

# BALANCE, BLEND and INTONATION: It's a Package Deal

Presented by Dennis Granlie  
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**I**t's the SOUND! Balance, blend and intonation are the greatest determiners of the band's sonority. Like a three-legged stool, if one is weak, the others are directly affected.

Too much eye/technical training vs. ear training typically happens. Balance, blend and intonation are ensemble skills requiring ear training in the ensemble.

Webster: Sonorous: producing or capable of producing sound, especially sound of full, deep, or rich quality; resonant. (Consider the string quartet)

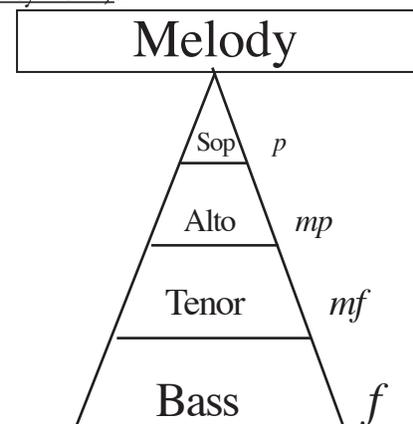
## BALANCE

- Poor balance (too loud) is the root cause of most poor festival/contest ratings
- Easiest concept to teach, because it is just dynamics, but...
- Dynamic markings are like speed limits; you must adjust for conditions
- Listen for two kinds of balance, melodic and harmonic (also melody and accompaniment)
- Melody rules; if you can't hear the melody, you're too loud (including percussion)
- Have just the melody play
- Rule of thumb: cut 30% off the marked dynamic if you don't have the melody
- Thickness of scoring has a big effect on melodic balance; adjust for conditions

How to establish simple pyramid harmonic balance (remember, melody rules):

1. Determine who is sop., alto, tenor, bass
2. Assign dynamics: bass = *f*, tenor = *mf*, alto = *mp*, soprano = *p*.
3. Play unisons keeping the pyramid "fat" at the bottom
4. Apply to scales, rounds, chorales
5. Crescendo 100% bass, 75% tenor, 50% alto, 25% soprano

More complex pyramid balance requires more  
3rd than 2nd, more 2nd than 1st within each section.



## **BLEND**

- Blend is a more complex concept, but visual analogies abound
- Combination of good tone, good balance, good pitch
- In good blend, the many become one, individual sound disappears

Ed Lisk's 3-point check:

1. If you can hear yourself, play softer
2. If you can still hear yourself, adjust your intonation
3. If you can still hear yourself, adjust your tone

### **Things to think or do to help blend:**

- Make your sound disappear into the \_\_\_\_\_.
- Dump the entire band inside the tuba. Make your sound part of the tuba sound.
- Be a chameleon, not a zit!
- Make one sound; the band
- Keep sound focused above staff and reduce volume in upper woodwinds.  
(often the register with the most technical challenge)
- Clarinets think "ooh" to sweeten tone (corners in).
- Saxophone is seldom heard as its own voice in the best professional concert bands.
- Percussion, be aware of tone, not just rhythm.

## **INTONATION**

(assumes correct posture, support, embouchure, reed, etc.)

- Most complex concept in the package, and often least addressed
- Must be addressed daily (constantly)
- Tuning to a meter is EYE training
- Start simple, but invest time daily to tune:
  - unisons on like instruments
  - unisons on different instruments
  - octaves on like instruments
  - octaves on different instruments
  - 4ths/5ths
  - chords
- Concert F good tuning note except for Eb instruments (use A or Bb)
- Sing/hum
- Talk about/adjust pitch every rehearsal
- Be sure student know tuning is a process, not an event
- Listen to your band when you are not conducting and focus on pitch
- Beware of Ear Warp

### How to Introduce “beatless” Tuning:

1. Start with “disturbances in the force” (beats) “How does out of tune sound?”
2. Pick two saxes and have them play a unison, vote
3. Move hands at same speed as beats-- slower is better, none is good
4. One player do something (when in doubt, the direction is out--90% are sharp)
5. Play again--better or worse? vote
6. Adjust if necessary

Repeat process with next player--be sure to vote!

Speed the process, eliminate the vote

Tune to tuba, neighbors, leaders

Invest time teaching kids to tune themselves, or spend time trying to tune your band every day

### Fun With Chords:

1. Assign notes for Eb chord, be sure all know if they are root, 3rd or 5th
2. Explain the need to lower the major 3rd 14 cents (demo 14¢?)
3. Start with roots, add 5ths, add 3rds and “pull” down with hand movement
4. Make obvious approval when chord improves/locks
5. What happens after cutoff?

### 10 Ways to Have Fun With Chorales:

- Gain Focus (give them something to watch)
- Teach good tone
- Teach breathing and breath control
- Teach phrase length
- Teach phrase shape
- Teach style
- Teach harmonic balance/sonority
- Teach group intonation
- Teach melodic awareness
- Teach harmonic motion

Bonus: Percussion learn mallets

### 10 Tips for Using Chorales:

- Stay simple--put ears, not eyes and fingers, to work
- Be sure students understand a chorale is a hymn (style)
- Insist on eye contact (why stare at a whole note?)
- Conduct phrase shape, length and style
- Ask questions that require critical listening to answer
- Turn balance “upside down” on occasion to compare sound
- Have band play with eyes closed
- Have band play with music toward you
- Create some sturm and drang
- Use the chorale sound as the basis of your band sonority

## THE PACKAGE (The Sound)

### Ingredients for an outstanding band sonority:

- Conductor has a characteristic sonority he/she pursues
- Daily attention to sound quality in rehearsals
- Student care about good sonority
- Students and director hear frequent examples of outstanding (or poor) sonority
- Students and director constantly analyze sound quality
- Careful literature selection allows time to teach balance, blend, intonation, etc.
- Conductor knows score well enough to work on details/minor flaws, sound

### Parting thoughts:

- As with the three-legged stool, strengthening one area benefits the other two.
- The director is solely responsible for the quality of the ensemble's sound
- Take/make time to work on the band's sonority, just as you would your own individual instrument tone
- Warm-up is the best time to work on ensemble sound
- The best bands keep the same sonority, despite personnel changes
- Your rehearsals are the only place the vast majority of students learn and practice ensemble skills
- Stop and replay examples of excellent balance/blend/intonation during rehearsal
- Train students to listen for small details

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