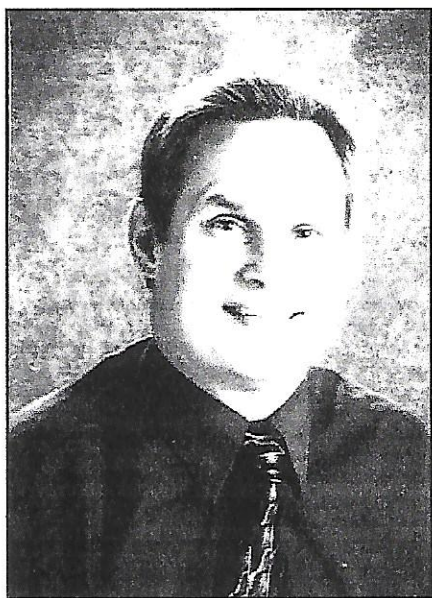


INSTRUMENTAL REPERTOIRE FROM THE NEW MILLENIUM

By Anthony Susi

It's hard to believe more than a decade has come and gone since I wrote an article on "Programming for Middle School Concert Bands" for the *CMEA* and *Bandworld* journals. A lot has happened since then in my career (besides my hairline receding) including a return to teaching at the middle school level again, this time around at Captain Nathan Hale in Coventry. I thought it might be helpful to middle school instrumental directors who have recently entered the field (i.e.; not prospective candidates for Rogaine) to share some of the literature I believe is "note" worthy, based on my experiences programming music for middle school festivals and my CNH Bands' recent performances at CMEA conferences. Thanks to having my first five days of school cancelled because of Hurricane "Irene", I finally had some free time to write my sequel. Hopefully many of you find it useful and not pointless like *Karate Kid 2* or *Staying Alive* but there I go dating myself again.



Before sharing some of my new recommendations of pieces to consider, I think it is more important to share a philosophy behind choosing music. A Band or Orchestra Curriculum is primarily the music our students are learning, not the number of performances or activities our ensembles participate in during the school year. The most prolific Jazz composer of

all time, Duke Ellington, once said "If it sounds good, it is good". I agree, but no matter how good it sounds, if it all sounds the same, it is never good (like a Justin Bieber concert). I'm certain you would agree there needs to be variety in style, genre and era for the benefit of the performers and the audience. Beyond preventing our middle school students from using their instruments as WMDs (weapons of mass destruction), it is our duty to educate our audience as much as it is to educate our students. Program notes and/or a brief oral presentation by the director or selected students should preface each piece. This not only provides a greater understanding and appreciation for the repertoire but also validates and justifies our curriculum to the public. Try not to write or talk over your audiences' head and be brief and concise; otherwise you risk losing their interest and attention to "twittering", missing the musical significance you're trying to share.

I also believe that "if it sounds good" but is too easy, then that is never good either. The challenge is to select music

that will enable students to improve their technical skills as well as their music literacy and still "sound good". Choosing educational music, therefore, boils down to two fundamental factors: technical demands and quality. I will attempt to outline criteria in each of these two categories that are important considerations.

TECHNICAL DEMANDS

In order to select appropriate music, a director must know their ensemble and audience. If the group is playing pieces too difficult, then your rehearsal will be consumed with solving technical problems while you sacrifice time needed to focus on tone, intonation, balance and important nuances like phrasing, dynamic contrast and articulation. Surely, we want to challenge our ensembles with some pieces, both technically and musically, but we must be certain that they are practical and attainable. Many conductors tend to "over-program" sometimes, but in doing so, may impose excessive frustration on themselves and their students with

an imbalance of musical and technical demands. Over-programming also applies to performing a marathon concert that goes beyond the saturation point of the average listener and endurance of the performers. No matter how impressive the last work or ensemble may be, it will fall on unappreciative ears. This often results in a mass exodus prior to the last group taking the stage that can rival Moses leading his people out of Egypt.

