

Beginning Band Instruction: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Class Method Books

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In beginning band classes, whether by design or out of necessity, instrumentalists are taught in heterogeneous groupings with the class method book functioning as the basic course of music study. In essence, the method book may constitute the beginning band curriculum. Given this position of prominence, it seems paramount that instrumental music teachers be aware of musical and pedagogical issues that may provide bases on which to make decisions regarding method book selection. Making informed choices is critical in any endeavor, especially one that represents a fundamental approach to music learning.

"Evaluation and selection of a method book are but first steps in an instructional process, the success of which may not depend so much on choice of materials as it does on the ability of the music teacher to teach."

The abundant supply of method books currently in publication can be somewhat daunting with respect to making informed decisions. Having many texts to choose from is beneficial only when one has a functional knowledge of each which from a practical standpoint may seem impossible. What primary concerns should one have in choosing from among these many options? Are there fundamental differences among band method books or are they basically the same? What instructional approach(es) will be most beneficial to young, developing musicians and consistent with teacher value orientations? How can one use extant research literature to become more familiar with various class methods? Some partial answers may be gleaned from the efforts of researchers in this area.

A summary of beginning band research (Ramsey, 1978) and synopses of class method books from authors' viewpoints (Warrick, 1987a&b; Warrick, 1988a&b) should prove helpful to practitioners interested in obtaining information and staying current regarding recent developments in

research and method books. Doctoral dissertations have addressed beginning band subject matter by investigating method books with respect to the theories of Jean Piaget (Kress, 1981) and in historical and analytical perspectives (Texter, 1975). Other research concerns have focused on application of comprehensive musicianship (Whitener, 1982) and individualization of instruction in the beginning band class (Froseth, 1971).

The purpose of the present investigation was to analyze nine selected beginning band method books published since 1974. The initial book in each series was selected for study. Texts with corresponding author/s, publisher, and year of publication are listed below:

- Alfred's Basic Band Method* by Feldstein and O'Reilly. Alfred Publishing Company, 1977.
- Band Encounters* by Swearingen and Buehlman. The Heritage Music Press, 1984.
- Band Today* by Ployhar. Belwin-Mills Publishing Company, 1977.
- Belwin Comprehensive Band Method* by Erickson. Belwin-Mills Publishing Company, 1988.
- Best In Class* by Pearson. Kjos West Publisher, 1982.
- Division of Beat* by Haines and McEntyre. Southern Music Company, 1981.
- Listen, Move, Sing, Play* by Froseth. G.I.A. Publications, 1984.
- Sessions In Sound* by Buehlman and Whitcomb. The Heritage Music Press, 1976.
- Ed Sueta Band Method* by Sueta. Macie Publishing Company, 1974.

Four general areas were examined - tonal content (melodic and harmonic material), rhythmic content, physical features, and selected individual instrument considerations. For consistency, analyses of tonal and rhythmic content, and physical features were

based on the clarinet book from each method. Where possible, specific features and musical issues were isolated and quantified for the purposes of analysis and comparison. In addition, results were examined for relationships to existing empirical research regarding beginning instrumentalists.

Tonal Content

Tonal content was analyzed with respect to use of melodies, familiar tunes, tonalities, vocalization activities, duets, rounds and harmonizations. Exercises were counted and percentages were computed based on the following criteria: melodic material, to be considered as such, must consist of at least one pitch and two measures; an exercise with a key center, to be considered as such, must consist of at least three pitches; vocalization must be intended for tonal development as contrasted with rhythmic chanting; and duets, rounds, and harmonizations, analyzed together as one entity, were counted according to number of parts and/or divisi (e.g., one duet would be counted as two exercises, under the assumption each student would perform both parts).

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It seems logical to assume that one may begin to draw some conclusions regarding authors' teaching philosophies and preferences (or perhaps "what sells") upon systematic analysis of tonal content, specifically familiar tunes and melodic exercises. Familiar tunes seem to provide a means to sustain student interest and insure exposure to phrasing and a variety of musical styles. Examination of Table 1 reveals that those texts which evidenced the lowest percentages of familiar tunes (*Alfred's Basic Band Method*; *Belwin Comprehensive Band*

Method; Listen, Move, Sing, Play) seem to compensate to some degree by including a substantial number of harmonizations, duets, and/or rounds. Variation among the other methods with respect to familiar tunes is relatively small. As one would expect, melodic exercise percentages are lower in cases where authors (*Alfred's Basic Band Method; Listen, Move, Sing, Play, Ed Sueta Band Method*) chose to isolate rhythm by employing rhythm-only exercises (see Table 2).

