

Music Educator's Time-Saver's: Music Office Organizers!

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I can't think of a better use of time than to have music office utility software programs that can better manage the myriad of administrative tasks that music educators routinely have to do in addition to their teaching and concertizing. For example, most classroom teachers and even some music administrators rarely have sufficient secretarial assistance in managing their responsibilities. In summary, you have to do it yourself! Unfortunately, one of the largest and most consuming task of any music educator is that of record keeping. Here is a better way to handle these burdensome clerical responsibilities.

Summary of Features for Music Office Organizer Software Applications!

Student Records: Grades, attendance, uniforms, equipment checked out, postal address, e-mail address, etc.

Personal Data: Word processing application with mail merging capabilities for bulk mailing. The ability to dial a phone number if a modem is attached to the computer. Printing out labels can be very handy for mailings and music library/equipment needs.

Music Library: Catalog of your music library and recordings, when you last performed it, program notes, parts missing, tips about rehearsing, instrumentation, etc.

Equipment: Name of student and date when it equipment was checked out or in. History of repairs for each instrument, value page of original price, date purchased, depreciation and estimated life.

General Ledger: Fund raisers with records for all budget, expenses and income.

Personal Information Management:

Appointments, things to do, telephone directory of professional contacts.

Solo & Ensemble Organizers:

Can you image hosting one without the aid of personal computers to manage the scheduling of the rooms available, adjudicators and hundreds of students enrolled?

What makes music office utility products so user-friendly is that they are designed specifically for music educators. These programs are essentially a database software application with instant retrieval of information plus the ability to do spreadsheet “what if” calculations for future enrollment and budgeting needs plus general ledger capabilities for maintaining accurate financial records for budgeting and fund raising activities. Their “fields” are already programmed and ready to go for you to use. Please note that not all characteristics listed previously are in every software product reviewed in this installment. In use cases, there are products available in single version or in different versions for band directors, choral directors, orchestra directors, church music director, church organist, solo or ensemble performer and/or music collector/listener. Pricing also varies from \$129 to \$399.00.

There are also special products in different products that can really appeal to ones special interests and needs. For example, programmable fields are possible in different degrees. Some products like Pyware’s two products allow you the option of changing and sorting/searching on nearly all fields to your specific needs plus the option of adding new fields as well. Others allow you to enter several new fields but at some restrictions. The ability to sort by any field and literally print out a report on anything that displayed on the monitor’s screen is useful. There are some products like *WinBand* that can have their data files merged with other users within a school district while

makes for easy use among teachers in a given school district. Bar coding is an exciting new product feature for it allows one to maintain an instrument inventory so easily that you will wish that you were never be without it ever again. For example, you can use an inexpensive hand scanner to bar code all of your music cases and instruments and then checking in and out of instruments is but one flick of your wrist away!

Be aware that some programs are designed in one centralized location in the computer program and others have several individual modules for each segment of the program. Advantage of a single module is that the data entry and access can be quite user-friendly to use and learn plus exceptional quick access for data entry. However, the advantage of a separate modules is that each module can more customized and sophisticated in its database design but also with a higher learning curve. And lastly, some products are designed to operate only a Pentium level computers while others can operate on older Mac's and PC with Windows 3.1 or Mac version 7.0 operating system. The advantage of a higher level operating system is more sophisticated programming design in the program. All programs reviewed in this installment are available on Mac and PC except for *WinBand* and *WinChoir* but these programs can operate on a PowerMac computers.

Music Office Database Software Programs!

Pyware Music Office and Music Administrator System:

Pyware's Music Office and music Administrator System software products are basically the same program for the PC and Mac platforms for \$295 each. Basic differences is in the monitor interface indigenous to each platform. Windows hardware requires: Windows 3.1/95/98 with 16 MB RAM, and 2 MB hard drive space. Mac hardware requirements: 4 MB RAM and 1 MB hard drive space. One aspect of these programs is that the software runs on both older, slower computers and today's "warp" speed computers. The programs are organized so that all six parts are accessible

from the main screen. There are uniforms, equipment, music library, inventory, student data and general ledger sections. There are really attractive parts of these programs that allow you to go into depth. For example in the music library section, there are fields to enter in the description of the music, parts that are missing, enter in points of interest or concern about a particular arrangement, results of the last performance, tips about rehearsing, etc. I like how the parts and pieces can be sorted and printed in any manner you wish. Parts can be also be listed in a spread sheet format showing any missing parts at a glance. The general ledger section is comprehensive in that it can contain records for keeping track of your budget, expenses and income. Each record can be edited individually or displayed in spread sheet format for quick entry. Calculations can be made per month, year, or between any two chosen dates. There is also a summary of accounts or breakdown. The equipment and student file data sections are likewise just as useful and powerful. You can easily customize a section to meet your needs. Simply add any fields you want such as parent information, student class, age., etc. In the equipment section, there is even a history page to show the activity for an item such as repair records or condition along with a value page for vital information such as purchase price, date purchased, and estimated life.

But the strongest point of these products is that most records can be listed individually or in spreadsheet format. They may be sorted or searched by most any field. In fact, any list displayed may be printed. Labels can also be printed for things such as mailings or labels for music, etc. In summary, a very versatile product that can do a lot of different kinds of record keeping. For more information, go to: Web; <<http://www.pyware.com>>.

