

Rehearsal Tidbits

By Art Sheinberg



These are presented in a random order. I hope you get an idea or two!

1. Having one student or one group play while keeping others engaged is a vital tool in assessment. The engagement for the others can be by assigning a task such as joining in on the last phrase or every other phrase or last note of each measure. The possibilities are immense.
2. Take a short time (perhaps two minutes) for partner practice with a well-designated task, for example "work together on the rhythm in measures 5-13." Have a clear signal announced indicating the end of the activity.
3. For a fun, end of the rehearsal activity, pair up with one person doing left hand, and the other right hand on the same instrument. Surprisingly difficult and thought-provoking!
4. Rehearse with destinations in mind: Go over cadences first, and then back-up. Ask the students to suggest where they think that the phrase starts. This encourages musical thinking and analysis.
5. Sneak theory knowledge into rehearsals by using terms such as "tonic, dominant, hemiola, etc." on a regular basis.
6. Invite another class in for short informal performances. Kids will be proud to show their colleagues what they have learned.

7. Make sure that the students are aware of the structure of the music: instead of saying "please start at measure 9" say instead: "please start at the third phrase."
8. Posture affects concentration and focus; insist on heads balanced on spine and a firm foundation.
9. Avoid counting off ("one, two, three, play"). Instead, simply use a breath or a conducting gesture, or both to start. The counting off gives the kids permission to not pay close attention. (Sorry about the split infinitive!) The breath is much more musical and demands focus. Have students responsible for the breath: "we'll start at the recapitulation, Sam will start us."
10. Determine where you will stop. Give directions as "let's play from the second phrase and stop at the fermata at the end of the exposition."
11. Wait, wait, wait for focus and quiet before giving any instructions. It feels like a long time, but in reality your rehearsal will be much more efficient if everyone is with you all the time. The kids will self-police for focus if they know that you will not continue until everyone is ready.
12. Determine the essential nature of a problem: "John, do you think that this phrase is difficult mostly because of the pitches or the rhythm? I agree that the pitches are the difficulty, so let's play it focusing on the pitches by pretending that every note is a whole note. Now pretend that they are all half notes. etc"
13. Take small bites, but with great variety and repetition, ensuring understanding: "We've been struggling with the fourth phrase. Please circle that phrase with your pencil, and check your neighbor to see if you have the same place circled. Let's work on it for the next ten minutes. Sally, what do you think makes this phrase more difficult than the first three? Let's make sure that everyone is understanding the pitches; everybody do your left hand while Gary says the names of the pitches. Let's play it together at a ridiculously slow tempo and analyze our success. We'll start at quarter note equal 60 bpm. If we

rate it as at least a "nine" on a scale of 1-10, then we'll increase the tempo. Our goal performance tempo will be about 90 bpm. Etc."

14. Rhythm problems can be conquered by "equalizing" to the smallest note value. Have students play a phrase, changing everything into eighth notes. For example a dotted quarter equals three eighth notes, a half equals four, etc. Halve one student "solo" on the equalized part while everyone else plays the "real" part, and vice-versa. Have the students partner with one kid playing equalized and the other "real" and then trade.

15. Keen awareness of what is happening in other parts is essential for enjoyment of ensemble playing. I like to encourage the kids make an analogy to the relationships in their life: "Don't you think that life is more fun when most of your energy is focused on your friends, teammates, than on yourself? Music is the same way. When most of your energy is focused on what your colleagues are doing and how you can relate to and enhance that, then the real fun begins! Let's play the first four phrases, and see how much you can tell me about what another section is doing."

16. Make sure that you end each rehearsal with a musical success. It does not have to be large. One beautifully played and felt phrase enjoyed by all is enough to make the students and their teacher look forward to the next rehearsal!