

Master Class

by J.D. Shaw and Jeff Conner (Boston Brass)

Playing in a chamber ensemble has wonderful opportunities for the growing musician, however too often these students are not presented with a plan of action in order to rehearse and communicate efficiently. The freedom of chamber music is not without its own perils. The absence of a conductor allows the musicians to express their own opinions, but these opinions can also conflict. The challenge is to operate the rehearsal in an open manner while at the same time merging many ideas into one synergistic goal. The ensemble is a team but no team will be successful without strong individual players. Each player needs to understand and study the music carefully, make musical judgments, and be able to present their ideas in a concise manner. One has often heard that "there is no "I" in team," however there is a "me" and the responsibilities of each person are tremendous.

Music is an extremely passionate endeavor and it is easy to be highly protective and defensive of our opinions on how a phrase or section of music should be performed. Musicians tend to take these opinions quite personally, so the feat is to try to separate musical opinions from personal emotion. In an ensemble, everyone's opinions should be laid out on the table. Each presenter of an idea should have thoughtful reason and logic behind their stance. Simply stating "I just feel that it needs to be this way!" is not enough and irresponsible on the part of that player. Communication of ideas is, above all else, the most valuable rehearsal tool that any ensemble can have.

After all ideas have been presented, try rehearsing through some of these ideas. Usually, an idea will take shape in a more convincing manner when performed by the ensemble than simply expressing the idea vocally. Be flexible and open to all opinions because, very often, the group can meld several concepts into one. One will find that there is not necessarily just one correct way to play a section of music. At this point, the musicians need to decide on which action they are going to take. This is not always easy. In Boston Brass, we have the luxury of having 5 members so when we vote there is always a deciding majority. After the vote, the majority's decision is employed. Have faith - trust your fellow musicians. To continue to argue that one's opinion somehow outweighs the decision of the majority is arrogant. If one finds himself in the position of the minority, the responsible action is to live with the decision for a while and see if the idea takes shape. Most often, in Boston Brass, we find that we will merge all of the ideas naturally during performance simply because we are aware of everyone's corresponding opinions.

Many chamber groups have come and gone. The reason for many of their demises come from the fact that many people simply can't work together due to clashing egos, dictatorial leadership, or communication breakdowns. Separation of personal emotion from group decisions and thoughtful argument will circumvent many of these problems that have continually plagued musical ensembles. People ask us all the time "How do you guys live with each other day in and day out? Do you always get along?" In Boston Brass we usually get along famously, but when we do have arguments, we understand each other to a degree that we can make decisions without letting our emotions interfere and

we respect and trust each other's talents, abilities and opinions.

If you want more info on the Boston Brass musicians, visit their website
(www.bostonbrass.com)