



ORCHESTRA

Taking This Show on the Road

The Importance of “Touring” with Your Orchestra Program

by Christopher Jannings

When most people hear the phrase “orchestra tour,” thoughts of a high school trip to New York City or a college tour across the Midwest may come to mind. “Touring,” however, should not simply be limited to older students. Plenty of opportunities abound for ensembles of all ages inside and outside of your community. This article will explore the myriad of options orchestra directors of all levels have for taking their students out on tour.

In my twelve years experience touring as an educator (and many more as a student myself), I have found that where you go doesn't matter. The benefits acquired can be just as great whether you travel six miles or six hundred miles. Your tour destination will obviously depend on a number of factors: school tradition, finances, age of students, and more. Regardless of where you go, here are some ideas to consider for your tour:

1) Perform for other students

While you may draw a crowd performing at a mall, in a museum, or another public location, I have found that the most meaningful performances have been for other students in a school setting. This could be an exchange concert with another school or performing for younger students. You will generally have a larger, more attentive audience with this type of performance. “Public” performances tend to provide transient audiences that will stop by and gawk for a couple of minutes and then move on.

2) Perform at a nursing home or senior center

Though the audiences may not always be huge, you will be hard pressed to find a group to perform for that will appreciate your presence more. The joy you can bring to seniors by bringing students to perform can really be a special experience for both you and your students. If your tour is local, this is also a great way to build community support for your program and your students.

3) Schedule a clinic with a collegiate or professional conductor/clinician

Regardless of how accomplished you are as a conductor/educator, kids can always learn and do more with the occasional different voice. If you've ever had a clinician work with your ensemble, you've

probably experienced the somewhat frustrating and somewhat comical scenario where the clinician asks the orchestra to do some of the *exact* same things as you've been asking them for weeks. Like magic, they do it for the clinician. Working with an accomplished clinician will reinforce some of your great teaching as well as expand your students' horizons.

4) Plan some “fun” outside of performing or rehearsing

Going on a bigger trip? You will obviously do some sightseeing. Try to also plan for some type of group bonding experience. I've had great luck in the past with “learn to curl clinics” at a local curling club or epic shows at Medieval Times. Other popular group experiences include Ropes Courses and other challenges (great for team building). What about more “local” tours? With younger kids in particular, something as simple as going out to lunch together as a group can be an experience the kids really look forward to. Never underestimate the excitement of kids eating fast food while some of their other friends are stuck eating the same old cafeteria food at school!

5) Attend a performance

Students of all ages can benefit from seeing professional musicians in action. Beyond the superior sound production, there is also visual modeling of breathing, moving, and other musical communication that students need to learn.

Hopefully this gives you an idea or two if you can get your kids out and about. Best of luck to everyone as you get into the spring and charge towards the end of the school year!

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