

Selecting Appropriate Literature for College Orchestra: A Study of Repertoire and Programming Choices of CODA Conductors

*Joel Neves
Michigan Technological University
Houghton, Michigan*

Selecting appropriate repertoire is the most important task of an orchestra conductor. Choosing the right music is essential for developing individual musicianship, achieving peak ensemble performance, and inspiring a loyal patronage. Playing ill-suited repertoire, however, can misdirect the talents of the musicians, create unpolished performances, and diminish audience engagement. A conductor's critical task, therefore, is to judiciously select the type of repertoire that best showcases the orchestra and its unique skillsets.

There are numerous print and online resources that aid the college orchestra conductor in this important process. This is especially true of online music score and audio/video streaming sites, which seem heaven-sent for music professionals. If ten years ago one needed to contact a music publisher for a perusal score, wait for it to arrive in the mail, and then try to locate a CD recording, today's conductor—for a majority of the orchestral repertoire—needs only to search online for the score and parts and multiple professional audio and video recordings, usually without spending a dime. This allows for an in-depth examination of multiple scores in a short amount of time, thus making it easier than ever to evaluate music for one's orchestra.

The central challenge then becomes sorting out the playable from the unplayable, the practical from the pipe dream, and finding those hidden gems that are uniquely cut for your orchestra. This process of selecting suitable repertoire is much more of a science in the wind band world. College orchestra directors lack the industry-wide tools¹ that band directors commonly utilize, such as core repertoire lists, music difficulty grading scales, and voluminous research on literature selection criteria, along with a vast peer network, CBDNA, formed in the 1940s. There is no equivalent of the American Band College Music Grading Chart, the National Band Association's tiered rankings list (www.nationalbandassociation.org) or the Wind Repertory Project (www.windrep.org) in the college orchestra sphere.

This presents a unique opportunity for the College Orchestra Directors Association to address this deficiency. More research can be encouraged on the topic of repertoire selection for the college orchestra. A collaborative project can be initiated that creates a

¹ JW Pepper, Lucks Music, and Alfred offer "educational" arrangements of orchestral literature that are suitable for middle school, high school, and smaller college orchestras. Each arrangement is listed on the publisher's website along with snippets of the score, streaming audio of the *entire* piece, and a grading scale – certainly an impressive array of helpful tools for selecting educational literature. Sadly, none of these options are available for the original compositions.

playability grading chart for orchestral music. Core repertoire lists could be suggested. Member submission of concert programs (a current initiative) can be expanded. Such robust tools and resources could greatly assist CODA members in the vital task of repertoire selection.

In this spirit, this paper provides guidance to the college orchestra conductor in selecting standard orchestral literature, with a central focus on data derived from a repertoire survey of CODA members administered in 2011. The article is organized as follows: 1) current online and print resources, 2) summary of repertoire data from CODA member survey, 3) programming philosophies, 4) selected concert themes and repertoire, and 5) conclusion.

Current Online and Print Resources

Free Online Scores²

The most comprehensive free online collection of orchestra music is the International Music Score Library Project (www.imslp.org), a user-submitted wiki of orchestra, band, and choral scores—and usually the parts, too—that are in the public domain, or pre-1924, in the United States. (Some living composers allow their recent music to be listed as public domain works.) IMSLP has revolutionized how orchestra conductors, in particular, locate and evaluate music scores: it is free, all files are downloadable and printable (potentially saving orchestras thousands of dollars), and its collection of almost 75,000 compositions embodies the largest repository of Baroque, Classical, and Romantic orchestral scores and parts on the Internet. For those seeking choral or choral-orchestral scores and parts not available on IMSLP, the Choral Public Domain Library (www.cpdll.org) is an excellent companion resource.

Another essential free online resource is the New York Philharmonic's Digital Archives (archives.nyphil.org), which currently houses the orchestra's entire collection of marked scores and parts performed during its "International Period": 1943 to 1970. (When completed, the Archives will contain all documents from 1842 through 1970.) These documents open a rare window into the artistic choices made by individual musicians, such as the principal bassoonist's phrase markings at the beginning of *Rite of Spring*, Leonard Bernstein's tempo and dynamic alterations to Beethoven symphonies, or the string bowings used by Andre Kostelanetz. The bowed parts alone—numbering in the tens of thousands—are an invaluable time-saving and educational resource for conductors and concertmasters. Also, since it lacks a public domain or country-specific restriction, the Digital Archives offers access to many 20th century or otherwise hard-to-find compositions not available on IMSLP. For example, a cursory search produces the marked scores and parts to Shostakovich's Symphony Nos. 1, 5, 7, and 9 and Copland's *Appalachian Spring Suite* and *Lincoln Portrait*.

