

Somerset High School Symphonic Wind Ensemble & Concert Band

Top Five List of the Most Common Performance Errors

5. Clearly Identifiable Rhythmic Performances

Practice the rhythms separate from your instrument! Sometimes too many things to concentrate on (such as fingerings, breathing, pitches, intonation, articulations, stickings, etc.) cause you to become frustrated while practicing! Put your instrument down, turn on your metronome to a “slower than performance” tempo and clap or speak the rhythms. As you begin to understand the rhythm, start to speed up your tempo a little at a time. Breaking down the problems is the easiest way to win the race!

4. Lack of Articulations

It is not always what you say to someone, but how you say it that makes all of the difference. Articulations are an important tool in music because they are how we present the pitches and rhythms to the audience! Practicing and performing them correctly is crucial. Listening to music without articulations is like listening to a lyrical song in another language; we hear it and understand its beauty (*and perhaps its meaning*), but something is always lost in translation. Once again, articulations can get lost in the cloud of the continuous list of responsibilities that a musician has towards the music. There are two great ways of isolating articulations for practice. *First be sure that you understand all of the rhythms before you proceed!* Start with a self-evaluation. Tape yourself performing the music. Listen and mark all of the articulations that you are not completely performing correctly! Now you can begin to practice. 1. Perform them to a slow, playable tempo (with your metronome) without all of the pitches. Play everything on concert Bb. This will help you to concentrate solely on articulations. 2. When you have an understanding of the articulations, you can now play the pitches. However, set your metronome to the tempo at which you can clearly and cleanly perform the most difficult part of the music. This will allow you to effectively develop the proper tempo while performing the articulations correctly!

3. Inconsistent Pulse Performances

Inconsistent pulse is a common problem for all musicians from beginners to professionals and is why understanding how to use your metronome is so important. You can buy the most expensive and impressive sports car, but if you do not know how to drive it, it is of no use to you! Be sure before you work on pulse, that your rhythms and pitches are learned. As stated in the previous section, set the metronome to a tempo at which you can clearly and cleanly perform the most difficult part of the music. This will allow you to effectively develop the proper tempo! *Now put down your instrument!* Remember, your mind guides your performance of the music and your instrument has little to do with maintaining the correct pulse. Your mind needs to be trained. Sing your music along with the metronome while you clap the beat. When you are successful, then you can pick up your instrument and slowly develop your performance to the correct tempo. You will be amazed how much faster the light bulb can switch on when you isolate the pulse without your instrument!

2. Tonality and Intonation

Tonality is the quality of sound that you produce on your instrument and intonation is the quality, balance and blend of that sound when performed with others. ***The key to their development in a musician is the ability to listen, assess and adjust!*** Tonality and intonation may seem to be specifically a woodwind and brass issue, but they are not. Many percussionists, as well as woodwind and brass players rely too heavily on their inanimate instrument to create music! You are the musician, without you, that instrument is just an object without purpose! You channel your music to the listener through your instrument by knowing where to hit a drum to produce the desired sound, how to shape your mouth to develop the correct embouchure, how to diaphragmatically breath and distribute your air supply into the instrument properly, how to hold a mallet correctly, how to perform with proper posture, where to strike a keyboard instrument to produce a desired sound and how to hold your instrument properly. The list goes on and on. Perform Music, Don't Play It! Children play, composers invent and musicians perform. 1. To develop good tonality, start by taping yourself. The key to fixing poor tonality is hearing and identifying the problems. For wind instruments, concentrate on long tones when working on trouble pitches in the extremities of your range. Start on an easy pitch that sounds good and take a long, deep, diaphragmatic breath in and play the pitch for 30 seconds. When that sounds good, move up or down chromatically to the next pitch and continue through your trouble notes. Remember that this is not accomplished in a day. It takes years; be patient and remember that slow and steady wins the race! 2. For percussionists, strike your instruments at different velocities and in different places on the playing surface. Test the waters and search for the best sound. 3. These are great ways to practice, but even the best, professional athletes need coaches and so do musicians! Seek one out! Private instruction is a way for someone with more experience to listen and assess your performance and tell you how to adjust! No one wins the Superbowl without a great coach!

I. Inconsistent Dynamic Performances

What seems to be the easiest part of performing music is the most overlooked, partially because of its simplicity to perform. In all cases (air supply with wind instruments / stick heights and velocity with percussion instruments) the most important ingredients needed for proper dynamic performance is CONCENTRATION, ATTENTION and RESPECT. Performance of dynamics and dynamic contrast are crucial for a stylistically accurate performance! Without dynamics, music has no heart or emotional impact on its listeners. ***Give the dynamics the same respect as the notes and rhythms! It is what makes music HUMAN!***

Key Points to Remember and Implement when Practicing!

METRONOME SETTINGS

Buy a metronome and learn how to use it properly! The key is to listen to it and work with it, not against it or in spite of it. A metronome is a set of training wheels that even the most advanced, professional musicians never get rid of.

SELF-EVALUATE

Record and listen to yourself! Be your own teacher. Listen to your performance, identify the problems and isolate them in practice. It is the best way to solve the problems!

GOAL ORIENTED PRACTICE

Isolate your problems and work on them one at a time! Don't just practice to practice; have a goal and work towards it.

PERFORM THE MUSIC, DON'T PLAY IT!

Practice perfection and expect nothing less than that from yourself. Self-motivation is the key to success! Always play with heart, caring and understand! This is the key ingredient in making the music come alive!

GET A COACH!!!

Just like in life, if you can take advantage of the opportunities presented to you, there is nothing that you cannot accomplish. There are thousands of years worth of musical knowledge and experience out there waiting for you to ask for it. What is it worth to you, \$15 and a half-an-hour a week? Those who seek out knowledge will obtain it! Don't sell yourself short; be the best musician you can be!