

## **BEGINNER BAND CLINIC**

### **Setting Up**

Setting up your first beginner band is one of the most important steps you will take in the development of your instrumental program. Make sure you have discussed the program with your administration, the parents, and the students that may be candidates for the band (instrumental) program. Do not assume that everyone is going to be elated with what you are about to organize. Remember you will be competing for use of the students' time, as students who will want to participate in band are generally the same ones who are involved in sports, piano/voice lessons, special studies, church, Brownies, etc. Therefore the response may not be what you expected, but do not give up, start small and build. It takes approximately 3 years to produce a band from beginner level. Lets assume you have received a positive response from your Principal, parents, and some very excited students and your ready to start.

### **Recruiting**

Prepare and hand out through the students a letter announcing the program and that you will be having a Musical Aptitude Test for those wishing to participate in the band program and that a meeting will be arranged to present and discuss the program. Parents or guardians must accompany the students for the test. At this meeting make sure the parents understand that the students must study if they participate, and what a valuable contribution music can make to their child's development. Music can be a lifetime activity.

### **The Music Aptitude Session**

Many band directors do not use a music aptitude test. I find them very useful in a number of ways:

1. I do not use the test to decide who will or will not be in the band.
2. They do help in selecting students for particular instruments.
3. Those who have high scores generally do well and progress at a faster pace than someone with an average score.
4. Students with an average score will progress at the pace your band method is programmed.
5. Students with a below average score will be slower and will require extra help from the band director or an assistant. The assistant could be another teacher, parent, local musician or an advanced music student.

Knowing this information in advance is a great help in rehearsal control. It also assists in motivating and developing the overall progress of the band. It is useful information for possible future instrument transfers.

If someone fails the test, have him or her do it again in a less stressful situation.

Remember: The test is to be used as a guideline on the amount of work you and the student have to do to receive satisfactory results. It is 10% talent and 90% work! You must convince the student and parents that the instrument they play is not as important as how much they enjoy performing music.

## **Instrumentation**

This depends on what grade level you are starting beginners. If you are starting students in grade:

IV & V flute - clarinet - trumpet/cornet - trombone - baritone - percussion

VI & VII flute - clarinet - trumpet/cornet - (French) horn - trombone - baritone - tuba (small) - percussion

You have probably noticed that I did not have the following instruments available for beginners: piccolo - oboe - bassoon - bass clarinet - saxophone

Saxophone is a very popular instrument and quite expensive. It is better that the student play flute/clarinet for at least a year (or two) or you may have a band with 8 to 10 saxophones. This does not produce a good band sound. You must be in control of this and be very selective.

Oboe and bassoon are very difficult to start without expert instruction. Students selected must be prepared to work hard on these instruments to be successful.

A questionnaire on what kind of musical environment the student is accustomed to is another valuable aid. I may include questions such as:

1. Do you have a tape or CD player in your home?
2. What is your favorite kind of music?
3. Do you play another instrument? e.g. piano, ukulele, guitar, recorder etc.
4. Have you participated in pre-school music development programs such as *Music For Young Children* or similar pre school programs, etc?

These questions and others will help you in deciding what students are best suited to transfer to, e.g. trumpet to French horn - baritone to tuba - flute or clarinet to oboe.

## **Procedure: Music Aptitude Session**

If you have more than 25 students divide them into two groups. Usually a group of 25 is quite comfortable. If you can get help from other interested parents or teachers do so. You can use these volunteers to help mark the tests, distribute materials, and supervise.

The aptitude tests are available from Selmer Music Instrument and King Music Instrument Companies. They have aptitude kits that contain a tape for testing - aural - rhythmic - timbre - recognition, marking sheets and a pamphlet for administering the test.

1. In your introduction to the parents and students explain how the program will operate and your goals for the band in its first few years. Emphasize the value of music in a child's life, the self-discipline and the social skills. The importance of music study and improvement of study skills is becoming an important factor in the development of education.
2. How important the aptitude test is to their child's success and how it will be administered.
3. On completion of the test, have your assistants mark them. Both of the tests mentioned above have a marking card, so little or no musical knowledge is required.
4. While the tests are being marked, you will explain to the parents how instruments will be procured. e.g. rentals - school - purchased etc. I will go into this area in more detail later.
5. Following the marking of tests put them in order of results, from the lowest to the highest. Then call each student for their physical check to see what instrument they are best suited for. Try your best to give them what they wish, but there are some physical features that can curtail a student's progress. Here are a few major ones:
  - a) Do not put students with a teardrop lip on any brass instrument.
  - b) Extreme over bite - avoid: flute, trumpet or French horn.
  - c) Make sure smaller students can cover all the holes and keys on the flute/clarinet when held in the proper playing position.