²The websites of the major music publishers, like Schirmer or Boosey & Hawkes, are excellent resources for repertoire planning, but since these portals lack comprehensive online score examination and audio streaming, they will not be discussed in this article.

Free Online Audio/Video Streaming

Two online streaming services are vital companions for score study: YouTube and Spotify. YouTube, a user-generated video sharing website, contains the most extensive library of free classical video and audio content on the Internet. Its usefulness to conductors can hardly be overstated: the bulk of the standard orchestral repertoire is located on the site, often with numerous audio and video renditions of each piece. A search for “Beethoven Symphony 5,” for example, produces the following video results:

- 1,450,000 unique hits
- Toscanini, Stokowski, Munch, Szell, Karajan, Giulini, Bernstein, Harnoncourt, Kleiber, Abbado, Muti, Thielemann, and Dudamel conducting the piece
- hundreds of audio recordings (in video format)
- multiple alternative interpretations, including graphic video music animations, pop remixes, solo instrument arrangements, sketch comedies by Sid Caesar and Rowan Atkinson, and a three-year-old maestro conducting it in his living room

YouTube also includes thousands of performances by college, community, and regional professional orchestras playing the standard repertoire, which can prove uniquely useful to college conductors. The Chicago Symphony playing Shostakovich 5 is one thing, but witnessing a performance of the piece by a university orchestra (especially one with similar skill sets as your own) can provide more realistic clues as to its playability.

Spotify is a “freemium” audio streaming site that offers digital rights management-restricted content from major record labels. Known mostly for its pop music anthologies, Spotify’s classical music collection is surprisingly broad and extensive, making it an essential portal for accessing classical music on the Internet. No other online service, whether free or subscription, can boast the complete classical catalogues of Naxos, EMI, Deutsche Grammophon, Decca, Sony, and BBC among its offerings. And unlike automated music recommendation services like Pandora Radio, Spotify offers an individualized experience that allows users to select their own song tracks. (But it does not allow MP3 downloads of these tracks.) Spotify is an excellent second option if a YouTube search comes up empty – Berlioz’s four *Prix de Rome* cantatas, for example, are available on Spotify but not YouTube.

Subscription Online Scores and Audio/Video Streaming

Alexander Street Press (www.alexanderstreet.com), an academic database publisher, offers the definitive subscription collection of classical music scores, streamed video and audio on the Internet. It is the only online portal that combines all three elements in one place; it’s as if IMSLP, YouTube, and Spotify were incorporated into the same cross-functional platform. Alexander’s three-volume Classical Scores Library includes 25,000 in-copyright editions from major publishers (thus no public domain restriction) with scores from Medieval through twenty-first century numbering over one million pages. Its audio database contains over 50,000 audio recordings from EMI. And its extensive Classical Music in Video collection offers exclusive copyrighted content from opera,

orchestra, chamber, and solo performances; full orchestra rehearsals; and masterclasses, interviews, and documentaries.

The Berlin Philharmonic offers a subscription video streaming service that is unique among professional orchestras. Since 1990 many of the orchestra's concert performances, and almost all from recent years, have been filmed live in high-definition video and audio. Subscribers can watch these live broadcasts, along with the complete catalogue of 230+ archived performances, via the orchestra's Digital Concert Hall (www.digitalconcerthall.com). With a variety of camera angles and superb audio mix—along with excellent interpretations of the orchestral repertoire by a world-class orchestra and its conductors—no other professional orchestra succeeds better at vividly sharing its live performances online. These videos can be valuable tools for evaluating orchestra literature performed at a very high level.³

