

Achieving Your Ensemble Sound:

It's
Fundamental!

Presented by Chris Grifa

Wednesday, December 16th, 2015

10:30 a.m - 11:30 a.m.

W181

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Improving “our” group’s ensemble sound

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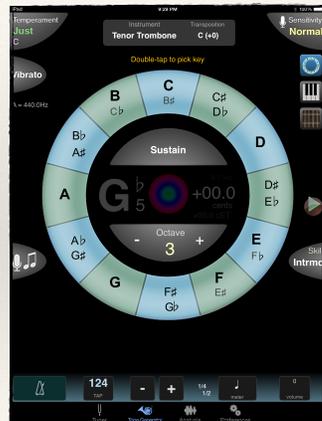
Main Objectives

1. The “Power Five” sound *fundamentals*
2. Maximizing your “fundamentals time”
3. The 4 basic exercises
4. Working on advanced ensemble concepts using the same basic exercises
5. How to bring the *fundamentals* work to the music

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Classroom Tools

- ❖ Yamaha Harmony Director
- ❖ TonalEnergy Tuner iOS App
- ❖ Sound System
- ❖ “Visual Metronome”



3

Classroom Set-Up

- ❖ Computer
- ❖ Harmony Director
- ❖ Document Camera
- ❖ Sound Mixer



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First Step

Have a *Sound Goal* in
your mind

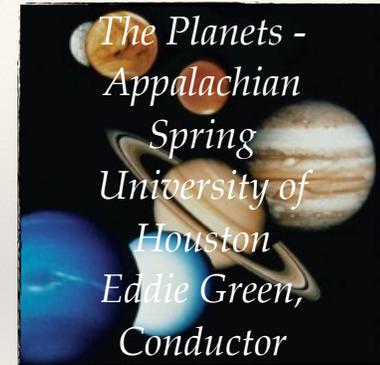
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University of Houston Wind Ensemble

Eddie Green

The Planets - Appalachian Spring
Available on iTunes

*Also check out his Grainger recordings!



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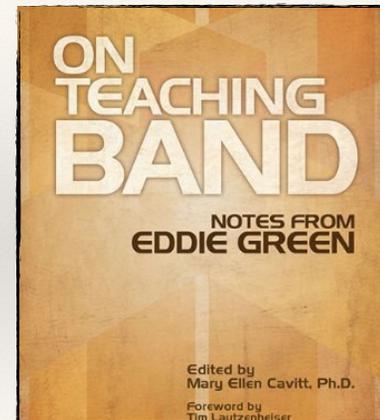
What I like about this sound

- ❖ *Vibrational/Pure* Sound
- ❖ *Clarity* of articulation and release
- ❖ Every instrument is clearly heard *evenly*

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On Teaching Band

- ❖ Fundamental ideas for embouchure, posture, and tonguing on every instrument
- ❖ Every time I read it, I take something new away from it
- ❖ I highly recommend you read this book!
- ❖ Available at the Pepper Booth here at the Midwest Clinic!
- ❖ Stick around for a chance to win your very own copy!



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Understanding Sound

- ❖ Sound is *vibration*
- ❖ We want to create the *purest* vibration as possible
- ❖ Eliminating any *impurities* or *blemishes* in the sound

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The #1 Enemy of Pure Sound?

TENSION

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Objective #1

THE POWER FIVE
FUNDAMENTALS OF
SOUND

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The Power Five Fundamentals

- ❖ Posture
- ❖ Breathing
- ❖ Embouchure
- ❖ Tonguing
- ❖ Releases



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Posture

- ❖ **Balanced** (student should be able to easily stand up from their posture position)
- ❖ Feet flat on the floor with knees over ankles
- ❖ Backs straight
- ❖ Shoulders are down and relaxed
- ❖ **No part of their body touches any other part of their body**
- ❖ Chins neutral
- ❖ **Natural faces** (check for any unnatural creases)
- ❖ **Look for tension in the eyes and hands**
- ❖ **Students must remain still**
- ❖ **Music stand height** (great posture sets the height of the stand)



Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band"

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Breathing

- ❖ Focusing on relaxed but full breathing starting from the students' first day of band will eliminate most tension created issues
- ❖ Students have been "breathing" their entire lives
- ❖ There are two parts of the breath: the inhale and the exhale

Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band"

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Inhale

- ❖ Start with a 4 count breath from day one to reinforce tension free breathing
- ❖ Gradually move to a 2 count and then a 1 count breath
- ❖ "Breathing down from the chair" focusing on expansion
- ❖ **"Letting" your stomach expand versus "making" your stomach expand**

Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band"

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Exhale

- ❖ Air must be directional and focused on the exhale
- ❖ **Students use their eyes to send the air to the back of the room**
- ❖ "breathing hand exercise" - Have students use their hands as a way to feel if their air is staying consistent

Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band"

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Embouchure

- ❖ Embouchure plus air flow equals tone quality
- ❖ **Letting the air create the vibration, whether on a reed, a mouthpiece, or head joint**
- ❖ **Students need to understand what vibrates on their instrument to create sound**
- ❖ **How to make the vibration as pure as possible**
- ❖ Know each instrument's specific embouchure set up
- ❖ Know each instrument's ideal vowel sound
- ❖ **Look for those unwanted creases around the mouth created by tension**

Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band"

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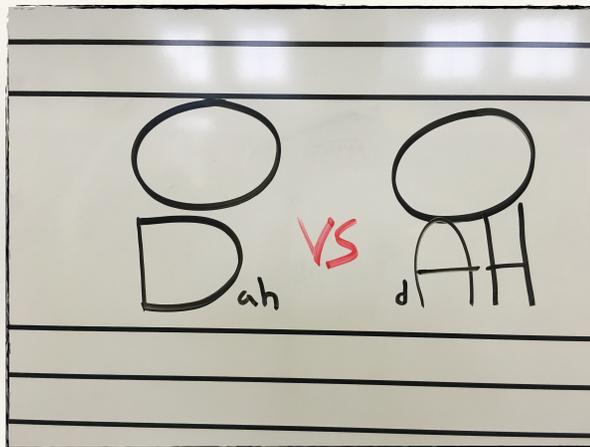
Tonguing

- ❖ Tonguing is the most challenging area to eliminate unwanted sounds
- ❖ Students need to know the proper tonguing technique for their instrument
- ❖ What tonguing syllable do you want to use?
- ❖ "dOO" or "tOO" tonguing syllable depends on which instrument
- ❖ Tongue needs to be quick
- ❖ The air must continue forward as a student activates their tongue
- ❖ **"The tongue strikes the same spot with the same strength every time"**
- ❖ Tongue is in the down position 98% of the time
- ❖ "dAH versus D_{ah}" is a visual to help students understand how little of the tongue sound we want to hear

Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band" and "Essential Musicianship"

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Tonguing



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Releases

- ❖ **Organize the end of the note just as you would the beginning**
- ❖ Release with a breath
- ❖ **Embouchure and tongue MUST STAY STILL on the release as to not create any unwanted *extra* sounds**

Concepts taken from "On Teaching Band" and "Essential Musicianship"

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"You have to make your instrument sound
like *YOUR* instrument."
-Richard Saucedo

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These concepts should be introduced from day
ONE and *MUST BE WORKED ON DAILY!!*

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Objective #2

Maximizing your
"fundamentals time"

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Warming up **VERSUS** Fundamentals

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Reflective Activity

- ❖ What do you do during your “warm-up time?”
- ❖ What kind of exercises do you use and what is their purpose?”
- ❖ Do your students have specific goals that they are focusing on during your “warm-up time?”
- ❖ If you could assign one word that describes your warm-up, what would it be?

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2 Keys to a focused “Warm-Up”

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The “WHAT”

- ❖ The exercises that we use to continually improve our ensembles
- ❖ These exercises should focus on the continued improvement of both the *individual* and the *ensemble* as a whole
- ❖ The ideas focused on should build upon each other to further enhance development

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The “HOW”

- ❖ “How” we work on an exercise can be more important than “What” the exercise is
- ❖ The “What” should always be goal oriented for both the student and the teacher
- ❖ Students should receive focused and deliberate feedback
- ❖ “Warming up” the students’ minds to think critically
- ❖ Creates a calming routine

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Teacher Engagement

- ❖ Know what you want to improve
- ❖ Show excitement while working on the fundamentals
- ❖ Make it fun and engaging
- ❖ Keep your students involved with the process
- ❖ Inspire them to think
- ❖ Be creative with your exercises

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Student Engagement

- ❖ Always question the students
- ❖ Be creative with your questions
- ❖ Fist to Five or Thumbs for quick responses
- ❖ Students must be able to tell you what they are hearing
- ❖ Students need to be able to tell *YOU* how to fundamentally play their instruments (The Power 5)
- ❖ Students must know why they are playing this exercise and what they are trying to improve
- ❖ Students want to sound good and will know when they are improving

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Objective #3

The Four Basic Exercises

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Essential Musicianship

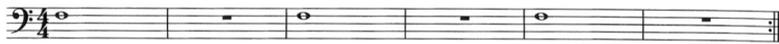


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The Power of 1-1

1. Ensemble Sound

1-1 Block Concert F



Student Goals

1. Take a breath together before each note.
2. Start each note together and keep a steady air stream for four full beats.
3. Release (end) each note together.
4. During whole rests, breathe on count 3.
5. Vibrato-producing instruments may use vibrato.

