Blair School of Music

COVID-19 Protocols and Practice Room Policies

Spring 2021

Blair faculty committees have established protocols for keeping all faculty, staff, and students safe during this extraordinary time. For musicians, this means we need to make temporary adjustments in the way we perform with each other and interact with our audiences. By being very cautious now, we hope that we can be back to normal performing sooner than later. Our science-based recommendations follow closely the results of the International Performing Arts Aerosol Study Report 3: https://www.nfhs.org/media/4294910/third-aerosol-report.pdf

Concerts:

Faculty and student degree recitals may occur, but without an audience. The only exception is that faculty who are evaluating a student degree recital may attend in person, with appropriate social distancing. Each concert will be live streamed and recorded. If the situation changes as we move through the semester, we will adjust the audience policy as appropriate.

Lessons:

Faculty and students must wear masks during lessons. There are special masks available for voice, brass, and woodwinds in order to reduce the spread of aerosols. Department chairs of these areas will provide further guidance. For strings, percussionists, and pianists, all students and faculty will wear masks at all times. Social distancing is 6x6 feet and for trombones it is 6x9. For areas that involve aerosols, the amount of playing time is 30 minutes, with 15 minutes of clear time before resuming playing. All faculty should allow 20 minutes between students’ lessons so that the air can circulate and refresh.

If lessons are taught online, we recommend: https://cleanfeed.net/. This free platform improves the sound quality while using Zoom. You must use Chrome and both instructor and student should use earphones.

Performance Classes and Ensemble Rehearsals:

Performance Classes and Ensembles may be held in person. For any classes involving aerosols, the total time for playing is 30 minutes.

Practice Rooms

Students will reserve time in the practice room, and 15 minutes will remain free between reservations. Any student who uses a room without a reservation must register their attendance by emailing heather.d.white@vanderbilt.edu. Each practice room will be labeled with instructions for sanitizing both before and after the use of the room. Cleaning supplies are located in the practice room hallways.
Brass Department

In addition to the COVID-related protocols put into place by the Blair School of Music, there are some protocols specific to brass players. These will be strictly enforced and you are expected to abide by these protocols from the moment you step on campus. These have been agreed upon by the entire brass faculty, approved by the Deans of the Blair School, and are informed by the most up-to-date recommendations of the International Performing Arts Aerosol Study. By adhering to these protocols, we can make music together, learn together, and build community in person, all while keeping the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff as our top priority.

Masks while playing:

All brass players should wear a mask when playing their instrument in the presence of another person. This will include ALL ensemble rehearsals of any kind, and MOST in-person private lessons and performance classes. In some special instances, when lessons or performance classes take place in very large spaces (such as IRH, Turner, and Ingram), your teacher may allow you to play without a mask on. This is at the sole discretion of the faculty, and you should always get clear guidance and permission from them before de-masking.

At this time, the wearing of masks during performances will be handled on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Blair leadership. Students doing solo recitals with a pianist can reasonably expect to be able to perform without a mask on (but standing quite far from your masked pianist), but this is subject to change. Ensembles should expect to perform in masks for the time being, but again this is subject to change as we learn more.

There are many different masks available on the internet that people have designed for wind players. Students are of course free to purchase these and try them out. However, for a variety of reasons, and in accordance with the IPAA Study, the current recommendation is that brass students simply wear a disposable mask with a single horizontal slit to make space for the mouthpiece to come through to the lips. The point of a mask while playing is not to necessarily filter out every aerosol particle. The point is to contain the spread of an individual's aerosol “cloud” and keep it as close to the person as possible. According to the research happening at University of Colorado, disposable masks with a slit will do that effectively. It’s their number 1 recommendation for brass players to slow the spread of COVID. The other great thing is that a disposable mask has no detrimental effect on breathing or performance. At worst, it’s a little awkward and annoying.

No matter the mask you wear while playing, there are 5 things that are essential to keep in mind:

1. When putting on your mask, make sure especially that the top of the mask is sealed firmly around the nose and cheeks and that your horizontal slit is properly situated in front of your mouth. You should make sure that the disposable masks you use have the moldable nose-bridge so that you get a snug fit on the top of the mask.

