Tuning Ears and Warming-up Minds:
Reflective Rehearsal Techniques for Adult Flute Ensembles

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Cover photo: Anna Vähätalo

Print:
ISBN 978-952-329-290-1

PDF:
ISBN 978-952-329-291-8

https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-329-291-8

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A note to you, Reader

This handbook is meant for directors working with returning musicians to help you better understand the unique challenges they bring with them to rehearsals and performances. You will find information about adults (and specifically returning musicians) as learners as well as rehearsal techniques to help develop the skills returning flutists need to confidently enjoy their ensemble experience. Returning flutists deserve material and understanding specifically adapted to their needs. It is my hope that the material presented in this handbook helps to fill that gap.

This handbook is presented as part of the portfolio for my doctoral project in the Applied studies program of the Doctoral School of the Sibelius Academy. The rehearsal techniques were developed during first five years working with the Helsingin Huiluorkesteri (Helsinki Flute Ensemble). Throughout this handbook, I will include references to the report of this project: Returning Flutists: Developing Improvisational Rehearsal Techniques for use with an Ensemble of Non-Professional Flutists Returning to a Musical Practice, where you can find more in-depth information on the ideas I discuss here, and a longer list of references for further reading. In addition, you can find lists of resources and more of my ideas at www.kathyweidenfeller.com.

I encourage you to read through the first chapters of this handbook before looking at the exercises and rehearsal plans in Chapter Five. Chapter One contains general information about what challenges and strengths adult learners and specifically, returning learners bring with them to their new learning experiences. Chapters Two and Four contain practical advice on starting an ensemble for returning flutists, including how to choose repertoire. Chapter Three contains ideas about conducting and leading an ensemble that I believe are important for all ensemble directors to consider. The information I present here is based on new research as well as my own experience working with the HHO.

In Chapter Five, I will explain in more detail the reflective improvisational work that I use in rehearsals. While I've found the particular exercises I describe here to be helpful, I don't consider them a prescriptive method of working. Which actual exercise you use is not as important as how you use them: first by building trust, then including

reflection and guided questioning with each exercise, and finally, creating and maintaining a curious, enthusiastic, and supportive atmosphere. I hope once you understand the way I use these exercises and the motivation and theories behind their use, that you will think of this handbook as an invitation to collect, develop and adapt exercises that meet the specific needs of your own ensemble.

There are a few terms and abbreviations I use throughout this handbook that I would like to define for you here:

Improvisation Edward Sarath used the term 'trans-stylistic' improvisation to describe explorations and improvisations that, instead of expecting the performer to first understand and internalize a set of rules, draws on the musical styles and patterns that the musician has already internalized (see Sarath, 2002). Trans-stylistic improvisation describes quite well the way I use improvisation in this handbook. For a more in-depth explanation, please refer to Chapter 4.2 of the report of this project

Returning flutists – often shortened to RFs: refers to non-professional adult musicians who are returning to a musical practice after a several year break in their studies. I believe that adults who studied music formally as a child and then return to the practice as an adult do have different challenges and motivations than someone who begins a musical practice as an adult. For a more in-depth definition and explanation of why I decided to use this phrase to describe these musicians, see Chapter 3.1 of the report of this project.

Reflective improvisation This refers to the improvisational exercises and reflective questions described in Chapter 5 that I developed to use as rehearsal techniques. While these exercises sometimes move at what may seem to be a slow pace, the amount of learning that happens during these sessions can help to speed up rehearsals in the end. More information can be found in Chapter 3.6 of the report of this project.

HHO refers to the Helsingin Huiluorkesteri (the Helsinki Flute Orchestra), the ensemble that I worked with during this project.

References to 'Journal' in citations refers to the rehearsal journal that I kept as part of the data collection for this project.

I hope you find the information presented here beneficial and the rehearsal techniques bring you and your ensemble many hours of enjoyable creative exploration.

Tuning Ears and Warming-up Minds:
Reflective Rehearsal Techniques for Adult Flute Ensembles

Introduction

Picking up an instrument after a break of five, ten or even twenty or more years can be a daunting task for someone returning to a musical practice. Wonderful, and not so wonderful memories of lessons, performances and other musical experiences flood back, a bit like stepping into a time machine and meeting the person you were the last time you picked up your instrument. Returning to a musical practice may involve conflicting thoughts and emotions–joy at the thought of making music again, fear of not being good enough, frustration at not being able to invest as many resources as the returning musicians would like to into the project.

A director working with RFs should understand the unique needs and challenges these musicians bring with them to their new practice. This understanding can help the director plan rehearsals with space for exploration can help develop new ways to approach musical challenges. Finding new repertoire and new ways to rehearse it can bring novelty and increased awareness into rehearsals. It's also important that the director themselves is willing to reflect on their own well-practiced beliefs surrounding learning and musical development. Expanding how we think about learning and teaching musical skills can help us better support the returning musicians in our ensembles. Rehearsals can become a source of change and development for everyone involved.

Returning musicians will have different goals, motivations, and skillsets than an ensemble of younger students or professional musicians. Because of this, it is important to develop both an understanding of those needs, and rehearsal techniques that are specifically designed for this group. I have found that incorporating improvisational exercises together with directive and reflective questioning into rehearsals can help returning musicians become more confident in their own musical skills, develop a sense of community within the ensemble, and encourage self-directed learning.

This handbook is the result of a journey that began when I myself became an adult learner, as I 'returned' to formal conducting lessons. I say returned, but most of my

conducting experience up to that point was based on a short course as an undergrad, some reading, and learning 'on the job'. But I did take those experiences, as well as my experiences as a musician and teacher with me into the lessons, and those past experiences influenced my new learning. The difficulties I faced as a student surprised me: I had trouble focusing not only during lessons, but in my own personal practice. Honestly, at times I didn't even understand what or how I needed to practice. It took a lot of energy to go beyond what I thought I knew, to where I could recognize the skills I was lacking.

It was only once I was able to critically reflect on the old beliefs I held about myself as a musician and learner that I could start to understand what skills I needed to develop in order to make progress in my studies. The teacher in me became fascinated with why I was struggling in this way, and then interested in finding solutions that would not only help myself, but other adult returning musicians as well. I discovered that the emotional struggles I had as a returning learner were not unique. As adults, we are very likely to carry fixed beliefs about ourselves that we have internalized from messages we received in earlier learning situations, some that we may not even be aware of. To successfully navigate new learning situations, we first need to have a supportive environment where we can reflect on and expand those old beliefs. Not addressing those beliefs can cause anxiety and make it difficult to learn.

I'll explain a little about adults as learners and consider the many roles of a director of an ensemble of RFs before I share the improvisatory rehearsal techniques I developed to use with my own ensemble. When working with RFs, directors might have to reconsider the goals they have for their ensemble. They might need to think differently about the role rehearsals play in their ensemble's practice. I develop and use reflective improvisation in rehearsals to address challenges that RFs bring with them to rehearsals. This also requires directors to think differently about how they structure rehearsals. You will find quotes and stories drawn from my own work throughout the handbook to help you understand how I have put these ideas into practice.

This handbook is part a portfolio of work presented as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Musical Arts in the Applied Studies Program of the Doctoral school of the Sibelius Academy. In addition to this handbook, the project includes a report that goes

into more theoretical detail on the ideas presented here. I will include references to specific chapters of this report, and other additional reading suggestions at the end of each chapter. In addition to the report and this handbook, there is a website connected to this project, where you can find lists of resources, a blog where I share thoughts on this work, and visual material.

I hope that the ideas I present here and the rehearsal techniques I describe will help other directors create rehearsals for their ensembles so that returning musicians can reflect on old beliefs they hold and expand them to develop together as musicians. I hope it will encourage directors to explore new repertoire and new ways of interacting with their ensembles. And I hope it will help you and your ensemble find more confidence and more enjoyment both in rehearsals and performances.

Chapter One: Adults are Adults

As adult learners, we are caught in our own histories. However good we are at making sense of our experiences, we all have to start with what we have been given and operate within horizons set by ways of seeing and understanding that we have acquired through prior learning. (Mezirow 1991, 1)

I believe it's important for the director of an ensemble of returning musicians to have some understanding of the unique challenges that adults bring with them to a learning situation. This handbook focuses specifically on returning musicians because I find the gap between the experience and understanding they gained as younger musical students, and the technical skills and personal practice time that have disappeared over the years can be a place for anxiety to grow. I also believe that returning musicians are uniquely motivated to participate enthusiastically in an active musical practice. Adults often return to a musical practice to rediscover the joy they remember from their earlier experiences. Returning musicians are an important part of the musical community, situated nicely between younger students, the general public, and professional musicians. Creating enjoyable, challenging musical experiences for returning musicians benefits the entire musical community.

Returning musicians have different motivations, different schedules, and probably, different brains and bodies then they did when they last played and performed. An adult brain may be slower at retaining new tasks, but it is also better at drawing on past experiences to help in new situations. RFs may need more time to retain new skills, but they also have a large resource of experiences that can serve them well in their new musical practice. Active participation in music seems to be particularly good at helping brains stay healthy and happy well into adulthood. Adults who continue a musical practice continue to learn faster and understand language better than their peers who do not. The social aspect of playing in an ensemble only amplifies these benefits.

Adult learners have had a lot of experiences with different types of learning environments, which means they can draw on both informal sources of knowledge – their peers in the ensemble – as well as formal learning sources – the director giving information during rehearsals. A motivated adult learner will also search for knowledge in many different situations and willingly share this knowledge with other like-minded

adults. Novel social environments are good places for adult learning to happen which is why the homogeneous ensemble is a good place for returning musicians to develop their technical and musical skills.

Creating new social relationships creates new knowledge as adults share their experiences with each other. Keep in mind though, that navigating these new relationships is not always easy – adults are often anxious about how they will be accepted into a new group – and the leader/director of a group needs to take time to create a supportive space where the returning musicians can feel accepted. Theatrical improvisatory games and activities that encourage adult musicians to interact with each other in non-musical ways during early rehearsals can help encourage interpersonal relationships. Once the individual ensemble members gain an identity within the group, it will be easier for them to take chances musically.

