

WMHS Symphonic Band

Balance, Blend & Intonation

Balance and Blend

It is important to keep in mind the difference between balance and blend as it applies to the band. “Balance” refers to the *strength* in sound of a section (saxophone, flute, percussion, etc.). Some instruments naturally produce a more dominant sound and can “throw-off” the overall pleasant sound of a band's balance. *Good balance cannot be achieved by having everyone play at the same dynamic level!* Sometimes, more attention is needed to a melody, single note, or moving inner line.

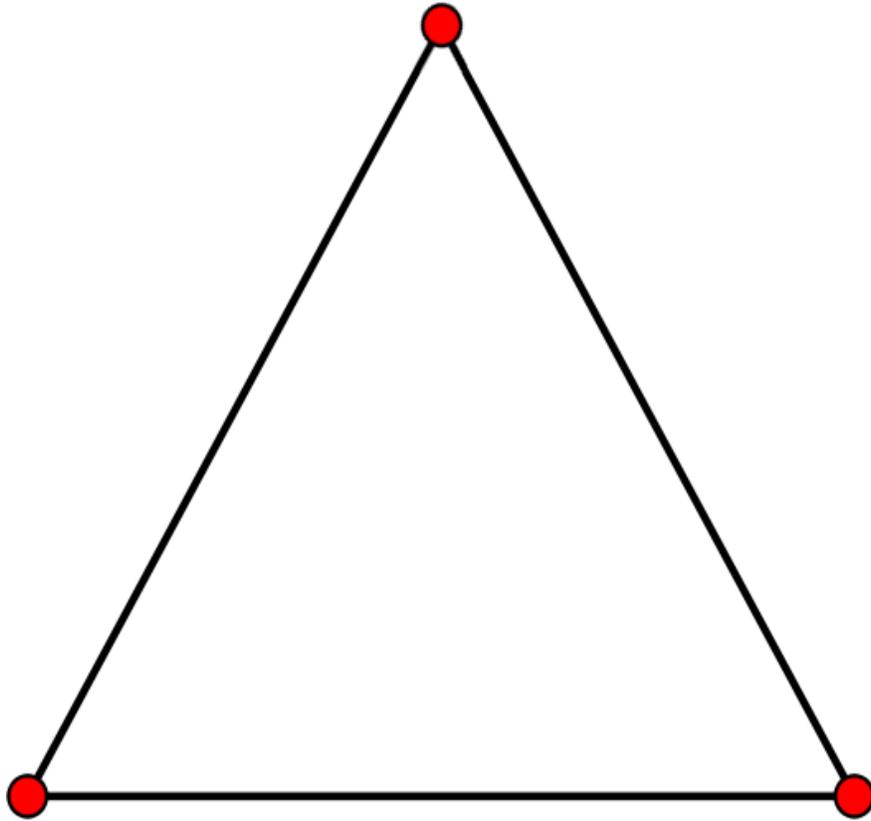
“Blend” has two meanings: (1) merging the sounds of two different instruments (like oboe and clarinet) in such a way that they produce a sound more interesting than the sum of their parts, and (2) the combination of sounds from many instruments into a single, homogenous sound so that no one player or section dominates.

Balance and blend both depend on careful listening, not necessarily playing. There is no quick fix to achieving balance and blend. Every band member must know their role in the overall sound *and* be aware of the sound of the ensemble.

The Pyramid Approach

A more sophisticated approach to the problem of balance and intonation is identified with the composer and music educator, Francis McBeth . It is based on the theory that, at any given dynamic level, the higher pitched instruments should be playing softer than the lower pitched ones. This is consistent with the notion that players should be able to hear the bottom notes of the chord so that they can tune to them. McBeth illustrates the concept with the use of a triangle (see below). Today, however, the idea is more commonly known as the pyramid approach.

The width of the triangle is a measure of volume, so that the higher the voice, the softer the sound.



Group 1

Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, First Trumpet, First Clarinets

Group 2

Second and Third Trumpets & Clarinets

Group 3

Horns, Alto and Tenor Saxophone, First Trombone

Group 4

Second and Third Trombones, Baritone/Euphonium,
Baritone Saxophone, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon and Tuba

Percussion

The Percussion Section's sound is not heard, it is *felt*.