



## **Boundaries Broken and Reimagined**

**CLINICIAN:**

**Brian Balmages - TBA Featured Composer**

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## **Texas Bandmasters Association 2017 Convention/Clinic**

**JULY 20 – 22, 2017  
HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

## Boundaries Broken and Reimagined

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*“Emotions are like the gold embedded in mountains. No matter how much you dig out, there’s always more, somewhere. And, of course, there’s fool’s gold and real gold, like with emotions. To be able to tell the difference between superficial music that may excite your taste like sugar, and great music that nourishes you forever, requires a lot of digging. But what an adventurous dig it is!” – Michael Colgrass.*

### **What is Educational Music?**

The term has come to be almost synonymous with commercial music and a generic characterization of the majority of music written for school ensembles. Truly educational pieces teach musicians about *musicality*. Any piece with significant musical value is educational. A piece that only teaches technical things such as rhythms, dynamics, etc, may be educational, but it is not music. – remember, the term is *educational music*.

### **What defines an artistic piece?**

- Musically engaging and not overly predictable
- Stimulates the imagination (not necessarily programmatic, but inspiring)
- Provides an artistic experience: the ensemble emotionally identifies with the piece
- Students (and conductors) become better musicians as a result of working on the piece

NOTE: There *is* a place for novelty, light concert music, and “crowd pleasers.” However, a diet based solely on candy is not a healthy one and must be balanced with music that is more nourishing. Even when choosing this type of music, it is important to look for the following elements.

### **Elements to Consider When Selecting Music for Your Ensembles**

#### **Melody**

- Is there adequate development?
- Do students get the opportunity to work on phrasing?
- Is phrasing appropriate for the level of the musician?

#### **Harmony**

- Interesting harmonies (not just I, IV, V) when musically appropriate  
It is also important to expose younger students to dissonant music
- Harmonic development

#### **Rhythm**

- A rhythmic cell that is overused can make a piece sound very repetitive and predictable.  
There are many exceptions (i.e. Minimalism) but need to be considered on a case by case basis
- Does rhythm enhance the musicality of the work? (is there a REASON for a rhythm?)

### **Texture/Orchestration**

- Sparseness (not full band all the time)
- Interesting scoring (saxes DO NOT always have to double horns!)
- Use of interesting sounds
- Use of cues versus doubling

### **“Small to All” (or “All to Small?”)**

- The way a piece is conceived can have a huge impact on its sound
- Rethink the term “restrictions”
- The easiest of pieces can still shatter boundaries

### **Form**

- Does the piece use a formula approach (ABA)?  
This approach is not always bad, but repetition of sections solely to make a piece easier to learn is unacceptable. A great piece of music often doesn't sound good the first time through.
- Is the composition predictable?
- Does the pacing and structure of the work make sense?

### **Teaching / Conducting**

- If there is nothing to teach in a piece, why use it?
  - Remember: a piece that has musical worth has significant teaching value
- Special techniques (aleatoric music, singing, etc.)
- If the piece doesn't challenge/inspire the conductor, how can he/she inspire the ensemble?

Fight the temptation to depend on the music to motivate your students.  
Depend on *yourself* instead.