Research has identified training involving tonal patterns as an effective means of developing sight reading abilities and auditory-visual discrimination skills among young instrumentalists (MacKnight, 1975). The design of *Listen, Move, Sing, Play* is such that new material is introduced via this type of patterned approach. The traditional method of single-note presentations (fingering and location on staff) which exists outside the context of "real" music is avoided in favor of introduction and development of two-measure note patterns extracted from lesson material. The concepts of major and minor also are illustrated in this patterned approach, and this may reflect literature that has been critical of methods which employ a definitions-only approach to teach concepts such as these (Grutzmacher, 1987).

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The mere presence of minor keys in sufficient supply may function to establish a contrast with major tonality (or the reverse) and, as a consequence, enhance learning. This premise is consistent with research on contrasting (positive and negative) examples in concept learning (Haack, 1972; Jetter, 1978).

The data in Table 1 seem to raise questions concerning method books that to a large extent ignore minor keys. The results of the present investigation reveal a need for primary texts which give students opportunities to experience directly minor tonality through performance. *Sessions In Sound* and *Listen, Move, Sing, Play* were the only texts in which melodic content included minor tonality in excess of 10%, with *Belwin Comprehensive Band Method* being the only other one above 5%.

Research findings have indicated that vocalization may be an important factor in the development of sense of pitch in beginning instrumentalists (Elliott, 1974). Sing-

ing is a prominent feature in *Listen, Move, Sing, Play* as students vocally imitate the instructor's melodic model as a preamble to instrumental performance. Also included here are vocal texts for many exercises. Singing is encouraged on several occasions in *Band Encounters*, while it is conspicuous by its absence in the other methods reviewed.

Rhythmic Content

Rhythmic content was analyzed with respect to rhythm-only exercises and those which contained eighth notes, dotted quarter note/eighth notes, triplets, and sixteenth notes (analyzed separately). Rhythm-only etudes were considered as such if they promoted various forms of rhythm response (chanting, clapping, tapping, counting out loud) and did not, in any way, involve pitch. Exercises, consisting of the above-mentioned note values or rhythms, to be considered as such, were those that contained at least one example of the designated note value or rhythm. In addition, percentages were computed with respect to meters used.

Isolation of rhythm is a salient feature in *Alfred's Basic Band Method; Division of Beat; Listen, Move, Sing, Play; and Ed Sueta Band Method*. Table 2 illustrates percentages of rhythm-only exercises and utilization of vocal chanting and rhythmic movement (clapping, lap patting). *Division of Beat* employs the Eastman System of counting (1 ta te ta and 1 ta lah ta lee ta for consecutive sixteenth notes in 4/4 and 3/8 time, respectively) and *Listen, Move, Sing, Play* utilizes the Gordon System (Duta Deta and Duta Data Deta for consecutive sixteenth notes in 4/4 and 3/8 time, respectively). Both *Alfred's Basic Band Method* and *Ed Sueta Band Method* reinforce syllables which simulate instrumental articulation (tah; and too, ta, t respectively) in rhythm-only tasks. Isolation of rhythm, which in practical application represents the practice technique of taking the technique (rhythm) out of the music, is supported by empirical evidence which suggests that simultaneous presentation of melody and rhythm may inhibit some students' ability to attend to rhythm (Sink, 1983).

The effectiveness of various rhythm reading methodologies has been examined in research literature (Bebeau, 1982; Colley, 1987). Results have shown that a non-mathematical, syllabic approach may be at least as effective as the traditional method which relies on recitation of numbers, and the careful consideration of all available

information is certainly warranted. In the present investigation, the Gordon System, mentioned above, avoids a numbers approach to rhythm reading. *Ed Sueta Band Method* recommends a shift in emphasis from syllables to numbers as students mature. *Division of Beat* employs the breath impulse method, a practice technique by which controlled thrusts of air, directed into the instrument, audibly subdivide the beat. This system has been found to improve rhythm performance (Middleton, 1974).

