

Susan Babcock – Brass Review Editor

Concert and Competition Season Tips

Advice for getting ready for a performance or an adjudication

If you've ever had students perform at NYSSMA® solo and ensemble, NYSSMA® majors or have taken a day trip to be adjudicated (and have proceeded to the roller coaster parks in the afternoon), then you know the drill and how to prepare your students for these wonderful playing opportunities. If you're new to teaching, however, you might consider these tips to help prepare you for an excellent concert or adjudication season.

1. Read the program notes in the score.

Some composers choose to write the music first and then find a title; others take great care in selecting a title that fits the music. Read their notes. Composers will tell you exactly what is important to them and might save you some time.

2. Mark in the specific percussion part in your score.

How many times have you had to flip back to the first page to know exactly what percussion auxiliary part is being sought? Take the time to read the score and literally write in "Crash Cymbal" if you don't immediately recognize the part. A lot of teachers get "stuck at the top" of their score and don't make their way down to the bottom of the page.

Don't forget your percussionists! If you have two groups (that make up the **collect band**) you might even consider writing your percussion student's name next to each part. It can be very difficult in the spur of the moment to remember who is playing what part and who is in the different class periods!

3. Have extra music ready to go.

Have your extra music! You might even consider writing the kids' names on the original parts before you make your copies (especially for the auxiliary percussion parts or if you have specific students on 1st/2nd parts).

Also, make sure you bring the original music with you. More than likely all of your students will be playing from copies at a competition. On the rare occasion that this is not acceptable, have the original parts with you so that you could pass them out quickly. You can simply leave the original music in a backpack or on the bus, if you're at an amusement park.

4. Order extra scores now.

This seems to be the last thing we do! Order the scores early so you don't need to be concerned about this the week of the per-

formance! Think too about how you present your materials to the judges. A nicely typed document (with the title of the music and composers, *with the order you intend to perform the pieces*) stapled onto a fresh large manilla envelope only enhances your seriousness and professionalism. An organized group will "sound better."

5. Put up recordings for kids to hear.

Be careful of copyright problems here, but if you can put up a recording from a reputable music retailer (perhaps from a website like JWPepper.com), your students will be able to hear a quality sound and even practice along with the music at home.

6. Practice with a metronome (of course) but also consider a drone/pedal tone.

Many teachers will turn on a metronome to keep a consistent beat, but consider also putting on a tonic drone. There are many available on YouTube. This works wonders for the developing clarinet embouchure. It's especially useful in passages where students are in a high tessitura.

7. Plan for combined rehearsals if your groups are split into two.

Many programs are lucky enough to have a large number of student participants. If your program is split into two sections, it's crucial for the ensembles to come together as one for blend and balance. You do not want your first rehearsal together to be at the concert or in a new school for the performance.

8. Bring in another teacher to do a mock competition (and consider moving the kids to a different room or even turning their chairs around).

Have a teacher from a different school, grade level, etc., listen to the kids. This mock trial run will be a wonderful test to see where the kids are in their development of the music.

If you can change locations that would be wonderful too. If the auditorium, for example, is the only room because of your numbers, consider flipping around the group. You conduct from the back (have the flutes in the back facing you) and the low brass by the edge of the stage. Acoustically it will sound very strange. You want that. You want the kids to be able to try to adjust right on the spot.

This is a great technique for "shaking it up" before the event. We always want to

teach kids to adjust to a new room by watching us in the moment, but how can we practice this if we are always in the same room?

9. Make a recording of the kids and send it to them.

Consider making a cell phone recording of the students and then post it on your school's website (just for the band to hear!). Wrong notes will be obvious. While the recording won't be the best, wrong rhythms and wrong notes don't lie! The level of listening the kids will do to hear themselves is exactly what we want! Have you ever heard a kid say, "Wow! I never heard that part before!"

10. Consider copying the score and have the students analyze it.

Depending on the level of your students, this will be varied. If you have a younger ensemble, the students might simply benefit from learning how to read a score. If you have an older ensemble, they will benefit from seeing who plays with them, before them and after them, lining up chords vertically, etc.

I also love having the students see the snare parts. Usually, the snare parts are much more rhythmically challenging than, for example, a bass clarinet part! The kids at this point will "know how the music goes" and will be able to locate their parts within the score. They have also heard, for example, the more advanced rhythms of the snare, so seeing it on paper might be the first time they have seen sixteenth notes. This can be a powerful teaching tool regarding how to write in the rhythms.

11. Teach phrases: sotto voce, etc.

One trap we can fall into is knowing our groups. This sounds ridiculous because we WANT to know our students! But the irony is that sometimes we don't push as hard because *we think* we know what they can and cannot do. Consider teaching phrases in different languages. For example, instead of saying, "You don't have the melody; play softer," you might say, "We need to be sotto voce, or under the voice" there. Everyone loves to be pushed! Let's keep the level high!

Consider using these tips to help aid your program. The concert and adjudication season is right around the corner! Be prepared, have fun and good luck!