Sterling Weed, 1901-2005

On September 11th, one of Vermont’s legendary music educators died peacefully in his home. Sterling Weed will be long remembered by the hundreds of individuals he taught in schools and in his home, and by the thousands of people who listened and danced to his “Imperial Orchestra”.

Photo at right: Sterling Weed and His Imperial Orchestra played at Governor Howard Dean’s Inaugural Ball at the Sheraton Conference Center in South Burlington, VT. (Photo by Cindy Humiston Weed)

Also in this issue...

- VMEA announces award recipients
- Teachers share techniques for effective practice
- VT MIDI project continues to grow
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October 15 for December issue
January 15 for March issue
April 15 for June issue

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Dear Fellow Music Educators,

The year is almost half over!! Can you believe it? It seems it was just yesterday that the new sixth grade students were arriving to begin their three years of education at our school. Now, they are halfway to grade seven and I haven’t even met all of them in class yet. Time flies by when you love your work and the students you work with.

As you read this letter, I’m sure that many of you are preparing your students for All State auditions, district festivals, school programs, and concerts, not to mention the day-to-day educating that takes place in the music classrooms and rehearsal halls around this state. I am so fortunate to be a part of this profession, and I believe we all share a common vision. We all hope, wish, and work toward a well-rounded arts education for all students in our districts. To that end, I would like to talk a bit more about advocacy.

We are all well aware of NCLB — No Child Left Behind. We are most certainly aware that although this law suggests that the arts are core subjects, the need for our students to test well in reading and math is making it difficult for schools to improve or even maintain their arts programs at the same level from year to year. We are seeing the ramifications of NCLB every day throughout this country in the reduction of qualified music teachers and exceptional programs. What does this mean for us? It means that we, too, are being more carefully scrutinized and our students’ needs are taking a back seat to positive test results. How can this be changed? First, we need to work more closely together as an association to discuss the problem and work for its resolution. We need to support each other by sharing ideas via dialogue/discussion and personal involvement in each other’s work. When was the last time you attended a concert given by one of your colleagues and their students? Have you written any recent articles to the media about what’s going on in music in your community? Have you started any new innovative music programs in recent years? How will the public know what we are doing in the schools unless we tell them?!

I know many of us live the same daily schedule. We have more classes than many of the other teachers in our buildings, we travel around to several schools daily or weekly, we see all the students in our school sometime during the year, and many of us do church work, performing, or some other kind of professional music work outside the school day. In addition to all of this, we are expected to showcase our students several times a year in our community. What other department has to display their work to the community? Time is at a premium for all of us. I believe, however, that advocating for ourselves and our programs is time well spent. If we don’t do it, who will? We offer an incredible service and exceptional education to our students. Music plays an important role in their lives. What will you do to advance the arts in your community?

The VMEA Fall Conference was held recently at Essex High School. I was a little disappointed by the poor attendance. We moved the conference to Thursday in hopes of getting more members to attend. We had several nationally reputable presenters who had a tremendous amount of information to impart. In addition, for the first time, we had a children’s choir that rehearsed all day in the auditorium and performed for us at the end of the conference. It was an excellent way to end our conference. Those in attendance responded that the day was very worthwhile and educational.

Why weren’t all the sessions full? What can we do to improve the conference to attract more of our colleagues to attend? If you have any thoughts on this, please contact me or a member of the Executive Board. We need your input and are here to serve your needs. If you have ideas, please share them with us. On a similar note, do you know someone who is not a member of MENC/VMEA? Perhaps they are waiting for a personal invitation. Ask them to join! What have you got to lose? With your words of invitation, perhaps we will recruit another member to help work toward a better arts education for all students.

Congratulations are in order for two of our colleagues. Mr. Adam Sawyer from Barre Town Elementary and Middle School was recently awarded the Outstanding New Music Educator award, and Ms. Vicki Matteson from Rutland Intermediate School was awarded the Music Educator of the Year award by the VMEA. Information about them can be found elsewhere in this issue of The Vermont Music Educator. Congratulations to both of them on this well deserved honor.

Lastly, I want to thank the Executive Board members for their countless hours of work to see that the VMEA runs smoothly. They are the reason that VMEA is able to offer the fall conference, All-State Music Festival, and other music activities around the state. They are teachers, performers, parents, and even students themselves, and yet, they find time to serve on the board. The next time you see any of them, thank them for their efforts... and if you are interested in serving in some capacity on the district or state level, let someone know. We definitely need all the support we can muster. We are possibly facing some severe cuts in the next few years due to budget constraints if we don’t work to improve our communication with our communities. For your part, what will you do to help our cause?
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Sterling left an even greater legacy than his musical performances. For most of his working life, Mr. Weed was a music teacher. He was the teacher for the St. Albans School band and taught music at B.F.A. Fairfax, Franklin, Enosburg, and Milton. He directed the Enosburg Town Band and the concert band at B.F.A. St. Albans and St. Mary’s High School. It has been said that he taught some 4,000 students! On top of that, some of Mr. Weed’s students have become teachers themselves.

Joanne Scott, music teacher at the Fairfield Center School, has known Sterling Weed for over 30 years. “Fond memories!” says Ms. Scott, who first met Sterling during the late 1960s. “Sterling always gave anyone who had an ounce of talent the opportunity to learn, and for me, at that very crucial time, he was a beacon of hope. I was always welcomed with open arms and nurtured by him. My choice to become a serious musician was in large due to Mr. Weed and to that huge family of musicians he cultivated. It was Mr. Weed who taught me to swing and only recently gave me the courage to begin improvising... something he began back in his days with Weed’s Orchestra). How is this possible? Look at the man’s record. Often the band was playing six or seven nights a week! For 32 years he played for dances at Selby Lake in Canada on Friday nights, and for 18 years he could be heard regularly at Lake Carmi. Most of us haven’t held a job or been married for that long. And if this helps to give some perspective to this amazingly long musical career, one of his first jobs was working for the Empire Theater for three years playing piano and flute for the silent “moving picture” shows just before the “talkies” were introduced.

But the most amazing thing is that we’re not just talking past history here; this band that played throughout the 30s, 40s, 50s and was still playing right through the 80s, 90s and welcomed in the new millennium, all with its original director. That’s 75 years! It’s simply incredible, and now that history, that resource, that person who was Sterling Weed is a memory in the hearts of many musicians and fans alike.

