

Quality Control: Discovering Repertoire that Meets YOUR Standards

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Abstract:

The continued efforts to program diverse repertoire has inspired an influx of new music for the wind band medium. How can we, as musical curators, effectively and proactively ensure that the works we choose are of high quality in this constant and growing landscape?

The aim of this panel-presentation is to consider the intersection of artistry, creativity, quality, and emotive potential when selecting repertoire. This discussion will address the definition of quality based on historical studies of Wind Band music, and encourage attendees to develop their own repertoire standards

Alongside re-examining the presently existing narratives, we seek to provide actionable plans and methods to consider when exploring the following questions:

1. What has the history of academic studies in the wind band realm revealed to us?
2. How do we explore what “quality” means to each of us as individuals, as musicians, for our ensembles, and communities?
3. How can we be welcoming and supportive of composers in the discourse on quality programming?
4. What are the social issues surrounding the diversification of wind band repertoire? And how do we continue to diversify our repertoire with empathy and thoughtfulness?
5. How do we actively take responsibility for programming quality music by diverse composers?
6. How does access play into what music we choose for concerts? (and also - how do we continue to evolve as musicians/ artists (expanding musical *palate*))

I. What is Quality as it relates to art? - A Historical Overview

A. Defining “Quality”

1. The Modern Definitions

- a) Noun - Peculiar and an essential character
- b) Noun (2) - An inherent feature
- c) Adjective - A degree of excellence
- d) Adjective (2) - A high degree of excellence

2. The Evolution of the Term

- a) Cicero, 45 B.C. - ‘Qualitas’ meant to determine the essence of anything
- b) Socrates, Plato, Aristotle - “Man is the Measure of All Things”
- c) Medieval Ages - Qualities defined the physical aspects of the world
 - (1) Manufacturing Guilds - Concerned with upholding minimum quality criteria

3. Quality and the Wind Band

- a) Acton Ostling (and Towner/Gilbert) - “Serious Artistic Merit”
- b) Battisti, Cramer, Dvorak, Grechesky, Ciepluch, Margolis

B. How does the established criteria for quality relate to the needs of you and your students?

- 1. By defining a word, we limit its scope. As times change and culture shifts, definitions must do the same
- 2. Much of the way we define ‘quality’ allows for our ever-growing appreciation of music from cultures other than our own
- 3. Examining potential (unconscious) biases that have defined taste in quality
- 4. Not a “This or That” Model, but one of “Yes, and...”

II. What is it that YOU value?

A. Reflect on what you programmed for the 2023-24 academic year.

List the pieces/composers you programmed for the 2023-24 academic year:	
How did you select these pieces?	What criteria did you consider?
Did you use any resources to assist you? (State lists, programs from colleagues or other ensembles, books or articles, etc.)	Were any pieces new to you? (never played or conducted before) Were any pieces new additions to your school/ensemble library?

B. Exploring our own value systems

1. Programmatic aspects / the meaning behind the music
2. Audience considerations
3. The needs and priorities of your ensemble/students/musicians (educational qualities)

C. Aesthetic qualities

1. We find the potential of a piece to spark a personal connection and evoke a visceral reaction to be underappreciated and undervalued in the programming process.

2. A piece may have visceral musical and artistic qualities that are meaningful to an individual performer or audience member, even if they do not evoke an emotional response in us as the conductor.
3. Focus on VISCERAL musical/artistic qualities that are meaningful to the individual performer and audience member.

III. Determining your perspective on quality

A. Defining “Quality” Revisited

B. The Florence Price *Dilemma*

1. Moore, Edward. “City Assured Symphony Season of 28 Weeks for Next Winter: Negro in Music Given Place in Concert of Century of Progress Series.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1933.
2. Stinson, Eugene. *Chicago Daily News*, June 16, 1933.

C. Thinking like a composer

1. What things are “valuable” to the composer?
2. Compositional process
3. Application for conductors/educators/musicians

D. Questions to ask

1. Why am I programming/why did I program this work?
2. Have I considered context/background? Seeing the ink “around” the ink.
3. What have I risked in the effort to introduce quality music?

IV. Actionable Items for programming

A. Determine your priorities

1. After taking a moment to reassess your definition of quality...
2. You will know what your priorities are, so you might be more motivated to...
3. Engage in and develop habits that directly translate into..
4. Taking actionable steps towards achieving your programming and educational goals

B. Habits to consider developing:

1. Keeping a notepad/running log of items of what repertoire you've heard in the past year and taking the time to reflect
2. Create a separate catalog of works that represent the type of music you'd like to perform one day
 - a) A template catalog for you to use (please see last page for a physical copy you can make copies of/fill out):



3. Expanding your exposure
 - a) Listen to more ensembles that you don't typically listen to
 - b) Check various resources such as state lists, international conference performances, etc.
 - c) Allow the youtube/spotify/apple music algorithm to take you for a ride
4. Stay connected (resources)
 - a) State lists/MEA lists
 - b) Local/National/International Conference Performance Lists: Midwest, MEA, SBA, WASBE lists
 - c) Repertoire resources : Wind Repertory, AWWH, ICD, Diversifying the Stand, traditional google searches, etc.
5. Set aside time to listen and explore; allow that time to be sacred.

- a) Set a timer and tell yourself you'll research/skim through music you don't know for 30 minutes
- b) If you can, set aside a week every summer where you spend an hour dedicated to listening to music in your catalog
- c) Continue to refine your tastes and priorities re: your own understanding of quality

Organic diversification of repertoire

- C. "You are what you eat" - Good music in is good music out
 1. Personal reflection of musicianship & musical tastes/ personal definitions of quality
 2. The ability to pick out elements of music that are attractive to you - *why* do you like this music? Is it because you're familiar with it?
 3. Quality of "ingredients" - (JFJ/Eric Ripert video) what elements of musical compositions make them palatable for study, performance, and presentation?
- D. Avoiding box-checking & tokenization
 1. Avoid choosing music solely because it is readily available
 2. Avoid choosing music solely because of the composer's demographic
- E. Investing representation in the future of music (our students) - so that diversity is a norm in the future.

V. Conclusion/wrap-up conversation

- A. How do we continue to diversify repertoire with empathy and thoughtfulness?
 1. Explaining the concept and importance of "empathy & thoughtfulness" = More intentional inclusion. Inclusion without understanding or acceptance is "tokenism"
 2. Anecdotal experiences of POC/Historically marginalized composers & "forced" programming initiatives
- B. The "filters" we born and how this affects our programming and music-making
- C. GAME - *THE PIECE THAT HOOKED US*
- D. Inclusion & Diversification vs. Musical Elitism
- E. Call to dedication to Self - Acceptance & Self - Understanding as educators & artists

