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Programming 101

Essential Tips and Suggestions for Indoor Percussion

Planning the Program

There are three components that are cornerstones to a successful indoor program. They are the identity or personality of the ensemble, the concept and design of the show and the training and excellence of the performer's skills. This material is designed to assist ensembles to stand out and be unique. There is a tendency to overlook aspects of personality within the percussion ensemble and to pick music that lacks real staying power and interest. Often there just doesn't seem to be the time to go through all the steps we will discuss, but their importance really can't be stressed enough.

Designing an Identity

Image-Personality-Style

There is an innate collective personality that exists with the members of your ensemble. This personality or identity is influenced by their social and economic situation, their beliefs, attitudes, values and goals. They bring to your percussion ensemble some built-in properties that can serve you well in understanding your members, capitalizing on who they are and helping them to discover the best of who they can be. The other component will be those same values, beliefs, attitudes and goals of your staff. Unless the two are compatible, you could find yourself with a conflict you really don't need.

These two groups will combine to form the core personality of who you collectively are. This core personality or identity will remain the base of your ensemble. It will evolve and grow, but will essentially be the same. It is upon this base that you will develop the second aspect of what we call identity. Each program you create will call for a particular sound, style, look, role, and character. This secondary element becomes a part of the design of each show. Here is where the members act out the exploration of the many varied options you will give them.

Most teens are in their search of who they are. You can provide them with a unique opportunity to investigate many possibilities in the safety of the percussion family. You can give them the confidence to discover who they are and who they can become. For this reason, the process involved here is an important development for them and for you. You are encouraged to invest in these steps.



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Know Your Members

Discover their individual personalities, fears, circumstances, strengths, opinions and preferences.

Know Yourself and Your Staff

Understand your individual personalities, weaknesses, circumstances, strengths, and opinions.

Explore with Music

Music opens up lines of communication. See what the kids relate to, take them beyond the top 40 by introducing a variety of sounds and watch their physical response to the music. Talk about what the music feels like, what it looks like. A little improv shows you who is willing to get up and perform as well as how motivating the music is to them and how they act it out. Observe the gestures, attitudes, and responses you get from the students and begin to put together a sound and look for your show based, at least somewhat, on their natural responses and their feedback to you and to one another as they share in this process.

Motivate Your Members

Generate enthusiasm, build confidence, and be positive and honest. Set a standard for your group — they will reflect you! You will become the energy source from which they will draw. Eventually they will return that energy to you when you need it most. Find time to laugh at yourself and with them.

Design a Look, and Attitude, and a Personality

Use the collective line's personality as the basis for your program's sound, role, and character. Define the character or role of the program. Spend time directing how they should feel when they are playing their part. Give them specific gestures and attitude for the role.

* *Remember this is a process; don't look for all of this to happen in one rehearsal. It is an ongoing effort. The most memorable groups have a clearly defined look and attitude. * *

The Program and its Concept

Your program concept, musical choice and visual style contribute largely to set you apart from the many others in your class. Strive to be remembered as you create your program.



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Consider these Options

- Create a musical soundtrack that will showcase you and your best assets as you create your musical and visual illustration.
- Don't select music that demands a skill you don't have. Be careful of music with more depth than you can illustrate. Can you pull it off?
- Never create a program a piece at a time. Select music that can be designed to create a whole show. Have the master plan in place before you begin.

Consider these Questions

- Does it have highs and lows?
- Does it have opportunity to develop ideas?
- Does it have impact and effect built in?
- Does it provide contrast?
- Will the students be able to relate to it?
- Will the audience understand it?
- Does it have a great ending? It Must!
- Can you produce a count sheet to it? Do you understand the count sheet?
- Will it show your ensemble off to their best advantage?
- Does it inspire creativity?

Know what is going on in the activity...Study lots of other percussion ensembles.

Create an accessible program. Be unique and proud of who you are.

Be very careful of going too high up the abstraction ladder. Young performers often have a hard time with abstract interpretation.

Lastly, as your show is starting to come together, make sure that it can be completely understood by audience members and judges alike, without any explanation from the design team. If you find your program won't translate without an explanation, head back to the drawing board.

Both Musically and Visually

- Pace your show
- Contour your show
- Provide visual and musical interest through contrast
- Remember the importance of staging, focus, continuity, coordination, layering, appeal, and effect.