> *Our identities are so much more formed than when we were kids. We first just have to get past ourselves in order to start to open up to each other. (HHO member, Journal entry, spring 2014.)*

The leader/director's role in an adult learning environment looks more like that of a supportive coach than a formal source of knowledge. In fact, with an ensemble of returning musicians, the director should be prepared to take on many different roles. In early rehearsals, the director may need to be the main organizer taking on a lot of non-musical roles as well as being the musical director. The returning musicians will need to feel supported as they navigate the new social relationships within the ensemble and they will look to the director/leader for that support. As the ensemble develops, the roles that a director takes will develop as well. They should be able to hand some of the organizational tasks to ensemble members. They may spend more time during rehearsals in an observational role, rather than always being the formal source of knowledge and direction. A director who develops the ability to read the needs of the ensemble as a whole and the returning musicians individually, and change their interaction accordingly will be able to make rehearsals a supportive space and encourage self-directed learning.

Self-directed learners show their motivation by taking charge of how and what they learn. Returning musicians like having this kind of control over their learning situations, but they may need help becoming self-directed in their new musical practice.

They may understand the time and energy needed to create an impressive performance but lack a repertoire of personal practice techniques or the time to use them. RFs most likely also carry old, well-practiced beliefs they have developed about themselves as musicians and learners. Rather than using energy to discover new ways of learning, these learners often waste that energy in proving the very fixed and limiting ideas they hold of themselves. Ideas such as 'I don't have a sense of rhythm', or 'I have a lousy tone in the low register' might help a director understand what kind of support these musicians need, but if a returning musician is not able to expand those beliefs, they can easily stand in the way of new development. Earlier criticisms from earlier learning environments may lead RFs to believe there is only one right way to study music or learn new flute technique. They might also believe that if they can't study in that one particular way, they will not be able to develop at all as musicians. Without the space and support to reflect on these old beliefs and expand them or abandon them, learning in the present can't happen.

> One of the flute ensemble members came to me for a private lesson. I asked them to show me what they had worked on with an earlier teacher, so they took out a classic tone exercise. I asked them to play it as they usually did when practicing. After they played through it, I asked how they had used the exercise with the earlier teacher. Looking confused, they answered. 'We just played it?' After a short discussion, I realized they thought that playing through the exercise was enough – they did not know how to be aware of their playing while practicing. This had caused anxiety, because despite doing what they were told, the RF felt they had made no progress. Because of that, they had concluded that they were not capable of developing further.
>
> Rather than just giving a prescription of playing through an exercise x number of times, I took the time in this lesson to ask what a 'good flute tone' meant to this RF and then modeled a sound for them that came as close as possible to what they described. We could then, together, discuss how their present sound differed from their ideal and I helped direct attention to technical aspects of their playing and how to change them to get closer to that ideal. Together we came up with a plan on how to use this exercise in a way that would help them develop their tone further. (HHO journal entry 2014.)

To transfer this type of reflective work to an entire ensemble, it is first necessary to build social connections between members. I use improvisatory games drawn from theatrical culture to help build trust in an ensemble. In Chapter Five, you can find descriptions of the games I have used with my own ensemble. Once these connections are built, reflective improvisation can give an ensemble the space and time to discover new ways to develop musical skills. In this way, the ensemble can learn to become aware of how they are approaching different challenges, similarly to how I helped the RF described above discover how they wanted to develop their tone. Using reflective improvisation,

the director can create a space where the entire ensemble explores new ways to address challenges such as tone, intonation, rhythm, and other technical challenges together.

As director, it is important to remember that you are also an adult with a lot of experience in learning and teaching. Most likely you also have some well-practiced beliefs about yourself as a musician, learner, and teacher. Just as it will be beneficial for the RFs in your ensemble to reflect on their own limiting beliefs, it is important for the director to transform their beliefs as well. Even with the best of intentions, any effort to create a transformational learning environment for an ensemble will fall short if the director holds on to old beliefs about musical learning. One way for a director to prepare for introducing reflective improvisation into rehearsals can be to find a group of peers interested in improvisation. This can help the director understand not only the challenges that arise when starting to improvise, but also the emotional responses they have to learning new skills as an adult.

Chapter One in review

Adults have different motivations, experiences, and are different physically; therefore, they have different needs than younger learners.

Adult brains–especially ones that practice music–are still plastic. Retention of new skills might take longer, but adults are still able to learn. The adult brain is particularly good at drawing on past experiences to help in new learning situations.

Adult learning happens through novel social interactions. But: creating new social interactions can be stressful, and an ensemble needs trust to create these new connections.

A good leader helps to build trust by understanding the needs of their learners: when to step in to give support and when to step back and allow the adults to take the lead in learning.

Adults are good at navigating different social interactions with people they trust. Once there is trust, a social group can come together to create knowledge.

Reflecting on and expanding past beliefs helps to prepare returning musicians to learn in the present situation.

Director/leaders should also reflect on their own past beliefs to insure they are not limiting their own ideas about learning that could affect how they interact with returning musicians. Finding opportunities to be a new learner is a good way to do this.

Additional Reading:

- Chapters 3.1 and 4.1: Weidenfeller, K. 2022. *Returning Flutists: Developing Improvisational Rehearsal Techniques for use with an Ensemble of Non-professional Flutists Returning to a Musical Practice.*

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Chapter Two: Creating the Ensemble

> Directors of adult ensembles may need to soften the 'musical training' model that we commonly see in schools, and, instead, encourage a 'musical journey' model where adults are invested in forging musical paths that lead toward meaningful destinations (Rohwer 2005, 44).

If we consider learning to be a social activity and understand that adults are particularly good at taking advantage of social learning environments, then it's easy to see how an ensemble can be the ideal situation for returning musicians to develop and learn new skills. We learn from our interactions with others when those interactions take place in a safe, supported space. Adults might have fewer novel social experiences than they did when they were younger, but they are very good at using the different types of social interactions they do have as sources of knowledge. So, an ensemble of like-minded individuals can be the ideal place for musical development to happen.

Starting and organizing an ensemble for returning musicians will look somewhat different than it would for ensembles of younger students. Scheduling rehearsal times might be difficult. Even getting the word out to RFs will not be as easy as for younger ensembles. And, as I mentioned above, most of this organizational work in the beginning will fall to the director. At the very least, deciding how to find ensemble members, choosing repertoire, creating a rehearsal plan, and probably organizing the rehearsal space will be the job of the director. If the director already has a studio of retuning flute students, or know other teachers who do, it may be easy to invite them to take part in the ensemble. Flute organizations are another source of possible ensemble members.

It is my experience that once the ensemble is established, and works well together as a community, it will begin to attract new members. Concerts and word of mouth are possibly the best advertisement for finding returning flutists. Ensemble members who enjoy participating in an ensemble will talk about it and their enthusiasm will attract other, like-minded returning musicians. It is just as important once you have found RFs who are interested in creating an ensemble, to start building a sense of community as it is to find the best rehearsal space, or interesting repertoire.

Cultivate a sense of humor, and flexibility These qualities are important for a director of an ensemble of adult returning musicians, especially since just finding a

rehearsal schedule that works most of the time for most of the ensemble will be a challenge. While returning adults are taking part in a musical practice on their own time, for their own social and musical development, they have many other roles and demands on their time that will interfere with this practice, no matter how important it is to them. The adult returning musician has a different motivation for attending rehearsals than younger or professional musicians might have. For a RF, the rehearsal is part of their leisure activity. So, while they may be looking to develop musically, they are also looking for an enjoyable social experience.

The goals of this type of ensemble will look different that those of a younger student ensemble. I do believe that returning musicians enjoy stretching themselves musically and technically, and the repertoire the director chooses for the ensemble should reflect that. But it's the musical experience that is most important for returning musicians. They want to perform interesting music in interesting places with interesting people. The ensembles' goals may change rapidly at times and won't have the same upward learning trajectory that a director might plan for in an ensemble of younger learners. A director will need to be flexible with rehearsal and concert plans and ideas when changes arise. Helping RFs navigate their own anxieties and limiting beliefs requires patience. When a director takes the time to cultivate their own awareness during rehearsals, they will have a better understanding of how to keep the returning musicians aware and enthusiastic.

Be clear about your goals for the ensemble It is especially important in the early days of a new ensemble for the director to be clear about their own goals for that ensemble. A director should be honest about what their own expectations are, and what kind of returning flutist they envision participating in their ensemble. This can help interested RFs decide if this ensemble suits their musical and social needs. In a new ensemble, everyone is navigating new social interactions in addition to figuring out what is expected of them in the group. If the director can make sure that expectations are clear and the language being used is understandable to everyone, it can help the entire ensemble feel more comfortable. As an ensemble of returning musicians develops, its needs and goals will as well. A director should understand the changing needs and goals of the ensemble and its individual members and take those into account as they plan repertoire and concert activities. Once the ensemble has developed into a community,

encouraging individual members to take active roles in organizational and musical decisions can help them feel more responsible for the ensemble.

Prepare the space For a new ensemble, a comfortable space makes navigating new social interactions easier. Adults may have physical issues that affect how they approach their new musical practice. Sight, hearing, and other physical limitations can get in the way of learning if they are not considered during rehearsals. Good lighting is essential, so it is important to provide extra lighting if needed. Offer as wide a variety of seating options as possible. Large exercise balls can make great seating for wind players. Try to make sure the rehearsal room (and your rehearsal time) has space enough to allow for movement of some kind in every rehearsal. And try to find a space that is quiet enough and where the acoustics work well enough so that everyone can hear each other. Being able to understand directions and other talking that goes on during rehearsals helps everyone participate equally in the rehearsal. Finding a seating arrangement for your ensemble that makes listening and interacting easier can provide support for the returning musicians who may not have much recent ensemble experience.

Prepare what you bring to the space In early rehearsals and concerts, it is a good idea to have a variety of pieces ready for the ensemble. Works that allow you to get to know each other as performers are better than trying to program challenging repertoire in the beginning. A director's job is to know the score in its entirety and to be able to communicate that score clearly to their ensemble. Whether you plan on communicating from the front, within, or even from the side of the ensemble, you should have an overall vision for each score and an idea of how you can communicate that idea to the ensemble through gestures or verbal directions. A director's disorganization or anxiety can easily create anxiety in the ensemble members, so it is important to consider how you bring yourself into any rehearsal or performance. It is my experience that the more prepared you are, the less anxiety you will feel, and therefore, the more comfortable your ensemble will feel. Being prepared means you can clearly and efficiently communicate to the ensemble, leaving time in rehearsal for improvising, and socializing.

I also believe preparation includes having a set of tools available for when the RFs don't have the skills or understanding to perform the director's vision. This is where reflective improvisation helps. There are times when the conductor's words or gestures

are not enough, and RFs will need some form of instruction to be able to confidently perform programmed material. Again, building trust between all members of the ensemble will make this type of instruction effective. Incorporating group instruction into rehearsals can help build confidence, as RFs gain control of their own musical voice. I will go into more detail in Chapter five on why I feel improvisation is an especially effective tool for this and how I incorporate it into rehearsals.