Have a flute, clarinet, trumpet, French horn, and trombone/baritone available to assist you in choosing the right instrument for the new band member.

## **Procedure**

Start with the mouthpiece (head joint) of the instrument they feel they would like to play.

### **Clarinet**

Use a #2 reed on a clarinet mouthpiece. Have two or three prepared reeds handy and a little Detol and water solution to disinfect them after each use. Have them shape their lips into the required embouchure, with the reed attached to the mouthpiece and the barrel, place in the mouth, top teeth on the top of mouthpiece about 1/2 inch, a slightly rolled lip over the bottom teeth placed an inch on the reed, seal corners of lips up to the mouthpiece, then asked the student to put air through the mouthpiece using a *heeeee* sound. This generally produces a tone on the clarinet instantly. Take care that they do not bite on the mouthpiece. When they have established a sound it should be the F# concert just above middle C on the piano. Now add the rest of the clarinet, using the correct hand positions. They may find this a bit clumsy at first, so make sure they have the clarinet in their mouth for balance. They should produce the note G (F concert). You now have a budding clarinetist.

### **Flute**

Use the head joint only - place palm of left hand over the open end of the head joint, put lip plate against the student's bottom lip, shape lips as if to say the letter M. Have the student take a deep breath and with air say the word *pooooo*. Make sure they direct the air across the flute aperture and not into the flute as if they are blowing on a soda bottle. If the lip aperture is too large when they use *pooooo*, have them use *peeeee*. After they have produced a sound, add the rest of the flute, making sure they are holding the flute properly and have the proper hand positions.

### **Trumpet/Trombone/Baritone/Tuba**

Use only the mouthpiece. Have the student shape lips as if to say the letter *M*. Place mouthpiece 1/3 on upper lip and 2/3 lower lip. This could vary sometimes and they may find that 1/2 and 1/2 may be more responsive. Have them take a deep breath and blow air against their lips. Make sure their chin is flat and the corners of the lips are sealed. Do not let them roll their lips over their teeth or puff their cheeks. As they are buzzing carefully place the mouthpiece in the instrument, a sound should be produced. Make sure they are holding the horn correctly and have the proper hand positions.

### **French Horn**

The main difference with the French horn is the position of the mouthpiece - 2/3 upper lip and 1/3 lower lip. Make sure right hand position is correct in the bell (the right hand should not be outside of the bell). The left hand should be on the valve levers.

## **Percussion**

Test student on rhythmic answering - alternating hands. Explain that drum set is only one part of the percussion instrumentation. Melodic percussion is part of the course. Try to get students who have at least 1 year of study in piano.

## **Balanced Instrumentation**

As you are selecting students be aware of the importance of having a balanced instrumentation. If you are starting a band it must sound like a band and therefore instrumentation is very important:

- 4 to 6 flutes
- 6 to 9 clarinets
- 2 to 3 alto saxophones (maximum)
- 4 to 6 trumpets/cornets
- 2 to 4 French horns or Eb alto horns
- 3 to 4 trombones
- 2 to 3 baritones
- 2 to 3 tubas
- 4 to 6 percussion

Tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, oboe, bassoon, and bass clarinet are added through transfer in 2nd or 3rd year.

## **Drop Out**

Drop out % based on the grade the student begins instruction:

Grade IV /V = 5% to 10%

Grade VI = 20% to 25%

Grade VII = 30% to 35%

Grade VIII = 40% to 45%

Grade IX = 45% to 50%

Grade X= 50% + (very seldom successful)

This is based on results that I had in my experience as a band director.

## **Where Do The Instruments Come From?**

If the program is fully funded by the School Board, care must be taken on what instruments they should purchase. Most boards want the program to be accessible to all those who wish to participate, regardless of race, color or income. It is essential that instruments be provided for them. This can become very expensive. When all is provided, instrumental programs tend to become a haven for those with nothing to do, and collect the non-interested to the eventual collapse of the program. It is also used as an excuse not to have a band program in the system.