Concepts taken from "Essential Musicianship"

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The Power of 1-1

- ♦ This simple exercise can work on every concept mentioned above
- ♦ Focuses on the beginning, middle, and end of the note (the Three Ss)
- ♦ Can be used for working on the most basic of fundamentals and some of the most challenging ensemble concepts
- ♦ **The rest in-between offers a great opportunity to continue to reinforce sound ideas**
- ♦ Each exercise has goals listed for both percussionists and wind players
- ♦ *Teaching Tip: Have students focus and concentrate on one of the three Ss as a goal.*
- ♦ *Director Tip: Listen to make sure that students are truly starting and stopping together.*

Concepts taken from "Essential Musicianship"

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The Three Ss

Start
Sustain
Stop

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2-1 (Tonguing)

2. Rhythm and Tonguing Exercises

2-1 Long to Short Notes



Student Goals for 2-1 through 2-5

1. Breathe and start together.
2. The tongue should move up and down naturally; the same part of the tongue should go to the same spot with the same strength each time.
3. Match tonguing style (articulation).
4. Match note lengths.
5. Keep the air steady, constant and smooth.

Concepts taken from "Essential Musicianship"

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2-1 (Tonguing)

- ❖ The same part of the tongue goes to the same spot with the same strength every time
- ❖ Every note must begin and sound the same every time
- ❖ Air must continue through each measure
- ❖ Starting with the whole note reinforces the use of directional air through each note
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Guide student listening by having them focus on the beginning of each note. Ask questions like "Which one of the four quarter notes didn't sound like the others?"*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Repeat a measure if you feel like the students are not performing their articulations the way that you want them to sound.*
- ❖ *Taking it Further: Insert a problem rhythm from your concert literature.*

Concepts taken from "Essential Musicianship"

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3-1 (F Remington)

3-1 Descending Intervals Created Up and Down



Student Goals

1. Breathe together.
2. Start together.
3. Follow through with the same air and vowel sound.
4. Release together.
5. Organize the end of each note as clearly as the beginning.
6. Strive for a clear tone quality without extraneous noises.
7. The middle note of each group should match the surrounding notes in sound and volume.
8. The third note of each group should match the tonal energy and pitch center of the first note.
9. The wider the interval, the more focused the air stream should be.
10. It is the woodwinds' responsibility to produce accurate intervals to support the brass.
11. As intervals expand, it is important the tonal resonance remains consistent from note to note - and instrument to instrument (i.e., the half step and the fifth should match).
12. Breathe on count 4 quarter rests.

Concepts taken from "Essential Musicianship"

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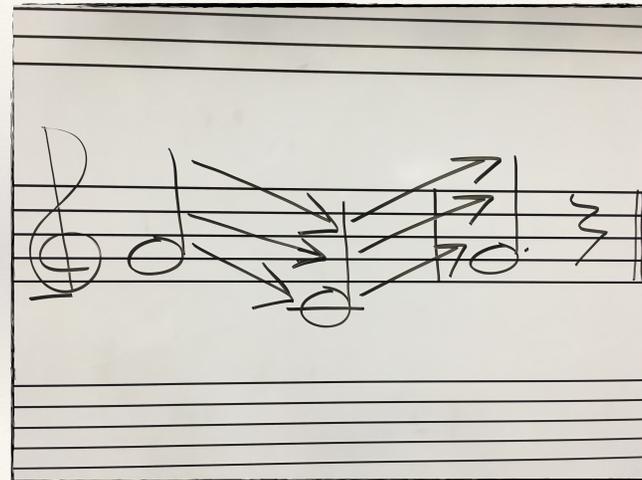
3-1 (F Remington)

