

All-State: Orchestra Cello Sectional

presented by Greg Hamilton

Gregory Hamilton is the cello professor at Concordia College, Moorhead, and was the cello coach for this year's All-State orchestra. In beginning the cello sectional class, Hamilton said his goals were to spot-check specific places in the orchestra music, and address general issues of playing in an orchestra cello section.

He began with the Bach/Stokowski *Komm, süßer Tod*. He praised the incredible sound the section had been developing, but found they lost their sense of ensemble in the forte passages. "The vibrato must match the intensity of the bow. Physically move with the leader. Take the edge off the sound; get the spin. Each phrase must disappear and grow together; watch the principal; breathe with him; keep the sound alive." Greg worked for dynamics and color—a wispy piano, not a heavy bow piano. He had three stands at a time (out of 12? there were a lot of them!) play so they could more easily hear each other. "Take your time getting to the climax; be the last person to change."

In the second movement of Shosta-

kovich *Symphony #5*, Hamilton praised the students for keeping the tempo even, but asked for more dramatic dynamics. "A mezzo forte diminuendo needs to disappear; the crescendo to forte needs to be huge." The ♩^\sharp passage needs "big bows to get ring; start from the string; a short quarter, almost an eighth, but with lots of bow to give ring." Hamilton was picky in his coaching; "no rough sounds. The trill needs to resolve rhythmically. A long note with an accent and crescendo needs the bite of the accent, then increase speed of bow for the crescendo."

In the pizzicato accompaniment to the solo violin, Greg commented that cellists always tend to rush the pizz. They need to be sensitive to what they are accompanying. "Never pizz on top of the beat; don't be the first to play; don't rush the soloist."

In an entrance after a rest, "wait for the rest before you come in; place your entrance. Don't play a rest passively; it is active; practice saying something in the rest; in performance feel the rest in your gut."

In the Shostakovich fourth movement,

Hamilton commented that they students had "underachieved" at the big exposed place. The offbeat was early because they were not listening to the viola downbeat. "Set the bow on the rest, then play with a clean attack—not an accent, but not sneaking in." For the long shift to the high note, Greg commented that it was like holding hands with your friends and taking a running jump into a cold swimming pool. Everyone has to go all together. If some chicken out and don't jump in, the effect is lost. "Don't hold back. Subdivide ($\frac{2}{4}$ into 4) the measure before the big shift; bow close to the bridge!"

The class was wonderful. Hamilton was correct that the section sound was developing really well. Each time he had the students play, it was pretty good. But he was able to go after one detail after another and change pretty good to wonderful. It was inspiring to hear the results when the performers have a clear concept of their sound goal, listen carefully, and engage in picky practice. †