

## Rehearsing the Very Young Band - Part Two

### SOUND ADVICE!

In the first issue of *Kjos Band News* (Spring, 2000), I authored an article entitled  $A + E = T$ . Simply stated  $A$  (Air) +  $E$  (Embouchure) =  $T$  (Tone). This means that the tone quality an individual produces on a musical instrument is determined by two factors: air (speed and direction) and embouchure.

The tone or sound of a band, however, is more complex than just the aggregate sound of the members of the ensemble. A band may be comprised of great players, playing with great individual tone, but the ensemble sound may still be deficient. In this article of *Kjos Band News*, I will present SOUND ADVICE — that is, advice regarding how to produce a good band sound.

Before a director can instruct students on how to produce a good sound, he or she should have a concept of the ensemble sound they want. John Paynter, the late Northwestern University band director, emphasized “the sound you have in your mind is the sound you will make.” This is true for directors and students. Listening to recordings or live performances of bands will offer a variety of models for study and emulation. It is very important that the band director not only knows the sound he or she wants, but is able to instruct his or her band on how to produce that sound.

A good band sound is produced by good balance and blend, and is often described as “dark” or as a “pyramid of sound.” This sound fosters accurate intonation and good dynamic control. It is achieved by having the lower (bass) instruments predominate, with the tenor, alto, and soprano instruments less pronounced.

Begin with exercises designed to teach students dynamic understanding and control. When students are comfortable with the execution of basic dynamic levels (piano, mezzo piano, mezzo forte, and forte), integrate the following “pyramid-creating” steps:

1. Begin with the bass instruments and have them play the root of a *Bb* concert triad at a *f* volume level. (The percussion instruments should execute a long roll when it is their time to play).
2. Add the tenor instruments playing the fifth (concert F) of a *Bb* concert triad at a *mf* volume level.
3. Next, add the alto instruments playing the third (concert D) of a *Bb* concert triad at *mp* volume level.
4. Finally, add the soprano instruments playing the root of the *Bb* concert triad at a *p* volume level.

This is the start for producing a good band sound. As each group (bass, tenor, alto, and soprano) plays, insist that there be good blend within their group. That is, there should be a wonderful, homogenous sound where no instruments “stick out.” Also ask each member of the ensemble to listen for the instrument listed immediately below them on

the chart and blend their sound with that instrument. Additionally, ask students to “get inside the sound of the person sitting next to them.”

## Soprano Voices

Woodwinds	Brass	Percussion
Piccolo	1st Trumpet	Bells
Flute		Xylophone
Oboe		Snare Drum
1st Clarinet		Triangle
		Cymbals

## Alto Voices

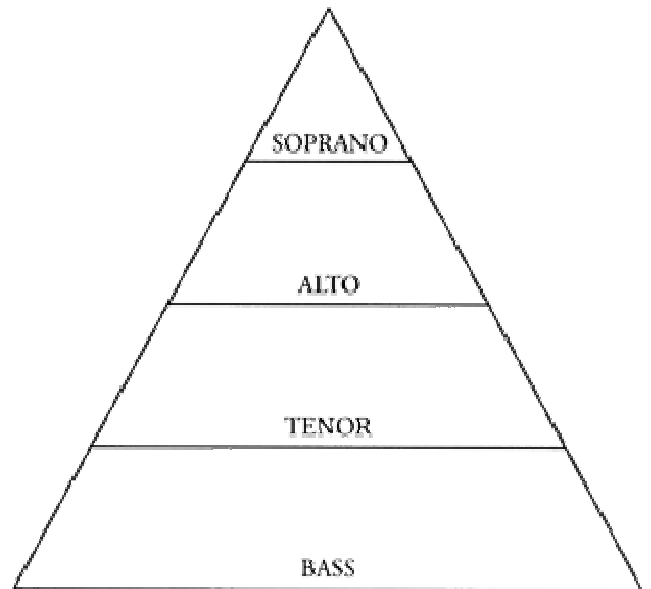
Woodwinds	Brass	Percussion
2nd Clarinet	2nd Trumpet	Marimba
3rd Clarinet	3rd Trumpet	Chimes
1st Alto		Wood
		Block
		Tambourine

## Tenor Voices

Woodwinds	Brass	Percussion
Alto Clarinet	Horn	Tenor Drum
2nd Alto	1st Trombone	Tom-Tom
Saxophone	2nd	
Tenor Saxophone	Trombone	

## Bass Voices

Woodwinds	Brass	Percussion
Bass Clarinet	Baritone	Timpani
Bassoon	3rd Trombone	Bass Drum
Bari. Saxophone	Tuba	



Each instrument or instrument family has a specific function in creating a pleasing band sound. The conical brass (tubas, euphoniums, baritones, and French horns) produce the dark, rich quality; the low woodwinds produce the “resonance”; while the upper woodwinds, brass, and percussion produce the brilliance. It is often helpful to suggest to your students to “get inside the sound” of the conical brass.

Once the basic pyramid is established, maintain the relative balance and blend of the pyramid sound while performing crescendos and decrescendos. One approach is to have the band begin by playing the notes listed on the preceding page at a p volume level and then execute a four or eight count crescendo to af volume level, followed by an equal number count decrescendo. Use the following proportions:

- Bass instruments crescendo/decrescendo 100%
- Tenor instruments crescendo/decrescendo 75%
- Alto instruments crescendo/decrescendo 50%
- Soprano instruments crescendo/decrescendo 25%

Remind students that whether they are playing loudly or softly, the air speed should remain constant. Loud playing requires more volume (quantity) of air than does playing softly. Students should strive for consistency of air speed whether they are playing loudly or softly.

This is a simple, but very effective way to produce a wonderful, pleasing sound with your band. I call it, SOUND ADVICE.

Published in Kjos Band News, Fall 2002, Volume 6  
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