2. The first time or two putting your instrument to your face will be Awkward. Embrace the awkwardness and take some time to help your mouthpiece make its “nest” in the mask, whenever possible without using your hands to manipulate the mask. You may find that opening your mouth (but not exhaling) while putting the instrument to your face can help this process. Once the “nest” is created,
it becomes much easier to put the instrument to your lips and take it down again in a somewhat natural way. After 15 minutes of practice, it will feel pretty normal. After a few days, it will be second nature.

3. When taking the instrument away from your lips, do so with great care, so as not to snag the mask with your mouthpiece and pull the mask away from your face

4. When you are not actively playing, and also not talking, you should breathe through your nose. Breathing through your mouth will just spew aerosols through your now open horizontal slit. Breathing through your nose helps your aerosols get caught in the mask and not spread. An example of this is if you have a multi-measure rest while rehearsing a piece. Another example would be pausing briefly to receive instruction/feedback from your teacher in a lesson or rehearsal before resuming playing.

5. MOST IMPORTANT: If you are talking, or if you are not playing for an extended time, you must put your regular unmodified mask on over your modified “playing mask”.

**Bell covers:**

The bell cover policy will be very similar to the mask-wearing protocol. All brass players will affix bell covers to their instruments any time they are playing in the presence of another person. This will include ALL ensemble rehearsals and MOST in-person private lessons and performance classes. Again, some special exceptions may be granted, at the sole discretion of the faculty. Bell coverings for performances will likewise be handled on a case-by-case basis.

There are many different bell covers on the market for you to try. There are also ways you can use things like panty hose to make a cheap and easy bell cover. You should consult with your studio teacher for further guidance or recommendations. The three keys to remember that are outlined in the IPAA Study: - **GOOD:** Something is better than nothing. Even panty hose can help stop aerosol spread. - **BETTER:** The thicker the material, the better. Play with the thickest bell cover you can stand. - **BEST:** If you apply MERV 13 filter material to the underside of your bell cover, even better! This has proven really effective in the study

**Emptying Water:**

You are responsible for making sure your water is NEVER emptied on a surface that could be touched by another person. That means you CANNOT empty your water on the floor under any circumstances. Especially in the practice room, where the floors are carpeted. There will be 2’x2’ puppy pads at Blair for your use, but the brass faculty recommends that you use those sparingly to prevent needless waste. We recommend that you use either a towel (that gets folded up and placed in a ziploc etc) or a plastic container with a lid (perhaps with paper towels at the bottom that could be replenished daily). Whatever you decide to use to collect your water, you must bring it with you into the room and you must take it with you when you leave the room. Do not use waste receptacles to empty your water unless there is absolutely no other alternative.

IMPORTANT: In case of accidental dripping or spillage onto any shared surfaces, you are responsible for cleaning it up and disinfecting the surfaces. This includes the floor, chairs, and stands. You are responsible for your water!
Voice Department

All students and faculty will remain masked in all lessons and coachings. Lessons and coachings are no longer than 30 minutes with a 15-minute break between students in which everyone will clear the room and the door will be closed behind.

Vocal Performance class is split into two 1/2 hour segments with the break in between. Five singers will sing in each segment without a mask. The singers have been assigned rows toward the back of Ingram Hall, with socially distanced four seats between everyone. Everyone except the singer (while they are singing) will be masked. The singer will be masked until right before they begin to sing and will re-mask directly after.

If requested, or if necessitated by illness, we will teach remotely. We are continuing our quest to find the best way to make that work. Soundjack seems the best solution but that isn’t working on campus due to security issues, probably. VUIT is working on that issue and we hope to have that resolved in the next week.

