Chapter 9

Of School Bands, Orchestras and Jazz Ensembles

Chung, a fifth grader attending a concert by high school students in his elementary school gym: Wow! I'm going to play that one . . . that big instrument.

Ben, another fifth grader: Why? It's way in the back. No one will see you.

Chung: But the sound was so cool. I could feel it with my insides.

Ben: Yeah, but I like that shiny one up front. That's my sister's friend playing it and she is really nice to me.

Chung: I like the uniforms, too.

Ben: Yeah, they're nice . . . and it will be fun to come back and play here again one day.

How Did We Get Here?

If school music were started all over again, right now, right from scratch, would it turn out anything like the instrumental program as it currently exists? That would be rather unlikely. The typical instrumental music program, with its various large and small, wind and string, indoor and outdoor ensembles, is a product of historical pressures and convergences rather than centralized planning (Humphreys, 1995). Across time, student-centered educational philosophy, high-visibility national performances by student groups, professionally sponsored national contests, intercollegiate athletics, the enthusiastic support of the music industry, and even international relations in the form of two world wars have provided opportunities for the widespread development—and astounding success—of band and orchestra instruction in the schools. Interestingly, despite the historical genesis of instrumental school music, little has changed since its appearance in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Describing the state of instrumental music in 1937, Birge wrote,

> The instrumental field includes first and second orchestras and bands and classes for instruction in all instruments, including the piano. The orchestras play the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven and many of the best overtures and suites, both classic and modern. The bands are of symphonic fulness [sic] in instrumentation and perform the standard selections of band literature. (Birge 1966, 172-173)

Writing almost seventy years ago, Birge is describing what is still considered the core of modern instrumental music education, particularly in places like the United States, Canada, and a number of other nations where instrumental music has become such a major component of school music.

On a large scale, the enterprise of instrumental music instruction in the schools has been tremendously successful for a very long time. On an artistic level, the musical distance between the best high school performing ensembles and their professional counterparts is less than that between those same ensembles and the school district's beginning band and orchestra classes. This speaks volumes about the potential for growth that young people possess as well as the effect quality musical opportunities and quality music instruction can have on aspiring instrumentalists.

The challenge of maintaining a quality comprehensive instrumental program is great. Instrumental music is one of a school's most expensive enterprises. Consider that school bands and orchestras typically require their own facilities—one or more rehearsal rooms, multiple practice rooms, and extensive library and storage space. Ensembles need specialized equipment that likely includes large instruments, concert and marching

percussion, electronic keyboards, and a variety of amplifiers. Concert and marching ensembles usually need uniforms, often different ones for each group. All this needs to be kept up to date, maintained in proper working order, and replaced as necessary. And, of course, overseeing all this is at least one music teacher dedicated solely (or, at least, largely) to instrumental music instruction. This is a sizable investment for a school to make in a program that may serve only one-fifth of the student population, at best.

For students who choose to pursue instrumental instruction, a substantial investment is usually necessary as well. With few exceptions, students must provide and maintain their own instruments. Reeds, strings, sticks, and mallets break or wear out and need replacing. Uniform parts such as shoes, shirts, blouses, or ties may be the students' responsibility. Most schools, teachers, or parent groups now have programs in place to assist with expenses that financially troubled students cannot bear. Despite this need for significant contribution on the part of both the schools and the students, instrumental music programs not only still survive, but often thrive.

Even considering that a proportionally modest percentage of the student population participates in school ensembles, it is remarkable that in terms of sheer numbers so many students elect to join the band or orchestra. In many schools, the opportunity to join a beginning instrumental class in fourth, fifth or sixth grade is the first time a student is asked to *choose* whether he or she would like to participate in music. But what does a fifth grader know of bands or orchestras? Certainly these ensembles are historically part of Western culture—in the case of school band, particularly American culture—but they are not necessarily part of a young person's soundscape. Unless a parent was once a band member or a sibling played in the orchestra or the family holds season tickets to the local symphony, a child probably has only limited knowledge of the

kind of instrumental music that exists in schools. She may have seen the high school band in a local parade or the jazz ensemble at the district open house. She may have seen a string quartet performing at a relative's wedding or watched a tuba player "dot the 'i'" during a college football game. Maybe she just heard that the band teacher is "cool."

On the other hand, maybe the student believes that joining the band will allow her to become a performing musician like those whose recordings she owns, whose songs she hears on the radio or whose videos she has seen on television. The idea that bands and orchestras may play a different type of music from that done by a favorite contemporary performing artist does not register as strongly as the desire a student may have to join the ranks of "musicians." Nevertheless, that student is stepping into a particular musical world, shaped by tradition and led by educators who are charged with carrying that tradition forward and nurturing the creative and artistic spirit of young people.

