

## “SOUND” TECHNIQUES FOR SUPERIOR ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE

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I have often wondered when a frustrated conductor stops and asks the ensemble to listen and play with a “warm beautiful sound,” gives a downbeat, and there is little or no positive result...

Why a student never asks the real question:

How?

### Your challenge

STEP 1 – WHAT IS THE SOUND YOU WANT? – (Your inner ear sound print)

i. Describe the sound you want (Use adjectives)

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

II. What is the basis/reference for your desired sound?

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

### Listen to the ensemble

STEP 2 – REACT RATHER THAN ANALYZE – (Use your ears and body reaction, not your mind)

i. Describe the sound you hear (Use non-musical adjectives)

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

II. How do you *feel-react* to that sound? (Use non-musical adjectives)

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

**Identification**

**STEP 3 – WHAT IS CAUSING YOUR REACTION?** – (Where does your attention go immediately)

i. Identify possible elements of *distraction* from your desired sound

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

**Remedy**

**STEP 4 – THE FIX IS IN - "THE HOW"**

Individual vs. Ensemble

i. Individual – You will quickly reach an ensemble sound quality limit until you improve the tone quality of the individual players. (Relieve your ensemble frustration here)

- A. Warm-up vs. Build-up – Warm-up for tone quality, Build-up for Technique
  - 1. Get off the podium and remedy!
  - 2. Simple individual warm-up check points for immediate improvement

Maximum Vibration = Maximum Fundamental = Maximum Characteristic Tone Quality  
(Anything that impedes maximum air flow or response diminishes maximum vibration)

Piccolo/Flute \_\_\_\_\_

Clarinets \_\_\_\_\_

Oboe/Bassoon \_\_\_\_\_

Saxophones \_\_\_\_\_

Trumpet \_\_\_\_\_

Horn \_\_\_\_\_

Low Brass \_\_\_\_\_

Percussion \_\_\_\_\_

Strings \_\_\_\_\_

**As the evaluator/teacher**

**Begin to recognize a correct and incorrect sound and make immediate visual corrections**

## STEP 4 – CONTINUED...

### Individual vs. Ensemble

II. Ensemble – It is the responsibility of each *individual* player for the quality of the ensemble sound. (Relieve your frustration here – It's not your fault – unless it's not defined)

A. Blend vs. Balance – Blend is vertical sonority; Balance is horizontal identity (Should not be used in the same context. You blend sound, you balance line)

1. Blend and intonation are inseparable elements
2. Intonation is the primary element to produce a quality ensemble sound

An individual can only tune to a *single* reference pitch at a time to successfully eliminate waves  
(Every student must have a *single* listening point of reference throughout a performance)

Blend – Vertical Sonority

(Unison/Chordal) \_\_\_\_\_

(Melody/Counter melody) \_\_\_\_\_

**As the evaluator/teacher**  
**Define all listening points of reference throughout a piece.**  
**The responsibility is now on each individual player.**  
**When an issue occurs, indicate where the listening point is located.**

**Still frustrated?**

## STEP 5 – OTHER IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS THAT EFFECT SOUND

I. Ensemble Set-up

- A. Instrument location – tradition is unimportant
- B. Part assignment – all principal players control the overall sound
- C. Sonic space – Sound waves need space to travel through

II. Clarity

- A. Articulation – Articulation is style. Must be consistent between players
- B. Balance – Define the texture line
- C. Rhythm – Turn OFF the metronome!! – Please!!

III. How we hear sound – We hear highs louder than lows (Opposite of the overtone series)

NOTES