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**Monday Morning Strategies:
Practical Suggestions for Improving Your Orchestra
Mark Laycock, clinician**

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“There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable it is, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.”

--Agnes de Mille, writing to Martha Graham, quoted in *Dance to the Piper and Promenade Home* (1982)

Nurture your bass section

Develop bass players with musical sensitivity, keen ears, and an awareness of their vital role within the ensemble.

- regularly tune separately
- direct student listening downward
- emphasize leadership role: pitch and time
- balanced octaves with cellos
- feeder program pipeline; students with aural skills
- bring in a bass clinician

Teach respect for printed page

Players must recognize, respond to the composer's every marking.

- composer's intent
- sensitivity to all aspects of notation: dynamics, articulation, tempo changes
- may also heighten response to notes, rhythms
- training for future growth
- teach students notation basics
- foreign language learning: reading, speaking, writing

Promote compositional awareness

Guide students in understanding the compositional process.

- dynamic inventory
- textural priorities
- phrase length
- style
- relate to literature previously performed

Go beyond written notes

At age-appropriate levels, students should learn to incorporate musical instincts, previous experiences in bringing to life the composer's notation.

- notation as starting point
- phrase shape

- follow melodic contour
- dynamic support from accompanying voices
- tapered, lengthened phrase endings
- repetition must have direction
- phrase to dissonance, chromaticism
- strengthen bottom octave when doubled
- if it doesn't grow, it dies
- highlight natural weight of meter
- delay crescendo, diminuendo

Encourage students to mark parts

The printed page is only the beginning: students need to be taught when, how to clarify their parts.

- pencil on every music stand
- get music out of sheet protectors, binders
- if principal marks, section marks
- mark anything that changes original conception of the piece
 - accidentals/reminders
 - tempo alteration
 - articulation (length, accents, space)
 - dynamics (both existing and changes)
 - balance cues
 - conducting gestures (pattern, subdivision)
 - rhythm/syncopation
- professionals mark
- teach symbols
 - high/low fingerings
 - positions
 - ritard/accelerando
 - tenuto/tenuto+staccato
 - caesura
 - bow retake
- ignite-response.net (“Get Them Marking” under sample chapters)

Breathe together

Students should breathe with the conductor's preparatory beat and at every entrance.

- physical involvement in the music
- encourages movement
- promotes precise beginnings
- communicates style, dynamic
- eliminate silent count-off
- eases tension, helps calm exposed entrance

Stage position

Arrange players in the classroom and on stage for maximum contact with the podium as well as projection to the audience.

- outside players angled toward audience
- basses oriented toward audience
- straight line from player/music/conductor
- podium well in front of outside players
 - encourages eye contact between concertmaster, principal cello
 - encourages outward orientation

Posture/Position

Insist upon correct posture and playing position for every member of the ensemble.

- daily reminders
- affects tone quality, intonation
- reflects ensemble discipline, director's tenacity

Regimented class period

Establish, maintain consistent routines for beginning, ending rehearsal.

- transitions students into unique rehearsal environment
- warm-up/tuning procedure
 - How much noise is acceptable?
 - create environment for successful tuning
 - frees director to address "as may arise"
- rehearsal room is your house
- establishes discipline, focus; sets tone for rehearsal
- ownership, self-sufficiency
- no cell phones
- pencil on every music stand
- tuning: efficiency vs. learning
 - electronic vs. acoustic
 - must be part of curriculum
- students thrive in a disciplined, predictable environment

Teach stand partner etiquette

Students must learn traditions, expectations of sharing a music stand.

- inside player turns pages, marks part
- outside performer never stops playing
- practice page turns
- pencil in information at bottom of page to facilitate transition to new page

Explore new repertoire

There is a wealth of resources for finding literature.

- tried-and-true as well as new publications
- personal musical growth
- social media
- publishers' websites
- conference programs (Midwest, TMEA, NOF)
- reading sessions

Incorporate technology

When incorporated deliberately, judiciously, technology can speed instruction, deepen understanding.

- Jeff Grogan KY all-state (Bernstein, Stravinsky, Steven Bryant)
- visual assessment (record, comment)
- professional performance of same piece
- tuner/metronome app (e.g., Soundcorset, Metronome Beats)

Stage decorum

An ensemble's first impression establishes level of professionalism.

- organized entrance, exit
- enter single file by section; stand until director's signal

- quiet onstage, off
- uniform ready position
- uniform appearance

Develop student leadership

Section principals assume an active leadership role in rehearsal.

- comments to peers during rehearsal
- active cues
- sectional rehearsals
- chamber ensemble comprised of principals

Recommended Resources

Internet

ignite-response.net (David Barg)
 nyphil.org (Orchestra music archive)
 School Orchestra and String Teachers (Facebook group)
 classicfm.com

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