Subscription Print and Online Dictionary

The definitive print encyclopedia of orchestral literature is David Daniels' "Orchestral Music: A Handbook," which catalogues both famous and lesser-known orchestral composers from the Renaissance to the 2000s. It lists the major—but not all—in-print orchestral works by each composer, with associated instrumentations, durations, editions, and publishers of the music. (A grading scale for determining difficulty or playability is not suggested.) The book's appendices organize these compositions in a helpful way for those crafting concert programs, including by ensemble type, instrumentation, and duration; and thematically by youth concert repertoire, composer anniversaries, and ethnic groups. The online version of Daniels' book is found at www.orchestralmusic.com, a subscription website that touts "monthly updates with new composers, new works, ... [and] more than 1,000 changes since publication of the 4th print edition."⁴

Summary of Repertoire Data from CODA Member Survey

These online and print resources are remarkable tools for evaluating and selecting orchestral literature – they have made the process more user-friendly, more convenient, more efficient. But the one issue these sources do not address is the question of appropriateness: after thorough score examination and listening to multiple recordings, can and should my orchestra actually play a given piece? This is obviously a personalized decision that takes into account many factors, and no outside source can adequately compensate for intimate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of one's ensemble. Nevertheless, industry-wide tools could be created that guide and assist college orchestra conductors, in particular, with the literature selection process (much

³ A similar service but with a broader scope is [medici.tv](http://www.mediciv.tv) (www.mediciv.tv), an online classical music subscription portal with live and archived video performances by multiple professional orchestras. Like Alexander Street, its video collection also includes documentaries, masterclasses, and educational films.

⁴ David Daniels, "Home Page," www.orchestralmusic.com (April 28, 2014).

like those employed in the band world) – unfortunately, such resources are not widely circulated or utilized.

To address this issue, a repertoire survey of CODA members was administered in 2011 with the dual purpose of 1) creating a database of standard orchestral literature that CODA orchestras performed during a six-year period (2005-2011) and 2) summarizing the programming philosophies that informed that literature. It is hoped that this data, which reflects the repertoire choices of college conductors over multiple concert seasons, could serve as a tool for guiding others in selecting repertoire. The ensuing discussion summarizes the survey's key findings.

Methodology

Respondents were asked two questions⁵: “What repertoire did your group perform from 2005-2011?” and “What is your guiding philosophy for programming concerts?” Repertoire data was gathered from 61 of the 117 CODA members who were active in Fall 2011 (a 52% sampling rate); 35 individuals responded to the programming philosophy question. Each composition was entered into a master list and coded for frequency of performance by a CODA orchestra.

From this master list, only those pieces that matched the definition of “classical literature for symphony orchestra, 1750-1970” were included in the final project database. This means that Baroque and contemporary⁶ were excluded, as well as pops, chamber, and most choral-orchestral music. This distinction was built upon a basic premise: that the “standard repertoire for college orchestra” probably revolves around symphonic literature from the classical, romantic, and twentieth-century (pre-contemporary) periods. And, indeed, the repertoire data verified this assumption, showing that the large majority of music programmed by CODA orchestras from ca. 2005-2011 spans early Haydn symphonies to music of the 1960s, while composers as diverse as J.S. Bach⁷, John Williams, and Jennifer Higdon were infrequently performed. The exclusion of Baroque, film, and contemporary music from consideration in this project does not imply, however, that these styles should not play an important role in orchestra literature selection, only that college conductors prioritized the more traditional classical symphonic literature in their programs.

⁵ The initial survey included questions related to type of music institution (college, school, or department), number of music degrees offered, number of music majors, and types of ensemble (all-student vs. hybrid college-community). The idea was to associate each piece with the skill level of the ensemble that performed it. This proved too daunting and subjective, so the survey was pared down to two questions only.

⁶ The League of American Orchestras defines contemporary music as “orchestral music of our time composed in the past 25 years.” League of American Orchestras, “ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming,” <http://www.americanorchestras.org/conducting-artistic-programs/ascap-awards-for-adventurous-programming.html> (April 1, 2014).

⁷ “[In surveying] subscription concert programming changes of ten major orchestras for fifty years, from 1942 to 1992, [it was found that] music of the Baroque period, which once constituted a major portion of large orchestra programming, had all but disappeared from the concert repertoire of these orchestras. The researcher [attributes] this phenomenon to the rise of specialized ensembles dedicated solely to the performance of early music, as well as to the appearance of chamber orchestra ensembles that programmed works by Baroque composers.” Jeffrey Thuerlauf, “A Survey of American Symphony Orchestra Programming for the 2003-2004 Season,” *Musiké: Revista del Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico*, <http://musike.cmpr.edu/v001/thuerlauf.pdf> (April 22, 2014), 2.