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There is an expressed concern by the authors of *Ed Sueta Band Method* and *Listen, Move, Sing, Play* that a patterned approach be stressed in rhythmic development. This is evidenced by the sequenced treatment and reinforcement of eighth note groups in the former text and vertical reading (an exercise developed to train the eye in reading groups of notes) of rhythm exercises in the latter text. *Best In Class* and *Division of Beat* also contain systematic development of eighth note patterns. This tendency away from a note by note approach to the teaching/learning of rhythm reading is supported by research which suggests that a focus of attention on note groupings actually may be impeded by barlines (Byo, 1988), and that students' perception of rhythmic completeness (probable resolution) and incompleteness (improbable resolution) may be influenced by melodic context (Boisen, 1981). Indeed, a longer-line approach to music reading might be more fruitful. Of the texts reviewed, emphasis on more advanced rhythms in *Ed Sueta Band Method* (sixteenth notes, triplets, and double the number of eighth note exercises compared to the other texts) and *Division of Beat* (sixteenth notes, triplets, and triple meters) is contrasted by the slower pace (fewer eighth note and dotted quarter/eighth note exercises) in *Belwin Comprehensive Band Method, Band Encounters*, and *Sessions In Sound*. Regarding meter, contrast among texts is evident in a number of instances. For example, 16% of the material in *Division of Beat* is in 3/8, 6/8, and 9/8 time while *Listen, Move, Sing, Play* uses only 2/4 time; *Band Today* and *Division of Beat* are the only texts to introduce cut time; and *Band Encounters* (5%) and *Sessions In Sound* (9%) are the only texts to use 5/4, 6/4, and 7/4 time signatures.

This wide range of rhythm and meter coverage seems to make provisions for differences inherent among various beginning band programs. One would expect the selection of a particular approach to rhythm development to hinge on factors such as age and musical sophistication of students, in addition to lesson frequency and time per week and class size. Fourth grade beginners may benefit most from a slower-paced approach while 7th and 8th grade beginners, or those with previous musical experience, may require the challenge of more complex rhythms and meters.

Harmonization, Duets, and Rounds

The rationale for combining harmonizations, duets, and rounds into one category in Table 1 was the inherent relationship of all three to development of musical independence, both melodic and rhythmic. Thus rhythm-only rounds were included in this count. The high percentage (83%) for *Belwin Comprehensive Band Method* was the result of inclusion of a large portion of full band arrangements. This is consistent with the expressed intention of developing a text which includes performance of full band arrangements during the first year of instrumental study. As one would expect, a higher percentage of harmonizations, duets, and rounds implies a lower percentage of exercises that are in unison or octaves. In beginning band instruction, there is undoubtedly a need for vicarious learning promoted by unison playing. Young brass players, especially in early stages of musical development, would have difficulty finding pitches if this were not the case; however, there is also an obvious need for musical activity which encourages independent performance. Sometimes the opportunity for small ensemble playing is provided not in the initial book of a series but in supplementary methods and materials (which require additional purchases); in other instances the instructor can rely on the initial method book to offer a balance between unison exercises and those that promote independence.

Physical Features and Other Content Areas

Physical features and other content areas were examined in order to answer questions concerning the appearance of lesson pages, the clarity of fingering charts and photography, quality of text in the student book and

teacher's manual, isolation of new materials, availability of supplementary material, and inclusion of various instructional considerations (see Table 3). The chance that visual clutter in the layout of a method book may be intimidating to young musicians is a concern of the instrumental instructor. It is unfortunate that oftentimes this cluttered appearance seems to be a result of attempts to provide helpful, written explanations and reminders.

In addressing the issue of clutter, a number of factors can be considered. How much information should the book provide? How much information should be expected of the instructor alone? How many times per week does the instrumental class meet - one or several? Indeed, a class that receives music instruction every day of the week may not need as much academic information built into the text. Alternatively, there may be a compromise in the form of added clutter. Uncluttered appearances were offered in *Band Encounters*, *Belwin Complete Band Method*, *Sessions In Sound*, and *Ed Sueta Band Method*.

Individual Instrument - Selected Considerations

Table 4 illustrates matters of instrumental range, percussion coverage, and clarinet technique. Ranges encompass notes which must be performed in order to successfully negotiate all musical material contained in text. This does not necessarily correspond to the range represented by comprehensive fingering charts. Percussion books were examined for coverage of melodic instruments, and clarinet analysis concerned the register break.

Crossing the break is generally acknowledged as one of the major obstacles confronting the young clarinetist. The manner in which this technique is approached, developed, and reinforced in class methods is worthy of careful consideration. With one exception, all texts reviewed in the present study included clarion register coverage. The number of exercises involving this register ranged from a high of 135 (*Ed Sueta Band Method*) to a low of 9 (*Alfred's Basic Band Method*).

