

"The Kaminsky Method"

Developing Balance, Blend, and an Accurate Center of Pitch in the Wind Band

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Tone quality, intonation, balance and blend are foundational elements upon which a wind band is able to achieve optimum sonority. The purpose of this session is to provide directors with a toolbox of proven techniques that they can use to tailor an effective warm-up routine to their individual groups. This process does not happen overnight – expect to make a warm-up routine a permanent addition to your daily rehearsal regimen. You must be consistent and persistent, especially in the beginning. The students have to hear what ‘right’ sounds like in order to recreate it, and in fact *want* to recreate it.

The exercises presented below each target/isolate a specific area of skill development. They will be presented more or less in the order of a standard daily warm-up, though not all of them will typically be employed every single day. At the director’s discretion, certain exercises may be added or omitted, according to the immediate needs of the ensemble.

SUGGESTED WARM-UP SEQUENCE

Breathing Exercises (*Stand for exercises 2 and 3.*)

- 1) The *How-Too* breath to help “breathing down.”
 - Set metronome to M.M. ~96-104.
 - Exhale three counts to empty lungs; breathe in one count whispering the syllable “how”; exhale four counts whispering “too.”
Note: The syllable “how” engages the diaphragm and opens up the air passage.
 - Experiment with other syllables for exhaling – “sss” or “ch.” The “ch” syllable will increase diaphragm resistance.
 - Increase to an eight-count (double whole note) exhale:
 - Add a crescendo on the last four counts.
 - Pulse staccato “ch” syllable four counts, then crescendo whole note on the last four counts.
- 2) Breathing Tubes (½” PVC coupling). Strive to inhale the same volume of air each time regardless of counts. The goal is to achieve a minimum of 80% lung capacity.
 - Hold tube between teeth protruding from mouth. Extend arms out from sides of body when inhaling, lower arms when exhaling. Keep chin up. “Cold air in; warm air out.”

Breathing sequence:

- Breathe in for 4 counts, out for 4 (2 reps)
- In for 3, out for 4 (2 reps)
- In for 2, out for 4 (2 reps)
- In for 1, out for 4 (2 reps)

- 3) Balloons. Stand with right hand on diaphragm to ensure expansion for full air capacity, balloon in left hand.
- Exhale for two counts to empty lungs; breathe in for two counts.
 - Blow into balloon for 12 counts. Balloon creates feeling of resistance in diaphragm. The first part of the exhale into balloon is the most difficult; use “5% burst” to start. This action simulates the proper action for initiating an attack on a wind instrument.
 - Release air from balloon downward.
 - Repeat exercise twice more seeking to increase balloon size with each rep (so increase inhale volume).

- 4) Left Hand Inhale/Exhale Monitor. After exercises 2 and 3 above are mastered, you may discontinue and replace with the following exercise.

Description: The left hand is held sideways with the large knuckle of the index finger against the mouth (to provide resistance) - form an “O” shape to inhale. Then, exhale onto the palm of the left hand to provide a focal point to aim the air stream.

- Set metronome to M.M. ~96-104.
- Exhale two counts to empty lungs; inhale two counts through the large knuckle, as in the description above - place right hand on diaphragm muscles to ensure proper expansion. Exhale for twelve counts against the left palm held flat, as in the description above - palm moves away from the body as count progresses to twelve.
- You can vary the counts on the exhale: out for eight; out for four

Breathing exercises don’t have to take up a lot of time. Just one minute per rehearsal will create results. Use the tubes and balloons for only ~a month to establish throat position and proper feeling of diaphragm resistance. Then, switch to the Left Hand Inhale/Exhale Monitor breathing exercise.

Tone Drives (*Apply Breathing Exercise #4 to singing, buzzing, and playing instruments.*)

SINGING:

- Inhale two, sing for twelve counts “dah” (open throat) on concert F to audiate pitch.

BRASS BUZZ/WW’S PLAY:

- Inhale two, brass *buzz* concert F on mouthpieces only (horns concert C); woodwinds *play* concert F (twelve counts).
- Repeat on concert E, Eb, D, etc.
- Once you reach concert Eb, woodwinds depress register keys on count 5 to help develop upper octave tuning (clarinets up a twelfth).

After you arrive at low concert Bb, stop for brass to put mouthpiece on instrument and proceed.

ALL PLAY:

Note bending exercise. Brass lip down to match woodwind pitch. This develops the ability for brass players to release tension and center the pitch for best tone quality.