In terms of compositions for choir and orchestra (notably those where the choir plays a continuous musico-dramatic role), Jonathan Green's exhaustive multi-volume "A Conductor's Guide to Choral-Orchestral Works" already analyzes major and obscure choral-orchestral works from the Baroque through twentieth-century periods. Each volume contains a "Performance Issues" section that covers what performers might encounter in a particular piece: vocal/instrumental ranges, contrapuntal complexity, balance challenges between choir and orchestra, difficulty of orchestral parts, suggested ensemble skill levels, investment of rehearsal time, and a playability grading system (i.e. "medium difficult"). Green's rigorous and systematic method for decoding *performance and playability issues* in choral-orchestral literature provides an excellent blueprint for future (CODA?) projects that might apply this method to the symphonic literature.

The Data and What It Means

The final project database in its current form⁸ represents an emerging picture of the types of repertoire college conductors have deemed appropriate for their ensembles. Certain of these pieces were programmed so frequently that, if compiled into one collection, they might constitute an inaugural definition of "standard repertoire for college orchestra." (These most oft-performed pieces are listed below.) And herein lies a key takeaway: if numerous college orchestras of vastly differing sizes and abilities have performed the same pieces over and over, it could mean that 1) these works are accessible, playable, or artistically meritorious and 2) perhaps my orchestra might consider performing them, too. On the flip side, those pieces or composers largely neglected by college ensembles could open up exciting new repertoire possibilities for the inquisitive conductor.

Most Oft-Performed Works

The most frequently performed composers and compositions from ca. 2005-2011 are listed below. Because of their popularity, these works might embody a broadly acceptable standard of playability by the typical college ensemble. (Note that numerals in parentheses equal number of times performed by a CODA orchestra, with the highest number of performances appearing at the top of each list):

Composers

1. Mozart (47)
2. Beethoven (25)
3. Haydn (18)
4. Tchaikovsky (17)
5. Mendelssohn (15)
6. Saint-Saens (14)
7. Copland; Ravel (13)
8. Brahms; Dvorak; Sibelius; Wagner (12)

⁸ There is insufficient space in this article to include the entire database, but it could be incorporated into www.codaweb.org as an editable Google Doc (or other web-based utility) so CODA members can add to it.

Compositions (All)

1. Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 (24)
2. Stravinsky, Firebird Suite (20)
3. Dvorak, Symphony No. 8 (17)
4. Dvorak, Symphony No. 9 (15)
Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition
5. Sibelius, Symphony No. 2 (14)
Brahms, Academic Festival Overture
6. Copland, Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo (13)
Gershwin, American in Paris
Mendelssohn, The Hebrides/Fingal's Cave
Mussorgsky, Night on Bald Mountain
Schubert, Symphony No. 8

Symphonies

1. Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 (24)
2. Dvorak, Symphony No. 8 (17)
3. Dvorak, Symphony No. 9 (15)
4. Sibelius, Symphony No. 2 (14)
5. Schubert, Symphony No. 8 (13)
6. Beethoven, Symphony No. 6 (11)
Mozart, Symphony No. 40
Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 5
7. Brahms, Symphony No. 1 (10)
Brahms, Symphony No. 2

Overtures/Tone Poems

1. Brahms, Academic Festival Overture (14)
2. Gershwin, American in Paris (13)
Mendelssohn, The Hebrides/Fingal's Cave
Mussorgsky, Night on Bald Mountain
3. Beethoven, Egmont Overture (12)
4. Respighi, Pines of Rome (11)
5. Bernstein, Candide Overture (10)
6. Debussy, Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun (9)
Rossini, William Tell Overture
Smetana, Ma Vlast: The Moldau
Tchaikovsky, Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture

Suites/Dances/Multi-Movement Works

1. Stravinsky, Firebird Suite (20)
2. Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition (15)

3. Copland, Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo (13)
4. Elgar, Enigma Variations (10)
Prokofiev, Lieutenant Kije Suite
Ravel, Mother Goose Suite
5. Bizet, L'arlesienne Suite No. 2 (9)
Copland, Appalachian Spring Suite
Dvorak, Slavonic Dances, Op. 46
Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherazade

