



# Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director

We know what we want to rehearse,  
*but what are we supposed to teach?*

A Path for Figuring Out What To Teach  
And When To Teach It

Christopher R. Selby

**The Goal of this Session is to help attendees answer “the three questions.”**

The Three Questions:

1. What do I want my students to learn by the end of the year?
2. What is my pedagogical plan for reaching these end-of-year goals?
3. How does my plan for today help students reach these goals?

KEY POINT: When we take skill building objectives out of our concert music rehearsal, we are left with the objectives of teaching musical skills. These objectives work for any and all levels of music. **Your curriculum stays the same, even when your music does not.**

### **Fundamentals Time**

Time and exercises designed for developing technique: Tone production, new bowing and articulations, finger patterns, scales, shifting, vibrato, literacy, etc.

### **Musical Rehearsal**

Time for students to express clear musical ideas and styles as an ensemble through the performance of orchestral music

**There are FIVE SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS of separating technical instruction from music making and using technical exercises to teach technique during Fundamentals Time.**

1. Technical exercises save time because they teach technique better than concert music.

- Exercises are more efficient at teaching skills
- Exercises can sequence skill learning in ways that can reduce bad habits.

2. Dedicating instructional time for teaching technique ensures technical growth for all students, not just the ones taking lessons. Fundamentals Time

- Provides more equity and access to all students in the classroom
- Improves the overall technical accuracy of the entire ensemble.

3. Rigorous technical exercises allow us to challenge students technically without giving them "challenging" concert music (AKA Music that is too difficult to polish before the concert.)

This is important because

- Teaching notes, rhythms and skills as they come up in the music is not an efficient use of precious time. These rehearsals force teachers to teach measure by measure which can bore the students we initially intended to challenge.
- Students who learn skills out of sequence are more likely to develop bad habits which makes the instrument and music more difficult and frustrating than it needs to be.
- When students are focused on tackling (or surviving) technical challenges in their concert music,
  - they don't get a chance to learn the musical or refined aspects of musical performance.
  - their heads are buried in the stands, not learning to pay attention to the conductor other players—and this affects the ensemble

**What is the best way to challenge orchestra students?** \_\_\_\_\_

4. Differentiating between fundamentals time and rehearsal time gives us time to focus on music making during the musical rehearsal part of class.

- If learning notes and rhythms is not making music, then what is it exactly?
- When we skip technical development to get to the music faster, we create a rehearsal scenario in which the technique becomes a barrier to music making.

5. Differentiating between fundamentals time and rehearsal time allows us a way to create helpful long range plans that organize all that we want to teach students.

- What skills do you intend to teach your students during fundamentals time?
- What music and music making skills do you want to teach your students during rehearsal?

## Concert Music Unit

### Time Line

Quarter 1 (Fall Concert)

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Quarter 2 (Winter Concert)

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Quarter 3 (Concert Festival--Assessment)

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Quarter 4 (Spring Concert)

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Life gets much easier for teachers who use a fixed set of ensemble objectives for teaching new concert music. Then we can create a year-long plan for teaching skills during fundamentals time.

**Goal: Express clear musical ideas and styles as an ensemble  
through the performance of orchestral music**

**Ensemble Objectives: Students make the necessary adjustments in their individual performance to:**

1. Breathe, move, cue and **perform together in synchrony** with other musicians.
2. Perform accurate **rhythms** together within a synchronized **pulse** and a musical **tempo**.
3. Use the same bow weight, speed and contact point as the other members of the section to create a well-blended ensemble **tone** and **timbre**.
4. Finely tune one's own notes to be **in tune** with other musicians.
5. Perform the same **bowings, articulations and styles** in the same part of the bow as other members of one's section.
6. Use a **volume** that blends with the section, that **balances** the importance of one's own part with respect to the parts of other sections of the ensemble, and that agrees with other players through the peaks, valleys and points in between of all **dynamics** and **phrasing**.
7. Convey clear and **musically expressive ideas** that go beyond the notes on the page; these musical concepts include character, style, interpretation, beauty, intensity, mood and emotion.

