



Ensembleship for the 21st Century

Artist-Teacher

Monday, June 30, 2014

8:30 a.m. Hockett Family Recital Hall

Ensembleship is the ability of musicians to function effectively (i.e. creatively and artistically) in groups. For more than a century, wind band conductors have pursued that goal with a relentless focus on individual preparation and connection through convergent thinking. However, it is only since the turn of the 21st century that scholars and scientists have focused their attention in earnest on the psychological and neurological underpinnings of creativity, including the crucial element of divergence. The scientific predisposition against the study of creativity has been mirrored in the development of the American system of music education. As a result, this bias has been firmly embedded in the rehearsal practice of conductor/teachers for generations.

This session will connect contemporary scientific thought to traditional rehearsal practice to build a more effective and ultimately artistic method of developing ensembleship, including rehearsal activities and techniques based on interactive and improvisatory modes of thought common among actors. Material to develop character, define point of view, and enable interaction (as opposed to simple presentation which tends to be the ensemble musician's default) will be woven into the flow to tip the balance from philosophical to practical. The emphasis for the session will be on how to achieve the shift in values, thinking, and behaviors that supports ensembleship.

<http://arts.unl.edu/music/faculty/carolyn-barber>

Artistry is an ideal that is often misunderstood, but it occupies the very heart of why education in the arts is essential. Artistry isn't merely skill, nor is it simply creativity. It is the deliberate exercise of all one's faculties (intellect, emotion, technique, intuition) in a concerted effort to bring into being something that wasn't there before. For a musician, it is an honest, unpretentious effort to make music in a given moment. For young musicians, that moment might be a single note, by accident. For pros it is likely to stretch over a sustained period of time, deliberately. Of greatest importance is the realization that artistry is possible at every level – from beginner to expert.

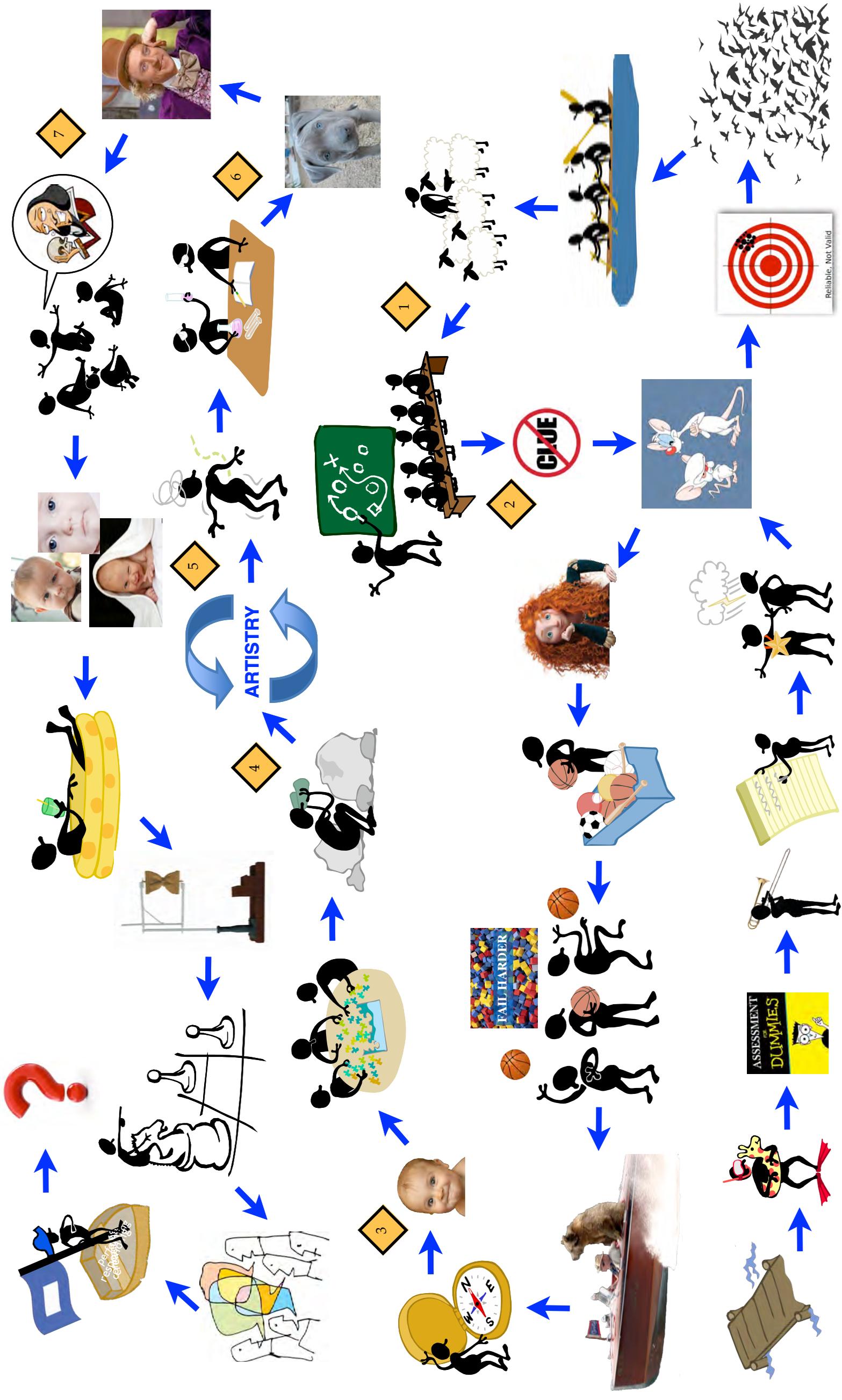
Connection, specifically the quality of the relationships among ensemble members and the conductor, is another misconstrued aspect of ensembleship. Consider magnets: opposite polarities attract (e.g. north to south) causing them to converge and lock together. Matching polarities repel (e.g. north to north), causing the magnets to move away from each other. If you were to strive to touch a matching pair together you would feel the repelling forces increase in strength as they came closer together. This "cushion" is exactly analogous to the invisible yet palpable connection between a conductor and an ensemble and between members of an ensemble. Every performer has the ability and responsibility to experience and exert artistic force. This divergent force is each musician's point of view.

