



The Region Band Clinician: Strategies for Success!

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THE SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOL HONOR BAND CONDUCTOR

“YIPPEEEEE!!! I got the call! NOW what do I do?”

Strategies for Success

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An invitation to conduct a “select” ensemble from a region, district, state, etc. is one of the greatest honors a musical organization can bestow upon us. Here are a few simple strategies to help make your guest conducting experience “*second to none*”.

THE INITIAL CONTACT – steps to take upon receiving the invitation

1. Respond as quickly as possible
2. Check your calendar – be sure you are available on the proposed dates
3. Ascertain the level of difficulty to program
 - a. request programs from the past several years
 - b. if possible, speak to directors within the region/area
 - c. communicate with your assigned percussion coordinator, if possible
4. Secure a written agreement – most organizations will initiate this step
 - a. dates and times
 - b. honorarium amount (inviting party will usually propose amount)
 - c. meal/lodging arrangements
 - d. transportation “to-and-from”
 - e. group/ensemble to be conducted
5. Begin to formulate “preliminary” ideas for programming
 - a. number of pieces
 - b. styles
 - c. difficulty

PROGRAMMING – a few simple tips...

1. **FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE LITERATURE!** Have a good working knowledge of proven works for the caliber of group you will conduct.
 - a. peruse many scores and recordings – be familiar with “old and new”
 - b. visit your local music distributor, use the vast online resources
 - c. start and maintain a “working library” of pieces that work best
2. Bring your *OWN* scores and **KNOW YOUR MUSIC!** You will be considerably more effective when the music is in your head.
3. Grade 1 and 2 works require score study (need love) too!
 - a. they don’t take as long as more difficult works, but they still deserve attention
 - b. difficulty is irrelevant – you either know the music or you don’t!
 - c. have your scores prepared – measures numbered and appropriately marked
4. You don’t have to “push the envelope” on every tune! For example, in a program with 4 pieces, here’s a good rule of thumb: 2 pieces that are right at your group’s level of ability, one slightly above and one below.
5. Always have a couple of “contingency” pieces.....*just in case!*

6. Work to put together a balanced, entertaining program
 - a. festival works
 - b. novelty works
 - c. holiday works (if the situation warrants)
 - d. marches
 - e. pieces from your state list – contemplate pros and cons

**If you are a composer, I would recommend you program no more than TWO of your own works. If performing three pieces, program only ONE of yours. A conscious clinician is also an educator, and must recognize the value of exposing students to as many composers and styles of writing as possible.*

7. Strive to put together a diverse program that ALL will enjoy. Avoid programming one style exclusively (contest/festival, novelty, etc.)

8. Don't EVER do this.... *"You pick the pieces - I'll just conduct whatever you choose."* Avoid this trap by all means! To not be familiar with your scores will only serve to detract from the students' honor band experience. As stated previously, you will yield the best musical results from your ensemble when you are prepared and ready for battle. When you are calm and knowledgeable and your mind is free, you are a much better clinician!

EMBRACE THE "7 Ps".... if you please....

PROPER

PRIOR

PLANNING

PREVENTS

POOR

PATHETIC

PERFORMANCE

THE TIME IS UPON US! That greatly anticipated "first day" is now at hand.....

1. Your initial greeting – a few things you can do to "break the ice"...
 - a. be positive - tell the students how great it's going to be
 - b. let them know how excited YOU are
 - c. congratulate your group on being named to the select ensemble
 - d. if possible, address the directors and parents
2. Keep your warm-up short and concise! Here's some "food for thought"...
 - a. use a simple scale or brief rhythm drill
 - b. briefly address breathing (if you feel the need)
 - c. *avoid scale sheets, chorales, written rhythm drills, etc.
 - d. *avoid extended warmup/tuning periods

**We must remember, good bad or indifferent, we are dealing with an "honors band"! How good they are in reality is irrelevant. Whether they auditioned or were director-selected, these kids were made to believe they are the finest musicians! They don't want to spend large amounts of time "warming up and tuning to perfection" – they do that stuff*

every day at home! In their minds, they are the “best of the best” and ***THEY CAME TO PLAY!*** So let’s not wear them down by giving them “more of the same” – do a comprehensive but brief warm-up, then start digging into those tunes! Make it a special experience for the kids and as much as possible, **KEEP IT ABOUT THE MUSIC!!!**

AND WE’RE UNDER WAY!!! – Now that we’re in “rehearsal mode”....