## Orchestra Units are Different than Academic Units

Our units do not run chronologically like they do in other classes. In History, for example:

September: Civil War  
October: Reconstruction  
November: Industrial Revolution  
December: World War I



**Orchestra units go all year long. We introduce them separately, and then we use exercises and music to teach students how they overlap.**

**Orchestra Units:**      **Tone/Articulation**      **Patterns/Positions**      **Rhythmic/Tonal Literacy**

September

October

November

December

January

February

March

April

May

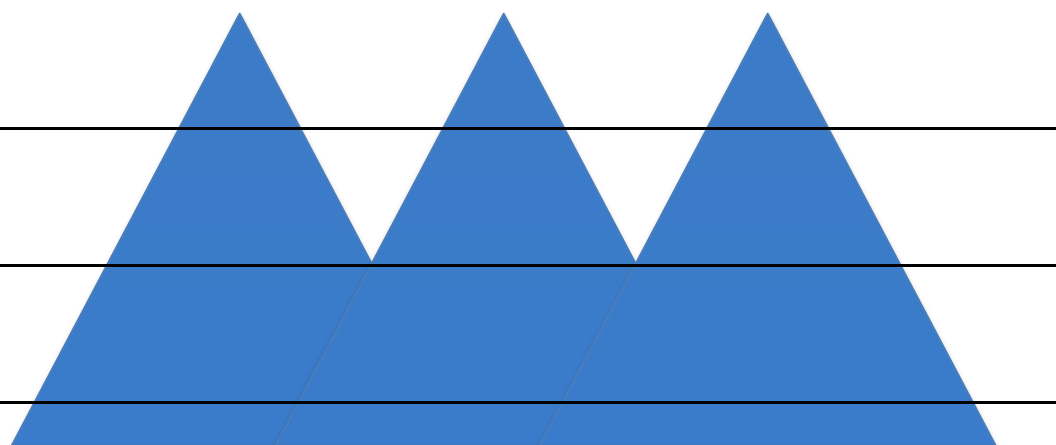


Orchestra units also last longer than a year. (Hopefully, they last a lifetime.)

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3



## Orchestra Units

1. Concert Music
  - a. Performing Music Together: Cuing, Breathing, Moving, Blending
  - b. Musical Context: Historical and Cultural
  - c. The rehearsal process
  - d. Self evaluation, group evaluation, problem solving
2. Scales, Arpeggios and Thirds—Putting Left and Right Together: Studying the patterns in different keys (Left Hand) & Producing beautiful tone in all parts of the instrument
  - a. Major and minor scales
  - b. One, two and three octaves
  - c. Arpeggios, dominant arpeggios and thirds
3. Tone and Articulation
  - a. Right Hand Position and Technique: Shape, balance, relaxed motion
  - b. Tone Production: Mechanics and Terms
  - c. Rhythmic Articulations
4. Left Hand Patterns, Positions and Fine Tuning
  - a. Position Review: Instrument and LH Position
  - b. First Position Finger Patterns and Velocity
  - c. Vibrato
  - d. Shifting (Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced)
  - e. Upper Positions (6<sup>th</sup> and Higher): Technique, Thumb position, and Alternate Clefs
5. Literacy and Creativity
  - a. Writing Familiar Melodies to study time signatures, key signatures, and other mechanics of music writing
  - b. Deciphering and Performing Rhythms Independently
  - c. Deciphering key signatures and performing correct finger patterns
  - d. Writing original melodies, creating arrangements

