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Introducing Score Study to Your Band

By Frederick Burrack

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Imagine your band students identifying the melody of a piece as it jumps among sections. How about recognizing harmonic modulation, or applying dynamic contrast through an understanding of compositional form? I used to consider that if I understood these compositional elements that my band students were significantly learning through performance. The fundamental purpose of teaching music in schools is to give students (as fully as possible) the ability to experience, understand, and create music so that they establish a solid and permanent relationship with music. As music educators, our ultimate goal is to develop knowledgeable and independent musicians so that we are no longer needed. We want our students to be able to understand, perform, and compose music even after they have left our classes.

As band directors, we study the score of a composition to understand the melodic and harmonic movement, the rhythmic interaction, the musical form, and the expressive possibilities. Understanding these aspects helps us to pinpoint the intricacies that lead to expressive performance. These same elements can help our students develop a better understanding of a composition. We must find ways to expose these compositional elements to our students. Why not share the process of score study with them?

I have found it useful to lead the students through a similar exploration of the compositional elements to enhance their understanding. This strategy uses pieces the students are already rehearsing for a performance. Similar to a chapter in a text, students can study a piece in detail

and be assessed on understandings beyond performance skills. Robert Garofalo's *Blueprint for Band* (Meredith Music, 1976) provides various examples and formats that can be used in developing guides for score study. The guides, or teaching units described in this book are instructional strategies that expose the elements within a composition. I have known high school bands to successfully use such units to enhance music both learning and performance quality.

The first step in developing a unit on score study is to decide which elements in the composition warrant particular attention. These elements could include rhythm, melody, harmony, expression, timbre, texture, form, historical background, biographical information, and style. Aural (ear-oriented), dexterous (hand-oriented), and translative skills (eye-oriented, e.g. reading music or sight-reading) skills may also deserve attention.

Rhythm

Identifying the elements to focus on helps determine the direction of instruction. Consider the challenges that could hinder a student's music performance and understanding. For instance, the ability to read rhythms can be an initial step to comprehending and understanding a composition. Although rhythms are essential in a composition, they are seldom performed homorhythmically by all instruments. However, you can teach the basic rhythm patterns of the melody or accompaniment to all students in the ensemble. Even if they do not play the melody, or play it only briefly, knowing and listening for these rhythms will help students develop rhythmic reading, comprehend subdivision, and reinforce compositional unity. Have students clap and count the rhythms, play the rhythms during a scale or warm-up, or dictate the rhythms to show visual and kinesthetic understanding. Figure 1 contains an example rhythm from "Overture Eroica," a grade 3 composition based on themes from Beethoven's Third Symphony, by Joseph

Skornicka.

Melody

While teaching the rhythms from the composition, melodic shape and movement can be examined. Icons of the melodic shape and printed notation are a visual reference for those in the band who do not have the melody printed in their parts. (Figure 2 demonstrates one way to show the melodic shape and notation for the first theme in “Overture Eroica.”) Group singing can help students learn the melody. Discuss which instruments play the melody, when and how the melodic segments fit together, and how to identify the melodies against the harmonic texture. Sometimes it is useful to have the ensemble play the melody in unison so that all students will develop a kinesthetic understanding of the melody. Most computer notation programs allow you to easily transpose and print phrases for all instruments.

Allowing all students to interact with the melody will help prepare them to understand and recognize the form of the piece. It also provides an opportunity for students to learn the melody simultaneously, even if the melody is not in their printed part. By studying melodic motives as a group, students will soon recognize when their part has the melody and how it fits into the piece. Since students are only looking at one part when rehearsing a piece, a unit on score study can give them the knowledge to make musical decisions about how they will play their part. For example, you may want to show them how various sections or instruments enter with the melody, as in the fugue from “Overture Eroica” (see figure 3).

Harmony

Harmonic movement is often understood by the director but neglected during instruction.

Through score study, you can introduce students to the major and minor tonalities, chord progressions, harmonic involvement in tension and cadential resolution, and thick or thin textures. By using portions from a condensed score, students can learn to see and hear the harmonic progression in triad form. Figure 4 contains an example from the transcription of the tone poem *Finlandia* by Sibelius. Identifying individual interval placement within chords provides a foundation for balance and tuning. It is not until students understand the structure of a chord that they have enough information to balance within the ensemble's sound.

Form

The overall shape of a composition provides the canvas upon which the composer paints the elements of sound. A form map can help students understand the balance of these elements. Students can follow a form map while listening to a recording of the piece like the one in figure 5. Then while they play, they recognize the segments within the form. This understanding transfers to expressive phrasing and dynamic shaping.

Dynamics

When my high school band was learning the transcription of *Finlandia* there was one point when the ensemble's limited dynamic contrast was not expressing the nature of the composition. It seemed that no matter what I said or did through conducting gestures, the students still failed to understand the emotional context. As a final attempt to help them achieve an appropriate expressive performance, I developed an expressive flow chart similar to the charts used in elementary music classes. This flow chart used icons to represent the dynamic contrast, the unity and independence of harmonic movement, and the relationship between phrases. For example, I

used figure 6 to show students how to approach the dynamics in the opening bars of Finlandia (notated in figure 4). The results were dramatic.

Background

In addition to the performance elements involved in the composition, it is useful for the students to know the historical background of the composition, composer, and musical era. By incorporating score study into your performance classes, you can effectively teach this information to students without using a great deal of rehearsal time. You could present this information to students, or you could assign students to research the historical period or composer for a piece. They could present their findings to the class or turn in a written assignment.

