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CONCERT PROGRAMMING SIMPLIFIED FOR THE OVERWHELMED SCHOOL CONDUCTOR

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CONCERT PROGRAMMING SIMPLIFIED FOR THE
OVERWHELMED SCHOOL CONDUCTOR

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Music

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CONCERT PROGRAMMING SIMPLIFIED FOR THE
OVERWHELMED CONDUCTOR

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CONCERT PROGRAMMING SIMPLIFIED FOR THE OVERWHELMED CONDUCTOR

An Abstract of the Thesis by
Adam Compton

This document describes the importance and viability of thorough concert programming. It contains five chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter covers one aspect to consider while going through the process of concert preparation. Some key points are an analysis of the Audience, an analysis of the Ensemble and the selection process of music. It also contains steps of putting together a viable order to a concert. The last two chapters give insight on different approaches to concert programming and some of the aspects of concert programming that does not deal primarily with the music and therefore is often found lacking in the average conductor. This document uses several different methods used by many accomplished music directors, pointing out key differences in theories and approaches. The impact of these varied approaches is pointed out and emphasized. By the end of the document, the reader should have a solid foundation of practical knowledge to create a successful concert experience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Great concerts are vital to the growth of the musician, especially in the academic arena. The feelings that can be expressed and felt in music are unique. Concerts or any public performances can create life memories that can shape a person for years. Most music directors can point out a few key moments in their own lives that led them down the path of creating music for a career. These moments are like pillars or beacons that often are referred to when a conductor needs to remember why they chose to get into this often-demanding field. Successful concert programming is the process that directors go through to create a performance for the ensembles for which they have responsibility. For some directors, it is a detailed step-by-step process with little to no variation. For others, it is a last-minute practice that never has any consistency. This thesis analyzes how to incorporate both a rigid detailed plan and in-the-moment flexibility. My argument is that you need to employ both strategies to develop a successful program. This document will delineate a clear path to design concerts that address long-term, specific planning and short-term modifications. The combination of an unyielding plan and flexible, on-the-fly adaptations will reduce frustration for directors, but also for performers and audiences.

Integrating both of these elements can be straightforward. Some take more thought and planning. Some are quick fixes, and some take an entire career to figure out.

The beauty of creating a spectacular concert is that there isn't a single foolproof way to do it. There is fluidity in our profession; when something changes, you must experiment all over again. It may sound like a real pain, but we do it because we love it, and we want our ensemble members and audiences to love it as much as we do. I will discuss the audience, the ensemble, how to choose music and what order it needs to be in. I will go over adding variety and then some clear instruction of putting together a concert. These guidelines will strengthen conductors, performers, and audiences. As readers put these principles into practice, directors can diminish any sense of frustration and they will not be overwhelmed.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

If any music director looks back on their time growing up performing in ensembles, they will probably have many fond memories of rehearsals when things just clicked or perhaps the feeling they had when they felt themselves grow as a musician. These are all important and even vital to our own musical foundation but some of the most vivid moments were when they performed in front of an audience. This could have been a concert with families in attendance. It could have been a festival performance in front of highly trained judges. Maybe it was a jazz performance at a club or restaurant, or perhaps in a football stadium filled with 60,000 fans. Every musician has key memories of playing in front of someone that gave a sense of accomplishment, a sense of satisfaction. Audiences are inherently part of the musical experience.

In this chapter, I will be discussing the role of the audience based on the rigidity/flexibility spectrum from chapter one since audiences are not static and therefore need constant attention. I will point out the differences in audiences that hear performances, and I will show how to assess this audience's expectations so a successful plan and necessary adjustments can be made. By following this assessment, the conductor will find that levels of frustration will subside and that stress levels will fall.

Audiences are different, obviously so therefore the aforementioned spectrum matters. The judges at an all-state performance who are trained to listen to the smallest detail and who are trained to know when and where any mistakes are, will listen to an ensemble very differently than the grandparents of a beginning sixth grade band Christmas concert. While both are hoping for a great performance, their definition of a great performance will be fundamentally different. Parents may tear up in joy after hearing an out of tune, out of time, no air support, one dynamic band with horrible posture. At the same time, judges may shake their heads in disappointment with a single cracked note from a trumpet in an otherwise flawless performance of an entire concert band. For most audiences, a middle ground approach on the rigidity/flexibility spectrum is the ideal whether they know it or not. Finding this middle ground will reduce anxiety on the part of the conductor.

The level of difficulty matters to an audience. Marching bands may get standing ovations and have the audience dancing in the stands at football games when a band plays something like *Louie, Louie*, which is considered a simple and repetitive piece. Whereas, national championship caliber marching bands may receive a polite golf clap at football games while performing complex music that pushes performers to their limits. Audience matters in both situations. Those same national championship caliber marching bands might get standing ovations and the crowd going nuts at high-end marching competitions. Whereas the crowd be bored out of their minds at the same competitions when a marching band plays something like *Louie, Louie*. Audience matters in both situations. Planning for appropriate audiences and allowing for changes will reduce the anxiety of the possibly overwhelmed director.

