For Parents of Beginning Bands Students

Many of you have had experience with Beginning Band, either through other children who have been through the program before, or as participants yourselves. But quite a few other parents have had no experience with beginning instrumentalists, and so may have many questions. I will try to answer some of the most asked questions here.

When does my child need to have his/her instrument in class?

Certainly not the first or second day of school, but we will start the real hands-on instruction by the beginning of the first full week of instruction, so the sooner, the better.

Where do I get an instrument?

There are many music shops around the area which offer instruments for rental or purchase. Plateau Music, Kennelly Keys, and Mills Music are three local shops which have all offered fine service to Plateau musicians for years. I can not recommend any one over the others – I have heard positive and, occasionally, negative about each over the years… For those of you in the Skyline area, there is a new shop opening in the Saffron Shopping Center (off of 228th, across from the Sammamish Safeway). I have heard nothing yet about their service or supply, just that they are affiliated with Ted Brown Music (of Tacoma).

What instrument should I get?

Hopefully, your child formed at least a rough idea of what he/she wishes to play from our school visits last Spring. We will be teaching Flute, Clarinet, Trumpet, Trombone, Baritone, and mallet percussion in the Beginning Band. Those who wish to branch out into Oboe, Bassoon, French Horn, Saxophone, etc., do so after the first Winter Break.

All students wishing to play percussion will start out on the mallet instruments (bells, xylophone, marimba, etc.) Snare drums, bass drums, and timpani are not covered until after Winter Break. Percussion students can use the school instruments for class playing, but will still need an instrument for practice at home.

'What about saxophones, french horns, and any other instruments missing from the list?’ you are probably asking. We don’t start them at the beginning of the year, most often because these instruments are difficult to start with (i.e. french horn), or, in some cases, can be too forgiving to start with, and thus too easy to learn to play incorrectly (i.e. the saxophones.) With these instruments, we have the most success when students start on a similar instrument and, after achieving mastery, switch over (i.e. clarinet to saxophone or trumpet to french horn). (The rental shops have always been accommodating when it comes to student switchers. You may wish to double check ahead of time, if this is something your child is planning to do.)

A final word of warning…
Some parents have found Absolutely-Too-Good-To-Be-True deals on instruments from non-music 'specialist' retailers, on-line auctions, etc. I am not saying that Music Stores are the only places to find good instruments, but too many of these Too-Good-To-Be-True deals have turned out to be just that (i.e. didn’t play in tune, broke down often, needed frequent and expensive repair, etc.), and we, as buyers, need to beware. If you are unfamiliar with instrument brands or think the deal might just be ‘too good,’ feel free to give me a call. I’ll be glad to share any information I may have.

**What about sticks for percussionists?**

The following is a list of recommended sticks for percussionists. Beginners do not all of these sticks right away, but they should have items 1, 2, & 3 and a stick bag for use during the first year. I know that, at first glance, the whole list seems like a lot of items, but when you factor the cost of the sticks vs. the cost of a good clarinet or saxophone or trumpet, it seems more reasonable.

**Basic Stick/Mallet Set for Concert Band**

1. 1 pr. Vic Firth SD1 General Snare Drum Sticks (or equivalent)
2. 1 pr. Vic Firth M7 Bell Mallets (or equivalent)
3. 1 pr. Vic Firth T1 General Timpani Mallets (or equivalent)
4. 1 pr. Vic Firth M1 Yarn Mallets (or equivalent)
5. 1 pr. Vic Firth SD2 Snare Drum Sticks (or equivalent)
6. 1 pr. Drum Set Sticks (Vic Firth Harvey Mason or equivalent)
7. 1 pr. Vic Firth M5 Rubber Mallets
8. 1 drum tuning key
9. 1 stick bag

**Jazz Drummers**

Jazz Drummers will need the sticks/mallets appropriate for their concert ensemble plus 1 pr. of brushes

**What about a lesson book for band?**

All of the Music Shops have been notified that we will be using the Standard Of Excellence books for all students. You can pick up a copy when you get your instrument. This is a great book, with up to date graphics and instruction. In addition, this year’s edition (the "enhanced" edition) also contains BOTH a CD and a DVD with examples of correct sound and playing
position, so that you can provide helpful reinforcement of correct playing methods, even if you - the parent - are not a music specialist.

What if my child wants to play one of the larger instruments? What about the bus?

There are a few of the larger instruments for school time use (i.e. baritone horns, tubas, etc.), but we have had no problems in the past with students taking other, smaller instruments to and from home on the buses on a daily basis.

What about instrument lockers at BLMS?

Lockers are available, but since there is a limited number, they are assigned on a “first come, first served” basis. Students will have to share lockers (especially those with smaller instruments.)

What about private lessons?

I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THEM!!! Lessons will help every student, especially as a beginner. Most of the local music shops have private teachers with after school/evening hours and reasonable rates. Several of my high school students have asked to be added to the list of Private Instructors which is available. In addition, several Private Teachers have set up ‘shop’ to do after school lessons here on the Plateau (last year, it was at PLMS) and several of our students made use of that convenient arrangement. There are many options for Private Instruction, and I encourage you to make use of whichever option works best for your student.