

We All Perform On the Same Stage: Improving the Ensemble Skills of Your Secondary String Players

Presented by
Joe Brennan
at the

*2019 Alabama Music Educators Association
Professional Development Conference*

January 17, 2019 – Birmingham–Jefferson Convention Complex, Birmingham, Alabama

I. Decisions for each rehearsal: Ensemble Skills vs. Ensemble Content

- A. Develop basic ensemble structure
- B. Develop ensemble awareness
- C. Develop ensemble playing skills
- D. Develop interpretation of conducting skills

II. Basic Ensemble Structure

III. Ensemble Awareness and Experience

- A. Hear, See, Feel
- B. Who can help me with my part?
- C. Is it about me?

IV. Playing Skills: Rhythm, Intonation, Artistry

- A. Rhythm: focus on the right arm
 - 1. bow rhythm
 - 2. simultaneous rhythms
- B. Intonation: focus on the left hand
 - 1. use of melodic patterns
 - 2. harmonic contexts
- C. Artistry: focus on the right arm
 - 1. manipulating the bow
 - 2. understanding bow control for various effects

V. Other tools to assist with developing ensemble skills

- A. Technology
- B. Assessments
- C. Chamber groups
- D. Recordings & YouTube - artistic references

VI. Conclusion: Discussion & Questions

Quotes and Analogies to use in rehearsal

1. hear the beat with your eye
2. the umpire effect
3. rhythmic traction
4. the rain gutter effect
5. the metronome is your best friend
6. I am your best friend
7. the big truck on the highway
8. what you don't want to practice is what you probably need to practice the most
9. vocabulary words
10. just because you can play it by yourself doesn't mean you can play it with us
11. own the music or it will own you
12. that's the stuff!!
13. you and the beat
14. rhythm is like football
15. Dynamics \neq Tempo
16. 60 mph, 30 mph, 15 mph
17. if you can't add, please don't take away
18. stay in the piece
19. if you have room in your brain
20. listen around the room & find someone to listen to
21. sound filtering
22. execute by design, not by chance
23. get your brain in the room
24. intonation is like baseball
25. accuracy is your goal, not speed
26. speed is not your friend
27. be the duck on the pond
28. train your brain
29. marinate your brain
30. it's like bench-pressing
31. duet with the metronome
32. stay in the room
33. artistry is like synchronized swimming
34. anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new
35. mistakes are opportunities for learning
36. it's ok to make a mistake; a mistake doesn't mean failure
37. it's about me/it's not about me

Space for notes

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Thanks for attending my session!!!

If you have any questions and/or comments, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I'm always grateful for the opportunity to work with orchestra students, meet other orchestra directors, and to collaborate with them. I would love to direct an orchestra festival in your area combined with offering a session for the participating directors.

You can reach me via the contact info just below.



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About Joe Brennan:

Joe received his Bachelors and Masters degrees in Music Education from Temple University studying violin with Julian Meyer while also playing regularly in ensembles on trumpet. Joe is the director of the string program at Haverford Middle and High Schools, located in suburban Philadelphia; a position he has held for the past 32 years. He directs five orchestras at the secondary level and teaches general music at the Middle School. In addition to his teaching duties, Joe is the Music Department Co-Chair for the School District of Haverford Township. While at Haverford, Joe has brought many string chamber ensembles and orchestras to perform at Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) annual state conventions. In 2006, Joe was recognized by PMEA with the Citation of Excellence Award. The Haverford High School Orchestra has participated in a "Side-by-Side" rehearsal and performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra as well as having represented the State of Pennsylvania by performing in **America's 400th Anniversary**, a national event, with President George Bush in attendance, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in the US, namely Jamestown.

Joe is a former President of the Pennsylvania/Delaware Chapter of ASTA and in 2018 was awarded the Distinguished Service Award for an Individual by the chapter. He is also the former director of the Chamber Strings at Montgomery County Community College. Joe has presented sessions at American String Teachers Association (ASTA) national conferences, MidWest Clinics, National Assoc. for Music Education (NAfME) conferences, as well as numerous state conferences. Joe has twice been chosen to attend the Juilliard School's "Conductors Workshop for Music Educators". He continues to be a guest conductor and clinician for string festivals.

Prior to coming to Haverford, Joe taught a Suzuki program in Readington Twp. School District in New Jersey. For 24 years Joe had been a church choir director and organist. He continually performs as a violinist and trumpeter throughout the Philadelphia area. Joe is a former Music Specialist with the Wilmington chapter of The Barbershop Harmony Society. Joe lives in Hainesport, New Jersey with his wife and children and enjoys sports and doing many DIY homeowner projects. Since being a kidney donor in 1997, Joe, has been an advocate for organ donor awareness.