

Learning the ABC's

by M. Max McKee

American Band College attendees and teaching staff have a lot to say about their special experiences in Ashland, Oregon. If you are considering attending in 2002, perhaps some of the following will help.

ABC starts June 21 and concludes July 4 each summer while featuring 25 of the world's finest teachers, clinicians, conductors and composers. Each presents clinics for all of the attendees; some conduct on the weekly public performances; some appear as soloists.



Robert Smith during the 4th of July concert.

Before any time passes," wrote guest composer and conductor, Robert W. Smith, "I want to thank the entire ABC staff for providing what is truly a *crown jewel* in our band world. The positive environment that surrounds it has a tremendous impact on our profession and provides a model for all such events to emulate. It is only through great

vision and perseverance that events like ABC continue to grow and prosper. Congratulations and a million thanks for being one of those who have made a difference!"

Compositions by Robert Smith played by the 155-member American Band College Directors' Band on the 4th of July concert included *The Iliad*, *Inchon*, *The Great Locomotive Chase*, and *To Challenge the Sky and Heavens Above*. His music was not only a tremendous hit with the band but also the 1500 people attending the concert.

Doing ABC, "I've learned so much over the past years," remarked 2001 graduate, Tom Hrbacek, from Temecula High School in California. "I am always able to use something from ABC each day in my rehearsals. I can truly say I've become a much better musician and teacher because of ABC. It has also provided me a great opportuni-

ty to stress to my students that "you never stop learning—it is a life-long process.



Jeff Tower during a jazz diagnostics clinic.

Each candidate who comes to the program is evaluated via an extensive entrance placement exam. By determining what kind of background the candidate has in fingerings, pitch tendencies, percussion techniques, embouchure development, band literature, rehearsal diagnostics and much more, the American Band College approach is one that concentrates on the individual's needs over a three-summer period.

For the introduction to his sixth and final thesis project, Temple (Texas) High School director, Brent Colwell wrote, "Knowledge is a major key to success in any profession. I can think of no better way to gain a great body of knowledge than to go to those who are the most successful in one's chosen profession. Over the three years in the ABC program, I have been a

fortunate participant in master classes taught by the greatest performers, educators and leaders in the music

profession. In addition, I have had the opportunity to perform several hundred wonderful pieces of music. There are few opportunities in life to have such an incredibly concentrated chance to gain knowledge. Thank you, ABC, for increasing my thirst for knowledge and for renewing my passion for being a band director."

Guest conductors on concerts during Brent's three summers as an ABC masters candidate included Alfred Reed, Francis McBeth, Mike Bankhead, Pierre Kuijpers (Holland), Kanat Akhmetov (Kazakstan), Philip Sparke (England), Jan Van der Roost (Belgium), James Curnow, Arnald Gabriel, Robert W. Smith and Tim Lautzenheiser. Another 60 clinic specialists in every area of teaching were also on hand in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

BW 2001

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How can I explain to others," remarked 2001 American Band College grad Rick Eckler from Dublin, Ohio, "when so many aspects of ABC are totally unbelievable? The clinicians from all over the world, the composers we love and respect and a staff that truly wants us to succeed all contribute to a wonderful experience. The fact that in a brief period of time after arriving in Ashland, we all become an instant *family* creates an exceptional atmosphere for learning. Everyone works to the betterment of all. My friends have witnessed my enthusiasm and excitement and I feel confident that my students have benefited from my work at ABC."

In the course of three summers, candidates return home each July (following written exams on July 5) and have five weeks to complete two thesis projects. One project is a Practical Application which the candidate determines by choosing from a pre-tested area of weakness and then creating materials that students in his or her program will find useful.

Just like students back home, each ABC candidate works on specific, individual areas of weakness rather than generic areas that are typically addressed with everyone in a classroom situation. At the same time, every candidate attends every clinic session during ABC regardless of strengths and weaknesses. Trumpet players, for instance, still gain a great deal by observing Allen Vizzutti do a master class with younger trumpet students. The same is true when sax players listen to Eugene Rousseau.



Allen Vizzutti with Stu Turner and the ABC Directors' Band

Keeping every aspect of ABC on a personal level makes it viable for all candidates. Jeff Kitterman, class of 2001, from Douglas, Wyoming wrote: "I put off getting my masters degree because I didn't feel that the content would be practical. The American Band College is the only program I could find that seemed practical. Now that I've been through

the program, I can say without a doubt that every moment I spent working in this program was relevant and beneficial to my teaching skills."



Linked to Southern Oregon University, the degree is sanctioned by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education with the American Band College

functioning as a separate non-profit fiscal entity; it is thus possible to hire professionals from all areas of the world and fashion coursework in totally practical ways.

Measuring candidate teaching expertise is installed at many levels of the ABC masters program. The other first-year thesis project involves written and on-tape "contest judging" of recorded performances by the bands of other ABC masters students as well as the candidate's own group. ABC graduate faculty evaluate these projects and provide feedback.

