

Gigging with Your Students: Are You Serious?!

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Synopsis

It's no surprise that over the past several decades, musicians have moved away from a "learn on the bandstand" approach to a "learn in the classroom, then to the bandstand" approach. While the merits of both methods are commendable, the end goal is essentially the same; to enable young musicians the opportunity to develop life skills including responsibility, confidence, teamwork, and leadership - skills that translate into any career.

One of the best ways to start our student musicians on the right path is to give them, at the earliest opportunity, a literal stage on which to learn the ins-and-outs of our trade. If we don't give our students the chance to succeed, and fail, while they're in a safe educational environment, they'll be obligated to learn the essentials of gigging outside of school. While this is obviously the end game, gigging while still in school provides the student musician with the chance to fail without the risk of losing income and/or damaging their reputation; they might end up with a bad grade, but that's about it! Understanding how to create set lists, run rehearsals, promoting/marketing, read the crowd, pace the gig, set up contracts, write charts, run a PA, etc. are fundamental requisites of being a 21st century, entrepreneurial musician.

What are some of the performance opportunities for our students outside of the normal rehearsal/concert schedule?

- Club dates
- Non-profit/foundation fundraisers
- Casual gigs
- Music festivals - focusing on non-competitive
- Local feeder schools
- Area schools that lack, or have an inadequate, music program
- Local radio
- Local university sporting events
- Seasonal concert series

What are some of the benefits of having students play off-campus gigs?

- Learning enough tunes to play a one, two, three, etc. hour set
- Understanding how to pace their chops to make it through the gig
- Understanding stage fright and how to control it
- Realizing how to become competent performers and engaging entertainers
- Learning how to correct equipment issues, form problems, etc. on the fly
- Developing an awareness of the "musical conversation" and how to contribute to it

Other opportunities for learning that go beyond performing include:

- Becoming skilled in how to book, and keep, a gig
- Learning the basics of, and learning how to run/troubleshoot, a PA system

- Personal responsibility re: making sure the student has everything they need for the gig, i.e. music stand, music, correct directions to the venue, reeds, straps, strings, sticks, cables, etc.
- Time management and schedule organization
- Understanding how to create an audience-friendly set list
- Students taking more ownership of "their" band in terms of song selection, advertising, finding gigs, running rehearsals, promotion, etc.

Ok, I get the educational component. How do I get my band out and gigging?

- Make sure you have an ensemble that is presentable and marketable!
- Have your students ask their parents what foundations, organizations, non-profits they may either be involved with, or know someone associated with, and create a database with that information.
- Start small, such as entertainment for a parent/school organization, a parent's workplace function, or playing for another school's assembly.
- It's imperative that you get video and audio of your group. More often than not, booking agents want to see the band to gauge skill, song content, and entertainment value.
- Put together a press kit that includes both video and audio recordings, a photo, bio, song list, list of venues played, quotes, one sheet, contact info, stage plot, awards, etc. There are an abundance of sites online that can help you with this and/or host it.
- Create band social media pages and have your students like it, have their friends like it, have their pets, grandmothers, etc. like it... *anysocialmedia.com/kentdenvermusic*
- Gigs beget gigs - the more you play out the better the chance to book additional gigs. Have extra promo kits, or at the very least business cards, at every gig.

Other thoughts...

- Come up with a plan on how you can get your students, your parents, the faculty, and the administration to support this new endeavor!
- Getting the band out into the community not only serves to educate your students and promote your school/program, but it publicizes the importance of music education as a vital part of 21st century education.
- Be sure to balance your student's time re: their other interests, academic, and athletic pursuits, not to mention your own personal time!
- If possible, try to move away from booking the performances on your own. See if any of your students are interested in learning how to book a band, and then give them the tools to do so while providing helpful feedback, supervision, and oversight.
- Do you ask for a performance fee/honorarium for the students/school?

In closing...

Get your kids out there! Although it might seem a daunting task at first (...and it is...), the benefits to your students, program, school, and community far outweigh the startup pains you're bound to encounter. Whether or not you are currently play out for a living, to keep your chops up, or if you're gigging days are far in your past, think about how much you learned on the gig in terms of being a musician, an entrepreneur, and a person. Why would you deprive your students of gaining the same experiences?