

# TEACHING AN ENSEMBLE TO LISTEN

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## PHILOSOPHY OF REHEARSING

- A rehearsal should be where musicians come together to learn each other's parts, not their own.
- A rehearsal must unite the performers in a shared understanding of the composer's intent and the conductor's interpretation of that intent.
- Each player must accept an equal responsibility for the outcome.
- Each player must know their parts well enough **to concentrate on listening to others.**
- Every rehearsal must have the potential to create beauty.
- Technical proficiency cannot dominate the entire rehearsal.
- Each rehearsal must encourage both extrinsic and intrinsic musical growth for the entire ensemble.

## WARMUP THE EARS

- Listening must be stressed from the first sound.
- Tune in a way that promotes evaluative listening (i.e. with a crescendo on tuning note)
- Establish listening goals in tuning and warm-up (i.e. match the clarinet, get inside the sound of the trombones, etc.).
- Use real music whenever possible for warm-up.
- Use your conducting to guide the ensembles listening.

## BALANCE

- Have students "get inside" of the sound of another player.
- Create "shades of green" (i.e. tuba blue, euphonium yellow at beginning of Holst First Suite)
- Stress listening to instruments that are leading because of their importance (i.e. low voice, solo part, high voice, inner part, melody, etc).
- Make students aware of others playing same part by asking not telling.
- When the balance is good, stop and acknowledge it, then play it again so the students gain awareness of their contribution to the expressive intent.
- Play expressive recordings of music with beautiful balance and blend.

## **STYLE AND MUSICIANSHIP**

- Find an intrinsic connection to each piece by empathizing with the composer's inspiration.
- Breathe together in the style of the sound to be created.
- Tension and release is a harmonic function that must be revealed in rehearsal.
- Crescendo can be led from the bottom and diminuendo from the higher voices in harmony
- Dynamics (forte, piano, etc) are relative to style and context.
- Every note should be part of a dynamic journey with a destination.
- Examine the source of the work to determine articulation and bowing style.
- Listen and match the length and weight of each note.
- Shape notes, phrases, sections, movements, compositions and concerts.

## **CHANGE WHERE PEOPLE ARE SITTING**

- Use a circle to emphasize individual responsibility (everyone is in the front row; send notes or rhythmic motives around the circle; place soloists or small chamber groups in center)
- Have students sit next to someone who does not play the same part, then ask questions about what they heard
- Have players who must play together sit together for a small portion of the rehearsal
- Have percussion sit inside the wind section to hear and match style and balance
- Have a soloist stand on the podium and create chamber music watching and collaboration.

## **WHEN NOT PLAYING HAVE STUDENTS SING, LISTEN AND EVALUATE**

- Involve everyone in the rehearsal and encourage students to sing their own parts and other parts.
- Ask players to listen to the music when not playing (during "rests") and then ask them who plays before they come in and what must they match or contrast.

## **OTHER THOUGHTS**

- Give positive feedback on an expressive moment; keep a balanced checkbook (deposits and withdrawals)
- Rehearsal pacing must not bog down, keep moving
- Insist on expressive intent from everyone all the time (including yourself).
- You can never be too musical!
- Find a multitude of ways to say (verbally and non-verbally) the same things (use analogies)
- It is easier to teach expressive performing if you are programming expressive literature!