Creativity is the key to ensemble development. Through the creative process the artistic potential of any ensemble can be unlocked. It is not a matter of following a method or manual. It is the exercise of an innate human capacity that has been undervalued and largely ignored until quite recently. Exploration of diverse disciplines including neuroscience, philosophy, and mathematics can lead to the reinvention of rehearsal procedures to achieve a broader spectrum of artistic outcomes. To that end, the current generation of conductors must overcome longstanding biases, inherited shortcomings, and personal trepidation to figure out how to teach what has never been taught - indeed, what has been thought to be unteachable until now.

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UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
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ARTISTRY

NO CLUE

FAIL HARDER

ASSESSMENT FOR DUMMIES

Reliable, Not Valid

7

6

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2

5

4

3

Wind Ensemble: Tips & Suggestions – Sectional Work

1

1. Phrase shaping has as much to do with the ebb and flow of harmonic tension as it does with dynamic and melodic contour. Find the moments of greatest tension and the moments of poise/rest (temporary or complete), and then consider what happens to momentum when you try to move from one to the next while maintaining a conversational dramatic flow.
2. Composers use fermatas to suspend or negate a sense of pulse. However, the fermata doesn't have to break the momentum. It can simply highlight a harmonic moment, or it can obliterate time entirely and create a "negative space" in which to set up new material. If your team is counting through fermatas (e.g. by doubling the note value), or treating them all equally, then you're missing the point.
3. All voices (SATB, or 1st 2nd 3rd) are responsible for developing and projecting a point of view that suits each individual line. The work of the team is then to reconcile conflicts among them, and determine priority (foreground, middle ground, and background). Hint: it is highly unlikely that any single voice should occupy the same relative location for the entire excerpt. Everybody should find an opportunity to step to the fore, however briefly. For clues, look to harmonic function, rhythmic interest, and melodic contour. Be on the alert for differences, e.g. one person has a leap while the rest are in steps, or one person's rhythm is active while the others are sustaining, or one person has a suspension...
4. While excellent tone characteristic to each instrument is essential, variations in tone color are an appropriate and effective tool in bringing a chorale to life. Consider the interrelationship of tone, articulation, range, and harmonic mood as you define the character of the excerpt.
5. Track your voice leading. What is your job in each chord (vertical)? What is the function of each note within the line (horizontal)?
6. Find and carry three layers of pulse to create stability. In the words of Cliff Towner, "Subdivide and conquer." White notes and rests have pulse too. Associate your breathing with pulse on a coherent level.
7. Pay as much attention to the backs of notes (releases) as to the fronts. Consider what you'll do, when you'll do it, and why (see #3 & 4 above).
8. Air in = air out. As a team, match the quality (pitch and tone), quantity (more is better), and timing (faster/slower depends on intonation and color choices, and duration depends on subdivision) of inhalations.



