

July 19, 2020

Hello everyone!

I hope you are managing to enjoy some of this summer. For some of us, we haven't had the opportunity to interact (outside of email) since March. These are truly unprecedented times, and I look forward to seeing you all again at some point.

A great deal of information related to ensembles and the COVID-19 pandemic has circulated over the past few weeks and months. In particular, my decisions related to the wind ensemble have been driven by the University of Colorado-Boulder Aerosol Study and the guidelines released by Johns-Hopkins/Peabody Institute. These are certainly not the ONLY references I'm connecting to... just the two that seem the most streamlined and most informative for what I am about to propose. Much like the rest of the faculty, I am keeping an eye on information from Otterbein administration, the Department of Music, Governor's office, CDC, City of Westerville, other K-12 and Higher Ed music "re-opening" plans, and all the pedagogical instinct I can muster. Plans may change, but I believe this is the safest course of action.

It is important to note that at this point, this plan ONLY applies to wind ensemble – it does not include other ensembles in the department, even other ensembles that fall within the band area. Each ensemble director is currently developing plans that he/she feel best address the unique aspects of the ensemble and weighing the risks/benefits of each situation. I will do my best to compile all the relevant info into one convenient place (likely the band website – www.otterbeinbands.com). Any questions about a specific ensemble should be sent to that director and myself.

The current trajectories of the COVID-19 epidemic are troubling; I am building this plan under the assumption that we will be back to remote teaching during fall semester, or perhaps even starting the term online with minimal notice. Based on available research and guidelines, the inherent risk of running indoor in-person band rehearsals that require social distancing, limiting rehearsal length to allow for air exchanges, mandated mask usage/instrument coverings in conjunction with playing a wind instrument, etc., are only some parts of a situation that should also address understanding trapped air in enclosed spaces, how aerosols are produced by wind instruments, and how long those particles hang in the air.

Bottom line, your health is priority number one. Let's turn an obstacle into opportunity.

The Master Plan: The Otterbein Wind Ensemble will be 100% ONLINE for Fall 2020.

Layer #1: Ongoing Safety Concerns.

- *Virtual "check-ins" will happen via video conferencing (Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate) throughout the semester.*

According to the Colorado study, band instruments produce aerosol sprays when played. Compound that with an airborne virus, questionable air flow/exchanges in the rehearsal space, and not enough physical room space to accommodate smaller chamber ensembles, one may arrive at the decision that the risk of in-person rehearsing is significant at this point.

These check-ins will happen during the regularly scheduled rehearsal time on pre-determined days... these notifications will come via email well in advance of the meet-up. These can serve as a simple connection to see how things are going, to address specific questions related to the literature, or run a modified sectional.

Layer #2: Required Technology to Maximize the Virtual Experience (STILL BEING FINALIZED... STAY TUNED)

- *ALL students in the wind ensemble (and various other ensembles/classes) will be expected to purchase a USB microphone and audio interface to capture the best possible audio quality for projects and assignments.*

In conjunction with Eric van Wagner, I have developed an easy-to-follow guide for purchasing your own gear. Many schools are exploring online options, so these items are in HIGH demand – please make your purchases sooner rather than later.

While these suggestions are made with the band area in mind, this equipment will be used across the department in different ensembles, classes, and studio lessons as applicable. We have worked to standardize the required equipment so that it will carry over from an ensemble to an academic class to a studio lesson relatively easily. These suggestions will appear as a separate document that (I hope) will make sense to someone who has little to no experience in buying and using microphones and interfaces. I took the cost into consideration and suggested a range of products that should be able to meet most budgets and still fulfill the needs of the course.

Think of this purchase as the equivalent of buying a textbook, complete with possible resale options or further uses down the road.

- *Each student in the wind ensemble will receive a student subscription to SmartMusic. This subscription will be active for the entire academic year (August 2020-May 2021) and will be paid for by the Music Department.*

Ongoing playing assignments related to sight reading and rhythmic accuracy will be made. These aspects have been a concern in recent semesters, so this is a golden opportunity to get back to fundamentals. These assignments will be posted weekly but will be asynchronous (not tied to a specific class, but rather the week they appear), so you can work at your own pace throughout the semester.

The SmartMusic repertoire library also contains MIDI orchestrations of select literature that you can practice along with on your own. Especially savvy users can manipulate speeds through recordings on YouTube, or through GarageBand or Audacity. Some of the repertoire for the fall has been selected specifically to make sure it is represented in an accessible way with predesigned accompaniment/recording.

It is possible that other classes or ensembles will utilize SmartMusic this semester – brass methods, string methods, and string orchestra immediately come to mind. We are all coordinating efforts to make sure we purchase the correct number of subscriptions for all students involved. One student subscription for you should meet the needs of all applications in all classes.

