Finally, it is important to mention that much of this book could be used in music teachers’ advocacy efforts; many sections and even whole chapters could be shared with fellow staff members, the administration, and even parents.

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Instrumental music teaching involves a complex set of knowledge, skills, techniques, and dispositions. Kevin Mixon’s book, Reaching and Teaching All Instrumental Music Students, is a valuable introduction to many of these aspects of instrumental music teaching. The text addresses many topics, such as the inception of an instrumental music program, recruiting students, gaining support from parents and administrators, designing rehearsals, and improvisation.

The first few chapters of Reaching and Teaching All Instrumental Music Students would be useful for all teachers who are starting music performance groups. Mixon provides specific advice about how to recruit students, and he stresses the importance of learning to relate well to people. He provides examples of tests for examining students’ musical aptitude, letters to send home to parents of potential ensemble members, and procedures for recruitment performances. The book includes advice about maintaining motivation for students who are already involved in ensemble performance. There are excellent descriptions of techniques for dealing with common difficulties that directors encounter, such as individual behav-
ior problems (pp. 43–44).

The middle and end of the book shift to more instrumental-specific information, including tips on designing instrumental rehearsals and introducing notation to an instrumental ensemble. As with some of Mixon’s previous writing (see his article, “Three Learning Styles … Four Steps to Reach Them,” in Teaching Music, February 2004), many of the techniques are geared toward addressing varied learning styles within the rehearsal. The learning sequences that are described are designed for read/write, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners—this would surely be useful for teachers with diverse populations in their classrooms.

Each chapter of this relatively short book addresses a topic that is large enough to be the subject of an entire book itself. Mixon compresses a great deal of information into the book, making it densely populated with valuable information. The audience for the book is not entirely clear, but it is certainly appropriate for preservice or new teachers. This book is not a candidate as a text for an instrumental methods class. For that purpose, defer to texts that address learning styles within the rehearsal. The learning sequences that are described are designed for read/write, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners—this would surely be useful for teachers with diverse populations in their classrooms.

A very strong and much-needed element of this book is its focus on teaching instrumental music in diverse settings and to exceptional learners. Mixon opens the book by stating, “Well-funded and supported instrumental music programs have had the spotlight for so long that many directors have come to believe that quality instruction and high student achievement can only take place in ideal circumstances” (p. xi). The author teaches in an urban environment and is qualified to offer advice for teachers in environments that present economic and cultural challenges. There are a number of useful suggestions for inclusion of varied learners. In addition, the book offers a nice primer for the teacher on improvisation and composition in the classroom.

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Chris Tanner offers a disclaimer at the beginning of Steel Band Game Plan: his book “is only a primer” (xii). While no topic is dealt with comprehensively, the book is an incredibly thorough introduction for anyone faced with the challenges of starting or inheriting a steel pan ensemble. Directing a program in an unfamiliar discipline, one needs questions as much as answers. The book is the ideal jumping-off point for discussing the topic effectively with administrators, or for the first day of steel pan class for the uninitiated music teacher.

Educators considering a steel band program would benefit most directly from the book. Tanner begins with the history of the style, from its origins in tamboo bamboo to current repertoire trends. Though no pan-tuners or pan-makers are listed in the text or appendixes, the various options in pan instrumentation are discussed. Along the way, both ideal and pragmatic options are discussed, and Tanner is forthright about the costs to be considered.

Directors taking over an existing program would benefit from the second half of the book, which addresses technique and rehearsal organization. There are peculiarities to teaching steel pans, and Tanner provides enough of an overview of those techniques to give a new director a good first week before experimentation and imagination lead her further. Photos of hand position and diagrams of steel pan ensemble room layout are invaluable. Basic Soca and Calypso beats are notated, and the arguments among repertoire decisions are presented.

Three appendixes point the reader to further resources, from publishers of steel band music to pan festivals to essential recordings. The appendixes are concise and well annotated. For those who need a quick introduction to the responsibilities of a steel band director, this book is invaluable.

The book is a great beginning’s logistical guide. For directors looking for guidance in arranging, specific repertoire suggestions, or innovative rehearsal techniques, this slim volume would be of little value. The book is not a replacement for a knowledgeable and experienced steel band leader, and for continued success a director should seek such a mentor. As a starting point for a successful directorship, though, one can’t do better than The Steel Band Game Plan.

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