You cannot just rely on a publisher's rating of Easy or Medium. Each piece of music often has its own underlying difficulties, unique from general categories. To properly assess the level of difficulty of any work and whether it is developmentally appropriate requires careful consideration of the following conditions:

1. Time Signature(s) and number of changes
2. Mode(s) and Key Signature(s) as well as the number of changes
3. Indicated Tempos
4. Frequency of Accidentals
5. Range and tessitura. Is adequate resting time provided for brass players chops?
6. Technical requirements, i.e.; do some or all of the clarinet parts cross the break rapidly?
7. Complexity of Rhythm Patterns. If necessary, can parts be edited or revised without losing integrity?
8. Instrumentation needed and scoring (thin vs. full, doubling of parts, amount of exposure assigned to particular instruments, etc.). Be aware of doublings in registers that present pitch problems!
9. Number of independent melodic and rhythmic lines occurring simultaneously.
10. Size and frequency of interval leaps, particularly for brass players hitting the correct partials.
11. Total length of the work itself and length relative to other works planned for a concert.
12. Rehearsal time needed vs. rehearsal time available until set performance date.

*You might want to add "Size of the notation in the score" if you are a veteran director like me who can't read a label anymore without holding it two feet away.

QUALITY FACTORS

Regardless of the technical level, our criteria for choosing a piece of music should also be based on other factors such as creativity, historical relevance, emotional and instructional value. Here are key topics and questions to help you determine the quality of a composition:

1. **MELODIC STRUCTURE** - What is the shape of the melodic content? Is it mostly steps and small skips with some larger practical leaps? Does creative melodic development occur? Do all sections have melodic content at some point? Are there some modal melodies?
2. **HARMONIC STRUCTURE** - Are there suspensions, consonant and dissonant intervals? Are the progressions always predictable or are there some unexpected harmonic twists and surprises?
3. **CRAFTSMANSHIP IN ORCHESTRATION** - Is there a balance of semi-transparent and tutti passages? How often do multiple rhythmic ideas occur simultaneously? Is there two or three part counterpoint? What is the percussion involvement? How many divided parts are there for flutes, clarinets, altos, trumpets, trombones and horns? Are there solo or soli opportunities to showcase performers? Does it exhibit a good balance between repetition and diversity? Don't hesitate to remove repeats if necessary because overkill of the same theme is like having a bad jingle stuck in your head. "Oh I love to be an Oscar Meyer Weiner..."
4. **EMOTIONAL VALUE** - Will it incite the students' and audiences' interest and imagination? What is the frequency of dynamic variation and contrast? Can it evoke emotional response through rousing and/or serene passages? How will it impact the enjoyment level of the

concert program overall? Is expression created through *ritardandos*, *accelerandos*, *fermatas*, *cesuras* and *rubato* passages?

5. **PEDAGOGICAL VALUE** - Will learning the piece increase the growth of the students' music literacy, comprehension and/or technique? Does it reinforce musical concepts from other works? Is there multicultural content? Is a variety of articulations and music terminology utilized?
6. **PROMINENCE** - Is it by a reputable composer or arranger and/or has it withstood the test of time?

I'm not saying you should ignore performing a "light" piece. There are some excellent arrangements of popular music that contain real expressiveness and are a good representation of the original version. Many familiar movie and Broadway soundtracks lend themselves nicely to this genre of band literature. We all enjoy "comfort" food now and then but we all know too much in our diet is unhealthy. A simple rule of thumb would be to keep away from anything performed by Britney Spears or any other "pop" singer whose image trumps musical talent. Personal taste should not get in the way of good judgement. I play in a rock n' roll cover band but there is no musical integrity when a school Concert Band performs "Smoke on the Water".

Having said all that, here are some pieces for middle school bands (and orchestras in many cases) that I believe meet the technical and quality considerations I have outlined. I sincerely hope your ensembles and audiences enjoy them as much as they have in my school district.