1. ***BE POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE!*** Be quick with corrections/solutions and keep things rolling (the better you know your scores, the better position you’ll be in to do this)!
2. Quickly assess the skill level of your ensemble. While rehearsing the initial piece, get a sense of direction as to where to go with the next one.
3. ***YOU GOTTA LET SOME STUFF SLIDE!*** This is a hard one, but you’ve only got a few hours. Fix what you can, but don’t get “bogged down”. Don’t waste valuable time.....
 - a. repairing wrong embouchures
 - b. fine tuning – get it in the ballpark and *move on!*
 - c. getting stuck on “little things” – keep your eye on the “big picture”By all means address these aspects, but on a fundamental “blanket” level. Give the kids some good information to take home, but to belabor every little issue (and there will be many) will only serve to frustrate and confound.
4. Vary the rehearsal routine a bit. If possible, use some rehearsal time to do sectionals. In a 3 hour timespan (if applicable), you can have 1 hour of full band, 30 minutes brass/percussion, 30 minutes woodwinds, 1 hour full band.
 - a. great opportunity to bond with the kids
 - b. gives you a chance to do a bit more “detail” work
 - c. breaks up the monotony of an extended full rehearsal
 - d. gives YOU a couple of breathers

“It’s not what happens to you that matters - but how you handle it”

CONCERT TIME! Make your audience “buy in”. Liberace used to say “*Music is for the man on the street*”. So why not make it enjoyable and memorable?

1. Talk to the audience – make it fun. Break away from the “concert routine”
2. Explain *briefly* about the pieces – especially the program works
3. Speak in *layman’s* terms – don’t talk “above” your audience
 - a. our audiences will consist mainly of family and friends, not the musically elite
 - b. be mindful of parents who skip work/come directly from work for the concert
 - c. in many instances, much of your audience will not be musically astute; therefore we must be *relatable* and *easy on the ears!*

4. Be sure to publicly thank all involved
 - a. band organizer
 - b. percussion coordinator
 - c. host directors
 - d. collective district/region/county band directors
 - e. parents (a little advocacy, if you care to)
 - f. *and above all....the students!*
5. General stage presentation – you decide! Just be classy and put on a good show

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE PERFORMANCE! Now that you're all done....

1. Be available after your performance! Don't just "*grab the cash and dash*" – stay and interact with the kids, parents and directors. This aspect is often as rewarding as the performance itself.
2. If conducting a 2nd/3rd group, consider staying for the other concerts. It's another great way to discover literature.

A QUICK LIST OF "DOs" AND "DON'Ts".....

- DO* – be positive and proactive at all times
DO – thank the directors for their work with the kids (situation notwithstanding)
DO – if necessary, be *firm* but never *mean*
DO – have compassion for the kids and be mindful of *their* needs
DO – relax and have fun – if you do, so will everyone else!
DO – be good and gracious to everyone all the time
- DON'T* – over-program
DON'T – under-program
DON'T – get frustrated – (this often comes back to programming)
DON'T – be overly-detailed – get what you can and move on
DON'T – *complain about every little thing....be flexible
DON'T – *be "*elitist*" or "*band director condescending*" (presumably, you would like other invitations)

NOW HERE'S THE REALITY (teaching skill/ability notwithstanding)...

If you were positive and made people happy, they'll remember!
 If you were negative and condescending, they will **NEVER-EVER-EVER FORGET!!!**

"People don't care how much you know, but they know how much you care"

We must always remember that while the inviting directors do look to us for wisdom and ideas, they hire us chiefly to ***make their students happy and give them a good experience!!*** Of course, we want to put our best foot forward and do the best job possible. But whatever the situation, we must be flexible and proactive. And your great attitude and your countenance is the magic!

And with that, best wishes for great success and may you receive more invitations than you can accept!

GRADE ½

Casey's Last Run – Loest
Chariot Race – Owens
Dragon Dance – Story
Fanfare on “Ode to Joy” – arr. Owens
Gentle Winds – Loest
Samba La Bamba – Owens
Shepard's Hey – arr. DeStefano
The Nutcracker – arr. Balmages

GRADE 1

25 or 6 to 4 – arr. Story
Courtly Dance and Procession – Balmages
Gentle River – Grice
In Quiet Times - Swearingen
Hark! A Holiday Celebration – Owens
Pirates of the Barbary Coast – Loest
Tango Bells – Loest
Terracotta – Owens

GRADE 1.5

At the River – arr. Loest
Carpathia – Owens
Castle Gate, 1924 – Grant
Count Rockula – Loest
Etowah – Balmages
Fiesta Espanola – Loest
Heroes Triumphant – Owens
Thundercrest – Hilliard

GRADE 2

Blue Orchid, the – Owens
Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer – arr. Sharp
Irish Jig for Young Feet - Weller
Kamehameha – Owens
Los Braziles – Eveland
Palmetto Fantasy – Adderly
Rhythms and Riffs – Balmages
Trittico (mvt. 1) – Nelhybel/Story

GRADE 2.5

Excellentia Overture - Schafer
Excelsior! (march) - Owens
Ironclads – Owens
Jungle Dance – Balmages
Kitty Hawk, 1903 – Owens
**Sundance – Hilliard*
**Religioso – Nelhybel*
Trumpets and Drums - Barnes

GRADE 3

Anthem for Winds and Percussion - Smith
**Dry Bones – arr. Yoder*
Jupiter from “The Planets” – arr. Owens
Lake Canterbury Regatta – Holsinger
Red Baron, the – Morales
Three Scottish Vistas - Owens
Rain – Balmages
Star Wars Episode 1 (medley) – arr. Story

**out of print*