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(revised April 2024)

PreCollege Contemporary Band Ensemble Coaching

(suggested tips & techniques)

DIRECTOR'S PRACTICES

- **Establish the culture** of the program from the beginning; don't wait until there are too many unmanageable issues before setting things in order.
- **Know the songs** completely in order to teach and demonstrate parts effectively.
- Utilize harmonic & melodic **sequences over passages**. (e.g. Bm| Em| Bm| % | = 1 sequence)
- Have the class listen to & play songs **underneath the recordings**. The recording becomes the standard and you can arrange the song according to the level of the student's abilities.
- Check in on each **student's wellness**— both physical & emotional before the start of rehearsal. This should help you to navigate frustrations on the not-so-good rehearsal days.
- Maintain a **standard repertoire** to cut down on extra work in song preparation/ coaching the next wave of students.
- **Institute charts/ notation**, whether formal or informal, to help anchor the group.
- Encourage students to **learn songs by ear** and write lead sheets (standard notation helps, but can be too formal at times.)
- Develop **hand signals** and gestures to direct music form.
- Beginning students take longer to develop. Maintain more capable musicians to only round off the music and their abilities. You should be able to coach and **not “cradle and carry”** the group all the time.
- (Having students take **private lessons** keeps the momentum of growth.)
- ALWAYS ensure that the **bass & drums lock**--most styles are strongly established with these two instruments first.
- If possible, try to have **rehearsals twice a week** to thoroughly ingrain materials.
- Having a **syllabus and weekly lesson plans** to share cuts down on stagnancy and will outline your objectives.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES

- Invite parents to **open rehearsals** to see practices and involve them in the process of their student's musical development.
- Make up for **empty rehearsals** by playing alongside students or setting up backing tracks. This keeps the integrity of the group's sound.
- For each band, try to have an **alternate** on each instrument. This will keep the band from being empty and should bolster student development.
- Include a **5-10 min break** to either rest or free play/ jam.
- Empower the students to master the music and lead the band without your assistance. Each student should develop from an instrumentalist to a **mini band director**.
- Encourage **connectivity/team building** outside of rehearsal (bowling, rock climbing, video game session, live music attendance, etc.). A pizza party with a guided discussion goes a long way.
- Group Chats can be helpful depending on the maturity of the group.
- You can provide **negative feedback & criticism** without being destructive by blunt statements. Empower the students to do better. Ultimately, you want to help them understand the standard of the group.
- You can also pose leading questions: "What just happened? Why do WE not sound good? What will WE need to do to prevent this from happening?"; draw on analogies to prove your points.
- For students that **don't practice**: 1) video record the rehearsal and play it back after each song, 2) run the rehearsal without any breaks just to prove the point of lack of preparation, and 3) involve the parent--they are probably paying to have their student be a part of something great!!
- Have some venues or **consistent semester events** for students to perform. (e.g. video shoots, Fundraiser events, talent contests, restaurants, festivals, museums, public events, etc.) This helps recruitment and encourages student participation.
- Remind students that a part of rehearsing and **performing is entertainment**. This translates to facial expressions, slight dance movements, and crowd work/ banter for vocalists. After learning the music, get back to why you learned it in the first place→ ENJOYMENT!

(Optional Tips)

- Periodically utilize musical games: switching instruments to play, group computer games, theme song identification, body percussion (stomp, clap, snap, pat), etc
- Bring in a guest clinician or musician to work with the students alongside you.