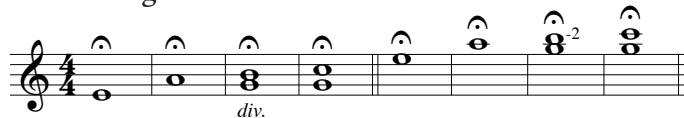
# Major Scales, Arpeggios and Thirds

## C Major

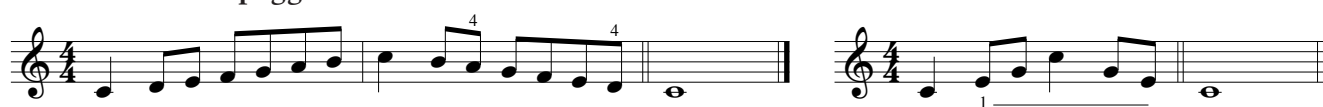
### 65. Tuning Canon



### 66. Tuning Chords



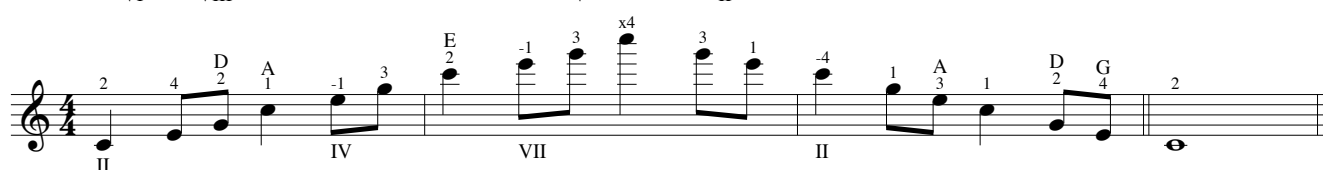
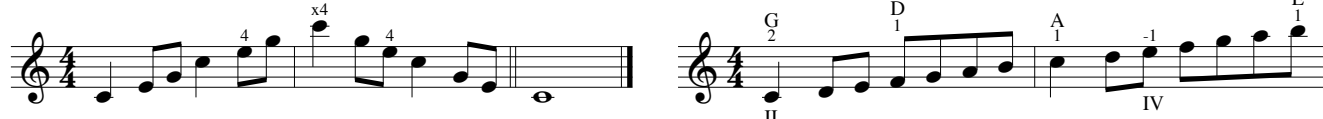
### 67. Scales and Arpeggios - One Octave



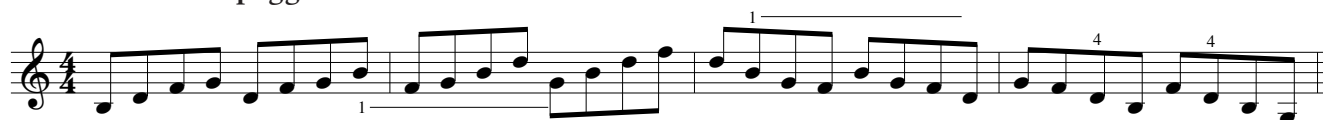
### Two Octaves



### Three Octaves



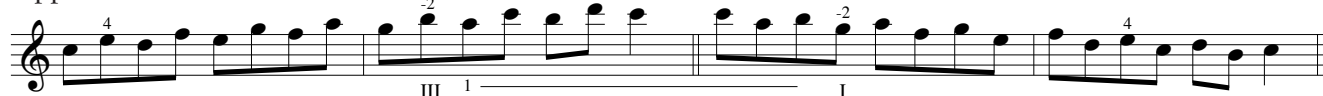
### 68. Dominant Arpeggio



### 69. Thirds - Lower Octave



### Upper Octave



## Scale Unit

### Sample Overview of a Six-Level Material Timeline

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
1 <sup>st</sup> Year One Octave		D Major	G Major	C Major
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year One Octave	Review D, G, C Major	A Major A Minor	F Major D Minor	B-Flat Major G Minor
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year Two Octave	C Major G Major D Major	F Major B-Flat Major	A Minor D Minor G Minor	E Minor B Minor
Level 4 Three Octave	C Major G Major D Major	F Major B-Flat Major	A Minor D Minor G Minor	E Minor B Minor
Level 5 Three Octave	A Major E Major B Major	E-Flat Major A-Flat Major	C Minor F Minor B-Flat Minor	F# Minor C# Minor
Level 6 Three Octave	B Major F# Major Sharp Keys	A-Flat Major D-Flat Major Flat Keys	B-Flat Minor E-Flat Minor Flat Minors	C# Minor G# Minor Sharp Minors

### Scale Objectives—In ALL LEVELS Students will:

- Perform with correct and relaxed instrument, left and right hand position
- Perform the correct fingerings and finger patterns across different strings and positions
- Shift fluidly and accurately from the elbow
- Perform with an even tone that projects well in all positions
- Finely tune all notes