Neglected Works and Composers

Identified next were underrepresented major composers and standard symphonic literature not programmed by CODA orchestras from ca. 2005-2011. A few factors might account for this neglect: 1) a certain piece or types of compositions—even the idiosyncratic styles of particular composers—were not accessible, playable, or artistically satisfying for orchestras at the college level or 2) such works and composers have untapped potential waiting to be discovered and enjoyed. Therefore, highlighting neglected works could prove just as valuable to the college conductor as the most frequently programmed ones.

The following categories (same as above) list selected pieces not performed by any CODA orchestra over a six-year period⁹:

Symphonies (including choral-orchestral where the choir does not play a continuous musico-dramatic role)

- ✗ Bernstein: 2
- ✗ Bruckner: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
- ✗ Copland: 1, 2, 3 (all)
- ✗ Dvorak: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- ✗ Glazunov: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 (all)
- ✗ Harris: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12
- ✗ Haydn: 95, 96, 97, 98, 102
- ✗ Liszt: Faust
- ✗ Mahler: 3, 6, 7, 9
- ✗ Nielsen: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
- ✗ Prokofiev: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- ✗ Rachmaninoff: 1, 2, 3 (all)
- ✗ Schubert: 1, 7, 9
- ✗ Schumann: 2
- ✗ Shostakovich: 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15
- ✗ Sibelius: 4, 6, 7
- ✗ Tchaikovsky: 1, 3
- ✗ Vaughan Williams: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9

⁹ Again, this includes only the 52% of CODA orchestras whose six-year repertoire could be gathered for this project in Fall 2011.

Overtures/Tone Poems

- ✗ Berlioz: Le corsaire, Waverley, Le roi Lear, Rob Roy
- ✗ Dvorak: Water Goblin, Noon Witch, The Golden Spinning Wheel, The Wild Dove, A Hero's Song, Scherzo capriccioso
- ✗ Liszt: Orpheus, Prometheus, Tasso, Mazeppa
- ✗ Massenet: Le Cid, Phedre
- ✗ Offenbach: Orpheus in the Underworld
- ✗ Sibelius: Luonnotar, En Saga, Pohjola's Daughter, Tapiola
- ✗ Strauss: Don Quixote, Also Sprach Zarathustra, Ein Heldenleben
- ✗ Tchaikovsky: Tempest, Hamlet, Francesca da Rimini
- ✗ Verdi: I Vespri Siciliani, Luisa Miller
- ✗ Von Suppe: Ein Morgen, ein Mittag..., Pique Dame, Die schone Galathee
- ✗ Weber: Euryanthe
- ✗ Wagner: Siegfried's Funeral March (Ring), Prelude and Liebestod (Tristan) Prelude to Act III (Tristan, arr. Stokowski), Prelude to Act I (Lohengrin), Faust

Suites/Dances/Multi-Movement Works

- ✗ Berlioz: Dance of the Sylphs, Minuet of the Will-o'-the-Wisps
- ✗ Brahms: Hungarian Dances (#1-21, except for No. 5)
- ✗ Copland: The Red Pony
- ✗ Debussy: Images pour orchestre: Gigues, Rondes de printemps
- ✗ Grieg: Peer Gynt, Suite No. 2
- ✗ Janacek: Sinfonietta
- ✗ Poulenc: Sinfonietta
- ✗ Ravel: Daphnis et Chloe, Suite No. 1
- ✗ Rimsky-Korsakov: The Golden Cockerel
- ✗ Sibelius: Lemminkainen
- ✗ Tchaikovsky: Sleeping Beauty

Programming Philosophies

The second part of the survey focused on fundamental principles of concert programming, which are broadly applicable to orchestras of any size or ability. The question asked of CODA members—"What is your guiding philosophy for programming concerts?"—elicited many thoughtful responses (35 total) ranging from the practical to the pedagogical to the philosophical. From these responses, 10 distinct categories emerged; each category summarizes its central philosophies, followed by a direct quote from a CODA member:

Playability

- Crafting repertoire that highlights strengths, softens weaknesses, and matches the instrumentation of the orchestra.

