

# Finding the Sweet Spot: Get a Rich, Dark Sound from Your Band

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With Special Guests: IPFW Symphonic Wind Ensemble  
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2:30 PM

## What is rich and dark, anyway?

**Myth:** A dark sound is applicable only for *mezzo forte*, *tutti* chords.

A “rich, dark” sound is a **clear** and **balanced** combination of **colors**.

- not necessarily heavy
- not necessarily dense
- can be loud
- can be soft
- can be light
- can be a small portion of the ensemble

General goal: Golden Mean+Transparency

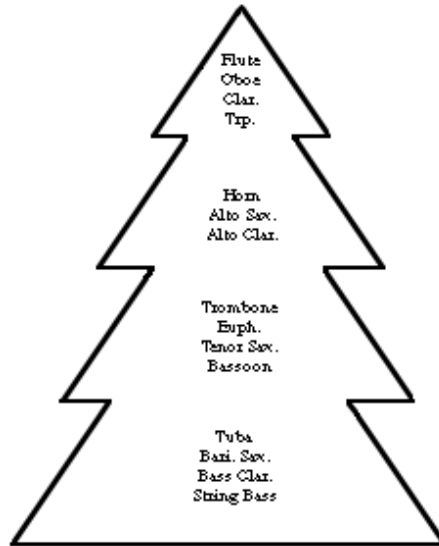
Every group has its own “sweet spot” for a given section of music!

## What gets in the way of a rich, dark sound?

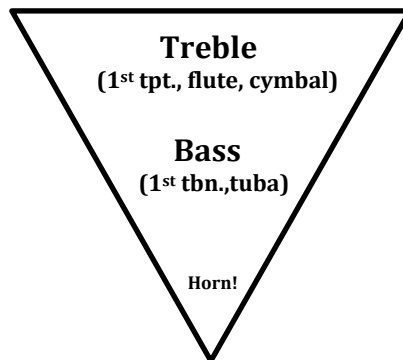
- Tone quality (hand-in-hand with intonation)
- Instrumentation/personnel strengths and weaknesses
- Score indications (or lack thereof)
- “Play the Pyramid!” (saying it versus teaching it)

## But, isn't the Pyramid what we want?

- If it serves the music at that moment!
- Success = student understanding through directed listening
- William Berz, Rutgers University, adaptation



- Common “untouched” *tutti ff* chord



### Golden Mean+Transparency

- 2/3 to 1/3
- Not at the expense of the “musical dialogue”
- Transparency starts with Director decisions
  - What is the primary color?
  - Do other timbres join that color?
  - Is it in a register that speaks well?
  - What supports it? Can I hear it?
  - Are there counter-melodic motives?
  - Should the background shape lines in the same manner as the melody?

## Directed Listening Helps Achieve Both Goals

- Where does my sound fit?
- Moving students (trios or quartets of mixed of like instrumentation, arch sections, section leaders trade to other sections, intersperse percussionists around ensemble with a score)
- “Core” groups
  - Tuba
  - Euphonium
  - Horn
  - Clarinet

### Listening Result

Flute/oboe-----clarinet  
Alto sax-----clarinet/horn  
Tenor sax-----Horn/euphonium  
Bari sax/bassoon-----euphonium/tuba  
Trumpets-----clarinets/horns  
Trombones-----tuba/euphonium (horn)

## Clarify Harmonies

**Problem: Are too many strong players given the same chord tone? Especially the third?**

- Do the root and 5<sup>th</sup> “ring”?
- 3<sup>rd</sup> fits “inside” (lower pitch of major third)
- Above the staff/middle of the staff/below the staff (quick way to focus in)

## Melodic vs. Non-Melodic

- “There are two dynamics: solo and accompaniment.” Is this true?
- Transparency!

## Ends of Notes are Our Friends

- Eradicate Bar Lines
- Staccato means...resonant!
- Compositional interest hides in fast music
- Last notes aren’t really all that interesting!

## Should Music Meant to Evoke Pain Actually Cause Physical Pain?

## Our Students Should be Able to Tell Us:

- Am I the primary voice? If not, what does my note/line contribute?
- Who shares my line? Should we be perfectly blended? Can I hear them?
- What can I do to support the primary voice?
- Am I using more tongue than tone?
- What does this *ffff* really mean anyway?

**An imperfect balance of personnel still has a “sweet spot”  
and can make a rich, dark sound!**



Special thanks to Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Dean Chick O'Connor, and the Department of Music, Chair Robert Bean, for supporting this demonstration.

See the Mynett Music booth in the exhibition hall to peruse:

*Great Music for Wind Band: The Top 100 Works in Grades IV, V, VI* by Chad Nicholson

Demonstration excerpts from:  
*To Walk With Wings* by Julie Giroux  
*Through Peaceful Eyes* by Ryan Nowlin

Listen to Nicholson's *Wind Bands of Every Flavor*, a podcast with news, reviews, repertoire discussions, and composer/conductor interviews.

Downloadable for free at [chadnicholson.wordpress.com](http://chadnicholson.wordpress.com), or subscribe at the iTunes store.

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