

# All-State: Artistry, Engagement and Reinforcement: The Three Ingredients of Artistic Rehearsals

presented by Jim Palmer — reported by Faith Farr

In the morning sessions, Jim Palmer presented ideas on hybrid and online learning, including suggestions for equipment, synchronous and asynchronous instruction, and pedagogical considerations for beginners—get parents involved to help! In the afternoon sessions, Jim Palmer provided exciting ideas for when we can return to in-person learning. He emphasized using terms like “beautiful” and “artistry” with students to get them thinking beyond notes and rhythms. In this session on Artistic Rehearsals, Palmer showed a variety of short videos he had recorded in his classroom pre-pandemic. The videos, his comments and discussion made for a very rich experience for workshop attendees.

## Selecting Appropriate Repertoire

The best resources for selecting appropriate repertoire allow you both to see and hear music. Have students follow the score and listen to videos. The best recordings are studio musicians recorded live and can be found at publisher’s websites, distributor websites and the *Teaching Music Through Performance* series. *Orchestral Music: A Handbook* by David Daniels gives instrumentation needed for each movement of standard repertoire—very useful in finding a new-to-you piece that suits your needs. Sometimes when paper copy is out-of-print, digital subscription is available. If you are downloading from [www.imslp.org](http://www.imslp.org), you need to make sure the pieces are U.S. public domain. They may be public in Canada or Europe but still protected in the U.S. You should print the page that says “public domain.” Consider printing onto 24lb+ paper (better quality than normal 20lb paper) if you are going to re-use copies. Or print onto 8.5x11 and then copy onto 11x17 to make a booklet for students to use.

There are two main steps to assessing whether you have selected appropriate repertoire to lead toward artistic rehearsals. Step 1 is finding out: how well did they sight read? If, “The train wrecked before it left the station” the piece is too hard for the group; don’t choose it. If, “It was the most artistic performance *ever!*” the piece is easy for the group. If you have a challenge piece, selecting a contrasting easy piece is OK, otherwise not. The best level is, “It had some challenges, but we made it.”

Step Two is: Preparing your music. Study your score. Edit the score and parts. Make practice copies. Make sure you are *not* sight reading with them... *Study your score!*

## Design a Warm-up

Make sure students know what to listen for (rhythm, intonation, etc.) Make sure you are teaching students to breathe—don’t count all the way to the start, but instead count to 3, then breathe on beat 4. Make sure your warm-up prepares for your repertoire—bow warm-up for lyrical music, spiccato, etc.

## Student Driven Assessment

Have one section play, say the first violins. The students already know how to lead each other to start; the conductor does not start them. Others listen. Listeners stay engaged because they know they’ll be called on to comment what they liked and what they could do more. Listening helps so when all are playing together they will recognize the first violin part. The teacher should stand opposite to the group that is playing to be able to eagle-eye everyone; if you stand near the disengaged student and they will become engaged.

When asking for comments ask a question first and give students time to think about their answer. Then, if no-one raises their hand, call on a student. “What do you like best” ... Connor. The follow up questions are, “What could we do better?” and “How would we fix [whatever they say needs to be better].” The follow up can be asked of the same or different student. You can guide the answers. “Joe – what do you think about their phrasing?” ... And “Would moving help the phrasing?”

After you have received student-driven assessment, summarize the comments, giving credit to students. “Connor said...” “Emily said...” Ask 3 positive questions and 3 constructive questions.

## Mixed up Orchestra

Do this activity close to a concert or when the music is at a more advanced level. The instruction: you have 40 seconds to move with your stand partner to be next to someone not in your section. The bass players are deliberately spread across the back of the room, otherwise students select where they

sit. Teacher counts down the 40 seconds. Students will be more efficient doing it for themselves than you telling everyone where to go. Just guide students who did not move. Now play, and the students need to listen/watch across room to be together. Never use a conductor with mixed up orchestra—have them listen. Possibly use a metronome if they can’t stay together. All students should take a turn leading the start of orchestra.

You can ask questions following Mixed up Orchestra. E.g. “[bass player] how did you get the last pizz together?” Ans: “I watched [my principal] across the room.” E.g. “What did you like about this experience?”

## Inverted Orchestra

Do this activity on different day from Mixed up orchestra! Everyone just turns around from their usual placement and faces the back of the room. Use when students are struggling with ensemble / aren’t listening to each other. Count off to get started; no-one can see the conductor because their backs are turned! Make sure you stop the count for the breath: “1& 2& 3 breath” for a start on beat 1. Now ask “What was most challenging about Inverted Orchestra?” ... Amber, Steve, etc.

## Four Corners

Count off students by 4, then students go into corners of room by number. Corner 1 plays m. 1–16. Corner 2: m. 17–24. Corner 3: m. 25–37. Corner 4: 38–52. Play in order, and each corner comes in as the piece progresses. Hopefully you get a seamless performance! This helps with counting because Group 3 needs to have counted since the start. The performance is done without conductor—assign who starts m. 1.

For the next segment of the piece, change the groups. For example all violas go one group clockwise and all second violins go one group counterclockwise. Now do next portion of the piece with students in different corner groups.

When a student comments on *what* to improve, they are also asked for a suggestion on *how* to improve. What answer they give is not as important as the process they used to get to an answer. As a teacher, you need to be hyper aware of ethnicity and gender in who gets called on, to keep things balanced.

Palmer makes videos on his Galaxy phone that he can instantly upload to his smartboard for playback in class.

### **90-minute block**

A 90-minute block rehearsal period would include: warm-up; small group (3 to 5 days); and full group. On Fridays, play in small group (small group is chamber orchestra – 10-12 players). Playing orchestra music from group. Ask questions of variety of students,

and be aware of who you are asking and their comfort level, so you can help students who need it.

### **Student Lead Performance**

In watching the videos, it was obvious how much Palmer asks and expects his students to lead themselves. None of the videos were the first time the students had worked on the music, and for all of the rehearsal techniques, Student Driven Assessment, Mixed

Up Orchestra, Inverted Orchestra and Four Corners, the teacher selected a student to be the leader, they counted, took a breath, gave a signal and everyone came in.

*Jim Palmer is editor, arranger, and featured clinician for Alfred Music, and Orchestra Director and Fine Arts Department Chairman at Allatoona High School in Acworth, GA. Faith Farr has been editor of this magazine since 1996. †*