Sterling’s death)

A LIFE IN REVIEW

Born 15 days before Louis Armstrong, on August 4, 1901
Youngest of three brothers
Musical family: grandfather and father played violin; mother played piano and organ; brother Lorenzo played trumpet and violin; brother Ora played trombone, drums, and bass; sister-in-law (Ory’s wife) taught Sterling to play piano
Began his performing career at age 11, playing piccolo in a community band
Played his first gig on saxophone two days after getting the instrument
Attended school in the building that is now the St. Albans Historical Museum
Learned to tune pianos
Earned a music degree from Polk College (LaPorte, In.) in 1926
Married twice; no children
Started music programs in several Franklin County schools (St. Albans, Milton, Fairfax, Enosburg, and Franklin)
Directed community bands in Enosburg, Fairfax, and Milton
Led Weed’s Imperial Orchestra from 1932 through 2005 (the group disbanded for a while but was revived for a fundraising event and continued until Sterling’s death)
Band’s theme song: “Wang Wang Blues”
Sterling’s favorite song: “Let Me Call You Sweetheart”
Music library includes about 4,500 arrangements
Was the oldest bandleader in the United States (and probably the world)
Honors included a special recognition award from VMEA in 2000 and a lifetime achievement award from the Vermont Arts Council in 2001

Sterling Weed, on his career:
“I enjoyed every bit of it. I had a great time.”

Source: Associated Press article “Almost 100 and Still Blowing His Horn” by David Gram.
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DISTRICT FIVE REPORT
Submitted by Matt Tatro

Things have been busy in District V, from job changes and festival auditions to new births and weddings. I would first like to congratulate Marc and Meredith Whitman on the birth of their son, Malcolm Whitman. I would also like to congratulate Vicki Matteson on receiving the 2005 Music Educator of the Year award, not only within our district but also at the state level. Hannah Yarwood was selected as our Outstanding New Music Educator for District V, and Paul Stetson of Mount Abraham Union High School was given a special recognition award. I would finally like to congratulate Marc Whitman for being selected as President-Elect of the Vermont Music Educators Association.

Marc Whitman, Vicki Matteson, Fran LaPlaca, and Steve Sawyer have developed and presented an adjudicators workshop for our district. This workshop presents different musical examples and guidelines for adjudicators. Using a video recording, a guideline is presented followed by an example to demonstrate it. The participants then judge the example based on the concept from the video. This is followed by a discussion of the example. The goal is to help our adjudicators to be more consistent in their judging. For each person who attends and then judges at the auditions, we are offering them credit they can use towards recertification. Marc, Vicki, Fran, and Steve have put in many hours to develop this workshop, and I would like to congratulate them on a job well done.

We have two district festivals coming up in February and March. As always, our managers have been working hard to get some great guest conductors. We hope that our students will leave energized and excited about music. We are also continuing our efforts to help teachers in our district who need support at all levels. We have many dedicated music professionals who work hard for our students. We are trying to make sure they have all the support that they need to continue this valuable service.

ORCHESTRA PROGRAM
OPEN TO HIGHLY SKILLED MUSICIANS
Submitted by Anne Taylor

The Kennedy Center / National Symphony Orchestra Summer Music Institute is a four-week summer music program at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., for student instrumentalists. The program is intended for serious music students with the primary acceptance standard being musical talent. The fellowship provides the following benefits to students accepted into the program:

- Round-trip air transportation to and from Washington, D.C., as well as housing, meals, and local transportation during their stay in our nation’s capital
- Private lessons taught by a member of the National Symphony Orchestra
- Chamber music coaching by NSO musicians
- Master classes and seminars
- Attendance at selected rehearsals and performances of the NSO
- Participation in the NSO Summer Music Institute Orchestra, conducted by Elizabeth Schulze
- Performance opportunities in the D.C. metropolitan area
- Exposure to internationally-renowned conductors, soloists, and musicians

The program is open, by recorded audition, to students who are seriously considering orchestral music as a career and willing to devote themselves to a musical education, as follows: high school students in grades 9-12 and college students entering freshman or sophomore year (as of September 2006).

The sponsoring organization for Vermont is the Vermont Alliance for Arts Education (VAAE). The NSO Institute application form is available online <www.vaae.org>. All applications and supporting materials should be received at the VAAE office (P.O. Box 327, Fairlee, VT 05045) no later than February 3, 2006.

Students will be notified of the results by March 31, 2006.

ESSEX CHILDREN’S CHOIR
Submitted by Sara Puretz

This year’s annual Twelfth Night Celebration, featuring the Essex Children’s Choir, will be presented Saturday, January 7 at 6:30 p.m, under the artistic direction of Constance J. Price, at the Chapel of Saint Michael the Archangel on the St. Michael’s College campus. A suggested donation of $10 is requested to support the presentation. Doors open at 5:15 p.m. Seating is limited. For more information, call (802) 863-9161. (In case of bad weather, the snow date is Sunday, January 8 at 4:30 p.m.)
ALL STATE FESTIVAL UPDATE
Submitted by Steffen Parker

The 79th Vermont All State Music Festival will take place May 10-13, hosted this year by Mt. Anthony Union High School in Bennington. Kicking off the event will be the annual All State Parade on Wednesday, May 10, starting at 6:00 p.m., when 3,000+ elementary, middle and high school musicians will march their way through the streets of Bennington, performing a wide variety of selections.

After more than 25 years of hosting this event around the state, this is the first time it will be held in Bennington County. Mt. Anthony's music educators, faculty, and staff, led by co-hosts Marj Rooen and Paul Lambert, will be preparing the rehearsal and performance facilities for the more than 400 high school musicians who will be there next May. Many families in the Bennington community will participate as well, opening their doors to house these students during their three-day stay.

But before all of that, more than 1,300 musicians will audition for the privilege of participating in an All State ensemble at two audition sites this January. The southern auditions on January 7 will be hosted by Rob Gattie, Erica Howard, and the students at Hartford High School in White River Junction, while the northern auditions will be hosted by Aimee Bushey, Christina Toner, Dave Domenick and their students at South Burlington High on January 14. Besides the jazz, wind, string, and vocal auditions for high school students held at these two sites, audition performances for the Vermont All State scholarships will also be held at the same time. Applications for these auditions were accepted online this year for the first time using a system developed by Festival Director Steffen Parker.

More than 100 Vermont music educators and musicians volunteer their time and abilities to organize and operate these auditions; even more help is always appreciated. If you can help with the adjudications of these talented musicians, please contact the appropriate adjudicator coordinator: Karen Casavant (Vocal – kcasavant@wssu.org), Steve Olson (Instrumental – pelier@adelphia.net), Tony Pietricola (Jazz – tonyje@gmail.com), or Gary Moreau (Scholarship – alwayssinging@adelphia.net).

More information on the Vermont All State Music Festival is available online or by contacting Steffen Parker (sparker@vpaonline.org).

ON THE WEB @
WWW.VMEA.ORG/ALLSTATE.HTML

NEW FLYNNARTS COURSES
Submitted by Tracey Gilbert

The spring semester for FlynnArts music classes begins January 16. Classes include jazz combo workshops for students and a jazz/blues vocal performance class for adults. For a full brochure, more information, or to register, call (802) 652-4548, extension 4.

