

Choosing Literature for Success at Contest

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As we finish the fall semester and prepare for the next, we are quickly reminded that “contest season” will soon be upon us! While the entire year’s repertoire is not solely centered around our UIL performances, it is important that thoughtful, purposeful consideration is given to the music we choose to showcase our ensembles. Planning with the end goal in mind is the key to ensuring student success. However, before starting to organize a plan, recognizing the attainable potential of our students and making ourselves aware of time constraints is crucial.

Keeping these ideas in mind, what will you be able to play with your students? If you do not have a copy of your school’s calendar, get one immediately. In constructing a rehearsal timeline, the dates of school-wide exams, bad weather holidays, dances, and field trips are important to know. Once these dates are solidified, and if you have the means to do so, you can begin planning regularly scheduled sectionals and rehearsals. This is where the magic really happens.

Does the Music Fit Your Band?

When selecting literature to perform, leave all egos aside! The performance of the music you select will be adjudicated with the same UIL rubric, no matter the age of your students. A Grade IV has to sound like a Grade IV. While it is encouraged to push them to excel at

high levels, be honest and realistic about what is achievable in your time frame. Knowing your students and what skills they possess are important in finding the right music. We should strive to prepare our students for their future in music without inundating them with too much too soon. There are volumes and volumes of great publications for all grade levels.

Before selecting music for the ensemble, there are a ton of factors to consider: What is your instrumentation? Do you know the strengths and weaknesses of every section? Will these pieces challenge the strongest players and develop the less experienced ones? Are there soloists to showcase? How much endurance will my students need? Are these pieces written in a range that will show off their best sounds? What are the rhythmic concerns?

As you talk yourself through these questions, the answers to what is playable becomes more evident. The most successful literature for contest will allow for musical success while remaining just challenging enough to require continued development. Remember that UIL evaluations are not set up to expose the weaknesses of your band, but rather highlight all the great things they are doing. Every teacher, especially those with limited teaching experience, is highly advised to seek out the counsel of experienced mentors who are willing to lead you down the path to choosing the best

program. Never underestimate the expertise of those who have already been through the trenches and can provide invaluable commentary on the “dos and don’ts” of programming.

Programming Considerations

Expose your students to music whose “juice is worth the squeeze.” While there are many wonderful pieces out there, there are also many others that are written with almost insurmountable pitfalls. Find quality music that is written well. These are pieces that are based on academic ideas that can be played! Avoid music that is trite in content, lacks proper orchestration, or does not exhibit a high degree of compositional craft. The music you select to perform at contest should showcase your strengths, and not highlight the areas that you are attempting to improve over a long period of time.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that bands must play a slow piece to demonstrate the many abilities involved in executing lyricism. There is no written rule that a lyrical piece should be played at contest. Take great caution when selecting slow pieces that expose small sections, tone quality, and intonation difficulties.

Contemporary pieces are a great opportunity for students and directors to interact with a living composer. Performing new music is also part of a comprehensive music education and important to forwarding our

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repertoire and supporting composers attempting to do so. Multicultural pieces can expose students to new, less familiar harmonies and rhythms. There are many opportunities for community involvement into how music relates to culture and society, and applying TEKS that cross over into other curriculums.

Multi-movement works have a positive and negative aspect. Younger bands may benefit from performing a multi-movement work that has short movements. This gives young players a time to rest both mentally and physically as well as have a “reset” moment. More advanced multi-movement works involve more time if each movement has a different style. These works have to be treated as separate pieces. Pieces that are through composed but have difficult transitions can prove to be just as challenging as a multi-movement work.

Marches are the single-celled organisms of band. They are our history and our beginning! Traditional military marches come in many different styles and flavors, and teach important fundamental ensemble skills of balance and style. The traditional march form is also part of our band heritage that should be kept alive in our band halls. Concert marches pair great with other traditional pieces from the PML and offer variations of style. Furthermore, pasodobles, processionals, and circus marches—not to mention marches from other countries—can be great additions to your program as well.