Chapter Two in review

Word of mouth is a good way to attract adult ensemble members.

An organized and prepared director helps to create a feeling of safety and comfort and leaves time for more time for improvisation and socializing..

Rehearsal folders are an easy way to ensure that individual parts are always present in the rehearsal space.

If a director is clear about their goals for the ensemble, they will attract returning musicians who share those goals and feel loyal to the ensemble.

Directors of ensembles for returning musicians should develop their sense of humor, flexibility, and patience. Humor can help to build community and communities can use it as a tool in learning.

Adult schedules require unique scheduling solutions.

An ensemble of returning musicians is on a musical journey of exploration and their goals and needs may change frequently.

Additional Reading:

- Chapters 1.3 and 4.3: Weidenfeller, K. 2022. *Returning Flutists: Developing Improvisational Rehearsal Techniques for use with an Ensemble of Non-professional Flutists Returning to a Musical Practice.*

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Chapter Three: To Conduct or Not to Conduct

> Conducting is listening and communication during rehearsals and in performances (Jansson, 2018, p51).

I think it's important before we go any further to state this: your decision as director on whether to conduct the ensemble from the front should never be made based on your technical skills (or lack thereof). Whether or not you end up conducting from the front of the ensemble, developing a good conducting technique will help you run more efficient rehearsals and develop your own confidence as leader of a musical ensemble. And the more confident you are, the more comfortable the RFs in your ensemble will be. Knowing when your ensemble benefits best from having a conductor in front, when it's best to step away from the ensemble, or even when to playing within the ensemble is one more part of understanding your ensemble's needs.

Conducting gestures, when understood by the ensemble and given clearly, can often explain musical ideas faster than words. A good conductor understands that their non-verbal communication does not stop with their hands: eyes, posture, breathing, all types of body movement send messages to the ensemble. And learning to conduct includes more than just learning gestures. Score preparation and rehearsal planning are essential parts of conducting, and skills essential to running efficient rehearsals. It's only once the director has developed these skills that they can decide between conducting from the front of the ensemble or participating in another way.

Conducting is communicating. The conductor should know the score well enough to help each member of your ensemble understand their part in the whole. Having one member of the ensemble that knows the entire score and can communicate just how much of an accelerando, or diminuendo the piece needs, or how short of a staccato, leads to more efficient rehearsals. Being in front of the ensemble also allows the conductor to hear the entire ensemble in a different way than any one member of the ensemble could. In addition, the conductor knows what skills ensemble members will need to play a certain piece and has ideas on how to help the ensemble develop those skills. When the conductor can run efficient rehearsals, it leaves more time for the social and skill building aspects of rehearsals that are so important for an ensemble of returning musicians.

In performances, the conductor should know their ensemble well enough to how to keep the performers motivated, grounded, and confident. A good conductor understands that just as their enthusiasm is contagious, their anxiety can be as well. That should be motivation enough to be prepared not only as a teacher, but as performer before the first rehearsal and especially before the performance. Considering what sort of support the ensemble needs at different points in rehearsals and performances is what should inform the decision of how to interact and communicate. While conducting from the front of an ensemble it often is the best choice, there may be times when it makes musical and supportive sense for the director to play inside the ensemble. There may be other times when it's best not to participate at all.

Checklist for Conductors: How to choose how to interact with your ensemble:

Is the piece so structurally complicated (time changes, difficult entrances, other structural challenges) that the ensemble may need a conductor to navigate it? A structurally difficult piece can move forward more quickly with a conductor in front of the ensemble. Helping a large ensemble navigate time changes, fermatas, and other similar structural challenges is more efficient from the front of the ensemble, where the conductor can use gestures, and see the entire ensemble at once.

Sometimes, the structural or musical difficulties could be better handled first through a reflective improvised exercise. However, there may be times when a faster-paced rehearsal that is more formally 'conductor-lead' will feel more challenging and perhaps more satisfying for the RFs. Sometimes a combination of the two ways of working will be the best solution. Keep in mind that as your ensemble develops, the way you approach challenges like this will change as well.

Can you explain technique or phrasing more effectively from playing within the ensemble? Since the director of a homogeneous flute ensemble is most likely a flutist themselves, there are times when it might be more efficient to demonstrate a specific technique or even musical phrasing by playing within the ensemble. I often have my flute out when doing reflective improvisational work with the ensemble so I can easily demonstrate the exercise before I stand aside and observe the RFs' own performances.

Sometimes, especially if the piece we are working on involves the use of techniques that might not be familiar to the RFs, it is more efficient for me to demonstrate by playing alongside the members of the ensemble, rather than through gestures or words.

Does the ensemble understand your conducting gestures? It is always important to make sure that the entire ensemble understands what is being asked of them. That may mean you need to explain the gestures you will be using when conducting. You may have to explain different roles members of the ensemble will take on during rehearsals and performance. Gestures can't always convey that the second flute part needs to be brought out more than the score suggests. It may even mean you need to make sure that everyone understands the musical terms you are using during rehearsals. I once had a rehearsal grind to a halt because an ensemble member confused an articulation mark with rhythmic change. Returning musicians may have different levels and types of earlier music education experiences, so it's always important to be sure that everyone really understands what you expect of them. I find using reflective improvisational exercises can be a good way to explain something the ensemble is not understanding through my gestures.

Does the ensemble need more instructive support to be able to do what you ask of them? Sometimes RFs might understand your gestures but are not capable of performing what you are asking for. If the tempo is still slowing down in that technically difficult spot after several rehearsals, or the RFs still don't come in correctly at difficult entrances, this may be a problem that should be worked on with reflective improvisational work. Creating an exercise to address the challenges in the piece gives the RFs tools to develop the skills needed. It also can give the director a chance to assess the ensemble and perhaps decide if it would just be a better decision to ask for a slower tempo or redistribute difficult parts.

Is the way you are interacting with the ensemble enhancing or limiting their feeling of ownership of the performance? Whether a director is playing with the ensemble, conducting in front of it, or observing from the side, they are influencing the way the ensemble works and how the RFs will feel about the final performance. It's important to be aware of how you can best support the ensemble at any given time during rehearsals or performances. Conducting from the front of the ensemble can be supportive and

motivating, or controlling, depending on the conductor's approach and rehearsal techniques. The same can be said for playing within the ensemble, or not participating in the performance at all.

In early rehearsals and performances of my ensemble, the RFs enjoyed that I conducted the ensemble. They also expected that I would use the same exact gestures, in the same way during all rehearsals and performances, and got nervous if I changed anything. Relying on my entrance cues sometimes meant they didn't count themselves. From time to time in rehearsals, I would play within the ensemble, and lead from there, to cover parts that were missing, or to get a different perspective of how the ensemble sounded. I felt then as though I was taking on two roles, and the ensemble was just following me as a flutist, without considering their own role in the performance, or actively listening to what was going on.

In both cases, my interaction with the ensemble was taking ownership from the RFs, rather than supporting them. In fact, they were allowing me to take ownership, so they could feel comfortable knowing that any difficulties they were having were a result of my interaction with them, rather than having to take ownership themselves. Now, when I notice this type of interaction happening, I know it means we need to spend time doing improvisatory slow work, to help the RFs gain confidence in the skills they need to perform this piece. When my conducting gestures or performance within the ensemble is just a support, I am adding to the ensemble's experience, rather than 'making the experience happen' for the ensemble. When we work this way, the RFs are eager to take ownership of the performance we create together. (Journal entry, 2017)

There are any number of ways a director can develop their conducting skills. If formal classes are not possible, follow rehearsals of conductors you admire. Watching and listening to the directors you play for yourself can help you understand what sort of interactions work best. What gestures do you find most helpful? When do you leave rehearsals energized? Set up a video camera in your own rehearsals to help you become aware of your habits and gestures and reflect on how you interact with the ensemble. Do you get the results you expected? Do you spend a lot of time explaining? Does your ensemble seem interested and engaged? Below I will include several resources for more

information. I believe that learning technical conducting skills, and the rehearsal planning skills that go along with that can be of great benefit to any ensemble leader.

Additional Reading:

- Chapters 4.3 and Chapter 5, Weidenfeller, K. 2022, *Returning Flutists: Developing Improvisational Rehearsal Techniques for use with an Ensemble of Non-professional Flutists Returning to a Musical Practice.*
- Baptiste, Frank L., 2007. *On Becoming A Conductor,* Galesville: Meredith Music Productions.
- Boonshaft, Peter Loel, 2002. *Teaching Music with Passion,* Galesville: Meredith Music Productions.
- Jansson, Dag, 2018. *Leading Musically*, NY: Routledge.
- Rudolf, Max, 1980. *The Grammar of Conducting*, NY: Schirmer Books.

Chapter 4: Choosing Repertoire and Planning Rehearsals

> Just about all of the pieces felt confusing and difficult at the beginning, but they became clearer little by little. It was wonderful to notice at some point during the rehearsal period that I had learned to play something that I didn't believe I could learn at the beginning. (HHO member, Journal entry.)

A lot of literature on working with adult non-professional musicians that suggest using familiar repertoire to keep adults motivated and interested in their musical journey. And there may be good reasons for this, familiar repertoire can be enjoyable, and comfortable to play. In the early days of a new ensemble, it may even be advisable to program works that are easily accessible to the RFs.. But it is in novel experiences that we learn the most. For this reason, I suggest programming modern works that include techniques and sounds that may be unfamiliar to the RFs. I try to find pieces for every program with my ensemble that introduce novel musical ideas. While I certainly program works or genre that are familiar to the members of my ensemble and ask them for input when planning programs, I also believe in challenging them to try new things. Programming works for performance that include improvisation and extended techniques can also help to motivate the RFs to not only experiment with them in the reflective improvisational exercises, but to include them in their own personal practice.

The challenge is to find repertoire that will excite and motivate your ensemble: pieces that are challenging enough to keep RFs interested, but not so out of reach to be disheartening. This is especially important with a newly established ensemble that is still developing their sense of social community. Especially with a new ensemble, it's a good idea to program works that make it possible to have multiple flutists on each part. This allows RFs with more established skills to support less experienced ensemble members. For a list of repertoire that includes improvisatory sections and/or requires the performers to use extended flute technique, visit the companion website https://www.kathyweidenfeller.com/resources/.