VMEA BOARD NEWS

VMEA welcomes its new collegiate chair, Dr. Ron Sherwin of Castleton State College. Dr. Sherwin hopes to facilitate relations between college/university music education faculty and their CMENC chapters, get CMENC members more involved at the conference and other events, and begin a formal survey of VT music educators to learn how the colleges and universities can better serve them.

Allyson Ledoux has changed roles, moving from choral music chair to conference chair. She has already begun planning the 2006 conference, which will be held Thursday, October 19 at Randolph High School. More details will be printed in upcoming journal issues.

The Board is still in need of a general music chair. Contact President Gary Moreau if you are interested in volunteering for this post.
Music Educator of the Year: VICKI MATTESON

With her love of music and wonderful teaching skills, Vicki Matteson has opened the world of instrumental and choral music to countless numbers of students during the past 30 years. She began her teaching career in St. Albans City School, where she was hired in 1973 to create an instrumental music program. In 1987, Vicki relocated to Rutland, where she continues to teach instrumental and general music in the Rutland Public Schools. During her career, Vicki has taught instrumental music, general music, band, and chorus. She also maintains a private clarinet studio.

Vicki is an exceptional educator, never accepting mediocrity. She strives to impart the musical skills to her students that give them the confidence to perform to the best of their abilities.

Vicki has been extremely active in professional music organizations, including VMEA District I (Secretary and President), VMEA (President, Secretary, Instrumental Chair, MLOSW Chair, Tri-M Chair), Vermont All State Music Festival (Director, Assistant Director, Band Manager), New England Music Festival (Band Manager, Executive Board), MENC Eastern Division Conference (Committees, Presenter) and VMEA District V (Auditions Chair). Vicki has given a great deal of time, organizational skill and expertise to these music organizations.

Vicki Matteson is an outstanding music educator. She continually strives for excellence personally and demands no less from her students. She has devoted her life to nurturing young musicians, providing them with an exemplary music education in every area that she teaches.

Outstanding New Music Educator: ADAM SAWYER

Adam Sawyer has been the band director at the Barre Town Middle and Elementary School for the past four years. At this school, he leads concert bands for grades 4-8. He also teaches the sixth, seventh, eighth grade jazz bands and provides instrumental instruction to students in grade four through six. Adam teaches general music to students in grade four.

Approximately 300 students benefit from Adam’s music instruction programs. His ensembles have performed for numerous occasions in the public outside of the traditional school concert. His students have marched in parades, including the All State Parade from 2002 through 2004. The seventh and eighth grade ensembles have been adjudicated at the High Note Music Festival in Lake George, N.Y., and received excellent and superior ratings. Jazz combos that Adam has organized have performed for many local Barre functions, while learning about the art of improvisation, and small ensemble technique. Adam has been very involved in the District IV Winooski Valley Music Association, serving as a school host and manager of middle and high school festival ensembles. He also conducted the District IV Middle School festival band in 2005, and the District I Middle School Festival Band in 2002 and 2005. Adam has served as an adjudicator for the Vermont All State Music Festival and was on the planning committee for the 2003 Festival, which was held in Barre.

Professional growth is a high priority for Adam. He continues to take workshops in music technology, develop music curriculum standards, develop assessment tools for instrumental and general music, and use recorded student performance for reflection.

Do you know someone who should be recognized with one of these awards???
Nominations for 2006 may be submitted anytime.
Eighth grade students from Barre City School (and their teacher, Brent White) listen as their composition is played by the Constitution Brass Quintet. The Vermont MIDI Project held its twelfth concert featuring student works earlier this month. For more information, read the article in this issue of the journal. (Photo courtesy Sandi MacLeod)
Moss doesn't grow on the shoulders of a conscientious music major. You have to practice your instrument, study for your courses, listen to quality music, go to concerts, and perform daily. Oh yes, there are always the small life treasures such as earning money, washing laundry, and eating (if time permits). As the days swiftly pass, you begin to think, "If I just make it to all of my classes, rehearsals, and lessons, I will figure out the rest later." The rest" is then easily pushed aside until success is thwarted and the stress level is compounded exponentially. Here are a few ideas to help you optimize those precious moments.

Many time management experts will encourage you to start with a daily appointment book or calendar in which you schedule all of your personal expectations of accomplishment. This is quite beneficial, but it may actually prevent you from discovering how you best work through life's daily tasks. You may not even know how you are using your time. You simply know that you don't have any time and can't get anything done.

What are you doing day in and day out? Keep a journal of your time for one entire week. In half-hour blocks, describe your activities, including sleep, studying, practicing, classes, and recreation. Make entries every few hours, as you will forget what you actually did and perhaps enter what you wish you had done. Keep the entries general so that it is not time-consuming. Instead of "I had dinner with Joe, Sue, Pat, and Crazy at Z's Restaurant on Maple Street," write "recreation/dinner with friends." The whole purpose is to find out how you are using your time.

At the end of the week, divide your activities into categories and calculate the time committed to each category. Also make a note of any preferences that appear, such as practicing in the morning and studying in the late afternoon. Revelations of how you have used your time should help you discover which areas are excessive or deprived. It may help you find when your energy is at its peak and when you might like to snooze.

A balance of sleep, study, and recreation will help you maintain sanity. You need 50-60 hours of sleep per week. Students who are sleep-deprived have lower grades than students who are getting enough sleep. Perhaps Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien are not the best use of your late-night hours. With sleep managed, how much time should be devoted to study and practice? Osmosis is not a proven knowledge acquisition process, and sleeping with your books under the pillow has not been shown to be helpful. Most students should plan for a minimum of one hour of homework for every hour in class. No less than one hour a day should be allocated for practicing. If you aren't sure how to tackle your practice and studies, talk with your applied and academic teachers for guidance. Allow time for beneficial recreation also; consider, as a reasonable goal, 10-25 hours per week.

Now that you have decided on a healthy level of equilibrium for study, sleep, and recreation, it is time to build a schedule so that little is left to chance. Revise the schedule as necessary, but stick to your goals. If you planned for 20 hours of practice but found that doing it in larger blocks of time wasn't optimal for you, break it into smaller segments. Identify your high-energy work time and use it for the hardest tasks. Do you study best in the morning? Schedule study time into your morning routine. Don't let distractions pull you away from your success goals.

Write the goals down so that they are not floating away from the path that you have set for yourself. Put your long-term goals at the beginning of your week schedule and your short-term goals on a daily "to do" list. Make sure that you:

- Make your goals clear and achievable.
- Set steps for achieving them in your schedule.
- Look to see what was achieved at the week's end.
- Reward yourself when goals are achieved.

It feels good to mark off these small achievements and even better to see progress toward your larger goals. Find friends with whom you can share your goals and have accountability coffee meetings to share what worked and what didn't work.

