

ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A STAGE BAND PROGRAM

by 4589

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B. M. E., Texas Christian University, 1959

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

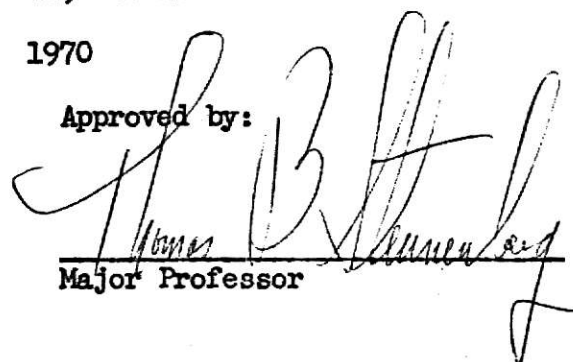
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1970

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INTRODUCTION

Since World War II the stage band has been an addition to the music programs of many high schools. Training for musical leadership along this line has therefore stimulated the growth of such programs in many colleges and universities. There were, at the end of World War II, many factors favorable to the growth of these programs. The "big band sound" was still in the ears of the high school and college generations; it was danced to by the service men in their limited times of recreation; it was heard in juke boxes around the world. It is little wonder that it attracted many followers.

Prior to this time, the "big band" seems not to have had a place in the academic programs of either the secondary or collegiate institutions; though formal groups were common, they were not officially connected with these institutions. Strangely enough, though the professional "big band" has almost disappeared, it has survived as an amateur activity under the sponsorship of the very institutions which had formerly ignored it.

No one has clearly traced the history of the stage band movement in the schools. Research in the Kansas State University Library with its many resources yielded only articles pertaining to the pros and cons of having stage bands in the schools and did not provide a single article pertaining to the historical development of this new program. Most of the supposed facts of its development are undocumented; they are accepted by hearsay. The most authentic source of information is perhaps

Dr. M. E. Hall, a pioneer in this area who founded the stage band program at North Texas State University in Denton, Texas, in the fall of 1947. Information from Hall was secured through interview.

According to Hall, there were a few high school dance bands before 1950, but too few to consider that they were of general importance before 1950 or 1951. Leonard King of Brownwood, Texas, started the first known Stage Band Festival in 1951. In the first year, there were a total of six bands at the festival. Hall states that, "they had to look long and hard to find the six bands for the first festival." By 1970, participation in the festival had to be limited to sixty four bands; many applications were eliminated.

When the movement started, such an organization was usually referred to as a "dance band." Being offensive to certain groups of people, the reference was changed to "stage band."

Since the stage band movement has entailed the development of qualified teachers, it was inevitable that they would associate into a professional organization. In 1968, under the leadership of Matt Betton, Hall, and Leon Breeden, the National Association of Jazz Educators was officially voted into existence at the National Convention of the Music Educators National Conference.

Presented in this report is a text concerning the training of the stage band for instrumental directors in the secondary schools. The rapid growth of the stage band has created a need for a text for the director that has not been exposed, either as a teacher or a performer, to the stage band, its organization, its style, its articulations,

or its techniques. The text is informal. It was not written in the conventions of an academic dissertation; rather, it was designed to catch the spirit of the stage band movement, and to supply pertinent information in as clear a manner as possible.

The stage band has four outstanding qualities; it teaches two ways of playing and interpreting music; it improves sight reading; it encourages experimentation and improvisation; it provides experience leading to additional professional opportunities. The stage band also provides an organized manner for presenting music that students, parents, and the community will enjoy.

Effective scheduling, proper rehearsal organization, and a thorough knowledge of the possible instrument combinations will make the program operate at its optimum. The manner in which the inexperienced director presents stage band articulations, their interpretation, and meaning, and an effective approach to teaching improvisation, will greatly enhance the success of the program. Appropriate music, method books, and textbooks are mentioned.

Effective application of the stated essential techniques for the development of a stage band program constitutes the body of this study.