

Ten Quickly Fixable Problems Heard at UIL Contest, Over and Over!

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention,
July 26, 2011

Presented by Rick Yancey
Assisted by David Berndt
This Clinic is sponsored by :



Preface:

I am fortunate to have judged thousands of bands and orchestras over the last 25 years at UIL and other festivals. As I worked to overcome problems in my own ensembles, I heard those same problems in many groups I judged. I also heard many wonderful bands that had conquered those problem and gone on to incredibly high levels of achievement. I had many talented mentors and colleagues that discussed these issues with me, and we tried many different ways to solve them, some of which worked!

This clinic will discuss 10 of those problems and present practical solutions.

1. Loud Piccolos

The problem - The piccolo in the band is often very loud, sometimes enough to obscure the flutes. as the range gets higher, the piccolo has to force out the sound, gets VERY loud and out of control.

The solution. Only use a piccolo for solos, and when you want the piccolo color. Use your judgement to take the piccolo down an octave at times, have the student play flute when you don't want piccolo. Sometimes putting the piccolo player on the second row helps with the volume issue. It is not mandatory to cover piccolo parts (except solos) if it is hurting your performance, don't go there. Many middle school bands use a piccolo and the student can't control the instrument. If the student plays only piccolo and doesn't even have a flute in their lap, that is a warning sign.

Additional issue: Who gets to play piccolo?

2. Screeching Clarinets

The problem - Very mature band, very mature clarinet section, very challenging literature. The clarinet part is very high, and the clarinets are obnoxiously loud when they are up high.

The solution - Insist that the clarinets sound like flutes on the very high parts, imitate the flute sound. If the clarinets are playing in unison with the flutes, ask them to color the flute sound, not to compete. Take parts down an octave as practical, and have as few students as possible up high, certainly not the whole section! You will likely have to write out the parts down the octave for them. Clarinets work in 12ths, not octaves.

3 great fingerings - high G - overblow 1 and 1 Bb (Beethoven 8th fingering)
high F# overblow regular high right hand Bb
high F (covered F) D in the staff with the left hand C key down

Additional issue : Composers

3. Directional Brass Issues

The problem - The trumpets are not having a good day. We hear every note they play, every rough attack, every split note, every pitch problem. They are too loud, even on accompaniment parts, and don't blend with anything else.

The solution - IMHO, the standard set up should have a music stand in front of the trumpet bell. The music stand cannot be too close to the instrument, there must be at least 18 inches or so between the bell and the stand. When you want a fanfare or trumpeting type call, raise the bell so it clears the stand. You now are making choices about what you want the ensemble to sound like, and are able to get a much different color with other instruments when playing in the stand.

Transcriptions

Euphonium solos

4. Swinging Rhythms

The problem. The younger the band is, the larger the problem here.

The image shows three lines of handwritten musical notation. Each line consists of a rhythmic pattern followed by the text "is played". The first line has a triplet of eighth notes. The second line has a triplet of eighth notes. The third line has a triplet of eighth notes.

This is a stage of development issue, and students need lots of time to discern the difference and to be vigilant when the difficult rhythms come up.

The solution - The director must be unrelenting on playing the rhythms correctly. Isolate the rhythm and play it on F. Put this into your warm up, playing the rhythm on each step of the remington. A slower tempo will allow more students to be successful. Say the rhythm with subdivision 1 2 3 4 1

Have some of the band say it while others play. Pick out individuals that play the rhythm correctly and praise them.

If you give in to this, if you accept it, it is all over, it will never get better.

As you work on your music, shout a reminder each time the rhythm comes up.

Insist that the students be DELIBERATE about how they play their rhythms. and you must be ADAMANT that it is done well!

Additional Issue - compressing rhythms

5. Percussion Issues

The problem - Percussion sounds in the band are poor. The whole percussion section may be too loud, or individual instruments may be too loud due to placement. Suspended cymbal crescendos are apocalyptic.

The solution - Work towards a better concept of how you want percussion parts to sound. Listen to recordings. Bring in a percussion consultant to demonstrate to you and the students the more mature sounds on the various instruments that you want, and how to produce them. Rehearsal time must be spent making adjustments and experimenting with different mallets, where to play on the head, muffling, etc.

Cymbals
Bass Drum
snare drum
timpani

level one - percussion play correct rhythm on correct beat

level two - percussion play with excellent sounds in appropriate volume

level three - percussion play WITH the other instruments to produce the desired color and result. Communication is high.

