Woodwind Quintet Literature

by Joanna White

Flutists learn many skills from performing in woodwind ensembles because these ensembles are the core of an orchestral wind section. The late Roger Stevens, Los Angeles Philharmonic flutist and teacher at the University of Southern California, was such an advocate of woodwind quintets that he even proclaimed that if an orchestra had its woodwind players actively participating in four woodwind quintets as well as small ensembles for the string and brass players, it would greatly improve the orchestra because everyone would listen and adjust to each other.

The intonation, tonal blend, balance, and adjustments between the solo and accompaniment in a woodwind quintet are basically the same as those encountered every day in an orchestra. Indeed a woodwind quintet is a microcosm of any large ensemble.

In a quintet a strong sense of rhythm is so important that groups often rehearse with a metronome, or they may speak word patterns that match the rhythmic nuances of the music. For the rhythm in the coda of the last movement of the Partita by Iving Fine quintets have traditionally practiced by saying opportunity knocks to imitate the quintuplet rhythm.

To improve intonation, quintets often play unison scales at varying dynamics. Wind intonation is different from working with an equal-tempered keyboard instrument because just intonation is used. Quintets can hold a simple major triad, remembering that the fifth of the triad should be slightly wide, and the third should be lowered about 14 cents for just or pure intonation. It is best to use various dynamics and voicings during this exercise, and players should adjust to the root of the chord. Tuners provide a good reference point, but ultimately players must be able to tune to each other as they play.

Ensemble members should know the intonation tendencies of the other instruments in the group. For example, flutes tend to play flat in a decrescendo while clarinets tend to play sharp. Take rehearsal time to explore the pitch tendencies of each instrument so that adjustments can be anticipated. Flutists should be completely familiar with all alternate fingerings in order to match pitches with other players quickly.

Musicians spend a lot of time talking about note beginnings, but they spend relatively little time discussing note endings. In quintets the attacks, note lengths, and note releases are very important. Ensembles should develop a full vocabulary of articulation or bowing styles for the broad range and style of musical compositions in the literature. Playing notes that are soft, loud, short, or long is not enough; gentle, firm, bombastic, crisp, lilting, and delicate articulations are also necessary.

String quartets blend easily because they play instruments with similar timbres, but wind players must use tone color changes to blend and contrast with each other in order to provide an interesting tonal palette. Sometimes flutists should sound brassy like a horn by using upper lip pressure and air directed down, and other times flutists should sound cool like a clarinet by opening the embouchure and using more air pockets in the upper cheeks.

Flutists must also determine how much vibrato to use, and how wide and fast it should be. Because flutists often play in unison or octaves with the oboe, they should match vibrato speeds and widths in order to blend. The clarinet uses little or no vibrato, and flutists sometimes play with a straight sound to blend with the clarinet. At other times a small amount of vibrato provides the desired color on top of the compound sound. Solo passages require a bold, bright vibrato, and chorale sections require very little. Experienced players know when to meld into the ensemble’s sound and when to be the icing on the cake.

Flutists often direct woodwind quintets because they can conduct with the end of the flute so easily, but the music often dictates which player should lead. The group should decide who starts each movement and sometimes each phrase. The player who leads should breathe in tempo before the first note to make the tempo clear to everyone. As players move and breathe simultaneously, they will feel the entrances together. Some flutists move around too much while playing, which is quite distracting in a woodwind quintet. To avoid confusion within the ensemble, they should avoid extraneous movement when another instrumentalist leads.

The earliest woodwind quintet literature was written in the 19th century, but transcriptions and arrangements from earlier eras are numerous. Information about composers and the performance styles from many time periods is important for accurate interpretations.

Good balance within a quintet reflects a collective understanding of the compositional form, who has the solo and accompaniment, and where the phrases peak. The first time I heard the fourth movement of Hindemith’s Kleine Kammermusik, I had no idea what instruments were playing in the middle section because the flute, muted horn, and clarinet played so softly and balanced. This is the goal for all small ensembles.

Additional quintet resources are available at www.personal.cmuich.edu/~white1jm/, and I recommend the following works for woodwind quintets at the levels indicated:

**Standard Woodwind Quintets**
- Collection, Twenty-Two Woodwind Quintets (Southern Music)
- Collection, Ross Taylor Woodwind Quintets (Southern Music)

**Grade 3 Standard Repertoire**
- Agay, Denes, Five Easy Dances (Theodore Presser)
- Barthe, A., Passacaille (Southern Music)
- Haydn, Joseph, Two Short Quintets (Southern Music)
- Jacob, Gordon, Swansea Town (Emerson Editions)
- Kvandall, J., Hymn Tunes (Nordiska Musikforlaget)