In fact, directors need to ask themselves, for whom are we playing? What are their expectations? What is their interest level? How long can we keep them interested? When these questions are answered, we can start programming. Thomas Palmatier said, “Six minutes is the maximum length that most audiences will stick with a piece mentally. Six seconds is the time it takes a listener to decide if they like something or not.”¹ There can be some flexibility with this idea, but it is a good parameter to try to stick to when planning out what pieces you will be performing. If the expectation of the audience is a more mature sound, a desire for emotional peaks and valleys, or virtuosic performing, then one can push past the six-minute idea. If the expectation of the audience is light entertainment, brief exposure to themes, or simply background music, then one could stick to Palmatier’s six-minute recommendation. This is an example of how to make a plan and be willing to adjust to the needs of the potential audience.

Directors can educate an audience through long-term programming and openness to fine tuning. As audiences experience more music, you can try to expose them to some new musical ideas. While grandparents at a sixth grade Christmas concert will clap for joy at “Jingle Bells” that sound like farm animals, those same grandparents would raise their eyebrows if their grandchild performed that same level piece as a senior in high school. Their expectations would change as they hear the progress made over time. A good director knows this and can push the audience to experience new things as they mature in their expectations.

¹ Thomas Palmatier, “Concert Programming for Success”, March 3, 2020
<https://sbomagazine.com/concert-programming-for-success/>.

Knowing the audience is a tool that leads to programming success. If we, as directors, can meet or exceed their expectations, we will succeed in keeping our audience. In the article “The Art of Programming” it states: “When expectations are exceeded, fans are made. Fans are advocates. Advocates create momentum. Momentum leads to increased opportunity.”² This means that if a director takes the time to program with the audience in mind, they can expect that audience to become inherently attached to the performance and the audience is connected in that way, then they will become a support system to the ensemble.

All directors want to have increased opportunities for their students and themselves in the adventure of creating music. If we can get our audiences to be our advocates, then our crowds will grow and with that growth comes better chances for our ensembles to succeed. When a school conductor knows the audience, the conductor will have the confidence to meet the audience’s expectations and therefore allowing the conductor to not be as overwhelmed by the idea of connecting to their audience.

² Bandworld, “The Art of Programming”, November 4, 2022
<http://www.bandworld.org/MagOnline/Issue45/20.pdf>.

CHAPTER III

PROGRAMMING FOR THE ENSEMBLE

A good director should know the ensemble. Knowing your ensemble is vital to programming a successful performance. As a director, you will need to know the strengths and weaknesses of your group. You will need to know where and when to push and where and when to ease off. In this chapter, I will discuss the importance of programming for your ensemble. I will talk about the vitality of analyzing your ensemble and how that should affect how you move forward, as a director when choosing music for them to perform.

These are just a few of the questions that a director may ask when doing an analysis of the performing ensemble. What are some of the strengths of my ensemble? Are they good readers? Do they have a mature sound? Do they listen? Is the air support there? Do they have a sense of pulse? Unfortunately, none of these questions have a simple, concrete answer. In fact, most of the answers will change from rehearsal to rehearsal. Judging musicality is subjective and always will be because it is a creative art.

To address these general, wide-open questions, we should be asking direct and specific questions. Examples of this may be: Can our clarinets cross the break? Do we have a percussionist with adequate rudimental skills? Can our trumpets play the range that is found in the piece? Do we have a bassoon player? If not, is the part doubled? Will this

piece keep our percussionists involved? If we, as conductors, do not want to be overwhelmed, then we must take this time seriously.

After we have gone through and answered these types of technical questions, we are then faced with some of the bigger picture questions, such as: How difficult will it be for my players to successfully navigate the woodwind choir portion of the piece? Will my brass be able to sustain their pitch throughout the piece without getting tired? Are the musical phrases too challenging or too easy? Will the ensemble be able to create the “dark tone” that is needed at letter B, while playing at a *pp* dynamic? Where are the moments that create teaching opportunities in this piece? Are there a lot of them or only a few? Does this piece sound like many of our other pieces?

The questions that need to be asked vary from piece to piece, ensemble to ensemble and director to director. There is not a perfect, all-encompassing list of questions. In order to formulate the correct questions, the director must spend time with the ensemble. The director must listen to them. As directors, we should be able to spot weaknesses and strengths in our groups. It is only after we know our groups that we are ready to start choosing repertoire for them.