Choral and Instrumental Ensembles

1. Mask/instrument cover policy for ensembles
   - Any singing with more than one person requires a mask
   - Mandatory to wear a mask in ensembles while playing - wind/brass must have a slit for the mouthpiece.
   - Instrument/bell covers mandatory for winds and brass
   - Any talking must be through an unmodified mask, not your mask with a slit

2. Procedures for entering the room
   - If your instrument produces condensation, please pick up sanitizing wipes/pads before entering
   - Enter the room, sit first then unpack
   - Wind/brass must arrive warmed up and don’t play until instructed to do so. Strings and percussion may warm up normally

3. Playing/singing breaks
   - Any ensemble including winds/brass
     - 30 minutes of playing maximum (marked by stopwatch, timekeeper)
     - INGRAM break procedure: place your instrument in your case, Leave SL, enter SR
     - IRH break procedure: enter single door, exit double door.
     - TURNER break procedure: exit Turner through the SL double door and enter Ingram Lobby, exit through main lobby doors, then return to Turner through main Blair entrance.
   - At the conclusion of playing breaks, please repeat above procedures for entering the room.

4. Managing your playing/singing area
   - Condensation: You are responsible for any condensation collection. Disposable pads will be available
• Rule of thumb: Clean before, clean after

5. End of rehearsal **exit** procedure

- **INGRAM**: pack your instrument, stagger and socially distance, Exit SL and through Ingram Lobby Doors
- **IRH**: exit double doors
- **Turner**: Leave SL, use roundabouts

**Woodwinds Department**

In addition to the COVID-related protocols put into place by the Blair School of Music, there are some protocols specific to wind players. These will be strictly enforced and you are expected to abide by these protocols from the moment you step on campus. These have been agreed upon by the entire wind faculty, approved by the Deans of the Blair School, and are informed by the most up-to-date recommendations of the International Performing Arts Aerosol Study. By adhering to these protocols, we can make music together, learn together, and build community in person, all while keeping the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff as our top priority.

**Masks while playing:**
All wind players should wear a mask when playing their instrument in the presence of another person. This will include ALL ensemble rehearsals of any kind, and MOST in-person private lessons and performance classes. In some special instances, when lessons or performance classes take place in very large spaces (such as IRH, Turner, and Ingram), your teacher may allow you to play without a mask on. This is at the sole discretion of the faculty, and you should always get clear guidance and permission from them before de-masking. At this time, the wearing of masks during performances will be handled on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Blair leadership. Ensembles should expect to perform in masks.

There are many different masks available on the internet that people have designed for wind players. Students are of course free to purchase masks and try them out. The current IPAA study recommendation is that wind reed students wear a disposable mask with a single horizontal slit to make space for the mouthpiece to come through to the lips. The point of a mask while playing is not to necessarily filter out every aerosol particle. The point is to contain the spread of an individual's aerosol “cloud” and keep it as close to the person as possible. According to the research happening at University of Colorado, disposable masks with a slit will do that effectively. It’s their number 1 recommendation for wind players to slow the spread of COVID. The other great thing is that a disposable mask has no detrimental effect on breathing or performance. At worst, it’s a little awkward and annoying.

No matter the mask you wear while playing, there are 5 things that are essential to keep in mind.

1. When putting on your mask, make sure especially that the top of the mask is sealed firmly around the nose and cheeks and that your horizontal slit is properly situated in front of your mouth. You should make sure that the disposable masks you use have the moldable nose-bridge so that you get a snug fit on the top of the mask.

2. The first time or two putting your instrument to your face will be AWKWARD. Embrace the awkwardness and take some time to help your mouthpiece make its “nest” in the mask, whenever possible without using your hands to manipulate the mask. You may find that opening your mouth (but not exhaling) while putting the instrument to your face can help this process.
Once the “nest” is created, it becomes much easier to put the instrument to your lips and take it down again in a somewhat natural way. After 15 minutes of practice, it will feel pretty normal. After a few days, it will be second nature.

3. When taking the instrument away from your lips, do so with great care, so as not to snag the mask with your mouthpiece and pull the mask away from your face.