**Secondary Grade 3 Works**
- Arne, Thomas, Suite of Dances (Skidmore Music)
- Washburn, Robert, Quintet for Winds (Oxford Univ Press)

**Grade 4 Standard Repertoire**
- Arnold, Malcolm, Three Shanties (Warner Bros. Pub.)
- Bach, J.S., Little Fugue in G Minor (Western International Music)
- Danzi, Franz, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 56, #2 (G. Schirmer)
- Farkas, Ferenc, Antique Dances (Editio Musica Budapest)
- Gebauer, Francois R., Quintet #2 in E♭ Major (Universal Edition Pub.)
Klughardt, August, Quintett, Op. 79 (McGinnis & Marx)
Lefebvre, Charles, Suite, Op. 57 (International Music)
Milhaud, Darius, La Chemine du roire (Southern Music)
Piazzolla, Astor, Milonga sin Palabras (International Opus)
Plog, Anthony, Animal Ditties (Editions BIM)
Reicha, Anton, Quintet in E minor, Op. 88, #2 (Assoc. Music Pub.)
Sweelinck, Jan Peters, Variations on Folksong (Boosey and Hawkes)

Secondary Grade 4 Works
Amos, Keith, Lupin, the Pot-Bellied Pig (Caprice Music)
Arrieu, Claude, Quintet in C Major (Billaudot)
Berger, Jean, Six Short Pieces (C.F. Peters)
Biggs, John, Scherzo, publisher unknown
Bord, Henri, Quintet, Op. 2, #1 (McGinnis & Marx)
Felciano, Richard, Contractions (E.C. Schirmer)
Forster, Emmanuel Aloys, Quintet (Southern Music)
Foster, Arnold, Variations by Giles Farnaby on Elizabethan Song and Dance Airs (Oxford Univ. Press)
Hoover, Katherine, Homage to Bartok (Papagena Press)
Jager, Robert, Mumbley Peg (Ludwig)
Mozart, W.A., Magic Flute Overture (Neil A. Kjos)
Perle, George, Quintet for Winds #4 (Galaxy Music)
Persichetti, Vincent, Pastorale, Op. 21 (C. Schirmer)
Rameau, Jean-Phillipe, Gavotte with Six Doubles (Assoc. Music Pub.)
Roseman, Ronald Isaac, Renaissance Suite (E.C. Schirmer)
Schuller, Gunther, Suite (McGinnis & Marx)
Still, William Grant, Miniatures for Woodwind Quintet (Intern'l. Opus)

Grade 5 Standard Repertoire
Berio, Luciano, Opus Number Zoo (Universal Edition Publications)
Bozza, Eugene, Scherzo, Op. 48 (Alphonse Leduc)
D'Rivera, Paquito, Aires Tropicales (Havana-New York Music Co.)
Damase, Jean-Michel, Dix-sept Variations, Op. 22 (Alphonse Leduc)
Fine, Irving, Partita (Boosey & Hawkes)
Gershwin, George, Porgy & Bess (Gershwin Pub.)

Band and orchestra directors often have problems finding good repertoire for young woodwind quintets because music catalogs seldom give other information besides the difficulty level.

My suggestions with instrument ranges, key signatures, rhythms, possible music hazards, and annotations by players who have actually performed the music, are a small sampling of woodwind quintets that are graded in Woodwind Quintet Repertoire for the Young Musician at www.Mus.cmich.edu/

Early High School
Agay, Denes, Five Easy Dances, 1956, grace notes, frequent accidentals and off-beats, crucial accent placement. (Theodore Presser)
Barthe, Adrienne, Passacaille, 1966, fugal section, 16th-note triplets, trills. (Southern Music)
Biret/Holcombe, Habanera, 1988, large leaps in clarinet and bassoon, grace notes in oboe and flute, horn has some bass clef and very low notes. (Musicians Publications)
Guion, David/Waln, George, The Harmonica Player from Alley Tunes, 1968, oboe and flute grace notes, bassoon and horn mostly off-beats, accidentals in all parts, some bassoon notes are out of the range with an optional 8va. (Neil Kjos)
Mendelssohn, Felix/Seay, Albert, Scherzetto, Op. 102, #3, 1951, presto, some accidentals, bassoon has low, fast articulation. (Jack Spratt)
Mozart/Weigelt, Gunther, Divertimento #14, K. 270, 1954, trills in flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon, last bar of 1st mvt. has upper range for the flute.
Pierne, Gabriel, Pastorale, Op. 14, #1, 1949, horn part in G, key change from minor to major, # meter, some accidentals (Alphonse Leduc)