Rob McWilliams explains his philosophical framework for choosing repertoire for his ensembles by using the principle of “The Three E’s.”³ These “E’s” are Expression, Education, and Entertainment. He states that he does not move on to the next “E” until the previous “E” is satisfied. This is a good place to start when programming for your

³ Rob McWilliams, “Choosing Repertoire and the Three E’s”: Expression, Education, Entertainment.”, November 14, 2022
https://au.yamaha.com/en/education/greatstart/articles/ensemble_learning/three-es.html.

ensemble, however, being prepared to be flexible can be advantageous as we gain experience as a conductor.

Expression (or even emotion) covers a wide variety of human feelings. McWilliams listed a few: joy, fear, anger, sadness, happiness, and anticipation among others. We must ask ourselves what some of the expressions are that we wish to convey in this piece. Is there one overarching emotion? Or are there a wide gamut of emotional points or hits in the song? If so, what are they and how do we get those feelings or expressions performed? Do we want to convey this to the audience? Or perhaps, there are certain expressions or emotions that we want the performers to experience.

Education is the second “E.” What do we want the ensemble to learn? Do we want to teach a new rhythmic concept? Do we want to push a technical aspect? Do we want to develop player independence? Perhaps we want to build tone quality or explore new keys or genres of music. These are some of the questions that McWilliams brings up. I will go into this a bit more in the next section but suffice it to say that we, as directors, need to set educational goals for our ensembles and choosing the correct repertoire can help us achieve those goals.

The last “E” that Dr. McWilliams brings up is entertainment. Is the music recognizable? Is it accessible to the students? Will it be enjoyable for the ensemble? Will it be relatively satisfying on the first hearing? This is the last “E” to be considered. While entertainment value is important, it shouldn’t supersede Expression or Education. “Prioritizing entertainment value is somewhat akin to allowing students in an English course to choose the books they will read and study based on what they currently know

and like rather than what will develop a deeper understanding of literature, language, rhetorical devices, etc.”⁴

This is just one philosophy for choosing pieces that fit your ensemble. There is wisdom in this philosophy. We need to make sure that we allow our ensembles to have musical experiences first and foremost because it is these experiences that will shape them and nurture them in their musical growth.

Joseph Alsobrook, in his book, *Pathways*, describes a rule that he follows called the 80/20 rule. Simply stated it says: “When choosing music for a performance the music should be 80% readily attainable by your students, 20% challenges them and under the 20%, 80% of the musicians should be able to execute 80% of the musical and technical demands.”⁵ What does this rule mean in a typical ensemble? In the previous section I listed some educational questions that we would want our ensemble to learn. In a fictional world, all our students would learn a wide variety of educational concepts in every rehearsal and with every piece of music presented to them. However, it is good to set a few goals that are attainable and have the students experience success achieving those goals instead of failing at achieving a huge list of goals. This relates to the 80/20 rule. If, as a director, you choose 80% of your music that can be performed with a small amount of effort or rehearsal time, this will free up time to focus on a few concepts that you would like your ensemble to improve. By choosing fewer goals and giving your ensemble a chance to focus on those goals, progress will be made. One of our primary goals as directors and educators is to lift a student or ensemble from one level to another. When a student or ensemble goes through

⁴ Rob McWilliams, “Choosing Repertoire and the Three E’s”.

⁵ Joseph Alsobrook, “Pathways” (*A Guide for Energizing and Enriching Band, Orchestra and Choral Programs*), GIA Publications, 2002.

that growth and recognizes the improvement, the chances of them becoming a lifelong learner in music will increase.

Sarah Labovitz uses the example of choosing a piece that contains a section of compound music if an ensemble struggles with compound meter but only doing it for a short period of time and not having your whole performance in compound meter.⁶ If there is a skill that needs to be worked on, then perhaps choose a piece that utilizes that skill but only in small quantities. Then through rehearsal and repetition, the ensemble can overcome that deficiency and grow in their musicality.

Failure will occur when directors try to do too much at once. It is better that directors focus on small, incremental, growth phases than to try to climb Mount Everest in one day. Learning and growth happen step by step and very rarely in large leaps at a time. We need to allow our students to become experts in something musical. Over time, when the students start to master different aspects of the music, confidence will grow and what was once a great challenge now becomes an easy fix.

Some of us are directors of less proficient or beginning ensembles and some of us are directors of more advanced or mature ensembles. We need to know which one we are because both can be very successful. It takes time and effort to evaluate our ensemble. Directors need to listen to them. Directors need to find out what motivates them. Directors need to understand where they are coming from. After that is completed, directors can follow some of the strategies listed above to try to choose music that will allow the ensemble to have a great musical experience. Choosing repertoire that will satisfy them,

⁶Sarah Labovitz, “Programming to get the Most out of Your Concert Assessment Concert Cycle”, December 18, 2021
<https://sbomagazine.com/programming-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-concert-assessment-concert-cycle/>.

will challenge them, but will not overwhelm them is crucial. The ensemble needs to be exposed to a variety of musical concepts and ideas, and this takes time because your ensemble is always changing. Developing a pattern of growth and learning incrementally is essential to improvement for the musical ensemble. While following set plans using the Three E's is a great way to start, be aware that as one gains experience, learning to adapt this set plan and adding variation over time will lead to less rigidity and allow the conductor to feel some of the pressures alleviate. All of this takes time, but it is worth this investment if the school conductor wants to feel in control and give the ensemble the best opportunity for educational growth.