The Shape and Size of the Instrumental Program

An instrumental music educator is expected to have expertise in a variety of performance arenas. The same individual who conducts the symphonic band may also need to direct the jazz ensemble and lead the marching band. After teaching the freshman string orchestra during last period, the instrumental music teacher may then be required to front the pep band at an after-school girls' basketball game. To be specific about it, school instrumental programs include some combination of the following: beginning instrument classes, large concert bands, string orchestras, full orchestras, jazz ensembles, jazz combos, marching bands, pep bands, chamber ensembles, percussion ensembles, and nontraditional ensembles.

Which is a teacher's favorite ensemble? Which does a teacher most enjoy teaching? In which did the teacher most enjoy performing? It doesn't matter, really. It is

the task of the music educator to give each ensemble complete attention and enthusiasm. Recalling Chapter 1, Rob's passion for jazz may lead him into music education, but it will not carry him through the school day. Nor will it carry his orchestra, symphonic band, and marching band students through the year. Every musical experience gives students an opportunity to grow as musicians and to enjoy the unique activity of music making...providing that the teacher facilitates these experiences with commitment and professional integrity.

Break Point 9.1 Peak Performance

In which ensemble did you find your most "peak" performance experiences? In what ways did these experiences depend or not depend on the setting, the audience or the type of literature you performed? Is there a specific experience that you had as a school musician that you would want to replicate for your own students?

While the *content* of the instrumental program is largely consistent from one school to another, the *structure* of instrumental teachers' days can vary widely. In some school districts each instrumental ensemble class is team-taught by two full-time instrumental specialists, significantly increasing the personal attention each student can receive while simultaneously allowing the full ensemble to remain on task. In other districts the majority of the instrumental teacher's day consists of brief private lessons, a series of weekly one-on-one teaching opportunities designed to complement the daily full ensemble class. Still other instructors find themselves spending each day of the week at a different school, helping beginning and second-year students develop fundamental skills. Other districts provide a more vertical distribution of responsibilities such that each

instrumental teacher works with students at every level, from the most junior to the most senior.

Regardless of one's specific responsibilities, the success of an instrumental program rests on the ability of one or more music educators to construct a coherent, sequential, yet multifaceted experience for students. Strength in one area is often contingent upon strength in another. While one particular student's path through instrumental performance may look quite different from another's, all roads should offer the finest of music making along the way.

Becoming an Instrumentalist

Students may walk into beginning instrumental classes with little knowledge of the skill they are about to learn. In the case of the elementary choir, a child has likely already developed a love of singing and has, in fact, been doing it for quite some time, inside and outside the music classroom. But at the outset of beginning band and orchestra classes, the love of playing an instrument may only have been a love from afar. Not that musical instruments, in general, are unfamiliar. Many elementary programs engage students extensively in instrumental music making through the use of percussion, mallet keyboards (often referred to as Orff instruments), and recorders. These are instrumental ensembles in the truest sense of the word, but do not necessarily represent experiences shared by all beginning band and orchestra students.

To get students going in the right direction, it is beneficial to establish clear and open lines of communication between teacher and student, student and parent, and parent and teacher. As one who will have spent many years participating in, studying, and now teaching instrumental music, it would be understandable if the instrumental teacher overlooked the fact that fifth graders and their parents may not really know what band is,

what orchestra is, and what the difference might be between the two. They may find it incomprehensible that an instrument so clearly popular as the guitar does not figure into any of the opportunities offered, or that the number of beginning percussionists has been limited to four. To understand the source of such confusion or, better yet, to head off conflicts before they arise, consider the varied perspectives from which the student, parent, and teacher view the beginning instrument experience. The *student* has been an active music maker all her life—singing, moving, listening, responding. For her, the beginning instruments class represents an opportunity to make music in a way that is new, more challenging, and perhaps more like she is used to seeing or hearing in the adult world. The *parent*, alternatively, has provided constant support for each new endeavor his child has taken on. He has sought out opportunities that he feels will contribute to his daughter's quality of life. Now the time has come for her to learn to play an instrument, a pursuit he reasonably associates with her becoming a well-rounded human being. The *instrumental music teacher* has as his primary concern assembling a class of beginning students that will provide a solid future for the band or orchestra program. The success of the upper-level ensembles depends on the teacher's ability to recruit a class of sufficient size and appropriate instrumentation, a program blueprint of which this student is an integral and very specific part.

Aside from the decision to join the instrumental program itself, the selection of an instrument is probably the most consequential choice a beginning student has to make. Why do students choose the instrument they do? The factors that operate to influence this decision are numerous. Size, convenience, role models, sound, looks, peer pressure, adult pressure, teacher pressure, or just random chance may push a student toward or away from certain options. Stereotypes about who plays what kind of instrument, possibly

established years earlier, may affect a student's opinion. Alternatively, a student might not even know which instrument is which (recalling one beginner who referred to every instrument as a "trumpet").

