

# workshop



## GENERAL MUSIC

### The Essential Connection Between Rhythm and Movement

It is the most fundamental aspect of music, yet so many students struggle with rhythm. How does one effectively teach budding young musicians to properly feel and read the rhythms all around them?

Eileen Benedict, vocal music specialist at the Edith L. Slocum School in Ronkonkoma, New York, finds it best to start teaching her young students not through notation but through something more natural: movement of the human body. She explains, "I always ask my students what kind of movement *they* feel they should do to each piece of music. Typical responses include marching, jogging in place, jumping, and swinging. I then suggest ice skating and swaying as further terms for them to act out. As you know, duple [meter] is much more common and so is the primary 'feeling' for children. The concept of heartbeat is also spoken of from the start and is addressed in each and every lesson."

In Benedict's curriculum, by October of her kindergarten classes she has students doing some rudimentary notation in which they render heartbeats in groups of four, drawing lines on the chalkboard as they sing. Benedict teaches basics like



*tas* and *ti-tis* and the quarter-note rest at the beginning of first grade. At the same time, she makes sure every new song is studied and read before the students learn lyrics and games.

To differentiate between duple and triple meters, Benedict uses movement activities similar to those mentioned above. "Just as marching or walking are typical for duple, skating or swaying are typical for triple. 'The Skater's Waltz' and 'My Monster Frankenstein' ('My Darling Clementine') are really fun to use for movement in 3/4," she says (see Figure 1). "I teach time signatures from the beginning of first grade, and I ask students to study to make sure each measure has the correct number of beats. This can turn into some fun when a song has a pickup [measure] and the students all discover my 'mistake'!"

Benedict finds a multistep process beneficial to students' understanding of the rhythms in a piece. She has the students "1) study the music silently; 2) share what they see, such as the number of measures, the time signature, and number of rests; 3) chant the rhythms; 4) chant and clap the rhythms; 5) audiate the rhythms and clap; 6) sing the melody on solfège; and 7) add words, games, and instruments as required." This process not only helps students learn the rhythms in a given piece, but also helps them gain an awareness of the basic rhythms that are common to different meters. —Adam Perlmutter



## BRASS AND WOODWINDS

### Single-Reed Articulation for Beginners

Far too many beginning clarinet and saxophone students go through their school days articulating in ways that hinder their overall performance. Often it is only when students reach more advanced levels that a teacher picks up on the subtle problems that have held them back from reaching full potential on their instruments. A concentrated focus on the basics of tonguing from the very start can help eliminate the need for such remedial work in later years.

Loraine Enloe, assistant professor of instrumental music education at the



FIGURE 1: "My Monster Frankenstein" ("My Darling Clementine") serves as an excellent teaching tool for waltz time. More advanced students, when checking to see if the piece has enough beats, will find a "mistake"—the pickup bar, which only contains one beat.



University of Idaho, believes that the most effective way to teach articulation to a woodwind student is through call-and-response exercises. The teacher should play and model the proper technique, then have the student attempt to play with the same sound and attack. These exercises—which can consist of simple quarter-note or eighth-note rhythms, beginning with smooth legato tones—should be the primary part of the first several weeks of lessons. “Avoid asking students to tongue on the tip of the reed,” Enloe advises. “Instead, have them aim the tips of their tongues at a spot around ¼ inch to ½ inch down from the top.” In some cases, it may be helpful to mark that spot on the reed with a pen, giving the student a visual reference point to think about when tonguing on the actual instrument.

For a legato tongue, start tones with an air attack, then slowly extend the tongue until the player can feel the reed tickle the tip of his or her tongue. This is the basis of legato technique, and once this sound is well developed, the student can begin to tongue with more pressure to achieve a crisp edge on the notes. As the student plays the exercises, the teacher should watch for any motion under the chin that might indicate excessive tongue movement, beyond what is required for a clean attack. Teachers should also insist that their students keep air moving in a steady stream rather than regulating it in pulses with their throats; movement at the base of the neck can be a sign of this commonly overlooked mistake.

The guiding principle in Enloe’s approach to teaching single-reed articulation is that students must have a firm grasp of this most basic part of tone production before any other concepts are to be taught. Simply jumping into a lesson book on the first day of class may not be the best approach. During the initial lessons, focus instead on the building blocks of blowing and proper tonguing until the student has the confidence and ability to produce solid, well-defined articulations. —Chad Criswell



## STRINGS

### Muscle Memory, Ear Training, and Intonation

As string teachers are well aware, sound intonation does not happen overnight. However, Charlene Dell, assistant professor of music education at the University of Oklahoma, maintains that a few simple insights into what produces good intonation can offer tremendous help to educators. “Intonation,” she says, “is a combination of what the player hears in his head and the muscle memory that he attributes to that sound.” From this fact, it follows logically that students who consistently have intonation trouble are experiencing a disconnection between what they are hearing and what their muscle memory is producing in their fingers: “The weaker the intonation, the weaker the connection between what you want to hear and knowing the finger spacing that will bring you that sound.”

Teachers can further students’ knowledge of that spacing by encouraging them to play the same notes in a variety of positions. “If one wishes to play in tune with a note in a different place than ‘usual,’” Dell says, “he needs to train his hands to recognize the spacing between the fingers in those new positions or on those new strings.”

Interestingly, Dell advocates the use of singing as a way of helping students become aware of intonation. “Singing is a concrete way to know how and what a person is audiating. So the more we get our kids to sing, the more we are training their ears to hear, and the better model we are providing for them to hear the note before they play it—a necessity for good intonation.” In this way, teachers can increase the likelihood that students will not simply do the prescribed fingering in a rote manner, regardless of how it sounds.

Dell also recommends helping students to play in tune by asking them to listen to the way notes fit into a chord: “Playing against a drone, or playing against chords in which the notes fall,



may provide students with the context in which to play their notes.” In fact, Dell is currently doing research to determine just how effective this specialized ear-training technique is.

By employing various techniques to train both ears and muscles, string instructors can do much to help their students stay in tune. Instead of looking to a teacher or an electronic tuner for validation, students will begin to develop both an inner awareness of their intonation and the skills to judge its accuracy.

—Cynthia Darling



## PERCUSSION

### Developing Sight-Reading Skills on Mallet Percussion Instruments

Sight-reading while playing a mallet instrument can present serious obstacles for the developing percussionist. Many young players who have solid snare drum technique usually cite fear of playing the wrong note(s) as the number-one hurdle to overcome in order to begin making real progress.

Some students try to memorize music in order to avoid these challenges. Some choose a soft mallet so they can contribute to the overall performance but not let any wrong notes be heard so directionally. Why not embrace these challenges and improve your students’ reading skills at the same time?

Greg Byrne, associate director of