

# The composition as curriculum . . .

Dr. Janet R. Barrett, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

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*The BandQuest curriculum is founded on the premise that teachers can develop a comprehensive curriculum for middle school band by starting with musical works of high quality to use as centerpieces for curriculum development. This project is also founded on the notion that composers often draw inspiration from complementary musical traditions or ideas outside of music when creating a new work, and that the study and performance of the work should emphasize and connect to those complementary themes and related ideas. This approach holds particular promise for accommodating diverse learning styles and appealing to the eclectic interests of middle school students.*

## **The first stage in the process of designing curriculum for BandQuest**

The BandQuest curriculum editors and developers (Joanna Cortright, Herb Dick, Janet Barrett, John Nuechterlein, Krystal Banfield, and the late Claire McCoy) designed a comprehensive and interdisciplinary curriculum for three compositions:

- 1 A+: A "Precise" Prelude and an "Excellent" March by Tom Duffy
- 1 *Hambone* by Libby Larsen
- 1 *Spring Festival* by Chen Yi

The format of the curriculum for each work is a CD-ROM that can be used by students and teachers in flexible and varied ways. The components of the curriculum provide:

- 1 An introduction to the work itself...  
including a full videotaped performance of the work, and guided listening maps that describe the form and features of the work;
- 1 An introduction to the composer...  
including an interview with the composer, excerpts of the composer's interaction with the middle school band students, and a composer's biography;
- 1 A teacher's guide...  
that features an analysis of the work, teaching strategies, and exercises that will help students master the musical challenges presented by the work;
- 1 A "skill builders" section designed for students...  
that can be used for individual and small group practice;
- 1 A "create" section...  
that encourages students to explore some of the compositional techniques used by the composer and also to invent their own;
- 1 Interdisciplinary connections and related musical styles and genres...  
that broaden students' understanding through the study of closely related musical styles and through connections to history, cultural traditions, art, literature, and other complementary disciplines.

## **The second stage in the process of designing curriculum for BandQuest**

In the summer of 2001, teams of middle school band directors and general music teachers were selected to participate in a series of workshops that featured this approach to developing curriculum. Six works were previewed by the twelve teachers involved in the project. Each team was eventually assigned to a particular composition. The teams studied the works, investigated many related curricular ideas, and wrote a curriculum for their work based on the BandQuest framework. The compositions featured in this stage include:

- 1 *Grandmother's Song* by Brent Michael Davids (curriculum developed by Javan Larson and Pat Teske)
- 1 *Old Churches* by Michael Colgrass (developed by Rebecca Tokke and Tim Buzza)
- 1 *Smash the Windows* by Robert Rodriguez (developed by Nancy Rasmussen and Valerie Frizzell)
- 1 *Alegre* by Tania Leon (developed by Corey Needleman and Dave Flavin)
- 1 *City Rain* by Judith Zaimont (developed by Regina Zakrajsek and Jane Oxtan)
- 1 *New Wade 'n Water* by Adolphus Hailstork (developed by Tom Wells and Margaret

**Curriculum teams used the Facets Model as a tool for examining the structure, form, expressive meaning, and context in which a work is created (Barrett, McCoy, & Veblen, 1997, p. 77)**

- 1 Who created it?
- 1 When and where was it created?
- 1 Why and for whom was it created?
- 1 What is its subject?
- 1 What is being expressed?
- 1 What techniques did its creator use to help us understand what is being expressed?
- 1 What kind of structure or form does it have?
- 1 What does it sound or look like?

**A sampling of insights from the curriculum teams described the benefits of collaborations between teachers and composers, and general music and band teachers. Teachers also commented on the intellectual and artistic satisfactions of this work.**

- 1 *It was thrilling to be able to call the composer to discuss our ideas about the project.*
- 1 *The two of us share an office, but rarely have time or the occasion to think together.*
- 1 *It is a joy to be able to delve deeply into a piece, and to discover how my understanding of it changes as I find out more about the composer and the context of the work*
- 1 *Investigating dance, history, literature, and cultural traditions has piqued my interest regarding the ways that other disciplines connect to music.*
- 1 *Good curriculum work is a messy, creative, and very satisfying business.*

#### **Related references**

- Barrett, J. R., McCoy, C. W., & Veblen, K. K. (1997). *Sound ways of knowing: Music in the interdisciplinary curriculum*. New York: Schirmer Books/Wadsworth/Thomson Learning).
- Barrett, Janet R. (2001). Interdisciplinary work and musical integrity. *Music Educators Journal* 87 (5), 27-31.
- McCoy, Claire W. (2000). The excitement of collaboration. *Music Educators Journal* 87 (1), 37-44.

Dr. Janet R. Barrett  
Chair, Music Department  
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater  
800 W. Main St.  
Whitewater, WI 53190

Office phone: 262-472-1310  
FAX: 262-472-2808  
E-mail: barretj@uww.edu