

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor

## Practice ≠ Rehearsal



*“The purpose of a rehearsal is to learn everyone else’s part and never your own! Your own preparation before the rehearsal is your personal ‘welcome gift’ to your fellow musicians.”*

— Anonymous (seen on a sign at a rehearsal, early 2019)

“Did you practice today?” My guess is that there are many parents who ask this question of their budding instrumentalist and/or vocalist every day. Yet, I find myself routinely correct-ing and reminding my private students (and occasionally their parents) that practice and rehearsing are two entirely different things.

Unfortunately, in today’s world where kids are so over-extended to begin with, practice and rehearsing are often lumped together to mean the same thing. “Sure, I picked up my horn today to practice (in band) as opposed to practicing on my own.”

In my mind that’s like having a team scrimmage where an athlete’s individual skill set is fine-tuned at the expense of the whole team’s performance. Translation: it’s better to work on developing your own individual abilities before you join the team on the field. Doesn’t this philosophy also hold water when we look at an individual musician’s preparation (at home and/or in a school practice room) before a rehearsal takes place?

### It’s a tough choice

Sadly, I will admit that during my days as a high school band director I was guilty of spending way too much time working on music we were playing in band during in-school lessons. The reality that most of my students did not have the luxury of a private teacher outside of school, coupled with the fact that very few of them rarely picked up their instrument outside of our in-school lessons and rehearsals, forced me into making a difficult decision. Thus, the music we performed in band took the place

of technical studies, etudes and solo literature that would have otherwise been introduced in group lessons. During rehearsals our full band warm-up process (incorporating scales, long tones, rhythmic exercises, sometimes sight-reading, etc.) would replace the tailored warm-up routine that I would have happily created for each of my students if I only knew that they would use it outside of school. One of my horn teachers in college called this “the prescription” and, boy, was he right: every student should have his or her own personalized warm-up routine.

**There is a common misunderstanding ... that there are “shortcuts” to practicing**

The trouble is, when you have a before-school band rehearsal at 7:15 a.m., when do kids do their individual warm-ups? The same holds true during the school day when the bell rings and kids have to quickly unpack, sometimes scarf down their lunch and then begin the full ensemble warm-up ahead of rehearsing. This is not individualized practice by any stretch of the imagination! But, it is reality in many places.

### Reinforcing practice

I won’t re-visit the notion that today’s kids have much less free time to practice outside of school because I know that you already deal with this

every day. Instead, it’s important to find a way to educate our students and their parents that regular home practice is a necessity that should not be ignored. There is a common misunderstanding among many parents (and, kids) that there are “shortcuts” to practicing regardless of whether the instrument is your voice or a member of the orchestra or band. I recall that occasionally kids would come in to tell me that they “practiced” for 2-3 hours the night before. “That’s great!,” I’d say. Never mind the fact that it was only one day out of seven that the kid practiced. Did it make a difference? No. The quality of practice is an entirely different subject for a future editorial so, I won’t even attempt to address this right now.

Go back to the beginning of this editorial and re-read the quote I have used as my lede. I think that this quote should be strategically posted in every rehearsal room in every school because it really defines why we practice outside of rehearsal time. As educators we routinely talk about accountability with students, but sometimes we don’t clearly define what practice and rehearsals are all about. It’s never too late to re-visit this concept with your kids.

I know that you are in the final stages of preparing your spring concert program(s), and I hope that this short essay gives you some ideas for future use with your students.

All the best for a wonderful performance to you and your students, and be sure to stress with them the importance of practice first to make rehearsing more productive! ||