It is the teacher's job to decide what instruments will be available for selection and how that selection will be made. Figure 9.1 presents one possibility, a progressive approach to instrumentation that leads, among the band students, from a small array of instruments to a full complement. Beginning with fewer choices allows the teacher to divide her attention among fewer competing technical needs. It also allows students to help each other as they try to master skills unique to their own instrument group. In this particular system, because of the necessity of "growing" the range of instruments in the ensemble, it would be more accurate to say that students are being asked to select the *first* instrument they will play—the one on which they will begin—rather than the *only* one they will play.

For orchestra students, the composition of the beginning group is no different from that of a professional string orchestra. Switches are still likely, though they will be from a one-half or three-quarter size instrument to one that is full size rather than between different instruments. It may also be that, in time, a larger number of low voices—cello and bass, or even viola—will be needed than was originally selected. Different technical and musical demands necessitate the separation of beginning orchestra and band classes (as suggested by the solid line between the two groups in Figure 9.1) with full orchestra opportunities only emerging in later years. Unlike most beginning band students (though flute may be an exception), some beginning orchestra players will arrive in class with experience gained through Suzuki instruction. This internationally renowned method gives significant initial attention to performance

through imitation rather than notation. While a number of teachers have adapted this method to class settings, strict adherence to Dr. Suzuki's principles of instruction necessitates a blend of private and group lessons, involving not only the teacher and student but parents as well.

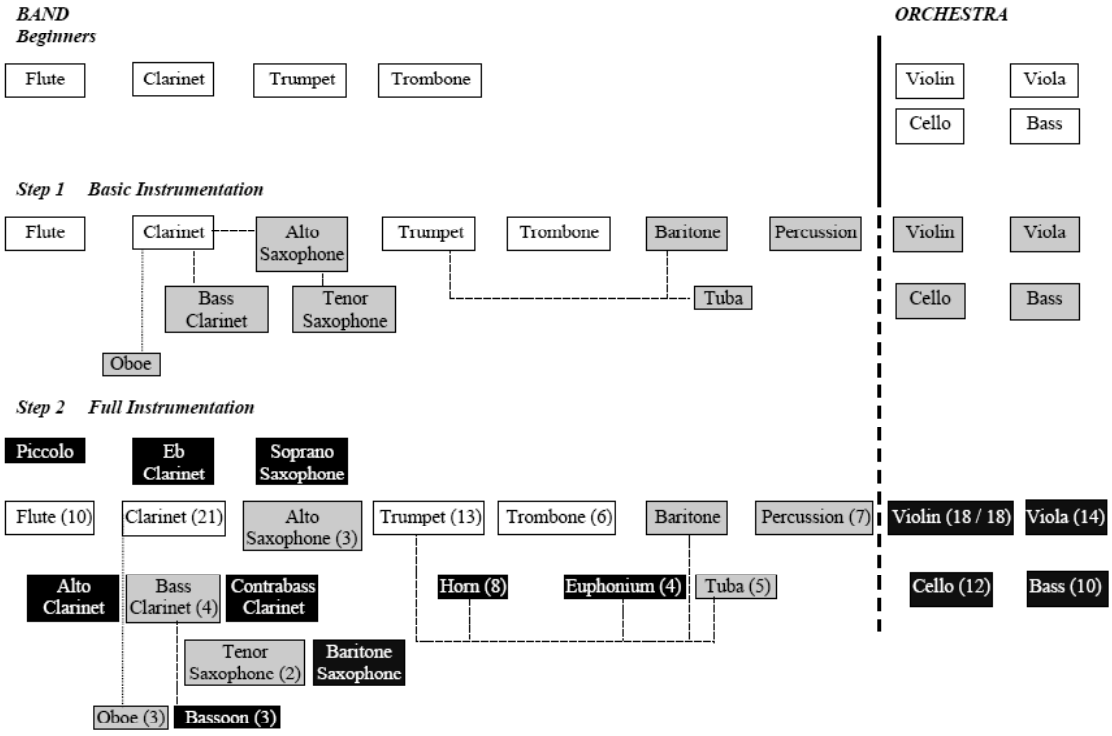

Figure 9.1. A progressive approach to instrument assignment for large concert ensembles. Approximate numbers of players for full symphonic instrumentation are shown in parentheses.

Break Point 9.2 Making the Choice

Why did you choose the instrument you did? What effect do you think your choice has had on your own identity as an instrumentalist? Can you identify any specific opportunities or experiences made available to you because of the instrument you play? If you had it to do all over again, would you make the same choice?

