

## **Community and School Music Wind Bands: Making and Maintaining Effective, Complementary, Rewarding Relationships**

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Amateur community and school wind bands have a long and successful history throughout Australia and the United States. These ensembles have similar goals, namely to develop ensemble musicianship and provide public entertainment. Unfortunately, a degree of friction sometimes occurs between school and community music programs, resulting from ignorance, indifference, or jealousy. School and community music programs ought to recognize their common goals, develop positive relationships, and investigate opportunities that will combine their human and material resources. This paper examines some goals of community and school wind bands, some sources of friction, suggests some opportunities for partnerships, and identifies some potential benefits that can result when school and community ensembles collaborate. Each type of ensemble brings a unique contribution to music education, yet the groups can assist each other to create rewarding experiences and foster meaningful interpersonal relationships. Such relationships not only support community music making endeavors but can also lead to an awareness of life-long learning through school music education.

What is community music? The term 'community' can simply refer to a group of people who live and work in a particular geographical area, but more broadly represents a group of people who share common interests, beliefs, social position, racial or national identity, employment, education, hobbies, obligations and/or convictions, regardless of geographic proximity (Cahill, 1998; Falk & Harrison, 1998). A further consideration is that people can often hold membership in several communities simultaneously, and this suggests collaborative possibilities.

One international group of music educators listed 14 characteristics of excellent community music activities, including:

- active participation in music-making of all kinds (performing, improvising and creating)
- the development of active musical knowing ( including verbal musical knowledge where appropriate)
- multiple learner/teacher relationships and processes
- a commitment to life-long musical learning and access for all members of the community
- a recognition that participants' social and personal growth are as important as their musical growth
- an on-going commitment to accountability through regular and diverse assessment and evaluation procedures
- flexible teaching, learning and facilitation modes (oral, notational, holistic, experiential, analytic)
- excellence/quality in both the processes and products of music-making relative to individual goals of participants. (ISME CMA, 2000)

Cahill (1998) points out that community music ensembles often bring people of different ages and backgrounds together for the purpose of artistic endeavor. The ensembles can become unique micro communities within themselves because they require coordinated efforts of the participants. Likewise, Egan (1989) asserts that communal music making:

*can be used as a tool to aid in one's social development by serving as a beautiful and significant unifying factor. By bringing together people from different ethnic, economic and intellectual groups to share a common experience, music can promote an understanding and appreciation for the spiritual values of all people.... By actively participating in a field of interest as well as submitting to the mental discipline required in the study of music, the individual is better equipped to meet the obligations and needs of society as an active citizen, a responsible adult and a directed human being. (p. 91)*

Ensembles can promote a sense of security by providing a regular rehearsal framework of activities with perceived, worthwhile outcomes. The rehearsals can reinforce participants' sense of self-worth by providing opportunities for the successful completion of tasks, peer acceptance, and the recognition of group achievements. All of these outcomes can nurture a sense of responsibility and leadership, and self-confidence. Ensemble participation can provide positive environments where members experience the joy of significant, creative music making through group participation. Relationships formed within music ensembles can also lead to lifetime associations and friendships. This paper's second author (Monte Mumford) cherishes a special friendship that began on his first day of high school, and which remains undiminished over twelve thousand miles and thirty-seven years. Successful music ensembles also provide environments where powerful learning incentives can operate to challenge and expand participant's views of music making, potentially leading participants to pursue a wider range of inner personal goals. These benefits occur when conductors develop rehearsal strategies that focus on both interpersonal and musical skill development. These outcomes are achieved through exposure to suitable quality repertoire, effective rehearsal technique and validated learning strategies.

Performance ensembles, community and school-based, can be viewed as both the catalyst and culmination of personal and music achievement. They can provide experiences where the various elements of music education such as history, theory, composition, technical skills and musical expression are brought together. It is at this point that the goals of community and school ensembles sometimes diverge. School groups are often viewed primarily as vehicles for developing musical knowledge and skill while community groups are viewed primarily as vehicles for entertainment, relying on performers with sufficient skills so as to not need much rehearsing or educating. In this divergence lies perhaps the source of some friction between these groups. These difficulties sometimes are instances of benign negligence in which school and community ensembles simply are unaware of the other's existence because they are so focused on their own agendas. Less charitable motivations include inflated self-importance, or conversely, feelings of inadequacy by either group members or their directors. Points of tension between community and school music ensembles usually arise through perceived or real conflicts of interests such as performance date conflicts, priorities, teaching styles, choice of repertoire, etc. These conflicts result from a lack of understanding, or appreciation, of each group's goals.

