

## Preparing a Band for *Festival Competition*

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“If the judges cannot find anything wrong with a performance, then they have no choice but to give a band the top rating.” It is a philosophy that stresses the importance of attending to every detail no matter how small, and one that has resulted in plenty of Division I ratings.

The following checklists will help band directors who have experienced problems in coaching their bands to the top festival competition level, as well as those who are new to the field. If all the statements can be checked off, the chances of a band receiving a Division I rating will be greatly enhanced.

### Selecting Festival Music

- \_\_\_ You attended at least two reading clinics in the past year.
- \_\_\_ You heard recordings of the selections you are considering.
- \_\_\_ The selections are in contrasting styles.
- \_\_\_ The selections will challenge students but not discourage them.
- \_\_\_ The music fits the strengths and weaknesses of all sections.
- \_\_\_ You and the band like the music.
- \_\_\_ You have alternate selections available in case your first choices don't meet your expectations.
- \_\_\_ The music fits the allotted festival time limits.
- \_\_\_ You discussed possible choices of music with top band directors you know.
- \_\_\_ A full score is published for all selections.
- \_\_\_ You considered all music, even transcriptions.
- \_\_\_ You have not chosen music just because everyone is playing it.
- \_\_\_ You made an effort to hear the music you are considering played by outstanding bands in your area.

### Preparing the Music

- \_\_\_ You have checked your conducting technique (cuing, beat, etc.)

- \_\_\_ The band is tuned frequently with an electronic tuner.
- \_\_\_ The band does breathing exercises.
- \_\_\_ Recordings of the festival selections are played for the entire band.
- \_\_\_ You have brought in a clinician several weeks before the festival to hear your work, personally conduct the band, and write criticisms of the band.
- \_\_\_ You have paced the presentation of festival numbers so they will not become worn out and you still have time to prepare them.
- \_\_\_ Sectional rehearsals have been held.
- \_\_\_ Each band member can play his or her part accurately and musically.
- \_\_\_ Parts are balanced within sections and with the rest of the band.
- \_\_\_ You are striving for professional quality tone throughout the band, especially in solo and small ensemble passages.
- \_\_\_ You have checked for rhythmic errors.
- \_\_\_ Dynamic marks are being observed.
- \_\_\_ Players are articulating properly.
- \_\_\_ Releases are being executed at the proper time.
- \_\_\_ You know what to do when the band plays out of tune even though you have tuned each instrument accurately with an electronic tuner.
- \_\_\_ You are aware of the unique physical characteristics of each instrument in the band, and are using this knowledge to enhance tone quality, intonation, and finger facility.
- \_\_\_ You are aware of players' posture, embouchure, instrument placement, and hand position.
- \_\_\_ Players are using the best available instruments. The metronome is used to check tempos regularly.
- \_\_\_ You have checked the meanings of foreign words in the score that are not commonly used. They may affect your interpretation.
- \_\_\_ You have stressed knowledge over enthusiasm and excitement.
- \_\_\_ You have insisted on musical accuracy and musicality rather than letting things slip by.

### Checklist for the Woodwind Section

- \_\_\_ Instruments are in perfect mechanical adjustment, and are clean and polished inside and out.
- \_\_\_ Players who need to use vibrato are capable of producing it, and know when to use it.
- \_\_\_ Desirable trill and alternate fingerings are being used.

#### *Flute and Piccolo*

- \_\_\_ The head joint cork is properly spaced.

#### *Oboe and Bassoon*

- \_\_\_ The best reeds available are being used.
- \_\_\_ All players have at least four good reeds and they know how to adjust reeds.
- \_\_\_ Bassoon bocals are clean inside.
- \_\_\_ The whisper key hole is open on all bassoons.
- \_\_\_ The bassoon bocal being used produces the best intonation, and players have bocals available in different lengths.
- \_\_\_ Bassoon players are aware of the seat strap as well as the neck strap.
- \_\_\_ Bassoon players can play in the tenor clef.

#### *Clarinet and Saxophone*

- \_\_\_ Instruments are equipped with top-quality stick rubber mouthpieces selected with the advice of top clarinet teachers or players in the area as to lay and interior shape.
- \_\_\_ The best ligatures available are being used and players know how to tighten the screws of a ligature properly.
- \_\_\_ The best French cane reeds available are being used, and reeds are of optimum strengths.
- \_\_\_ Each player has at least six good reeds available.
- \_\_\_ Bass clarinet players use the floor peg.
- \_\_\_ Saxophone players' neck straps are adjusted properly.

### Checklist for the Brass Section

- \_\_\_ Instruments have been cleaned and polished inside and out, slides lubricated and valves oiled.
- \_\_\_ Springs, water keys, bumper corks, rotary valves, rotary valve strings, etc. are in perfect mechanical adjustment.
- \_\_\_ Instruments with unsightly dents or distracting finishes have been eliminated if possible.
- \_\_\_ Valve, tuning, and playing slides are easily movable, lubricated, and dent-free.
- \_\_\_ The best mouthpieces are being used, selected with the advice from several top teachers or performers in the area.
- \_\_\_ Faulty pitch resulting from built-in acoustical problems has been corrected.
- \_\_\_ Mutes in good condition are available.
- \_\_\_ Players can double and triple tongue.

- \_\_\_ Range has been developed to handle more demanding selections.
- \_\_\_ Mouthpiece stems are without dents.
- \_\_\_ Mouthpiece backbores are clean.

