

No Double Reeds? No Horns? No Problem! Making the Music Fit Your Band

A Basic Guide to re-scoring music to accommodate for deficiencies in instrumentation and weak and/or missing sections or soloists.

Merlin “Pat” Patterson

The following guidelines to re-writing/re-scoring music were originally presented at a clinic at the 2009 Texas Bandmasters Association Clinic/Convention. TBA Executive Director Mike Brashear asked me to prepare this article in hopes that it would be helpful to directors whose band’s instrumentation might have been compromised as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is my hope that this information will be of value and service to directors as they prepare for UIL Concert Evaluation.

The focus of this article will be the presentation of some basic techniques and guidelines for re-scoring band music to accommodate for instrumentation deficiencies, weak or missing sections, weak or missing soloists, etc. The idea for the original clinic on which this article is based came to me as a result of an increasing number of colleagues asking advice on how they should deal with various shortcomings in the instrumentation of their bands. Most of these were young teachers who had not even taken a basic college level orchestration course, nor did they yet have the experience as band directors to have learned these skills on the job. Also, when judging bands at various contests, I have noticed that in many situations, some directors—again, usually young teachers—will just omit critical musical material

when it is scored for instruments that they don’t have or, if they do have the instruments but their players are weak, more often than not, they will not strengthen the weak sections with stronger players from other sections, even if they have the opportunity to do so.

First of all, there is historical precedent for the practice of re-scoring music in order to personalize it for a given ensemble. Not to make absurd comparisons, but many world class conductors have routinely rewritten the music they perform; however in such cases, it was usually done to modernize what the conductor perceived as antiquated scoring. Mahler, for example, prepared his own performing arrangements of the symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and others, often in drastically different orchestrations. Arturo Toscanini and George Szell touched up the scoring in the Beethoven and Schubert they performed, and Leopold Stokowski was perhaps the most notorious re-writer of them all.

So, when is it appropriate to re-score your music? The obvious answer is when you do not have a section or sections required by the music or, if you do have them, they are not strong enough to adequately project the critical musical material that the composer has assigned to them. Now, many will say that if you don’t

have the instrumentation that a given piece requires, then you should select something else, and whenever this is possible, I would urge you to do so. If the instrumentation of your band is, let’s say, 3 flutes, 4 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 7 saxophones, 5 trumpets, 1 trombone, 1 baritone, and 6 drummers AND your district requires you to go to UIL contest, then there really isn’t much music you can play “straight out of the box.” You simply have to do SOME rewriting. So...

WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO RE-SCORE MUSIC?

I. Missing and/or weak section(s)

- Very few bands have ideal instrumentation. This is especially true of many small school and middle school programs.

- Double reeds and horns

II. Missing and/or weak soloists

- Choose an appropriate substitute based on the guidelines below.

CONSIDERATIONS

I. Essential musical lines must be retained or strengthened (i.e. rewritten) if the original instruments are not available or are weak (even if octave adjustments must be made).

For example, the bass line must be retained even if you don’t have any tubas.

II. How much rewriting is too much?

- When the musical content of the piece is compromised

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- Rewriting is much more acceptable in Grades I, II, and even III music than Grades IV and V.

- Rewriting is much more acceptable in small school and middle school bands than in large AAAAAA programs.

- Rewriting is much more acceptable in non-varsity groups than in varsity.

- Whenever possible, select music that you can play “straight out of the box.” Many Grade I and II, and to a lesser extent, Grade III pieces can be successfully performed by bands with less than ideal instrumentation.

- Rewrite as little as possible.

“WON’T THE JUDGES DISAPPROVE OF ME DOING THIS?”

First of all, there is no UIL rule which specifically prohibits the re-scoring of music, but what will the judges say? The answer will vary from judge to judge, but most judges—the smart ones, anyway—will understand and accept that you must do whatever you must do to enable your band to be successful. Most would probably prefer that the re-scoring be kept to a minimum, but at one time or another, they have all been in your situation and have had to rewrite something.

If one judge criticizes what you’ve done, then that may be his/her personal opinion, but if all three judges criticize you, then your re-scoring has compromised the content of the music.

Again, the practice is more acceptable in Grade I music than in Grade V, in Class A and AA than in Class AAAAAA, and with non-varsity than with varsity bands. And if your re-scoring is tasteful and skillful enough, the judges might not even notice.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR RE-SCORING

I. Range

- Always (try to) choose a substitute that can play the line in the same range as the original instrument
- Avoid changing octaves whenever possible

II. Color

- Whenever possible, choose substitute instruments which have a similar color as the original instrument – reed for reed, brass for brass, etc.

The chart, titled "Instrument Ranges", displays musical staves for various instruments. At the top, two horizontal lines indicate the "Advanced Range" (upper) and "Practical Range" (lower). The instruments listed are: Piccolo (sounding an octave higher), Flute, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet (* for instruments with low C), Contra Clarinet, Bassoon, Saxophones (* for instruments with high F# key), Trumpet, Baritone T.C., Horn, Trombone, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba, and Double Bass (sounding an octave lower). Each staff shows a melodic line with notes and rests, with dashed lines indicating the range of the instrument.

III. Instrumental Characteristics

- Try to choose substitute instruments which have the same general musical characteristics as the original instrument

- Timbre
- Vibrato (especially important when making substitutions for solos)







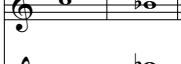
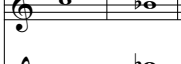
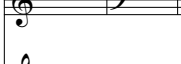
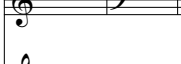
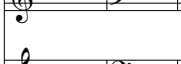
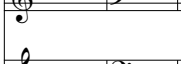
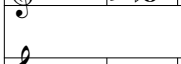
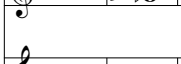
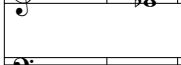
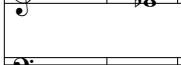


Example: Flute, soprano saxophone, or alto saxophone are often more desirable substitutes for an oboe solo than clarinet because they are all “vibrato” instruments.