CHAPTER IV

PROGRAMMING THE PERFORMANCE

When preparing for a performance, there are many things that the director must consider. Several of them will be discussed, however, a comprehensive list will probably never be found. The things that will be discussed will be things that I consider to be the most important things when programming a performance. I will be including perspectives and examples from many successful directors who have had various degrees of success in the music directing world. By including these differing views, the reader should be able to ascertain that there is no one way or magic bullet that automatically creates the perfect performance. Music is a creative and emotional medium that changes as much as we do. Perfect one day may be “just ok” another day and bland or forgetful music may have a totally new effect on the listener after some changes in their personal lives. The director must keep this in mind when creating the performance.

Elizabeth Green gives three steps to be used when planning out a concert program. “Think ‘interest’-when setting up the program; think ‘contrast’-to guard against monotony; consider ‘sequence’- how one composition leads to the next; live the concert in your mind. Imagine yourself as a member of the audience.”⁷

⁷ Elizabeth Green, *The Modern Conductor* Upper Saddle River, NJ: (Prentice Hall), 1997, 247.

These three steps can lead to some decisions that can keep the focus of the performance on, not only the audience, but the performers as well. Many times, as directors we don't do a good job at the last step, which is going through the entire performance in our mind and evaluating the result of the program. By doing so, a director can avoid pitfalls and can continue to "fine tune" the program until the desired effect is reached.

Wayne Pegram states: "This important word [public] indicates that we should use our musical taste to select music that will allow every member of the audience to really enjoy at least one selection. It is very important that the music be of quality that can be enjoyed by both conductor and student plus offering something worth teaching; but do not overlook the general audience. All too often musicians tend to do things to impress each other rather than enlighten and entertain audiences. Just as every rehearsal should have both concentrated serious moments and lighter, even humorous moments-so should a concert."⁸

The audience should be near the top of our mental list when considering what should be performed. The ensemble should be next on our mental list. Finding the balance between educating and entertaining is the trick. When the director considers the big picture, hopefully, things will start to come into focus a bit more and small decisions will lead to large dividends. The goal is to program a concert that will have an emotional effect on the audience while allowing musical growth in the performer. If this can be achieved, then by all intents and purposes, the concert will have been a success. If the concert is a success, it will give the conductor confidence, which in turn will reduce anxiety.

⁸ Wayne Pegram, *Practical Guidelines for Developing the High School Band* (Parker Publishing Co), 1973, 163.

The first question that comes to a director when prepping for a performance is often, “what do we play?”. This is also a very loaded question. There are almost an infinite number of correct answers and an infinite number of incorrect answers. With that many possibilities, how does a director navigate an effective response? First, what is chosen to perform could and should have a lasting effect on others. Second, depending on how success is measured; directors should want to have students experience growth as well as providing a lasting impression on them. In addition to this, the audience should leave the performance satisfied and, to some degree, enlightened by attending the performance.

According to Keith Ozsvath and Greg Scapillato in their “Concert Programming Hacks” presentation, there are resources.⁹ There are some personal resources and there are some universal resources. Our personal resources can be pieces that we have performed as a student that had an impression on us. Perhaps there are pieces that we have heard as an audience member that has moved us. Another source could be recommendations from colleagues and friends. These resources are unique to each of us and can be very finite. However, that does not mean that they are less valuable. I have found that when I conduct a piece that has had an emotional impact on me, I tend to portray that emotional connection more easily. There is something to be said about giving your students and your audience the same experience that proved to be pivotal to your own musical heritage.

There are some common resources that anyone can use. These resources, while great, can be overwhelming in their size and will take a great deal of time and effort to narrow down the criteria that the director is searching for. Some of the common resources

⁹ Keith Ozsvath and Greg Scapillato. “Concert Programming Hacks Presentation,” June 26, 2019 <https://www.teachingmusicandmore.com/single-post/2019/07/02/concert-programming-hacks-presentation>.

are publisher's websites, such as jwpepper. These sites will contain literally thousands of titles that can be searched out. Another common resource can be composer's websites. Many modern composers have chosen to self-publish their music. If you do a search for a specific composer, chances are you will be able to find their individual site which will probably contain a large amount of their compositions. Online collections, such as windrep, are also some common sites that can be used. These sites have been created by directors as an aid for other directors to help them find pieces. The sites can be comprehensive as many people have contributed to them and they are continuing to grow. The site, YouTube, has become a global resource when it comes to finding great music. Some videos just contain the audio track, some videos contain a live performance, while other videos contain a score that can be followed while listening to the piece. Youtube is a site that is universally used by directors around the world and the content is growing daily.