- Exhale for two - inhale for two, brass *play* concert F for twelve counts with woodwinds.
- Exhale for two - inhale for two, brass *lip down* a half step to concert E for twelve counts while woodwinds play concert E to provide a tuner for the brass.
- All return to concert F to allow brass to center the tone for maximum resonance.
- Exhale for two - inhale for two, all play a whole step down to Eb (no more note bending).
- Continue chromatically downward with these 12-count tone drives.

- Lip Slur (Brass), Chromatic Scales (Woodwinds):
 - Woodwinds slur low Bb (concert) ascending chromatic scale in triplet eighth notes; Brass slur descending half notes Bb – F – low Bb (horns play C – G – C). Woodwinds playing chromatic scales helps drill all fingerings, esp. side keys, fork-fingerings, etc.
 - Entire exercise descends chromatically. On the final iteration (concert F), brass hold out final note while woodwinds play additional octave.

Tuning (use Harmony Director or other pitch generator to match pitch)

- Clarinets – three registers to address. Barrel, middle joint and bell adjustments affect different registers. Tune open G – be sure to use proper airstream and embouchure. Use Harmony Director (set to equal temperament) to check pitch. Make adjustments to instrument - push in or pull out barrel, as needed. Then check low C, then long C. Syllables: Ah (open G), Ee (low C), Ah (long C). Sing the syllables on pitch to internalize tuning mentally, then apply to the instrument. Tune individuals, then have them match pitch with each other. Note embouchure adjustments made by each player to match pitch.
- Flutes – Tune A (Note: Piccolos & flutes generally have opposite intonation tendencies.)
- Saxes – Tune F# (concert A). Combine with flutes to match pitch.
- Double-reeds – Tune A. Match pitch to sax section.
- Trumpets – Tune C (concert Bb). Note physical adjustments (airspeed, embouchure) required to match pitch.
- French Horns – tune both sides of double horns. Tune trigger C (concert F) for Bb side; tune G (concert C) for F side.
- Trombones and Euphoniums – Tune Bb on top of the staff.
- Tubas – Tune Bb in the staff (2nd line), not low Bb.

Don't spend the entire class period tuning each section. Spread the process out over several days. Note: All of this is simply *calibrating*. During the "calibration" process (tuning adjustments for each different section), keep other sections engaged by encouraging active listening: "What did you hear?" Actual tuning is an ongoing process – a journey, not a destination.

Be aware of variables: Brass are subject to the harmonic series (3rd and 6th harmonics are sharp; 5th harmonic is flat). In addition, each individual instrument has inconsistencies unique to it (even different makes and models of the same instrument). Encourage players to use their tuning apps to learn which particular notes are out of tune on THEIR instrument, and then learn to make the necessary adjustments to compensate. Above all, LISTEN!

Triads:

Voice out Bb concert triad for each section within comfortable range. For French horns, four parts: low C, F, A, C. For euphoniums, 4th line F. For tubas, second line Bb. See "A Daily Warm-up Routine" by John Paynter for additional voicings.

- Go "around the band" section-to-section, four counts for each, in score order from tuba to flute, listening for consistency of tone/intonation.
- Then, all woodwinds together. Then, add the brass. Listen to the sound!
- Periodically combine unlike sections to encourage listening/adjusting.
- Play Bb chord with entire band, then move triad chromatically downward to A, Ab, G, etc. Concentrate on maintaining integrity of intervals as tonalities shift.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Don't be afraid to spend a significant amount of your available rehearsal time developing basic skills/concepts to improve sonority. It is the single most important aspect of your performance that allows the music to be communicated clearly. Judges at an assessment recognize excellent sonority almost immediately. At the start of the year, developing the elements of outstanding sonority may encompass 80% or more of your rehearsal time. As the group progresses, the ratio of development time to literature time should gradually adjust from 80-20% to 70-30%, 60-40%, 50-50%, etc. *provided you are getting the sound you want*. It is important to keep a brief warm-up routine in place even after you have consistent sounds established.

If you are hesitant to devote a significant amount of your rehearsal time to simply developing your sound, consider that if you do, more of the time spent with the actual literature can be spent on dynamics and expression – the elements usually most lacking in an average performance. Much of the structure of the piece will fall into place automatically because your group has already learned to listen and adjust to achieve “the sound” they know they are capable of.

If you ever struggle with classroom management, one of the best ways to combat distractions is to keep your activities fast-paced. Going straight from one exercise right into the next eliminates the opportunity for off-task behavior. Variables such as weather, outside events, school schedules, holidays, phases of the moon, etc. *will* impact the focus your groups bring to rehearsals. So don't hesitate to fall back to an earlier ratio if you are not achieving your desired sound. They will learn that compromise in this area is not acceptable.

