



TOUCHPOINT

The Division of Education Newsletter

Conn-Selmer
DIVISION OF EDUCATION

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser
Vice President of Education
Cell: 260.410.0717
DrTim@conn-selmer.com

Michael Kamphuis
Managing Director, Division of Education
Work: 574.523.0677
Cell: 574.607.6000
mikamphuis@conn-selmer.com

Kelly Bryan
Manager of Educational Outreach
Phone: 574.523.0651
Cell: 574.329.8727
kbryan@conn-selmer.com

Gary Markham
Executive Director,
Music Administration Collaborative
Phone: 678.300.3438
markham@aol.com

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A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint*, **David Orehowsky, Director of Bands at Pennfield Middle School and K-12 Instrumental Music Department Chair for the North Penn School District**, shares his strategies for organizing and executing a successful jazz ensemble audition process.



How to Structure an Effective Jazz Band Audition Process

By David Orehowsky



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One of the more critical keys to a successful jazz season lies in creating an effective audition process. This article will offer strategies for structuring a typical big band audition process in a middle school setting; however, it is easily adapted for an elementary or high school setting.

In preliminary drum auditions, I play trumpet along with students during the prepared piece, covering as many melodies and brass hits as I can, which gives me a gauge of the student's natural feel of the tune. In the next round, I bring back the strongest drummers (also works well for bass, piano, guitar) and have each student play with the lead players from the horn section and remaining rhythm players.

Select an audition piece: (ex: *Stro's Place*, by Carl Strommen)

- Grade 2 or 2.5 (easy - medium easy)
- Medium tempo swing/blues style
- Melodic material present for all instruments
- All rhythm parts notated
 - * Bass – mostly walking, with some melodic/rhythmic variations
 - * Piano – chords all written, some melodic material
 - * Guitar - melodic material and chords/comping
- Recording must be accessible online

Additional Criteria

- Ask rhythm section students to imitate basic comping rhythms; offer the option of allowing students to share additional pieces/songs/styles.
- Consider including a short sight reading or rhythm reader component.
- If practical, include improvisation over an F blues or easy modal changes.

Establish technique related criteria:

- Prepared Scales
- * Select a few major scales, a chromatic scale, and a blues scale; indicate either an even or swing style.
 - * Bass, guitar and piano players are often from outside the band program; provide the option of playing other major or minor scales of their choice; consider asking a few basic theory questions regarding chords, etc.

Adapt the audition process to fit your particular instrumentation and age setting, while considering the following:

- Publish a proposed calendar so students and parents understand the commitment requirements before auditioning.
- Keep the process simple and relaxed.
- Listen to all of the same instruments on the same day.
- Perform each step in the same order for each audition.
- Have a second person sit in on the audition for a another opinion, or for instruments that one might feel less knowledgeable evaluating.
- Have "call-backs" to experiment with different combinations of students in sections. Make it clear to saxophone students that *they are not only alto players and must be open minded to playing tenor and bari, too.*
- After publishing the list, follow-up with students who did not make the group to encourage them to try again in the future.
- Take notes!

Drummers' Requirements

- Demonstrate a variety of jazz styles; rock, funk, shuffle, swing w/brushes, ballad, bossa, etc.
- The following audition piece learning process is helpful for novice jazz set players. Listen to the recording for each step; do each 3X before moving on:
 - * Study the part – do not play.
 - * Play along in a swing style, focusing on time (no kicks or fills).
 - * Play the fill/kick rhythms on the snare only (do not keep time).
 - * Keep a swing time on ride; play the kick rhythms on the snare with your other hand.
 - * Only play the light fills and the kicks (no time on ride).
 - * Combine steps 1-5.

The audition process can be hard work, and somewhat stressful - for both the students and the director! Plan and prepare, talk to experienced jazz directors and continually examine each step of your process until you have created the basis of one that works best for your setting.

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Former Director of Fine Arts for
the Washoe School District in
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