WinBand and WinChoir:

WinBand and *WinChoir* are identical music office software products for instrumental and

vocal teachers, respectively. PC hardware requirements; Pentium 166 CPU or faster, 32+ MB RAM, Windows 95/98, 20+ MB hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, VGA monitor. Mac hardware requirements; power Mac's and G3/G4 computers. Price: \$199. These products are very easy to use as all you have to do is point and click! All screens are designed to be "user-friendly" and readily accessible for those of limited computer experience. The database format is painless as there are pre-formatted reports and labels for just about any aspect of your music program. Data can be sorted in various ways before printing, making access to data efficient and precise. You will like the fast and easy tables of product applications just waiting to be clicked: student information, attendance, grade entry, grade display, activities, money raised, money owed, music library, equipment inventory, uniform inventory, finances, calendar/diary, phone log along with options, help and exit. Each of these buttons gives you a view to additional screen shot for you to work from.

But what really 'knocks off' my socks are two new features that will be copied by other competitors: bar code scanning of inventory, music library and uniform and extensive global e-mail functions. It is simply amazing to see how powerful bar code scanning can be once you have put on official tags on instruments and their cases. It is literally possible to put all the instruments in a row at the end of school in May or June and walk to each case and scan in the returns without touching your computer's keyboard. To my surprise is that you can be more accurate with bar code scanning techniques as well as much faster than by keyboarding it all by yourself. The global e-mail capabilities can really speed up your communication with parents and students.

Another unusual feature is that it is possible file merge with other WinBand and WinChoir users for overall school district use. I like this feature because it allows you to manage your own data but also allows you to share it with others quickly and accurately, including a centralized

source. This makes it very important to give you the full view of what music, equipment, etc. is available for your use.

There are two other “straight-ahead” music office programs from the same publisher: WinEnsemble and Texas UIL FormsMaster.. The first one will solve the nightmare of scheduling solo and ensemble festivals. Designed for maximum flexibility, the user is able to make complete schedules and reports on practically an unlimited number of entries and judges, including two-day events. The Texas UIL FormsMaster is designed for Texas band, choir and orchestra directors. It enable you to print all nine Texas UIL forms on plain paper and import/export data from existing data bases or other MDM software. For music educators outside of Texas, the Texas UIL FormsMaster can be specially adapted to suite any other state’s contest requirements. Both products are point and click music data management programs. Both programs have the same hardware requirements as *WinBand* and *WinChoir* and priced at \$199 each. For information, go to: Web: <<http://www.winband.com>>.

The RCI Music Library:

The RCI Music Library is designed to organize and track performances, create program notes, catalogue composers, and keep up with equipment and music loans for music directors, performers and collectors. Windows hardware requirements: 486/33 CPU with 8 MB RAM, Windows 95/8/98/NT or later, a hard disk drive and a CD-ROM drive. Mac hardware requirements: 68020 CPU or any Power Macintosh running System 7.1 or later with 8 MB of available RA and a CD-ROM drive. A versatile product that primarily designed to manager your music library and inventory as well as members in your organization, recording library, vendor details, fund raising, an electronic grade book with attendance options and performance data. What

makes this product unique is that it is available in no less than eight versions as follows: band director, choral music director, orchestra director, church music director, church organist, singers, solo or ensemble performer and music collector and listener. This product is the least expensive one reviewed at \$129.00. In addition, there are site licenses available for 10 or more users. It is possible to purchase more than one version so the music library product can be used more efficiently. There are six primary screens in operating this program to store details about pieces of music, composers, instrumental arrangements, performers, performance dates, program notes, loaned materials and more.. Once you enter the data into the fields for the appropriate music, it is accessible from the other five primary screens. There are three renameable fields for further customization. Program is protected with password protection. The printed detailed reports are particularly effective. For more information, go to Web: <<http://www.riden.com>>.

Music Manager Software:

Master Music Manager Software is a database designed specifically for organizing school, community and church music programs. PC Hardware requirements: Pentium 266+ CPU with Windows 98, 15 to 20 MB disk space and 64 MB RAM. Macintosh hardware requirements: PowerPC, System 7.6.5+, 15-20 MB disk space and 64 MB RAM.. The software includes five basic modules which can be customized to meet the user's specific needs. The music library module can be used with the music library, band, orchestral or choral selections. The inventory/equipment module keeps track of equipment, supplies, instruments, and uniforms. The membership module includes a powerful word processing application with mail merging and a spell checker and dictionary capabilities. The recordings library helps the user to search recordings by titles, composer and other fields. The personal directory deals with an address/phone book with the

ability to dial a phone number if a modem is attached to the computer. Note: additional database modules can be designed by the user with DataDesigner, a database builder module which is included in the software package. What makes this software program attractive is its graphic design that is basically point & click operation with many time savings features, such as clairvoyance feature for repetitive entry, time-saving duplicate form entry feature, multiple music libraries with no limit.

Although it is the most expensive product reviewed at \$399 but there are also many extras built-in that will appeal to those who like “whistle and bell” features.. I like the personal monthly planning calendar, templates for letterheads and memo forms, the ability to design custom report forms, import & export data, the ability to customize existing data files and screens, perform math calculations, zip code auto entry and more. For more information, go to:

<http://www.musicmanager.com>.

Summary Comments

Which product(s) are best for you? Contact the web sites cited above and download demos to try at school or home. If you have an older computer, you might have only one or two products available to you. If you have newer computer, your options are greater. Do you desire a centralized, simplistic interface for novice user or are you looking for more power in your software applications with separate modules? Lastly, are there any special product features that you absolutely need? Check out the bar code scanner as one rather powerful feature that is worth investigating. However, each product has their own specialty features that are worth your perusal time before purchasing a product. Good luck making your decision!