Are all beginners young? Is upper elementary school the only window of opportunity to choose instrumental instruction? As noted in Chapter 8, this is a question somewhat unique to instrumental programs. If there is only one point in a young person's student life at which he may choose to study a band or orchestra instrument, over time instrumental programs can only get smaller. On the other hand, a program that includes multiple potential entry points for new instrumentalists can continue to grow. It also allows students the chance to take a step toward musical growth when the time is right (recalling my own experience as both a high school freshman and a novice trombonist). Beginner classes in the upper grades, summer beginning classes, and one-on-one or small group peer coaching can provide regular infusions of new interest and skill.

<Insert Figure. Having beginning instrumentalists at many levels allows programs to grow.>

The Middle Years

The middle level of instrumental instruction is characterized by change. The evolution of a young person's skill and artistry between sixth or seventh grade and the beginning of high school is remarkable. It is not surprising that many veteran music teachers identify this as their favorite level to teach. Through the sheer accumulation of time, students who participate in band or orchestra for a second, third, fourth, or fifth year are demonstrating something well beyond a passing interest in learning to play an instrument. They are making a serious commitment.

Early adolescents are in the process of figuring out who they are. They are

changing in appearance and personality, in the way they relate to each other and to the adults they encounter. Each is beginning to stake out his or her own individuality while still seeking support and approval from their peers. Their continued presence in instrumental music indicates that they have chosen to make band or orchestra membership part of their identity and that other ensemble members make up a significant part of their social circle. Participation in a performance group is changing them both as young musicians and as young people.

On strictly musical terms, the middle-level instrumentalist is one who moves away from the safe, sequential confines of the method series. "Music" no longer refers to the song on page 24 of the class instruction book, but to the stack of loose sheets she has been given in a folder. Each has a title and a part designation—second clarinet, first violin—indicating that there is much more information about this piece than can fit on a single sheet of paper. She must now make sense of how she fits in the emerging ensemble. The decision she made about which instrument to play takes on new significance as the different sounds and colors are segregated and assigned separate roles. Greater independent musical responsibility is required.

But even instruments may change at this level, too. The basic instruments from which beginners typically may choose are no longer sufficient to fill out the ensemble. Piccolos, bass clarinets, baritone saxophones, double reeds, French horns, bass trombones, and tubas –not to mention a whole host of new percussion—become options for student exploration. Reduced-size string instruments may now be laughably diminutive in the hands of growing adolescents.

As exciting as some of the changes associated with early secondary school can be, others pose significant challenges to the music educator. Moving into middle-level music

classes usually means that students move from the elementary school environment to a middle school or junior high school campus. It may also mean that they must make a transition from their regular elementary music teacher and beginning band or orchestra teacher (if these are, in fact, different people) to an unfamiliar teacher—one who possibly stands on a podium and wields a baton. It is at precisely these sorts of junctures—moments of significant contextual change—that ensemble retention rates can drop precipitously.

New schools present students with new choices. They may wish to try out new experiences or distance themselves from things they now associate with "little kids." New teachers represent new social settings. The social structure of band or orchestra as students knew it is about to change and that change may seem intimidating or undesirable. An ongoing task of the instrumental teacher is to smooth these transitions so that the next level of music making does not seem foreign or forbidding. Visits to elementary schools by the middle school ensembles, joint performances between the beginning and intermediate groups, beginning-level section rehearsals run by junior high students, frequent guest visits by the secondary instrumental teachers to the beginning classes or by beginning students to secondary classes are all strategies that can minimize the gap between the different levels of instruction. Younger students get the chance to become familiar with the middle-level setting, to meet the middle-level instructor and see middle-level students making music and taking on positions of leadership—students they may see as older versions of themselves. The activities of older students are often the goals toward which younger students aspire.

The Many Faces of the High School Instrumentalist

The Concert Ensembles. The large concert ensembles are generally viewed as the

heart of the instrumental music program. They are thought of as the central hub around which other ensembles revolve, the core from which other groups draw strength. From a broad perspective, these are the destinations to which all roads lead, starting from the beginning classes through the middle-level bands and orchestras. The symphonic band and the symphony orchestra are often considered the most musically "serious" ensembles, playing the most substantial literature in the most formal settings. Even at high schools where second or third-level concert groups exist, their function is largely preparatory, getting students ready to step into the top concert organizations.

For the music educator, the top high school concert ensemble presents the greatest opportunity to step into the role of conductor. With the very best high school ensembles, the musical challenges posed to the teacher—much like those faced by the student performers—require significant study and analysis. The results can be sublime, producing musical performances that reach toward the level of professionals.

There are good reasons to think of these organizations as occupying the center of the instrumental picture. First, among the high school ensembles, they tend to involve the largest number of students and the most diverse instrumentation. Second, the symphonic band and orchestra are the modern equivalents of the ensembles that served as the historical starting points for instrumental school music, with other performing groups gaining curricular status and popularity later. Third, beginning method books are clearly designed to introduce and refine skills uniquely tied to symphonic ensemble performance. From the instrumentation available to the selections included in the lessons, from the stylistic emphasis of the content to the type of note-reading expected, these materials prepare students for success as performers of concert literature.