- Choosing easier music for the first concert of the year since it's the beginning of the concert season and musicians are still getting to know each other.
- Key question: Can the music chosen be prepared at a high level of excellence within the allotted rehearsal time?¹⁰

“We have a fairly large paying audience and need to perform at a high level, so we are careful to stay within our abilities any given season.” (Daniel Dominick, Austin College)

Themes

- Creating concert-specific themes (“Tales from the Dark Side”) as well as overarching season themes (“The Symphonies of Beethoven”).

“For me, curating a program is most important: these works must have a logical cohesion with one another that is intelligible for audiences and players alike.” (Andrew Koehler, Kalamazoo College)

Balance

- Blending the familiar with the unfamiliar, the old with the new, the challenging with the easily playable.

“I aim to provide a balanced diet and work to include some repertoire each year a) from a living composer, b) that is somewhat off the beaten path, c) that is standard and deserves even more airtime, in my perception, and d) that helps pedagogically.” (Brian Casey, Texas A&M University-Kingsville)

Personal Taste

- Selecting repertoire based on conductor preference.
- A conductor's enthusiasm for a particular piece or composer is critical to its success.

“I have at times ended up over-programming a single composer's works, in part because I like them, and in part because I think the students are served by more exposure to that particular composer (examples: Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams).” (Brian Casey, Texas A&M University-Kingsville)

¹⁰ “There is a danger in having multiple pieces beyond the ability level of the students. When this happens, ... ‘You end up *chasing notes* the entire rehearsal sequence and there is no time for making music.’” (emphasis added) Aaron J. Backes, “A Multiple Case Study of Six Exemplary Band Directors' Repertoire Selection Processes,” MA thesis, (Bowling Green State University, 2010), 27.

Contemporary Music

- Performing the music of our day, which also includes the twenty-first century.

“Orchestral music should reflect the music of our times and not just music from the past. [I program] at least one modern or contemporary piece on every program.” (Chris Kim, Cornell University)

Pedagogy

- Selecting repertoire that advances a technical, musical, or pedagogical goal for particular individuals, or for the ensemble as a whole.
- Challenging advanced players artistically and musically.¹¹
- Exposing students to certain music solely because of its intrinsic merit.

“[I prepare repertoire] always with an eye to developing the skills and capacities of the individual musicians.” (Michael Shasberger, Westmont College)

“I try to challenge the best players while making sure that the least capable players will be able to learn a way to play a part that will contribute and in which they will learn something.” (David Hagy, Wake Forest University)

“I try to select compositions that students need to perform. Occasionally, I use music that calls for a larger orchestra (not instrumentation but size of strings) than ours but we perform the music because our students need to have the experience of performing it.” (J. Robert Gaddis, Campbellsville University)

Collaboration

- The repertoire selection process as a cooperative effort.

“Repertoire is selected via a collaborative process that involves input from the applied faculty and students, and is ultimately worked out in consultation between the conductor and the director of the string program.” (Michael Shasberger, Westmont College)

Beethoven and the Symphony

- The symphony as the pillar of orchestral repertoire.
- Beethoven’s symphonies deserve special priority and consideration in comparison to all other composers.
- One conductor suggested at least one symphony *per semester*, and one Beethoven symphony *per year*.

¹¹ “[E]ach individual program ... has what he calls a ‘project piece.’ This is the most difficult piece on the program and challenges the students technically and musically. ‘I like to have one piece that is almost sight-readable, one project piece, and then pieces of varying degrees of difficulty.’ Aaron J. Backes, “A Multiple Case Study of Six Exemplary Band Directors’ Repertoire Selection Processes,” MA thesis, (Bowling Green State University, 2010), 27.

The Four-Year Plan

- Musics from many style periods, genres, nationalities, and geographic areas.
- Planning out repertoire based on a four-year rotation.

“Mozart or Haydn each year (every year, usually at the beginning of the year); in the course of four years, one Brahms symphony, one or two Beethoven symphonies, other Romantic symphonies (Dvorak, Schumann), later Romantic works (Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Mahler), important 20th century works (Stravinsky, Debussy, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, etc.), American works of the neo-romantic school (Copland, Hansen, Hovhaness, etc.).... I try to make sure we cover various national styles and geographic areas--British, Russian, Spanish, French, Scandinavian, Slavic, etc.” (Dan Sommerville, Wheaton College)

The Large Picture

- Selecting sublime music that is artistically satisfying and inspiring.
- Instilling in students an understanding of the profound human value of great music.