### Assessment: Rubric for All Levels

Category	Few correct 3-4	Some correct 5-6	Most correct 7-8	All correct 9-10	Score
<b>Instrument And Hand Position</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Body and Instrument position</b> are correct, relaxed and well-aligned <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Left hand</b> , elbow, wrist, thumb and finger shape and placement are correct <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Right hand</b> , thumb, pinky, fingers, knuckles and wrist are fluid and placed correctly				
<b>Rhythm, Tempo and Fluency</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Tempos</b> are correct and consistent; no rushing <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Rhythms are correct</b> ; notes and rests are counted and subdivided correctly. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fluency</b> : No stopping, stumbling, or dragging				
<b>Intonation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Notes</b> are consistently correct and in tune in all positions <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fingerings</b> are correct. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Shifting (if any)</b> : Relaxed, fluid, and accurate <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Finger Patterns, half and whole step distances</b> are correct. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fingertips adjust quickly</b> , refining the pitch after finger placement.				
<b>Tone and Articulation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Bow Speed and Weight</b> are balanced and produce an excellent tone that projects well. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Contact Point</b> is the correct distance between the bridge and fingerboard <input type="checkbox"/> The <b>Bow Angle</b> is perpendicular to the string and rotated correctly <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Slurs and articulations</b> are correct				



## Right Hand Unit

### A. Sequence

1. Right Hand Position and Bowing Mechanics Review
2. Bow Strokes and Rhythms (Each Level starts at the beginning and reviews all strokes up to the new strokes.)
  - a. Level 1: Détaché and Staccato: Quarters, 8ths, triplets,
  - b. Level 2: Marcato—Grab and Release
    - i. Staccato vs. Marcato Half notes and quarter notes
    - ii. 16ths grouped in 4s and 2s (détaché)
    - iii. Hooked bows and dotted rhythms
  - c. Level 3:
    - i. Single 16<sup>th</sup> Notes
    - ii. Spiccato Introduction and single 8ths
  - d. Level 4:
    - i. Spiccato Triplets
    - ii. Sautillé 16ths: 4's, 2's
  - e. Level 5:
    - i. Spiccato 16ths and faster
    - ii. Fast triplet sautillé and ricochet
  - f. Level 6: Review the above at faster tempos

### B. Assessment

<b>Position</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bow hand, arm and shoulder are relaxed; <input type="checkbox"/> Fingers—especially thumb and pinky are curved, relaxed, and resting on the stick <input type="checkbox"/> Knuckles are fluid and flexible, not rigid
<b>Basic Tone</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bow weight, speed and contact point are well balanced and produce a good tone that projects well <input type="checkbox"/> Student performs correct articulation in the correct part of the bow <input type="checkbox"/> Student demonstrates good tone choice and range between sotto voce and espressivo tone qualities.
<b>Articulation Tone</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Détaché</b> notes are rich tone and connected bows; does not lift between changes <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Marcato</b> notes have crisp attack, followed by good tone, quick vibrato <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Spiccato</b> is controlled, not whacked; left hand lines up with notes well. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Sautillé</b> has good separation; left hand lines up with notes well. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other strokes</b> have good tone and left hand lines up with notes well.

## Small Sample of Right Hand Exercises

### Even Bow Distribution

2a. Frog Tip

2b. Frog Tip

2c. Frog Tip

2d.

2e.

2f.

Introduction (teacher) Theme (student)

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Bass

### 14. Triplet Bowing Etude and Variations

12/8

a. b. c. d.

### 15. Sixteenth Notes and Slurs

4

4

## Left Hand Unit

### A. Objectives

1. Level 1
  1. LH Set Up—Correct elbow placement, boxy fingers, and relaxed thumb
  2. Beginning Patterns: (D, E, F#, G) (D, E, F, G)
  3. Adjust Fingertips to finely tune notes
2. Level 2
  1. Backward and Forward Extensions
  2. Patterns in combination in First Position
3. Level 3
  1. Relaxed, controlled vibrato motion
  2. Relaxed controlled shifting motion
  3. Patterns in combination in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> position
4. Level 4
  1. Shifting studies and patterns into 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> pos.
  2. Keys in three to five sharps and flats
5. Level 5
  1. Shifting studies and patterns 7<sup>th</sup> Position and Higher
  2. Upper position technique (thumb position)

### B. Assessment

<b>Position</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Instrument is balanced by the body; left hand does not hold instrument. <input type="checkbox"/> Left Arm and Elbow place the left hand for the best access to the notes on the string <input type="checkbox"/> Fingers are curved, relaxed and hovering over the notes/strings.
<b>Intonation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Notes</b> are consistently correct and in tune. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fingerings</b> are correct. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Shifting (if any):</b> Relaxed, fluid, and accurate <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Finger Patterns, half and whole step distances</b> are correct. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fingertips adjust quickly</b> , refining the pitch after finger placement.

