

Rock n' Roll High School

How a Rock Band class can work in a well-rounded high school music program

Presented by Matthew Verplaetse

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Novato High School



About me

My resume includes:

- Degrees from universities in Indiana
- Performance experience as a saxophonist in concert bands, saxophone quartets, and jazz bands
- Teaching primarily concert bands, jazz bands, marching bands, and orchestras at various levels

It does **not** include:

- Any rock performance experience
- Ability to play a standard rock instrument

About Marin School of the Arts

- Marin School of the Arts is a specialized program within Novato High School
- Novato High School enrollment: about 1400
- Music classes include:
 - Two concert bands
 - Two jazz big bands
 - String orchestra
 - Three vocal music classes
 - Two Rock Band classes



Why teach rock band?

(And how to explain it using administrator-friendly language)

- Allows for a more student driven instructional model than more traditional music classes
- More student voice and choice in repertoire
- Seamless integration of project-based learning into your music program
- Attracts students who might not otherwise enroll in a music class
- Culturally relevant to students
- Trains students on their instruments, music theory, working collaboratively, and more

.... but how?

Structure of the MSA Rock Band Program

- Two sections: Intermediate and Advanced Levels
- 18 students In each section: 6 vocalists, 6 harmony instruments (guitar/keys), 3 bass players, 3 drummers (3 bands with 2 vocalists, 2 harmony instruments, 1 bass player, and 1 drummer each)
- Students placed in groups by instructors with condition that groups may and will change at any time at the instructors' discretion
- Students chosen by audition (but most get in)

The MSA Rock Band curriculum

How the classes are organized and planned

- Organized into two-week units or projects. Usually one assigned song + one student choice
- Projects include covering specific artists, time periods, or styles or writing an original song
- Source material: always recordings, never tabs
- Each two week unit offers several grading & assessment opportunities:
 - Song choice assignments
 - Background information assignments
 - Class Performances

Rubrics

Song selections



Choose songs for Class Performance 6: Pre...

Due Dec 4, 3:55 PM

Posted Nov 30

For our last class performance of the semester, each group will perform one song by The Pretenders and one song of their choice. List your selections here.

1

Turned in

1

Assigned

14

Graded

Grading Rubric (10 points total)

3 points for listing your Pretenders song

4 points for listing the title and original artist of your other song

3 points for being on time

[View question](#)

[View responses](#)

Rubrics

Background info



Background info for Class Performance 6: P...

Due Dec 11, 3:55 PM

Quality of response

/7

Advanced *7 pts*

The response provides relevant information that will help to inform how the piece is performed.

Proficient *5 pts*

The response is relevant to the song or artist but might not be as helpful to how it is performed.

Approaching Profi... *3 pts*

The response has been copied and pasted or provides only very superficial information.

Not Meeting Expect... *1 pt*

The response is irrelevant to the song or artist.

On time

/3

Was this assignment submitted on time?

Yes *3 pts*

No *0 pts*

Rubrics

Class Performances

Response to Feedback

/30 

Feedback received from instructors throughout the course of the assignment has been implemented.

Yes	30 pts	Some	15 pts	No	0 pts
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Preparedness

/10 

The performance shows evidence of preparedness and that rehearsal time has been used productively. Parts and lyrics are performed from memory.

Yes	10 pts	No	0 pts
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Performance Etiquette

/10 

The class performance is treated like a public performance. Setup needs are handled efficiently and in advance when possible. Songs are introduced in a clear and professional manner.

Yes	10 pts	No	0 pts
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Examples of assignments

Artists we've covered

- Ash
- Beatles
- Cars
- Coldplay
- David Bowie
- Buzzcocks
- Byrds
- ELO
- Foo Fighters
- Iggy Pop
- Janet Jackson
- Kinks
- Led Zeppelin
- Lynyrd Skynyrd
- Pretenders
- Ramones
- R.E.M.
- Yardbirds
- Neil Young

Examples of assignments

Themes

- Choose a song by a Black artist (Black History Month)
- Do a song from 1984
- Any song with three-part vocal harmony
- Write an original song
- Musicians in the news - allows for tie-ins with current events

A day in the life

How we spend our class time

- 50 minute classes three times a week, 90 minutes once a week
- First 5-10 minutes: announcements, reminders, what to work on, occasional theory lesson
- Rest of the time: students work in groups, teachers circulate for supervision and feedback - like group work in almost any other class
- Class performances every other Friday, students give each other feedback

