

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)**