Assessment

There are many options for assessing students on how well they understand the elements exposed through score study. Rhythmic understanding can be assessed through playing tests, writing in counts, rhythmic dictation, or rhythmic identification. Written exams are a possible assessment method for determining whether students understand music vocabulary and what they have learned about musical eras and composers. Aural identification of melodic and/or harmonic content can indicate learning. Students could design their own form map to expose understanding of the musical form. Rhythmic dictation and shaping of melodic material can demonstrate both melodic and rhythmic comprehension. There are many ways to assess understanding beyond performance skills, some of which are found in Garofalo's book. Another helpful resource for assessment is Susan Farrell's Tools for Powerful Student Evaluation

(Meredith Music, 1997).

If our goal as educators is to develop independent and knowledgeable musicians, then it only makes sense to translate our score study into a unit for students. In a music performance classroom, score study can inspire students to value what they encounter in performance.

Exposing compositional elements provides tools of understanding that can unlock the musical potential of each student. As our students have musical experiences, knowledge about music and how it is made encourages a relationship with the musical piece that can awaken inner feelings, enhancing the recognition of the piece as an aesthetic work.

Figure 2: “Overture Eroica” Melodic Motif

The first theme is introduced in measure 5 by the lower woodwinds and baritones with a light accompaniment in the clarinets. The theme is then shared throughout all sections of the band found at measures:

5: Low Woodwinds/Brass

9: High Woodwinds

22: Low Woodwinds/Brass

34: High Woodwinds

50: High Woodwinds/Brass and Baritones

58: High Brass and Baritones

117: Low Woodwinds/Brass

Notation of the first theme



Melodic shape of the first theme

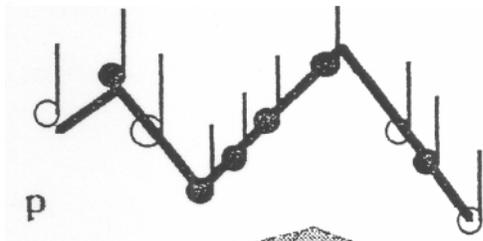


Figure 3: Fugue from “Overture Eroica”

The development section in Skornica’s arrangement begins at measure 101. It is written as canon that is passed around to all sections of the band in F minor as seen in the example below. After intertwining the original melody with this canon it modulates to A-flat major at measure 127. The effectiveness of this section depends greatly on the strict tempo that must be maintained. Special attention must be paid to the dynamics in this section.



The first voice begins in the cornet and clarinet sections. The second is played by the upper saxes, trumpets, horns, and euphonium. The third is played by the trombones, tubas and low woodwinds.

Figure 4: Finlandia Harmonic Analysis: Finlandia, Sibelius/arr. Lucien Cailliet, Carl Fischer,
Grade 4

The first eight measures consist of a chorale-style theme of much grandeur and power, introduced by four crashing chords. This theme begins on an F-sharp minor chord with the fifth in the bass. This is the second inversion of the chord.

- Play the triad without the bass note. Notice the tension created when we add the fifth in the bass to the upper triad.
- Notice how Sibelius added more tension to this chord by resolving the bass C-sharp upward and the other C-sharps downward.
- As the theme progresses, the tension resolves with a relaxed A major chord in root position.

Andante sostenuto

Trb., Horns, 2nd & 3rd Cor's, Bar.

f *sfz* *f* *sfz* *ff marcato*

f Tubas *sfz* *f* *sfz* (no Tubas) Timp. (A)

Figure 5: William Byrd Suite Flow Chart, William Byrd Suite, Byrd/arr. Jacob, Boosey & Hawks, Grade 5

The first movement has a sixteen-bar theme that uses eight-measure antecedent/consequent phrases. The second theme follows with variations that develop the themes. The second theme is unique because it is structured as antecedent/consequent/consequent thus making it twenty-four measures long. All examples are shown in the concert key of F major.

Un poco pomposo

Theme 1
Measure 1

Theme 2
Measure 17

Variation 1 of Theme 2
Measure 41

The image displays three musical examples. Above each staff is an arch diagram. The first arch diagram shows two phrases: an antecedent phrase (measures 1-8) and a consequent phrase (measures 9-16). The second arch diagram shows a similar structure for Theme 2. The third arch diagram shows the structure for Variation 1 of Theme 2. Below the arch diagrams are three musical staves: Clarinet (measures 1-16), Trumpet (measures 17-24), and Hn/Cor/Trb Ensemble (measures 41-48).

Variation of Theme 1
Measure 57

Variation 2 of Theme 2
Measure 73

Variation 3 of Theme 2
Measure 97

The image displays three musical examples. Above each staff is an arch diagram. The first arch diagram shows two phrases: an antecedent phrase (measures 57-64) and a consequent phrase (measures 65-72). The second arch diagram shows a similar structure for Variation 2 of Theme 2. The third arch diagram shows the structure for Variation 3 of Theme 2. Below the arch diagrams are three musical staves: Cornet (measures 57-64), Oboes, Cornets (measures 73-80), and Hn/Cor/Trb Ensemble (measures 97-104).

Figure 6: Finlandia Expressive Chart

An example like the one below can help students to visualize the dynamic contrast for a piece.

This figure corresponds to the measures from Finlandia shown in figure 4.

Andante Sostenuto