- ❖ Focus is on making different notes sound the same
- ❖ 3-1 works on what must happen "in-between" the notes
- ❖ As the intervals widen, the air must be more focused
- ❖ This exercise most closely resembles our music
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Guide student listening by practicing each "phrase" slowly, going note to note to help your students "find" the center of each note.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Practice at various speeds to help reinforce the necessary air and embouchure adjustments needed to perform this exercise at any tempo.*
- ❖ *Taking it Further: Have the brass perform 3-1 on their mouthpieces while the woodwinds play on their instruments to help reinforce the embouchure adjustments needed.*

Concepts taken from "Essential Musicianship"

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3-1 (F Remington)



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The Power of Sustains

- ❖ Having students sustain a pitch for an *indefinite* amount of time
- ❖ Students must focus on keeping the tone steady
- ❖ Without a specific length of time, students will take a more relaxed breath
- ❖ The student's ability to hold out phrases greatly improves
- ❖ Builds strength of embouchure
- ❖ An easy way to have students really focus on *listening*
- ❖ Can be done on any note
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Guide student listening by having the woodwinds sustain an F while the brass analyze their (woodwinds) tone quality and steadiness of pitch.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Make sure students are breathing when needed. This is not a "how long can I hold this note in one breath" exercise as that can create tension.*

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Objective #4

Variations on the Basics

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3 Levels of Listening

Level 1 - Yourself

Level 2 - Your Trio/Section

Level 3 - Listening *Down* to the tubas

Students must match Volume,
Tone, and Intonation

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3 Levels of Listening (1-1)

- ❖ Using 1-1, have students start out in Level 1 listening (self)
- ❖ During the rest have students move to Level 2 listening (trios)
- ❖ Continue to Level 3 listening (tubas)
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Help guide student listening by asking them questions about what they are hearing from their trios. Have trios play by themselves to demonstrate matching volume, tone, and intonation.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Listen to make sure the sound is getting clearer because the students are listening and adjusting. The solution is not just playing softer.*
- ❖ *Taking it Further: Instead of having the students listen to only the tubas, challenge the students to listen to every instrument down to the tubas. For example, the flutes would try to hear every instrument.*

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Level 4 Listening (1-1)

- ❖ Focus on balancing to a section or sections other than the tubas/lows
- ❖ This works on those moments when you want to hear just one particular color or chord in the music being created by one specific section
- ❖ Students will learn that they will have to make decisions on how loud to play
- ❖ Listening “forward” is the most challenging

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Level 4 Listening (1-1)

- ❖ Using 1-1, during the rests, call out a section that you want the band to listen for
- ❖ The section will change to the concert G to help students “find” the particular section
- ❖ The concert “G” must still vibrate (sound) evenly with the F
- ❖ Keep rotating through each section including percussion
- ❖ Eventually, the section called can stay on the Concert F
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Help guide student listening by asking questions as to how they need to balance to a particular section.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Listen to make sure that the section you called is truly resonating with the concert F.*
- ❖ *Taking it Further: Call out two groups. The first group moves to the 3rd and the second group moves to the 5th creating a major triad.*

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Level 5 Listening

- ❖ This level lets the students focus on the hall that they are playing in
- ❖ This level was created when we played in several new venues
- ❖ The focus is to get the room, regardless of size, to respond to our sound
- ❖ Helps students to quickly gain confidence in any performance venue



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Section Leaders (1-1)

- ❖ Have only your section leaders play first to set up your sound
- ❖ This helps not only in quality of sound but balance as well
- ❖ Have your section leaders play a few times before adding in the rest of the ensemble
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Help guide student listening by addressing the differences between the small ensemble sound and the large ensemble sound.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Don't hesitate to go back to just the section leaders during the exercise.*
- ❖ *Taking it Further: Slowly add in players a few at a time to see how long you can keep the same section leader sound.*

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Balance Training (1-1)

- ❖ Balance training helps students understand their place in the “pyramid” of sound
- ❖ Using 1-1, start the exercise with your lows to set up the foundation
- ❖ Add in your middle voices followed by your upper voices
- ❖ Break your ensemble into groups of your choosing:
 - ❖ Group 4 - Tuba's/Low Woodwinds
 - ❖ Group 3 - Trombones, Baritones, Bassoon
 - ❖ Group 2 - Alto/Tenor Sax, French Horn, Clarinet
 - ❖ Group 1 - Flute, Oboe, Trumpet
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Guide student listening by making sure their group's sound is “inside” the previous group's sound.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Listen to make sure Group 1 and Group 4 are heard clearly as they set up the boundaries. Groups 2 and 3 can easily “muddy” up the sound.*

