

Creative Ideas to Engage Your Audience at Concerts

WORKING

1. The A-List: the most Practical Ideas

- ♪ Parents "play the musical instrument" game
- ♪ Staff music ensemble
- ♪ You pick the song contest
- ♪ Student-led...everything!
 - ♪ Speaking parts
 - ♪ Skits
 - ♪ Soloists
 - ♪ Composers
 - ♪ Conductors

2. The B-List: Good info I might not have time to cover

- ♪ Re-arranging songs from method books
- ♪ Off stage parts
- ♪ Enter the stage differently
- ♪ Lighting effects
- ♪ Teach the audience to conduct beats
- ♪ Have the audience sing/percussive effects
- ♪ Play a recording of students from in class
- ♪ Put a bassoon fingering chart in the concert program
- ♪ Compose your own music for the kids
- ♪ Have the students create a class arrangement of a song
- ♪ Educating the parents about the elements of music
- ♪ Dress up in a costume
- ♪ Teach a song entirely by ear
- ♪ Have soloists play into a guitar amp
- ♪ Percussion ensemble music is always interesting
- ♪ Cell phone text voting: Polleverywhere.com
- ♪ It is about recognizing small opportunities:
How can I *creatively* intensify what the piece is trying to connote?

GROWD

3. Things I would tell you over coffee: philosophy/thoughts

- ♪ The golden rule for engaging your audience:
 - ♪ **You must make it your problem that your audience is going to be disengaged**
- ♪ We must re-envision the roles of conductor, performer, audience, and performance space:
 - ♪ **The Conductor** is an educator to their community when they are on stage. Teach the audience what the kids are doing is important.
 - ♪ **The Performers** are creative entities beyond the music they play. They are much more multi-talented than you think they are.
 - ♪ **The Audience** is not a passive entity during a performance. They are an active one. Tap into their willingness to be entertained and engaged.
 - ♪ **The Performance Space** dictates the expectations the performers and audience members bring to the performance. Know how to utilize this to your advantage.

4. A few lingering thoughts...

- ♪ Entertainment can always have subtext. You can trick your audience into having fun and learning at the same time.
- ♪ Think about how boring we have made the structure of our concerts:
"Enter stage, person waves a stick, music happens, leave stage".
 - ♪ How can we disrupt this structure to make a more interesting experience?
 - ♪ Think about your favorite concerts you have been to (in any genre of music). What did the performers do to engage you?
- ♪ Do audiences always know what you are doing on stage?
 - ♪ Don't take for granted the audience knows what something as basic as tuning or conducting *does*.
 - ♪ The audience either doesn't know much about music or they don't have the descriptors to identify what they hear in the music. They might be fascinated to learn.
 - ♪ The audience needs to learn something about the piece of music, but that can be done with more than a speech. Find a way to get the audience inside of your head. Why did you choose this valuable piece of music for the students to play in the first place and how can you convey that?
- ♪ **A final thought:** You might be the only person in the room who knows why what the students are doing is important. Through creative ways to engage your audience, how can you make them also realize what the students are doing is important and meaningful?

Creative Ideas to Engage Your Audience at Concerts

1. The A-List: The Most practical ideas

- ♪ Parents "play the musical instrument" game ← Stolen from Jimmy Fallon!
- ♪ Staff music ensemble ← If all else fails, anyone can play percussion right?
- ♪ You pick the song contest ← I put a spot on the back of my Fall concert program for the audience to submit a song suggestion for my bands to play. Anything goes! I narrow it down to a few choices (4-6) for the Winter concert and they vote again. I announce the winner at the Festival concert and arrange the music for the Spring concert.
- ♪ Student-led...everything!
 - ♪ Speaking parts ← It is fun when students write their own, but make it due a week before the concert so you can proofread.
 - ♪ Skits
 - ♪ Soloists ← Email me for some great composition project worksheets. I have had students do 12 tone compositions and pop songs arranging projects!
 - ♪ Composers ← Here is my process: I pick an easy march or 6th grade piece for the 8th grade band to play. 4 weeks before the concert, any student can do a 5 minute warm up on the podium. This usually weeds out a lot of kids. 3 weeks before, 5-6 student conductors get 10 minutes on the podium and must present a lesson plan. 2 weeks before, student conductors get 5 more minutes. Class votes on the student conductor. 1 week before, the student conductor gets rehearsal time with the class. Runner up conductor gets to do warm ups.
 - ♪ Conductors

It is even better when they do research and find music on their own for this!

Make it a competition between the students and the parents: who can count the conductor's beats better in different time signatures?

2. The b-list: good info that

- ♪ Re-arranging songs from method books ← Create "on the spot" rearrangements by having different instruments play individual measures. Repeat the song multiple times with different soloists or section solis. Add a simple, dramatic introduction (a trill on a neutral note, aleatoric sound clusters, etc). Have one student be the "last person standing" and play just the last note!
- ♪ Off stage parts ← If you are nervous about phasing issues, have the off stage parts alternate with the band on stage.
- ♪ Enter the stage differently
- ♪ Lighting effects ← I drape a string of rope lights on the students' music stands (duct tape might be needed to hold it there) and conduct with a glow stick. The lights are connected to a surge protector beneath my podium; on the last note I shut the lights off for a beautiful effect. An additional effect is to have a row of 20 students stand behind the band and blink flashlights on/off.
- ♪ Teach the audience to conduct beats
- ♪ Have the audience sing/percussive effects
- ♪ Play a recording of students from in class
- ♪ Put a bassoon fingering chart in the concert ← I record my 6th graders playing their first ever note on their instruments in class. I play this recording at their last concert as 8th graders.
- ♪ Compose your own music for the kids
- ♪ Have the students create a class arrangement of a song ← I did this for "The 12 Days of Christmas". Each instrument section presented their own variation on the main theme and I helped stitch it together into a cohesive arrangement.. I also did a "pop song mini-arrangement" where students voted on their 5 favorite pop songs as a class and I created a VERY easy monophonic arrangement of the melodies.
- ♪ Educating the parents about the elements of music ← Pick one concept (dynamics, texture, etc) and one excerpt from the students' music (4-8 ms. max) and do a demonstration before you start the music
- ♪ Dress up in a costume
- ♪ Teach a song entirely by ear ← ...then have students turn around their music stands to the audience of course!
- ♪ Have soloists play into a guitar amp
- ♪ Percussion ensemble music is always interesting

I also use this to teach my parents how to build scales. Half step (slide finger over once), whole step (slide it twice), then: W-W-H-W-W-W-H

When they see your name in the upper right hand corner of the music, it will change the way they approach the music.

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It is about recognizing small opportunities:

How can I *creatively* intensify what the piece is trying to connote?

Playing a remix/mashup arrangement? Hold an audience contest to see who can guess the most songs! Song about a historical event? Why isn't a social studies teacher at your school reading a narrative while the band is playing? Song about ninjas? You probably have a student who can do karate moves during the song!