Even with the special status afforded these ensembles, the symphonic band is

much more prevalent in the school curriculum than the orchestra, with incidence of the latter ensemble varying widely by region (Smith, 1997). This may seem surprising given that the local or professional symphony orchestra is a more common and more visible institution than the local or professional band, if there is such a thing. But it begins to make more sense when one considers the greater variety of functions the band can perform, particularly as the marching and jazz organizations are drawn from this ensemble. Perhaps also relevant is a perception that the orchestra is a more socially elite organization or, at least, representative of a more socially elite cultural institution.

Ensemble format at this level requires consideration. Many orchestra programs move to full symphonic instrumentation at the high school level. While this allows students access to some of the best-known repertoire in the Western classical canon, few pieces provide wind and percussion players the level of engagement offered by band literature. Similarly, some programs feature a wind ensemble—with players placed one on a part—as the highest level of band experience. Such an ensemble offers an entirely unique challenge to students, necessitating a high level of independence.

The Jazz Ensemble. Among the mainstays of the instrumental music program, the jazz ensemble is the newest arrival. This is remarkable given that the jazz idiom came of age chronologically in tandem with, or even ahead of, instrumental school music. In its earliest days, jazz was associated with lifestyles and social contexts deemed to be at odds with the prevailing view of better living. The earliest jazz performers shaped their art by synthesizing a broad variety of musical influences, while subsequent generations of players learned by sitting alongside these veterans on the bandstand, in the clubs, and in the recording studios. Formal educational institutions played little part in the development and transmission of the jazz style and actively excluded jazz from the

acceptable musics of the academy.

The more recent view of jazz as a sophisticated art form worthy of serious contemplation and scholarly study coincided with its disappearance from the mainstream of popular culture as well as the appearance of jazz studies programs in a number of colleges and universities. School jazz ensembles, originally known as stage bands or dance bands and granted only club or extracurricular status as best, are now typically part of the formal instrumental program at the secondary, middle and, in some cases, even primary level.

There is little question whether school band music or school orchestra music is, in fact, band or orchestra music. However, there is less agreement whether, for all young jazz players, school jazz music is always jazz. The format of the performing group—the big band or combo—certainly echoes the jazz tradition. But, for students to truly learn the art of jazz, they must attend to matters of style and improvisation. On the page, students may note that jazz looks quite similar to concert music. Its realization, however, requires a different set of performance practices. Tone, technique, articulation, and interpretation all take on a new character in the context of a swing, bop, or Latin chart. Improvisation is the heart of jazz playing yet these opportunities may come to only two or three "solo chairs" of an eighteen-member big band. Successful jazz music selection and lesson planning allow all students the unique experiences of jazz performance—its particular styles and skills. Few other school music activities offer such a rich opportunity for students to explore an entirely different musical world.

Jazz's original status as a music (and even a lifestyle) on the periphery of accepted social norms sometimes affects the personality of school jazz ensembles. There is often a distinct identity—an air of confidence, even a mildly defiant swagger—among

jazz ensemble members when they are on the way to or from a rehearsal or gig, especially if students from the school's other ensembles are present. Where concert and marching ensembles typically have uniforms or strict dress codes, jazz groups tend to take on a more eclectic appearance. Rehearsals seem more relaxed with far less distance—both physical and personal—between the players and the teacher. Overall, there is an element of "coolness" that students associate with membership in a jazz ensemble that is as attractive as the performance opportunities such membership affords. This strong ensemble personality can become increasingly unsettling to members—particularly female members—to the point that they may choose to end their jazz performance careers (McKeage, 2004).

The Marching Band. With few exceptions, there is no more visible school ensemble—instrumental or otherwise—than the marching band. The presence of a marching band at school athletic events has become "as natural as having a choir in church" (House 1965, 154). The appearance of a marching band signifies that a truly important community event is about to take place. To many outside the music department, the marching band *is* the band program. As a teaching colleague inquired one December, "So what do you all do now that football season is over?"

Such notoriety is not always well received by the music teacher who may wish that greater attention were paid to the concert ensembles, groups that she may consider the artistic heart of the program. Nevertheless, the marching band commands more public attention than virtually any other segment of a school's academic curriculum. Admittedly, this sometimes results in music being seen as "un-academic," more closely related to the athletic programs it supports than the fine arts programs it represents.