6. Flat trumpets




The problem - Trumpets are flat during the performance, and extremely so on “bad” notes, especially 4th line D.

The solution - There is a strong possibility that you are tuning your trumpets to F concert and / or Bb concert, but they are playing above center “pinched” and thus you pull them out to get them down to pitch on those notes. You have tuned them flat. When playing in the above center world, there is little room left to lip up. Push the main tuning slide in a bit, and make them open up to come down to pitch. Have them match an audible pitch. Notice that this is a fatter, warmer sound also. After several days of this, the “bad” notes are much improved.

7. Over styling

The problem - In an attempt for personality and definition, rhythms and separations are created that are unnatural sounding and distorted.

This happens very often in marches

 is performed 
Also  is played much too short

Staccato means "separated"

The solution - be sure that the sounds, rhythms and durations that you are creating are the same ones made by professional and University groups. Don't reinvent music.

You don't score points for observing markings, it must sound good.

8. Your Friend, the Tenor Sax

The problem - Does not play well with others.

The tenor sax(s) are loud. When they play with a weak trombone section on the same line, an immature, nasal, and unpleasant sound is produced.

The solution - First, be sure that the tenors are playing on good mouthpieces and reeds. When I hear nastiness in the saxes, there are often repair and equipment issues. Consider rewriting the tenor sax to play with the woodwinds more, not to reinforce the low brass part. Insist that the low brass players pull the wagon, not the tenors. Give them a proportion of the sound that they cannot exceed, a percentage. Sometimes moving the tenors up an octave helps, they can be quite loud in the low register.

9. Hierarchy of lines

The problem - The melody is not clearly heard, the accompaniment is too loud. The students are playing without listening, there is no clarity.

The solution. Work the individual lines with everyone present. It is very important, and be sure they know this, that they know and hear the various parts in the music, and stay aware while they are playing. Use the terms, melody, accompaniment, counter melody, punctuations, etc. Even if the parts are being well played, continue to use some rehearsal time to work the lines.

Chorale playing is an ideal intermediate step.

10. Rewriting to solve problems.

The problem - There are a million situations where students struggle with range, control, on bad notes and partials, weaknesses are exposed ,etc.

The solution. Using discretion, rewrite and reinforce parts.

Examples - last fermata of a piece is A C E . the trumpets are all on the C concert and are flat. Give them different chord tones to play. Many times if you look at the numbers of students on the root, third and fifth, it is skewed anyway. When the range is a struggle, put less people on the higher chord tones. The chord is intact, just a little darker sounding. Move a bunch of your flutes down an octave. Mitigating the range can produce a much less strained sound.

A weak solo is given to another instrument. A solo becomes a duo.

A difficult technical passage is rewritten to trade off difficulty - for example

Example A becomes

Example B for one player and example C for another

As the students improve, they may be individually restored to the original part. An additional benefit of this, is that it establishes a standard for clean technique, and puts a challenge before each student.

Add instruments (like bari sax and bass clarinet) to reinforce a weak bass line. Write a Contra bass clarinet part for a piece that doesn't have one. Add strength and color.

Other Topics

Defining colors in individual lines by using percentages

Clarity at holds and important chords

Clarity through "bopping" or structure one

Smooth chorale playing

Rick Yancey

ryancey@choicemusicevents.org

Managing Director

The Mark of Excellence / National Wind Band Honors

Music Across Texas



The Foundation for Music Education is a not for profit 501 c 3 organization committed to raising funds for the support of music education, and for the proliferation of music education in our schools. Among the projects we sponsor are:

TMEA mentoring – MERN
Music Matters Blog
Stars Under The Stars
Private Concert Series
Scholarships and Endowments
Sponsored Clinics
Lubbock Concert Band
The Mark of Excellence/ National Wind Band Honors

The Foundation For Music Education is proud to sponsor our 2011 TBA Featured Clinician - Paula Crider and Featured Composer - John Mackey

TFME Executive Director

Dick Clardy

Board of Trustees

Dianne Brumley	Jon Locke
Dr. Fred Hardin	Anthony Maiello
James Keene	Scott Maples
Dr. David Kneupper	Dana Pradervand
Gary Lewis	Karen C. Savage
Jon Locke	Scott Maples
Nathan Ziegler	