

A “Logical” Approach to MPA

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1. Cross the T’s and dot the I’s (administrivia)

- A. All paperwork regardless of how much is required must be done in a timely fashion, “the sooner the better”. Your biggest concerns should be about the music.
- B. Unless you are hosting the event, buses are a necessary evil. There are probably more forms for school buses than charter. Success on stage usually requires actually being on stage. If you are new to the game, ask a veteran teacher or especially the person in the school office who is experienced at buses and transportation issues. The same holds true if the travel requires an overnight stay.
- C. Choose chaperones wisely. Beware the over zealous mom who volunteers to chaperone every trip. The best chaperones always have your back and absolutely know that the teacher is in charge. Bad chaperones can make your trip a very difficult.

2. Everyday is preparation for MPA

- A. The most important performance of the year is the next one on the calendar.
- B. Try to de-mystify MPA as being the “HOLY GRAIL” of the orchestra world. If every performance is treated as the holy grail, and it should, your MPA experience will allow you some decent sleep during the night.
- C. When looked at pragmatically, has one the judges ever paid for new instruments, sold cheesecakes, washed cars, or helped a student with a bloody nose? No, but your orchestra parents, community, and administration have. Suddenly those little school concerts, community events, and other “menial” concerts now take on a whole new meaning which increases their importance.

3. Choosing the right music is the “key of A major” success

- A. At the beginning of the year, have folders prepared with 25-40 pieces for the orchestra to read through. Make sure that all levels and all genres are represented. This will serve a few purposes. Sight reading skills improve, there is immediate importance to those first few days of school, and you get a better idea of where the ensemble truly stands. Many things can happen during the summer with kids. Some will have attended a high-powered music camp and their skills can grow exponentially. Other student’s instruments will see the first light of day for three months. It is always a crapshoot. There may not be one of these pieces that you want to program for MPA which is fine.

- B. If the orchestra cannot get through a phrase without stopping during a reading session, **DON'T** program this piece for MPA or any other performance for that matter. It is not worth the whale training.
- C. Music that is played well and is recognizable at sight should be a strong consideration for performance.
- D. Easier music that comes together quickly can also be considered. There can be an endless number of teaching opportunities when the orchestra has a firm grasp of notes and rhythms.
- E. Remember, there is no such thing as simple music, just simple-minded musicians who think that it exists.

4. Bring in a bunch of clinicians.

- A. Obviously, local Colleges and Universities are a breeding ground for clinicians who are willing to come to your school. They see it as a wonderful recruiting tool and you will gain new insights into the music as well as garnering new ideas for your own teaching. Watching a bass sectional led by a fine teacher is an eye opening experience for a violinist or vice versa.
- B. Bring in colleagues from your district to come in and work with the group. It would be great to have a podium exchange. You will gain new insights into the music as well as garnering new ideas for your own teaching.
- C. The band and chorus director at your school can be a great resource as well. Who knows more about a singing tone than the choir director. You will gain new insights into the music as well as garnering new ideas for your own teaching.
- D. Go out to dinner with colleagues and talk about music. No matter how much we vow that we are not going to discuss work, fat chance. You will gain new insights into the music as well as garnering new ideas for your own teaching.

5. Pre MPA concerts

- A. Pre MPA concerts are wonderful things. Unfortunately, they are usually held one week before when it is usually too late to make any major adjustments to the pieces.
- B. Good judges will give general comments on tendencies of the group that will hold true of any piece, not just the holy trinity at MPA. October would be a great time to bring in three judges to listen to the group. Imagine taking their words of wisdom and then applying them for the rest of the year. Pre just means before and not right before the witching hour.

- C. Consider changing the format. So many districts want to re-create that MPA experience. How about a pot luck supper followed by a performance for the judges who have of course been invited to the dinner.
- D. Make it your own event and be the only school involved. Use your judges more effectively. They can all work with the kids in a clinic type situation. Fun will be had by all.

6. It is legal to play more than three pieces after Christmas

- A. There is a limit to how much the students and director can tolerate of those three beloved compositions that are wind up being detested by the time the orchestra hits the MPA stage. Quantity time does not always correlate with quality music performance. Students will eventually lose interest.
- B. Mix up the rehearsals with other music and not just music to practice for the sightreading room. Remember those 25-40 pieces in the folder at the beginning of the year. They might be worth taking a look at again for future performances.
- C. Is your goal really to play a perfect performance? Absolutely! This being said, don't beat the same dead horsehair day after day, week after week. Save that technique for the DCI corps.

7. Change it up at state

- A. I would suggest that you play at least two different selections if going to state. Three would be ideal. Imagine studying fractions, decimals, and percentages for two months in math. After the exam, (MPA performance), the entire class gets straight A's and has bestowed upon them superior knowledge of these three factions of math. There is only one thing to do right: continue with fractions, decimals, and percentages and take the same test 6 weeks later. This does not make a whole lot of sense. Everybody wants to play new stuff.

8. The journey is much more fun than the destination

- A. Something magical has to happen every rehearsal. This can mean a small expressive utterance, an amazing crescendo, a perfect release of a phrase, or even the fact that everyone has a pencil on the stand. Always look for something and make a big deal out of it.
- B. If you are not having just a great time making music with your groups, shame on you. This doesn't mean that you cannot be demanding and have high expectations each and everyday. It does mean that the orchestra is going to look forward to your classroom because of what you offer them on a daily basis.

C. Be resolute in the fact that the greatest musical moments are going to happen in rehearsal and not on stage. Once in a while when that lightning is captured in a bottle during performance that proves that magic has been taking place all along.

9. Rehearse for efficiency

- A. Make sure that there is a lot more music and less talk. Naturally, you are going to talk about the music, techniques, pedagogy, etc. Students did not sign up for a lecture class.
- B. Why not start from the end of the piece and work backwards. This changes things up as well as making the end of a piece well rehearsed. Ex: 150-end, 134-152, 118-136, etc. I always try to overlap a few measures for cohesion.
- C. At first, repeated sections, 1st – 2nd endings, DC, DS, can be eliminated from rehearsal time, especially towards the beginning of the cycle.
- D. Keep things fast paced, This keeps the group on their toes and forces them to think fast.
- E. Make sure that you are ultra excited about making music with your orchestra. They will sense your passion and work harder to achieve the desired outcomes. Every note is equally important in its musical role.
- F. Try to rehearse more than one section at a time. Many times, duets between sections exist and should be rehearsed together.
- G. Get off the podium more. This gives ownership to the orchestra.
- H. Fast pace rehearsals create better discipline in the orchestra room.

What does your MPA stand for?

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| Music | Performance | Assessment |
| Major | Panic | Attack |
| Merely | Performing | Again |
| Music | Played | Anytime |
| Many | Positive | Achievements |
| Music dir.'s | Phavorite | Adventure |
| Multiple | Pleasurable | Activities |
| Music dir.'s | P _____ in the | A _____ |