

THE COLLEGE BAND: A Philosophy

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There are events in our lives that require the reassessment of our goals and priorities. Usually these "reality checks" occur because of life changing circumstances or "close call" situations.

However, in the teaching profession, I've found that reminding students of commitment, standards, and accountability, forces re-examination of one's own goals and philosophies concerning the subject matter being taught. Recently, I have refocused my philosophy of the college band.

It seems that the purpose of the college band is two-fold. It has a responsibility to the players, and a responsibility to the medium.

Being an integral part of the college music curriculum, the band serves as the major performing ensemble of most wind and percussion players. Therefore, a primary function of the ensemble is to educate the students to a variety of quality wind literature which gives them both a historical perspective and allows for the exploration of current trends in composition. Few musical venues provide the opportunity to both preserve the old and blaze a path for the new. Though other media have richer heritages, the wind band far excels in the commissioning of new works and supporting the efforts of current composers. Therefore, the opportunity to examine the history of our "instrument" as well as interact with those individuals creating the musical art of our time is an opportunity that should be a mandate for every college band program. Through the repertoire, we also hope that our music education students will gain the ability to recognize the characteristics of quality literature and, in turn, make informed and musical choices when selecting works for their school ensembles.

The second purpose, that of responsibility to the medium, is a somewhat vague notion, but critically important to the advancement of the art form.

The situation is simple. The wind band really only exists in academia. Though there are a few "professional bands" in the country, the responsibility for the advancement of the art form remains in educational institutions, particularly those of higher learning. We don't have models; we are the model!

If we are to preserve compositions of the past (Harmonie, and music of the French Revolution),

revere the cornerstones of the modern wind band (works by Holst, Vaughan Williams, and Grainger), pay homage to the great American composers who wrote band works (Persichetti, Schuman, Gould, Mennin, and Piston) and champion the music of our time (Harbison, Torke, Gregson, Maw, Larsen, Ticheli), we must actively promote the genre.

The orchestra, choir, and string quartet of the university, because of their professional counterparts and rich history, can limit themselves to providing quality performance experiences via repertoire to their students. The advancement of the medium will take place on the professional level. The college wind band cannot afford this luxury. If it indulges in such a practice, the genre will die; the medium will become a museum, colorful but lifeless!

It is the co-existence of these two responsibilities that challenges every college band conductor's teaching ability. We must convince our students of the importance of their role in the advancement of the art form while nurturing their music education needs. Convention performances, active participation in our national organizations, commissioning and recording projects, consortium memberships, and workshop presentations all serve to "further the cause!" We must feel responsibility to our students and our medium and be dedicated to the advancement of the "band movement" as well as our students' educational needs.

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