

Developing Large Ensemble Skills Through Chamber Music

The 2014 Midwest Clinic

Clinicians: h2 quartet

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Wednesday, December 17, 2014

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Meeting Room W185

Part I: Chamber Music as a Mechanism for Teaching

- **Levels of Teaching**
- **Students Talk to Students Better than Teachers Talk to Students**
- **Inherent Learning Experiences in Chamber Music**
- **Teaching Strategies with Chamber Music**

Part II: Chamber Music as a Vehicle for Musical Excellence

- **Chamber Music as a Microcosm for Large Ensembles**
- **Strengthening Section Playing**
- **Inherent Learning Experiences in Chamber Music**

Part III: Practical Strategies for Developing Large Ensemble Skills Through Chamber Music

- **Developing Ensemble Sound, Blend, Intonation, and Listening Skills**
- **Reinforcing Precision Regarding Internal Pulse and Rhythm, Attacks and Releases, and Articulation**
- **Developing Non-Verbal Communication Skills Through Eye Contact, Gestures, and Cueing**

Part I: Chamber Music as a Mechanism for Teaching

I. Levels of Teaching

A. Teachers teach students

1. Instruction is based on direct interaction with students.
2. Progress is partly limited to time spent with direct contact between students and teachers.
3. Concepts must be consistently reinforced by the instructor to increase retention.

B. Students teach students

1. Instruction is based on direct interaction, but concepts tend to translate more easily between students.
2. Students have an opportunity to learn from their peers through emulation.
3. Learning continues to take place without direct guidance from instructors.

C. Students teach teachers

1. This type of learning is powerful as it promotes a reciprocating relationship.
2. Instructors can learn residually through interaction with students.
3. Students are able to provide specific feedback and intellectually stimulate their instructors.

D. Students teach themselves

1. Students are able to consistently provide critical feedback on their performance.
2. Students develop a love for learning and a desire to continue to improve.
3. Learning becomes self-guided and is long-lasting.

E. Community of scholars

1. Intellectual discourse is maintained at all levels.

2. The student/teacher and student/student relationship truly becomes a mentorship and example of peer learning.
3. Students benefits from a consistent network of learning at all levels.

II. Students Talk to Students Better than Teachers Talk to Students.

A. Students relate more closely to other students.

1. Teachers work to facilitate positive working environments.
 - a) Promoting a culture of excellence
 - (1) Students help to model quality work.
 - Students teach by example.
 - Students teach directly.
 - (2) Students help to uphold a performance standard.
 - Less experienced students emulate the work habits of more experienced students.
 - Students help to define a culture in attitude, work ethic, and musicianship.
 - b) Promoting a culture of creativity
 - (1) Student collaboration
 - Students work together to realize common goals.
 - Studies become more autodidactic.
 - Students work under the framework of synergy.

III. Inherent Learning Experiences in Chamber Music

A. Gaining ownership of the musical material

1. Gaining ownership of the information
 - (1) Process reflection: tonal modeling, fundamental approach
 - Demonstrate tonal modeling to address short-term objectives.

- Demonstrate (and explain) tonal modeling to address long-term and advanced objectives.
- Reinforce fundamentals into musical objectives.

b) Greater sense of urgency to improve and succeed because of the interdependent nature of chamber music

(1) Greater ownership of technical and musical concepts

B. Developing musical intuition

1. “Intuition is knowledge that comes to a person without conscious remembering or reasoning.” – Bruce Benward

2. “Musical intuition is...the learned capacity to make discriminations of sound and its signification.” – Naomi Cumming

C. Teaching strategies

1. “Our lives at every turn have become the property of experts, through whom our experience is to be mediated. We have experts to tell us we are sick, and to tell us when we are well again...how to educate our young, experts to paint our pictures and compose and perform our music for us.” – Christopher Small

a) Students must be taught to make their own informed decisions.