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http://www.ted.com/talks/david_logan_on_tribal_leadership
Logan, David, John King, Halee Fischer-Wright. *Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization*. New York: Harper Collins, 2008.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub27yeXKUTY>
Rodenburg, Patsy. *The Second Circle: How to Use Positive Energy for Success in Every Situation*. New York: WW Norton, 2008.

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<http://www.theenergybus.com>
Gordon, Jon. *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy*. New York: Wiley, 2007.



"Creativity is not only a natural process; it's the natural process. Once we are willing to tap our creative potential, we will move to doing what nature does, creating the impossible; not just doing things differently, but doing different things."

George Land & Beth Jarman

Basic Practice Strategies: Developing a Point of View

Your goal is to develop a point of view for everything, not just the interesting or complex material. Work systematically through your ensemble parts, and don't ignore what seems simple – it needs attention too. Ideally, you will have a point of view prepared before the first rehearsal. During the rehearsal (and each subsequent rehearsal) you'll gather new information and inspiration from your colleagues as the various points of view collide and interact. Use these new ideas to continue to develop and refine your point of view even as the ensemble's interpretation comes into focus. To begin, select a phrase or passage.

Step 1: find and isolate

- a. Using the suggestions in the table below as a starting point, choose a single item in the phrase or passage. As you become adept at the process, additional items will come to mind.
 - i. If working on this exercise with an ensemble, establish a consistent and stylistically accurate flow of time/tempo in which each person will play only the single item he/she has chosen. The result will be a pointilistic composite of individual sounds.
 - ii. If working alone, simple identification of an item is sufficient.
- b. Intermediate version: select more than one item.

Step 2: emphasize

- a. Play the complete phrase or passage, but emphasize the item you have chosen as it occurs in the flow.
 - i. Consider alternative methods of emphasis, including
 - a. Dynamic contrast (change in weight or density, etc.)
 - b. Variety of articulation
 - c. Timbre adjustment (tone color, vibrato, etc.)
 - d. Slight variation in duration or tempo (without breaking flow)
 - e. See also: methods of investing energy (below)
 - ii. At first, strive to be obvious rather than subtle. Don't worry about making tasteful or elegant choices. The goal is for a listener to perceive easily what you have chosen to emphasize.
- b. Intermediate version: select more than one item and proceed as above.

Step 3: prioritize

- a. Select three or more items to emphasize as you play the phrase or passage.
- b. Establish a clear hierarchy among the items based on musical and aesthetic confluence. In other words, notice when different items occur simultaneously (e.g. highest note and longest note and tonic all in one). The bigger the confluence/overlap, the greater the emphasis.
- c. Consider the method of emphasis that best suits each chosen item within the musical context.
 - i. Now it's time to choose according to your knowledge of performance practice and what is appropriate to the musical context.
 - ii. However, continue to strive to be obvious or your decisions won't be perceptible. Nuance will accrue as the multiple points of view in the ensemble interact (like rocks in a stream, the roughness will gradually be worn smooth).
- d. Play the complete phrase or passage, weaving the various moments and methods of emphasis into a coherent composite flow. You are now playing with a point of view!

