

Performing with Others

Adrian D. Griffin

The more experience that we can give our students, the greater their breadth and depth as musicians. Students can play in community bands and orchestras, all state or district ensembles, perform at their church as a soloist or with an ensemble, or play chamber music in the school setting or elsewhere.

Advanced students should be encouraged to take advantage of as many extra-curricular performing opportunities as time allows. The experience of being in front of many different conductors and working with musicians of all ages helps the student grow not only musically, but also in terms of professionalism and attitudes. The advanced student gains maturity and leadership, which will be mirrored in the band as a whole as other students begin to emulate their more sophisticated peers.

Getting students involved with local churches is an excellent idea for musical development. Often churches are looking for musicians to complement their special services for holidays and weddings. These relationships are also a potential source of recommendations for college and scholarship help. The student will feel empowered by providing a service to the community, and from the recognition they receive for solos and other special performances.

Chamber music is a must for an advanced student. They need to experience what it is like to be the sole musician responsible for a particular part, and the parts themselves are often more soloistic. The experience of working with a close-knit group of musicians with their own musical opinions is a tremendous growing experience, both musically and personally.

Summer Music Festivals and Camps

Music festivals and camps are a wonderful learning opportunity for your students. Music camps extend the learning beyond the last day of school, when many students place their instrument into their case to hibernate until marching band camp starts up again in late summer.

Summer music camps offer students experience in advanced large ensembles, master-classes, small group ensembles, lessons, and coaching from great teachers and artists locally and nationally. Having even a few students participate in a music camp can dramatically benefit the band, both in terms of individual sections and also through the experiences that the students bring back to their peers.

You can expect these students to return with greater technical proficiency, increased musical sensitivity, greater confidence in performance, a more sophisticated understanding of the larger musical world, and a clearer sense of their own skills and course of study.

Socially, music camps give advanced students a place to feel like they belong. Advanced music students are sometimes alienated in their own band program simply for excelling at their instrument. Music camps gather students from all around the country who share common interests and desire to make great music. These students are ready to feed off each other's energy and excitement, and the result is intense music-making and strong friendships.

If you're lucky, these students will bring back their experiences and gained talents to your band and share them with their peers. Quite often this is all that is needed to create a spark in other students to step up and expect more from themselves.