When choosing repertoire for concert programs, I like to pair pieces that have similar attributes. Especially if I know that a piece I want to perform with my ensemble will be challenging, I find a second piece that presents similar challenges in a more accessible way. For example, if I am programming a piece in E major that presents a lot of technical challenges, I may choose a second piece in E major that is not quite as challenging technically, but helps the RFs become

acquainted with the key signature and its fingerings. For a slow piece with thick harmonies that I know will create challenges with intonation and phrasing, I would pair a second piece, in the same key, also slow and harmonic, but more accessible musically. This allows me to use pieces as part of the rehearsal process, giving the RFs more 'playing' time. It also provides an opportunity for less skilled members of the ensemble to have a chance to perform more exposed parts than what they might feel comfortable playing in a more challenging work, while still providing challenges for the more skilled flutists.

I begin to plan the rehearsal period at the same time I am choosing repertoire. As I plan the coming concert program, I try to anticipate the challenges I believe my ensemble will have with the repertoire. Not only does this help me to pair pieces, but it also helps me to start adapting improvisatory exercises to help develop the skills the RFs will need to feel comfortable performing the program. While I continually ask my ensemble for suggestions of pieces, or types of pieces, they would like to perform, I also continuously look for new pieces that introduce new techniques, styles or sounds. (Journal entry 2015.)

Rehearsal time for any ensemble is a valuable commodity, perhaps especially for an ensemble of returning musicians. The rehearsal may also be one of the few times during the week RFs are able to focus on flute playing. So it may seem counter-intuitive to include reflective improvisatory exercises that take a lot of time in rehearsals where time is a precious commodity. But taking that time allows you to explore new ways of developing old skills and do it in a fun, supportive way. It can also mean that later rehearsals will run at a quicker pace once the ensemble has developed the skills they need to confidently perform the programmed pieces. These exercises also help to keep the RFs aware and present during rehearsals and that can help make the rehearsals more effective as well.

Once the repertoire is chosen the director should begin learning the scores. A director should prepare a score in the same way you would prepare a solo piece for performance. Even if you aren't going to conduct from the front of the orchestra, you should know as much as possible about the score before your first rehearsal with the ensemble. Start with the big picture – the style, form, harmonic rhythm – before getting into details. Find and mark the overall form of the work: movements, sections, phrases.

Make a rough harmonic analysis. Be aware large structural changes or difficult entrances where your ensemble will need extra support.

Marking your score so that the elements that you feel are important are easily noticeable makes it easier to communicate them to the ensemble. Practice how you can communicate these challenges to your ensemble through clear gestures. At this point in your preparation, you can also plan what sort of reflective improvisatory work to include in rehearsals that will help develop the skills needed to succeed at these challenges. Keep in mind that no matter how well you prepare for the first rehearsal, your ideas, and the ensembles needs will differ from your original plans. Be prepared to be flexible. As you develop a toolbox of exercises to use in rehearsals it will be easier to be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of your ensemble.

I run my rehearsals on the assumption that they are one of the few, if not the only time that the RFs have the chance to play or practice the flute during the week. Even if it's not true, it helps to think that way as I plan what exercises I will include. The individual RFs can take part in the exercises at whatever level they are at, so everyone will learn something about their own playing. It requires everyone to work on the challenge at the same time, so no one is singled out during rehearsals, and they can draw on each other as sources of knowledge. I make notes after rehearsals of problems that occurred so I can develop exercises for later rehearsals, where I might have earlier stopped and given corrections. The exercises create a space for reflection and expansion of old ideas about technique, music, and performance. Improvising is always novel, and that helps to build awareness during rehearsal.

In the conducted sections of rehearsals, I refer to earlier exercises when similar problems arise, by asking the RFs to remember what it felt like during the exercise. Encouraging this kind of remembering helps to encourage reflection and awareness of the physicality of playing. The conducted sections of rehearsals also help me assess the needs of the ensemble, and prepare future rehearsals, including what sort of improvisational exploration may still be needed. While this improvisational work takes time, the way it gives returning musicians the space to explore helps to develop technique in a way that allows later rehearsals to move more quickly. (Journal entry, 2015.)

The pace of a RF ensemble's rehearsal will probably change more than with other ensembles. At times, it will feel as though rehearsals are running slowly. Using reflective

improvisation takes time. Building social connections do as well. There will be times when playing through pieces just for enjoyment is more important than taking pieces apart to practice carefully. When programming concerts, it's good to include works that are easily accessible along with others that provide enough challenge can help to keep all the returning musicians interested. I intentionally pair works that have similar elements – one challenging, the other easily accessible – to use as a rehearsal tool. Saving one accessible work to start in the middle of the rehearsal period can help to keep interest up and introduces novelty into the rehearsal period. Consider the overall arch of the rehearsal period when planning. That includes leaving space for things that come up unexpectedly along the way. Everyone will feel more comfortable if there is plenty of time to bring all the pieces to a performance level without feeling rushed just before the concert.

You can also create novelty in rehearsals by changing the order of your rehearsals. Start an occasional rehearsal by reading through a piece that you worked on in a previous rehearsal before doing warm up exercises. Ending a rehearsal with reflective improvisation can leave the experience in the RFs' mind to take with them to their own personal practice before the next rehearsal. Planning themed rehearsals that focus on one particular skill in the earlier part of the period can help to develop the skills that allow you to run more efficient rehearsals later on. As later rehearsals become faster-paced, you can use free improvisation exercises to help the ensemble develop more fluid phrasing and overall musical ideas.

Overview of Chapter Four

Plan repertoire that is familiar and accessible to RFs along with other repertoire that expands their musical knowledge.

Works that include improvisation and extended techniques can motivate RFs to explore using these sounds in performance and practice.

Prepare scores carefully by marking areas that may cause challenges and practice how to communicate those challenges to the ensemble. Create reflective improvisatory exercises to help develop the skills necessary to succeed.

Pair a more accessible work with similar challenges as a more complex work in concert programs. This allows you to rehearse technique by playing through pieces and gives RFs with less experience a chance to perform more exposed parts comfortably.

Reflective improvisatory work develops skills and builds community. It can help later rehearsals run more effectively.

Change the order of rehearsal schedules from week to week. Try starting a rehearsal by reading through a familiar work or ending with a 'warm up'.

Save one accessible piece for later in the rehearsal period to inject some novelty and keep interest and awareness high.

Assume that rehearsals may be the only time RFs have to practice during the week, but also remember they are part of these flutists' leisure time. Reflective improvisation presented in the right way can be fun and skill building at the same time.

Additional Reading:

- Chapters 3.6, 4.1.3 and Chapter 5, Weidenfeller, K., 2022. Returning Flutists: Developing Improvisational Rehearsal Techniques for use with an Ensemble of Non-professional Flutists Returning to a Musical Practice.

- Boonshaft, Peter Loel 2002. *Teaching Music with Passion Conducting, Rehearsing, and Inspiring*, Galesville: Meredith Music Publications.

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- Juniu, Susana, T Tedrick, and R Boyd 1996. "Leisure or Work? Amateur and Professional Musicians' Perception of Rehearsal and Performance", *Journal of Leisure Research*, 28 (1), 44–56

- Langer, Ellen J. 1997. *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

- Taylor, Donald M., Nathan B Kruse, Bethany J Nickel, Betty B Lee, and Tiffany N Bowen 2011. "Adult Musicians' Experiences in a Homogeneous Ensemble Setting." *Contributions to Music Education* v38 n1 11–26.

Chapter Five: Developing Ensemble Skills with Improvisation

> You don't have to practice boring exercises, but you do have to practice something. If you find the practice boring, don't run away from it, but don't tolerate it, either. Transform it into something that suits you. If you are bored playing a scale, play the same eight tones but change the order. Then change the rhythm. Then change the tone color. Presto, you have just improvised. If you don't think the result is very good, you have the power to change it – now there is both a supply of raw material and some judgment to feed back into the process. (Nachmanovitch 1990, 68)

While communicating through conducting gestures can be an efficient way to rehearse, there will be times that gestures are not enough for your RFs. It may be that the RFs don't understand or have the confidence or skill to perform what you are asking of them. Continually stopping pieces during rehearsals to offer explanations and corrections can interrupt everyone's train of thought, and cause frustration. And, if a RF holds a fixed belief about their abilities, receiving corrections from the director during rehearsals could cause them to become anxious and defensive, making it difficult for them to even hear the information the director is trying to give.

The idea of using improvisation to teach ensemble skills started in my work with younger student ensembles. Sometimes, honestly, it was because it was difficult to find material for the limited range of instruments or students I had in these rehearsals. But I also discovered that these improvisations helped the students become a group and their listening skills improved as well. Even when there were more students and written material, I continued to include improvisation as warm-ups and to develop ensemble skills. (Journal entry 2013.)

Since improvisation means many things to different musicians, I should explain how I am using it here. Some of the exercises I adapted to help build trust in a new ensemble were drawn from the theatrical improvisation culture. The improvisatory musical exercises are trans-stylistic: they are not based on one specific musical style, and they don't demand that the RFs first learn a set of rules before participating. The RFs can draw on whatever musical knowledge they already have when performing these explorations and enter the exercise from their own personal level and participate as much or as little as they feel comfortable doing. Through participating in the explorations and reflecting together, the ensemble will create new ways of working together. And each individual RF can expand their own understanding of their personal technique and how to develop it.

The exact exercises that are used in rehearsals is not as important as how they are used. Setting the stage for any exercise by building a trusting, supportive community is important. Once the RFs feel comfortable enough with the ensemble they should be able to explore their instrument and become more aware of how they play during the improvisational explorations. Improvisation itself encourages reflection simply because the participants must be continuously aware of what is going on around them and how they interact with the other sounds during the exercises. The director can help develop this skill further by using guided questions. The guided questions used during the reflective improvisational exercises model the self-reflection that the RFs can take back to their own personal practice. In the descriptions of most of the improvisational explorations in Chapter five, I have included questions that the director can use to guide the ensemble's awareness or to start a discussion in the description of each exercise.

When using guided questioning during reflection, be sure to wait for ensemble members to answer your questions. It can be very tempting to jump in with answers you may have. But every time you do that, you're reenforcing old beliefs returning musicians may have about their lack of knowledge. Use your knowledge, and the information you gained in observation to create the questions, but let the ensemble tell you what happened. This is one of the most difficult parts of working in this way. It's so easy to want to teach by telling. But waiting, listening, and using the information you receive when you've asked these questions is a powerful way to develop the confidence of your ensemble. The answers you wait to hear will sometimes surprise and challenge you.