There is no question that the marching band can take up an exorbitant amount of a

teacher's time and what some may consider a disproportionate amount of a school's or booster group's financial resources. But that is not to say it must. The difference between a band that begins its season a week before school opens and performs at four home football games, and one area festival, and a band that holds a three-week summer band camp, performs at four home football games, four away football games and eight major competitions in three states has nothing to do with marching band, per se, but the values of the director and, in turn, the expectations of the community. That is not to say that either of the above scenarios is inherently problematic. In either case, the prime considerations are whether the experience the students are having is in line with their educational needs and personal resources (including time, attention, and energy) and whether the activities of the marching band are in balance with the rest of the music program.

There is no single answer to the question of just what a marching band should be, how it should perform, what set of traditions it should follow. Some advocate giving greater attention to the marching band's sound than to its movement, in a sense presenting the marching band as a symphonic band on a field. Performances from recent Drum Corps International events featuring adaptations of symphonic wind literature may seem to support this depiction. Of course, when considering performances at this level, it would be a regrettable oversight not to acknowledge both the detailed complexity and precise execution of the drill. On the other hand, there are significant marching traditions in which energy and range of movement are the distinguishing variables among ensembles, traditions in which the distinction between sound and movement becomes essentially meaningless.

Exactly how a marching band relates to students' educational needs has been the

subject of some question. Marching bands have been criticized as offering little in the way of musicality. If, by musicality, one means nuanced performances of substantial works of aesthetic beauty and complexity, then perhaps there is some truth to this argument. But if one means performances that adhere to an agreed-upon array of stylistic expectations and that evoke an emotional, social or even physical response, then marching bands offer the possibility of a unique and highly musical experience. Marching bands are integral components of many social rituals including athletic events, holiday celebrations, civic festivals, and public ceremonies. They can personify a school's or community's identity. While these functions certainly fall under the category of service, they can also be viewed as opportunities for authentic music making.

<Insert Figure. Excellence is not specific to any one style. History has produced a variety of marching performance traditions.>

The Small Ensembles. Small instrumental ensembles range from chamber groups to jazz combos to percussion classes. These ensembles are flexible and mobile—the pep band or strolling strings, for example—and may also encompass a broader range of musical styles as in the case of fiddle groups and mariachi bands. While groups like these are often seen as existing on the outermost periphery of the instrumental program, a strong case can be made that the musical experiences they offer are unique and vital. Compared to the large ensembles that are, by nature, teacher-directed, the small groups provide students with opportunities for leadership, independence, and creativity. Decisions about repertoire, questions about interpretation, approaches to rehearsal, and even possibilities for performance venues may be addressed directly by the student

musicians themselves.

The small ensemble setting allows students to inhabit their own personalized and democratic musical world, a world in which they draw on their nascent expertise to exercise creative control. This is in stark contrast to the large ensemble world in which they are required to adopt and adapt to pre-ordained standards of style and practice, a world that seems almost "colonial" in contrast (Allsup 2002, 353). These sorts of experiences may be particularly meaningful not only for the students involved but for the teaching profession itself as the opportunity for leadership within the school programs has been found to exert a strong influence on the decision to become a music teacher.

Understanding the Instrumental Program

To describe the breadth of instrumental music in the schools only takes into account one plane of a rich, multidimensional reality. Perhaps more than any other aspect of school music, the instrumental program is a multi-layered hierarchy. Dense symphonic scores, complex field maneuvers, and lengthy open solo sections reveal a complex web of musical, institutional, and personal relationships.

At the broadest level are the ensembles, relating to each other in terms of both prestige and centrality. At different schools, different groups may carry the identity of "premier" ensemble. In one school, the senior orchestra may be the public face of the instrumental program with its own collection of commercial recordings, annual tours, and a dedicated website. At another school the marching band may fill this role with "Home of the Marching Such-and-such" emblazoned just under the school's name on the sign at the entrance to the campus. This hierarchy of prestige may create tension when the majority of attention is accorded a group other than one of the large concert ensembles.

At the next level, we find a pecking order within each of the ensemble streams. A

school's four jazz bands likely represent four distinct levels of seniority, achievement, or both. The Concert Band students are well aware that their group is not the Wind Ensemble. And where such organizations exist, it is rare that one would witness a parade in which the junior high marching band did not precede the high school marching band, usually by a considerable distance. Even in cases where there is only one school band or orchestra, students establish their own roles within the group by virtue of age (freshmen through seniors may take part in the same ensemble) and skill (every student can identify the best performers, no matter how much the teacher may downplay individual differences).

The existence of first, second and third parts on many instruments (continuing to fourth and fifth parts for some jazz pieces) contributes to a general "sorting out" within the various sections. There is even added luster to being the "first" second player rather than the second. Hierarchical roles are also institutionalized in the form of band or orchestra officers, section leaders, and, in the case of the marching band, drum majors, a reflection of that ensemble's military origins. Depending on how the director wishes to structure them, these positions may have a great deal or very little to do with seniority or performance prowess, perhaps instead reflecting leadership skills or overall dedication to the ensemble.

