

Let's Get Your Concert Ensemble Staged

Things to Consider When Setting Up Your Concert Group

I love setting up a new group each season! How I want it visually organized, what colors do I want to make sure are heard and seen, and what will work well for the ensemble members to play together in, are some of the things to consider when setting up your group.

I like to be creative in my set ups, especially if I'm using unique or different instruments. Don't be afraid to get creative with the setup, just be smart!

Start with the center of pulse. Where is timing coming from? Drumset, concert snare, rack, handdrums, tympani? Keep members/instruments playing crucial timing parts in the center back, so that everyone has a central listening point to lock into. Keep other rhythmic things close to this performer also, and consider arcing or turning them to have a better line of sight to hands. Let's build from here.

Some ensembles like splitting metal mallet instruments on one side of the ensemble and wood mallet instruments on the other. Others like to layer marimbas in front and vibes behind them. Take your pick, just mic and possibly pan accordingly. You might consider arcing the mallet lines, rather than having them all in a straight line. You're more on a "stage" and don't have to line up with that front boundary line! In fact, I recommend pushing back from the front boundary line to create space for the blend of the ensemble to be heard. Arcs are nice for members to see each other with a little more ease, be able to see mallet attacks, breathing, and pulsing without having to always turn their head and look into the center player. If the setup warrants it, think about turning certain instruments 90°, or slightly into the center, so there is always a line of sight to other players. Bells, Chimes, Racks may all play into this scenario to help these players. You can angle Tympani carts and Synth carts too! Make sure Concert Bass Drum and Tam Tams/Gongs are facing forward to help with hearing the articulation and sound projection.

Try spreading the ensemble out a little side to side, giving each instrument space to not muddy the sound, but don't have too big of a spread front to back to cause timing problems. Playing in a gym and listening is hard, again, another reason to have good lines of sight to players hands and the timing coming from central back. Setting up the students for success is your job, let's give them every opportunity to play the material together by making sure they can see and hear what they need to at any given moment.

If you are featuring any unique/soloist instruments/voices, give them a place or "stage" to be featured. I've used area rugs, little box platforms, carts from marching band season, stools, to name a few, to create these spaces. It's like turning on a spotlight for them and creates interest for the judges and audience.

All the other instruments are important, too!! Percussion instruments have a very visual element to them - let's see them!! Make sure line of sight from audience/judge is clear for all those auxiliary instruments. Hold those instruments up and move the player to be seen from behind other members/instruments. All those sounds give so much color to your music. If they are seen, they are usually heard.

Other things to consider are your speaker placement. Push them out to the sides more in front of your ensemble, so they don't cover acoustic sounds and sound design doesn't cover up important lines and voices. That being said, get your electronics plugged in ASAP in set up!

Lastly, be sure to practice the set up so members and parents feel comfortable on where things go and the spacing of instruments. It's a little more organic than a marching set up, but still needs to be detailed and practiced.

Let's set them up for success and making great music together. That's what it's all about!