Ideas for what might be a point of emphasis:

- a. Melody
 - i. Highest or lowest note
 - ii. Largest interval (leap)
- b. Harmony
 - i. Tonic, or resting tone
 - ii. Leading tone
 - iii. Notes with accidentals
 - iv. Resolutions, or suspensions
- c. Rhythm
 - i. Longest note value, or shortest
 - ii. Longer note following shortest
 - iii. Syncopations
- d. Meter
 - i. Downbeats
 - ii. Anacruses (pick ups)

Methods of investing energy (relates to air flow):

- a. Individual (solo)
 - i. Coming to rest, or ebbing
 - ii. In stasis, or orbiting
 - iii. Surging, or flowing
- b. In relationship to an ensemble
 - i. Reinforcing (helping, adding)
 - ii. Observing (allowing, giving room)
 - iii. Resisting (preventing, blocking)

Note for percussionists playing non-pitched instruments: "melody" refers to your relationship to the winds. If your rhythm tracks the melodic rhythm, then you are part of the melody even without pitch. "Harmony" refers to any time you play in combination with other instruments, particularly with other percussion. In that case, function (SATB) is determined by relative pitch (e.g. cymbal = soprano, snare = alto, toms = tenor, bass drum = bass).

Hallmarks of trust in an ensemble setting:

- Motion that corresponds to musical thought, particularly as it relates to momentum. Be on the alert in your own work for movements that are “noise” – random, habitual gestures or ticks unrelated to the line.
- Absence of gestural or sonic cheerleading or bullying. If you feel like you’re dragging everybody along, or making gestures that are large/energetic/exaggerated, or trying to leverage the sound of the group using your own sound, you are a cheerleader (if trying to be supportive) or bully (if frustrated). The antidote is to listen sincerely to your colleagues and strive to persuade them by allowing them to influence you. Have a musical conversation with them rather than shout at them.
- The absence of any single leader or constant focal point. A trusting ensemble is a flocking ensemble. As in a flock of birds, no single bird makes all the decisions for the group. The flock moves as different ideas occur in different areas – even at the back. The flock reverses direction, or flips upside down, or twists, or dives as different birds contribute to and adjust the collective flow of energy. Be on the alert for those who monopolize the conversation (see cheerleading/bullying above), or those who are silent (disengaged, or scared, or lazy, or confused). If you are inclined to be silent, make an effort to contribute in a small way – for example, to deliberately reinforce someone else’s idea, or to play devil’s advocate just for fun to see what happens.
- Much more playing than talking. Problems are solved by making music (improvisation in the moment) rather than disengaging from the music to have an intellectual discussion.
- Disagreement and friendly arguments. An ensemble that never argues is an ensemble without individual points of view, without musical vision, and without a purpose. Arguments can be verbal, but more importantly can be heard through playing in deliberate contrasts (dynamics, articulation, phrase shape, tempos, etc.). These disagreements are then resolved through playing by developing a consensus (flock opinion) through influence and improvisation.
- Synchronization of breathing and releases with awareness for the entire envelope of sound. Air speed, tone, and pitch are matched through peripheral vision and aural acuity. Releases are determined through a shared sense of pulse and contour. Negotiations to develop consensus are continual.
- Eye contact, laughter, relaxed and efficient posture, lack of tension in tone production (instrumental and verbal), and shared focus (a common physical, musical, emotional and intellectual energy).

Expectations for Ensemble Participation

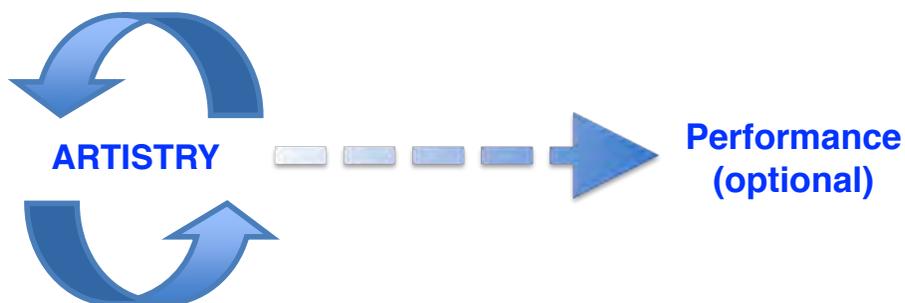


Individual **PREPARATION:**

- to achieve complete flexibility and facility,
- to amass vocabulary (aural, technical, & stylistic), and
- to evoke and work effectively within the context created by the composer.

