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A VIEW FROM THE PRESS BOX:
SHARPENING YOUR AX



► 2008: ANOTHER
SUCCESSFUL SUMMER!



► POSITIVE GREETINGS
DO YOU ACCEPT THIS
CHALLENGE?

Clinic chronicle

**Get set. The Mind set. The Skill set.
FJM Summer Clinics**

A-View From the Press Box: Sharpening Your Ax Part I

by George Boulden

As someone who has taught for over 20 years I have been fortunate to have some pretty good bands, several really fine bands, and a few that truly tried my patience and left me questioning my career choice. I have also had the opportunity to evaluate marching bands that fell into the categories mentioned above. Through it all I have learned a great deal from watching others teach, sharing ideas with other directors, and trying some things on my own (and being allowed to fail). It is my hope that these observations from the perspective of an adjudicator/educator may serve as a "refresher course" for those experienced directors like myself, and more importantly, help those just entering the profession to prepare for the upcoming marching band season.

Your Philosophy or "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

This seems like such an easy thing to talk about, and yet when I ask some band di-

rectors to tell me their philosophy of music education, it's as if I have asked for the keys to their summer home in Maine. Having a philosophy of teaching doesn't have to be an exercise in futility, but should express, in plain English, why you do what you do. More than likely your philosophy will evolve over the years, but still reflect your core beliefs. In my philosophy of music education the marching band serves as an extension of the concert band. This is perhaps not as glamorous as the other way around, but does keep me grounded with regard to the role of the marching band in a comprehensive music program. For that matter, what is the role of the jazz ensemble, solo/ensemble participation, and chamber ensembles? This core belief has not changed for me, despite the various viewpoints presented, generally by parents and students, in an attempt to reshape my way of thinking. Having a "sound" philosophy of music education can also be beneficial during the process of educating your administrators, parents, and students on the importance and value of music education related to the activities

of your marching band.

As you reflect on your philosophy, here are some initial questions to consider when outlining the role of the competitive marching band in your program:

1. What is the purpose of the band's participation in the contest or festival?
2. What is the value of the adjudication?
3. How important is the judging panel? What is the background and reputation of the adjudicators?
4. Can the answers to these questions be communicated to everyone (administrators, parents, students)?

Tied into these questions is the concept of expectations. Your expectations about what you are looking for in a quality performance must be communicated to your students daily. Remember that you usually get what you expect, so work to raise the bar at every rehearsal and performance. Be careful that you don't confuse effort with product - everybody works hard! In my observations of good teachers, the common denominator is that they work smarter not harder or longer. Typically, this is achieved by assessing the talent level of the band, notating both strengths and weaknesses before the fall season, and through thoughtful planning before each rehearsal.

Your Music is a Reflection of You

Simply said, selecting music is like choosing the textbook for your ensemble. You must take time to find music that fits your band, it's image, strengths, and your strengths as an educator. This is a

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Challenge!

"Hello. How are you?" "Fine, thank you, how are you?" "Fine, thank you." How many times have you had this less-than-riveting exchange with another person? And how often do you answer "fine" or "good", figuring others really don't want details? A sure way to brighten these greetings and interactions with people you see daily is to begin asking strategically positive questions instead. "Hello, Jennifer. What's been the highlight of your day so far?" Or, "Good morning, Paul. What goals are you planning to accomplish today?" Challenge yourself this month to engage those around you in more meaningful greetings with strategically positive questions and begin to foster a more congenial, positive atmosphere.

News of Note

- An enormous THANK YOU to all students, directors, and parents that participated in our 2008 summer clinic program! This summer was a tremendous success and we continue to receive feedback from students and directors as you all begin your fall marching seasons.
- Need some additional instruction for your group during your season? We can come **TO YOU!!** Contact us to schedule a private clinic at your school. The expertise and experience of our clinic program and staff with the convenience of your location!!



