

KNOW THE SCORE! - TRAVIS J. WELLER (NU/PA)

The evaluation and selection of repertoire is such an important task for a director at any level. This responsibility for band directors requires specific awareness in what areas their bands have developed strength, and where they will need to improve and mature. If repertoire is the curriculum for the concert band (and Bob Reynolds is right on this one), then we need to “know the score”!

Selecting the Score

When I am selecting a score, I try to think within each of the four roles that I fill in instrumental music education. As an advocate, I consider cultural, social, and historical aspects that may afford me the opportunity to bridge the gap between our rehearsal halls to the outside world and make a stronger connection for the audience to the music we perform. As a contributor to band repertoire as a writer, I consider the important band composers to which students deserve exposure during their time in my program. As a conductor, I consider this question: “Will studying and teaching my students this score make me a better musician?”

As an educator, it is important to consider if that score will allow the students to grow musically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

Marking a Score

Part of knowing the score is spending time with the work prior to rehearsal. It is important to become familiar with the melodic and rhythmic elements, the overall structure, and unique timbre and expressive elements of the work before stepping onto the podium to begin conducting and teaching the piece. I take time to use colored pencils on scores to mark tempo (e.g. green for faster tempos, yellow for a ritardando) and dynamic elements (e.g. red for forte, blue for piano). I also take time to mark entrances with stick figure representations of the instrument that is about to play. I also include phrase markings (so that I remember to share with the students) and occasionally conducting patterns (if meter changes frequently).

Linking to the Score

One of the more valuable things that I have done with my students is to link our daily warm-ups to elements within

the score. It is beneficial for the rehearsal to include tonal, rhythmic or expressive elements from the score in the warm-up material (e.g. if the work in minor, time would be devoted to learning the minor scale upon which the piece is set). These linking exercises that are part of the warm-up can lay the foundation for technical and expressive skills to develop.

One of the more engaging activities I included with my students was linking several scores to an inter-disciplinary unit. In our study of *The Trail of Tears* (with a Senior High Ensemble) and *Etowah* by Brian Balmages (with a Junior High Group), I constructed a website that allowed the students to engage with the history, art, and poetry from Cherokee culture. Through the process and self-evaluations the students completed, I discovered that it made the technical work more meaningful and the programmatic elements of *The Trail of Tears* by James Barnes more powerful. By linking and knowing more about the score, we can open the door for our students to connect our ensemble music to a much



larger world in which they live.

As part of our commitment to foster a deeper appreciation for quality wind literature, we need to be diligent in our repertoire choices. In our choices, in our preparation, and our teaching we have a tremendous opportunity to give our students the best possible experience in our ensembles. Don't wait to hear about the highlights later – know the score!

To see the Interdisciplinary Unit Website referenced in the article visit

http://www.personal.kent.edu/~tweller2/The_Trail_of_Tears.html

Editors note:

Check out the website indicated above; it is impressive.

He always draws a portrait of the conductor on the drum he hits the hardest.