4. When you are not actively playing, and also not talking, you should breathe through your nose. Breathing through your mouth will just spew aerosols through your now open horizontal slit. Breathing through your nose helps your aerosols get caught in the mask and not spread. An example of this is if you have a multi-measure rest while rehearsing a piece. Another example would be pausing briefly to receive instruction/feedback from your teacher in a lesson or rehearsal before resuming playing.

5. MOST IMPORTANT: If you are talking, or if you are not playing for an extended time, reed players must put on a regular unmodified mask over your modified “playing mask”. If your mask includes a flip-down cover for the mouthpiece opening, you must fold the cover over the slit while not playing.

**Bell covers:**
The bell cover policy will be very similar to the mask-wearing protocol. Reed players will affix bell covers to their instruments any time they are playing in the presence of another person. This will include ALL ensemble rehearsals and MOST in-person private lessons and performance classes. Again, some special exceptions may be granted, at the sole discretion of the faculty. Bell coverings for performances will likewise be handled on a case-by-case basis.

There are many different bell covers on the market for you to try. There are also ways you can use things like panty hose to make a cheap and easy bell cover. You should consult with your studio teacher for further guidance or recommendations. The three keys to remember that are outlined in the IPAA Study:
- GOOD: Something is better than nothing. Even panty hose can help stop aerosol spread.
- BETTER: The thicker the material, the better. Play with the thickest bell cover you can stand.
- BEST: If you apply MERV 13 filter material to the underside of your bell cover, even better! This has proven really effective in the study.

**Reed Water:**
In case of accidental dripping or spillage onto any shared surfaces, you are responsible for cleaning it up and disinfecting the surfaces. This includes the floor, chairs, and stands. You are responsible for your water!

**Brass Methods Class:**

Instruments will be assigned at the beginning of each unit: trumpet (weeks 1-4), trombone (weeks 5-8), horn (weeks 9-12), tuba/euphonium (weeks 13-15). The instructor has already procured these instruments and is quarantining them in isolated storage in Blair School of Music (with the exception of tuba and euphonium, that are being stored in MRH.) Before instruments are assigned, they will be thoroughly cleaned by the instructor, including sterilization of mouthpieces, slides, and the inside of cases. When instruments are returned, they will be quarantined again, and the instructor will complete a thorough cleaning and sterilization before returning them to their regular storage space.
The class has 3 students and meets in IRH, a room with 40-person capacity. This ample space allows us to distance 10 feet between each person side-to-side, as well as 10 feet from the instructor toward the front. Condensation is emptied into a trash bin during class. I place the can centrally and in close proximity to allow them easy access. At the start of every class I sanitize each student’s mouthpiece and provide them with a towel to dry the Sani-Mist after 10 seconds. Students dispose of the towels by placing them in the provided trash can.

After 30 minutes the class discontinues playing to allow for clearing the space of any aerosol buildup. Additionally, this is a sound practice for the following class (conducting).

We are using disposable masks with slits cut into them for playing, and keeping our nose and mouths covered when doing breathing exercises by changing between masks (slit for playing vs. no slit for regular use). Bell covers are also in use while students are playing.

**String Methods Class**

The instructor checks out the instruments from Jenny Simpkins (office staff) for the entire semester and stores them in her office. The students are each assigned to either cello/bass or violin/viola for the first half of the semester. Following the midterm exam, the students then switch to an instrument of the other type. Other than the one-time mid-semester swap, students will not exchange instruments.

Sanitizing stringed instruments is difficult because the varnish used on the bodies of the instruments is alcohol-soluble. Isopropyl alcohol can be used to clean the strings, fingerboard, neck, and chin rests; however, it is difficult to use because even the slightest amount on any other part of the instrument may ruin its varnish. For this reason, students use Webcol alcohol prep pads (the type used for prep for medical injections) because they are not saturated enough that they will drip on the instruments. These prep pads may also be used on fiberglass and composite bows. I recommend a dry cloth to clean the remaining surface areas of the instruments.