Q: “How long do you warm up?”

A: “As long as it takes.”

Singing is a GREAT tool. As they say, “If you can sing it, you can play it.” Human physiology dictates that people *hear* in tune, even if maybe they can't sing in tune. That inner tool can help players to transfer what they hear *directly to their instruments*, which, as we already know, do not automatically play in tune. Sing melodies, chorales, rhythms, even whole sections of pieces.

“Listening targets” are notated by individuals on their parts to be aware of particular instruments/sections to listen to as a piece is performed so balance/blend is achieved.

When performing accented notes, it should be more about the *air* behind the articulation, not the tongue. Air will achieve greater projection of tone than a harsh articulation. Be conscious of pitch variations that occur when articulating a note. There can be some sharpness that results.

Percussion should balance their parts by listening for the winds that share parts similar to theirs (e.g. mallets/woodwinds, bass drum/tubas, etc.).

When tuning brass encourage them to “push (air) from the stomach, not the face.”

Practicing extremes can help make the less extreme more comfortable. To feel comfortable at forte, practice fortissimo. To feel comfortable on high C, practice high Eb. Balloon practice is extreme compared to actual wind instrument performance.

When possible, transfer specific balances achieved in warm-up materials directly to concert literature. Encourage the same level of listening awareness as pieces are performed.

It can be helpful to tailor parts of the daily warm-up to address specific rhythm/key/articulation/balance issues that may crop up in the performance literature.

While it is good to have a lesson plan, don't be so tied to it that you can't make adjustments with regard to the group's progress (or lack thereof). It's better to do less and do it well than to do everything you have planned ineffectively. In the latter case, you'll most likely just have to back up and cover the same material again another day, but properly. Don't practice doing it wrong!

Use of "props" in warm-ups (e.g. breathing tubes, balloons, etc.) can help to promote habits you want to establish in your groups. Breathing tubes (~2" length of ½" diameter PVC pipe on a string worn around the neck) help to establish proper throat position and air intake. Balloons help to establish diaphragm support and air speed through instruments for producing optimum tone quality.

The target sound evolves through the course of a year. As long as you continue to strive to improve, the target keeps moving higher and higher. The ultimate goal is to create the best quality of sound you've ever heard from a PROFESSIONAL group. Major symphony orchestras and elite service bands are good aural examples. Be sure your groups are exposed to these sounds through recordings, or better yet, through live performances. Service band performances can be found in almost any community. Keep your eyes open for these opportunities and encourage ALL of your performers to attend. Better yet, organize group outings for your bands to ensure attendance. As a director, it's important to fill your ears with quality sounds. Always seek out exemplary performances by esteemed groups so you have consistent aural examples of the sound you are looking to recreate.

Don't be afraid to explore other techniques and add them to your routine. It can and should be a continuing work in progress.

RESOURCES

- Tonality Shifting Warm-Ups (regular and developing bands versions), C. Sharp Music, Inc.
- Sound Innovations (top group), Peter Boonshaft and Chris Bernotas, Alfred Music
- Habits of a Successful Musician (intermediate group), Scott Rush and Rich Moon, GIA Publications, Inc.
- Foundations for a Superior Performance (beginning group), Richard Williams and Jeff King, Neil A. Kjos Music Co.
- Warm-ups That Work, An American Band College Project of Bandworld Magazine, bandworld.org
- Treasury of Scales, Leonard B. Smith, Alfred Music
- 101 Rhythmic Rest Patterns, Grover C. Yaus, Alfred Music
- Yamaha Harmony Director (HD-200 or -300) electronic keyboard – saxophone patch is recommended for most situations.
- Drone generators
- Breathing tubes – PVC ½" coupling – available at Lowe's, Home Depot, Menard's, etc. Players (except flutes) can easily store tubes in cases.

SCORE

TONALITY SHIFTING WARM-UPS

F series

Chris Sharp (ASCAP)

1. Long Tones ♩ = 84

Piccolo

Flute 1
2

Oboe 1
2

English Horn

Bassoon 1
2

Clarinet in E♭

Clarinet in B♭ 1
2
3

Alto Clarinet

Bass Clarinet

Alto Sax 1
2

Tenor Sax.

Baritone Sax.

Trumpet 1
2
3

Horn in F 1
2
3
4

Trombone 1
2

Trombone 3

Euphonium

Tuba

Mallets