These damaging attitudes can result in missed opportunities for sharing library/repertoire resources and instrument/equipment resources. Furthermore, pursuing separate agendas robs ensembles of opportunities for mutual assistance in time of difficulty and the exchange of ideas founded on mutual respect. Ensembles that collaborate have the potential to benefit from exposure to differing teaching strategies, increased performance opportunities, broader social contexts, broader repertoire exposure, and multiple reinforcements of music learning/making, both technical and expressive.

We (the authors) each have community ensembles with links to tertiary music education programs. It is our hope that descriptions of our individual situations and our recent teaching exchange will encourage readers to consider exploring the possibilities for school-community collaborations in their own locales.

### **Launceston, Tasmania, Australia**

In 1984 Monte Mumford moved to Launceston, Tasmania taking up a position as Lecturer in Music at the University of Tasmania. One of his duties was to give half-hour private lessons to music education students for second instrument study. He was struck with the time-consuming nature of the task and contemplated its effectiveness in preparing potential music teachers for ensemble music instruction. What useful outcomes were to be gained from the process of achieving a limited performance standard on a single instrument, isolated as it were from an ensemble context? He came to the conclusion that it would be more effective for the students to learn the processes of ensemble instruction through participation within the ensemble context. He believed that participation in a group learning environment would in turn widen students' range of musical experiences through both the processes of participation and observation.

Monte proposed to trial this method with university education students. However, he also planned to invite the general community to participate. His purpose for opening the program to the wider community was twofold. Firstly, he wished to provide a practical learning environment for his

education students. Secondly, he wished to respond to the community's need for opportunities to experience and share in an educationally based musical performance program.

Armed with a background of ten years experience in the successful training of high school beginning bands, Monte was convinced that this method of learning would also be effective for his education students instrumental education needs. He decided to trial the plan with participants over a wide range of ages to test his ideas.

The opportunity to implement his ideas came with the establishment of the University of Tasmania Community Music Programme in 1985. The aim of the program was to initially provide semi-professional performance opportunities for community and university music majors. By 1991 the program had expanded to include seven ensembles, which ranged in skills from beginning to semi-professional levels, involving over three hundred members. Today the beginning band ensemble, embedded within the program, continues to provide the most suitable vehicle for the teaching of second instruments study for music education students. It also provides invaluable opportunities for conducting students in developing their ensemble conducting skills. These opportunities are proving particularly valuable, as the growth of instrumental ensembles within both schools and communities continues to grow at an ever-increasing pace.

Many musicians have moved through the beginning band ensemble during the 14 years of its operation. Several participants have continued onto further tertiary study, while others have stayed within the program, progressing to higher levels of performance skill within their individual ensembles. Furthermore, a significant number of education graduates, trained through this program have gone on to achieve recognition as leaders in music education throughout Australia.

### **Iowa City, Iowa, USA**

In 1995 Don Coffman founded the Iowa City/Johnson County Senior Center New Horizons Band, a concert band of woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments is designed to provide "chronologically gifted" retired seniors with instruction in instrumental music. No prior musical expertise is required of participants, and the band attracts both novice and veteran players.

The Iowa City band is part of a growing movement of bands sharing the same vision. The first New Horizons band began in Rochester, New York, in 1991 (Ernst & Emmons, 1992), and Don's band was the fourth to appear. The movement has expanded to approximately 50 bands across the United States and Canada. The mission of each band is to provide instruction on instruments as well as a performing band. Most New Horizons Bands, or NHBs, differ from other amateur community bands because they don't simply rehearse music for an impending performance. The New Horizons Band movement is a loose affiliation of bands that share a newsletter, Internet website (<http://newhorizonsband.com>), and national institutes, which consist of players who gather for a few days of intensive music making. Bands typically are led by retired high school or college band directors or by college teachers who can be somewhat flexible with their schedules. Most rehearse at music stores, schools, or in churches. Don's band is relatively unique in using undergraduate and graduate music students as instructors, because one to three professional teachers lead most bands.

Twice weekly on Tuesday and Thursday mornings members congregate at the local Senior Center for 45 minutes of small group instruction or chamber ensemble coaching followed by a 60-minute band rehearsal. The brass players (who refer to themselves as the Antique Brass) and percussionists form two groups, while the woodwind players are organized by ability into small groups of similar instruments. Students from the University of Iowa's School of Music—undergraduate music students preparing for music teacher licensure and graduate students with teaching experience—comprise his instructional staff for these groups. The concert band, which Don directs, is the centerpiece of the program. The concert band has nearly tripled in size from 26 players in 1995 to 68 at present in a relatively short time. Furthermore, the program has expanded from one band to five. Some bands were formed completely by members' own initiatives, such as the Polka Dots, who are devoted to polka music; the Dixie Kids, who specialize in Dixieland jazz; and the Old Post Office Brass, a quintet whose name reflects the original purpose of the building where they rehearse. In 1998 Don added the Silver Swing, which plays Big Band swing music from the 1930s and 1940s. He also added a Green Band for "unripe" novice players in response to members' wishes.