Next is a videotape-based thesis project for second-year candidates. This involves preparation of video



During the in-house certification ceremony, the American Band College Class of 2001 graduates took time for a group photo: **Bottom Row (right to left)** April Brobst (Boise, ID), Brent Colwell (Belton, TX), Steve Conant (Pawtucket, RI), Bruce Davidson (Wildomar, CA), Kevin Durfee (Indianapolis, IN), Rick Eckler (Dublin, OH), Cathy George (Turlock, CA), Kenneth Goff (Miami, FL), Lynn Graciano (Spanaway, WA), David Haaversen (Two Harbors, MN), Doug Hargis (Solana Beach, CA), Doug Harris (Aurora, CO). **Middle row (right to left)** Jeff Held (Anaheim, CA), Christopher Holt (Bend, OR), Tom Hrbacek (Temecula, CA), Regan Huffman (Longview, WA), David Jakes (Annandale, VA), Mike Jones (Lawrence, KS), Pamela Hodges Jones (Riverside, CA), Patrick Keeley (Jasper, IN), Jeff Kitterman (Douglas, WY), Craig Kitzrow (Fond du Lac, WI), Floy Latham (Kalamazoo, MI). **Top row (right to left)** Elizabeth Lonergan (Myrtle Creek, OR), NM), Bonnie-Jean McGilvray (Bellingham, MA), Deborah Nevin (Bonita, CA), Wade Presley (Nevada, IA), Catherine Roe (Buckley, WA), Keith Schmink (Pontiac, IL), Lucretia Schram (Grass Valley, CA), George Scott (Brawley, CA), Joseph Sullivan (Sykesville, MD), Andy Van Horn (Evanston, IL), Stuart Welsh (Leavenworth, WA), Keith Westmoreland (Grand Rapids, MI).

segments from sightreading, a mid-point rehearsal and the final public performance plus development of teaching materials used in preparation of the composition. Again, ABC graduate faculty evaluate these projects and provide feedback.

Opportunities to conduct during ABC also figure prominently in candidate evaluation. Second-year candidates are videotaped while doing all of the sightreading of new music with the ABC Directors' Band. Voice-over evaluations accompany the finished video.

Preparation of music with the ABC Directors' Band for the incoming guest conductors (Alfred Reed, Philip Sparke, Robert Smith and Tim Lautzenheiser in 2001) provides an important conducting experience for third-year ABC masters candidates. Videotaped as well, candidates meet with the graduate faculty for evaluation.

Qualifying for certification in the American Band College masters degree program culminates in conducting one of the ABC Rehearsal Diagnostic Bands (fondly known as "Boo Boo Bands"). Here the third-year candidate tries to diagnose and correct as many intentional (but typical) errors these bands have been instructed to play as part of exit exam evaluation.

Returning graduates now mark one of the most significant aspects of ABC. In 2001 thirteen grads returned just for the joy of being

involved while serving as mentors to those just entering the program. Returnees play in the concerts and many now serve as volunteer, operational staff.

Study centers in the Southern Oregon University dorms also provide special help for the 150 candidates in the American Band College program.

Thanks for having the vision," wrote first-year candidate Heather Walker from Spanaway, Washington. "I really needed this program; it has helped me recharge and has given me many contacts who I know will help me out when I am in a bind."

Universally, those who attend say things like Bruce Houston, a 1998 ABC graduate from Massachusetts: "I came out to Ashland thinking about how many more years I would teach until I could retire. I now think about how many years I can continue to teach until I am forced to retire. The program has been a real fountain of youth for me. My two weeks spent in Ashland are constantly on my mind. You and the instructors were able to convey to all attendees just how important band directors are to our students and our society. You make a strong case for how much there is to learn to perform the job adequately while providing the vehicle to attain these skills."

Vision in creating ABC has mostly to do with the world-class staff. Noted low brass teacher, Winston

Morris, from Tennessee Tech wrote: "I can't tell you how impressed I am with what you have done with ABC!!! It really recharges my faith that there are folks out there doing the right thing for the right reasons. You have tapped into this and have been a major factor in keeping music education a positive endeavor. For this you certainly have my most profound thanks and support."

World-renowned conductor, Frederick Fennell commented: "What

your ABC stands for is joy, making it exciting to learn. Keep dreaming your dreams. Let nothing—and mostly, nobody—try to blunt your greatest weapon: enthusiasm!"

Ygnacio Valley High School (California) Director, Steve Accatino, a 1995 ABC graduate,

remarked: "I just concluded the most profound educational experience of my life. Never have I been a part of a program that has had such an immediate effect on my teaching of instrumental music."

Zeroing in on the needs of each attending director is ABC's greatest strength. Coupled with its true family spirit, the American Band College provides unique ways for directors at all stages of personal development to improve.

For more information on ABC, call us at (800) 247-2263, email maxmckee@jeffnet.org, or visit our web site: <http://bandworld.jeffnet.org>. By regular mail write: 407 Terrace Street, Ashland, OR 97520.



Col. Arnald Gabriel in concert with the 1999 ABC Directors' Band

X-Factors with ABC include the tremendous camaraderie, the non-competitive learning atmosphere and the opportunity to perform the great band literature as well as talk about it.

