

SO MUCH MUSIC – SO LITTLE TIME!

Making Wise Choices for Young Bands

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Each year over 2,000 new works are written and published for concert band. With the advancement of music notation systems, along with internet availability for marketing and digital delivery, it has become easier than ever to “publish” music. How do we sift through this mountain of new titles to find appropriate and rewarding music for our students? How many of these works will be remembered in 10 years? How many deserve to be?

Focus on quality music that accomplishes the following goals:

1. Contains musical and emotional depth – or music of intrinsic lasting value
2. Teaches important musical skills and/or concepts
3. Is appropriate for the level of the band – including all instruments
4. Provides variety and enjoyment for the intended audiences (usually parents)

It is important to maintain **balance** in your program and provide **variety**. There are times when lighter selections are appropriate. Chosen carefully, and in balance with more “serious” pieces, these can be great morale boosters and provide an interesting change-of-pace for your audiences. Expose your students to ALL genres, styles, and historical periods.

Basic Factors:

Keys - Are they familiar to your young players, and are there modulations within? Best choices in order are: Bb, Eb, F, Ab, C and related minors.

Duration - Is it appropriate for the level, and intended purpose? Will endurance be a factor? Consider time restrictions for contest and festivals. Consider the rehearsal time required.

Instrumentation - Does it fit the level, and more importantly does it fit YOUR band? In particular look for how many trumpet parts are required; clarinets, trombones, horns, percussion, etc.

Instrument ranges - Are these appropriate and consistent for the level? Check woodwind parts, not just brass. Do you need one of the clarinet parts to stay below the break. Is any one part disproportionately more difficult than the others?

Overall rhythmic complexity - In addition to the complexity of the rhythms and use of syncopation, how many *different* patterns will need to be taught? Are complicated patterns notated and articulated consistently throughout the piece?

Solos - Are there exposed solos for instruments you may not have - like oboe and bassoon? Are these smartly cued in some other part? (Muted trumpet does not always work for oboe solos)

Interesting parts - Do ALL instruments get to play something interesting? Less important in music for professionals, but critical in music for students.

Pacing/Endurance - Do all brass and woodwind parts include adequate amounts of rest paced throughout the piece? Or are some instruments required to play from beginning to end with no break? (a common characteristic of writers with only keyboard or percussion background)

Student appeal - Does the piece hold their interest? Keep in mind they don't have to like it the first time they play through it! Music of depth and value sometimes requires time to sink in.

Musical Content - Is the piece enjoyable to listen to? Does it "go somewhere" and offer a logical formal shape and satisfying emotional content? Is it unique and/or interesting? Will you get tired of it after your band plays it 100 times? Can you teach "beyond the notes"? Avoid bland or boring music that serves **only** to teach a particular concept or technique.

Instrumentation:

Grade 1 - 1.5

Fl., Ob., Bsn., 2 Clar., B.Clar., A.Sax, T.Sax, B.Sax, 2 Tpt., Hn., Tbn., Bar., Tuba, Perc.
(2nd Clar. below break - double reeds and low reeds optional - unison bass line)

Grade 2

Fl., Ob., Bsn., 3 Clar., B.Clar., 2 A.Sax, T.Sax, B.Sax, 2 Tpt., Hn., Tbn., Bar., Tuba, Perc.
(3rd Clar. below break - double reeds and low reeds optional)

Grade 3

Fl., Ob., Bsn., 3 Clar., B.Clar., 2 A.Sax, T.Sax, B.Sax, 3 Tpt., 2 Hn., 2 Tbn., Bar., Tuba, Perc.
(Oboe, Bassoon and F Horn solos are cued.)

Hidden Factors:

General - Look for parts with range or difficulty issues not compatible with the overall level.

Horns - If you don't have particularly strong or independent horns, check to see if important parts and/or chord tones are covered by other instruments (clar., saxes, etc.)

Clarinets - Even if you have players who can play above the break, do they have to negotiate back and forth in rapid succession? Innocent-looking passages can actually be quite difficult.

Low woodwinds - Playing lower notes in the range in itself is not overly difficult, but look for chromatic movement in this register and also quick changes to other ranges of the instrument.

Brass - In addition to looking at the upper range, check for larger and/or awkward skips. Octaves can actually be easier to hear (and play) than unusual sounding intervals of 6ths or 7ths.

Independent playing - How many *different* lines are being played at the same time? Three at once is common - melody, bass line, and accompaniment. However, trying to maintain and keep track of 4, 5, or more different elements simultaneously can be extremely difficult.

Independence within sections - Young players often rely on "following the group" for keeping track of where they are in the music. With inexperienced players, look for "block" scoring within each section. An effective solution might be to have the 1st part on its own part, and the 2nd and 3rd parts playing together. Scoring the 3rd clarinet with a completely different section, just for the sake of keeping it below the break, is asking for trouble.

Easier 2nd & 3rd parts - An effective way to make a piece sound harder than it really is, is to make sure the 2nd and 3rd parts (typically the weaker players) are easier to play than the 1st parts. Be careful, however, that these lower parts are not so different from the 1st parts that it will be difficult for these players to keep track of where they are.

Doubling - Often necessary for young bands with incomplete instrumentation. Check for any unwanted exposure of independent bass clarinet or bassoon parts, for example. Are cues provided? Are all of your strongest players (tpt. 1, tbn. 1, clar. 1, etc.) playing the same note of a given chord? Is the 3rd of the chord played only by weaker players?

Other Editing Factors:

Is the use of articulations/slurs practical, logical, and vertically consistent from part to part?