<Insert Figure. Instrumental ensembles feature many layers of student leadership.>

So, in the instrumental program, everyone seems to have his or her own place, an amalgam of several identities. One young musician may be horn section leader in the symphonic band, mellophone rank leader in the marching band, fourth trumpet in the jazz

band, and, as a reward for such commitment, music librarian. Alternatively, another student may only have played third clarinet in symphonic band for the duration of his high school years. This raises an interesting question, one that has been posited more than once to proponents of the traditional instrumental program—and one that deserves careful consideration. Why would one spend four years playing the third clarinet part? Should a student spend so much time in such a particular role? What benefit could that student possibly draw from his experience?

Perhaps the musical experience that students value is not one based on—or, at least, entirely based on—musical achievement. Consider that even after many years of participation in the band or the orchestra, students may not identify band or orchestra music as particularly interesting to them. Also consider that many students put their instruments away for good on high school graduation, even after exclaiming repeatedly that they love band or that orchestra is their favorite class. Perhaps some students place the highest value on the opportunity to *make* music rather than to *get better* at making music. Other students may find the social and personal identity that goes along with ensemble membership to be of the highest importance. For these students, ensemble membership may not be an experience that transcends time and place. It is an experience they have at a particular time and with particular people. They love band, but *this* band. Orchestra is their favorite class and they have taken it every time it has been offered, but now this class is over. Their value system may be quite different from that of a student who has chosen music as a profession, but it is no less valid. The quality of the broader ensemble experience requires every bit as much attention as the quality of the sounds that ensemble produces. That said, while it is important to understand why things are so, it is not necessary to assume there is no other option. It is still the responsibility of the

instrumental music teacher to guide each student toward a deeper level of musical understanding, a higher level of musical achievement and a more confident posture of musical independence.

Teaching the Instrumental Class

While many of the instructional strategies employed by the instrumental teacher are similar to those used by their choral and elementary counterparts, there are several unique aspects to teaching orchestra and band. The aspiring band or orchestra teacher must quickly and accurately transpose between keys and clefs. She must read and interpret visually dense musical scores, some containing twenty or more staves on each page. She must possess a fundamental understanding of and achieve at least a minimal proficiency on virtually every instrument. She even must appear both commanding and natural when conducting with a baton. These skills support and enrich the instrumental classroom, but are still only tools to help shape the ultimate outcomes.

At its heart, the study of an instrument is about the development of fine motor skills and a high level of aural discrimination. Movements produce sound. Depending on the quality, placement, and function of the sound, decisions are made about subsequent movements and sounds. The permutations of this process are infinite, covering every level of challenge and every musical style. For new instrumental teachers and music educators with less experience in the instrumental area, this limitless variety of technical demands can be intimidating. Even a look through the most basic beginning method book suggests that instrumental instruction is a relentless march through an ever-expanding collection of skills, amassed line by line, page after page. Nevertheless, all these skills, regardless of the level of the performer, are based on the fundamentals of tone and precision.

Consider Figure 9.2:

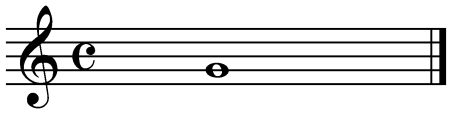

Figure 9.2. A simple instrumental task.

This may appear to be a very rudimentary performance task that one might expect to find on the early pages of a beginning trumpet, clarinet, or violin book. It would be easy to see this as a simple building block to be introduced, practiced, and quickly left behind on the way to more elaborate challenges. But within this small musical space can be found the fundamental components of outstanding performance. First, this task calls for 4 counts of a characteristic tone. Recall that a "characteristic" tone varies according to context. For beginners, a desirable tone is likely to conform to the standards of the concert tradition. A trumpet player on a marching field, a saxophonist in a jazz combo, or a fiddler in a bluegrass band may be working toward other sound concepts appropriate to their respective styles. Regardless of the performance style, tone production requires a combination of appropriate physical processes (embouchure, posture, finger placement, bow grip) and mechanical manipulation (reed placement, bow angle). Second, the correct placement of the tone in time necessitates precise onset and release of the sound. Within these two parameters can be added such stylistic refinements as the shape of the tone (phrasing, dynamics) and the style of the onset (articulation).

Now look at Figure 9.3:

Figure 9.3. A more complex instrumental task.

In its simplest form, this demonstrates the addition of technique, the movement of tone

and precision across musical time. Ideally, a significant portion of instructional time is spent isolating and refining some combination of these three issues: tone and precision followed by technique. While commonly known as the "warm-up," the portion of the band or orchestra class devoted to fundamental performance skills equips students with the tools necessary for sophisticated musical expression. Few teachers have ever felt they spent too much time on warm-ups.

