

WOODWINDS - RICHIE HAWLEY

You are only as good as your reeds...

I always tell my students this key phrase so that they know how important it is to practice and perform on a reed that has the proper resistance. For me, a "good reed" is one that has the correct resistance for the individual player. Having the appropriate resistance in a reed promotes great air support, which is the key to having a wonderful sound, easy articulation and large dynamic range. But often times teachers demand that their students develop terrific air support without having first examined if their student's reed is too hard or too soft. Air support and tone improvements are dependent on having the correct strength of reed for the individual player. When a reed is too hard/resistant, the student will force their air production in an unnatural and uncomfortable manner. Instead of just using the diaphragm muscles, the added resistance will cause many other systems of the body to strain to produce airflow which will result in producing tension in the shoulders, upper torso, and throat. This extra strain and tension transfers into the mouth where the embouchure bites down on the mouthpiece and reed- making the airflow into the clarinet even more restricted. It's a vicious circle that then makes the player force even more! On the opposite end of the spectrum, a very light/soft reed will enable the student to produce a sound easily, yet improperly by puffing the cheeks instead of engaging the diaphragm muscles. The sound will be thin and shrill. The light reed will also allow the player to have a very weak and poorly shaped embouchure that lacks the strength to focus the air into a beautiful and rich sound. The perfect strength reed is one that allows the student to blow with slight resistance and zero strain. This perfect combination of resistance and response allows proper development of embouchure and diaphragm muscles. As these muscles develop, a harder reed may be necessary. It is important for a teacher to help the student find the right strength reed for their level of playing. This will really allow rapid improvements and a rewarding experience of playing the clarinet.

Appointed principal clarinet of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 1994, Richie Hawley left that position in 2011 to become the Professor of Clarinet at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. Mr. Hawley appears regularly as a chamber musician and recitalist, including performances with his new group, the Rogue Ensemble. He made his debut at the Marlboro Music Festival in 1999 and toured with the legendary Musicians from Marlboro for the 50th anniversary performance at Carnegie Hall. During the summer season, he serves as the teaching and performing clarinet artist at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara.

PERCUSSION - RAY ULIBARRI

Eliminating the Electronics Headache
in Marching Band

Let's face it, electronics are becoming a larger part of the Marching Band idiom every year, and they are not going away. We have all witnessed and experienced the devastating effect that electronic failure can cause. In this article, I would like to share some tried and true tips to minimize problems that arise from adding electronics to your marching band.

The standard instruments that are currently shaping outdoor pageantry are synthesizers and samplers. These instruments can be both hardware based, i.e. keyboards, and software based, i.e. Garage Band. Both can be very effective and relatively stable in an outdoor environment and both need additional hardware to function properly. For software based synths, the midi or audio interface allows your software devices to communicate with controllers and output devices. Keyboard synthesizers, however, should be connected to the mixing board with a DI box to prevent signal loss and allow for longer cable connections.

Speakers - Always set your speakers up in front of your microphones. Sending your speaker signal back through the microphones causes feedback. Most groups I see that have feedback have their speakers too close or angled toward their microphones.

Cables - Owning and maintaining the proper chords and cables is a crucial and often overlooked component when adding electronics to your band. I always use the shortest XLR cables possible and wire each instrument separately to keep extra cable from getting tangled or pinched. Each marimba or vibe has a cable only long enough to connect to another instrument or to a snake. By attaching the XLR cable with zip ties to the frame of the Marimba or Vibe, I eliminate any extra cable from dragging or tangling during transport and setup. A good trick for long speaker cables or extension chords is to drill a small hole in the bottom of a 5 gallon bucket. Feed the end of the chord that connects to the speaker or power through the hole at the bottom. Use a small traffic cone inside the bucket to coil the excessive cable around the cone to keep it from tangling. Most importantly, educate the students and staff about the importance of minimizing wear and tear that can occur by stepping on or pulling cables. Last but not least, have a spare of everything. I keep an assortment of cables, power adapters, flash drives, and chord testers on hand for emergencies.

Ray Ulibarri is currently in his sixth year as Percussion Director at Ronald Reagan High School in San Antonio. Mr. Ulibarri is the former Percussion Arranger for the Crossmen Drum and Bugle Corps and the former caption Head of the Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps. He is also the former front ensemble arranger and caption head of the Blue Knights World Percussion Ensemble. In addition, Mr. Ulibarri serves as an active adjudicator for WGI and clinician for Yamaha. Ray also endorses Evans Drumheads, Zildjian Cymbals, Innovative Percussion sticks and Mallets and Planet Waves Cables.

FRETTED – MATT SMITH

The What and How of Effective Practice for Guitar

Let's first look at what to practice. The 8 most important skills needed to be a great musician are, in no particular order: Ear training, scale and chord knowledge, composition, reading and writing chord charts and notation, repertoire, technique, music theory and improvisation. In this column let's explore the first three!

1) Ear training – the skill of understanding what you're hearing, and how to play it on your instrument. This skill is probably the most important skill you'll need as you develop your abilities on your instrument. Start very simply with easy songs you've heard many times. Slowly build in complexity as you develop. A big hint: sing everything you play. Making the connection between your speech center and your instrument will help you immeasurably in this endeavor.

2) Learn new scales and chord forms – these are the fundamental building blocks of your foundation as a player. Study chord forms by grouping them into categories. For example, learn as many positions as you can of the four triads, major, minor, diminished and augmented. Then move onto the 7th chord family: maj7, minor7, dominant7 and minor7b5, (sometimes called half diminished). Learn these forms with roots on the 6th, 5th and 4th strings, as these are the most common forms. There are a lot of scale forms to learn also: major and minor pentatonic scales, modes of the major scale, as well as modes of the melodic minor scale and altered scales. A well rounded musician has a grasp of the forms and usage of these scales and various positions of each. A good place to start is to root each scale again on the 6th, 5th and 4th strings.

3) Composition - any artist is represented by his or her body of work. Composing is a skill that musicians should place great importance in. It's what represents and immortalizes us. As a teacher, I've always stressed the importance of using newly learned skills as a springboard for writing. It gives focus to the practice routine, and makes learning new ideas fun. Everything you've learned or are learning should be brought into play when writing. Try and compose at least a song a week. Before you know it, you'll have enough songs to record an album!

Matt Smith is a New York-raised, Austin-based musician who has over 30 years of experience performing, producing, instructing, writing, and leading clinics. Matt is a lifelong musical performer. He's performed with, opened for, or recorded with B.B. King, Sheryl Crow, Trey Anastasio, Al DiMeola, Greg Allman, Los Lobos, Johnny Winter, Buddy Guy, Adrian Legg, Ed Gerhard, Portishead and many others. A born troubadour, Matt has performed at numerous international guitar festivals including the Bath International Guitar Festival and the Montreal Guitar Festival. His family history of bands includes The Matt Smith Band, The Monstas, Matt Smith's World, Chop Shop, and The Hot Nut Riveters. Matt is excited to be working on a new album of his own.

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