

Successful Programming and Performing with a Small Band

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Challenges of Small Bands: Limited Instrumentation and Limited Music Choice. Pitch problems are more obvious with smaller bands.

Merits of a small band – easy to blend and tune...and small bands have clear tone

Our experience with small bands

Example: Kamigo Elementary School performing Suite on Celtic Folksong

Notes from *Teaching Smaller Bands* DVD – Bravo Music

- **Tone Quality is most important regardless of size**
- **Do not seek the same band sound with a small band as a large band. Don't play louder; play with wind speed and vibrancy**
- **Suggestions for ideal instrumentation.** For example: for a 30-piece band they suggest:
 - 1 piccolo, 1 flute, 1 oboe, 3 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 2 alto, 1 tenor, 1 bari, 1 bassoon, 3 trumpets, 3 horns, 3 trombones, 1 euphonium, 2 tubas, 5 percussion and 1 string bass
 - For a 16-piece band: 1 piccolo, 1 flute, 1 oboe, 1 clarinet, 1 bass clarinet, 1 alto, 1 tenor, 1 bari, 1 bassoon, 1 trumpet, 1 horn, 1 trombone, 1 euphonium, 1 tuba, 1 percussion, 1 string bass
 - They also talk about ideal instrumentation for 20 and 25-piece bands.
- **Describes ideal set-ups for small bands**
 - Experiment with set up to accommodate acoustics of the hall and size of your group
 - The video shows different timbres achieve with different set ups. For example, we liked it when they put their two saxophones on the front row.
- **The video also demonstrated their scale training and daily drill and how tuning and tone were even more important for small bands. They suggested practicing unison playing on a daily basis:**
 - Start with all low voices playing unison on scale degree 4, then 3, 2, 1 (each on 8 counts of sound followed by 4 beats of rest at first; later on, 4 counts of sound)
 - Follow this with high voices doing the same thing

- If you have a bigger group, you may want to break it up into more color groups (for example, saxophone and horns could represent one color group)
- **Video provides examples of three approaches to ensemble blend and balance:** pyramid, barrel and inverted pyramid.
- **The video demonstrates creativity of percussion setups** to play several percussion instruments simultaneously or switching quickly between instruments. And methods of teaching wind players to cover percussion parts.
- **Introducing a piece of music:**
 - If players are able to play unison scale training exercises well, you can transfer this to playing any piece of music.
 - Students with same technical passages need to get together and tune just those passages
- **In selecting music for a small band:**
 - Do not select music requiring more parts or instruments than your band has.
 - Determine how many instrument parts are required. Notice if some parts are optional or not. Determine the minimum number of instruments required. Next check to see which parts are doubled or have the same musical lines. If they are doubled, perhaps you can eliminate one of these parts. Just make sure that all notes in the harmonies are covered.
 - If you must play larger band music, you may need to arrange it. If so, you have to get copyright permission from the publisher or composer.
- The video concludes with practical suggestions for band directors who work with small ensembles.

The Well-Balanced Ensemble – DVD from Bravo Music

- Includes Sound Balance for Small Bands
 - **This video goes into great detail about how to assign each voice and volume balance. They create a chart to establish a hierarchy of Main Melody, Counter Melody, and Accompaniment parts. This video demonstrates playing “without awareness” and “playing with awareness of musical roles and balance.”**
 - **Ramifications of increasing/decreasing number of players and playing flexible instrumentation music.** They suggest reducing the number of players when soft dynamics are needed, when the same melody or patterns are repeated or when a solo line needs to be better heard. Video examples of playing with all members and with reduced texture are provided.
 - How to create tonal color. **Players/teachers should have a shared image of the sound goal when playing music.** Video examples are provided of balancing the small band and mapping out what instruments are needed to be more prominent.
 - In conclusion, 1) organize roles and volume balance, 2) adjust the number of players, and 3) use appropriate timbre that fits each situation. This makes performances more expressive and musical.