Is the use of dynamic markings clear and logical? Are dynamics before and after crescendos and decrescendos clearly defined? Is there sufficient variety in dynamics?

Are percussion parts interesting and appropriate for the level? Be sure to check mallets and toys.

Is the level of rhythmic complexity in line with the other grading factors? For example, it is usually not appropriate for a piece to include grade 1 rhythms and ranges, but be scored for 3 trumpets, 4 horns, and 3 trombones, etc.

On “pop” tunes, are the rhythms appropriate and authentic-sounding? Or have the rhythms been simplified beyond the point of recognition? If a piece has comfortable ranges for all instruments, slightly more complex rhythms can be taught. This is particularly true on popular tunes that the students are used to hearing a certain way. It’s often easier to teach how the “real” rhythm is notated, rather than trying to force them to learn a “simplified” version. (Care and discretion are called for here!)

Options for bands with incomplete instrumentation:

Flex-Band – Grade 2-3

- Use with any combination of Brass, Woodwinds or Strings
- Scored with just five parts
- Includes traditional percussion scoring
- Variety of titles from serious to light programming

Pops for Ensembles – Grade 2-3

- Section features with optional Rhythm Section
- Great for pre-concert use
- Variety of lighter titles available

Programming considerations (for ALL levels):

- Variety!! Program a mix of composers, styles, and historical periods
- Play the band classics (expose your students to Holst, Grainger, Vaughan Williams, etc.)
- Challenge your students, but don’t program over their heads (set realistic goals)
- Don’t abandon the march, and occasionally try a classical transcription
- On occasion, program an easy lyric piece and focus on making music!
(a beautiful and rewarding performance does not always have to be with difficult music)
- Include occasional well-written lighter selections for fun, variety and entertainment

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Programming Suggestions

**** Marches ****

Grade 3

The Invincible Eagle - Sousa/arr. Jay Bocook
March of the Belgian Paratroopers - arr. Swearingen
Normandy Beach - John Edmondson

Grade 2

Dorchester - Eric Osterling
New Forest March - Johnnie Vinson
St. Petersburg March - Johnnie Vinson
The Streets of Madrid - John Moss

Grade 1.5

Forward March! - Paul Murtha
Gallant March - Michael Sweeney (1)
Gateway March - Eric Osterling

**** Contest/Festival ****

Grade 3

Awakening Hills - Richard L. Saucedo
Folklore for Band - Jim Andy Caudill
Nathan Hale Trilogy - James Curnow
Voices of the Sky - Samuel R. Hazo

Grade 2

Black Forest Overture - Michael Sweeney
Flight of the Thunderbird - Richard L. Saucedo
Our Kingsland Spring - Samuel R. Hazo
Shackelford Banks - Jay Bocook

Grade 1.5

Atlantis - Anne McGinty
Imperium - Michael Sweeney
A Prehistoric Suite - Paul Jennings

**** Lyric Pieces ****

Grade 3

And Hold in Memory... - Johnnie Vinson
Nessun Dorma - Puccini/arr. Jay Bocook
With Each Sunset - Richard L. Saucedo

Grade 2

Down by the Salley Gardens - arr. Michael Sweeney
Fantasy on an Irish Air - arr. Richard L. Saucedo
Nessun Dorma - Puccini/arr. Johnnie Vinson
Rivers - Samuel R. Hazo

Grade 1.5

Canon of Peace - arr. Paul Jennings
Looking Past the Shadows - Richard L. Saucedo
Shenandoah - arr. Michael Sweeney
Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon - arr. Sweeney

**** Adaptations of Classics ****

Grade 3

Music from Carmina Burana - Orff/arr. Jay Bocook
Fanfare for the Common Man - Copland/arr. Longfield
First Suite in E-flat - Holst/adpt. Robert Longfield
Suite from Lincolnshire Posy - Grainger/arr. Vinson
The Sinfonians - C. Williams/adpt. Jay Bocook
Themes from An Original Suite - Jacob/arr. James Curnow

Grade 2

British Masters Suite - arr. John Moss
Themes from First Suite in E-flat - Holst/arr. Sweeney
Horkstow Grange - Grainger/arr. Michael Sweeney
Salvation is Created - Chesnokov/arr. Michael Brown

Grade 1.5

Chorale from Jupiter - Holst/arr. Paul Murtha
New World Symphony - Dvorák/arr. Paul Murtha
Night on Bald Mountain - Mussorgsky/arr. Sweeney

**** World Music ****

Grade 3

Celtic Ritual - John Higgins
Lament and Tribal Dances - Michael Sweeney

Grade 2

Asian Folk Rhapsody - Richard L. Saucedo
Distant Thunder of the Sacred Forest - Michael Sweeney
Highland Legend - John Moss
Korean Folk Rhapsody - James Curnow
Three Czech Folk Songs - arr. Johnnie Vinson

Grade 1.5

African Sketches - arr. James Curnow
Celtic Air and Dance - arr. Michael Sweeney
Songs of Africa - arr. Johnnie Vinson

**** Light Concert ****

Grade 3

Great Movie Marches - arr. John Moss
Music for a Darkened Theatre - Elfman/arr. Brown
West Side Story Medley - Bernstein/arr. Jay Bocook

Grade 2

Disney Blockbusters - arr. John Higgins
Fiddler on the Roof, Highlights from - arr. John Moss
Wicked, Music from - arr. Michael Sweeney
John Williams Trilogy - arr. John Moss

Grade 1.5

Do Re Mi - arr. Paul Lavender
Hogan's Heroes March - arr. Eric Osterling
Pirates of the Caribbean - arr. Michael Sweeney