Large projects in college can be overwhelming. As soon as you know your goal — learning a Beethoven sonata or writing a research paper on the national standards — pursue smaller objectives that you can measure. Sit under a tree and map out an attack plan. Look for the obvious divisions of labor and continue to break those down into smaller units until each objective is manageable and has a completion date. The Beethoven may seem overwhelming when you look at the end product, but how about breaking it into significant parts? Writing papers can also be broken into manageable parts, beginning with checking out the necessary books and reading them. Those parts can be reduced to even...
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- October 22, 2005
  Early Decision Students
- January 21, 2006
- February 4, 2006
- February 17, 2006

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Vermont MIDI Project Begins National Pilot Project

Teachers in seventeen schools from across the country have joined a new pilot opportunity with the Vermont MIDI Project that brings this innovative music composition program to their students. VMP connects professional composers, students, and teachers in a password protected website for comments and suggestions about student works-in-progress. Sibelius USA is providing some support for this pilot project for the initial schools as they explore music composition within the curriculum.

Current pilot participants include:

- Piscataquis Community High School and Middle School in Guilford, Maine
- Marymount School in New York City
- Sunset Ridge Elementary School, in Northfield, Illinois
- Project LEARN, a group of 5th grades from six schools in the Old Lyme, Ct., area

The project also welcomes a consortium of middle schools and high schools in the Simsbury, Ct., area, including

- East Hartford High School
- Henry James Middle School and Simsbury High School
- Rocky Hill High School
- Glastonbury Middle School
- Norwalk Charter School
- Bloomfield Middle and High School
- Wethersfield High School

Interest in joining the project continues from across the U.S. and in several countries around the world. The project has reached this year’s limit of schools for the pilot project. Those who wish to become involved are invited to attend the Arts and Technology Summer Institute to be held at Castleton State College from Tuesday, July 25 through Friday, July 28, 2006.

Live Performances with Professional Musicians Continue

Opus 12 was held November 15 at the Elley-Long Music Center at Saint Michael’s College, home of the Vermont Youth Orchestra. Fourteen student compositions were chosen from the 22 submitted to the password protected website for mentoring. These compositions by students in grades 6 through 12 were for instruments from the brass family or for piano and were performed by the Constitution Brass Quintet and pianist Tim Guiles. Sibelius Scorch files (a free plug-in for the web) may be viewed and heard at <www.vtmidi.org/opus12.htm>. Recordings and multimedia CD-ROMs will be available around December 20.

Opus 13 will be held at Elley-Long Music Center on Monday, April 13. The instrumentation for the spring concert is woodwind quintet and string quartet. Selections to be considered for this event must be posted for the first time to the password protected website by mid-January. All details are available at <www.vtmidi.org/opus.htm>.

Students at Maple Street School in Manchester, Vt., work on their compositions. Part of the Vermont MIDI Project, these students will be joined by kids in other states as the project expands. Read the details elsewhere in this issue. (Photo courtesy Sandi MacLeod)

Upcoming Events

Allie Homziak, a sixth grade student at Edmunds Elementary School, will have her piece, “Amazon”, performed at the Vermont Symphony Orchestra’s Flynn Center matinee performance on December 8. Allie’s piece will be featured along with those of other noted Vermont composers Troy Peters, David Gunn, Dennis Bathory-Kitsz, and Laura Koplewitz. Also on the program are works by Strauss, Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky, Bizet, and Beethoven. How exciting to have the work of a Vermont MIDI Project sixth grader selected for performance alongside these compositional giants!

Allie’s piece has been performed by live musicians several times. She composed the work as a third grader in an afterschool composition program with Betsy Greene at Champlain Elementary School. Amazon was selected for the Vermont MIDI Project Opus 3 concert, held at St. Johnsbury Academy in May of 2003. The following spring, Allie was selected in the MENC Call for Compositions and “Amazon” was performed by a woodwind quintet from the University of Minnesota at a session in Minneapolis at the national MENC conference. Further information about Allie’s composition is available on the web site.

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VT MIDI Project

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Benji Goldsmith has participated in VMP as an independent study student since the fall of 2004. His compositions were performed at Opus 10 and Opus 11. Benji’s recent composition, “Suite for Orchestra” has been selected to be performed by the Vermont Youth Orchestra at their First Night concert at the Flynn Theater in Burlington on December 31.

Troy Peters, from the Vermont Youth Orchestra, and Sandi MacLeod, VMP coordinator, collaborated to create an opportunity for Vermont MIDI Project students to submit works for full orchestra. Troy provided a workshop session last May for students with hints and tips about writing for the VYO. Compositions were submitted for online mentoring from June through September with one selected by Troy and a VYO committee for performance. This new collaboration will continue, and another Vermont MIDI Project student work will be selected for 2006.

Workshops on music composition and using Sibelius have been held this fall at Hunt Middle School in Burlington and Maple Street School in Manchester Center. More workshops will be organized for other locations throughout the winter and spring. Watch for details on the web site or contact sandi@vtmidi.org to arrange a workshop at your site.

Independent Study Students

A small number of independent study students have been incorporated into the activities of the Vermont MIDI Project. These students all have notation software at home and no school opportunity for Vermont MIDI Project participation. They come to the project from a previous experience with composition—a school program, a private instrumental teacher, or a summer camp program. Independent study students pay a small participation fee and follow the same guidelines as other project participants. These can be viewed at <www.vtmidi.org/mentorguidelines.htm>.

Music Ed Major

Continued from Page 12

smaller activities if you need more immediate completion gratification. Perhaps you could make an outline of cited notes or take an active approach to measures 99-120 in the first movement of the Beethoven. As you discover problem areas, revise your plan.

Perhaps you need to prime the pump. Often, the “on button” is hard to activate. As you make your plan, include a starter ingredient. The yeast might be to read a couple of funny jokes, climb a flight of stairs, phone home, or rearrange your desk. Perhaps you need to play a favorite piece or improvise before you enter the battle phase of your goal acquisition. Include that in your plan so that you aren’t drawn into procrastination. You will find that your energy is well in gear if you can just get started with activities that position you to move forward with your tasks. Make the startup activity something you want to do, and you will find the next steps in place for success.

So you don’t have time to overhaul your whole life? Pick one or two of the techniques discussed to see if they are effective for you. Time management is a life skill that continually evolves over the span of your career. Emily Dickinson inspires us:

We’d never know how high we are
til we are called to rise;
and then, if we are true to plan
our statures touch the sky.