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SUBSTITUTION GUIDE FOR MISSING OR WEAK INSTRUMENTS

Missing/Weak Instrument	Primary Substitute	Secondary Substitute	Notes
Piccolo	Flute	Oboe E-flat Clarinet	Flute best color choice
Flute	Clarinet	Oboe Soprano Saxophone Alto Saxophone	
Oboe	Flute Clarinet Soprano Saxophone	Alto Saxophone Trumpet	Can often be omitted in Gr. I, II, and III
Clarinet	Flute Alto Saxophone	Soprano Saxophone Oboe Trumpet	
Alto Clarinet	Clarinet Bass Clarinet	Alto Saxophone Tenor Saxophone	Can usually be omitted in Gr. I, II, and III
Bass Clarinet	Bassoon	Baritone Saxophone	
Contra Clarinet	Bass Clarinet Tuba	Bassoon	Can usually be omitted in Gr. I, II, and III
Bassoon	Bass Clarinet Tenor Saxophone Baritone Saxophone	Horn Trombone Euphonium	Can often be omitted in Gr. I and II
Alto Saxophone	Clarinet	Oboe Flute Trumpet Horn	Often doubles horn, especially in Gr. I
Tenor Saxophone	Bassoon Clarinet	Bass Clarinet Baritone Saxophone Horn Euphonium	Can often be omitted in Gr. I
Baritone Saxophone	Bass Clarinet Bassoon	Euphonium Tuba	Can often be omitted in Gr. I and II
Trumpet	Clarinet	Oboe Soprano Saxophone Alto Saxophone	
Horn	Clarinet Alto Saxophone	Trumpet Flugelhorn	Often doubles alto saxophone, especially in Gr. I (sometimes even in Gr. II and III)
Trombone	Euphonium	Horn Trumpet Bassoon	Often doubles euphonium in Gr. I
Euphonium	Trombone	Horn Bassoon	Often doubles trombone in Gr. I
Tuba	Bass Clarinet Contra Clarinet Bassoon	Double Bass	
Double Bass	Tuba Contra Clarinet Electronic Keyboard		Electronic keyboard best, especially if music calls for pizzicato

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	Written	Sounds	Interval
Piccolo			Sounds an octave higher than written
English Horn Horn			Sounds a P5th lower than written
E-flat Clarinet			Sounds a m3rd higher than written
B-flat Clarinet Soprano Saxophone Trumpet			Sounds a M2nd lower than written
Bass Clarinet Tenor Saxophone Baritone T.C.			Sounds a M2nd plus one octave lower than written
E-flat Contra Clarinet Baritone Saxophone			Sounds a M6th plus one octave lower than written
B-flat Contra Clarinet			Sounds a M2nd plus two octaves lower than written
Alto Saxophone			Sounds a M6th lower than written
Double Bass			Sounds an octave lower than written

All other instruments are notated in Concert Pitch.

PERCUSSION

More often than not, it is more desirable to just omit certain percussion parts rather than attempting to make substitutions. However, here are some guidelines for dealing with percussion issues:

- Prioritize the parts from most important to least important
- Always cover the basics—snare drum, bass drum, cymbals first, then timpani and as many mallet parts as possible; anything else that is rhythmical in nature
- Mallets parts can often be omitted when they double wind parts
- Make a percussion score for your players to play from, enabling them to easily move from part to part and allowing them to cover as many parts as possible
- The easier parts can often be played by wind players

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS AND OTHER UNSOLICITED ADVICE

Become at least functional on a music notation program—Finale, Sibelius, etc. Not only are transpositions automatic with these programs, they are great time savers and of course, they print music that is of publisher quality.

If at all possible, get a soprano saxophone. This versatile instrument can, in the right situation, convincingly substitute for flute, oboe, clarinet and even trumpet, and it opens up many more possibilities for ensemble music selection for S&E contest.

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I hope the guidelines and techniques outlined in this article will be beneficial in the preparation of your UIL Concert Evaluation program.

Best wishes.

Acclaimed as “one of the finest transcribers of all time” (James Keene, University of Illinois-retired) and “without peer as a band arranger” (Eddie Green, University of Houston-retired), the wind transcriptions of Merlin Patterson have set new standards in attaining “the highest possible current degree of attention to color and imagination” (Jerry Junkin, University of Texas and Dallas Wind Symphony). Merlin Patterson received his formal musical training at Sam Houston State University where his principal teachers were Newton Strandberg, Fisher Tull, and Ralph Mills. Additional study has been done under Eddie Green of the University of Houston. Among his transcriptions are Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring and The Firebird Suite (1919), Debussy’s The Engulfed Cathedral, Janacek’s Sinfonietta, Holst’s The Planets (complete), Wagner’s Procession to the Cathedral, Elgar’s Enigma Variations (complete), Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade, Respighi’s Feste Romane, and Javelin by American composer Michael Torke. His transcriptions have received critical acclaim in numerous music journals and have been performed by leading professional organizations, including the United States Marine Band, the United States Air Force Band, and the Dallas Wind Symphony as well as by major university ensembles across the United States and around the world. Recordings of his transcriptions are available on the Mark, DBP Audio, Albany, Naxos, Altissimo, Metier and GIA record labels. His works are published by TRN, Manhattan Beach Music, and Boosey & Hawkes. Most of Patterson’s transcriptions are available through Merlin Patterson Music at www.merlinpatterson.com.