

Games and Challenges for the Instrumental Rehearsal

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Last spring, I presented a session at the CMEA conference. It was well-attended, and many attendees requested additional materials to share with their colleagues. I have outlined many games and challenges you can use to target specific skills within an instrumental rehearsal. Many can be easily adapted for use in vocal and general settings. My collection of activities will be featured in a four-part series throughout this year's CMEA News issues. In the fall, we focused on skills related to pitch and tonality. In the winter issue, I will share activities to build rhythmic skills. In the spring, we'll discuss strategies for practicing expressive skills, such as dynamics and independent musicianship.

Music Baseball

Many physical education supply stores carry baseball dice, often called "Home Run Anyone." Arrange the students in teams of 9 or more. If student can clap and count a one measure rhythm pattern correctly, they roll the baseball dice. If they perform it wrong, it is a strikeout and the same rhythm pattern is given to the next batter. If no one answers it correctly after 3 outs, have the whole class perform it and give a new rhythm pattern to the opposing team's first batter. Use sheets of paper on the floor for bases. Base runners can only score on a force home.

Rhythm Telephone

Form two single-file lines. Tap a one measure rhythm inaudibly on the shoulders of the people at the back of each line simultaneously. They in turn lightly tap the rhythm on the shoulder of the teammate in front to them, and so on, until it reaches the person at the front of the line. The front student must notate it on the board before the other team does. If they get it wrong, they do not erase it, but the person behind them at-

tempts to notate it correctly, and so on, to see how far back in the chain the rhythm pattern was passed on correctly. (You may want to have a metronome clicking the whole time as a point of reference.)

Variation 1: Show the one-measure rhythm pattern to the people in the back row to see if they can interpret it correctly by initiating the tapping on their teammate's shoulder.

Variation 2: Challenge the teams to do a two measure rhythm pattern.

Musical Chairs with a Twist

Each team should consist of 12 or more players. A row of 16 chairs with a space between each fourth chair must be set up for each team. These four groups of four chairs represent the 16th note subdivision of one 4/4 measure. Perform a rhythm pattern and the first team that recreates the notation correctly by putting people in the right chairs where the note heads would occur gets a point.

Variations – Use 12 chairs for 3/4 time or 6 chairs for 6/8 rhythm patterns.

Rhythm Dictation

Ask one section of the band to perform a challenging measure in their

part that no one else has (flutes for example) and the rest of the band has to try and notate the rhythm. The instruments performing the measure must be accurate for the others to decode it correctly so the entire band is strengthening their rhythm skills.

Rhythm Bingo

Students each have a Bingo card with one-measure rhythm patterns in each square. Perform the patterns randomly and the first student to correctly get five consecutive squares in a row, column or diagonal wins.

Rhythm Flash Cards

While the students are tapping the macro beat in their feet, ask them to clap and count through a series of one measure rhythm patterns on flash cards sequentially from quarter and eighth note patterns to more complex 8th & 16th note combinations. Pause briefly between each card so students can try to decode the next card before performing it together. Once the group has successfully accomplished this, shuffle the flash cards and challenge them to count and clap through them again, only this

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Continued

time, show the next card as soon as they begin performing the present one. This game helps them develop the ability to always read ahead in the music.

Variation 1: Use flash cards in assorted meters and replace traditional counting with Gordon or Kodaly syllables.

Variation 2: For syncopated patterns, you may want to try having them pat their lap for a down beat and clap for the upbeat while they decode the rhythm pattern with counting instead of tapping their feet and clapping their hands. This will provide a physical subdivision of the beat and may better illustrate that the emphasis is on the upbeat for syncopated rhythms.

Hungry?

Substitute traditional counting or rhythm syllables with foods that students can associate with the sound of the rhythmic grouping. I use "Pie" for a quarter note, "Piz-za" for a pair of eighths, "Pep-per-o-ni" for four sixteenths, "Cheese-burger" for an eighth and 2 sixteenths and "Lemon-ade" for 2 sixteenths followed by an eighth.

Play the Rests

Start a scale with students playing the first note as just an eighth note and resting the remaining of the

measure. The next measure they would play the first two notes of the scale as a pair of eighths and rest for the remaining 3 beats. The next measure they would play the first 3 notes of the scale in 3 eighths and rest for the remaining 2.5 beats, etc., until they complete the entire scale ascending in one measure of 4/4. Do the same sequence of adding one 8th note per measure starting at the top of the scale and descending. There should be no audible pulse to help students internalize the rests as they play.

Variation: Play the full scale either ascending or descending in one measure and add one 8th rest to the beginning of each subsequent measure in place of a scale degree.

Rhythm Blackjack

Each card should have a single note or rest value on it, ranging from a 16th note/rest to a whole note/rest and everything in between. Instead of getting 21, the first person whose cards add up to 6 or gets the closest to it without going over wins. "Black Jack" in this version is getting total of 6 with only 2 cards and pays double (if you choose to play with chips). Tie always goes to the dealer. Works best with 8 or less students in a group so you need multiple decks.

Bop It

In order to improve articulation and rhythmic precision, you need to clearly indicate the beats with your baton and the ensemble needs to watch you closely. Request that they just say "Bop" for the initial attack of each note (no sustained sound) in their part as you conduct through a passage. Then transfer this to having the students just tongue each note when it occurs without any sustain to reveal how well their timing is aligned.

IMPROVING TEMPO

On & Off

Tired of your band sounding tired and dragging the tempos down? Set the metronome at the desired tempo through an amplifier and have the band play along. Randomly turn off the metronome volume for a passage while the students are still playing and then turn it on again for the students to hear if they maintained the beat or not.

Where's the Beat?

Challenge your students to play a section or all of a piece without you conducting or providing any visual pulse to compel them to listen more intently to one another in order to stay together.