I rarely take part in explorations during rehearsals because I find it easier to observe what is going on from outside the exploration. It's not enough to listen to the sound being produced, the director should also notice how the RFs are approaching the exercise. As you learn to observe your ensemble, you can start to notice body movement that can give you clues to how each member is taking part in the exercise. Do they seem active, engaged? Or do they seem to be holding back? Are their movements stiff or fluid? You can ask questions that will help the RFs be more aware of how they are participation, such as 'Do you think the ensemble is working together during this exploration?' 'Do your movements feel fluid and natural?'. You may also at times want to ask what the ensemble members are getting from the exercise 'What did you notice (or learn) during this

exploration?', or direct their attention to a specific area 'Did you notice how your throat felt during this exercise?

Building Trust

Before introducing instruments into the improvisations, the director should use exercises to create trust between the members of the ensemble. Even when the director creates a supportive environment by preparing themselves and the physical rehearsal space, the RFs still need to navigate new social relationships within the ensemble. Theatrical improvisational groups have a long tradition of using games and exercises to help build trust between members. Perhaps the most well-known of these exercises is 'Yes and…', that simply has one member of a pair offer a suggestion and the other member should agree eagerly to whatever the suggestion is, adding their own contribution. This is a fun exercise to include in an early rehearsal of a new ensemble and in my experience, always produces laughter as each pair share their journey.

I like to do at least one trust building exercise with the ensemble whenever there are several new RFs, or we haven't rehearsed in a while. These trust building exercises are one of the few times that I as director take part in the exercise, rather than just observing. That is because the point of these exercises is to develop a sense of ensemble and I am part of that ensemble. These exercises don't need the same type of reflection as later instrumental improvisations will. Here, we are practicing the idea of making mistakes together in a light-hearted way. This will hopefully help to build trust between the individual members of the ensemble and help the RFs feel more comfortable to take chances in the later instrumental improvisations.

The following two exercises are drawn from the theatrical improvisation culture. Along with introducing ensemble members to each other, they also develop important ensemble skills, and the second of the two could be continued with instruments. Humor and a sense of curiosity should be the most important elements of these exercises as well as all the other exercises I will describe in this chapter. Every 'mistake' (and there will be many!) should be celebrated, even applauded! But at the very least met with friendly smiles and laughter. We learn through our mistakes and celebrating learning is important.

Name, City, Color

Have the ensemble stand in a circle facing each other. If you use this exercise with a new ensemble, you may want to first ask everyone to say their name. I like to start the exercise so that I can also set the tone and make sure the ensemble understands that in this exercise 'mistakes' are not only expected – they will be celebrated.

Say the name of another member of the ensemble in the circle and dramatically present them with the object (the more exaggerated the drama, the better!). These two members change places. The new member in the center then repeats the process, calling out another name,

When everyone has been in the center of the circle at least twice, move on to the next section.

Now, ask everyone in the circle, in order, to call out the name of a city. It is important for everyone to remember the order they cities said (it's usually enough at the start for everyone to remember the city just before and just after their own). Go through the city names a couple times to insure everyone remembers the order.

Combine the two elements: Have the ensemble yell out the name of their city at the correct time, in order. At the same time, someone will be in the center of the circle, calling out the name of one of the ensemble members. The name calling is random, the order of the cities should remain the same.

As names are called, everyone will be changing positions within the circle. However, the order of cities still remains the same. Ensemble members will need to listen for both their name and the city before their own, to know when to call out.

You can continue to add additional elements to this game to make it more confusing: Have everyone choose a color at a later point in the rehearsal, when Again, ask everyone to remember the order of colors (that will be different than the order of cities). Continue as before, this time everyone has three elements to be aware of.

Every time I've done this exercise, it doesn't take long for the ensemble to start to work together and remind each other when they miss a cue. Celebrate 'mistakes' with laughter and applause!

Name, Movement, Emotion

Standing in a circle, have each of the RFs say their name rhythmically and make some sort of gesture to go along with that rhythm. After each flutist introduces themselves, have everyone else repeat their name and gesture.

Go around the circle a second time, this time asking each flutist to add an emotion to their performance. Again, everyone repeats. Encourage the ensemble to exaggerate the emotions and the gestures.

Repeat just the emotional gestures one after another around the circle as a movement composition. See if you can do it without any break so that it becomes a sort of dance.

Exaggerate the movements and emotions. Do this very slowly, and then very quickly.

Break into groups of 3, and with a short time limit (5 minutes at the most) have each group create a short improvisation using the rhythm of their names, the gestures, and the emotions (you can add instruments at this point or continue without).

Each group performs their composition for the other groups and is hopefully met with loud applause and laughter.

Gifting

In addition to being a way to build trust in early rehearsals, this exercise works well to build enthusiasm and trust just before a concert.

In a circle, one ensemble member gives a gift to the RF to their right, saying something like 'Hi! (name of RF) I found this and thought of you. Hope you enjoy it.'

The RF giving the gift decides the size and weight of the package and shows that through their movements but does not know what is inside.

The recipient opens the package and emotionally shares the gift with the rest of the group. They can decide what the actual gift is (share with the group!) and how they receive it. The rest of the ensemble should respond with enthusiasm either positive or negative, depending on the recipient's response.

The recipient then gives their own package to the next ensemble member in the circle.

If there's a limited amount of time, have the director give everyone a gift from the center of the circle. The ensemble members can open their gifts at the same time and share their gifts enthusiasm together. This can be a good exercise for just before a performance.

The more enthusiastic everyone is, the more effective this exercise is. The recipient can take as much care in presenting their gift as the receiver does in opening it and reacting to it.

The way the director interacts with the ensemble during these exercises will also help to build trust. Set the tone of the exercise by being aware that your own body language is open and enthusiastic. The director can encourage engagement and enthusiasm through their own reactions to what is going on during the exercises. In my experience, these exercises can help to prepare the ensemble to continue exploring improvisation. They do take some time and energy, so I usually move on to reading composed works after the first time I do these exercises with an ensemble and continue with other exploratory work in later rehearsals.

I believe reflection is one of the most important elements of any of these exercises. We can design different exercises to meet almost any need our ensemble has, if we are able to observe and help the ensemble direct their attention to the aspect of the exercise that will best support their development. It can also be the trickiest part, since it can be very difficult to both ask in a way that leaves space for the ensemble to answer, and to wait for the ensemble's answer, and respond to what they experience. It does happen at times that an exercise might end up directing the ensemble in a direction I could not have foreseen at the beginning. The important part is that there is development, awareness, and growth.

Warming up Minds and Bodies

The way a rehearsal begins can set the tone for the entire rehearsal. Incorporating movement into the early part of a rehearsal can help the RFs move from their buys days towards focusing on the rehearsal to be present and aware of their own body and their interaction with other ensemble members. Encouraging RFs to take part in non-verbal communicative exercises heightens their awareness, preparing them for the rest of the challenges the rehearsal will bring. Some of the following exercises are non-instrumental, others use instruments from the beginning, or can start as non-instrumental and develop with instruments.

Statues

This is a non-instrumental exercise involving movement to music. It should be noted that this exercise does ask ensemble members to be in close proximity and use touch with each other. It is always important to make sure that all ensemble members feel comfortable doing this type of exercise. Allow members who do not feel comfortable to have the option of not participating. They could also join you in observing the exercise or participate in other ways, for example, choosing the music used.

Divide the group in pairs. One RF will start as the statue, the other is the sculptor. The statue stands with their eyes closed.

Play music, preferably something flowing and slow. Ask the sculptors to gently and lightly touch a part of the statue's body that they'd like to move. Have them touch it in a way that also suggests what direction they would like it to move (up, down, left, or right)

The statue gently moves that part of the body, in response to the music, until the sculptor touches another part of the body.

After about 4 minutes, have the RFs switch roles.

Between the two instances of this exploration, ask questions that direct the RFs' awareness to how it feels to move their body or watch the other member move.

Are they surprised at the amount of movement they find in their body? How does the movement (either touching or moving their body) feel?

Notice how the pairs interact with each other and adjust your questions accordingly: if a pair seems to be moving stiffly, you might want to ask if everyone feels the movement in the music. Or ask about the tempo, or style of the music if their movements seem to indicate they aren't listening.

After the second instance, ask the RFs to compare the experience of being in the two different roles.

Did they listen differently in each role? Did they experience time differently?

Bubbles

Throw each member an imaginary bubble. Explain that it is very flexible, and very strong. Have the RFs hold the bubble halfway between the bottom of the ribcage and the navel,

keeping their arms free from the sides of the body. Have the flutists move their arms from side to side while holding the bubble, check to see that the movements are free and flowing.

Find a common pulse with the arm movement. Have the RFs inhale for 4 beats, moving the arms and hands out to the side as the bubble expands. Hold the breath for a count of 4, with a feeling relaxed expansion rather than 'holding', exhale for 4 beats, then wait for 4 beats before the next inhale, keeping the body open and relaxed.

Repeat several times. Ask the RFs if they can feel their lungs filling with air in a seemingly automatic way after standing 'empty' for four beats. You can help them feel this by slowing the pulse down and talking the RFs through the exercise so that they can remain calm and feel space rather than tension in their body.

Repeat the exercise, this time holding the hands above one another and expand the bubble up and down from the center of the body. Be sure that the lower hand moves downwards in the same amount as the upper hand moves upwards

Repeat several times. Direct the RFs' awareness to space they may feel in their upper torso as they separate their arms.

Drop the bubble, and let arms hang freely in their natural position. This time, with each inhalation, have one arm move forward, the other back. For the exhalation, have the arms move back to their position at the side of the body. Alternate which arm moves forward with each inhalation and remember to keep the arms free along their whole length.

Repeat several times, directing the RFs' attention to their sides.

Walking exercises

Walking exercises are the least favorite of my ensemble since they don't involve instruments and seem to have no purpose. The idea behind the exercise is to use easy movement to help each individual become more aware of how they use their body, but also to help develop a physical sense of moving together as an ensemble. It's also very interesting how much information I can gather watching the ensemble walk around the hall. In reflective discussions during these exercises, if I ask the RFs how they felt during the exercise, they explain that they felt awkward, and that they weren't really aware of the other members of the ensemble. This is what I observed from the way they moved around the room. After these discussions the next

performances of these exercises are different: the RFs seem to move more comfortably, and there is a sense that they are aware of each other in a different way (Journal entry 2014)

Walking around

Ask RFs to walk as though different parts of their body are leading them: right, left shoulders, elbows, hips; navel, back of the head.