Personal **ENGAGEMENT:**

Evaluation, emulation, absorption, and transfer throughout the rehearsal process.



Confident **POINT OF VIEW:**

To support conversation, persuasion, influence, reaction, and rebuttal.

IV Course Objectives: to develop the following skills, attitudes, and attributes in each member of the ensemble. [Excerpts from the UNL Wind Ensemble Syllabus]



(continued...)

1. Musicianship

- a. Defined as knowledge, skill, and artistic sensitivity in performing music.
- b. Cultivated through the discipline of consistent, thoughtful practice founded on a healthy balance of technical and artistic elements. In the words of Elliott Eisner, artists are “individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills, and the imagination to create work that is well proportioned, skillfully executed, and imaginative.”
- c. Essential elements of musicianship include:
 - i. Strong aural skills, including the ability to hear and adjust pitch, tone, and the complete sound envelope as needed (articulation, releases, dynamics, density, etc.)
 - ii. A vivid imagination for sound and the ability to describe one’s thoughts and emotions clearly and reliably through an instrument.
 - iii. The ability to connect all musical training to and through performance (history, theory, etc.), continually building a comprehensive mental anthology of styles and concepts.
 - iv. Analytical skill to support audiation, improvisation, and teamwork, including a reliable sense of harmonic function and elemental role (melody, bass, background texture, etc.)
- d. The goal, as described by Guru Dev: “At some point in a musician’s development his instrument becomes purely a tool, an extension of himself. This is when the theory and the technical problems of that instrument have been overcome and he no longer thinks about them. He is free just to play, to be an open channel, to let the creative force within express itself effortlessly through him and his instrument.”

2. Integrity and professionalism as a member of the Wind Ensemble team.

- a. Integrity is the quality of possessing and adhering to high moral principles and professional standards.
- b. It’s not the job you do, it’s how you do the job. Accountability is a major component: the obligation to accept responsibility for one’s actions and attitudes.
- c. Additional elements of professionalism include:
 - i. Consistent and punctual attendance, and appropriate focus/state of mind.
 - ii. Appropriate conduct and communication with teammates, faculty, and staff both in and out of rehearsal.
 - iii. Proper and timely completion of assignments and tasks, including daily individual practice.

3. Flexibility and curiosity in one’s attitude and approach toward literature and technique.

- a. In the words of Elliott Eisner, “To succeed the artist needs to see, that is, to experience the qualitative relationships that emerge in his or her work and to make judgments about them.”
 - i. “In the arts judgments are made in the absence of rule.”
 - ii. “The arts teach students...to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices and to revise them to make other choices.”
 - iii. “...as we learn in and through the arts we become more qualitatively intelligent.”
- b. Flexible purposing: “In this process, ends shift; the work yields clues that one pursues. In a sense, one surrenders to what the work in progress suggests.” (Eisner)
- c. Thinking within the medium: “...the relationship between thinking and the material with which we and our students work.” (Eisner)
- d. The goal is to “work at the edge of incompetence,” rather than dwelling within the areas we know how to predict and control. (Eisner)

4. Ensembleship

- a. Defined as the ability of musicians to function effectively (i.e. artistically) in groups.
- b. The elements of ensembleship include:
 - i. Individual preparation and connection through convergent thinking.
 - ii. Improvisational skill and individual point of view through divergent thinking.
- c. The first step in building ensembleship is to develop an understanding of the myriad roles each person plays. An initial diagnosis of the ensemble’s character leads to guided role-playing and eventually instills independent musical intuition. Even as step one is in progress, new and variable patterns of connection emerge as the musicians send and receive information, influence each other, and are influenced.
- d. The goal is a state of being: improvisatory, creative play and the exercise of artistry.