Tune Selection, Medley Construction, Band Practice Strategies

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Tune Selection

• Important Point
  • Playing compositions within the ability range of the band
    • Simple tunes played well are more often more musically satisfying than difficult tunes played not so well

• Well considered arrangements of key-changes, mood swings, tempo changes, breaks, time signature changes
  • Must have initial impact, variations, tasteful use of slow passages and an exciting finish
  • Tasteful use of harmony

• Allowance for personal taste
  • No matter what you do, you cannot please everyone

• Try and use some known tunes
  • Too much new material will be lost on the audience
Tune Selection

- Tune Types available
  - Marches
  - Hornpipes – pointed and round
  - Strathspeys
  - Reels – pointed and round
  - Airs
  - Jigs
  - Waltzes
  - Asymmetric Time Signatures (not recommended to lower grade bands for competition medlies)
Tune Selection

• Three things to focus on
  • Opener
  • Building up to a slow air for mood change
  • Then building up to an exciting finish

• Opener Choice
  • March
  • Hornpipe – pointed or round

• Must have musical impact
  • Important to highlight the bands sound
    • Feeds back to the ability range, if everyone is comfortable with the standard of the tune then the sound and expression will be optimised
    • Sound always likely to be better at the begining
    • Consider harmony but not always necessary
      • Depends on the rest of the medley
Tune Selection

• Slow Air Choice
  • Must have harmony
  • Consider weighting of harmony and or counterpoint
    • Don’t overpower the melody (same applies to all harmony)

• Medley Ending Choice
  • Must be musically exciting
  • Must be melodic
  • Some form of harmony advantageous
  • Consider an ending phrase

• Intermediary Stages
  • Once you have decided on the Opener/Air/Closer start thinking about the intermediary stages
  • Consider breaks and ending
Medley Construction

• Once you have the opener/closer/air
  • Can decide on what comes after each tune
  • If you are finishing on a reel then it will more than likely be preceded by a strathspey
  • If you are finishing on a jig, then the strathspeys should follow the opener, followed by reels

• Strathspeys
  • Consider key changes
    • Identify key
  • If opener and 1st strathspey are in the same key then change key for 2nd strathspey
Medley Construction

• Reels
  • If opener is round then consider pointed reels
    • Makes for good variation

• Jigs
  • Consider key changes between jigs
    • Identify key
  • If opener and 1st jig are in same key then consider changing for 2nd jig
    • Makes for good variation

• After Slow Air
  • Will either be strathspeys, hornpipe (pointed or round), or jigs
Medley Construction

• Consider the following tunes for a medley using the process described
  • Opener’s
    • Beverly’s Wedding, The B52, The Man From Skye, The Waterhole
  • Air’s
    • McLeods Oran Mor, Sine Bahn (Fair Jean), Cliffs of Doneen
  • Closers
    • Reels
      • Willie McKensies Reel, Sleepy Maggie, Tail Toddle, Dancing Feet,
    • Jigs
      • The Jig Runrig, Merrily Danced the Quakers Wife, Queen of the Rushes, Paddy’s Leather Britches, The Hag at the Kiln
Medley Construction

• Intermediary Stages
  • Strathspeys
    • Fiddlers Joy, A.A. Camerons Strathspey, McPhedrans Strathspey, The Smiths a Gallant Firemen, Seonaidh’s Tune, Stirling Castle
  • Depending on Closer Could Be
    • Jigs
    • Strathspeys/Reels
  • Also consider
    • Hornpipes
      • e.g. Calum Iain, Man From Skye, The Waterhole
    • Waltzes

• Consider Structure
  • Do the tunes go together musically
    • Listen to each tune and assess
    • Does the medley have a good “feel”
Medley Construction

• Consider Breaks
  • Counts into jigs, reels, strathspeys, airs
    • Makes it easier to get into the rhythm of the tune

• Consider Ending
  • Does finisher have a natural end or do you need to create a finish
    • Look at a few examples

• Consider Harmony
  • Look at a few examples

• Once complete, let an outside respected person have a listen and be prepared to listen and adjust as necessary

• Look and listen to P&D article “Where to Place Harmony In a Medley”
Band Practice Strategy

• Early off season
  • Select tunes
    • Within the ability range of the band
      • Ability to concentrate on sound/expression
  • Learning on practice chanter
    • Playing over with P/M (2 bar phrases)
    • Learning to play complete tune with music
    • Learning to play complete tune without music
      • P/M’s responsibility to ensure correct expression/phrasing/execution
      • Easy to forget expression when concentrating on memorising
      • Group playing on practice chanters
  • Transfer to pipes
    • Playing at home (or practice area)
    • Playing with band
      • Group playing on pipes for unison/expression/phrasing
    • Playing in performance
      • You always think you know a tune until you have to play it in performance
      • Can only be helped by practice
Band Practice Strategy

• Early Off Season
  • Coordination with Drum Corps
    • P/M provide recordings of tunes asap
      • Drummers require more time
        • Composing scores (side + mid section)
        • Writing score out
        • Trying out with P/M
        • Adapting
        • Learning/Memorising
    • Chanter Drum Pad Trial
      • Any initial issues can be sorted out
      • Full band trial (PC/Drum Pad)
    • Leading to full band trial, pipes/drums
    • Refinements as necessary
Band Practice Strategy

• Later Off Season (three four months before 1st competition)
  • New reeds selected and being blown in
    • Ensuring reeds are optimised to peak in competition performance
  • Players doing home practice to eliminate any mistakes
  • Practicing starts, breaks, expression etc at band practice
    • P/M, L/D doing one on ones as necessary with relevant players

• Approx 1 Month Before Competition Season
  • Start working on sound at every practice
  • Try and ensure band has been well tuned at practice
  • The less you play on competition day the better (within reason)
  • Know every player and how long you will get from everyones pipes

• Competition Day
  • Don’t go to competition to practice – go to produce your best sound
  • Use methods discussed to produce your best sound
  • Don’t tire players out before your performance
  • Keep your best performance for the circle not the practice field

• Good Luck
  • PP&PPPPP