



Trouble-Shooting Storage Problems in Music Facilities

By Denny Meyer, Wenger Corporation

In many school music departments, storage can be a stealth problem. Unless you had input in the initial design of the music area, chances are the storage areas are inadequate. There never seems to be enough space to store the furnishings and equipment you use on a daily basis, or items used only seasonally. While you focus on day-to-day teaching activities, it's easy for storage issues to escape detection. Until one day, when the stealth problem suddenly demands your attention. It might be the instrument cases cluttering the floor of the storage room, making navigation dangerous. Or the file cabinets in your music library that are overflowing with sheet music. Maybe the choir robes and band uniforms are hanging unprotected in the open commons area or shoved into overstuffed closets. Or, the worst could happen -- an instrument is stolen.

If not addressed, storage problems like these can become time-wasting distractions that disrupt the teaching and learning process. In addition, improperly stored equipment is more susceptible to damage or theft. This article will offer trouble-shooting advice for common storage problems related to three of the most expensive types of equipment found in school music departments: instruments, sheet music and robes/uniforms. For each type of equipment, solutions should strive to minimize the space required while maximizing the amount of protection.

Instruments. When storage space is scarce – as it usually is – the first step is to identify any instruments that are only used infrequently or seasonally (e.g., contrabassoon, marching band equipment). These instruments may be taking up

valuable space in your rehearsal or storage room that would be better utilized for frequently used instruments.

If you currently store instruments in cabinets and have outgrown your current space, you may consider “doubling up” or “hi-packing” additional instruments into the same compartments to maximize available space.

If there is adequate ceiling height in your rehearsal room, perhaps a mezzanine-type balcony could be built to store infrequently used instruments (e.g., marching band percussion instruments, bass drums, sousaphones, etc.).

When there is no available space in your music area, seek out potential storage rooms in another area of the building, even if it may be far away from the music department.

If you calculate the cost of replacing instruments – both student- and school-owned – they represent a significant investment (e.g., tuba = \$4,500; cello = \$4,000; string bass = \$8,000). Repair costs can also mount quickly.

The air temperature in instrument storage areas should remain relatively constant, between 65 and 72 degrees F, with humidity levels between 35% and 50%. Extreme environmental variations can damage instruments through cracking, loosening of glue joints and corrosion.

If theft and vandalism are problems, storing each instrument in an individual, lockable cabinet will drastically reduce, if not completely prevent, these issues. This solution provides the most security and protection for instruments. When properly designed, the cabinet layout can also help improve traffic flow in the storage room, which increases available class time.

To help justify the investment in lockable storage cabinets, add the total replacement cost of your current instrument inventory and what you spend annually in repairs, and weigh this cost against installing a storage system that will provide complete, long-term security.

Sheet Music. Just as with instruments, a first step toward solving storage problems for sheet music may be purging your system of infrequently used items, passing them

down to lower grades in your district or even discarding them to make more room for preferred titles.

If you are storing sheet music in standard file cabinets or open shelving, chances are you are running out of space for additional titles. For example, storing 1,000 music titles in standard, 4-drawer file cabinets requires 10 - 12 file cabinets and almost 14 feet of floor space!

A high-density storage system uses significantly less floor space than standard file cabinets and stores music vertically. Four seven-shelf, high-density units – enough to hold approximately 1,000 titles – require less than six feet of floor space.

If you have trouble pulling titles out of your file system, the system is probably too full and your music is likely to be damaged or torn. At the cost of \$50 - \$100 per title, you cannot afford to replace too many of them.

Another solution to consider is stacking file cabinets on top of your existing file cabinets. This may cause access problems, but could be a workable solution if you do not have any more space for expansion.

If you store your music on open shelves on the wall or on freestanding shelves and have no room to expand, try to find a larger space outside the music area. Or look for any additional space in your rehearsal room for file cabinets, as one band director solved this problem by building a 20' by 20' mezzanine floor for sheet music storage above the practice rooms in his band rehearsal room, which had a 30-foot ceiling.

Robes/Uniforms. Examine the condition of your school's robes and uniforms. Are they excessively wrinkled, worn or mildewed? You may be storing these garments too close together and in a space that lacks adequate ventilation and climate control.

Robes and uniforms need to "air out" completely between wearings to keep them looking new and to maximize their life span. A typical choral robe or concert uniform may cost \$200 or more, which means your school's total investment in garments is significant.

For maximum protection, the best solution is to store garments in lockable cabinetry that hangs them neatly and provides adequate ventilation. This solution will work only if you have space available for cabinets.

If you only use these garments a half-dozen times per year, it is not necessary that they are stored near the music area. Find a space or room to store them, even in a distant area of the school. What is most important is that the space has good ventilation and the garments are not tightly packed. Rolling clothing racks can provide a mobile storage solution.

The same climate-control recommendations for instruments – both temperature and humidity – also hold true for garments. Wherever the storage location, most garment manufacturers recommend using contoured, non-metal hangers to minimize crease lines and avoid rust stains.

If necessary, create your own storage room by suspending steel hanging bars or rods between two walls. Perhaps ask the high school shop class for help. Ensure the bars, rods, walls and hardware are strong enough to support the necessary weight.

One band director solved the uniform storage problem by requiring that students keep them at home. Students were held responsible for the care of their uniform.

To overcome any “stealth” storage problems, the most effective solutions require both well-designed storage equipment and a proactive, disciplined director. The positive results for your instruments, sheet music and garments will help keep your music program looking good and sounding good for years to come.

Denny Meyer is a Product Manager at Wenger Corporation, Owatonna, Minn. Meyer has made presentations on music facility planning at national MENC conventions, Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinics, and at regional Council of Education Facility Planners conventions. He received his bachelor's degree in public school music education from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. Wenger offers a complete range of innovative storage solutions for music education and performance facilities. For more information, call 800-733-0393 or visit www.wengercorp.com.

(Originally published in School Band and Orchestra, December 2002.)