



# TOUCHPOINT

The Division of Education Newsletter

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VOL. 1 • Issue 34 • February 18, 2014

## A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint*, Peter Warshaw, Fine Arts Director for Leander ISD, gives great advice on how to improve the overall sound of your ensemble.



### Strive for CPR\* In the Sound of Your Band

By Peter Warshaw

\*Clarity, Purity and Resonance

When one considers the many barriers to producing a great ensemble sound, it only makes sense that refining sound production should be a logical and integral part of each rehearsal. This very common ensemble issue is partially due to the fact that students are playing on a wide variety of instruments in different octaves with "bad" notes that vary across the ensemble.

the ensemble, striving to match the tonal resonance and energy of the previous student with no bumps or gaps in sound. The full ensemble enters at the end, matching the sound of the last student. One variation is to have the students overlap entrances (i.e., each student plays for eight counts...the second player enters four counts after the first player starts), which begins to address some of the skills band members must demonstrate over the course of a typical rehearsal.

#### Tone Production

The most important performance practice for great ensemble sound production is for every student to create a sound that is resonant, vibrant, pure and characteristic of the instrument he or she plays. This also positively affects intonation, as students cannot play in tune if they are not first "in tone".

This exercise can be time-consuming, and students may begin to lose interest if too much of the rehearsal is used. Consequently, you might want to look for ways to turn this exercise into a game. In my middle school rehearsals, we would frequently repeat concert F whole notes with a whole rest in between. I then called out which group was to play next during the rests – brass, woodwinds, flutes, boys, girls, people wearing the color green, etc.

#### "Stacking Concert E", etc.

When the band's concert F is stable in terms of tone quality and intonation, stack additional notes in the same manner, moving downward chromatically. Resist the temptation to continue until the tone quality of the new note matches that of the band's concert F.

It is important to start each exercise at a point of comfort – at a dynamic level or tempo that is playable for the students – and only one item should be added or modified at a time to help measure the progress of the ensemble and each individual. Additionally, the progression of each exercise should be structured according to the ability level of the players to avoid reinforcing improper habits or acceptance of lower standards.

#### "Stacking Concert F"

While this exercise can be conducted on any note, concert F is within the mid-range of every wind instrument and is generally one of the better notes on many. Hence, I suggest using it as a tonal template (your horn section may use concert C rather than concert F).

As the individual players produce sounds that are more resonant and pure, the ensemble will increase in clarity; which, in turn, will increase the audibility of impure sounds within the band. This is a **good** thing! The issues that were present prior to utilizing these exercises can now be identified and corrected.

#### Points to Remember

In summation, here are the most important points to remember:

Have each student in the band play a concert F, starting with:

- The lowest voice instrument, adding instruments upward.
- The highest voice instrument, adding instruments downward.
- The player with the most resonant and characteristic sound, adding according to ability level.

1. The goal of each exercise is for every student to produce a clear, focused and resonant sound that is characteristic of his or her instrument.
2. Set your students up for success by providing measurable goals and advancing through any task sequence one item at a time.
3. As the sound produced by your ensemble begins to increase in clarity, you and your students will hear more improper sounds, and you may think the ensemble is getting worse. However, this is a normal outcome and a sign that the students' instrumental and auditory skills are improving.

This can be done either by adding one person or one section at a time, with or without a transitional rest as students are added. If a tonal change occurs, check the tone quality and intonation of the added players (be aware that a change could also be caused by a difference in tone produced by the previous group). Continue to add students until everyone is playing.

I highly recommend utilizing this exercise in section rehearsals as well. It will be much easier for students to build confidence in their ability to match sounds with instruments of identical or similar tonal characteristics.

#### "F around the Room"

Each student plays concert F and passes the sound around

I wish you all a great concert season and a great sounding band!



#### Welcome to our newest VIPs!

##### David Gorham

Director of Bands  
Owasso High School, OK

##### Blane Hinton

Director of Bands  
Allen High School, TX

##### Michael Hengst

Assistant Prof. of Trumpet and  
Athletic Bands  
Metro State University of Denver

##### Stephen Meyer

Director of Bands  
Clear Creek High School, TX

#### Our Next Issue Featuring:

An article by **David Orehowsky**,  
K-12 Instrumental Department  
Chair for the North Penn School  
District in Pennsylvania.

#### In Our Last Issue:

To be a Great Teacher—Words  
of Wisdom from My Mentor

by David Branson

[Click here for the full article](#)