

INTRODUCTION

In December of 2004 it was my distinct pleasure to have been accepted to present a session at the renowned Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago. The proposed presentation was to be titled *Management Techniques and Musical Skills: The Twin Foundations of “Pin-Drop Quiet” Band and Orchestra Rehearsals*. This would be a completely new clinic for me. Considering that the Midwest is such a huge and important international convention, I started my planning well in advance of the date of the presentation. I first made a bare-bones outline, then fleshed that out. My next-to-last step was to type the presentation as a word-for-word speech, the kind a politician might read from a teleprompter. I had no intention of actually reading the clinic in Chicago. I just wanted to know how it might sound if it could possibly be delivered perfectly.

About two weeks before the date of the Midwest, I considered my work to be about 80% complete. All that was needed was a summary of the major points with a few minutes left at the end for questions. I thought it might be a good idea to time the presentation as it existed at that point to see how many minutes remained for the final 20% that still needed to be developed. Midwest clinics are strictly limited to an absolute total of sixty minutes from the introduction of the speaker to the end of the session. I set a clock to exactly 1:00 p.m., allotted two minutes for someone to do a short introduction, and then proceeded to read the speech aloud to my living room wall. When I finished I checked the clock. It said 2:35! One hour and thirty-five minutes for a not yet completed one-hour clinic. Brilliant! I realized immediately that I would have to spend the final two weeks of my preparations doing surgery, cutting out this and that, hoping all the while that I did not remove so many vital parts that I rendered the thing a useless cadaver. Before beginning the unpleasant task of deciding which materials to relegate to the computer’s trash bin, I saved the original file with a different name. That would allow me to resuscitate and reactivate any of the discarded materials that I might later need to reinsert. Because it was so long, with tongue in cheek, I saved the file as “*Midwest: The*

Book.” That renamed file is essentially what you hold in your hands, although it has since been expanded many hundreds of times over from the original. I never really intended to develop the file into a book. I was more or less just poking fun at myself for writing far more than could possibly fit into a one-hour clinic.

The actual clinic at the Midwest did fit into the hour, although there was no time for questions. I am happy to report that it was very well received. Since that original presentation in Chicago, I have repeated the same clinic many times over throughout the United States, Canada, and abroad, always to large and receptive audiences. Numerous people who have heard it have suggested that I really ought to write a book on the subject. On those occasions, I will admit that the computer file *Midwest: The Book* did float back into memory.

Classroom management is an enormously important and troubling subject for many. I recently typed “classroom management” into my favorite search engine (with quotes to avoid things like business management, time management, wastewater management and the like). I received over five million hits. For me, that huge number validates my impression that classroom management is definitely on the minds of many educators. I suspect that it may be an even bigger concern for many of us in music rooms and rehearsal halls. The vast majority of research on the subject of classroom management has been geared toward the traditional classroom with a student to teacher ratio of perhaps 24:1. Our class sizes are very often considerably greater than that. In my clinics for instrumental teachers, I often describe the situation this way: “Standing in front of a middle school band of sixty-five is like standing in front of sixty-five hormone-producing factories with each one having a potential noise-making machine in its possession.” What we do is different and, some would say, more difficult than what the teachers in traditional classrooms face on a daily basis. In our classrooms we encourage students to fully participate, to move, to make sound rather than sit still and be quiet. This is not to say that the available data geared to the smaller, academic class is of no value to us. On the contrary, much of it works wonderfully well in even our largest classes. Accordingly, you will notice in this text many similarities to well-known and respected management methodologies. They

have been invaluable to me, and I have enthusiastically used them as a solid foundation, a starting point for building a system that is more geared toward what music teachers do. So if some of what you read sounds familiar, it probably is, but it has very likely been modified to speak more directly to our particular situations.

After I retired from thirty years as a public school music teacher, I had the time to reflect on my wonderfully satisfying career. I am one of those people who can truthfully say that, if I had it to do over, I would literally not change a thing. I certainly would not change all my failures into successes, psychologically comforting as that might be. From my failures, I learned. Without them I would not have much to share with you. As I surveyed my career, warts and all, I asked myself what it was that made it possible for me to have found such a wonderful way to spend my life. There were, of course, many factors that played a significant role, but I finally zeroed in on two that I felt were the primary reasons for the complete sense of fulfillment that I enjoyed.

First of all, to my own satisfaction at least, I solved the problems associated with teaching rhythm. I truly felt that I could teach rhythm to monkeys. Because I was primarily a middle school teacher, I will admit that there were those days when I was sure that was exactly what I was doing! Why was teaching rhythm ranked so high on my list? Having students able to solve their own rhythm problems made classes so much more enjoyable, fast-paced, and musical. I didn't have to stop the full group in order to teach four students how their part went in measure twenty-seven. They could figure it out themselves. Large numbers of students were not sitting around being bored or, more likely, getting into trouble while a few of their friends were getting help. Classes in which the majority of students are actively participating the majority of the time greatly decrease both the opportunity for and the desire for involvement in off-task behaviors. Everyone is playing or singing most of the time, and students who are making music literally don't want the music to stop! The greater the number of musical skills like reading rhythms that students master, the less time and energy teachers need to devote to management. Musical skills and

classroom management go hand in hand. The better one is, the better the other can be.

Second and most important, after three or four years of trial and error, I somehow solved the classroom management puzzle. An observer once remarked that he or she could hear a pin drop in my middle school and high school bandrooms which, by the way, were carpeted. Now that's quiet! The same program worked beautifully for my large and potentially rowdy eighth grade general music classes that met every day of the week, at the end of the day. And I did it without raising my voice or sending a student to the office to be disciplined by someone else. All problems were solved where they occurred—in my classroom, without anger.

This program may work for you exactly as it is described here, but that is fairly doubtful. Your particular situation—your teaching style, your community, your administration, your daily schedule, how many buildings you work in, and a whole host of other things will likely require small, medium, or even large modifications. Even with the changes you may have to make to accommodate the differences, I am personally convinced that the basic principles of this program will work in any situation. In the interest of full disclosure, I will tell you that I never taught any students younger than fourth grade, and I never taught in an urban school. The suburban school system in which I spent my entire career had three middle schools. Even though mine was considered to be the “toughest” of the three, it was nothing like the unfortunate urban situations that we all know exist. However, I have done considerable reading on urban schools and have seen video documentaries that have demonstrated wonderful successes with classroom management in the most dire of circumstances. That research has made me aware of fantastically successful urban classrooms operating on the same basic principles that are recommended here. In those classrooms I could not help but notice...

- students who all know exactly what is expected in the classroom,
- students who know exactly what will happen if they step over the line,

- students who agree that the consequences are fair and are for the good of the classroom community,
- teachers who are dedicated and energetic and enthused about what they are teaching,
- teachers whose eyes seem to constantly scan every square inch of the room,
- teachers who move around the room as they teach,
- teachers who are firm, fair, and consistent every day, from the first day to the last day of the term—no exceptions,
- students who are bursting with pride at the extent of their knowledge of the subject, and
- classrooms that have essentially been formed into close-knit, co-operative, well-mannered communities of learners.

To me these are the secrets of exemplary classroom behavior in any and all settings—big or small, public or private, rural, urban or suburban. For music teachers, what is required is the mastery of both *Management Techniques* and *Musical Skills*. We really can't have one without the other.