Programming with Purpose

Choosing Repertoire that Fits Your Band

Presenter - Christopher Gonzales

1. Play the Band You Have

- Every ensemble has a unique combination of strengths, weaknesses, instrumentation, and experience.
- Choose repertoire based on your students, not just the grade level or difficulty rating.
- Recognize the difference between the ensemble you have today and the ensemble you want to develop.

Guiding question: Do I understand the current abilities of my students?

2. Know Your Ensemble

Evaluate your students' current abilities in these areas:

- Tone quality and intonation
- Rhythmic accuracy and subdivision
- Technical facility and articulation
- Range and endurance
- Instrumentation and section balance
- Musical independence and maturity

Guiding question: What can my students perform consistently, and what skills need development?

3. Read the Score Through the Lens of Your Students

Look beyond the title, composer, and difficulty classification.

- Identify challenging passages, exposed entrances, and independent parts.
- Examine range, rhythms, articulation, tempo, and endurance.
- Consider the demands placed on individual instruments and sections.
- Determine whether the musical demands align with your students' abilities.

Guiding question: What does this score actually require my students to do?

4. Find the Hidden Trouble Spots

Identify the passages that could prevent the ensemble from performing the piece successfully.

- Difficult woodwind passages or exposed solos
- Underdeveloped low brass or limited upper-register control
- Challenging percussion parts or unfamiliar instruments
- Rhythmic independence and coordination between sections
- Balance, intonation, and endurance challenges

Guiding question: Which passages are most likely to determine the success of this piece?

5. Choose Music That Fits—and Grows—the Band

- Build on existing strengths while addressing specific weaknesses.
- Select challenges that are achievable with purposeful instruction.
- Consider rehearsal time, student motivation, and the performance timeline.
- Distinguish between music that stretches students and music that overwhelms them.

Guiding question: Will this piece help my ensemble make meaningful musical progress?

6. Build a Program with Purpose

- Select contrasting styles, tempos, and musical characters.
- Develop different technical and expressive skills across the program.
- Balance the demands of individual pieces with the demands of the full concert.
- Create a cohesive program that showcases achievement and supports growth.

Guiding question: How does each selection contribute to the musical and educational goals of the program?

7. Apply the Framework: Repertoire Evaluation

Work through a sample score or a piece you are considering for your own ensemble.

1. Identify the musical demands.
2. Compare those demands with your students' abilities.
3. Locate the most challenging passages.
4. Identify the skills students could develop.
5. Decide whether you would program the piece now, save it for later, or choose something else.

Final reflection: What will you change about your repertoire selection process?