



## **Traps, Tricks, Tools and Techniques**

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# Traps, Tricks, Tools and Techniques

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Presented by Rick Yancey

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# Traps, Tricks, Tools and Techniques

A myriad of challenges in performing band music calls for a variety of techniques and solutions. How do you get inside the head of a student to make a change in how they play? Why are some directors unaware of conceptual problems?

Here are some additions to your tool box that address specific problems.

## floating big skips

most often occurs in difficult solos in the literature and region etudes - the high note pops, is forced out.

Stand up. Go UP to the high note in the middle of sitting down. After repeated successes, you will be able to float the high note while seated.

## lyrical playing

What is lyrical playing?

modeling is best, but...

play behind the beat, with a metronome going. Clark studies are very good for this.

Then take the metronome away.

This is better accomplished in sectionals than in full band.

## melody/accompaniment concept

This is amazingly absent in some bands. This concept just does not happen unless the melody is clearly identified by the director over time on many pieces. Rehearse, just the melody and just the accompaniment always insisting that -

If you are the melody, play out

If you are the accompaniment, play under the melody, listen to the melody.

Eventually this concept will take hold. This concept, or lack of it, clearly shows in sight reading contest.

## matching pitch - day one

7th grade is probably the ideal year. Sectionals are the ideal time.

AFTER tuning the instruments, have student #1 play a pitch keeping the sound still.

Student #2 must match it, adjusting up or down. Use hand motions, expressions, to give feedback. Make a big deal out of it when it matches. Now student #2 plays without bending and student #3 must match. Have the rest of the students raise their hand when it matches - keep them involved and listening.

Do this on a "good" note, well within their comfortable range.

## clarity of lines

Many times I hear bands that make nice sounds, but have poor distinction of line.

It should sound exactly like what you see on the score. ( Eddie Green)

The only way to accomplish clarity, is by rehearsing the lines separately, with

EVERYONE listening actively. The knowledge and familiarity of the students with each and every line, while they play or rest, is what creates the clarity and intelligence of the performance. Rehearsing each line separately, and even playing them all well, does not result in this desired clarity.

### hints the composers give you

the title of the work

program notes

please don't skip the visual imagery, history, or cultural context of the work.

specific instructions in the score

the genre of a movement - example "hymn" "dance" "march"

### how to hide your bad flute intonation

You can't, and trying to hide it will make it worse!

First, flute players must hold their heads up and keep the proper angle of air across the head joint. The outstretched band director hand will usually result in a ducking of the head, and lower pitch and air speed. When there is a pitch problem happening, flutists must keep heads up and deal with it! Vibrato, and lack of it, is a part of this as well. You might want to consider at what volume levels your flutes can successfully play in tune.

### a darker sound

How do you get the band to play with a darker sound? Know what you want, work to get there. Use words like darker, warmer, chocolate, rich, relaxed..... don't be shrill, don't be noisy. Tension + high tessitura = bright.

Where tessitura is an issue, take students down an octave or to a different chord tone. Especially in flutes and trumpets, not everyone needs to be playing the high Bb written by the composer. Softer mallets help, consider the role of bells, xylophone.

Rehearse a fast piece more slowly, chorale style, concentrating on a darker sound and relaxation to take the aspect of technique away. Your very efforts and attention to change the sound will convince the students to alter the sounds they are making.

### weapons of mass destruction - the piccolo, suspended cymbal

**Piccolo** - just because there is a part does not mean it all has to be played.

Choose wisely, when to play the piccolo part, and WHO plays the piccolo.

If the piccolo is loud enough that the flutes aren't heard, this is a problem.

A piccolo specialist that has no flute in their lap is a red flag that decisions are not being made.

**Suspended cymbal** - a written suspended cymbal roll in the music is not license to overpower the rest of the sound of the band. If the composer wanted to only hear cymbal, why would they bother to write parts for the other instruments? Many times the crescendo is pp to mp or p to f. Just add color and tension / release to the sound

### brass cracking notes - usually on an entrance

Start with a soft tongue - this will take repeated attempts

show them where to listen to find their pitch

### undance like dance music - agogic accent

Agogic accent -

Weight given because of placement on a strong beat

Dance music should have enough weight on strong beats to inspire a physical response in the listener. We should be able to determine the meter. Young students that struggle

with the technique on a piece may neglect to push on the strong beats, which neglects the strongest aspect of a dance. Modeling is the fastest way to teach this.

### finding the groove

Our brains recognize a reoccurring pattern in the rhythm of the music - satisfaction comes from this recognition of this organization - allow this satisfaction to continue even as lines are added, don't subvert it to become just a busy texture.

Music of Mackey, Hazo, Bernstein comes to mind.

Steve Van Telejuice described a groove as a point in a song or performance when "even the people who can't dance wanna feel like dancing..." due to the effect of the music

### ways to use and not use the metronome

"If you don't use the metronome much, turn it on. If you use it all the time, turn it off" - Fred Allen

A metronome is vitally important for learning and stabilizing rhythmic music.

A metronome should not be relied upon very much on lyrical and slow music.

Many pieces of music "broaden out" and arrive at the end. Kill the met and don't play through to the very end in pulse.

Ritards. - are they contrived or do they always require watching?

A metronome serves the ensemble much better when used at the back.

Rehearsing at a slower practice tempo.

How loud? How much subdivision?

### The breath as enhancement instead of hindrance

I believe that students, and some directors, regard breathing as a hindrance, a necessary evil. Many students tend to chop off notes to breathe due to the impending next down beat. They maintain this even when playing alone on etudes and solos and have difficulty using breathing as a part of phrasing.

Problems in breathing on major solos in the literature. Soloists - breathe in the style of the music you are playing!

The panic breath.

When you hear a really good choir, you are able to enjoy the breathing with them and it adds to the frame of the music. We breathe. Breathe!

### compliance mode/performance mode

In many rehearsals and performances, I see wonderful, dutiful students being in compliance mode. I am not talking, I am playing all my notes as I have been taught to do. I am not sticking out or playing too loud, I am in tune ( I think ). I AM NOT GETTING YELLED AT. I am a good band member doing my job. I call this compliance mode.

In performance mode, band students are shaping the music, playing with expression, getting into it, taking musical risk.

How do you get from compliance mode to performance mode?

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