FJM Clinic final show at Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, Arkansas

thoughtful and careful process that reflects an aspect of your philosophy of music - it is who YOU are! Matching the level of difficulty to your band provides the opportunity for the group to formulate attainable goals and perform at a higher level while continuing to grow musically. Along these same lines, teach what you know. Nothing is more frustrating for the director, students, and adjudicator than to witness the performance of a style or genre of music that is not communicated well. In my experience the best example of this concept is the "swing chart" utilized in some shows. It is difficult, at best, to teach your band to swing, if you have never swung. If you must perform a swing tune, bring in someone who can teach the style correctly. This concept also holds true for latin music, rock, ska, etc.

Avoid Controversial Themes

I really thought that this concept had been addressed sufficiently over the years but just recently I adjudicated a 9-11 show that incorporated the use of small children, machine guns, terrorists, and a realistic mock up of the twin towers. To be quite honest I don't recall what or how the band played. As you can imagine I, as well as the rest of the judging panel, was stunned at the "effects" being employed in the performance. I kept wondering at what point did the director get the green light to pursue this programmatic idea. In that same weekend I witnessed a mental health show that featured electro shock therapy and guard members in straight jackets whose goal was to escape from the mental hospital by the end of the performance. Again, I was left wondering about the intent of the performance and what the audience was supposed to take away from the presentation. I can't help but think that if the directors had bounced these ideas off other colleagues they would have realized these show concepts

were too controversial. I know I am dating myself, but I also wondered how these shows play on Friday nights? More importantly, is that even a question for us to ask? I believe it is, and must be considered part of our mission to be entertaining, and in some cases educational, while at the same time keeping our audience in mind.

In Tone Leads to In Tune

From the musical side of evaluation, tone quality is addressed almost immediately; there's a reason it's the first caption on many music adjudication sheets. So many other components (blend, balance, intonation, color, and texture) of individual, sectional, and ensemble musical performance cannot be addressed until characteristic tone quality is present. Listen to your students individually, in the classroom, and on the field. Everyone benefits from a private lesson, and this is a wonderful opportunity to isolate and identify individual problems. Utilize other staff members, as well as recordings of each instrument, and peer leadership to ensure that everyone understands how their instrument is supposed to sound. Additionally, it is also beneficial to create breathing exercises that may be utilized as part of the warm up period. As a good friend likes to say, "There are no country trumpet sounds or city trumpet sounds, only a trumpet sound." Finally, step back from your ensemble during rehearsals. Musically you can address field balance issues, and visually speak to field perspective concerns.

Look for Part II of this article in our October issue of the Clinic Chronicle.

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DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

Erick Harris
Director of Bands
Fred J. Page HS
Franklin, TN

Erick Harris is the Director of Bands at Fred J. Page High School in Franklin, Tennessee and was recognized as the Page HS Teacher of the Year in 2004. Mr. Harris is a Madisonville, Kentucky native and a graduate of Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. He also has performance experience as a member of the Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps from 1994-1997 and was a member of the visual staff for the Madison Scouts in 2003, 2005, and 2006.

The Fred J. Page marching band program's recent successes include being named the Tennessee State Marching Band Champions in Division II 2004—2007, Bands of America Class Champion and Finalist at the 2005 St. Petersburg Regional and the 2006 Atlanta Super Regional, and Bands of America Semifinalist at 2007 Grand Nationals. The marching band is strictly extra-curricular with rehearsals three times each week as well as prior to each Saturday contest. This year's competition schedule once again includes the Tennessee State Championships, Bands of America Regional and Grand Nationals performances, as well as various other contests throughout Tennessee. Fred J. Page HS also offers to its students other successful ensembles such as Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Band, Concert Percussion Ensemble and Marching Percussion Ensemble. Students participate in an extensive private lesson program, All Mid-State Bands, All State bands, the Williamson County Youth Orchestra and the Nashville Curb Symphony.

Mr. Harris strives to teach students to excel through hard work, dedication, commitment, and goal setting. "I understand that the majority of high school music students will go on to other things after high school, so I hope through the band experience, they gain important life lessons that will prepare them to be productive and valuable members of our global society," Harris says.

Find out more about the Fred J. Page High School bands at www.fredjpageband.com.

Want to see your director here?
Email us at clinics@fjminc.com to nominate someone who inspires you!



Fred J. Miller, Inc.
Lauren Tucker, Clinic Coordinator

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