Late High School
Beethoven/Skowronek, Felix, Five Pieces for Mechanical Organ, 1973, bassoon 1st mvt. tenor clef and extreme range, 3rd mvt. has complete rhythms, 4th mvt. dotted eighth-sixteenth note pattern in all parts. (Oxford Univ. Press)
Cambini, Giuseppe Maria, Quintet #1, 1963, 16th-note diatonic or arpeggios runs in all parts, horn in Eb, 3rd mvt. faster with chromatics (McGinnis & Marx)
Farkas, Ferenc, Antiche Danze Unghesi, 1959, 32nd runs in flute and clarinet, 2nd mvt. bassoon has tenor clef, 3rd mvt. key change to four sharps, 5th mvt. fast, articulation in flute (Editio Musica)

Ibert, Jacques, Trois Pieces Breve, 1953, 1930, some bass clef for horn, tenor clef for bassoon, difficult rhythmic passages in upper Woods, some stopped horn, many accidentals, meter change in 3rd mvt. (Alphonse Leduc)
Joslin, Scott/Iannaccone, Anthony, The Easy Winners, 1975, complex syncopations, ragtime rhythms with ties, accidentals, fast tonguing, (Shawnee Press)
Roseman, Ronald, Renaissance Suite, 1980, 2nd mvt. bassoon in tenor clef, 3rd mvt. meter changes, stylistic challenges. (Schirmer)
Taffanel, Claude, Quintet, 1983, horn in Eb, chromaticism and accidentals, register skips in flute, oboe, clarinet, 1st and 3rd mvt. faster, large range for horn. (A. Leduc)

MaryBeth Tuma Minnis is assistant professor of bassoon and assistant director of the School of Music at Central Michigan University. She performs frequently in several orchestras in Michigan and is an active chamber musician and clinician.
Mendelssohn, Felix, Scherzo from Midsummer Night’s Dream (Doblinger)
Mozart, W.A., Fantasy in F Minor, K. 608 (Hans Sikorski)
Onslow, George, Wind Quintet in F Major, Op. 81 (F.E.C. Leuckart)
Reicha, Anton, Quintet in C Major, Op. 91, #1 (C.F. Peters)
Takacs, Jeno, Eine Kleine Tafelmusik Op. 74 (Doblinger)
Tanausuz, Justinian, Alabaqa Luli (International Opus)

Grade 6 Standard Repertoire
Barber, Samuel, Summer Music, Op. 31 (Schirmer)
Blumer, Theodor, Quinter, Op. 52 (Original Print)
Blumer, Theodor, Tanz-Suite, Op. 53 (Schott)
Carter, Elliott, Woodwind Quintet (Associated Music Publishers)
Dahl, Ingolf, Allegro and Arioso, (McGinnis & Marx)
Etler, Alvin, Quintet #1 (Associated Music Publishers)
Etler, Alvin, Quintet #2 (Associated Music Publishers)
Nielsen, Carl, Quintet, Op. 43 (Wilhelm Hansen)

Secondary Grade 6 Works
Bach, Jan, Skizzen (Galaxy Music)
Badings, Henk, Quintet #2 (Donemus)

Bland, Ed, Woodwind Quintet #1, Jazz Quintet (Osmund Music)
Blumer, Theodor, Serenade und Thema mit Variationen, Op. 34 (Sikorski)
Crawford-Seeger, Ruth, Suite (Alexander Broude)
Dejong, Conrad John, Variations on Spanish La Folia (Josef Marx)
Francais, Jean, Wind Quintet #2 (Schott)
Genzmer, Harald, Blaserquintett (C.F. Peters)
Hetu, Jacque, Quintette, Op. 13 (Durnbemar)
Moysie, Louis, Quintet for Winds (McGinnis & Marx)
Pijper, Willem, Quintet (Donemus)
Pliss, Karl, Serenade (Doblinger)
Schirn, Lalo, La Nouvelle Orleans (Scherzo Music)
Steenvansky, Endre, Quintette #2 (Boosey & Hawkes)
Tomasi, Henri, Quintette (Henry Lemoine)

The following works are exceedingly difficult:
Deak, Jon, Bremen Town Musicians (Carl Fischer)
Francais, Jean, Wind Quintet #1 (European Amer. Music Dist.)
Harbison, John, Quintet for Winds (G. Schirmer)

Villa Lobos, Heitor, Quintette en forme de Choros (Editions Max Eschig)
Secondary Difficult Works
Aquila, Miguel, Wind Quintet #2 (Perr International)
Higdon, Jennifer, Autumn Music (Lawdon Press)
Maslanka, David, Quintet #2 (Carl Fischer)
Orban, Gyorgy, Wind Quintet (Editio Musica)
Tower, Joan, Island Preludes (Assoc. Music Pub.)

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Ohio Flute Festival Winners
At the Central Ohio Flute Association Festival last April Katie Williams, student of Diane Gilley, won the junior division, Morris O’Brien, a student of Bradley Garner, won the senior division, and James DeVoll, also a Garner student, won the young artist division.