- Students are capable of making informed decisions for themselves and should be encouraged to do so.
- Students must learn to think independently and not depend on a teacher for critical decision-making.

2. Instilling a culture of expectations and accountability

a) Relationships between students

(1) Older students set positive examples.

- Students take more ownership of the studio.
- Students take more ownership of their education by helping to improve their learning environment and collaborators.

(2) Older students have an opportunity to mentor younger students.

- Older students benefit more from the experience through process reflection.

(3) Younger students have an opportunity to learn directly and indirectly from older students.

- Younger students have a greater opportunity to learn skills and repertoire from their older counterparts.

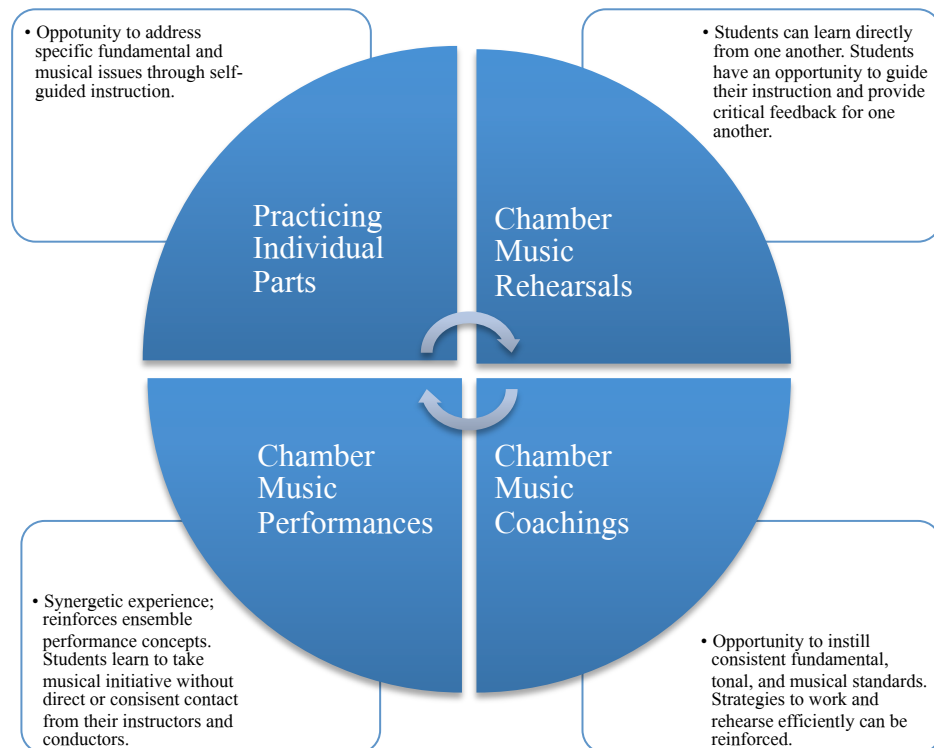
(4) Students of the same age and/or ability have an opportunity to push one another to achieve at higher levels.

- Peer inspiration and encouragement tends to be the most powerful motivator.

3. Creating an environment for the free exchange of musical and intellectual concepts

a) Emphasis on chamber music

- Students can directly define their band/orchestra/studio culture through direct collaboration in chamber music.
- Chamber music is an interdependent activity.



Implicit community of scholars – everyone teaches, everyone benefits

Part II: Chamber Music as a Vehicle for Musical Excellence

I. Chamber music as a microcosm for large ensembles

1. Chamber music emphasizes the significance of non-verbal communication and eye contact within ensembles.
2. The nature of chamber music helps students to reinforce important ensemble ideals such as maintaining a consistent internal pulse within the ensemble, breathing together, and cueing through physical gestures.
3. Concepts regarding phrasing and musical hierarchy can be easily understood and reinforced.
4. Chamber music provides an opportunity to solidify musical objectives and elevate ensemble skills and critical decision-making.