Dr. Dawn McCord, an active choir director and organist for many years, serves on the faculty at the University of West Georgia. Dr. McCord received her undergraduate degree from Florida State University, her M.M. in Choral Conducting from Louisiana State University, and her doctorate in Music Education/Choral Conducting from the University of Georgia. Dr. McCord has taught in the public schools of Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida, and received numerous awards for her activities. From 1991-1999, she was on the faculty of Brenau University, where she taught music education, conducted the chorus, and supervised student teachers.
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PRACTICING

In this issue’s mini-focus on practicing, first read about the concept of perfect practice, and then take a look at one Vermont educator’s idea for assessing student practice.
Your brain is like a computer. It can learn almost anything you put into it, and repeat it back almost flawlessly. Why, then, should it be so tricky to learn a difficult piece of music? Simple: because we constantly enter the wrong data into our computer.

Think about it. When most musicians practice a difficult passage, what do they do? They play it at full speed, and get it wrong. Then they play it at full speed again, and get it wrong again. And again and again. Then, finally, almost by chance, they get it right once. Satisfied, they go on to the next passage.

So what has the brain (and fingers and bow arm and embouchure) learned from this practice? It has stored the data that was input the first time, and the greatest number of times — the incorrect data, that is. Just like a perfect computer, when called upon in performance, the brain can then retrieve this incorrect data flawlessly. And the result is a replica of all the mistakes in practice … a very messy performance.

The key to effective practice, then, is never to input the incorrect data in the first place. The amazing truth is this: if you never make a mistake in practice, then you will actually be incapable of making a mistake in performance.

Never make a mistake in practice? How is that possible? Let me show you how.

For any passage within the realm of your technique, there exists a tempo at which you could play it flawlessly right now. Once you find that tempo, you are on the way to playing it quickly and fluently.

Let’s take an example. Say you want to learn an incredibly fast passage made up of thirty-second notes, at the tempo of quarter note = 100. When you look at it, it’s overwhelming. When you try to play it with the metronome set on 100, not only do you miss notes constantly, but you are seized by a very uneasy feeling. Your stomach tightens up. Your jaw tightens. Your breathing becomes shallow and inefficient. In short, you panic.

But wait. What if, instead of thirty-second notes, the passage were made up completely of whole notes? If every one of those notes were a whole note, could you play the passage right now? Of course you could. You could play it in tune, in perfect rhythm, and with beautiful tone. What’s more, you would feel no panic whatsoever. In its place, there would be a beautiful feeling of ease and grace.

So try it. Put the metronome on 100 as before, but this time, each note gets four beats of the metronome. In other words, treat each note as a whole note.

Once you have done this, put the metronome up a notch or two and play the passage again. Still incredibly easy, right? Now keep increasing the speed, going up a notch or two with each repetition. When the beats get fast enough, lower the metronome again and start playing each note as if it were a half note — two beats to each note. Then later, one beat to a note, as the beats get even faster.

Keep repeating the passage, one or two notches faster each time, until you feel just the slightest feeling of unease when playing. At this point, stop. You have reached the limit of easy playing for today.

Tomorrow, start the metronome a few notches lower than where you ended today. You will find that you can get the passage even faster before you have to stop. By the day after tomorrow, you will be flying.

It is extremely important here to stop whenever you begin to lose that feeling of ease. In this method, we always want to bring that feeling with us as we increase the tempo. The reason is simple. If the brain always senses ease in connection with this passage in practice, it can only sense ease in performance.

With this method, you can master almost any difficult passage in three or four daily sessions of five minutes each. I guarantee that when you learn this way, your results will be much more effective and reliable than before. And the beauty is, your computer will always retrieve the data correctly. Every single time.

Try this method with each of the tricky passages in your music. You will be surprised and thrilled to see what happens.

Good luck!
TEACHING STRATEGY

Thoughts on Practicing and the Use of a Practice Journal

Tom Cate

Editor's Note: The following text was given to band students at U-32 to explain how to practice effectively and record details about practice sessions.

THE PRACTICE JOURNAL

I have observed over the years that telling students to practice assumes they know what the word “practice” means. This frequently is not the case. I have also observed that many students have a hard time sustaining a regular practice routine that not only meets the demands of performances and tests but also sustains long term musical growth and, more importantly, a sense of renewal and excitement in their playing. And finally, there is no real discussion of practice issues and problems.

As an experiment to address the concerns listed above, we are going to use practice journals this trimester. You will each be given a composition book where the following information for each practice session will be noted:

1. Date/time/length of session
2. Goals (short and long term) that will hopefully be addressed
3. Warmups/maintenance/technique
4. Music worked on
5. “Eureka” moments to include successes, connections, and new understandings
6. Issues and/or problems

The journals will be turned in on Monday, every three weeks. I will read and grade them and get them back to you on Tuesday.

Different sections of the band will turn them in on different Mondays. A practice session will take up no more than one page of the journal. You will be graded on the quality of your practice as well as the quantity. The emphasis will be on quality.

ON PRACTICING

1. Listening carefully to what you play is just as important as what you play. It is the development of a discerning ear that allows you to improve musically. You are practicing your ear as much as you are practicing your instrument.

2. You need to not only hear the things that need to be fixed … you need to hear in your inner ear how it will sound when you play it correctly. There needs to be an inner ear/brain correct model to compare with what you are playing. If you don’t know how “right” sounds, how will you know what to fix, and how will you know when it is “right”?

3. The listening needs to be value- and judgement-free. The listening has to be objective. Thoughts like: “I can’t,” “I am terrible,” “This is too hard,” “I’ll deal with it later,” and “It’s good enough” all impede progress.

4. Emotions such as impatience, anger, frustration, and a growing sense of lack of confidence show that you are being subjective, rather than objective.

5. Believe it or not, you are in control or can take control of what you feel. Most of the time feeling neutral — in Zen, “no mind” — is the most useful headspace. “No mind” does not mean that you are not paying attention; it means you are not being judgmental.

6. The most effective emotional/mental space includes focus, presence, patience, honesty, and stubbornness (discipline). Focus includes setting small, attainable goals and staying with it until those goals are advanced or achieved. Presence means that you are paying attention (listening carefully) to what you are doing. When present, you notice when you are getting off track, and you get back on track. Patience implies that you have realistic goals and a thoughtful plan for achieving those goals, without judgement.

7. Don’t compare yourself to how well others play, but use good playing anywhere you hear it as a model for your own playing. You are not really competing with others; you are competing with yourself.

8. Be fearless. Nothing is ever lost by trying to do something that seems very hard or even unattainable. Remember… even the hardest tasks can be broken down into a series of smaller and smaller attainable steps.

9. You are the teacher when you practice. Teach yourself. Use the techniques that I pattern for you in class when I rehearse you. Don’t expect that improvement will come magically.

10. Some of the many joys of music are the small and large victories that are achieved in home practice. Stay with a problem or come back to it again and again until you have mastered it. Then feel the satisfaction of accomplishment.

11. You are “practicing your brain” as much as you are practicing your instrument. Be mindful of what you are thinking and doing. Going too fast (impatience), leaving an “issue” too quickly without solution (impatience/denial), jumping from one thing to another (lack of focus and concentration), lack of follow-up (forgetfulness), and lack of practice goals (mindlessness) are all practice issues
that the brain will present. You need to “practice the brain” out of these habits by being very present and gently insistent when these habits occur.