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2-1 with Harmony

- ❖ 2-1 with harmony works on the ability to keep notes resonating with each other while tonguing
- ❖ This will give you a clear picture of how much the tongue is getting in the way of the sound

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2-1 with Harmony

- ❖ Start 2-1 as normal to set your group sound
- ❖ Have either your brass or woodwinds move up to the concert G while the other group stays on the concert F, creating harmony
- ❖ As you progress through the exercise work your way up the five note scale
- ❖ *Teaching tip: Help guide student listening by having them continue to work on clarity of articulation as well as balance and blend.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Listen to make sure that the harmonies are strong and vibrant. Do not let the quality diminish as the students' tonguing demands increase.*
- ❖ *Taking it Further: Don't hesitate to return to the whole note rhythm to re-focus the ensemble sound.*

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3-1 with F Sustain

- ❖ Have a group (woodwinds/brass) sustain a concert F while the other group performs 3-1
- ❖ This works both intonation and harmony
- ❖ The F drone gives students a constant pitch center to help guide student listening
- ❖ *Teaching Tip: Start slowly and go through one phrase at a time so students can understand the way the harmony both sounds and “feels”.*
- ❖ *Director Tip: Listen to make sure the middle note is resonating with the concert F. Also listen that the students are matching the drone F when they return to it.*

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Sustains for Intonation and Vibrations

- ♦ Using the concert F sustain, split the group in half while having one group move up the five note scale
- ♦ Getting sounds to *vibrate* with each other
- ♦ Opportunity to discuss *Just* versus *Equal* Temperament
 - ♦ Lowering the 3rd and raising the 5th
- ♦ “Opening” up the sound
- ♦ *Teaching Tip: Help guide student listening by having them focus on the way the harmonies both sound and “feel” while resonating.*
- ♦ *Director Tip: Do not be in a rush to move to the next note. Let the students have an opportunity to adjust and fix the sound. Don’t hesitate to stop and tell them if it sounded great!*
- ♦ *Taking it Further: Once students are comfortable with the Concert F five note scale, do the same exercise in a different key; perhaps in the key of one of your concert pieces!*

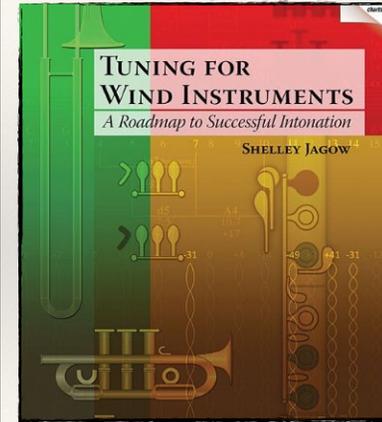
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Tuning for Wind Instruments

-Shelley Jagow

“The most complete intonation resource for band directors. This book contains everything a music educator requires to approach fine-tuning intonation with their ensemble.” - Shelley Jagow

- ♦ **Learn** the origin of our pitch and tuning standard
- ♦ **Understand** when to apply equal versus just tempered tuning
- ♦ **Identify** the best tuning notes for each instrument
- ♦ **14 steps** for tuning chords
- ♦ **Properly** tune brass slides
- ♦ **Improve** your knowledge of over 70 tuning truths and myths



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In-Tone + In-Balance = In-Tune

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Objective #5

Bringing fundamentals to
the music

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Starts with YOU!

- ❖ Put the baton down and LISTEN!
- ❖ Step off the podium and listen to the group
- ❖ Resist the urge to sing along!
- ❖ Does it sound the way you want it to?
- ❖ If not, fix it!
- ❖ SOUND MUST COME FIRST!

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Refer or Revert back to the 4 basic exercises often!!!

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Be Creative

- ❖ Create sustains in the music
- ❖ Use a drone where appropriate (Harmony Director / TonalEnergy)
- ❖ Small Groups play sections (start with 1st chair players, rotate players so everybody "has an opportunity")
- ❖ Divide the band into 3 or 4 small ensembles

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Technique

- ❖ Working on sustains improves airflow, relaxation, and phrasing
- ❖ Go "note by note" slowly so students can learn what it feels like to go from one note to the other, then gradually increase speed (similar to 3-1)
- ❖ Play faster literature slowly in a "Chorale" style

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Thank You!!



Thank you Steve Purcell, Tim Dawson and Paige's music for all of their support and sponsorship of this clinic!

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DRAWING



Thank you J.W. Pepper for donating these books!

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