“Focusing on performing great music at the highest artistic level possible has always been the mission of the orchestra.... Despite all of the challenges of people, places, and things, it is the inspirational power of great music that makes it all possible.” (Elisa Koehler, Goucher College)

“I want to leave my students with an understanding of the value and truth imbedded in great music that they will carry with them into their careers, their families and their communities for the rest of their lives.” (Kory Katseanes, Brigham Young University)

Selected Concert Themes and Repertoire

These programming philosophies, along with the lists of most oft-performed and neglected music, were a key catalyst and inspiration for the themes and repertoire performed by the Keweenaw Symphony Orchestra. Selected examples from the past three concert seasons are listed below – these illustrate how one college orchestra utilized the data from this project to retool its approach to repertoire:

Theme: “Tales from the Dark Side”

Repertoire: Dance of the Seven Veils (Strauss)
Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima (Penderecki)
Night on Bald Mountain (Mussorgsky)
Noon Witch (Dvorak)
Firebird Suite [selections] (Stravinsky)

Commentary: Darkness, exotic fantasy, and death serve as a continuous thematic thread, lending dramatic coherence to the program. Noon Witch—a piece that matches the “off the beaten path” definition—was synced to an English translation (via surtitles) of the *Polednice* poem from which Dvorak drew inspiration for the work. The performance made young children cry in the audience.

Theme: “Synthetic Symphony”

Repertoire: Symphony No. 38, First Movement (Mozart)
Faust Symphony, Second Movement (Liszt)
Symphony No. 4, Third Movement (Tchaikovsky)
Symphony No. 9, Fourth Movement (Dvorak)

Commentary: With no actual symphony programmed for the season—and wanting to follow the principle of “one symphony per year”—this performance featured an artificially constructed “symphony” built upon individual movements from different symphonies. There was no attempt to find a thematic corollary from movement to movement, only to show the general character, tempo, and style of a typical first, second, third, and fourth movement from a symphony, in sequence.

Theme: “Beethoven’s Eroica”

Repertoire: Symphony No. 88 (Haydn)
Symphony No. 3 (Beethoven)

Commentary: Thematically, this program traced the evolution of the symphony from quintessential classicism (Haydn) to radical reinvention (Beethoven). By direct comparison to the Haydn, audiences could more fully appreciate the revolutionary character of Beethoven’s symphony. The concert also fulfilled the orchestra’s essential role of championing the symphonic form.

Theme: “1863-2013: Lincoln and Gettysburg”

Repertoire: Civil War Fantasy (Bilik)
Symphony No. 6 “Gettysburg” (Harris)
the CIVIL warS: Interlude #2 (Glass)
Afro-American Symphony (Still)
Lincoln Portrait (Copland)

Commentary: 2013 was the 150th commemorative year of key Civil War events: the Emancipation Proclamation and Battle of Gettysburg/Gettysburg Address. This concert highlighted music inspired by these events, including Afro-American Symphony, whose work and composer are symbolic of the racial progress initiated by Lincoln’s Proclamation. The program featured living composers (Glass, Bilik), 20th century composers (Harris, Still, Copland), thematic cohesion (Civil War), and balancing the well-known (Lincoln Portrait) with the underappreciated gem (Gettysburg Symphony).

Theme: “From Russia with Love”

Repertoire: Sleeping Beauty Suite (Tchaikovsky)
Antar Symphony, First Movement (Rimsky-Korsakov)
Symphony No. 9 (Shostakovich)

Commentary: Googling the search term “from russia with love orchestra” reveals the immense popularity of this particular concert theme. This program intentionally featured one of the pieces from the “neglected works” list (Sleeping Beauty Suite), and highlighted another underutilized jewel, Antar Symphony. The choice of Shostakovich was both pedagogical and practical: our musicians needed to experience Shostakovich and his Ninth Symphony is easily the most playable and technically approachable of the fifteen.