Using these resources can be, and will be, time consuming. Because of this, it is prudent that the director starts this process long before the performance or even before rehearsals start. The reality is that it should start months before anything else. Once the director starts listening and perusing scores, this process doesn't end.... ever. Successful directors start early in their career making an inventory of pieces. Throughout their career, they keep adding to this inventory. How this is inventoried varies from director to director. Some may use an ever-expanding spreadsheet. Some may keep concert programs recorded. Some may even keep audio recordings of pieces that they have conducted successfully. As the director grows and matures through experiences, he/she will start to pick out things that are liked and things that have proven to be unsuccessful. The director will start to know what works well for the ensemble and what pieces really had an impact on the audience.

This will lead to a variety of experiences that will vary from director to director. As I stated earlier, there is no single way of doing things correctly every time.

Here are a few suggestions that have been made by some very successful directors when considering choosing literature.

Anthony Maiello recommends the following considerations:¹⁰

1. Quality of the Music
2. Technical and musical ability of the performers in the ensemble
3. Goals/mission of the ensemble
4. Instrumentation
5. Amount of rehearsal time/ preparation time
6. Budget (guest artists, admission charge, purchasing music)
7. Length of the concert
8. Audience
9. Purpose of the concert
10. Place of the performance

Lynn Cooper has a different list of considerations.¹¹

1. Different tonal centers
2. Meters
3. Styles and moods

¹⁰Anthony Maiello, *Conducting: A Hands-On Approach* (Belwin-Mills Publishing, Warner Bros. Publishing, Inc. 1996, 198.

¹¹Lynn Cooper, *Teaching Band and Orchestra: Methods and Materials*. (GIA Publications), 2004, 141-142.

4. Historical period
5. Form and structure
6. Diversity and ethnic origin
7. Scoring variety: tutti, use of soloists, small ensembles, section, and choirs of voices
(e.g., brass, woodwind, and percussion)

While these lists appear to be completely different, one can easily see that pieces, when correctly chosen, can overlap and meet several of the criteria mentioned above. I tend to look at the first list as a type of “macro” level list and the second list as a “micro” level list. A prepared director leans on the first list initially and then, as pieces come to mind, he/she switches gears to focus on some of the second list.

As a director listens, studies scores, and becomes exposed to various titles and compositions, he/she will start to gain an idea of some possibilities for a program. Ozsvath and Scapillato suggest making a few lists. These lists can be called “For Sure, Possible, Not Now, and Never”.¹² If used, these lists will simplify the process that the conductor will go through. I have found that for me the “Possible” list tends to get long quickly as I go through repertoire preparing for a performance. We may hear things that we like and maybe we can find some way to fit it in the program. The “Not Now” list tends to be the second longest as I weed through the pieces. These are the pieces that have potential but perhaps my ensemble is not a fit for it or perhaps it is not appropriate for the audience that I am playing for. The “Never” list is usually filled with pieces that are way too challenging or way too simple for the groups that I am working with. Many directors become enamored

¹² Keith Ozsvath and Greg Scapillato. “Concert Programming Hacks Presentation,” June 26, 2019
<https://www.teachingmusicandmore.com/single-post/2019/07/02/concert-programming-hacks-presentation>.

with these ultra-challenging pieces and sometimes fall into the trap of trying to pull them off when the ensemble isn't prepared. When that happens, the performance suffers. One should not play a piece that is way too difficult just for the sake of playing it. This can lead to frustration and despair which are two things we should avoid as music directors. The "For Sure" list tends to be the shortest list. This will consist of pieces that the director knows will be a great fit for a program. Sometimes a program will start with one "for sure" piece and then after some research, will grow from that piece. Once the "For Sure" list becomes long enough, then the director can go into the next phase of creating the program, which is finding the correct order for the pieces.

Selecting the order

There is a common analogy when describing a successful concert order and that is the analogy of a good meal. The analogy goes something like this: Appetizer, Soup/Salad, Main Course, Dessert.

Appetizer

Just as there are many ways to create a great appetizer in a meal, there are many ways of creating a great opening statement in a performance. While many great directors state that the opening piece should be up-tempo and exciting, I believe that Gerald Klickstein may have stated it best when he said "Like hors d'oeuvres before a banquet, your opening selection whets listeners' appetites. Start with straightforward music that introduces an audience to your sound and enables you to settle in."¹³. This way of explaining the opening of a concert allows the director to have some freedom in how to

¹³ Gerald Klickstein, "7 Tips for Designing Concert Programs", January 8, 2012
<https://www.musiciansway.com/blog/2012/01/7-tips-for-designing-concert-programs/>.

draw the audience in. While many good meals, movies and books start with a bang, sometimes a more poignant introduction can have a bigger payoff later. Having stated this, please do not think that fast, bold, and big is not effective. Most of the time, it is very effective. One could argue that this is the most successful way to start a program. It sure is the most common and I believe that it almost always works. However, I do not think that is the only way to start a program because programs can vary themselves. There are many good appetizers out there and they can all be very different. Sometimes stuffed mushrooms are awesome and sometimes a person just might be really looking forward to the chips and salsa that come before the meal.