B. Fostering creative interpreters

1. Chamber music can help to create musicians who think deeply about music.
2. Students have an opportunity to overtly develop musical affect through contrast.
3. Chamber groups have the opportunity to independently discuss important structural components of music, such as cadence points, dissonance, dominant harmonies, etc., and how to deal with these ideas in performance.
4. Students in chamber ensembles have an immediate opportunity to play beyond what is literally written on the page with greater finesse and deeper musical thought.

C. Developing ensemble skills

1. Chamber music performance-practice maintains an augmented demand to blend tone concepts and vibrato within the ensemble.
2. Working within a chamber ensemble provides a clear backdrop when addressing intonation and concepts regarding justly-tuned intervals.
3. The ability to interdependently maintain internal rhythm becomes increasingly important.
4. Concepts regarding matching style and articulation within the ensemble can be easily understood and reinforced.

II. Strengthening Section Playing and Music Programs

A. Musical ideals between sections in a large ensemble

1. Blending and matching tone concepts is of the utmost importance when playing in a section within a large ensemble.
2. Playing with good intonation is synonymous with playing with good tone concepts within a large ensemble. Intonation and tone concept are two sides of the same coin.
3. High-level section playing includes the ability to quickly match style and phrasing.
4. Sections within a large ensemble must be able to maintain an interdependent internal pulse.

B. Developing music programs through chamber music

1. Student chamber ensembles can help to advocate for music programs.
2. Chamber ensembles can provide a greater degree of visibility for music programs.
3. Working through chamber ensembles can help students take greater ownership of their music education.

III. Inherent Learning Experiences in Chamber Music

A. A culture of excellence and accountability transfers from chamber ensembles to large ensembles.

1. Students are empowered to make critical musical decisions.
2. A desire for improvement and musical progress comes from within the large ensemble.
3. Chamber music drives students to play on a higher level and encourages them to be greater than the sum of their parts.

Part III: Practical Strategies for Developing Large Ensemble Skills Through Chamber Music

I. Physical Components to Developing Ensemble Skills

A. Developing ensemble sound, blend, intonation, and listening skills

1. Developing intonation necessarily corresponds with developing tone quality and blend within the ensemble.
2. Tuning from the lowest voice reinforces blend and balance.
3. Understanding intonation tendencies on one's instrument is of vital importance.
4. Creating strategies for approaching and justly tuning intervals and chords
5. Stressing the importance of listening skills in order to develop blend and intonation

Exercises:

- “Remington” exercises at the octave and at the 5th
- Scales in octaves and 5^{ths}
- Chord tuning and the importance of approaching Perfect intervals first
- Listening exercises

B. Reinforcing precision regarding internal pulse and rhythm, attacks and releases, and articulation

1. Underscoring the importance of working with a metronome
2. Rehearsing at different beat levels and reinforcing metric hierarchy and hypermeter
3. Recording devices can be a great tool for reinforcing precision.
4. Stressing the importance of maintaining appropriate balance at release points

Exercises:

- Rehearsing with attack points only
- Rehearsing in smaller groups within the ensemble to reinforce consistency in internal rhythm, attacks, and releases
- Reinforcing style through VERY SLOW rehearsal
- Changing articulation patterns and rhythms during rehearsal to reinforce technical concepts

C. Developing non-verbal communication skills through eye contact, gestures, and cueing

1. Movement within the ensemble helps musicians to maintain an internal pulse.
2. Movement within the ensemble also helps musicians to solidify phrasing and musical contrast.
3. Cueing and breathing together helps chamber ensembles play more cohesively in regards to matching tempo, style, dynamics, and phrasing.
4. Using eye contact to solidify attacks and releases

Exercises:

- Exercises to assist with cueing that communicates style, musical direction, and tempo
- Rehearsing attacks and releases through eye contact and breathing only
- Underscoring the importance of “feeling” the beat together and in the same way
- Using chorales to solidify phrasing and musical contrast within the ensemble

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