build skills slowly and correctly.
- **Repeat Often.** Repetition is the most effective way to teach a new physical skill, so we try to stay out of the way and give them many opportunities to practice and explore the technique.
- **Exercises.** During band camp, we build a collection of exercises to isolate specific issues. Once the school year begins we use these to refine our technique.

◆ *Body Awareness*

We use the following exercise to teach the correct mental and physical approach to our ideal body alignment and carriage. We begin by breaking the sections of the body apart. After we rebuild our posture, we open our bodies up to try and create as much individual presence as possible.

Focus:

- Having correct alignment and taking up space
- Understanding and separating each section of the body
- Creating a uniform look through the ensemble

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◆ *Dance Warm-up*

Integrating dance skills into the vocabulary of wind players has become much more important. Our choreographer, Curtis Uhlemann, gave us this exercise so that we could expand our movement vocabulary.

Focus:

- Increasing movement quality, fulfilling each motion
- Connecting the timing of the visual phrase to the music
- Maintaining balance and body control

◆ *Box Drill*

This is the staple of our visual program. Once the school year starts, this becomes our primary exercise during our limited fundamentals time. This fairly standard box exercise incorporates our major forward and backward slide techniques, along with direction changes.

Our goal is to develop the quality of this exercise over the season so that the students all have the same understanding of what our visual expectations are for individual technique and ensemble awareness. We will create variations of this exercise by changing count structure, tempos, form responsibilities, or by isolating key phrases in order to focus on specific needs throughout the course of the season

Focus:

- Displaying good foot timing and technique
- Maintaining posture and movement quality on the move
- Maintaining cover downs and form awareness
- Exhibiting control through direction changes

IN CONCLUSION

The greatest influences on our program have without a doubt been Tom Bennett who taught at both the high school and college levels (Spring and J.J. Pearce High Schools and University of Houston) and Gino Cipriani, Brass Caption Head at “The Cadets” Drum Corps, who has worked both in drum corps and in public schools. We have received additional guidance from Tim Rhea, Mike Brashear, Mark Chambers, Jodie Rhodes, Jason Buckingham, Joe Dixon, and Philip May. Behind the scenes, there are our many private teachers and instructors who mentor our students individually. If you were to study all of their backgrounds, you would realize very quickly that we do not subscribe to “one school of thought at Johnson.” Perhaps the greatest goal we have aspired to at Johnson is to bring together and learn from those instructors and professional players whom we believe are the best at what they do.

Jarrett Lipman is the Director of Bands at Claudia Taylor “Lady Bird” Johnson High School in San Antonio, Texas. He is currently on the Brass Staff at The Cadets Drum Corps of Allentown, PA where he instructs the Baritones and served as the Assistant Corps Director of the Crossmen Drum Corps of San Antonio, Texas in 2008. Lipman also works with “The Guardians” Open Class Drum Corps of Seguin. At Johnson High School, Lipman directs the Marching Band, co-conducts the Wind Ensemble with Alan Sharps, and assists with the Symphony Band, Concert Bands, and Jazz Ensembles. The Johnson High School Marching Band advanced to the 2010 and 2012 UIL State Marching Contest and was named a State finalist in 2012. Since 2010, the band has been a consistent Bands of America Regional and Super Regional Finalist and was named a Bands of America Grand Nationals Finalist in 2011 where the group placed 8th overall. The Johnson High School Wind Ensemble advanced to the TMEA State Honor Band Contest Finals in 2012, placing 5th overall. The Wind Ensemble has earned exclusively Sweepstakes ratings at UIL Concert & Sight Reading Contest since the school opened in 2008. Lipman graduated Magna Cum Laude with degrees in Music Education and Euphonium Performance from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. Lipman currently studies with Tom Bennett, Gino Cipriani, and Joe Dixon. In 2014, Lipman was selected as the Phi Beta Mu International Bandmasters Fraternity Texas Chapter’s “Outstanding Young Bandmaster”.