Ask the ensemble to walk lightly, and then ask them to notice if they can hear the sound of each other's footsteps. Does the ensemble find a common pulse? How does the walking change if you ask them to greet each individual they pass as they walk?

Give the ensemble different cues: have them walk fiercely, quietly, angrily, sadly, etc

As the RFs are walking, have them point to objects. Have them call out the last object they pointed to – as they are pointing to the next object.

Have them name an animal (or make the sound of an animal!) that begins with the same letter as the object they are pointing to. I save the noise-making part for last, as everyone is wondering why I'm having them walk around and getting frustrated. Make sure to encourage the RFs to be loud with the noise-making!

A-B-A

This is another walking exercise done in the form of a musical work. Explain before the exercise begins that you will ask the ensemble to move around the room, first individually and then slowly becoming aware of each other. Ask the ensemble to move closer together as they become more aware of each other, until they are walking as a single unit in tight formation (section 'B') until they naturally feel the need to move apart again (second section 'A').

Discuss: Based on what you, the director, observe, ask the following types of questions:

If you notice the movements are stiff, ensemble doesn't come together or move apart naturally: Did the exercise feel comfortable? Were you aware of how the other ensemble members were moving around you? Could you feel the group pulling together

and moving apart before you saw it? Would it be somehow possible to be aware of the other members of the ensemble, and allow them to enter your space?

If the B section is short in comparison to the two A sections: How did the B section feel? Did you get a feeling of moving as one entity? Or squished and uncomfortable? Did you notice how the other ensemble members were moving? Is there a way you can feel comfortable moving as an individual within a close group?

Direct the RFs' attention towards hearing, and feeling, rather than watching and reacting. Does it change the way the ensemble interacts?

Improvise! What happens if you ask the ensemble to make a crescendo with their body movements into the 'B' section, and a decrescendo as they move into the second 'A' section? Or the opposite? Can they create a different form by moving together and apart in different ways?

Tuning Ears instead of one Note

When working with non-professional musicians, I don't tune in the beginning of rehearsals. RFs often come straight to rehearsals from their regular daily routine and probably need time to slow down and redirect their focus to rehearsal awareness. They rarely have the practice time and experience needed to control their embouchure and airspeed enough to produce a note at the beginning of rehearsal that can indicate what the intonation for the rehearsal will be. I believe it is much more effective to use this time for exercises throughout the rehearsal that can direct attention to specific skills that will help the RFs control their airspeed and direction.

I suggest to ensemble members that they set their flute up the same way every time they play. Having the flute in the same position can help the RFs develop a sense of how they direct their air into the flute, and how that affects the pitch of what they play. While I use exercises like those I describe below in most rehearsals as intonation problems arise, I also plan a thematic rehearsal on intonation at the beginning of most rehearsal periods where we can focus on intonation from different angles. In addition to reflective improvisation, in these rehearsals I will also read through slow choral-like pieces or use specific parts of pieces we are working on as listening exercises. In addition, I encourage

the RFs to ask questions during these rehearsals, and take the time to answer through discussion, or by suggesting an exercise.

I've included exercises in this section that focus on dynamics. Since the speed and direction of the airspeed is an essential aspect of both dynamics and intonation, I believe these exercises belong together.

Bending

Explain and explore how easy it is to bend notes on the flute.[1] It is important to clarify that bending should happen mainly with subtle movements of the lips and flute since overuse of the neck or jaw can lead to pain. The movements involved are so subtle that it may take some time for the RFs to understand just what a small movement is required. In my experience, most RFs will try to bend by just moving the flute at first, since they have little understanding of the flexibility the lips have. Talking about the musculature of the lips and exploring flexibility without the flute may be a good way to start.

Concert C on the staff is the easiest for the flutists to bend so it's a good place to start this exercise. Have the ensemble members explore how low and how high they can bend their note. Encourage them to play these extremely flat or sharp notes long in pairs or small groups and listen to the interaction. The RFs should be able to hear the difference tone[2] resulting from playing tunes at slightly different pitches together. Encourage them to listen to how the difference tone changes as they bend their notes in different ways.

Once the ensemble is comfortable bending notes, have one flutist, preferably playing alto or bass flute, play one tone as a drone. You might want to stay on the C for a while, before switching to an 'A', but you can try other notes as well. Have the other flutists bend the same note up and down, using both their lips and the position of the flute to raise or lower the pitch, and then find their way back to the droned note. It may be easier to start this exercise in small groups, to make it easier for the RFs to find their way back to the original note.

[1] Bending notes refers to raising or lowering the pitch of an individual note by redirecting the placement of the airstream against the embouchure hole. Pitch can be lowered by dropping the jaw and/or rolling the flute in against the lips, lowering the direction of the airstream, or conversely, by raising the jaw and/or turning the flute away from the lips to raise the airstream and pitch.

[2] Difference tone: a tone equal in frequency to the difference between the frequencies of two notes actually being played. When the difference tone is not in tune with either of the notes actually being played, the flutist will hear beats in the sound. Adjusting one of the played notes, the difference tone can be brought into just intonation (Debost, Michel. 2002. *Simple Flute: From A to Z.* Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, 139.)

Improvise! Encourage the RFs to create a musical improvisation using only bending.

Circle of A

This exercise is a more advanced exercise since it involves being able to quickly adjust pitch. The RFs should understand how the set-up of the flute, direction of airstream, and shape of their mouths can affect pitch before doing this exercise.

Have the RFs stand in a circle and one flutist starts by playing a concert A^1. After listening for a short time, the next flutist in the circle joins them in playing the A^1. After listening for a short while to the interaction of the two pitches, the first flute stops playing. The second flutist plays alone for a short while, until the next flutist joins in. This continues around the circle.

Ask the RFs to just listen to the interaction of the two notes the first time around the circle, without changing anything. Encourage them to listen to the interactions of other members of the ensemble, to see if they can hear when the two notes are in or out of tune.

The next time around the circle, have the flutist joining the pitch try to match the pitch they hear. Encourage them to first try in one direction only, even if the intonation seems to get worse. Remind them that this is also a good lesson – they now understand how their note related to the one they were trying to match.

Encourage the RFs to see if they can match the pitch through changes to the speed and direction of their airstream, rather than by immediately moving the position of their headjoint. Have them change the position of the headjoint only if it is obvious that they are consistently playing noticeably sharp or flat to the other ensemble members.

To continue: have the ensemble turn so they are facing outside of the circle, so they no longer make eye contact. Now the RFs can only use hearing to know when to enter.

The first flutist playing should decrescendo as the second flutist enters, to try to keep the note both at the same volume as well as pitch throughout the circle. The goal should be to try to keep the A sounding as if it is just traveling around the circle. This requires the RFs to listen carefully to know when it is their turn to enter. Play a few times around the circle and see if the group can fall into a steady pulse and start to instinctively know when to enter.

Count to 3

Ask the ensemble members to count to 3 a few times outloud, each time raising the dynamic level of their voice. Most likely, the tone of their voice will literally rise in pitch as the dynamic increases. Ask them to notice this, and notice how it felt: can they feel the tension in their throats, neck, torso, legs that causes their voices to rise in pitch?

Ask the RFs to count again, and this time try to find space – resonance – in their body to increase the dynamic. How does the feeling in their body change? Can they find even more space in their body? Are they able to lower pitch of their voice as the dynamic increases? When they understand how to lower the pitch of their voices, add instruments to the exercise.

> Can the RFs find the same space as they play each note increasingly loud and does that help prevent a rise in intonation as the dynamic increases?

Try the same exercise creating a decrescendo, again starting first without instruments

> Direct the RFs' attentions to the space in their bodies: Can they keep support in their sound even as it gets softer?
>
> Diminuendos can be more difficult. You may need to do an exercise on airspeed awareness (such as bending, bubbles, or playing harmonics) before returners feel comfortable making a diminuendo without flattening their pitch.

Embodied Dynamics

> Play crescendos and diminuendos for the ensemble (this can be done with any instrument or sound making device that allows you to make noticeable dynamic changes or use a recording of dynamically interesting music).
>
> Have the ensemble recreate the dynamics in exaggerated movement. Ask the RFs to listen carefully and have their movements mimic the feel of the dynamic being played: is it dramatic? Slow and steady? Encourage the rfs

Measured Dynamics

I developed this exercise during a rehearsal where intonation problems in a unison section were not being solved by other means. I was running out of ideas, tried this, and was surprised at how well it worked. Here I've expanded it a bit, originally, I did it in the middle of a rehearsal with two players playing the hairpin dynamics. I would suggest

During rehearsal when there's an intonation problem in one section, ask the RFs to play a 'hairpin' crescendo–diminuendo over 8 beats on the tricky note. At some point during the hairpin, the note will most likely be decently in tune. Could they hear where? Can the other RFs not playing during this exercise hear? Play again and ask those playing if they can feel when the intonation is good. Again, ask the help of those flutists not playing to direct attention towards the desired intonation.

Can the RFs reproduce the **feeling** of good intonation without making the dynamic changes? Ask leading questions to direct awareness to the speed and direction of airstream. Can they play soft and loud without affecting intonation? How does that feel?

My Favorite Scale

It may seem strange to include a scale exercise under the heading of intonation but find this simple exercise can often do more to improve the intonation of an amateur ensemble than listening to one note at the beginning of the rehearsal. It requires the ensemble members to listen carefully to their own sound, and how it relates to the ensemble. The RFs also get to hear some amazing harmonies and experience how it feels to be in the middle of an interestingly large chord.

Instead of having the ensemble warm-up by playing one major scale together, ask all the RFs to play their own personal favorite scale. At the same time. If the ensemble is large, you may want to have each section choose one scale. Play the scale in half notes, two octaves up and down. Enjoy the resulting harmonies!

The first time you use this exercise, you should have a discussion:

How easy/difficult was it to stay on your own scale? Were you able to focus on what you were doing with everyone around you playing a different scale? Were you able to listen and enjoy the interesting harmonies that resulted from the combination of different scales?

To continue: Either still playing their own favorite scale, or everyone playing the same scale, have half the ensemble start on the lowest note of the scale and play up, the other half at the top and play down.

Increase technical challenges by asking members to play the scale a half-step above their favorite scale. Or play a harmonic minor scale starting from the same note.