#### *Trumpet and Horn*

- \_\_\_ Valve slides have been tuned with a tuner.
- \_\_\_ Horn players know how to play muted and stopped parts.
- \_\_\_ Proper right hand positions are being used by horn players.
- \_\_\_ Horn players understand how to alter pitch with the right hand.
- \_\_\_ Horn players know how to transpose.
- \_\_\_ Horn players know which slide is the tuning slide.

#### *Trombone, Baritone, and Tuba*

- \_\_\_ Trombone players understand why some positions are adjusted in order to be in tune (high G should be played sharp).
- \_\_\_ Trombone players know methods for avoiding smears.
- \_\_\_ Trombone players can legato tongue.
- \_\_\_ Trombone players can play in tenor clef.
- \_\_\_ Trombone players have been encouraged to purchase a trombone with an F attachment, and they know when and how to use it.
- \_\_\_ Tuba and baritone players with four valve instruments know when and how to use the fourth valve.

### Checklist for the Percussion Section

- \_\_\_ All heads are new and fresh.
- \_\_\_ Proper sticks are being used, and proper sticking technique has been decided and is being followed.
- \_\_\_ Players are standing erect and facing the conductor.

#### *Snare Drum*

- \_\_\_ The pitches of all batter heads are the same.
- \_\_\_ Pitches of all snare heads are the same, and the strands of snappy snares touch the drums evenly.
- \_\_\_ The pitch at each tuning screw is the same.
- \_\_\_ Drummers use matched sticks.
- \_\_\_ Stick sizes are right for concert performance.
- \_\_\_ Drummers are using buzz rolls for long rolled parts in selections where they should be used.
- \_\_\_ Drums have been checked for excessive muting.
- \_\_\_ Drummers are beating at the most desirable spot on the drum.
- \_\_\_ Drummers are playing lightly and not covering the band.
- \_\_\_ Drummers are getting the sticks away from the head quickly.
- \_\_\_ Drums are at the proper height.



### *Bass Drum*

- \_\_\_ The bass drum is tuned properly and the pitch at each tuning screw is the same.
- \_\_\_ The bass drum is large enough for the band.
- \_\_\_ The drummer is striking the drum in a light manner midway between center and top.
- \_\_\_ A new lamb's wool beater is being used.

### *Cymbals*

- \_\_\_ Players are using proper hand positions, and they are striking the cymbals together at the correct spot and with the proper motion.
- \_\_\_ Cymbal players know when to double cymbal parts with the bass drum part.
- \_\_\_ Crash cymbal parts are played with proper motion.
- \_\_\_ Pads are new and clean, and straps are new and laced properly.
- \_\_\_ Cymbals are clean and polished, and have been checked for cracks.
- \_\_\_ Cymbals of optimum size and thickness are being used.

### *Suspended Cymbal*

- \_\_\_ The cymbal is large enough for the band.
- \_\_\_ The player is beating the cymbal at the proper spots on the instrument.
- \_\_\_ The single stroke roll is being used for sustained sounds.
- \_\_\_ The cymbal is at the most desirable height.

### *Timpani*

- \_\_\_ Fresh heads are being used.
- \_\_\_ Enough timpani are available to play the part.
- \_\_\_ Timpani are tuned so the same pitch is heard when striking the timpani at each head screw.
- \_\_\_ New, clean-looking sticks are being used.
- \_\_\_ The brake on each drum is properly adjusted.
- \_\_\_ The timpani player is able to make pitch changes quickly and accurately.
- \_\_\_ The player has a pitch pipe for tuning.
- \_\_\_ The player is using the best hand positions.
- \_\_\_ Rolls are played fast enough and with good technique.
- \_\_\_ The sticks quickly rebound from the head.
- \_\_\_ All dents have been removed from the timpani.

### *Mallet Percussion*

- \_\_\_ Beaters are rebounding quickly.
- \_\_\_ All percussion players can do multiple mallet work.
- \_\_\_ Brass bell beaters are being used.
- \_\_\_ The motor on the vibes is turning at optimum speed, and the damper is working properly.
- \_\_\_ Parts are being played in proper octaves.
- \_\_\_ Bearings on moving shafts on the vibes have been oiled.
- \_\_\_ Belts on the vibes are in good condition, and

spare belts are available.

- \_\_\_ The dampers on the chimes work properly and players know how to use them.
- \_\_\_ All chime tubes vibrate freely.
- \_\_\_ Hammers rebound quickly from the chimes.
- \_\_\_ All chime tubes are securely fastened to the instrument.

### *Miscellaneous Percussion*

- \_\_\_ All the needed miscellaneous instruments are available.
- \_\_\_ The tambourine is tuned.
- \_\_\_ The tambourine is struck with the fingers and not beat on the hip.
- \_\_\_ The players use a thumb roll on the tambourine, or, if another roll is used, the players can perform it at a fast speed.
- \_\_\_ Claves are held so the hand holding the lower clave forms a resonating cavity.
- \_\_\_ The maracas have a crisp sound.

### **Checklist for the Day of the Festival**

- \_\_\_ You have allowed plenty of time for travel and warm-up.
- \_\_\_ You have made an effort to keep band members calm and collected.
- \_\_\_ If you plan to announce the names and composers of the festival selections, you can properly pronounce foreign titles and names.
- \_\_\_ You have enough full scores, properly numbered, for all the judges.
- \_\_\_ All band members look neat and are properly uniformed.



photo by Kirby Fong