Theme: “Night at the Ballet and Opera”

Repertoire: Amahl and the Night Visitors (Menotti)
Swan Lake [abridged] (Tchaikovsky)

Commentary: Performing an opera and a fully-choreographed ballet on the same evening required a strong collaborative effort between music, theatre, sound, and dance divisions. This also presented an important pedagogical opportunity for the orchestra musicians, most of whom had never accompanied an opera or a ballet. The dual task of flexibly accompanying singers in the first half, and then setting and maintaining precise tempi for dancers in the second, stretched and developed their musicianship.

Conclusion

These thematic programs suggest specific ways conductors might incorporate concepts from this article into their concert seasons. The online and print resources previously mentioned, as well as the repertoire data and programming philosophies from the CODA survey, could serve as tools that reinforce already-successful methods of repertoire planning. They also embody a multifaceted approach to literature selection that could be expanded upon and modeled industry-wide.

Bibliography

- Alexander Street Press. "Music." www.alexanderstreet.com.
<http://alexanderstreet.com/products/music> (accessed January 4, 2014).
- Backes, Aaron J. "A Multiple Case Study of Six Exemplary Band Directors' Repertoire Selection Processes." MA thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2010.
- Bandworld. "American Band College Music Grading Chart." www.bandworld.org.
<http://www.bandworld.org/pdfs/GradingChart.pdf> (accessed October 13, 2013).
- Berliner Philharmoniker. "Digital Concert Hall." www.digitalconcerthall.com
(accessed November 1, 2013).
- Choral Public Domain Library. "Home Page." www.cpdlib.org (accessed June 18, 2013).
- Daniels, David. "Home Page." www.orchestralmusic.com (accessed April 28, 2014).
- Daniels, David. *Orchestral Music: A Handbook*. 4th ed. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005.
- Green, Jonathan D. *A Conductor's Guide to Choral-Orchestral Works*. Vol. 1-5. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1994-2008.
- International Music Score Library Project. "Home Page." www.imslp.org (accessed February 4, 2013).
- League of American Orchestras. "ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming." www.americanorchestras.org.
<http://www.americanorchestras.org/conducting-artistic-programs/ascap-awards-for-adventurous-programming.html> (accessed April 28, 2014).
- National Band Association. "Selections." www.nationalbandassociation.org.
<http://www.nationalbandassociation.org/selections.html> (accessed December 4, 2013).
- New York Philharmonic. "New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives." archives.nyphil.org (accessed June 17, 2013).
- Spotify. "Home Page." www.spotify.com (accessed May 24, 2013).
- The Wind Repertory Project. "Home Page." www.windrep.org (accessed November 13, 2013).

Thuerauf, Jeffrey. "A Survey of American Symphony Orchestra Programming for the 2003-2004 Season." *Musiké: Revista del Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico*. <http://musike.cmpr.edu/v001/thuerauf.pdf> (accessed April 28, 2014).

YouTube. "Home Page." www.youtube.com (accessed January 19, 2013).

Who needs conductors? The question is not quite as fatuous as it might seem. Many leading orchestras or choirs, and a fair number of less accomplished ones too, can quite easily navigate their way through even the most complex works without anyone waving a baton in front of them. Then there are those who have built up great orchestras over the years, winning admiration and fondness in equal measure. Born in New York, brought up in Australia, it was after moving to Prague to study with Václav Talich that Charles Mackerras fell in love with Czech music. In particular, he became a lifelong advocate of Janáček, conducting the UK premiere of *Káťa Kabanová* in 1951. This descriptive study examined professional conductors' use of rehearsal time in sequential pattern components, discussing task presentation targets, and using verbal imagery and modeling techniques. Commercially available videos of 15 professional conductors rehearsing prominent orchestras were scripted, coded, and timed for selected teaching behaviors. A study of the relationship between instrumental music teachers' modeling skills and pupil performance behaviors. R C Sang. The authors assigned 60 college music students to one of five practice conditions and asked them to perform the composition after a brief practice session. Practice conditions were modeling, singing, silent analysis, free practice, and control. View *Orchestral Conducting Research Papers* on [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu) for free. Nevertheless, the statistics on the number of women conductors – particularly those working at the upper-most echelons internationally – paint an indisputable picture with the League of American Orchestras reporting that in 2016, the percentage of music directors were 91% male and 9% female. For conducting positions that are not music directorships it was 79% male and 21% female.