- including which instruments are required (e.g., how many timpani?) and which mallets and sticks will be needed to play them?
- What are the technical demands in each part? Study the general aspects, such as the key(s) of the piece, and more specific details in the individual parts, such as clarinet parts that linger around the throat register or horn parts that remain below the treble clef staff.
 - What is the harmonic organization of the piece? What do you know about the harmonic vocabulary, the harmonic rhythm, and the overall harmonic structure?
 - What is the rhythmic organization of the piece? What rhythmic figures comprise the piece itself, the tempo(s), and any specific challenges that are related to rhythmic issues?
 - What dynamic range is called for in the piece? Will the written dynamic markings call for some "modification" in terms of the actual performance of the piece by young musicians?
 - What is the phrase structure of the piece (e.g., organization, symmetry)? Pay close attention to physical considerations (breath) associated with various phrase lengths.
 - What is the duration of the piece? Is the piece sectionalized in some way (e.g., multiple movements, organized around several folk melodies in contrasting meters)? How may this affect the rehearsal or performance of the piece?
 - What are the idiosyncratic demands in the piece? Is any equipment, other than the instruments themselves, required (e.g., mutes)? Are there specific techniques that are required to perform the piece that may not be in the repertoire of average students at this level? Can students articulate at the tempo indicated?
 - How will the clarity and readability of the manuscript affect the students?
 - Solos

Consider Your Audience

Balance

- As we can see above, the Japanese bands have several ways of thinking about balance.
- Francis McBeth talked about the Pyramid of balance but this is sometimes misunderstood.
- The Pyramid of balance works especially well when we are playing chorales or chords.
- Balance should really be tied to the music we are performing.
- Kenneth Thompson's "Vertical Balance System states that "Each player listens to the ensemble. The player then makes a determination based on the function of his or her part as to how loud it should be played."
- He also states that, "The weakness of the pyramid system is that it always assumes that the tuba should play loudest and the flute softest."
- While we agree that the balance should be determined by the musical role, I'm not sure we can leave this up to students to determine.
- **If you have time to work with your students in determining the hierarchy of musical roles, this would be ideal.**

- If not, it is crucial that you, as the conductor, understand and teach the hierarchy to your students.

The music helps you determine the balance of the band.

- If the music is melody dominated homophony, then the melody needs to dominate. If the music is a chorale, you may prefer the dark sounding pyramid balance. If the music is polyphony, you may need to make sure that the simultaneous yet separate melodies can each be heard. If you perform a fugue, each subject or theme must be brought to the fore.

How Instrumentation Affects Balance

- In Shelly Jagow's dissertation she states that, "*The ratio for a wind ensemble is approximately 3:2 (woodwind:brass), while the ratio for a concert band is closer to 2:1 (woodwind:brass). In other words, the average school concert band should be comprised of approximately two-thirds woodwinds and one-third brass.*"

Instrument Transfers and Substitutes (also from Jagow's Dissertation)

- *Another method that a director may need to consider in order to cover absent instrumentation is to ask some students to consider switching to another instrument in order to learn a new one that is essential in the band, or have missing parts played by substitute instruments. The following charts provide suggestions of recommended instrument transfers (Table 13) and substitutions (Table 14).*

Table 13: Recommended Instrument Transfers

<u>Student plays...</u>	<u>Student can transfer to ...</u>
Flute	Piccolo, oboe, saxophone, or keyboard percussion
Oboe	English horn, flute, or bassoon
Clarinet	Eb, alto or bass clarinet, saxophone
Saxophone	Soprano, alto, tenor & baritone saxophone, clarinet
Trumpet	Horn, baritone/euphonium (TC)
Horn	Trumpet
Trombone	Baritone/euphonium (BC), or tuba
Baritone/Euphonium (TC)	Trumpet
Baritone/Euphonium (BC)	Tuba, trombone

Another option is to consider using other instruments to cover parts not originally written for them (Table 14).