12. The brain is much like a camera in that it needs things slowed down so that it can take a clear snapshot. Seeing and hearing things clearly is the first step in improvement. The size of the lens needs to match the image being shot. In other words, don’t try to take in more than is possible. Work on small chunks at first. Connect the small chunks into larger chunks when ready.

13. Being a successful musician requires patterning — that is, the creation of specific chemical and muscle patterns that are accurate. Patterning requires repetition, not only at a given practice session, but at future practice sessions. You have to come back to things you have practiced over and over again until they become habit (“no mind”).

14. In terms of repetition, the general rule is: “Five times in a row with no errors.” If you do it correctly four times and then make a mistake, you have to start over again. If five in a row is not attainable, then slow it down! Five times in a row perfectly on one day does not mean it will be perfect the next day. Remember: you are patterning your muscles and brain. It takes time!

15. Probably one of the hardest things is to slow down. What keeps us from slowing down? (a) “I should be able to do it!” (b) “I don’t have the time to do it slowly as it will take longer to get it right!” (c) Impatience (d) Denial - “If I do it enough at this faster pace, eventually I will get it.”

Student Assignment: Please write a one-page, double spaced paper to include the following three things:

1. A plan for how you will fit your practice routine into your already busy schedule of academics, sports, and work.

2. List at least four musical goals that you hope to achieve this year.

3. Talk about your practice issues as they relate to the thoughts on practicing given above.

A clarinetist and saxophonist, Tom Cate is a native of Los Angeles, California. He earned a bachelor’s degree in music education from Cal State Los Angeles. After five years of teaching in the Los Angeles area, Tom moved to Vermont. He taught at Twinfield and at Berlin Elementary prior to accepting a position at U-32 High School, where he has been on the faculty since 1980.
There are numerous aspects related to rehearsal techniques that I feel are very important. Many pertain to the day-to-day activities we do as directors, conductors, and teachers. Other more specific techniques draw the conductor closer to their ensembles. I believe that getting students to seriously rehearse, without them realizing that it is work, is the ultimate rehearsal technique. I work to create an atmosphere in which rehashing and playing their instruments is as enjoyable as playing computer or video games, not in a “robotic” sense, but in a mode of agreement and eagerness. We should strive to make rehearsals as “everyday” as tying their shoes. With the right attitude and approach, we as educators can do that! Here is one of the methods I use to achieve this goal.

I have found that referencing a list of catchwords can help make my daily rehearsals more pleasant. Simply put, this is a list of things that directors can do to make their own lives, as well as the lives of their students, less stressful. This helps to make all other rehearsal techniques much more effective! Here are my eight “H’s” for a successful rehearsal:

1. HELLO

I am often the first adult inside the school building, that my students encounter each day. Therefore, it is imperative that I be awake, energized, and cordial. I like to be at the door as students enter. This is a great time to meet and greet each student one-on-one or hand out important notes or reminders to specific kids. Just as important, I talk to the students about their interests, offer them a “good game” comment, or congratulate them on being selected to the speech team, etc. This kind of activity reinforces the fact that I care about them and their interests outside my classroom. I make a concerted effort to try and say something to as many students as I can each day.

2. HEED

“Heed” is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as “to pay attention.” After students have arrived and are into their pre-rehearsal routines, I usually have some time to spend with individuals and their specific problems, concerns, and “joys.” These might include instrument repairs, finding extra parts of their music, discussing reeds and mouthpieces, or talking about the upcoming musical rehearsals. The last part of Webster’s definition is “to take notice of.” It is usually not difficult to tell if a student is having a bad morning, or if something is troubling them. This is the ideal time for some counseling, or at the least a friendly “how are you?” I always try to limit the issues I am dealing with during this pre-rehearsal routine so that I have at least 10-15 minutes for final preparation before the start of the rehearsal.

3. HOOK

I am not one to start a rehearsal with “hooks” include: deviating from our normal setup by turning the first four rows around to face the percussion section; setting the ensemble up in a circle; having the left side of the group face the right side; not allowing any stands in the rehearsal area (enabling us to really work on watching!); spinning a disco ball which I have hanging from the ceiling (I will often illuminate and run the ball when students are entering; when we reach a very important musical goal, or when we are playing a certain style of music); setting up a “graffiti wall” in the rehearsal space, where students can write notes and messages to one another; and presenting an ever-changing bulletin board of student pictures and accomplishments. All of these activities have proven to be effective ways for inviting students into the room and to gain their attention. Students have a “knack” for noticing even subtle changes in a rehearsal room as soon as they enter. With a strategic setup technique, I feel I can switch their focus and peek their interest. Many times, they will automatically work harder.

4. HUMOR

If it is not fun, middle school kids (or any students for that matter) will not enjoy it! Even on bad days, humor can often be the most important aspect in fostering learning. Often times I feel energized because of humorous student comments or actions. I believe that the contact a middle school band director has with their students can be divided up this way: 10% product; 90% process; and 100% performance. While you may spend 10 percent of the time performing and 90 percent of the time rehearsing, you must spend 100 percent of your time coming up with some humorous way to maintain control and entertain students while helping them learn (basically, making a fool of yourself, or purposely embarrassing yourself in front of adolescents!). If they enjoy the entertainment and the process is well structured and prepared, students will work hard for the program, and the product will be well received!

5. HEAR

I believe that students must be taught what it is we are asking them to listen for. I work on listening activities every chance I get. In a mode of agreement and eagerness. Students have a “knack” for noticing even subtle changes in a rehearsal room as soon as they enter. With a strategic setup technique, I feel I can switch their focus and peek their interest. Many times, they will automatically work harder.

The Eight “H’s” for a Successful Rehearsal

Donald N. Nagle
Ensembles

Symphonic Band
Jazz Band
Chamber Singers
College Chorale
The Music Theatre Company
Pemigewasset Choral Society
Chamber Winds
Guitar Ensemble
Piano Ensemble
Percussion Ensemble
Plymouth State Theatre
Plymouth Players
Contemporary Dance Ensemble
The Rep Company
Jazz Combos