That students have ample experience with right hand (chalumeau) exercises prior to introduction of the clarion register seems important. In this respect, results indicated *Best In Class* (34) and *Ed Sueta Band Method* (9) were at opposite ends. The category indicating number of examples which actually cross the break enables one to consider

the number of exercises that stay above the break entirely. These figures may reveal to some extent the degree to which authors have been meticulous in approaching this aspect of clarinet study. For example, despite a comparatively early introduction of the clarion register and little apparent right hand preparation, *Ed Sueta Band Method* stays above the break (no crossing) in 73 exercises. This would seem to allow time for students to become more at ease with clarion register playing before, or in combination with, development of the crossing technique.

Summary

From this overall analysis, one can begin to see trends — some subtle, some obvious — concerning instructional value orientations evident in the approaches of various authors. It seems appropriate that evaluation and selection of band method books should hinge on the degree to which the philosophies and preferences reflected in the method are compatible with those of the instructor. Of course, this requires the instructor to have clearly defined personal philosophy and preferences, and knowledge of "what's out there". It seems that the unfortunate alternative is to draw conclusions based on vague feelings and only cursory observations.

The method book used should provide the appropriate vehicle for the teacher who selected it. It is perhaps accurate to assume that the class method book which will satisfy the needs of every instructor is yet to be written. Nonetheless, the beginning band director who weighs the strengths, weaknesses, and unique qualities of the many available texts with a regard to personal philosophies and preferences should be left with a number of viable options. However, in the end, evaluation and selection of a method book are but first steps in an instructional process, the success of which may not depend so much on choice of materials as it does on the ability of the music teacher to teach.

Table 1
Percentage Tonal Content

	Alfred's BBM	Band Enc.	Band Today	Belwin CBM	Best In Class	Division of Beat	Listen, Move	Sessions in Sound	Ed Sueta Band Met.
TOTAL NUMBER OF EXERCISES	186	149	212	95	168	201	229	113	422
MELODIC EXERCISES	.77	1.00	1.00	1.00	.96	.86	.78	1.00	.76
FAMILIAR TUNES*	.14	.29	.24	.14	.34	.23	.00	.26	.25
HARMONIZATIONS, DUETS, ROUNDS**	.37	.08	.25	.83	.27	.22	.29	.09	.01
KEY OF C MAJOR	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.03
F MAJOR	.10	.11	.07	.21	.09	.06	.00	.05	.08
B-FLAT MAJOR	.43	.38	.38	.34	.49	.27	.31	.25	.27
E-FLAT MAJOR	.40	.40	.40	.25	.30	.34	.18	.31	.20
A-FLAT MAJOR	.01	.04	.04	.03	.02	.03	.00	.10	.06
D-FLAT MAJOR	.00	.00	.01	.00	.01	.05	.00	.02	.02
G MAJOR	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.04
MINOR KEYS	.04	.01	.03	.08	.03	.02	.12	.12	.01
NON-KEYED EXERCISES	.02	.06	.08	.09	.06	.23	.39	.15	.28
TONAL VOCALIZATIONS (USE OF)	NO	SOME	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

