MP3 players augment musician rate first class exam

Story and photo by MCSN Charles Oki, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

Musicians (MU) assigned to the U.S. 7th Fleet Band used their eyes and ears during the Navy-wide E-6 advancement exam March 5, thanks to the use of MP3 players.

MP3 players are being used to bring senses not normally used during advancement exams into use by displaying video and playing music, so musicians can analyze conductors conducting a performance or listen and interpret notes and chords.

This capability allows musicians to use their trained ears to help interpret music in a more realistic form, instead of reading text and sheet music.

"Multimedia capability is definitely an advantage," said Senior Chief Musician (SW) Adam Vincent, from Mauriceville, Texas. "You have to use a trained ear to interpret the music, instead of just memorizing text books."

The use of MP3 players offers an advantage to Sailors taking the test, because it evaluates more than a musician's in-rate knowledge, but also his or her musical talent.

It also helps Sailors maintain and refine their musical abilities while studying for the exams. As Musician 2nd Class Shin Takao, from Tokyo, Japan explains, the choice to implement the use of MP3 players also shows the Navy's willingness to listen to its Sailors and their opinions.

"I appreciate the Navy for picking a user-friendly and efficient device," said Takao. "It really helps that they chose something a lot of people know how to use."

MU2 Dirk Denton listens to an MP3 player during the Navy-wide E-6 advancement exam at Fleet Activities Yokosuka March 5. This is the first time the Navy allowed musicians to use MP3 players during a rating exam.

Prior to the use of MP3 players, the same multimedia test was attempted twice with mixed results. Experiments with thumb drives and Internet-based exams both had advantages and flaws.

One advantage, with both tests being conducted on computers, was they could be taken at any location with a computer. The disadvantage was the thumb drives would sometimes not register on computers, rendering the test unusable. The Internet-based tests experienced connectivity problems.

"The iPod (MP3 player) solves all the problems that we had with the computer based tests," said Musician 2nd Class Dirk Denton, from Brooklyn, N.Y. "It puts everything we need in to a smaller and simpler format."

Some musicians are hoping to make the multimedia test-taking experience a lasting one for all ranks.

"I hope through this we can improve our musical skills," said Takao. "I think it will help the Navy continue making quality leaders in the future and let us continue playing the highest quality music to audiences around the world."

MP3 player use during MU rating exams is still in an experimental phase and might soon be used for second and third class petty officer advancement exams.

Training evaluation sharpens *John S. McCain's* engineering skills

Story and photo by MC2 Byron C. Linder, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

Sailors aboard guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) are getting an outside look at their engineering programs and casualty control proficiencies with an evaluation from Afloat Training Group Western Pacific (ATG), during Multi-Sail, Feb. 27 to March 2.

The ATG evaluation is designed to educate and assist *McCain's* engineers with the proper procedures for day-to-day operations.

Considering crew turnover and new watch stander qualifications, Bloomfield, N.M. native Chief Gas Turbine System Technician-Electrical (SW) Mike Reinhardt, one of four ATG inspectors aboard, emphasized the importance of future readiness.

"We have drills, evolutions, admin, program reviews and classroom training for watchstanders," Reinhardt said. "They'll have a better knowledge of what's supposed to happen during their upcoming training cycle and be successful at certifying for the ULTRA-E (Unit Level Training Assessment-Engineering). The crew has been very responsive and is doing very well."

Gas Turbine System Technician-Mechanical 1st Class (SW) Andrew Avelino, one of *McCain's* engineering officers of the watch (EOOW), noted the value of training and having some outside eyes looking at the ship's Engineering Department.

"The training is in preparation for ULTRA-E, but it's also to ensure we're staying at the top of our game for our daily operations," Avelino said. "After ATG leaves, we're going to continue training, by using the ship's engineering training team."

Avelino emphasized the importance of bringing in a fresh perspective to see where improvements can be made.

"ATG has been great. They're here to help us see the weak spots we may not see, because we are too close to it, too close to day-to-day operations. A new set of eyes sees the different areas to work on, and it's a great help."

The forward refueling station aboard guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56), receives a fuel line from Lewis and Clark class underway replenishment ship *USNS Alan Shepard* (T-AKE 3), during an underway replenishment at sea.

USS John S. McCain, commanded by Cmdr. John S. Banigan, is permanently forward-deployed to Yokosuka, Japan and is one of seven Arleigh-Burke class destroyers assigned to Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 15.