Information
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Department of Music and Theatre MSC 37
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Faculty
Craig Sylvvern, DMA (Ohio State), Department Chair, Saxophone, Composition, Music Technology
Don Baldini, BM (Indiana), Double Bass, Jazz Ensemble, Orchestra, Theory, Jazz History
Joseph Darby, PhD (City University of New York), Musicology, World Music
Maura Glennon, DM (Florida State), Piano, Accompanying, Piano Ensemble, Piano Literature
Gladys Johnsen, PhD (North Dakota), Music Education
Carroll Lehman, DMA (Iowa), Voice, Chamber Singers, Conducting, Opera Workshop
José Lezcano, PhD (Florida State), Guitar, Theory, Guitar Orchestra, Latin American Music
George Loring, MM (New England Conservatory), Piano, Piano Pedagogy, Accompanying, Theory, Harpsichord
Douglas Nelson, MM (Eastman) Band, Conducting, Music Education
Kathy Andrew, MM (Peabody), Violin
James Boccia, MALS (SUNY-Stony Brook), Trumpet
Elaine Broad, DMA (U of Cincinnati), Theory, Masterworks
Liane Cushing, MM (Boston Conservatory), Voice
Donna Dearth, MEd (Keene State), General Music
Joy Flemming, MA (U of Akron), Bassoon, Woodwind Quintet
Sussan Henkel, MM (Northwestern), Oboe
Karen Horton, MM (Manhattan), Horn, Brass Methods
Michael Kelley, MM (Julliard), Viola
Marcia Lehninger, MM (UConn), Theory, Masterworks
Ied Mann, MA (UNH), Guitar Studies, Music History
Robin Matathias, MA (CCNY), Flute, Flute Ensemble
Victoria Moore, MM (UMass Amherst), Low Brass
Timothy Rogers, MM (Bob Jones), Class Piano, Fundamental Music Skills
Thomas Souza, MM (UMass Lowell), Clarinet
Pamela Stevens, BA (Central Missouri State), Voice
Christopher Swist, MM (Hartt), Percussion, Percussion Ensemble
Scott White, MM (Boston U), Organ, Piano Class
Perri Zimmerman, MM (UMass Amherst), Cello

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Fax 603-358-2973
dbutler@keene.edu
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Scholarships
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Eight ‘H’ Rehearsals

Continued from Page 22

I get (listening for unisons, melody, harmony, etc.). It is important to create a focal point … one that the students can concentrate on with no interference. For example, I will have all of the students play one note while describing what it is I want them to listen for (tone, intonation, other sections, etc.). Without technical or harmonic interference to divert their concentration, they can simply listen.

6. HARMONIOUS

At least one time in every rehearsal, students must be successful musically. To find, manufacture, or create that moment is not the job of the player but the responsibility of the teacher. Even if nothing seems to be going right that day, I work to find something positive for that rehearsal. Do not feel that you must save that moment for the end of the rehearsal, as in “to end on a good note.” Somewhere in the rehearsal there must be musical success. (Using quality literature makes discovering the moment easier!) One way to create a harmonious ensemble — one that reeks of camaraderie and friendship — is to accentuate the positive moments and let all who are present bask in the glow.

7. HARP

Not in the sense of “harping on them,” but in “repetition.” If I practice “harping” correctly and carefully with my students, everything begins to make sense to them. I explain they are not doing things incorrectly, but that instead, I am reinforcing concepts we have already learned. One of the posters I have in my band room reads “Repetitio Est Mater Educatio.” This translates from the Latin as “Repetition is the Mother of Education.” If students believe and trust in your ability, they will repeat sections of exercises and literature any number of times. Repetition becomes a normal everyday occurrence. I do remind them, however, that I will not always do a phrase or passage the same way every time (which encourages them to always watch!).

8. HOUSEKEEPING

When kids come to band, they want to play! They do not want to listen to a 40-some year old man (an OLD guy in their eyes) speak at length to them about rehearsal etiquette or concert dates. With this in mind, I always try to save announcements for the end of rehearsals. I am, however, communicating important information to them, so I approach that time with a sense of urgency. I may state, “just sit back and relax for a moment, save your questions until I am finished, and listen to the following announcements.” Sometimes I have to remind students that this is NOT the time to be putting their instruments away. Normally, that type of statement only needs to be made once. And I never end a rehearsal without saying, “Have a good day!”

These eight steps have saved me a great deal of time and energy over the years. There are certainly thousands of more “tricks of the trade” out there! I firmly believe that running a tight ship and doing everything possible to make sure that ship runs smoothly is, in itself, a very effective rehearsal technique. In my opinion, the term “rehearsal technique” includes anything that makes the musical process of working with students as productive and educational as it can be. Best wishes for a successful year with your “8 H’s”!

Donald Nagle is director of bands at Schroeder Middle School in Grand Forks, North Dakota.
Meeting called to order at 5:20 P.M.

REPORTS

Secretary’s Report
Motion to approve as printed: Steffen Parker. Second: Glory Douglass. Motion passed.

Paul mentioned that the balance from the treasurer’s report was left out of the last May minutes. Cindy will correct that. Also questioned whether we had increased the mileage to meetings to $.20/mile. No one could recall that we had.

Treasurer’s Report
Motion to approve: Steffen Parker. Second: Glory Douglass. Motion passed.

Paul presented current figures:
Income: $1336.50
Expenses: $3705.29
Balance as of May 16, 2005: $5095.69
Less Journal funds ($1490.70)
Available VMEA funds: $3604.99

Steffen clarified that the stipend listed on the treasurer’s report was for VMEA’s share for festival office expenses, not a position stipend.

Paul cautioned the board that funds are getting low. We spend about $3500 a year in fixed costs.

District insurance payments have not been coming in. Though the idea was never for District and All State festivals to cover the whole insurance amount (VMEA uses the policy for the conference, and as the head organization taking out the policy, we cover a share of it as an organization) but districts should be paying $25 per festival day. Steffen and Gary will send out bills.

Steffen reported that we will need a blank copy of the form to Paul.

Motion to allocate $270 to re-

Motion to allocate $500 from last year’s All State funds for development of online registration: Cindy Hall. Second: Glory Douglass. Motion passed with one abstention.

Steffen reported that we will need a biennial report and late fee to get back in good standing with the state.

Motion to allocate $270 to re-

President’s Report
Gary went to the National Leadership Conference. There is a movement afoot to separate the Eastern Division Conference from MENC because of financial questions. MENC takes 21% administrative fee from

Continued on Page 28
### 2006 High Note Festivals

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Presented by Dr. Alyn J. Heim
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

the conference for the All Eastern festival. Because of that, Eastern Division is showing a financial loss. Not clear where the money is going. If separation occurs, state organizations may have to bear the financial burden of the All Eastern festival. Gary will keep us updated.

National anthem project – September 14 is the anniversary of the penning of the national anthem. There is a push for state leaders to host morning events at 9:00 a.m. Gary encouraged board members to support this initiative if possible and to let him know if you do, so he can report back.

Conference
Steffen presented an information chart that showed who is doing what, along with a schedule grid.

Discussed expenses, logistics, clinicians, etc.

A list of previous exhibitors was sent around for board members to augment.

Discussed moving the concert up to 3:30 instead of 4:00. Usually have poor attendance for mid-afternoon sessions anyway.

Possibility of Dawn Willis doing a choral conducting session. We would need a spot on the registration form to see who is interested, because Dawn would like to contact them before the festival.