As in any music teaching context, successful instruction is based on careful selection of materials—in this case, the literature to be studied. Literature allows students to embed fundamental skills within a meaningful context. The music found in the band or orchestra folder will include simple pieces that provide repeated practice of basic ensemble skills, pieces that push students' technical skills to higher levels, pieces that introduce students to the core repertoire of the different ensemble traditions, pieces that stretch students' knowledge of musical form and structure, and pieces that expand students' experience of the musical world around them. When chosen well, literature presents challenges, the nature of each varying from piece to piece. And of course, literature should also be great fun to play. Students want to make music and little is more rewarding than making music well.

In addition to all the attention given to performance proficiency, the teaching of instrumental music is also about teaching musical literacy. The beginning student may have already spent five or more years in elementary music classes where he learned about clefs, time signatures, rhythms, and note names. Elementary students can be very sophisticated in both their musical understanding and their musical behavior. But all that knowledge can seem to vanish in an instant when he is handed a violin. For the band and orchestra teacher, teaching students how to transfer knowledge is as important as

teaching new information and skills.

While the skill of accurately translating printed notation into sound is critically important for the band or orchestra student, it does not diminish the value of translating musical ideas into sound without the use of an intervening symbol system. For most students, the love of making music came from a young lifetime of experimenting with, manipulating, and enjoying sound rather than notes and rests. Despite the strong emphasis given to music reading in the instrumental class—a student's first day with an instrument may often mean studying line 1 in the method book—it is equally critical that students develop an expressive mastery that does not rely on the printed page. Instrumental performance skills allow students access to a broad sonic palate with which they can construct their own melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas as well as re-create those of others. Rote learning, imitation, and improvisation should feature prominently in the young instrumentalist's learning experience. Literacy skills allow the young musician to understand in a symbolic way ideas first formed in memory and imagination.

Among older students, literacy evolves into fluency by moving beyond the interpretation of note names and rhythm patterns. For these students, concert literature can be not only a vehicle for performance but also a means of exploring historical styles, cultural traditions, and variations of form, timbre, and harmonic language. It can be a model on which to base one's own musical creations and a target toward which one can aim evaluative and critical skills. To support the development of musically knowledgeable young people, performance-based courses cannot focus solely on the preparation of performances. After all, documents such as the National Standards describe music as a diverse and comprehensive learning experience. The Standards and other curricular guidelines like them should not be checked at the rehearsal room door.

Thus we see the structure of the instrumental class take shape: focused attention on the fundamental skills of tone, precision, and technique followed by application of these skills to challenging literature, all infused with opportunities for exploration of formal and contextual knowledge.

A Unique and Varied Place

In a number of nations throughout the world instrumental instruction holds a prominent and multifaceted place in the school music curriculum. Instrumental music in schools takes many forms, from a flute duet to a marching band, from a jazz combo to a symphony orchestra. By learning an instrument, a young person is able to make music in a new way; he is learning a unique set of skills in which a mechanical object is manipulated toward artistic and expressive ends. He is also joining a family of traditions that stretches far back into history and reaches every corner of the world.

By becoming an instrumentalist a young person adds a new dimension to his musical experience. But it also places him in a unique musical culture, one inhabited by generations of past and future band and orchestra members. Instrumental ensembles have been a major feature on the school landscape for over a century and their continued popularity, prevalence, and level of achievement suggest that the experiences they offer—musical, social, and cultural—retain a valuable function in the musical world of our society.

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Resources

Casey, Joseph L. (1993). *Teaching Techniques and Insights for Instrumental Music Educators*. Chicago: GIA Publications.

A compendium of thoughts and opinions offered by some of the most renowned teachers of instrumental music. Full of ideas, personalities, and conflicting points of view, this book is a stimulating collection of "best practice" tips organized by topic area.

Colwell, Richard J. and Thomas Goolsby. (2002). *The Teaching of Instrumental Music*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

A comprehensive resource covering every aspect of instrumental teaching including administration, rehearsal techniques, and instrument pedagogy. This is one of the very few books to focus on both band and orchestra in the same volume.

Miles, Richard, ed. (1997). *Teaching Music through Performance in Band*. Chicago: GIA

Publications.

A multi-volume series featuring essays on instrumental music teaching and detailed performance analyses of significant ensemble literature. All difficulty levels are included and separate volumes are available for beginning band, orchestra, and the teaching of marches.

Parncutt, Richard and Gary E. McPherson, eds. (2002). *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Each chapter of this book presents a review of pertinent research literature on a selected aspect of performance and applies findings to the music teaching context. Included are chapters addressing performance anxiety, sight-reading, practice, and conducting.

Small, Christopher. (1998). *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

A careful examination of the broad and social nature of the music as demonstrated through the example of a symphony orchestra concert. Applicable across styles and traditions, Small's ideas provide a thought-provoking framework for understanding the musical ensemble experience.