

DIRECTOR DEVELOPMENT DAYS REVIEW - Burke Lokey



Notes of Interest

Teaching Tone

The quality that we love most about our instruments

Concert Music

No new techniques should be in the concert music

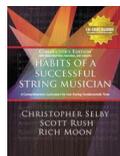
Long Range Plans

Orchestra Units are different than most academic units

"Do we as teachers focus too much on the left hand? While robotic left hand precision is nice, the right hand controls most of the expressive elements in our music – the qualities that make music more human."

Breaking Tone into Its Parts:
- Review and Improve bow hold
- Teaching tone skills
- Develop ensemble tone and its relationship to intonation

The 3rd annual MSBOA Director Developments Days was held Friday and Saturday, November 17 and 18. I was excited for the headliners this year: Christopher Selby, Peter Boonshaft, and Robert Longfield. I heard Dr. Selby's orchestras perform at ASTA in 2012 and I was very impressed. I had seen Dr. Boonshaft once before, and I have one of his motivational books. And of course everyone (especially in Michigan) is aware of the great arrangements by Mr. Longfield. I left the conference with some great new ideas and feeling very motivated. In particular, I have been applying some of the concepts that I learned from Dr. Christopher Selby, which he outlines in his book which is meant for high school orchestra programs, *Habits of a Successful String Musician*.



Habits of a Successful String Musician

A Comprehensive Curriculum for Teaching Fundamentals

by Christopher Selby, Scott Rush, Rich Moon – GIA Publications

This book is packed with great ideas.

It is very comprehensive and well organized, divided into clear categories that are useful for any level of ensemble. I will give you a quick peek of some of my main notes.

TEACHING TONE

"In addition to being controlled by the wrong hand, tone is not visibly depicted in the notation. We use our scores to help us figure out what to teach: notes, rhythms, bowings, dynamics, even tempo markings and musical words. But we forget what we cannot see"

- Dr. Christopher Selby

When it comes to fundamentals in my high school orchestras, the focus is scales and arpeggios. I always tell my students that if you can play your scales, then you should be able to handle any music I throw at you. Through the scales we can learn shifting, tone, intonation, etc.

But after this session from Dr. Selby, I have shifted my focus to teaching tone. Open string exercises – daily.

This has immediately paid off.

Not only have the lower performing students begun to improve their sound and feel better about contributing to the ensemble, but the higher level players who often complain about the music being "too easy" have something to focus on and develop. We still do the scales, but the focus has changed.

CONCERT MUSIC

“One of the most common and detrimental mistakes that orchestra teachers make is programming music that is too difficult for their students to learn and polish in the 8-10 weeks they have before a concert. We tend to plan with our eyes and we fail to plan for all of the musical components that we cannot see”

I know that I am in danger of falling into this trap almost every concert cycle.

Goal: Students express clear musical ideas and styles as an ensemble through the performance of orchestral music.

One of Dr. Selby’s main points was that each class should be divided into two main parts – fundamentals time, and concert music. The goal of the concert music is not to teach the students how to read and perform notes, rhythms, play in tune, articulations, or other techniques. The goal should be to perform all of these skills with other players to convey a clear musical idea.

He gave some examples that I think directly translate to the classroom at any level, and I have started thinking about them as I think about concert music:

Keep it simple: separate individual performance skills from concert music

- If your groups haven’t been practicing exercises that are in upper positions, do not select a concert piece where the students are expected to perform in upper positions. Compare to a basketball team – the team would never try a zone defense in a game or scrimmage if they haven’t gone over the techniques in practice.
- If your group cannot “get through” the music on the first read, then put it away for another time. It is not the right piece.

“Concert music should convey clear and musically expressive ideas that go beyond the notes on the page; these musical concepts include character, style, interpretation, beauty, intensity, mood, and emotion”

I spoke with Dr. Selby about how to deal with those students who think they are ready for that high level repertoire. He said it is important to stand your ground, and he explained that their most difficult music should be in the exercises during fundamentals time.

Selecting concert music that is at the right level and something that the students will enjoy playing is probably our hardest, and most important job. It all comes down to proper planning, and knowing what you want your ensembles to learn.

LONG RANGE PLANNING

Our units do not run chronologically like they do in other classes.

“Orchestra units go all year long. We introduce them separately, and then we use exercises and music to teach students how they overlap”

Traditional long range planning formats do not work well for review heavy formats like an orchestra class. Many orchestra units last longer than a year (hopefully a lifetime!)

I know that since I began my teaching career, the expectations of planning that are put upon me by administrators have changed many times. My goal has always been to try and take what I already do and apply it to the new framework. The ideas that Dr. Selby presented in this session helped me add depth and clarity to my year-long plans.

Dr. Selby had three questions that we looked at in the session:

1. What do I want my students to learn at the end of the year?
2. What is my pedagogical plan for reaching these end-of-year goals?
3. How does my plan for today help students reach these goals?

Tip from Dr. Selby – “Once you find a great teaching piece, (MS especially) there is no reason why you cannot use it every year. Think of how successful Suzuki teachers are with “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

I started to think about all the different “units” I teach in my different classes and I thought “No way do I have time to do this.” This can be overwhelming to think about at first. Then I realized that there is no reason to rush into developing these new units.

Keep it simple.

Separate individual performance skills from concert music (I am noticing a pattern here) Organize the skills I already teach into units, and then develop one unit at a time. I have started to develop units for three of what I consider the most important techniques that I teach:

- Tone and articulation (right hand)
- Finger patterns and positions (left hand)
- Scales and arpeggios

*Sample Objective:
Students will perform the beginning finger pattern (D,E,F#,G) with a soft hand and a correct set up.*

Thanks to Dr. Selby I have some great examples of objectives and goals that can go along with each of these units. Then, when I am assessing the students, I focus on the individual techniques and the grading becomes more objective. Once I have developed these units, I can easily organize them into long range plans, and all of the sudden my year is planned out and this part of our difficult jobs has become streamlined and efficient.

These classroom technique books, especially paired with the *Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director* are informative, well organized, and have helped to refocus my planning and concert music preparation.

Looking forward to seeing many of you at other conferences this year.

Burke Lokey
St. Joseph High School Orchestras
Lake Michigan Youth Orchestra
MSBOA Vice President – Orchestra Activities