



Wind Ensemble

GREGORY X. WHITMORE
Director of Bands

Concert Programming Philosophy & Selection Process September 28th, 2015 – 12:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Two Quotes To Guide Our Programming Efforts:

“.....For only through immersion in music of lasting quality can we engage in aesthetic experiences of breadth and depth”.

-H. Robert Reynolds.

“Children should be taught with only the most musically valuable material. For the young, only the best is good enough. They should be led to masterpieces by means of masterpieces”.

-Zoltan Kodaly

Step One – The Programming Ethos:

1. Concerts are **curated**. This is a high end, artistically-centered process with both artistic and educational outcomes. This is more than just “picking music”.
2. Consider your connections to the titans in our profession. Your work in programming for a concert/season is directly connected to the work performed by Gustavo Dudamel, Alan Gilbert, Leonard Slatkin, etc. We should come to the literature planning process with the same effort, creativity, and artistic energy.
3. The act of programming a concert/concert season is akin to selecting ingredients for a meal, be very careful from where you are sourcing your “produce”.
4. Central Question: “Why am I forsaking **all** other pieces of wind literature to perform *this* work?”
5. In many instances, the compositional quality of the literature selected, the literature’s ability to assist in the individual and collective ensemble technical and artistic development, and the inherent artistic value of the literature selected for performance speaks volumes about the educational and artistic intent of the director of bands selecting said literature.
6. The “second band/ensemble” deserves **and requires** a concert program that is well curated both educationally and artistically.

Step Two – Inspiration.

1. Join the mailing lists for the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, etc. Use their concert seasons subscription series as inspiration for your own programming.
2. Study any forthcoming domestic or international anniversaries, historical events, or dates of institutional significance, allow these to inform your programming.
3. Consider compositional significance as it pertains to initial anniversaries of the work's premiere, allow these dates to inform your programming.
4. Collect college band concert programs, state honor band concerts, and use these as good "starting points" for your programming decisions.

Step Three – Education Objectives.

1. *Literature Of Only The Highest Quality*: The work has evident artistic and compositional craftsmanship. The work has a formal structure, with textural balance, and overall coherence and structure. Motivic, rhythmic, and thematic development is proportional to the overall structure of the work.
2. The work possesses educational and artistic value. The work is appropriate to the overall ability of the ensemble, yet still allows for the ensemble to be "stretched". The work is neither too difficult, nor too easy.
3. The work possesses artistic depth, and the voice of the composer is clear throughout the composition.
4. The work challenges the ensemble in technical, and emotive aspects. The publisher grade is not the final determining factor in the work's programming.
5. The conductor should consider the instrumentation needs of the ensemble (even if in some cases additional players or substitutions are required).

Step Four - Curious & Thematic Programming.

1. Concerts are thematically structured. However, the programming of literature is not completely beholden unto a “theme”. Additionally, concert programming should allow for moments of curiosity and “anti-structure” by the ensemble.
2. Concert thematic programming should allow for an increased audience experience. (Consider guest artists, student groups, guest ensembles)
3. Concerts should feature works for large and small ensemble, as well as overall variety in compositional style, genre, and compositional period.
4. Concert programming should maintain a unifying element that allows for the audience and ensemble to be taken along a journey - be it spiritual, intellectual, or physical.
5. The conductor should establish and maintain a commitment to programming work from the core repertoire.
6. Is there a “high point” to your concert season? If so, when? How does this affect the concerts before, or after this point?

Step Five - Conductor Signature.

1. Each conductor should establish a functioning repertoire that comprises their own central repertoire. Concert programming will be centered from this repertoire, and extended outward.
2. “Someday Study”: Each conductor should study literature that they would like to “someday” perform with their ensembles, even if not the ensemble is not yet able to perform the work.
3. Each conductor should spend time working to study the masterworks of the wind/orchestral areas for personal knowledge.
4. Each conductor should find a “Big Five” list of cornerstone literature that can be performed on a rotational basis.

