

Selecting Literature for the Non-Varsity Band

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention 2005

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Problem: Selecting and locating music that is interesting, fulfilling, “good”, etc. for the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th bands at secondary schools.

Some issues:

Instrumentation. There are very few years where I have not had to rewrite parts for particular instruments regardless of the level of the band or the literature. Don’t be afraid to experiment. The most important aspect is what sounds good, not what is on the page.

Solo substitution: If a piece of music fits all of your criteria and you don’t have the particular instrumental soloist, rewrite it for the strongest soloist you have. Contact Fred Allen at Stephen F. Austin University. He is a MASTER at determining the best timbre for the solo.

Wide ability levels: A problem in most of our school bands (even the “good” ones). You need to find a way for the student to contribute. Constantly review your pedagogical approach and experiment with rewriting/scoring parts so a student is successful.

Smart students, no skill: This is again an issue in all bands but certainly at the non-varsity level. Use those students’ assets for leadership roles, organization, feedback on rehearsal techniques, make them the “go to” students. These students (especially the older ones) are invaluable in your leadership goals.

Music Selection: Try to give the students some ownership. They are not all going to like every piece. Make sure you have the conviction and the passion to teach the piece. MANY TIMES a director has selected a piece based solely upon a colleague’s suggestion. Develop your own criteria (Richard Floyd at the UIL office has an excellent list of selection criteria that I am sure he will gladly share with you)

Music Sources:

Publisher’s recordings and lists: A time consuming endeavor to “wade” through the recordings to find a suitable piece, but you must take the time. Make a list of the tunes that are possibilities (with some brief notes) and keep them in a file folder.

Mid West International Band and Orchestra Clinic:

All Ensembles are required to program different levels of music and some newer publications. Back issues of programs are a great source plus there are recordings available for purchase. The state of Texas has had many ensembles performing in Chicago over the years. Contact those individual directors for their tips. Each director that performs at Mid-West has access to the same material, and they may have found several good pieces in a grade level they did not have to perform or someone else may have chosen those pieces. Composers are often present at the exhibit booths and many music publishers and distributors are present.

Texas Music Educators Association Convention:

There are several honor band concerts each year along with top university ensembles. Like the Mid-West Convention, composers are often present.

Texas Bandmasters Association Convention:

A great place for new music being reviewed and performed and the **BEST** place for contacts and “schmoozing” with everybody, especially composers in attendance.

National Band Association: Being a member entitles you to a subscription to “The Instrumentalist” which always has new music reviewed along with great “how to” articles. The convention also has many performances by student groups, community groups and others. Collect the programs and periodically review them.

College Band Directors National Association:

NOT JUST FOR COLLEGE FOLKS!! This is a superb organization that enables you find new pieces, commissions, articles, and is a great contact source.

Teaching Music Through Performance in Band:

Vols 1, 2, 3, etc. (published by GIA). These publications have curriculum resources, lists of tunes with wonderful analysis, and SUPBERB recordings by the University of North Texas Wind Symphony

Local honor band concerts (All city, All District, All Region, etc.) Attend as many as you can. Try and collect the programs and notate the clinician for a source.

Have a concert dedicated to “new and different

music”: Grapevine High School has a Contemporary Concert the Monday night before the TMEA Convention. They try to program new works and non-traditional works to keep the students, audiences, and the staff up to date with newer works. A guest conductor/composer is usually on hand.

Summer University Band Camps: This is always a challenge to find music that is “worthwhile” and fresh for the performers. Also, these camps are a great place for more informal discussions on literature.

University Conducting Symposiums: A great avenue to hear new, old and different music and to participate in informative lectures and actual conducting.

Your sheet music dealer: Establish a relationship with your music dealer (mine goes back to 1968) that allows them to help you and be alert for new publications for what is “hot” and what is “not”. Most dealers have publications they are very proud of and will be happy to put you on a mailing list. Each dealer has a specialty or their own dislikes and favorites they may endorse. Find a composer and/or series that works well for your level, explore that series/composer and research up to date material.