Using Improvisation to Develop Technique

Any improvisation can be used to practice any particular technical skills, depending on how you present the challenge and how you use directed questioning during the exercise. Any time you isolate one particular technical skill and create a challenge where RFs can explore that skill freely and musically, you are building a space for learning and development to happen. Using reflective questions to direct attention to an area that may need development supports the learning. The following exercises are some examples of how you can work on specific technical challenges that arise in a composed work, using improvisational explorations.

Scaling:

In addition to the favorite scale exercise I mentioned in the section on intonation, there are other scale based exercises you can use instead of playing scales in a traditional manner.

Well-articulated:

Introduce different types of percussive articulation, flutter tonguing, or airy sounds, and have the ensemble perform scales using these articulations

All at once:

Conduct a scale at about 60 beats per min, two octaves, in half notes. The director needs to keep track of this, and ask the RFs to play the scale, all at once, each in their own rhythm, ie. quarter notes, 16th notes, triplets etc. going up and down the scale as many times as they can until the conductor ends the scale. Remind the RFs to keep whatever rhythm they are using in the tempo you are conducting. It will take some concentration to play the scale correctly and keep the tempo, encourage laughter when this gets confusing!

Switch:

Choose two contrasting scales, for example, one major and one (non-relative) minor, or even two made up scales. Write the notes of the scale out if necessary, especially if you are using unusual or created scales.

Start a free improvisation using one of the scales. Use a loud sound, or yell 'switch' to have the ensemble switch to using the second scale. Go back and forth several times.

Finally try combining the two scales in a large-scale improvisation.

Are you listening**?**

Choose a scale, number of octaves and rhythm it will be played in. If it is a difficult or unusual scale have the entire ensemble play it through once together.

Start from one end of the ensemble and have everyone play two notes of the scale. See if you can get through the entire ensemble without a change in tempo.

Next level: do the same but allow each RF to choose whether to play from 1 to 3 notes of the scale. Can you still stay in tempo? Try either version again but this time without the conductor. Can the ensemble still find a common pulse?

Entering

Divide the ensemble into 3-4 groups. This exercise should be conducted. You could have members of the ensemble take turns conducting.

Have each group create a simple, 4 beat phrase. Assign each group a number between 1-4. The entire ensemble starts by performing their phrase together, and then counts their number of beats, before entering again.

Try with longer rests between entrances.

If the ensemble is not large, assign each individual member their own number, so everyone is entering at different times.

Rhythm squares

Divide the ensemble into four groups and assign each group a difficult rhythm (one or two measures long) from the repertoire. This works particularly well when the piece includes difficult combinations of rhythms in different parts. Have each group use one percussive articulation to perform the rhythm. The more exaggerated, the better!

Have each group incorporate movement into their performance (I have found this especially makes it easier for each group to continue their unique rhythm in tempo). Again, the more exaggerated, the better!

Once each group is comfortable performing their rhythm, have individual members change groups. Each time they join a new group, the RFs takes on not only the rhythm of the new group, but the articulation and movement as well. Continue until all members have cycled through all the rhythm groups.

Two-sided Containers

Later, in the section on free improvisation, I will explain how I build 4-sided boxes to support beginning improvisors in free improvisation. But you can also use two-sided containers to create technique-building improvisations. Here are some examples:

Fast articulation: Side one: play short bursts of quick, well-articulated notes. Side two: Take a 2-second break between each burst.

Directed questions could include: How does your tongue feel? Can you use less effort? Can you hear what others are playing? Did you hear conversations emerge?

Wavy Sounds: Side one: Play long tones with a very wide vibrato. Side two: make sure there are only 4 flutists playing at any one time.

Directed questions: can you hear the interesting sounds that emerge? Do you notice how steady your airflow is? Can you play the vibrato to the end of the note?

Go straight to the source

Using elements of composed works you are working on as a base for improvisation is a good way to help the RFs find new ways to develop the skills needed to perform the section.

Work that rhythm:

Isolate a particularly difficult rhythm, or a section with two rhythms that are difficult to perform together. Try clapping the rhythm. Encourage the clapping to be musical, entertaining, encourage movement at the same time, anything to make it fun.

Perform the rhythms using percussive articulation.

Create a new piece based on this rhythm: use the articulated rhythm as a base, have the RFs take turns playing a solo over the rhythm.

Recomposing:

Ask the ensemble to describe the piece you are working on using non-musical descriptive words. Create an improvisation based on their description of the piece.

Change the key. See if you can keep the essence of the piece by changing other aspects as well: time signature? Tempo?

Go back and play the original work after the improvisations. Does it feel different?

What's that scale?

Have ensemble members look at a particularly nasty technical challenge within the work they are performing. Find the notes involved in the passage and create a scale from them. Play the notes in scale order, rather than in the order they appear in the passage. Play it back and forth a few times. Use different types of articulations.

Improvise on this scale. Start in pairs, creating short question and answer type conversations, move into a larger free improvisation. Encourage the ensemble to try different combinations of the notes in different rhythms, rather than trying to mimic the original order and rhythms found in the composed work.

Often there will be a simpler accompaniment in the work underneath the technical challenging part. Divide the ensemble into two groups, have one group perform the accompaniment, while the other improvises using the challenging 'scale'. Switch roles.

When you go back to performing the actual written composition, do you and the RFs notice a difference?

Musical Awareness through Improvisation

All good rehearsals should start with improvisation (David Dolan, 2014, masterclass, Helsinki).

As a rehearsal cycle progresses, the focus will change. You might not need to spend as much time working on technical challenges but including improvisation can still keep rehearsals novel and entertaining while helping to develop your ensemble's musical understanding. Different types of free improvisation can be used throughout a rehearsal: in the beginning as a warm-up, at the end to 'cool off', or in the middle to redirect focus or create novelty. Tie these improvisations to the works you are performing by using keys, harmonies, or themes found in the works.

A few general instructions for all free improvisation exercises: These exercises should be introduced once the ensemble has worked with improvisation for some time. The first exercise I explain here is a good way to introduce freer improvisations into rehearsals as it provides supportive limits to RFs who may be somewhat anxious about creating spontaneous music. It can also be effective to divide the ensemble into smaller groups for the first explorations. Have each group prepare their own improvisation and perform for each other.

Building a Box for Improvisation

When introducing improvisation into rehearsals, especially freer improvisational exercises, it will be important in the beginning to create limits that can serve as support for beginning improvisers. Finding four 'sides' that build a box to hold an improvisation can help bring some structure and support into freer improvisations.

'Sides' can be anything: one particular key, dynamic, theme, the number of flutists playing at once…whatever is relevant to the ensemble, and the present exercise. It can be a good idea to use sides that pertain to a specific piece the ensemble will rehearse after this exercise. Here are a few examples of 4-sided boxes to use as a basis for free improvisations :

A. 1). Use the notes of an F pentatonic scale (F,G,A,C,D). 2). Play everything legato, no articulation. 3) Dynamic range should stay between p–mf. 4). Constant feeling of motion, no super long notes.

B. 1) Use the notes of a one octave chromatic scale from G on the staff. 2) All notes should be strongly articulated. 3) Play as loudly as possible. 4) Most notes should be short, But if you haven't heard a long tone being played in a while, play one and hold it as long as possible.

C. 1) Think of a foggy morning. 2) Start in a minor but add other notes as necessary. 3) Limit the number of flutists playing at one time to 4 or 5. 4) The improvisation ends with the sun rising through the fog.

One of the rules could always be 'feel free to break the box if necessary'. Even if it's not one of the rules, it should be implied that the sides are there to help the RFs feel safe. Once they do, they should be encouraged to 'break out of the box'.

Soundscapes

Soundscapes are free improvisations with no limits placed on them. This type of improvisation may be difficult at first, as it is my experience that if RFs don't feel comfortable, they will not be willing to explore during this type of improvisation. However, once you have started to introduce different types of improvisational exercises into rehearsals, occasional free explorations can expand ideas and help the director understand how the ensemble is working together.

Soundscapes can be performed with or with or without instruments, conducted or completely free. It may be a good idea to start without instruments to help the RFs practice listening and responding to ideas they hear without having to worry about instrumental challenges.

Without instruments:

Have the RFs sit in a circle facing outwards. It's a good idea to turn off the lights as well, so it's easier to concentrate on listening. Have the RFs make sounds–any kind of sounds–but to also listen to what others are doing and copy what they hear.

Allow this exercise to go on as long as possible. If it ends very quickly–after just a few minutes – have a discussion where you encourage the RFs to listen with curiosity. Do they hear interesting sounds being produced around them? Encourage them to answer those sounds. Encourage the flutists also to try being 'disruptive' occasionally by playing a sound that they don't think belongs. How does that feel? What sort of response does it create in the rest of the ensemble?

Do the same, with instruments. Again, let the improvisation end on its own (check the note at the end of this section about ending improvisations for more information). If you hear that the resulting improvisations are very 'careful' – without interesting rhythmic or harmonic change – encourage the RFs to play something opposite to what they hear. Or come up with a theme for the improvisation. Consider building a box to start with one or two sides and encourage the flutists to break the box as soon as possible.

Conducted

Use simple gestures to conduct a soundscape: Holding up one finger= solo, 2 fingers = rhythmic accompaniment, making an O with the first finger and thumb = long tones. Also use entrance and cut off cues and include dynamics. The conductor decides which

members play what they play and when. Allow ensemble members to try conducting these soundscapes.

Start by asking for a rhythmic accompaniment. This will give the soloists a more secure space to play in.

Try this exercise both in a specific key, as well as without any specified tonality.

Story telling

Create a quick story by asking different individual ensemble members the following questions: 1.)'Once upon a time there was a …' 2.)'One day the…' 3.)'After that, (this happened)…' 4.)'Which meant that…' 5.) 'Finally…' Feel free to change and adapt the questions depending on your needs or how the story is progressing. Don't make it too long.

Break into smaller groups, and have each group come up with a musical interpretation of the story.

Perform the improvisations for each other.

Have each group assign a mood to their improvisation. Then have them perform a second time, this time exaggerating the mood they chose.

Combine the improvisations into one large group performance.

Composed improvisation

Find repertoire that incorporates improvisation to bring new ideas to the ensemble. Wil Offermans and Sophie Dufeutrelle both have works for flute ensemble would be suitable. Finnish composers J.P. Lehto and Lauri Toivio have also written pieces for flute ensemble that are a good way to introduce extended techniques and improvisation.

Sophie Dufeutrelle's *Avieries* in particular is a good work to introduce improvisation: it not only includes suggested themes, but also ideas for how the ensemble can divide into groups within the ensemble to develop the improvisation. A list of works containing improvisation can be found on my website: https://www.kathyweidenfeller.com/resources/

Have ensemble members create their own abstract scores for improvisation. If you have members who are visual artists, or writers, ask if they will share their work as prompts for future improvisations.