It's important to keep the entire program in mind. Avoid the same styles and key signatures for all contest pieces. It is always best to select music that will make a young, small or inexperienced band sound their best, even if all pieces are similar.

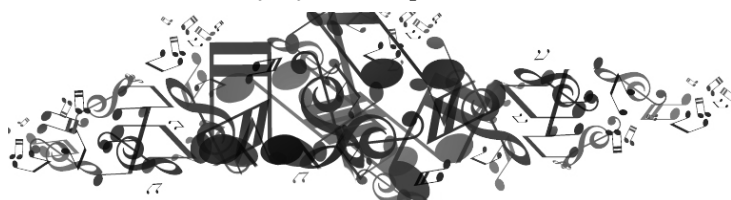
Keep in mind that a quality performance with superior aspects in tone, technique, and musicianship is best. *Reference the Concert & Sight-Reading Adjudication Rubric on the UIL website for further explanation.*

What is the Point of the Concerts Throughout the Year?

Another factor to keep in mind is the purpose of the concert at hand, each with a different goal. If your program gives a Fall Concert, it is important to remember that this is the time of year to build/train ensemble skills, as well as build the skills of the individual. Your new band must learn to play together as a unit, learning balance and blend with its new members (for some of your kids, like seventh graders, for the first time), ensemble fundamentals and exercises, and simply how to function as a band. It is also the season of District and Region Band auditions which requires much of your students' home practice time. With that in mind, selecting Fall Concert music requires finding a balance of readily attainable music that supports the ensemble skills you are teaching while not taking away from their audition music.

The Winter Concert is all about audience buy-in. Most often, this is the most attended concert of the year, and considering the musical tastes of grandparents is always appreciated. While holiday music is on many of our programs, it is by no means required, which can also open up another opportunity to play any of the great pieces not on the PML. A number of band programs use the Winter Concert as the debut of their UIL march, mentally preparing the students for the focus and attention to detail that comes with preparing a UIL concert program. If your band program does not follow this pattern, the Winter Concert is a chance to test the waters as to how far you can push your band (before choosing your UIL program) and which sections will rise to the occasion and deserve the spotlight.

When it does come time for UIL, the points for consideration vary based on your band. For a sub non-varsity level group, it is most important to choose music that is easy enough that they can achieve a really high level of performance. Even a sub non-varsity should sound amazing on their music...you just have to choose music on the appropriate level to allow that quality of playing. Non-varsity band members should be working on music that



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is initially just above their heads to allow for the most growth, pushing them towards potentially moving up to the varsity level. As for your top band, depending on the goals for your organization, this is the time to play The Midwest Clinic or TMEA Honor Band level pieces. However, remember to be honest about the actual level of your band and where you want the students to be.

For the Spring Concert, GO FOR IT! There are no judges, and your kids have worked hard all year! Bring out the pieces you are too nervous to perform at UIL, and push your kids as hard as they will let you push them. With your sub non-varsity it is often helpful to purposely program fun and catchy pieces so that your kids who will be placed there the following year (and those who will have a repeat placement) have something cool and positive to look forward to. With your non-varsity band, choose music that pushes your 7th graders to be next year's leaders. Also, consider giving your 7th graders 1st parts to help them with that transition (even if that seems scary). For your top band, go for flash! The Spring Concert is the perfect time to let your kids learn their limits by pushing them.

As you plan your curriculum, keep in mind that you have an entire year to expose your students to quality literature. Never feel pressured to play beyond what your band can perform at a high level at UIL. Take the necessary time to research and plan to offer the each student the best opportunity to grow musically throughout both semesters.

