



Teaching Musicianship in Band: Finding Music Among the Notes

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**DEMONSTRATION GROUP:
Lady Bird Johnson HS, NEISD, San Antonio**

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Many of the objectives in an instrumental music ensemble class are concerned with the “craft” of music: playing the correct note in the correct place at the correct volume with the correct articulation. But isn’t this just musically painting by number? This clinic shows that it is possible to integrate musicianship into every level of instrumental music education, from beginning band to university ensembles. Playing in an artistic manner is possible at every level, and these examples will show how easy it is.

- I. What is musicianship?
I believe that “being musical” means creating an artistically surprising moment when playing a piece. Some elements of musicianship can and should be taught.
- II. Individual vs. ensemble musicianship.
Both skills are necessary and both can be taught!
Individual musicianship is demonstrated in solo performance, either within ensemble literature or in the standard solo repertoire. Some skills are applicable to the product of combined sounds, i.e., the ensemble.
 - A. Step One: The “arch” (< >) in music of the Western Civilization
 1. Basic way to show tension and release in music
 2. Can be taught even in beginning book exercises
 3. May vary in amount of < and >, and still be effective
 4. Arch may be defined by non-harmonic melodic tone, chord progression, or outline of the range of a melody

- B. Elements to emphasize in tonal music
 1. Melody
 2. Countermelody
 3. Moving lines and figures
 4. Lines with chromatic movement
 5. Sequences usually crescendo

- C. Elements to de-emphasize in tonal music
 1. Accompanimental figures
 2. Repeated figures

- III. How can you teach musicianship in an instrumental music ensemble?

Unify. Ensemble is French for “together.” Together, we unify all elements of music when playing in ensemble. What do we unify? Time, style, volume and volume contour, phrasing, and every other element encountered in the work.

 - A. Articulation
 1. Music educators seem to agree (mostly) on legato and “housetop” accents
 2. Staccato: clearer definition
 3. Special note on staccato in fast tempi
 4. “Sideways” accents: differences in opinion

 - B. Note endings
 1. Square or dramatic
 2. Tapered

 - C. Intonation
 1. Get rid of the waves
 2. Tune down, but keep listening across too
 3. Not sure? Lip up or down till waves stop
 4. Always assume you need to adjust
 5. Humans can tolerate a greater degree of sharpness than flatness

 - D. Rhythm
 1. Subdivide
 2. Do your math homework
 3. Step on the escalator the speed it is already moving!

 - E. Balance
 1. Balance down—we hear high sounds louder than low
 2. Balance triangle vs. balancing to brass (in band)

F. Miscellaneous tips

1. "4 leads to 1." Learning to play across bar lines can make passages more musical. Can also be applied to anacrusis(es)
2. Low leaves last. When a held chord is released (especially in quiet music) high sounds leave immediately, middle sounds leave "on time" and low sounds leave last. The amount of time between the early and late release described here is almost imperceptible.
3. Winds, stay still at the end of release
4. The intake of breath should be like the music that follows
5. In lyrical music with slurred running notes, good musicians often hold the first note imperceptibly longer.
6. The lower note of an upward leap should be energized so the higher pitch can naturally float out of it.
7. Descending passages can get lost in the texture of the music: crescendo to define and project these lines.
8. Higher notes in a passage can leap out of the texture: control the volume of these.
9. Grace notes are ornaments and should be noticed. Tongue the start of a grace note, even when edited under a slur.
10. Vibrato waves should be faster when the music is either higher (in range) or louder and softer when the music is lower (in range) or softer.
11. Wind instruments should not use much (or any) vibrato when playing in ensemble passages (tutti and unison). Double reeds may use a bit, and flutes, even less than that. No one else use it in ensemble unless you have a solo.
12. Short notes surrounded by longer notes need more air to define and project them.