### **An Exchange**

Don and Monte met at the Ninth Biennial Meeting for the ISME Commission for Community Music Activity in Toronto, Canada July 9-16, 2000. After learning about each other's program they agreed to find a way to visit. Eventually, Don and his family stayed in Monte's home from mid March through mid May 2002, and Monte lived in Don's home during April 2002. During the exchange each taught the other's university classes and worked with each other's band program.

Both directors observed vibrant organizations with loyal members. Don observed how Monte's instructors meticulously taught counting, ear training, and musical expression. Monte was struck by the responsiveness of Don's band members and was inspired by these performers who were well into their 70s and 80s. Both groups displayed many of the ISME CMA defining points for excellent community music.

1. *Active participation in music-making and knowing.*
2. *Multiple learner/teacher relationships and processes.* Both programs relied on teams of instructors, and those instructors readily acknowledge that they learn much from their "pupils" about how to teach, how to learn, how to be a better musician.
3. *A commitment to life-long musical learning and access for all members of the community.* Monte's participants span the age range from approximate 10 years to 70 years. Don's participants range from 55 to 90 years.
4. *A recognition that participants' social and personal growth are as important as their musical growth.* Some of Don's research indicates that although a desire for active music making is the primary motivation for joining the band program, a desire for socialization is also clearly evident (Coffman & Adamek, 1999, 2001). Furthermore, many of the members consider these two desires to be "very important" or "essential" to their quality of life and rate these issues as highly as they do good family relationships and good health. Relationships, a sense of personal well-being and accomplishment, and the enriching recreational activities of the band program are highly important to members' perceived quality of life in both programs.
5. *An on-going commitment to accountability through regular and diverse assessment and evaluation procedures.* Monte's learners progress through graded method books and audition to obtain membership in the higher ability bands. Don relies on member feedback about instructor effectiveness.
6. *Flexible teaching, learning and facilitation modes (oral, notational, holistic, experiential, analytic).* This is particularly evident in Monte's program, which stresses developing oral, aural, and notational reading skills. Don's reliance on music education student instructors for small ensembles results in diversity of teaching styles for participants.
7. *Excellence/quality in both the processes and products of music-making relative to individual goals of participants.*

## Implications

What do these two programs have to suggest about school and community music ensemble relationships? Both band organizations operate in towns that have other adult amateur bands and school bands. Here are a few examples:

1. Don's New Horizon Band has performed jointly with University of Iowa Symphony Band, one high school band, two middle school bands, and an elementary school band. In these concerts each group performs several selections and then the groups are combined for one or two tunes. Participants have enthusiastically commented on the opportunity to "rub shoulders" with performers of a different age generation.
2. Monte organizes University of Tasmania and "friends" concerts that bring together a variety of undergraduate student musicians and local adult musicians in chamber settings.
3. Don recently added an adult aged band to the University of Iowa's annual summer music camp program for students aged 13-18. Adult participants rehearsed in their own group and then mixed with the younger players in master classes on their instruments and in classes on music theory, conducting, and history.
4. Monte's bands incorporate school aged players, so he schedules rehearsals for late afternoon and evening.
5. Both Don and Monte strive to be aware of the performances of music organizations in their communities so that they can avoid potential conflicts and so they can inform their bands of concerts to enjoy.

How should school and community bands view each other? Quite simply, they should provide support and encouragement for mutual benefit. School music teachers should encourage their students to be actively involved in their local community music program. Strong community music programs should consider how best to reinforce the training that occurs within in the school music program. Community music participation increases the variety of performance opportunities available to students. Community music participation can also provide opportunities for music teachers to maintain or develop their performance profile, which enables them to bring fresh, new musical insights to their students. And students benefit from seeing their teachers perform, which can be excellent modeling experiences.

Such mutual support could lead to increased opportunities for cross-age contact between children, adolescents and adults. These interactions help to reinforce attitudes about the benefits of respect, commitment, responsibility, and a spirit of cooperation. In short, these kinds of interactions serve to link school and community experiences for student. Schooling is often viewed in Western society as preparation for the “real world,” so student interaction with adult musicians initiates them into real world activities and allows them share a treasure of musical and social experiences.

These are but a few of the many benefits to be gained through mutual cooperation between school and community programs. Let us not allow fear, suspicion, ego, etc. to keep us from the ultimate goal of providing the joy of music making for more to experience. The study of music continues to provide an excellent pathway for the search for beauty, trust, respect, responsibility, and humility, with a willingness to keep improving and growing in the never-ending quest for excellence.

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