Soup/Salad

What makes soup/salad a good part of a meal? Typically, when we order a meal, we focus on the entree but oftentimes the soup or salad that comes before it can really add to the enjoyment of the meal. There is a reason that we usually get the soup or salad before the main course. It usually builds upon the experience that we had with the appetizer. Appetizers can be flashy and/or bold whereas a soup or salad is usually more subtle. After we open the performance with something to get the audience engaged, it can now be a time to get them to take a deeper dive into some music. This could be a piece that requires them to pay more attention or perhaps may be more thought provoking. According to Scott Watson, pieces which demand more mental engagement-due to their length, slow pacing, or dissonant harmonic vocabulary, etc.-are usually programmed fairly early when the listeners' ears are fresh.¹⁴ Keeping the audience engaged after a good appetizer will be the challenge. I agree that using a piece that requires more from the audience should be used

¹⁴ Scott Watson, *Perfecting Your Concert Program: Tips for Selecting Repertoire* (Alfred Music), July, 2018.

early on to maximize their involvement. We have all enjoyed a good salad or a tasty soup. There have been times, when I have been content with the meal after this phase before the main course even arrives. Sometimes this part of the experience is the most memorable. However, for most of our meals, these just lead us to the reason we are having the meal in the first place, which is the main course.

Main Course

The main course of a meal is usually the highlight of the meal. The same can be said about the featured piece in a concert. This is usually the most challenging part of the concert for the performers. It can also be a great time to feature a soloist or ensemble. If the concert were to have a masterwork in it, this is the place to put it. The audience has been attracted, has put some thought into it by now and it is now time to impress them. For the performer, this is usually the piece (or pieces) that they have put the most effort into and have worked on the most. It is now time for them to have their payoff moment. Maybe it is something that has multiple movements or perhaps really pushes their technical skills or their musicality. This is the climax of the story. This is when musical experiences are created. If the director has planned things well and the ensemble is prepared, then a lasting impression should be made. If this part of the performance fails, then it will have a very negative cloud on the whole performance. It doesn't have to be perfect, it rarely is, but it needs to be good. If things have gone as planned, then all we need now to top off the evening is a sendoff.

Dessert

By this point in the performance your audience has earned an easy payoff. Usually something novel or light. Maybe something quick and upbeat. If you want your audience

to leave with a smile on their face, give them a reason to smile. For many, that may be something familiar or catchy. This should be a piece that your performers are not too stressed over and that they can just enjoy performing. If that happens, the audience will pick up on that and the feeling will be contagious. There may be times when you may choose to leave the audience in a somber, thoughtful mood but more times than not, people like to leave a performance uplifted. This is true in books, movies, and in concerts. Directors who plan performances well will have the audience leave feeling like they could experience that performance again and again. This will encourage repeat attendance tendencies. This is simple, yet effective.

This meal analogy is just one way to think about performance order. I am sure there are many other ways to plan out the concert order. The key point is to make sure that you, as the director, give your ensemble and your audience a variety of micro-experiences that vary. Humans crave variety. Humans crave it in just about everything. Humans love comedies, suspense, horror and love stories. It is evident by our actions that we do not all want the same thing all the time. This is yet another way that shows that the ideal is often found somewhere in the middle of the rigidity/flexibility spectrum. In our musical performances, we should try to give a variety of events throughout the evening. If we think it through, and pace things correctly, we will have a greater chance at success and with that success, it will allow the school conductor to feel less overwhelmed.

CHAPTER V

POSSIBLE VARIATIONS ON PROGRAMMING

Most directors go through the process of preparing and then performing a concert many times over a career. It is easy to develop habits when doing this. While it is good to develop strengths and know how to avoid pitfalls, we must make sure that we do not become so entrenched in the way that we do things. This can cause us to get into a rut with our music programs. Occasionally a director needs to mix it up a bit to reestablish some pop in our programs, with our ensembles, for our audiences. This is a good way to feel refreshed and to re-commit to personal growth as a conductor. Finding that balance between a rigid structure and a constant state of fluidity will remove unneeded burden on a director. Here are several ways a director can add variety to programming a concert.