Non-musical Prompts

Ask ensemble members, individually, or in small groups, to create a short improvisation based on objects, ie 'cat', 'snowflake', 'thunderstorm' etc.

Perform for each other and ask the audience to guess what object they are improvising.

Another possibility is to have everyone improvise on the same object and notice the different ways each improvisation creates an image of the same object.

Use Poems, paintings, pictures as prompts for free improvisations.

Encourage ensemble members to share any of their own artwork or suggest their own favorite work as a prompt. Divide the ensemble into small groups, have the groups perform for each other.

Have one member of each group teach their improvisation to a new group

Combine the improvisations into a large group improvisation. Ask everyone to bring elements of the improvisations they remember to the large group work and exaggerate them.

Finally, a few general comments that can help the ensemble get more out of working with free improvisation. As I mentioned at the start, I don't recommend that the director uses much guided questioning in free improvisation. Instead, use performances and repetition with variations to develop ideas. I also don't recommend that the conductor participates especially if they don't usually play within the ensemble. Even if I plan to perform within a performed improvisation during a concert, I usually do not rehearse improvisation with the ensemble so that the improvisation grows organically from the ensemble itself, without my input. I feel this helps the RFs develop confidence in their own musical voice.

Developing Free Improvisations

With free improvisation, the focus is on exploring musical ideas and developing a sense of musical form, fluidity, and expression rather than developing specific skills. So rather than using guided questions to direct the RFs' attention to certain aspects of the exercise, here, the director should encourage the flutists to develop the ideas they are exploring.

In the descriptions of the exercises above, I have included some ideas of how to do that by performing the same improvisation in different ways. Here, I wanted to expand a little on those ideas.

Begin Free Improvisation work in small groups. Give each group about 5 minutes to work on their improvisation then have everyone perform for each other. Limiting the amount of time each group has to develop their improvisation can prevent overthinking and encourage the RFs to make decisions in the moment.

Have the small groups perform for each other, and encourage the audience (the listening groups) describe the improvisation: either describing structures (such as 'long, flowing phrases', 'strongly articulated', etc) or by using adjectives ('angry', 'moody' or 'sad')

Ask the audience members to perform the improvisation back to the original group, based on what they remember, and the descriptions. Or, have one member of each group move to another group, and teach the new group the improvisation they originally performed. Come back and perform for each other again.

After doing this kind of small group work, come together for a large improvisation based on what the ensemble remembers from each of the smaller improvisations.

A Note about Endings

Knowing when to end can be one of the most difficult parts of improvising. The first few times you do a free improvisation exercise with your adult ensemble one of two things will most likely happen: the improvisation is very short–less than a minute long – or the improvisation is very long and wandering, with no end.

Too short?

Break up the ensemble into smaller groups so that each flutist has more of a say in the improvisation and has less to listen to.

Have the small groups perform for each other. Listening to other groups perform can help the ensemble be more aware of how the length of an improvisation comes across to the audience.

Have the groups (large or small) come up with a story to go along with their improvisation. Or a shape, or musical form. Ask them to be aware of how the improvisation moves through the story or completes the shape or form.

Sometimes improvisations are too short because it can be difficult in the beginning to tolerate silence. If that is the case, ask the ensemble to listen carefully: do they feel there is still something more to say? Encourage the RFs to include silence in their improvisation.

Too long?

It's a good idea to allow the first few improvisations to go on as long as possible. I find when working with RFs that the first improvisational explorations are more likely to be too short than too long. In my experience, when improvisations become long with no apparent ending, it is a sign that the RFs are feeling more comfortable during improvisation. Let everyone say what they need to say without defining endings at first. Wait 'too' long to stop an improvisation if you need to because of time restraints.

Create a story to contain the improvisation, especially how the story ends.

Encourage the RFs to listen to each other, and engage in conversations during the improvisation, answering questions or repeating ideas they hear. Remind them to stop to think about what they want to say. Encourage them to feel comfortable with silence.

As the ensemble spends more time listening to each other, rather than just playing, it should become easier to feel or hear when an improvisation has reached the end.

Free improvisation takes time. Eventually the RFs will start to get a sense of when an improvisation has reached its end. They will become more confident in their ability to create interesting improvisations and their performances (most likely not just of improvisations) will sound more natural.

Additional Reading

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Chapter 6 Finding Balance

> …if you are searching for ways to enliven your rehearsals…every couple of minutes add burst of invigorated, vibrant, and almost frenetic pace. Change in pace is even more important than trying for a fast pace (Boonshaft, 2002, 13).

One of the biggest challenges when introducing improvisatory exercises into rehearsals is finding a balance between the improvisational sections and more traditional sections. This is important to consider when creating the overall arch of the rehearsal period but also in planning each individual rehearsal. I tend to plan most of our reflective improvisational work during longer weekend rehearsal sections. This gives us more time to explore and still leaves time for more traditionally paced rehearsing as well. When the RFs come to a shorter weeknight rehearsal, they often want to 'just play' through pieces. At the same time, spending some time focusing in the way that improvisation requires can prepare the ensemble to 'just play' more effectively and enjoyably. Learning to read the needs of your ensemble will help you find a balance that works for your group. Be aware: when you notice signs that the RFs are becoming bored with an improvisational exercise or loosing awareness during faster paced rehearsal sections it is time to chance the pace of the rehearsal, move on, or stop for a movement break.

I schedule more time for reflective exercises in the first rehearsals of a period especially with a young ensemble or an ensemble new to improvisation. Trust building exercises take time. Early improvisational explorations take time as well and work best with minimal time restraints. Once RFs gain the courage to start playing during improvisational exercises, they will have a lot to say. And it takes time to move beyond needing to play a lot towards a more aware, interesting, and structured improvisation.

Below is an example of a rehearsal period including six rehearsals, a dress rehearsal, and warm-up before the final concert. When I plan rehearsals, I do so with the awareness that the final rehearsals usually do not end up going exactly the way I have planned them in the beginning. I am constantly adjusting the plan during the period as I become aware of the needs of the ensemble. The most important thing is to have a plan and to continue to adjust the plan throughout the period, while remaining aware of the total amount of time available.

Example Rehearsal Period Plan

1) **Building trust, organizational work (part distribution), sight read accessible work(s)**

- **20 min: Name, City, Color exercise**
- **30 min: Distribute parts, read through 1st work – should be easily accessible**
- **10 min: Break**
- **10 min: Entrances exercise**
- **20 min Distribute parts, read through one or two sections of 2nd work**

2) **Themed rehearsal: intonation**

- **15 min A-B-A exercise**
- **10 min Bending exercise**
- **20 min read through 1st work**
- **15 min Break/ distribute pieces of 3rd work**
- **5 min My Favorite Scale**
- **25 min Work on 2nd piece, include Hairpin Dynamics exercise in trouble spots**

3) **Faster-paced rehearsal**

- **5 min My Favorite Scale**
- **30 min Work on 3rd piece, clarifying structural difficulties**
- **10 min movement break – Awareness walking**
- **15 min read through 1st work, refer to intonation rehearsal work**
- **25 min Work on 2nd piece, including some Recomposing work**
- **5 min distribute 4th work**

4) **Themed rehearsal: rhythm**

- **15 min Walking with intention**
- **15 min Rhythm squares using rhythms from 4th work**
- **5 min break**
- **25 min work on 4th piece, using Work that Rhythm exercise if necessary.**
- **5 min Free improvisation in the key of 3rd work, with rhythmic accompaniment**
- **25 min Work on rhythmic sections of 3rd work.**

5) **Faster-paced rehearsal**

- **5 min Play through 1st work**
- **5 min Circle of A**
- **25 min Work on 4th piece, referring back to rhythmic exercises from last rehearsal**
- **20 min Work on 2nd piece using What's that Scale**
- **10 min break**
- **30 min work on 3rd piece using Recomposing when necessary**

6) **Themed rehearsal: Improvisations and interpretation**

- **10 min Gifting**
- **15 min Building a Box, using pictures for inspiration**
- **10 min Play through 4th piece**
- **20 min use harmonic progression from 3rd piece as a basis for improvisation, then play through work**
- **10 min break**
- **15 min Work on 2nd piece using Recomposing**
- **10 min Improvise on 1st work, then play through work**

Dress rehearsal

- **10 min Walking with Awareness**
- **5 min Bending**
- **30 min Play through works 1 and 2, discuss, play again if necessary**
- **10 min Break**
- **30min Play through works 3 and 4, discuss, play again if necessary**
- **5 min Announcements**

Warm up before the concert

- **5 min My Favorite Scale**
- **20 min Read through parts of each piece, just enough to check tempos and make sure everyone feels comfortable**
- **Just before the performance, 5 min Gifting**

Additional Reading

- Chapters 4.2 and Chapter 5, Weidenfeller, K. 202., *Returning Flutists: Developing Improvisational Rehearsal Techniques for use with an Ensemble of Non-professional Flutists Returning to a Musical Practice.*

- https://www.kathyweidenfeller.com/resources/.

- Agrell, Jeff. 2008. *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians.* Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

- Gwin, Peter, 2007, *Group Improvisation,* Meriweather Publishing, Colorado Springs.

- Johnstone, Keith, 1981, impro, Improvisation and the Theatre, Methuen Drama, London.

- Sarath, Edward, 2010. *Music Theory Through Improvisation.* New York: Routledge.

- Nachmaninov, Stephen, 1990, *Free Play Improvisation in Life and Art*, New York: Tarcher Putnum.

A Finale Note

I hope that handbook helps directors better understand RFs and begins conversations on how to serve them better. I hope that it encourages directors to move away from formal types of rehearsal structures and encourages you to introduce new ideas and new music to your ensemble. I hope it has helped you understand how improvisation can be a tool to build trust, technique, and musical understanding.

I also hope this handbook inspires directors (and composers!) to think of ensembles of returning musicians as an important part of the larger musical community. During the project that resulted in this handbook, the HHO collaborated with young students and professional flutists in performances. They were able to work with composers during rehearsals. Everyone involved in these collaborations learned something and came away from the experience with a renewed sense of energy. To read more about how the HHO became a part of the larger musical community in our area, please see Chapter 5 of the report of this project.

I will continue to update https://www.kathyweidenfeller.com with ideas and resources. I also invite you to contact me with your own experiences using these rehearsal techniques with your own ensembles.