# Literacy Unit

## Literacy includes Reading AND Writing

### Reading Notes and Rhythms

- Rhythm Exercises should be sequenced in increasing difficulty of rhythms and meters
- Sight Reading Exercises should be sequenced in increasing difficulty in more advanced keys, and in higher positions and alternate clefs.

The following sequence is from *Habits of A Successful String Musician*

- A. Quarter Notes and Rests; Eighth Notes
- B. Ties, Dotted Quarters, and Eighth Rests
- C. Syncopation
- D. Intermediate Triple Meter
- E. Triplets
- F. Simple Sixteenth Notes
- G. Dotted Eighth Notes and Sixteenth Rests
- H. Cut Time
- J. Advanced Triple Meter
- K. Irregular Meter

### Writing Music: Meters and Rhythms

The following sequence is from Music Theory for the Successful String Musician

1. Introduction to rhythmic notation
2. Time signatures, quarter note beats and eighth notes
3. Dotted 8ths, ties and syncopation
4. Compound Meters with 8<sup>th</sup> notes
5. 16<sup>th</sup> Note Rhythms including dotted 8ths
6. Compound Meters with 16<sup>th</sup> notes
7. Half-note time signatures such as 2/2, 3/2, and 4/2

### Writing Music: Finger Patterns and Keys

The following sequence is from Music Theory for the Successful String Musician

1. The Staff, Clefs, and Note Names
2. Understanding the Fingerboard Map
3. Chromatic Notation
4. Key Signatures
5. Tetrachords and Thirds
6. Major Scales in Sharp Keys
7. Major Scales in Flat Keys
8. Minor Key Signatures
9. Minor Scales

You can also create units for History, Creativity, Chamber Music, and other categories that have not been addressed here.

## **A Complete Long Range Unit Has Several Parts**

1. The Objectives You Plan To Teach
2. The Assessment you plan to use to guide your teaching and measure student learning
3. The Material and Timeline you plan to use to teach these objectives.
4. Teaching Strategies

### **1. Performance Objectives**

#### **Select the Review and New Objectives for each level you teach**

1. Write all of the objectives that you plan to review and introduce through your entire program, in the order that you think they should be taught.
2. Include just a few of the objectives that are too remedial for your students and a few more that are too difficult. It's important to remember where your students are coming from and where they are going.
3. Focus on one unit at a time, and keep in mind that the list may not be as long as you think
4. Think about the skills first, and then write them as objectives. For example
  - a. Skill: Backward Extension
  - b. Objective: The student will recognize and perform backward extensions with relaxed technique and the correct half/whole step spacing.

Be aware of the New Material mentality and pressures that exist in our schools, and be able to articulate the importance of review through practice that is unique to the arts

#### **Plan a thoughtful well-sequenced Review**

- Remind students the material that was introduced in previous years
- Give clear descriptions of how “learned/polished” looks and sounds
- Catch up students who missed this material in previous years

#### **New Material**

- Plan a logical pedagogical sequence for teaching new skills; teaching skills as they appear in the music is neither logical nor pedagogical
- Do not introduce new skills through concert music; give students time to learn the skills before requiring them to be polished in a concert performance

## 2. Unit Assessments

*Teach with the end in mind*

Know what the end is supposed to look like before you begin teaching a lesson. When we clearly articulate we want students to be able to do by the end of the lesson, then the strategies we will need and use during the lesson will become much more clear. So, create the rubric first, and then teach the lesson. Other benefits of creating rubrics first include:

- Easier for teachers: Though the material being tested in each class level may change, the unit assessment does not change much from one level to the next.
- Easier for students: Help students understand what is going to be on the test by creating the test first, and then giving students the rubric
- As units overlap, they can be easily added as categories on rubrics

## 3. Materials and Timeline

Select the material that will teach the students the skills you want them to learn. This will include the exercises, etudes, scales and arpeggios, concert music organized into their respective units: Tone, Left Hand Skills, Rhythm, Scales, Concert Music.

- Keep it simple; address only one unit at a time.
- Organize the material in the order that you will introduce and teach it.