Corey Graves, a native of Henderson, is the head band director at Roma Middle School and the Roma ISD low reed instructor. He received his Bachelor of Music Education degree as a summa cum laude graduate from Stephen F. Austin State University, and earned a Master of Music in Euphonium Performance as a graduate fellow from The Ohio State University. Mr. Graves is a Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholar, the Region XV Middle School Coordinator, and in his eighth year as a music educator. Bands under his direction have consistently received superior sweepstakes ratings at UIL Concert and Sightreading Contest, in addition to winning Best in Class and Grand Champion at a long list of contests and festivals. Students at Roma MS are well represented within the three Region XV All-Region bands each year. In 2013, 2014, and 2015, the RMS Symphonic Winds earned the distinction as a National Wind Band Class A winner. In 2011, 2013, and 2015, these students were selected as finalists in the TMEA CC Honor Band Competition, placing 11th, 4th, and 2nd respectively. Mr. Graves was chosen as Roma ISD's 2013 Secondary Teacher of the Year. He is an active clinician, adjudicator, guest euphoniumist, and holds membership in TMEA, TBA, and Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society.

Mr. Rylon Guidry is the Head Band Director at Arbor Creek Middle School in Lewisville ISD where he teaches the beginner woodwind classes, the Honors Band & Jazz Band and assists with the Symphonic Band. Mr. Guidry previously was head director at Lake Highlands Junior High School in Richardson ISD and Associate Band Director at McKinney Boyd High School in McKinney ISD. Under his direction, the Arbor Creek Honors Band received consistent first division ratings at UIL Concert & Sight-Reading Contests and local festivals as well as Best in Class awards. The Honors Band has been selected by the Foundation for Music Education as a National Winner in the Mark of Excellence National Wind Band Honors Project two consecutive years—2014 & 2015. Most recently, the Honors Band placed 4th in the 2014-2015 TMEA CC State Honor Band Contest. While at Lake Highlands JH, the band program grew from under 200 to over 300 students. The Concert Band (2nd band) received Sweepstakes at UIL for the first time in over 20 years and the Symphonic Band (top band) received only unanimous first divisions at UIL and other local festivals. The McKinney Boyd Symphonic Band I was awarded 1st divisions in numerous music festivals and UIL Concert and Sight-reading competitions. The marching band received only unanimous first division ratings at UIL and was a finalist in many festivals including UIL Area contest. Mr. Guidry is a magna cum laude graduate of the University of Houston Moores School of Music where he studied instrumental methods with John Benzer and saxophone with Dr. Karen Wylie. He also served as Principal Saxophonist in the University of Houston Wind Ensemble under the direction of Mr. Tom Bennett. Mr. Guidry was also a four-year member of the Spirit of Houston Cougar Marching Band under the direction of David Bertman. Before graduating, Mr. Guidry student taught at Aragon MS and Langham Creek HS in the Cypress Fairbanks ISD. His professional affiliations include the TMEA, TBA and TMAA.

Darcy Potter Williams is the head band director at Stiles Middle School. Born to parents who met in their beginner trombone class, Darcy is 100% a product of the Texas music system. Her own musical education began in her father's band hall in Harper, Texas, where she spent her afternoons learning to play any instrument she could find in the storage closet while waiting to go home. In middle school and high school, she studied flute with Mr. Paige Brooke, a 36-year former flautist with the New York Philharmonic. Darcy received her Bachelor of Music in 2004 from West Texas A&M University where she studied with Gary Garner, Don Lefevre, Russ Teweleit, and Sally Turk. Darcy is in her 12th year of teaching. She began her teaching career at Burnet Middle School where she taught for 6 years. In 2009, her band won the Texas Outstanding Performance Series. After moving to Deep Park Middle School in Austin her band was selected to perform at the Western International Band Clinic (WIBC) in 2011. Most recently, Darcy and associate director Jenna Yee opened Stiles Middle School in 2012. In July 2015 they placed 3rd in the TMEA CC Honor Band Contest. In December 2015, they performed at The Midwest Clinic in Chicago. In addition to directing Honors Band, Darcy teaches beginner flute, double reeds, clarinet, saxophone, and trombone as well as assisting with Symphonic and Concert Bands.