

## Guidelines for Choosing String Repertoire

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“In choosing literature for performance, the musical quality of the works should be the primary consideration. While style, technical challenge, audience and performer appeal, and educational value are important considerations, none will be well served if the music does not measure up to high standards of quality” (Del Borgo, 1988).

- Process is daunting – challenges us to re-examine our values as music educators and musicians choosing a curriculum
- Commitment, exposure, and risk – music we choose to perform defines our values; we share this with our students and eventually an audience; responsibility – most important goal is to increase the self-efficacy, wellbeing, and musical development of our students; administrators and parents acknowledge the community/sense of belonging created in the music classroom – special and often unique in music programs; retention

### Level of the Orchestra

- Does not always coincide with the number of years in the program
- Be careful of the grading “trap” – often overlap, very subjective
- **Pieces that are “too easy” are ALWAYS better than too difficult**
- Music that is technically feasible – this decreases the risk of remedial pedagogy in future studies; solidify the technical foundation; do not be in a hurry to progress to more technically demanding repertoire! **Priorities are sounding good, increasing student self-efficacy, and keeping them engaged in their musical studies!**
- Which keys can they play in? – usually start with D major, then A major and G major, then B flat major, G minor, A minor
- Decide ahead of time what concepts or skills you want to teach before you select repertoire – you will establish a “core repertoire” and rotate some of the most successful teaching material
- Are they shifting? If so, how far?
- Clef changes for viola and cello?
- What bow strokes are they able to do? – martelé, détaché, legato, separate bows first, then slurred, hooked, spiccato, sautillé \* matching strokes!\*
- Are they using vibrato? – this is needed for long beautiful lines
- Strong and weak sections – finding music to highlight their strengths
- “Teachable Moments” in the piece

### Variety – repetition versus new material

- Choose repertoire that compliment and contrast with one another – create a balanced and sequenced curriculum that develops skills and knowledge at the same time!
- **Melodic Material** – does one instrument predominantly carry the melody or are melodies shared

- amongst the instruments?
- **Diverse Timbres** – look for a variety of instrumental colours
- **Balanced Material** – carefully discern whether you can balance the foreground and background material
- **Interesting Textures** – polyphonic versus homophonic
- **Historical** – music from a variety of periods
- **Forms**
- **Multicultural Approach** – new scales/modes increases their aural skills

### Contrast – juxtaposing contrasting ideas

- **Dynamics**
- **Rhythmic Material** – more than just predictable rhythmic patterns; look for propulsion and a sense of momentum; slow sections should involve opportunities for rubato at various points within the phrases and at cadential moments – increases their musicality!
- **Tempo** – tempo contrasts may provide increased interest and relief in certain moments; pieces at a variety of tempi and length (three minutes to twenty minutes!)
- **Instrumentation** – look for contrast in the use of instruments and differing timbres
- **Mode and Key** – note the overall harmonic scheme; logical progression of key centres
- **Time Signatures** – incorporate works in 3/4, 6/8, and cut time; introduce students to irregular and asymmetrical meters

### Musical Interest

- **Fresh Ideas** – does the piece have a unique sound that resembles other works by the composer?  
Musical personality
- **Harmonic Material** – tension and release with clearly defined cadences? New music will expand and enrich the students' understanding of harmonic elements
- **Dramatic Shape** – overall shape should have high points and contrast
- **Coherent Ideas** – logical unfolding of musical ideas – are repeats essential or do they simply lengthen the piece?
- **Transitions** – are they organic or abrupt?

### How Do You Find This Music?

- Keep lists! Core repertoire selections for your ensemble level and another of the core repertoire works for your medium (e.g., orchestra)
- Keep lists of music that you and your students perform each year – not only will this answer questions about when you last played a piece, but it will also be a record of the balance of musical choices that you make over the years
- Search for publishers or composers that appeal to you (e.g., Larry Moore)
- Conferences are a great place for this – performances, exhibits
- Festivals – listen to other groups and learn what is good
- Social Media – Facebook groups: International Music Teachers Exchange; ASTA; Orchestra Teachers
- Networking with colleagues and experienced teachers
- FJH – Soon Hee Newbold; Sandra Dackow; Elliot DelBorgo
- [www.jwpepper.com](http://www.jwpepper.com) - festival and state lists!
- ASTA String Syllabus
- Teaching Music Through Performance – [www.teachingmusic.org](http://www.teachingmusic.org)

- Music dealers are very important! – build a relationship with a trustworthy dealer
- Find new repertoire on a yearly basis in order to revitalize your teaching and music-making

### **References**

- Del Borgo, E. (1988). Selecting quality literature for bands and orchestras. *The Instrumentalist*, 24–28.
- McCallum, W. (2007). Repertoire as curriculum. *Canadian Winds*, 105–106.
- Reynolds, H. (2000). Repertoire is the curriculum. *Music Educators Journal*, 87(1), 31–33.

### **Suggestions of Current Popular Repertoire:**

#### **Larry Moore arrangements of popular music – can be found at:**

<http://www.sheetmusicplus.com/ensembles/string-orchestra/larry-moore/1710882+500137>

El Gato Pizzicato – Meyer

<https://www.jwpepper.com/El-Gato-Pizzicato/10370546.item#/>

Bach Country Fiddles – arr. Meyer

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Bach-Country-Fiddles/2472796.item#/submit>

Russian Sailor’s Dance – Gliere; arr. Caponegro

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Russian-Sailors-Dance/2479427.item#/submit>

Farandole – Bizet arr. Isaac

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Farandole/2156024.item#/submit>

Fantasia for Strings – Del Borgo

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Fantasia-for-Strings/2229730.item#/submit>

Dragonhunter – Meyer

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Dragonhunter/2475409.item#/>

Frog in a Tree – Siennicki

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Frog-in-a-Tree/2318913.item#/>

Aunt Rodie’s Appetite – arr. Compello

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Aunt-Rhodie%27s-Appetite/10046230.item#/submit>

#### **Repertoire Focusing on Viola Section:**

Viola Country – Meyer

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Viola-Country/10370736.item#/>

Viola Hero – Bulla

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Viola-Hero/10061226.item#/>

M to the 3rd Power – Nunez

Viva Violas – Meyer

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Viva-Violas/2475430.item#/submit>

Molly on the Shore – Grainger (arr. Sandra Dakow)

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Molly-on-the-Shore/5665377.item#/submit>

Danza Latina – Balmages

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Danza-Latina/10047927.item#/>

### **Repertoire Focusing on the Cello Section:**

Cello Rondo – Daniels

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Cello-Rondo/2311074.item#/>

Cellos Ole – Meyer

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Cellos-Ole/2397537.item#/submit>

Across the Wind – Spata

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Across-the-Wind/10370508.item#/>

The Red Lion – Woolstenhulme

### **High-Energy Repertoire (Advanced)**

Perseus – Newbold

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Perseus/10066401.item#/>

Maharaja – Spata

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Maharaja/10280360.item#/>

Lion City – Newbold

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Lion-City/10066399.item#/>

Lyric Metal – Balmages

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Lyric-Metal/10366847.item#/>