

Making Your Large Ensemble More Like a Chamber Music Experience

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- What is our over-arching goal as music educators? Should it be to equip our students with the skills necessary to access and appreciate great music for a lifetime?
- These skills, taken together, comprise what is known as musicianship.
- Why is chamber music such a good medium for teaching musicianship?
 - Requires increased awareness and communication
 - Requires greater ownership and understanding of the score and the process
 - Requires greater listening and analytical skills
 - Fosters leadership and negotiating skills
 - Provides a more subtle and intimate setting for making music
- In most cases it is difficult to provide our students with as much chamber music experience as we might desire (limited manpower for coaching, limited facilities, scheduling challenges, etc.), therefore we are largely dependent on the large ensemble experience to train our students.
- How can we make our orchestra rehearsals yield many of the same benefits as the chamber music experience does?
- Coaching vs. conducting (beating time)
 - Don't conduct . . . coach. Get off of the podium.
 - Be a "chamber conductor"
 - In trying to "help" with our conducting, we often make it more difficult.
- Give your students the skills to set them free (as soon as possible!).
 - Give them increased "response-ability."
 - Expect them to "fail" at first, A LOT! It's like riding a bike, tying your shoe.
- Short-term gain vs. longer-term goals

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- Techniques for the ensemble

Aural

- Listen, don't just hear. There's a difference.
- Directed, focused listening makes everything better
- Match color (think in color, not just dynamic)
- Ultimate blend yields better balance, intonation
- Work to even match vibrato
- Listen for built-in metronome (both internal and within the ensemble).
- This awareness of pulse and intonation may need to occasionally be "calibrated", but the musicians' ears will be at the performance. The tuner and metronome will not.
- Inner pulse + directed listening = good ensemble

Visual

- We, as conductors, must watch the musicians. The technique and ensemble issues are right there for the viewing.
- The musicians must communicate visually and "move musically."
- Breathe with your lungs and breathe through the instrument, with the bow.
- As much as possible, eliminate the "middleman" (conductor) for issues like ensemble. As conductor, try to do only the things that only you can do.
- Simon Rattle: "I don't have time to do your job and mine."
- It's much more fun to drive a Ferrari than a lumber truck.
- "Orchestra assassin"
- Don't follow, collaborate.
- The most difficult place to play in an orchestra is at the back of the string sections.