Richard Miles suggests using themes to add variety to our programs.¹⁵ Having a themed concert can be a great way to get your audience's interest up. By having a theme, one could possibly connect several pieces that would otherwise not be very effective together. Another place that I have found to come up with themes for concerts is in the marching band world. For the last forty years or so, marching bands have come up with themes for their halftime shows. While some of these themes are very specific, there are

¹⁵ Richard Miles, Concert Programming *In Teaching Through Performance in Band: Volume 8* (GIA Publications), 2011, 110-200.

many themes out there that are open to interpretation. There are many websites that contain marching band themed shows where the theme can be borrowed for a concert. They can be found with a simple online search. The point is that a themed concert can be a great way to do something different and still accomplish all the goals set out by the director.

Another possible variation to programming a concert is having a benefit concert. It is also a great way to get some people involved that perhaps, may not have been willing to get involved. This is another way to expand your audience into undiscovered circles of the community. It is also a way to show support for a group or individual that may help your students develop their social and interpersonal skills.

Involving music along with food is a recipe for success. There are very few people that would turn down the opportunity to have both in the same evening at the same time. This can be anything from a madrigal style dinner to jazz club dinner, to a country BBQ style dinner. The music can match the culture of the food. If you want to add some variety to your concert schedule, adding a food element will be a way to bring in the audience, and give your ensemble a memorable evening.

If one group is great, what about combining a concert with an ensemble for another school or community? This is an effective way to bring two or more audiences together. It is also a way to perhaps expose a younger ensemble to a more experienced or mature ensemble. A high school with a college, a community band with a junior high band, or perhaps a combined concert of two high school bands. This can be a successful way to bring a community together, enhance support for music, and help performers get excited about working with another ensemble.

Changing up the venue is yet another way to add variety to your programming. While performing on a stage can be very exciting, there are places that can really add a buzz about your performance. Maybe performing outside, in a park. How about a concert in a restaurant? Or you can use a historical reference and perform in someone's home. Any time you change the venue of a performance, you pull the performer out of their comfort zone and that will add to their anticipation of the performance. This may take some extra planning on the part of the director, but the payoff could be worth it.

These are just a few ideas of ways to add some variety to a concert. Variety is a good thing. However, we do not need variety for variety's sake. Structure is still an absolute need when programming. Music is the fundamental foundation that we are building upon, and we must adhere to that principle first. Keep it simple. Richard Miles, again, states it best when he says: "Perhaps the most important aspect to keep in mind is that no creative idea can ever take the place of high-performance standards incorporating the performance of quality music of artistic merit. If your performance is not excellent, a cosmetic cover-up will never be sufficient substitution. On the other hand, when great literature and high-performance standards are at the core of your program, creative performing strategies can greatly enhance your overall effect and provide additional exposure and enjoyment for your students."¹⁶ By adding a little variety in a planned way, it can lessen the weight that a school conductor can feel, bringing energy back into the program.

¹⁶ Miles, Concert Programming, 124.

CHAPTER VI

ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION AND POST CONCERT FOLLOW UP

In this Chapter, we will examine several things that a music director must do to prepare for a concert that has little to do with music. As music directors, we have had years of experience and very specific training in our musical fields. These experiences, for many, have led them to choose the path of a music director for their career. In college, we learn how to conduct. We learn what to listen for in an ensemble and how to identify problems and issues in the music and with the ensemble members. We develop a love for great musical literature. We are passionate about our craft, and we want to convey that to our ensemble so that, through them, we can connect with an audience. All of this is vital to being a successful director. However, when we get into the real world of a music director in an educational setting, we quickly realize that there is so much more to do that has nothing to do with our professional training. In this chapter, we are going to discuss some of those aspects of creating a great musical program that has very little to do with music and how, by following these steps, it will reduce feelings of being overwhelmed.

Here are a few things to consider when preparing for a concert that really doesn't have a lot to do with music.

Publicity

1. Communication with outside entities

2. Ticket creation and distribution
3. Creating a printed program
4. Stage set-up
5. Stage tear-down
6. Lighting issues
7. Sound and/or recording issues
8. Ushers
9. Security
10. Custodial Needs

This list is comprehensive and sounds like the ideal way to do things. This is the perfect picture of how to do things and most of the time does not happen. However, it is a good reference point and the closer that a director can get to this list, the more smoothly the evening of the concert can and should go. Start with just a few and as you feel your confidence and ability growing, continue to add to your list and eventually you will be able to do most, if not all of these things without feeling overwhelmed. As you gain experience as a musical director, you may want to incorporate more and more of these steps in your concert preparation.

Concert programs are a great way to get a lot of information to your audience in a quick, precise way. For many members of the audience, the concert program is the first impression that they receive about the ensemble and their perception of how the evening is going to go.

Concert programs should be visual. They should be easy to read and follow and they should give all the necessary information to the audience member for the evening.

One way to increase interest is by using something visual to grab the audience's attention. According to *Bandworld*, a good way to do this is by using logos and a themed approach to your programs.¹⁷ A few examples that they give are: if your concert has patriotic flair to it, then the program should reflect that by using red, white, and blue or perhaps some stars and stripes or even a bald eagle on it. Another example given was to use theater and/or Broadway visual references if you are performing show tunes. Yet another, was using runes or the color green if you are performing Celtic music. The point is to try to match the printed program to the music that will be presented. It doesn't have to be complex. Simplicity is almost always effective.

