A Young Teacher’s Guide to Selecting Orchestral Repertoire

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4-Step Approach

1. Needs of your concert season
2. Playing skills of your students
3. Pedagogical evaluation of the music
4. Matching the music to your goals
Step 1: Needs of Your Concert Season

Questions to consider:

- How many different concert programs?
- Full orchestra vs. Strings only?
- How many rehearsals?
- Special themes?
- Contests or festivals?
- Acoustics?
- Audience?
Step 2: Playing Skills of Your Students

• Frequent assessment throughout the school year
• Skill tests at the beginning
  • Provides a base-line assessment of the orchestra
  • Confirms the difficulty level of the music selected
  • Help you choose other literature
Step 2: Playing Skills of Your Students

- Benefits of assessment:
  - Encourages students to continue to develop skills
  - Helps you determine music for next year
Step 2: Playing Skills of Your Students

• Bowing skills:
  • Detaché
  • Staccato
  • Hooked
  • Spiccato

• Martelé
• Legato
• Tenuto
Step 2: Playing Skills of Your Students

- Left-hand skills:
  - Finger patterns
  - Cello extensions
  - Shifting
  - Vibrato
Step 2: Playing Skills of Your Students

• Other musical factors:
  • Intonation
  • Key signatures
  • Rhythms
Step 3: Pedagogical Evaluation of the Music

• Develop a list of sequential playing skills
  • Bowing skills
  • Left-hand skills
  • Expressive skills
Step 3: Pedagogical Evaluation of the Music

- Determine which playing skills are necessary to perform the piece
  - Detaché
  - Slurring
  - String crossings
Step 3: Pedagogical Evaluation of the Music

- Evaluate left-hand skills
  - Finger patterns
    - High 3’s, low 2’s, cello extensions
  - Shifts
  - Positions
Step 3: Pedagogical Evaluation of the Music

- Interesting rhythms and melodies for all instruments
  - Not just 1st violins
- Clear phrases and melodies
- Harmonic language
- Appropriate and expressive dynamics & tempos
Step 3b: Score & Parts

- Appropriate bowings
- Slurs too long
- Not enough slurs
- Suggested fingerings
Step 4: Matching the Music to Your Goals

• Does the music match the abilities of your students and your concert season?
  • Technical abilities
  • Musical abilities
• Too difficult or too easy?
• Too mature or not mature enough?
Step 4: Matching the Music to Your Goals

- Too many skills in one piece
- Arrangements & standard literature
- Pairings with method books
- Wide variety of composers
- Wide variety of publishers
Step 4: Matching the Music to Your Goals

• Avoid over-programming
  • 1 “safe” piece, 1 “stretch” piece, plus a few more
• Avoid similar tempos, key signatures, etc.
• Find ways to make “easier” pieces more difficult
  • Higher positions on lower strings
Pieces to Keep in Your Back Pocket

• Features violins: *Celtica* by Brian Balmages

• Features violas: *Santa Plays the Viola* by Mark Williams

• Features cellos: *Cellos Ole!* by Richard Meyer

• Features basses: *Revenge of the Double Bass* by Reinagle/Allen

• Features all: *Serendipity Suite* by Richard Meyer
When You Have Strong 2nd Violins...

- *Fiddles on Fire* by Mark Williams (easy)
- *Blue Fire Fiddle* by Soon Hee Newbold (medium-easy)
- “Presto” from *Symphony No. 1* by Haydn/McCashin (medium)
When You Have Strong Violas...

- *Viola Hero* by Stephen Bulla (easy)
- *Viva Violas* by Richard Meyer (medium)
- *Viola Concerto* by Telemann/Parrish
When You Have Strong Cellos...

- *Cellos Ole!* by Richard Meyer (easy)
- *Contrasts in E Minor* by Francis Feese (medium easy)
- *Fugue (L’Estro Armonico)* by Vivaldi/Lipton (Medium)
When You Have Strong Basses...

- *Toccatina* by Hofeldt (easy)
- *Bass-ically Bluegrass* by Phillips (medium easy)
- *Symphony No. 44 “Trauer”* by Haydn/Parrish
REPERTOIRE RESOURCES

• *Teaching Music through Performance in Orchestra*
• *Strategies for Teaching Strings*
• *State Contest Lists*
• *String & Orchestra Teachers* (Facebook Group)
• *Network of Positive Orchestra Directors* (FB Group)