* Based on number of MELODIC EXERCISES

** Based on TOTAL NUMBER OF EXERCISES

Table 2
Rhythmic Content

	Alfred's BBM	Band Enc.	Band Today	Belwin CBM	Best In Class	Division of Beat	Listen, Move	Sessions in Sound	Ed Sueta Band Met.
RHYTHM-ONLY EXER. (percentages)	.23	.00	.00	.00	.04	.14	.22	.00	.24
FIRST LESSON PAGE	P. 4	P. 6	P. 6	P. 26	P. 4	P. 4	P. 7	P. 7	P. 3
INTRODUCT. - WHOLE NOTE	P. 5	P. 6	P. 6	P. 26	P. 4	P. 5	P. 7	P. 7	P. 3
DOTTED HALF NOTE	P. 18	P. 11	P. 8	P. 29	P. 12	P. 9	NO	P. 11	P. 9
HALF NOTE	P. 10	P. 7	P. 7	P. 27	P. 8	P. 7	P. 11	P. 8	P. 5
QUARTER NOTE	P. 5	P. 8	P. 8	P. 26	P. 7	P. 6	P. 10	P. 9	P. 6
EIGHTH NOTE	P. 14	P. 19	P. 21	NO	P. 11	P. 9	P. 28	P. 19	P. 16
DOTTED QUARTER/ EIGHTH	P. 24	P. 22	NO	NO	P. 18	P. 12	NO	P. 23	P. 23
TRIPLETS	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	P. 22	NO	NO	P. 29
SIXTEENTH NOTES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	P. 26	NO	NO	P. 27
NO. OF EIGHTH NOTE EXERCISES	91	31	34	NO	69	74	49	28	146
NO. OF DOTTED QUARTER/ EIGHTH EXERCISES	21	12	NO	NO	15	15	NO	13	54
TIME SIGNATURES									
4/4	.66	.62	.70	.82	.83	.37	.00	.61	.80
3/4	.17	.14	.12	.13	.12	.15	.00	.15	.12
2/4	.17	.16	.13	.05	.05	.22	.52	.12	.06
5/4, 6/4, 7/4	.00	.05	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.09	.00
CUT TIME	.00	.00	.14	.00	.00	.09	.00	.00	.00
3/8, 6/8, 9/8	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.16	.00	.00	.00
RHYTHMIC CHANT/SYLLABLES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES
NUMBER SYSTEM	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
FOOT TAP	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
OTHER RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES

Table 3
Physical Features/Other Content Areas

	Alfred's BBM	Band Enc.	Band Today	Belwin CBM	Best In Class	Division of Beat	Listen, Move	Sessions in Sound	Ed Sueta Band Met.
TOTAL PAGES	32	32	32	40	34	34	33	32	41
TOTAL LESSON PAGES	28	22	24	14*	29	29	27	22	38
VISUAL CLUTTER	SOME	NO	YES	NO	YES	SOME	YES	NO	NO
CLEAR FINGERING CHARTS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CLEAR EMBOUCHURE PHOTOG.	YES	YES	NO	NO	NONE	NO	YES	YES	NONE
INSTRUCT'L. TXT-STUDENT BK.	GOOD	GOOD	OK	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
INSTRUCT'L. TXT-TEACHERS MANUAL	OK	OK	OK	V GOOD	V GOOD	OK	V GOOD	OK	GOOD
ISOLATION OF NEW MATERIAL	OK	V GOOD	OK	GOOD	V GOOD	OK	OK	V GOOD	GOOD
TERMS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

* In Part 2 (heterogeneous section)
only of Book I

Table 4
Individual Instruments - Selected Considerations

	Alfred's BBM	Band Enc.	Band Today	Belwin CBM	Best In Class	Division of Beat	Listen, Move	Sessions in Sound	Ed Sueta Band Met.
FLUTE RANGE	d1-d3	e ^b 1-d3	e ^b 1-e ^b 3	g1-c3	e ^b 1-d3	a ^b 1-f3	a1-b ^b 2	a ^b 1-e ^b 3	e ^b 1-f3
CLARINET RANGE	e-g2	e-g2	e-a2	e-g2	e-g2	e-a2	f-g1	e-g2	e-c3
ALTO SAXOPHONE RANGE	e1-c3	f1-c3	c1-c3	g1-a2	c1-a2	f [#] 1-c [#] 3	g1-g2	e1-a2	c1-c3
HORN RANGE	g-e ^b 2	b ^b -f2	f-e ^b 2	b ^b -c2	f-d2	f-e ^b 2	a-c2	a ^b -e ^b 2	g-f2
TRUMPET RANGE	a-e2	b ^b -f2	b ^b -f2	b-c2	b ^b -d2	b ^b -g2	b-c2	b ^b -f2	g-g2
TROMBONE RANGE	B-d1	A ^b -e ^b 1	A ^b -e ^b 1	A-b ^b	A ^b -c1	A ^b -c1	A-b ^b	A ^b -e ^b 1	G-f1
INTROD. OF CLARION REGISTER (PG)	26	21	19	31	21	17	no	20	12
NO. OF R.H. PREP. EXERCISES	24	29	18	15	34	22	47	22	9
NO. EXER. INVOLVING CLARION	9	27	50	18	49	49	NO	29	135
NO. EXER. WHICH CROSS BREAK	2	24	39	7	46	45	NO	25	52
PERCUSSION COVERAGE (Mallet)	NO	YES*	YES*	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES*	YES*

* Included in separate percussion books

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