The opportunity should be there for all who are interested and instruments should be available for those who cannot afford to purchase and some that are too expensive for the student/parent to rent or purchase. Therefore the Board should provide a basic set of band instruments to assist the poorer student and provide the more expensive instruments such as: tuba, French horn, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, bassoon, tenor saxophone, and percussion. Other items that should be provided include: music stands, folders, and music.

It is recommended that those who can afford to rent or purchase their own instrument should do so. Students stay in the program longer, take more interest and have an instrument to continue with when they graduate. As a matter of fact it is less expensive to participate in a band program for 6 to 8 years than it is to participate in most sports programs.

With costs for education getting higher each year school boards are hesitant to provide total funding. If the board has the interest of the student and the community in mind, they can work out a cooperative program between the school, parents and community minded citizens that will provide them with an instrumental program and a forward step in providing students with better music education.

## **Plan I**

Contact a reputable Music Instrument Dealer who can provide you with a rental purchase program over 3 to 5 year period for your initial set of instruments and accessories. The agreement should also provide additional instruments as the program grows. Over a 3 year period you would have a beginner -junior -intermediate levels and by the 5<sup>th</sup> year an added senior level group. In these plans they generally provide good quality instruments of the same make, along with an instrument service plan. Some companies will also provide some clinician services.

Once the instruments and accessories have been selected, a price is set and payment is set up over a period of three years.

Example: With a total cost for set up of \$45,000, over a 3-year period it would be \$15,000 per year. If this was broken down again and assessed - school \$5,000 - community \$5,000 - participants \$5,000 you would be well on your way. The community represents service clubs, parents association, town/city grants etc. If you break down the participants' portion for a 50-piece band it works out to \$10.00 per month for ten months (or one medium pizza).

## **Plan II**

1. If the board says yes to a band program but cannot provide funds at this time then it will take a little more work.
2. Contact all service clubs in area for financial support. e.g. purchase a tuba - bass clarinet - or offer some form of funding for operation.
3. Organize a Band Boosters Club of parents, interested citizens and students to organize fund raising events.
4. Contact music instrument dealer for rental/purchase plans ask about new and rental returns. Students/parents would rent flutes, clarinets, trumpets/cornets, trombones, and all other instruments would be purchased through fund raising by Band Boosters etc.
5. Check on that sister, uncle, or aunt who gave up playing and would be willing to donate their instrument to the band.
6. Place an ad in the paper(s). There are a number of fine instruments sitting in basements and attics that are no longer useful to the owner, who may wish to donate or sell at a reasonable price. You may have to make some minor repairs but it will add to your stock of instruments.
7. Students who participate must purchase the band method they will be using. The school may wish to purchase the conductor's book and a single class set.

(Sample rental programs attached)

## **Guideline To Desirable Physical Qualifications To Be Considered In Selecting The Appropriate Instrument**

### **Flute**

1. Student who has an upper lip with point in the center may divide the air column and should not play flute.
2. Arms must be long enough to hold flute to mouth and still cover keys correctly.
3. Students with a short upper lip should not play flute.
4. Double-jointedness is a disadvantage although not too serious except in right thumb.
5. Should have good eye/hand coordination.

### **Clarinet and Saxophone**

1. Fingertips should be large enough to cover tone holes easily (clarinets only).
2. Double-jointedness is a disadvantage.
3. Teeth should be even. Many orthodontists don't like their patients to play clarinet or saxophone.
4. Long fingers are an advantage.

### **Trumpet and French Horn**

1. It is best for students to have even front teeth with no protrusions.
2. Nearly perfect occlusion is best. Avoid excessive overbite or under bite (overbite is not as severe a handicap on French horn).
3. Students with very full lips should not play trumpet or French horn.

### **Trombone, Baritone and Tuba**

1. Medium full lips are desirable.
2. Strength of physique for size of instrument.
3. Students should have good ear for trombone.

### **Percussion**

1. Exceptional physical coordination is desirable.
2. Keyboard knowledge is desirable.
3. Good sense of tempo and rhythm.
4. Competition is extremely keen.
5. Students should have an intense desire to become a complete percussionist (drums, bells, marimba, chimes, vibes, cymbals).

**The single most important ingredient to success is desire.**