Classroom management

Basic principles

- Like any other class, clear and consistent expectations are key
- As multiple bands rehearse simultaneously, rotate frequently
- Keep them busy! Provide regular feedback, “bonus” assignments
- Phone use policy

Concerts

The product of our process

- Four concerts per year, each of our six bands plays 15-20 minutes at venues including:
 - Sweetwater Music Hall (Mill Valley)
 - HopMonk Novato
- Repertoire selected from what students have performed in class
- Doing these off campus, they will be the easiest concerts you ever do!
 - Some venues have their own amps & drums
 - All provide their own sound guy and ticket people
 - Most are generous with splitting proceeds to school programs

HOPMONK



Performances

Additional opportunities

- School-wide events like Open House, Back to School Night, etc.
- Homecoming Parade
- Lunch time concerts
- Other community events



Auditions

Why and how do we audition for this programs?

- Most years, demand exceeds capacity for our two sections on at least one instrument
- Auditioning helps facilitate control over instrumentation - in these classes, perfect instrumentation is essential
- Candidates choose one song from a list we provide and play it with a live band
- Also sometimes ask for scales, improvisation

Equipment

PA system

Item	Recommendation	Notes
Microphones	Shure SM58S	There are cheaper microphones, but quality mics last a long time. This one is the classic SM58 with an on/off switch.
Speakers	Yamaha DXR12mkII	Strongly recommend active (powered) speakers for portability, versatility. Important specs include connections, size, power
Mixers	For large room: Yamaha MG16XU For small room: Mackie 802VLZ	Learning curve is easier with analog mixers. Most important spec: how many mic inputs (not the same as total channels)

Equipment

Important amp specs

- Tube vs. Solid-State
 - Tube: More maintenance, more expensive. Some prefer the tone.
 - Solid-state: Less expensive, more features.
- Amp & speaker cabinet vs. combo amp
 - Amp & speaker cabinet: Can be more powerful, but also expensive.
 - Combo: all one unit. Less expensive, more portable, plenty powerful for most applications.

Equipment

Amplifiers

Instrument	Recommendation	Notes
Guitar	Boss Katana 50	New modeling amps are durable and can sound great, but can be overcomplicated. Different from jazz amp: clean vs. distortion.
Bass	Boss Katana 110	Any combo amp from a reputable manufacturer works. What you have for jazz band should be fine.
Keyboard	Roland KC-200	Roland amps work well, but we often just use the PA system for keyboard application.

Equipment Instruments

Instrument	Recommendation	Notes
Guitar	Fender	Most students interested in Rock will have their own
Keyboard	Roland RD-88	Minimum specs: quarter inch output, at least a few different sounds (organ, etc.)
Bass	Fender	Good to have a couple school-owned in case you need to switch or rotate guitar players
Drums	Gretsch, Pearl, Ludwig	What you have for jazz is fine, although you may want to have separate equipment

Equipment

Odds & Ends

Item	Recommendation	Notes
XLR Cables	Hosa, Mogami, Gator	Used to connect mics and speakers to PA. Always have extra and a plan to replenish. Get various lengths.
Instrument cables	Ernie Ball, GLS - braided or coiled	Used to connect instruments to amps & for PA applications. Like XLR, always have extra & get different lengths.
Microphone stands	On Stage, Gator	Have both straight and boom stands
Guitar stands	Hercules GS414B	Not totally necessary, but good to have around

Equipment

Where do you get this stuff?

- Local Retailer
 - In the North Bay, Bananas at Large & The Magic Flute
- Sweetwater
- Amazon
- Donations!

Other philosophies

Ideas I've heard about in other Rock programs

Beginning Class	We don't do this, but if we did, it would probably be just guitar
Rotating instruments	We don't do it Concert Band, so why do it in Rock?
Use of tabs or sheet music	Tabs found online are riddled with errors
Using horns	Want to keep them in concert bands and jazz bands
Assessment	There are a ton of different ways!

How do I get started?

If I was getting ready to launch a Rock Band class, I would...

- Learn basics of how to set up and operate a PA
 - YouTube videos
 - Mixer manuals
- Find help from someone with experience playing this type of music
- Equipment inventory
- Plan for rehearsal space
- Learn fundamentals on each of the instruments
- Research repertoire
 - Rolling Stone magazine lists of greatest songs, bands, etc.
- Educate administrators, counselors, parents, and students

Acknowledgements

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- Scott Thunes, MSA Rock Band Teaching Artist

I'm happy to discuss anything in this presentation further - contact me at mverplaetse@nUSD.org.

Link to today's slides