We will take careful consideration to mark the cases so students can easily identify which instrument is theirs. Most of the class sessions will be remote; the instructor will monitor a 6-foot social distancing rule for face-to-face class meetings.

**Woodwind Methods Class**:

The faculty check out the necessary instruments from Jenny Simpkins (Blair staff). The students receive them from the instructor after completing the proper paperwork. Each instrument has the necessary cleaning supplies and the students are responsible for care and cleaning. The instructors review the proper cleaning protocols during the first day of instruction on each instrument.

No one will share an instrument during the semester. Students will study flute first, and when they have completed the flute unit, the student will clean the instrument and return to the instructor. The instructors will quarantine the instrument before giving it a final inspection, making sure both the instrument and the case are sanitized. It will then be returned to Jenny Simpkins. The same procedure will be used for saxophone, then clarinet, etc.

During class, students are assigned seats in the classroom, ensuring at least a 10-foot distance between each other. There are three students in the class, in a room with SD capacity of 13. Additionally, the
instructors will use either Zoom or recorded submissions for work on lengthy playing activities and performance exams in order to minimize live playing time in the classroom.

**Protocols for Percussion, Harp, Strings, and Piano**

Students and faculty in these areas must follow the established protocols of wearing masks and maintaining 6-foot distancing at all times. All instrumentalists are using their own music stands and music scores.

**Piano:**

Disinfectant spray and paper towels have been provided in all piano teaching studios and practice rooms. Faculty and students must clean the piano keys before and after each lesson or practice session. Instruments are not shared in lessons since the faculty and student have their own piano.

**Harp:**

Harpists have their own instruments. Wipes, paper towels, and disinfectant spray have been provided for the studio. Students practice individually in the main area of the studio, and there is not eating in the studio. During lessons faculty and student each play their own harp.

**Strings:**

Faculty and students have their own instruments and no sharing is necessary during lessons.

**Percussion:**

Disinfecting and cleaning will occur after each use of a room, instrument, or piece of equipment. The regularity of this process will help to minimize the transmission of any droplets. Individuals will always be responsible for their own items.

Disinfectant wipes will be used to clean synthetic, hard rubber, or metal, including commonly touched items like hardware, metal rims, and keyboard frames. UVC lights have been placed in marimba rooms for sanitizing rosewood instruments that cannot be cleaned with wipes. Disinfecting and cleaning will occur after each use of a room, instrument, or piece of equipment.

Each percussion student has their own mallets and sticks.

Supplies used for disinfection:

- Alcohol wipes
- Sterisol Germicide solution
- Gloves for moving instruments/ cleaning

Wipes are available at all percussion practice rooms (5), teaching studios (2) and drumset room (1).

Steel Bands: Students are encouraged to buy their own sticks. However, if they use university-owned sticks they will be sanitized between classes. Students will touch the instruments and stands as little as possible. Adjustments will be made by the instructor who is wearing gloves.
COVID-19 Practice Room Policies (posted on all practice room doors)

Remember that you are responsible for your own safety and helping to end the spread of COVID-19. By following these protocols, you will be taking part in keeping the Blair building open for your use.

• You MUST have a reservation to use this room. If you do not have a reservation, but need to use the room, immediately send an email to heather.d.white@vanderbilt.edu with the following information:
  o Room Number
  o Day and time you used the room
  o Your instrument
  o Is this a one-time use or would you like to make this a permanent reservation?

• Music stands are no longer in the room. Please provide your own portable stand.

• Brass players MUST use Blair-provided puppy training pads to catch drips.

• Before entering the room, you MUST wash and sanitize your hands.

• Use one Blair supplied wipe (in the hallway) to wipe your hands, doorknobs, and everything you touch when you enter and when you exit the practice room.
  o Please use the wipe to clean the piano keys. If you’re in one of grand piano rooms on the 3rd floor, you’ll use the spray bottle in the room, not the hallway wipes.
  o Don’t forget to wipe everything down when you exit.

• If wipes or puppy pads need to be restocked, please alert Jared Wonderly – jared.wonderly@vanderbilt.edu