

# ***ARE WE DOING ANYTHING SPECIAL IN BAND TODAY?***

By

**Rodney Winther**  
**Professor Emeritus of Music**  
**Director of Wind Studies (retired)**  
**College-Conservatory of Music**  
**University of Cincinnati**

Those words “*Are we doing anything special in band today?*” should make every band conductor who hears them think twice about the sort of experience they are providing their students. We, as music educators, owe it to our students to make everyday a special day, and the only way that this will happen is by very careful long-range planning. Our goal should be to prepare our students for a lifetime of musical activity and engagement. Yet all too often our students are burned out after years of competitions, summer marching camps, endless repetitive rehearsals on the same music and drills, hawking candy, fruit, light bulbs, magazines, etc., - and on and on and on, all for the greater glory of East Sasquatch High School. Is it any wonder that music programs are the first place that school boards look when faced with yearly spending cuts? Our programs are viewed as luxuries, not necessities; social clubs instead of academic programs; costly fringe activities with short-term goals versus programs that prepare today’s youth to meet tomorrow’s challenges.

It is time for us to realize that our music programs are being held to a higher standard by parents and school boards, and if we do not improve our product, then soon there will be no product left. So let us begin by identifying the basic core knowledge that every musically literate person should have.

**1. Historical Knowledge** – compositional periods to include essential composers and their compositions...Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionistic, 20<sup>th</sup> Century (pre and post WWII)

**2. Theoretical/Compositional Knowledge** – including compositional styles and characteristics...

a. Basic Elements of Music – to include: melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre/instrumentation, and form

b. Basic compositional skills – to include being able to compose a single melody, countermelody, harmony, orchestration, transpositions, knowledge of a computer music-writing program (Sibelius), score order, overtone series

c. Basic theory background and knowledge – intervals (melodic/harmonic), chords and their different positions, key signatures, clefs, sight-reading skills, ear training skills

**3. Instrument Knowledge** – to include history of their instruments, care and maintenance, selection and care of reeds, manufacturers, professional performers, literature, playing skills

#### **4. Performance Skills**

- a. General Skills and Knowledge – to include all musical symbols, terminology, contemporary notation, broad musical concepts
- b. Solo performance – proper embouchure and breath support, attack and sustain a note in any style, all major/minor scales/arpeggios, mastery of two solo pieces in contrasting styles, knowledge of jazz notation, improvisation, sight-reading
- c. Ensemble performance – including participation in a chamber ensemble
- d. Ensemble skills – ability to match pitch, awareness of parts, form, thematic material, rhythms, composer, historical period, following a score

**5. Special Experiences** – to include exposure to guest conductors, composers, soloists, clinicians, concerts featuring student compositions/conductors/soloists, visiting ensembles, chamber ensembles, ethnic/world music, and interdisciplinary studies in the arts

This is a lot of material for a single teacher to present to their students, and at first it can be simply overwhelming. If we do all of this, how will we be prepared for our concerts/festivals/competitions? ***FIRST OF ALL, YOU MUST DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO LEARN AND THEN ESTABLISH A PRIORITY IN TEACHING THAT MATERIAL...***

**STEP ONE:** Establish your priorities – what experiences and knowledge do you want your students to have?

**STEP TWO:** After establishing your educational priorities, figure out what activities will enable you to teach each concept

**STEP THREE:** Divide the school year up into sections that might coincide with grading periods or with your concert schedule...organize your concepts and activities within these sections until the whole year is completed

**STEP FOUR:** Continue this process over a three or four year period, depending on how many class levels there are in your school (3 or 4 year high school, middle school, elementary school)

Remember, we are music educators, not activity directors. We need to prepare our students to take their rightful place in the board rooms of community bands, major orchestras, opera and ballet companies, non-profit organizations in the arts – in other words, we need to prepare them to become the leaders of tomorrow in those areas that make us human. This is a huge responsibility and one that requires complete dedication and honest self-examination on each of our parts.

***GOOD LUCK!***