Step Six: The Act Of Programming.

1. Programming should begin in March, and follow a “macro – micro” approach. Conductors should begin the process simply by laying out and brainstorming how/when concerts are planned (as well as all sectionals, dress rehearsals, and necessary extended rehearsals). Once the date planning process is complete, conductors should begin to think in large terms of programmatic themes, as well as collect scores of works interested in conducting.
2. Once thematic ideas are organized, the act of programming becomes central. The conductor should spend time considering/studying each piece for each concert – considering all of the aforementioned areas of concern. The conductor should consider recordings (both internet and physical recordings) as ways to consider each work. Scores of each piece are grouped by concert.
3. By Mid – April Concert Programming should begin to crystalize (yet there is still time for additions and subtractions). The conductor should formally list (type) the entire concert season, with concert and rehearsal dates, and sectionals listed. The conductor should study the completed programmatic “map” of the concert season. Also at this point, the conductor should critically question each concert against the criterion above. It may be prudent for conductors to invite suggestions from trusted colleagues.
4. By May, the entire concert season is complete, with all initial study and concert season forecasting complete. At this point parts should be ordered, and copied, along with all necessary scores required for each piece. Resource recordings should also be completed for student/conductor use. Dates can also be set for the concert session part reading, part distribution, etc.
5. By the last day of school: All music is copied and prepared for distribution (if not distributed to students). **The concert season is set and posted** with all requisite information for ensemble comprehension. The conductor now has the entire summer to complete in-depth score study of all season literature, as well as forecast problems that could occur in ensemble rehearsal (technical and otherwise).
6. This process extends out to further include all other logistical needs of the program (coaches, guest musicians, performance and rehearsal space). Additionally, students could also be given parts for summer practice for literature for the opening concert.

Strategies For Inclusive Rehearsal:

1. It begins with score study – having a functional knowledge of each piece allows you the insights to make creative and inclusive rehearsal decisions.
2. Consider the setup: Seat the students in non-traditional seating formations:
 - a. Voices or like parts.
 - b. Halves, Squares, “Internal Ensemble”.
 - c. Bring the percussion into the ensemble (seat mallets with wind players, timpani with tuba, etc.)
3. Coach the rehearsal. Get out of the conducting space, and into the coaching space. *Get off the podium in general.*
4. Principal player ensemble – Seat the principal players together, use them as a demonstration ensemble.
5. Central Question – Where are we going musically/Where is this phrase going?
6. Central Question – Can you tell us a melodic story through your playing?
7. Encourage players to “investigate the text” of their parts.
8. Phrasal maps – explain the larger structure of each piece (i.e. “This is an eight bar phrase – but it is really two four bar phrases with high points in measures three and six”).
9. Have the ensemble play conductor-less, with a principal player start the ensemble as if in chamber music.
10. Encourage students to play **through** the *low point* of the phrase, just as they play **through** the high point of the phrase.
11. Work the transitions – this is where music is lost.
12. Initiate the start of the sound with conducting gestures that are new to the student.
13. Have the ensemble (“HHS”): Hear – Hum – Sing. (This Includes Percussion)
14. Spend time singing Bach Chorales in voices – principal players play in order to assist in pitch security (can be removed). Seat the students in parts.
15. How would you conduct the group if you did not have to keep them together?
Conduct that way – and invite your students to communicate with you in new ways musically (without using your voice).
16. “Play the air”: Have the ensemble sizzle the air through the musical phrase.
Connect that air to conducting gestures.
17. Have the percussion “judge” the wind players. Ask them to assess the playing of the wind players in a particular section or parts of rehearsal.
18. Start in the center of a work and work outwards. Do not begin at the beginning.
19. Have the students move physically to get the feel and shape of the musical line, and the overall musical style.
20. Ask the students to “Sing in the style” of a musical phrase.

Reynolds, R. (2000). Repertoire is the curriculum. *Music Educators Journal*, 87(1), 31-33.
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