Table 14: Recommended Instrument Substitutions

<u>This instrument...</u>	<u>Can play this part ...</u>
Flute	Piccolo (transpose up an octave if possible)
Clarinet	Oboe (transpose up Major 2nd)

Alto saxophone	English horn (use saxophone mute and transpose up a Major 2nd) Horn in Eb
Tenor saxophone	Baritone/Euphonium (TC)
Baritone saxophone	Tuba (read in Treble Clef and add 3 sharps)
Eb ContraAlto Bass Clarinet	Bassoon (read in Treble Clef and add 3 sharps) Baritone Saxophone

Other More Obvious Ideas

Finally, if a director cannot encourage anyone to switch instruments, then the music could be arranged to ascertain that all necessary parts were covered without losing the central integrity of the music.

UIL C& CR considerations:

Instrumentation. While judges shall be instructed to criticize instrumentation only insofar as it affects the balance and general effect of the performance, schools are encouraged to conform as closely as possible with accepted standards of instrumentation.

Electronics.

(A) The use of electronic sound, to reinforce or to substitute for acoustical instruments that are a traditional part of the band or orchestra instrumentation, is prohibited.

(B) Electronics may be used for other instruments specified in the score under the following provisions:

(i) The substitute shall be performed live as a part of the performance.

(ii) It shall be the responsibility of the performing group director to provide all equipment.

(C) The use of electronics may be considered by each judge in determining the overall rating for the performance.

“Structuring” or Editing Technical or Rhythmic Figures for some of your students:

Examples:

- 16th note runs – change to downbeats only
- 16th note runs – change to 1&a or 1 e&
- 8th note passage – change to downbeats only
- Students who have difficulty may have parts simplified by eliminating technical passages
- Students who have difficulty may end up doubling bass line

Flexible Repertoire

The music is written for:

- Incomplete or unbalanced instrumentation
- Scored usually for just five parts
- Playable with combinations of woodwinds, brass or strings
- Includes traditional Percussion parts

Some of the Publishers:

- Flex-band series published by Hal Leonard for grade 2-3 band literature <http://www.halleonard.com>
- Build-A-Band Series by Barnhouse <http://www.barnhouse.com/>
- Flexible Series by Bravo or Brain Music
- Flexible Band Series by Carl Fischer
- First Year Jazz Charts Collection - <http://www.alfred.com/>
Alfred publishes Jazz charts with a similar concept. They are built to be played by a full big band, or with reduced instrumentation. They also come with alternate parts for flutes, and french horns etc.
- Rubber Band Arrangements <http://www.rubberbandarrangements.com/>
This is a site that takes this same concept and applies it to beginner band. They also have a first semester workbook. Each arrangement comes with "virtuoso" parts to challenge beginners that are pushing ahead, while still using the same songs as the full band. These arrangements can be repetitive, but they are built with building block segments that help make learning the songs easier.
- <http://www.bandexpansion.com/>

Dual Grade Series is an innovative and progressive concept of scoring mixed-grade parts for each instrument within a single composition. Part A (Experienced player), Part B (Beginning-level player) – written for experienced and novice students to perform in the same ensemble. Published by Bravo or Brain Music (recordings available on Youtube). Publications available at www.Bravomusicinc.com

- Short Stories by Daisuke Ehara <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Vba6e7RYzw>
- Celtic Fantasy by Keiichi Kurokawa https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwd_ebkDVZI
- Evergreen Overture by Hayato Hiros <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54v2CgE7OWE>
- I, My, Me, Mine!! By Souhei Kano <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paJnXy5SO8>

To gain access to lots of great musical examples and videos, subscribe to: <https://www.youtube.com/user/bravomusicinc>

Resources and Repertoire Suggestions for small bands:

- <https://smallbandlit.wikispaces.com/>
- <http://www.atssb.org/Commissions.htm>
- <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2307/3400194?journalCode=mejc>
- <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/105708379600600103?journalCode=jmta>
- <http://banddirectorstalkshop.com/2017/01/28/small-band-programs-strategies-success/>
- http://apps.texasbandmasters.org/archives/pdfs/clinic/2015_cude.pdf
- https://www.midwestclinic.org/user_files_1/pdfs/clinicianmaterials/2006/alan_wagner.pdf
- <https://gakingmusicblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/12/concert-band-contest-pieces-for-small-bands/>
- <https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/music-for-small-bands-collections.list>
- <https://fba.flmusiced.org/for-directors/small-school-resources/>

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