

WOODWINDS - RICHIE HAWLEY

If you love your reeds,
they will love you back.

Many students and professionals ask me, "How do I make my reeds better?" This question comes with the expectation that I will be passing on advice or a method of adjusting a reed with a knife or sandpaper. All are surprised when I say that I NEVER work on my reeds and that I confiscate my students' reed knives and adjusting tools on their first day of lessons with me at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. Instead of giving them a claim check for their confiscated knives, I give them a Tupperware box with a humidity pack inside of it, or a reed storage case (also with a humidity pack inside).

One week after this exchange of reed knife for humidity control, my students all remark about how stable and consistent their reeds have become. This is because their reeds are no longer going from 100% humidity (a wet reed after playing) to the 20-30% humidity of their daily surroundings, which happens when they are left out in the open to dry. This rapid and damaging drying of a reed occurs when the reed is just placed into a clarinet case, case pocket, or even left out on a stand or table. These are the main causes for reed warpage and also the dreaded "potato chip tip." I call it that because a reed that dries rapidly to below 50% humidity can get a tip that looks like a Ruffles potato chip! This is extreme warpage! Once a reed gets to this point, it will have lost its clarity, response and depth of sound.

Some will argue with me, saying "I live in Houston and its 90% humidity outside... I don't need one of those humidity packs..." etc. What those skeptics fail to realize is that in the most humid cities, the air conditioning is cranked up full blast all of the time, thus making the indoor humidity below 30%.

The other advantage of putting your reeds in a humidity controlled environment is that they have a chance to start to acclimate to a consistent environment right away upon opening the box. This is especially true if you ordered your reeds and they traveled to you via plane, train, or truck through many different temperatures and environments. A humidity-acclimated box of reeds will yield a higher number of great reeds than one that has not stabilized in this manner. I recommend unwrapping the cellophane from a new box of reeds and placing it in a humidity-controlled box or bag for one to three weeks before trying them. I guarantee that you will find more terrific reeds than ever before.

Give your reeds a little bit of humidity and TLC, and they will be there for you when you need them to be at their best.

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

Developing good habits and preparation
can make a huge difference

In this Blog, I would like to share my experience and insight into preparing your middle school percussion section for Concert Band contest. Developing good habits and preparation can make a huge difference in easing both your students and your own pre-contest anxiety. Often times, I think we tend to forget that our middle school students are really still beginners. Regardless of what band they are in, most students have only been playing from one to two years. In fact, most seventh graders have never had to pack and load or perform on another campus or venue. It is crucial that all necessary equipment makes it to the contest. First, have the students make a list of all equipment required to play your program. This list should include all instruments being used, mallets and hardware such as concert snare stand and suspended cymbal stand. It is important to be absolutely specific as they will load only what is on the list. The number of music stands needed, make-shift trap-stands and black towels are important as well. Don't forget to bring extra copies of music or the originals just in case. Next, let's tackle packing. My philosophy has always been to give the students the best information and equipment possible. Cases for drums, hardware, cymbal bags and mallets are necessary to protect your investment. I have seen great equipment ruined or damaged because they lack proper protection and cases. Delegate the section leader to check off the list as every instrument is packed and loaded. Next is setup. Having a routine is security and promotes consistency. Decide on the setup for all percussion equipment. I like the bass drum to be as close to the center of the back of the ensemble as possible. Hand cymbals should be close by. I consider these two instruments the impact and precision machines of the band. It is no coincidence that the bass drum and crash cymbal were played by the same person in old traditional marches. They also will often have the same part. For snare drums, I often use a blanket below them to help prevent them from being too live on stage. I also try to place the bells and xylophone close to the back of the ensemble to help their very articulate timbre to blend with the winds. Instruments like marimba and vibe I tend to keep towards the front of the stage as they don't speak very well. I always place timpani behind the tubas. All other instruments should be located as close as possible to parts that they compliment or resemble keeping in mind line of site to the conductor and balance at all times. Taking time to help them draw a diagram will build your relationship with your percussionists and help them take pride in providing the pulse for your band. From here it's easy. Follow through with the diagram and make adjustments as needed. Don't be afraid to experiment, but once you decide what works, make it routine. When you arrive at contest, let them know to setup like they setup everyday, and take the time to check the latest diagram. Make adjustments and rest assured your percussionist will feel a sense of similarity and security knowing they haven't forgot anything.

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 - Part Two

The eight 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. Three were discussed in the December 2015 *Bandmasters Review*. Here are three more!

4) Reading and Writing notation and chord charts – this skill is absolutely necessary for musicians to master. It's how we communicate with one another. Being able to walk into a room of musicians with clear, well-written music and/or charts is essential for communicating exactly how you want your music to be played. As a teacher, this skill is as easy as breathing. To a student, it can be intimidating. Try transcribing your original compositions or very familiar songs. Chart out songs and try them out with your band mates. Syncopation is the toughest skill to write, so get your reading sharp. Getting music you're familiar with is the easiest way of developing your writing ability.

5) Repertoire – To become competent in a particular style, one must study the greats of the genre. If you want to sit in at the good sessions in town, go check out what tunes are called. Every genre has its classics and master musicians. Learn the best songs of the style. Another aspect of repertoire is what you choose to play in performance. You should strive to educate your audience as well as entertain them. Every genre has its overplayed tunes. Watching what other successful musicians are playing is a good way to learn what goes over. A well rounded musician is proficient in a number of genres. Learning new material keeps you and your audience sharp.

6) Technique – it's pretty easy to reach a certain level of ability and feel comfortable there. It's also ultimately unsatisfying. Learning proper hand position and posture can help alleviate a lot of playing related issues. Right and left hand exercises are a part of a good practice regimen. Find exercises you enjoy doing. Many exercises that require repetition to develop dexterity I find more enjoyable while catching up on that latest episode of a favorite show. Repetition is the mother of skill.

In the June issue, we'll conclude our series on practicing with music theory and improvisation. All *Bandmasters Review* articles are archived on the website www.texasbandmasters.org.

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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