Layer #3: Placement Auditions.

- *Students should record their audition excerpts and email them to Dr. Yonchak BEFORE AUGUST 24.*

These audition excerpts will help me determine who to assign to which chamber piece. These pieces will all be available as PDF documents organized by section, then by player, in Blackboard under Wind Ensemble and the zero-credit registration sections. Not everyone will play on everything, as is the nature of chamber group assignments, but I believe this will provide an avenue for a version of sustained instruction and music making amidst total chaos. This would be an excellent opportunity to try out your new recording setup, but these excerpts can also be recorded using whatever device you have readily available in the meantime.

Audition excerpts are available on the band website – www.otterbeinbands.com.

Layer #4: Concerts and Productions.

- *Out of an overabundance of caution, the Wind Ensemble will NOT produce live concerts during Fall 2020.*

Final “productions” will be virtual ensemble recordings that will be built from student recordings of assigned parts for various pieces. Additionally, students will be part of the “mastering” process as they are solicited for critical feedback as the rough mixes become the final product.

Everything considered, all of these components cover aspects I have struggled with integrating into the regular scheme of rehearsals and concerts. Turning obstacle into opportunity, we have a situation that is VERY conducive to teaching a highly valuable skill set in the new normal.

Future band directors of America...

Semester At-A-Glance

Repertoire:

Dwayne Milburn, “American Hymnsong Suite” (full ensemble; selected movements)

Percy Grainger/arr. Goldman, “Sussex Mummers Christmas Carol” (full ensemble)

Omar Thomas, “Sharp Nine” (full ensemble; 5 parts + perc)

James David, “Zephyrus” (13 parts + perc)

Naohiro Iwai/arr. Kanayama, “Dreams of Tomorrow: Overture for Rebuilding” (5 parts + perc)

Tetsunosuke Kushida, “Little Suite for Flexible Band” (5 parts + perc)

Week	Repertoire Assignments	SmartMusic Assignments	Notes
1	M: Audition excerpt recordings due W: PDF charts posted in BlackBoard	n/a	Create/Verify accounts in SmartMusic and SoundTrap
2	Technology Primer – posted voice-over video exploring how to best use your microphone and audio interface.	Technical Exercise 1	Add a track to SoundTrack BB quiz related to video
3-4	Thomas, “Sharp Nine”: record main melody and one chorus of solo in SoundTrap	Technical Exercises 2, 3	Meetups scheduled as needed
5-11	Ensemble Pieces – map out reasonable goals per week for chamber and full ens pieces; MSY will provide feedback to students about submitted recordings	Technical Exercises 4-9	Meetups scheduled as needed
12	Students finalize track submissions MSY compiles and edits final versions	Technical Exercise 10	Meetups scheduled as needed
13	Rough mixes sent to students for review MSY edits tracks as needed/students re-record as needed	n/a	Students can post feedback on discussion boards through BlackBoard
14	Final recordings released to students	n/a	

Notes on SmartMusic assignments

Smart Music exercises are self-paced but are included in this semester map to help students pace their work. Everything should be completed by Monday, November 16 (start of Week 13). The timeline for all projects is somewhat flexible, but the entire project will move forward only when everyone plays their part (figuratively and literally).

Assessment

Grading will be a combination of multiple artifacts:

- Submission of audition excerpts (week 1)
- BlackBoard quiz related to technology primer (week 2)
- Adding tracks to SoundTrap as assigned (weeks 2-4)
- SmartMusic technical exercises (10 total, weeks 2 through 12)
- Submitting tracks/excerpts for final compilation recordings as assigned (weeks 5 through 11)
- Submitting feedback on rough mixes (week 13)

Sources

“Performing Arts Aerosol Study” University of Colorado-Boulder.

- Overview: <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/>
- Summary/Preliminary Results: <https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029958/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf>

Johns-Hopkins/Peabody Institute “Return to Campus Guidance for Applied Instruction and Ensemble Classes”

- <https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/ohiomea/covid/1594300198.pdf>

“September Ready”: Fall 2020 Guidance for Arts Education (State of New Jersey)

- <https://www.artsednj.org/wp-content/uploads/NJ-September-Ready-Arts-Ed-Guidance.pdf?fbclid=IwAR24H-AM9r4tvQVh0MOj7Pbq3SptfWFT71MMhMbz9m-uzTVpsI3nk15wNH8>

An ongoing list of COVID-19 resources is available through NFHS (National Federation of State High School Associations): <https://nfhs.org/articles/performing-arts-covid-19-resources>