Consider the following information to be included in your printed programs. This list comes from Wolfgang Kuhn's *Instrumental Music*¹⁸

1. School and organization giving concert
2. Location of concert
3. Time and date of concert
4. Name of conductor(s)
5. Rosters
6. Soloists
7. Accompanists
8. Special recognitions
9. Credits to production staff, crews and others who have assisted
10. Music to be performed (in the correct order)

¹⁷ Bandworld, "The Art of Programming".

¹⁸ Wolfgang Kuhn, "Instrumental Music: Principles and Methods of Instruction," *Literary Licensing, LLC*, (May 5, 2012): 148-149

These lists are large and contain a ton of information. As a director, you will need to find balance between providing crucial information and handing out a complete novel for your audience to read before the concert begins. Remember, for many, the printed concert program is the first impression for the evening. If it is done well, it can create a buzz and excitement before your ensemble plays their first note.

When utilized correctly, ushers can put out so many fires on the night of the performance. Ushers need to be trained and informed so they can be prepared to assist with the proceedings. You should clearly communicate expectations to your ushers so they can ward off potential problems before they get to the director.¹⁹

So, the concert is over. Here are a few things to consider doing after the concert is over to ensure continued success. It is good to keep records of what you just experienced. You can do this by doing the following:

1. Keep a few copies of the program
2. Collect and keep any reviews of the concert
3. Keep any photos of the concert
4. If the concert was recorded, keep a recording on file

There may be some additional “i’s to dot and t’s to cross” after the concert. This may include:

1. Do a financial report on ticket sales if applicable
2. Do a cost analysis of the concert (cost of music, publicity, etc.)
3. Keep a list of any contacts you received from the concert. This may come in handy in the future.

¹⁹ Lynn Cooper. *Teaching Band and Orchestra: Methods and Materials*. (GIA Publications), 2004.

From an educational point of view, you should consider the following ideas from Keith Ozsvath and Greg Scapillato.²⁰ You should do a director self-reflection by asking the following type of questions: Would I program this piece again? What was successful? What did not go well? What was challenging? What would I do differently? These answers could be kept with your copies of the program or any other notes from the evening. They also suggest doing a similar self-reflection for the performers. As you read through those, it may give you a different insight as to how the concert went and what really stood out to the people doing the performing. A self-reflection can also show the conductor what went smoothly and how that can reduce future anxiety when planning out the next concert.

These are just a few ideas and suggestions of things that you can do, as a director, that can make the concert experience run so much smoother and can give you, your ensemble, and your audience something that can be remembered and built upon as you repeat this cycle repeatedly in your career. Most directors have been trained in music for years before running their first concert. For most directors, there's little to no training on how to pull off all the preparational duties and post-concert follow up that has little to do with the actual music. Make a plan but allow for flexibility in that plan. The quicker that you can train yourself in these nonmusical skills, the more time you can spend on the actual music, which is where most of your focus should be found. Remember, simplicity is almost always effective.

²⁰ Ozsvath, Keith and Scapillato, Greg. "Concert Programming Hacks Presentation." June 26, 2019
<https://www.teachingmusicandmore.com/single-post/2019/07/02/concert-programming-hacks-presentation>.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have given you, the reader, some pieces of advice. This advice is based on things that I myself, and other directors have observed and noticed after years of trial and error. Some of this is universal and can be used in a wide variety of situations. Some of this is specific and should be very helpful when a certain situation arises and you, the director, are stuck. I would hope that you take this advice to heart. I believe that if you do, you will avoid many of the potential pitfalls that happen to new directors. If you are not a new director, then perhaps this will be a good refresher for you. Finding the perfect blend of rigidity and flexibility will allow the greatest chance at success. The education world is full of directors that do not or cannot get the best out of their students, their ensembles, their programs, or their communities in general. It is my hope that you can take some of this advice and avoid being one of those directors.

However, the best teacher is experience. If you truly want to learn if these pieces of advice work, then try them out. Figure out what success feels like, experience failure, feel elation, feel exhaustion. Only when you experience those things will the real lesson be learned. Becoming a master at creating and programming great concerts takes time. Virtually every director that I know looks back at their early years and cringe at some of the decisions and choices they made regarding a concert performance. Do the “Three E’s”

or try the “80/20 rule”. Mix it up at times or be formulaic at times. Flexible works. Being rigid works. However, finding the middle ground works best. You may find that you love some and don’t really care for others. Afterall it is called music education for a reason. Take it step by step and try not to do everything at once. Savor the successes and build upon them. Simplicity is almost always effective. These strategies will give you focus. They will open up your time for things that bring you happiness and this is the key to not being overwhelmed.

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