## 4. Teaching Strategies and Activities

Create strategies and Activities that will teach the students the skills you want them to learn. Take into account the material described above. This section does not have to be “full sentences.” For example:

- **Bow Hand Games:** Windshield wipers, stirring the soup, rockets, push-ups
- **Scale Activities:** Finger pattern worksheet, partner performances/assessments, one octave at a time, use a pedal tone, slow to fast, rhythmic patterns, on/off string,

# Sample Long Range Plan Quarter Overview and Weekly Plan

## Quarter 1 Overview

### **1. Tone and Articulation:**

- a. Review Right Hand Technique (1 week)
- b. Basic Tone Production Review; Terms and Open String Exercises 1-4, (1 week)
- c. Basic Strokes, Full tone: Bowing Variations 5 A-N (2 weeks)
  - i. Detache, Staccato, Legato, Marcato. Slur (11a - 11d)
- d. Full Bow Skills, Tip to Frog with good bow angle: Exercises: 6-G (1 week)
  - i. Portato/loure, up-bow staccato, Slur (11e – 11h)
- e. Dotted Rhythms and Syncopated Patterns (3 week)
- f. Chorales 1 & 2

### **2. Left Hand Skills:**

- a. Left Hand Position: Let Go of the Instrument
- b. Extensions—Backward and Forward
- c. Tetrachord Etude
- d. Velocity Etude
- e. Trills

### **3. Scales, Arpeggios and Thirds:** C Major & G Major

### **4. Creativity:** The Cover Project

### **5. Literacy**

- a. **Writing Familiar Melodies: Twinkle and Mary**
- b. **Rhythmic Literacy** Quarter Notes and Rests; Ties, Dotted Quarters and 8<sup>th</sup> rests
  - i. Exercises: Charts A and B from Habits Book Sections 7 and 8

### **6. Repertoire:** Allegro for Strings from Op. 3 No. 1 by Handel/Frackenpohl, Orange Jam

## **WEEK 6**

### **Tone and Articulation:**

Warm Up with Baroque style quarters, 8ths and 16ths: Ex. 5a-5d

Continue learning spiccato skills with exercises 9a-9c

### **Left Hand Skills**

Review All Finger Patterns with the Tetrachord Etude

Shifting Exercises 26-28. TEST #28 for a grade.

G Major Three-Octave Scale, Arpeggio and Thirds

### **Musicianship (Theory, Creativity, Literacy, Sight Reading)**

Sight Reading Syncopated rhythms: Ex. 214-216

### **Concert Repertoire:** Brandenburg 3, mm. 1-32

### **Fun Finish:** Chorale #2 or Orange Jam

## **String Resources Available Through GIA Publications**

*Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director*  
*Habits of a Successful MIDDLE LEVEL String Musician*  
*Music Theory for a Successful String Musician*

**COMING SOON!**

***Habits of a Successful String Musician, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (2023)***

***Habits of a Successful Young String Musician, Books 1 & 2 (2024)***

*By Sarah Ball, Margaret Selby, Christopher Selby, and Scott Rush*



**Dr. Christopher Selby** is the author of *Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director*, *Music Theory for the Successful String Musician*, and co-author of the *Habits of a Successful String Musician* series, a collection of string method books for middle and upper-level orchestras published by GIA. He is an active clinician and conductor, and has presented sessions at numerous Midwest Clinics, American String Teacher Association (ASTA) National Conferences, and state conferences across America. Dr. Selby is the 2022 Teacher of the Year at the School of the Arts in Charleston, SC where currently teaches high school orchestra. His orchestras performed at the 2019 Midwest Clinic, and they won the 2016 ASTA National Orchestra Festival's top award of Grand Champion in the competitive public school division.

Dr. Selby earned a music education degree from the Hartt School of Music in Connecticut, and a Masters and Doctorate in Orchestral Conducting from the University of South Carolina. His teaching career began in Fairfax County, VA in 1992. From 2001 to 2012, Dr. Selby was the Orchestra Coordinator in Richland School District Two where he taught high school and supervised the district's orchestra curriculum and instruction. He then moved to Charleston, SC and returned to teaching full time in the classroom in his current position at the Charleston County School of the Arts.

Dr. Selby regularly guest conducts Regional and All-State Orchestras across the southeast. He has held national leadership positions in ASTA and NAFME. Dr. Selby was the President of the South Carolina Music Educators Association (SCMEA) from 2011-2013 and he served two separate terms as the President of the state's Orchestra Division. He is a contributing author for *Teaching Music Through Performance in Orchestra*, vol. 4 and has written articles for NAFME and in ASTA's American String Teacher.