Grade 2.5

- Appalachian Morning* by Robert Sheldon, Alfred Pub., 2009
- Fanfare for the Third Planet* by Richard Saucedo, Hal Leonard, 2005
- Pulsation* by Richard Saucedo, Hal Leonard, 2009
- Rhythm of the Spheres* by Eric Morales, FJH Music Co., 2011



The Great Locomotive Chase by Robert W. Smith, Belwin Mills, 2000
Tribal War Chant by Michael Story, Belwin Mills, 2000
Under an Irish Sky, arr. Larry Neeck, Barnhouse, 2002
Whispers by Sandy Feldstein & Larry Clark, Barnhouse, 2007

Grade 2

Fiesta La Vida by Robert W. Smith, Barnhouse, 2008
Fire Dance by David Shaffer, Barnhouse, 2001
Greek Folk Trilogy, arr. Anne McGinty, Queenwood 2004
Out of Winter by Larry Clark, Carl Fischer, 2001
Pictures at an Exhibition by Modest Mussorgsky, arr. Michael Sweeney, Hal Leonard, 2003
Scottish Ayre, arr. Douglas Wagner, Belwin Mills, 2007
The Planets by Gustav Holst, arr. Douglas Wagner, Belwin Mills 2008
West Side Story by Leonard Bernstein, arr. Michael Sweeney, Hal Leonard 2003
Grade 1.5
African Marching Song (Siyahumba), arr. John O'Reilly, Alfred Pub., 2004
As the Eagle Flies by James Swearingen, Barnhouse, 2005
Celtic Air and Dance, arr. Michael Sweeney, Music Works, 2007
Eagle Ridge Overture by Mark Williams, Alfred Pub., 2003
Gathering in the Glen by Michael Sweeney, Hal Leonard, 2002
In a Quiet Place by Bill Calhoun, Carl Fischer 2009
Renaissance Festival by Tielman Susato, arr. James Curnow Curnow Press 2008
Summit March by Harold Bennett, arr. Larry Clark, Carl Fischer 2000
Too Beautiful for Words by Rob Grice, Barnhouse, 2008

Grade 1

Gates of Freedom (march) by Robert Thurston, Carl Fischer, 2001
Legion of Liberty (march) by Joseph Compello, Carl Fischer, 2003

Smithsonian Suite by Brian Balmages, FJH Music Co., 2003
Taiko! by William Windham, Belwin Mills, 2001
The Second Storm by Robert W. Smith, Belwin Mills, 2005

From the "Lighter" Side

Theme from Transformers arr. Michael Sweeney, Hal Leonard, 2008, Gr. 1
Star Wars Episode 3, Revenge of the Sith, arr. Mark Williams, Belwin Mills 2005, Gr. 1
The Chronicles of Narnia by Harry Williams, arr. Michael Sweeney, Hal Leonard, 2006 Gr. 1.5
Pirates of the Caribbean by Klaus Badelt, arr. Michael Sweeney Hal Leonard, 2003, Gr. 2
Highlights from Harry Potter by John Williams, arr. Michael Story, Belwin Mills 2001, Gr. 2

Anthony Susi has been teaching music in Connecticut public schools at both the middle and high school level since 1985. He is currently the Director of Bands at Captain Nathan Hale Middle School in Coventry and teaches the Instrumental Methods class at UConn. During the summer break he directs the Jr. Jazz Ensemble at Manchester Community College and the Coventry Summer "Pops" Band Camp. Mr. Susi

has served as a conductor for honors band festivals sponsored by the Rhode Island Music Educators Association, the Connecticut Music Educators Association (CMEA), Future Musicians Inc. (FMI), the American School Band Directors Association (ASBDA) and the Charter Oak Music Festival (COMF). Mr. Susi has presented numerous conference workshops, contributed articles for publication and served as Chairman for CMEA, ASBDA and COMF music festivals. He has also been invited to adjudicate both jazz and concert band festivals in Connecticut. Outside of teaching, Mr. Susi has composed several commissioned works for high school and middle school bands in the state since 1998.

RESOURCES:

Cooper, Lynn, "Finding Quality Music for Our Bands", pp. 69-70.
Jagow, Shelley, "Developing the Complete Band Program", pp. 191-202.
Owen, John, "Assessing Difficulty Level in Band Music", p. 77.
Peterson, Michael, "ASBDA Newsletter, Volume 5, Number 5"



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