Denis questioned why we have a discount for MENC affiliates. They don’t give VMEA discounts at their events.

Motion to eliminate the affiliate discount: Paul Rondinone. Second: Glory Douglass. Motion passed.

Motion to adopt the following fee structure for the VMEA Conference: Glory Douglass. Second: Steffen Parker. Motion passed.

- Member early registration: $50
- Nonmember early registration: $60
- Collegiate/Retired early registration: $20
- Collegiate/Retired nonmember early registration: $30
- Member at-the-door registration: $60
- Nonmember at-the-door registration: $70
- Collegiate/retired at-the-door registration: $30
- Collegiate/Retired nonmember at-the-door registration: $40

October 7 will be the “early bird” date. Registrations must be postmarked by this date to qualify for early registration.

Glory would like to purchase music and put her honorarium toward it. Participants could take the music home. Steffen felt it was better to put the music in as an expense and Glory can later donate it if she so wishes – so as not to set a precedent.

Clarified plane ticket procedures. Clinician MUST purchase it on his/her own and then get reimbursed.

Other clarifications and details: Registrations go to Paul. Checks made out to VMEA. Complimentary coffee and donuts will be served. No refunds will be given.

Available board members will meet at Essex Wednesday night before the conference to set up, stuff folders, etc.

OLD BUSINESS

Address Lists

Gary asked if anyone would be willing to take on the task of updating teacher lists. Mentioned a woman in NY who sends out birth announcements, birthday cards, etc. Huge barrage of personal touches that make people want to be a part of the organization. We need to work on getting new members. Send ideas to Gary.

Teacher of the Year Update

All the information is online. We will vote online the third week of September. Steffen will coordinate that process. He will also get last year’s awards back.

Executive Board Vacancies

Ron Sherwin is the new collegiate chair. Technology and Research chairs still vacant.

Listserv

We still need to find a new listserv. Some question as to whether newer board members are being included on the listserv. Steffen recommended disposing of the listserv in favor of all members maintaining a good, updated group list instead.

Allyson is District III Chair.

Michael Zsoldas is District VI Chair.

Betsey is general music chair, though she announced that she will be retiring from that position after the fall conference.

Future Meetings

Tuesday, November 1 at 5:00 p.m. at Spaulding High School.

January 13 at 5:00 p.m. at South Burlington High School.

Motion to adjourn: Steffen Parker
Second: Paul Rondinone

Meeting adjourned at 7:45

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Bill Kempster rehearsing the Chamber Singers

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Work with us
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Standardized Testing Season

Denis Lambert
VMEA Editor

“What does education often do? It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Each month, the school in town publishes a newsletter, which is sent to all Rochester residents. It contains a calendar of school and community events. In looking at the October issue, I noticed that standardized testing would consume most of the month (October 5 through October 25). Several days of education were lost at many schools during the month of October, and for most, it will happen again during March.

What is being tested? English, math, maybe science. Not music. This should be of concern to everyone, first because students are missing music class (and other subjects) to take the tests, and second because subjects not tested sometimes end up being viewed as unnecessary.

Standardized assessment in music is supposedly on the way. Whether or not this development helps or hurts remains to be seen.

The Politics of Test Results

The purpose of assessment should be to improve education. Sadly, some school officials may use assessment to eliminate programs. (“Look at these low music scores. They must not be getting a quality musical education. We need to find some money, so let’s cut the music program.”) Standardized assessment results are public information, yet they should not be used as a public relations tool to justify budget cuts. In fact, in most cases, the opposite should occur. When low scores are received in a subject, there must be assistance (professional development; mentoring opportunities) and extra resources (including money) given to bring about improvement.

You Too Can Be a Genius

Realistic expectations need to be set. Can we really expect a fictional world where, in the words of Garrison Keillor, “every child is above average”? Maybe everyone should get at least 70 percent of the questions correct, but having everyone score perfect will not happen. If it did happen, people would claim the tests to be invalid or too easy.

These results are from 1980!

One problem with standardized testing as it functions now is timeliness of information. Standardized test results take months to get back to schools. (Doesn’t computerized scoring make quick turnaround a realistic expectation?)

If the purpose of assessment is to guide curriculum planning, it would seem that the following schedule would make the most sense: Give the standardized tests in May, after students have learned the material they should know. Get results back to the school by the beginning of June. Share results from individual subjects with teachers of those subjects before “summer vacation” so they can think about any changes to be made the following year. (Most music teachers have little interest in being forced attend faculty meetings in which someone is lecturing while showing graphs of student science performance on standardized tests. They probably would like to know how Johnny scored on note recognition and rhythmic performance, however.) Schedule an inservice day or two at the end of the year for planning changes/revisions to the curriculum.

Are You a Good Test or a Bad Test?

With varied opportunities and serious inequities in music instruction time at different schools, devising a fair test that accurately measures student achievement in music becomes the challenge.

How much music theory knowledge should be expected if students are rehearsing in a large ensemble once a week, with no music lesson? It seems a practical music test would need to stick to basics, such as writing and reading rhythms, identifying notes, and so forth.

It’s Not Quantum Physics (or Calculus)

Pundits spend hours debating the topic of assessment, but the basic concepts of effective assessment are not terribly complex.

1. There should be a way of measuring what students know and can do in each subject.

2. There are specific skills that students should have in music, and those generally agreed-upon skills are the same throughout the state (and country). These are the national standards.

3. Any test given in music must involve the act of actually making music and must measure the types of activities (choral, instrumental, and/or general music) that are taught in a particular school.

4. In order for students to meet standards, the school needs to devote a realistic amount of time to music classes and also provide financial support.

5. Teachers can’t modify instruction unless they have access to information about the test (such as the ability to see what the questions were, which ones students answered correctly or incorrectly, etc.)

6. “Teaching to the test” is not education; teaching skills covered on the test is. There’s a fine line.

In Closing...

Assessment — when administered wisely from an educational perspective with proper preparation and reflection — can lead to stronger programs. Assessment done incorrectly wastes money and precious time, which is already limited.

Let’s hope it’s done right.
MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND
NEXT YEAR’S VMEA
FALL CONFERENCE,
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2006
AT RANDOLPH HIGH SCHOOL.

MORE DETAILS SOON...
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For interviews and scholarship information, please contact the Admissions Office.

Music Education Faculty

Ronald Sherwin, Ph.D., The University of Maine, Department Chair, Choral Music Education

Jonathan Lorentz, MA, New York University, Instrumental Education, Theory

Sarah McQuarrie, MM, The University of Maine, General Music Education, Piano

Richard Ullman, MFA, Sarah Lawrence College, Graduate, Kodaly Pedagogical Institute, Hungary, Aural Skills, Guitar

Marc Whitman, MM, Ithaca College, Secondary Music Education, Percussion