

# workshop



## GENERAL MUSIC

### What to Do With a Recorder Ensemble

These days, there are more than a few recorder virtuosos who specialize in early music. There are also amateur chamber recorder ensembles, as well as recorder orchestras of 60 and more players. Yet the instrument is still mostly known as the one that kids pick up as their first—and for good reason. Elementary students are often singing in two, three, and sometimes four parts, and those skills are readily transferred to recorder.

When well coordinated, a recorder ensemble is an excellent vehicle for teaching children to make music together. Herbert D. Marshall, associate professor of music education at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, gives an overview of considerations. “If the teacher establishes clear expectations and goals, the recorder class can be very successful,” he says. “Many teachers have consistent procedures for playing position vs. rest position and when it is appropriate to play. If the students have adequate readiness to learn the recorder—i.e., maturity, tone, and rhythm skills—then the class can produce a good sound and work together as a team.”



State School Music Association; nyssma.org) have comprehensive lists of repertoire for solo/ensemble music, most of which adapts easily to recorder. Another helpful source is an MENC book, *Playing the Soprano Recorder* by Lois V. Guderian,

Most school ensembles will consist of any number of soprano and alto recorders, sometimes for financial reasons. “Tenors and basses are a bit pricey, so it would take a commitment to have the standard ensemble of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass,” says Marshall. Also, on account of their larger grip size, tenors and basses can be more difficult for young musicians to handle.

Marshall suggests that a small recorder ensemble could take up the duration of a class or could be used to complement vocal or percussion exercises. Larger recorder consorts can also be taught in school, but perhaps not in the regular classroom. “I expect that would be an enrichment activity, done during lunch or as an afterschool club,” he says.

Luckily, there’s no shortage of music for students to play on the recorder. Standard repertoire ranges from the ancient to the modern, and the instrument even appears in musicals like *Pippin*. Organizations such as NYSSMA (New York

available at [menc.org/resources/view/menc-books](http://menc.org/resources/view/menc-books). You can also create your own arrangements—much folk and choral music lends itself well to the instrument. Keep in mind, though, that putting together repertoire that will keep a given group of students engaged can be one of the most challenging aspects of leading a recorder ensemble.

For more recorder resources, go to [americanrecorder.org](http://americanrecorder.org).—Adam Perlmutter



## BRASS AND WOODWINDS

### Steps Toward More Effective Brass Blowing

All brass teachers will inevitably come across students who struggle to produce a solid, focused tone, but even those with the most stubborn embouchure problems can be helped with a little common sense and a decent measure of ingenuity.

“A great way to diagnose difficult embouchure and buzzing problems is to simply ask the student to become the teacher for a moment,” says Matthew Parunak, a music educator from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. “Ask the student to explain to you how sound is created with a brass instrument. They should know and be aware that the lips vibrate as a result of the air passing over them and into the mouthpiece to create the buzz. Anything that doesn’t accomplish this efficiently needs to be changed in order to do so. By listening to the student’s ‘instructions,’ a teacher can often discover exactly what the student’s real