

BALANCING ACT:

Tips on Keeping your High School Woodwind Students On-track *and* Motivated

By Todd Cope

Television shows and movies often portray high school as an ‘easy walk in the park.’ In reality, we as educators know that this is not the case. With the increasing distractions and demands being placed on our students, can we continue to steer them in the right direction? The answer is a resounding YES!

The following four key areas often leave our students feeling overwhelmed and distracted:

- 1) Marching Band
- 2) Other Musical Activities
- 3) Learning to play an Auxiliary Instrument
- 4) Increased Schoolwork

MARCHING BAND

Most students who participate in high school band programs also participate in marching band. Continuing musical development during marching band season can be difficult due to lengthy rehearsals, football games, and weekend marching band contests. The time commitment is sometimes overwhelming and may cause students to stray from good performance practices on their instruments.

Take the time to guide your students through a good warm up before a marching rehearsal utilizing long tones and scales. A clarinet-specific warm-up should help develop and maintain a high level of musicianship and will foster a greater enjoyment of the activity. Similarly, playing etudes and solo works during marching season will be helpful in cleansing the musical soul after a long day on the marching field.

OTHER MUSICAL ACTIVITIES

Some of the more ambitious students may choose to participate in musical activities outside of the school day - private lessons, orchestra, or concerto competitions. If possible, employ a woodwind specialist who can work with students individually or in small groups to help students maximize their potential. Having a private teacher – one on one instruction – may be a luxury. But if you can arrange it, your students may actually enjoy being pushed into accomplishing their goals!

Participation in other ensembles (non-school groups) often fosters social as well as musical development. Performing in new environments with other musicians who share a passion for music can be encouraging and reassuring to our sometimes over-worked students. Encourage your “go-getters” to participate in a concerto or solo contest as well. While this can be stressful



and demanding, your top students may welcome the diversion and enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes from performing individually in public.

LEARNING AN AUXILIARY INSTRUMENT

Learning a new instrument can be a daunting task. Students may want to – or be required to – learn how to play auxiliary instruments (i.e. bass clarinet). In order to be successful on an auxiliary instrument, students should approach it in the same way that they approach their primary instrument. Insist that they learn proper fingerings and technique from the outset. Help them find proper equipment, paying special attention to mouthpiece and reed combinations. Starting with proper equipment and good fundamentals will yield greater success and less stress.

INCREASED SCHOOL WORK

The greatest challenge facing high school musicians is learning how to balance school work with musical activities. Young musicians deal with papers, projects, clubs, etc. in addition to church and family commitments. Put band rehearsal on top of all this and you've got the perfect recipe for "how to be stressed out"! Teach your students how to be organized and how to budget their time efficiently. As a busy high school student, I began each week by writing down a schedule for the entire week. Try this with your students. They will find that they really do have time to do their school work, time to practice, time to meet their commitments, and most importantly – time to have fun!

While our students may feel overwhelmed and distracted at times, it's important for us to remind them that we have "been there, done that." We can help them become successful by teaching them to take a systematic, organized approach to everything they do. Skills learned in band rehearsals are skills for life.



TODD COPE

Todd Cope joined the clarinet section of the New World Symphony in September, 2007. As a concerto soloist, he has performed with the New World Symphony, Meadows Symphony Orchestra, Eastern Music Festival Orchestra, and the Greater Dallas Youth Orchestra Wind Symphony. His concerto performance with the Music Academy of the West Festival Orchestra was featured on National Public Radio's *Performance Today*. Todd graduated from the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati where he studied with Richard Hawley. Other teachers include Carmine Campione and Deborah Ungaro Fabian. While a high school student in the Plano, Texas Independent School District, Todd was a featured soloist on NPR's *From the Top*. Todd began his studies in Mrs. Corley's beginning clarinet class at Renner Middle School.