

Choosing Quality Literature

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The world of band literature in today's classroom offers more diversity than ever before. When a music educator searches for resources, they can find a wealth of styles, genres, and composers. The challenge is what will benefit your students as you prepare to spend weeks and or months with a piece of literature. Every journey in programming great literature should be genuine and heartfelt to the development of the student musician. As we return slowly to normalcy over the next months and year, make choosing literature a top priority in order to benefit your students' education.

QUALITY LITERATURE HAS IMPORTANT TEACHING/ FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Every ensemble has strengths and weaknesses. The students that you have in front of you have been exposed to a variety of music. The question is solving the missing link in their development up to that point. A great example of a teaching concept is 6/8. Maybe you have programmed some fantastic marches in cut time or 2/4. You have performed multi movement works that also utilize the most common time signatures. But have your students truly been exposed to 6/8? Can they play in 6/8 with as much ease and dexterity as in common time? Meter selection is just one example of a musical fundamental you can develop. You can also focus on a type of song form,

style, multi-meter, harmony and so on. You should evaluate what new teaching tools the music offers. Good music is inherently teachable, and should provide many teaching tools for you to use.

QUALITY LITERATURE ALLOWS THE STUDENTS TO PERFORM IN A VARIETY OF MUSICAL CONCEPTS

Strive for variety when programming for a concert or festival to create contrasts for your students. Variety can come in many ways. Perform classic transcriptions as well as modern works in the same program. To showcase an extreme style change, place a programmatic driven modern work next to a more traditional piece. Exposure of contrasting genre and styles helps to create truly diverse musicians and furthers their understanding and appreciation for all kinds of music. Quality comes in uniqueness of style.

DISCOVERING HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT BAND LITERATURE BY CONTENT, COMPOSER, AND DIVERSITY

It can be easy to fall into a routine of playing certain styles or the same composers repeatedly. Challenge yourself to program literature that had significant impact on the band world. With enough research you can find great literature and composers that "changed the game" at every skill level. For instance, at the high school level

you can choose from Reed, Grainger, Benson,

Hindemith, Persichetti, Sousa, McBeth, and Smith, to Ticheli, Whitacre, Mackey, Giroux and Maslanka. These composers offer fantastic experiences for older students and there are just as many important composers for middle school students. It is also important to seek literature from different cultures, written by composers of diverse ethnic and cultural heritage. Play a concert of all women composers or music from around the world!

QUALITY LITERATURE ALLOWS FOR TECHNICAL FACILITY AND TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

First and foremost, select music which has artistic merit. This type of literature offers students unique and challenging exposure to virtuosic and technical demands and will develop both the individual musician as well as the full ensemble. Quality literature gives every section the opportunity to explore melodic content, develop that content, and interact in an important role with other sections in the band. By challenging all students in your ensemble, appropriate literature can elevate the quality of your band as a direct result.

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QUALITY LITERATURE OFFERS SOLOISTIC AND SMALL ENSEMBLE OPPORTUNITIES

Finding literature that promotes solo features and or smaller features like duets, trios, and quartets is important in the development of all musicians. The student musician learns to react in a chamber-like setting when the full work turns its focus to one player or small groups. That interaction and developing artistic solo lines can benefit both the soloist and those musicians supporting and or listening to that interaction.

QUALITY LITERATURE CREATES UNIQUE MOODS, IMAGERY, AND STORY TELLING

Standing in front of a masterpiece at an art museum offers a unique experience for everyone. The impact of a Picasso or Monet creates different reactions for each person in the moment. That impact can even change at each visit. You may see something new or get a deeper understanding of what you see before you. Music is the same. Music that takes the audience and performer on unique individual journeys is always worthy of performance. The design of the work, the melodies, the chord structure, the unique form, all can impact the audience and the musicians on stage. Composers and artists start with a blank canvas and ultimately the end goal is to create something of significance that stands the test of time. Seek those great pictures and stories. The music tells a full story and demands attention from both performer and audience. Great music can link to life experiences. The response after the performance is key here.

QUALITY LITERATURE IS ORGANIZED, INTERESTING AND EFFECTIVE

Great works have compositional techniques that flow logically, have fluency between ideas, are organized, easy to understand and structure that is educational in nature. In that logic the musical journey is clear and accessible. It is as if everything in the work is exactly where it belongs. There is order in melody, rhythm, and symmetry on a macro and micro-level.

QUALITY LITERATURE EXPLORES THE EXTREMES OF THE PERFORMER WHILE STILL MEETING MANY OF THE OTHER QUALITIES

To put in simplistic terms, a great work allows the musician to perform very high and very low, very loud and very soft, and very fast and very slow. It covers all the extremes. A simple concept, yet how many works do not cross so many paths along the way?

QUALITY LITERATURE USES UNIQUE AS WELL AS TRADITIONAL ORCHESTRATION TECHNIQUES FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN

Orchestration influences texture, color, timbre and even intonation fundamentals. Playing in traditional orchestration is a different experience with an element in a work that may be voiced or scored in a unique setting. Great orchestration can lead to stronger fundamentals as an ensemble learns to play in many different settings.

Music educators throughout our country are blessed with lists that many have determined as quality literature. Just as you prioritize your daily life decisions so must you prioritize what you program as a music educator. Your list may possibly be different than mine. It may have similar choices with slightly different bullet points within your opinion. Picture yourself walking into the Art Institute of Chicago. What gallery are you going to visit first? Are you headed to the Andy Warhol Exhibition first or the Renaissance Gallery? What led you to that decision? Now make the same decisions for your musical journey. Your passions can often let the music lead the way!

The Texas Bandmasters Association is always here for you. Reach out to your Region Reps, Board of Directors and Executive Director and let us know how we can continue to serve you and assist in keeping instrumental music at the highest levels for you and your students. Continue your amazing efforts! Congratulations on offering your students a music education second to none!