

# *SETTING THE TABLE:* Concert Programming For Music Educators

Dr. Gregory X. Whitmore – Presenter  
Director of Bands – Mt. San Antonio College  
Music Director – Pacific Symphony Youth Wind Ensemble





## THE APPETIZER:

“The classroom [orchestra/band room] is a microcosm of the world: it is the chance we have to practice whatever ideals we cherish. The kind of [orchestra/band room] situation one creates is the acid test of what it is one really stands for.”

(Weimer, 2013, p. 33)

# FIRST COURSE:

- **Core Beliefs Pertaining To Programming:**

- It is important to remember that programming for our ensembles is more than just “picking music”. I submit that our concerts should be **curated**. This is a high-end, intensive, deliberate, artistically-centered process with both artistic and educational outcomes.
- Consider your connections to the titans in our profession. Your work in programming for a concert season is also undertaken by the great conductors of the world’s great orchestras, choirs, and concert bands. We should come to the literature planning process with the same enthusiastic effort, creativity, and artistic energy as those at the vanguard of our art.
- The act of programming for a concert season is akin to selecting ingredients for a meal. Be very careful how and from where you are sourcing your “produce”.

## SECOND COURSE:

- **Your Values For Music Education: The Silent Forces At Work...**
- Assess what your values are regarding programming for your ensembles.
- Our programmatic values are often shaped by a variety of “silent influences”
  - Our own experience in music as students (middle school, high school, university).
  - Our own beliefs as to what qualifies as “quality” or “good” literature.
  - Influences of exemplary educators, and conductor-mentors.
  - Influences of fellow school music programs.
  - The ability level/developmental level of our ensembles.
  - Program Funding.
- Conductor-Educators are encouraged to find time to assess where their programmatic values system lies and how those values are influenced (and perhaps challenge those values) **prior** to the programming process.

# THIRD COURSE:

- **Thematic Programming:**

- I would submit that our concerts be thematically structured. Programming thematically allows for a central idea to unify our concerts, and provide structure to the literature we consider for our ensembles. Also, programming in this way allows for our concerts to “open up” to collaboration within other academic or artistic programs on our campuses and in our communities (consider guest artists, student groups, guest ensembles).

- **Some of My Own Examples: (Included In Your Handout)**

- **PSYWE:**

- "Music of Now & Before" – 11/2016
- "Music of Darkness & Light" - 3/2017
- "Empires & Everything Else" – 11/2017
- "Moments In Time" – 11/2018
- "Bach Frames" – 5/2019

## FOURTH COURSE:

- Join the mailing lists for the great orchestras. Use the concert season brochures as inspiration for your own programming.
- Research any forthcoming domestic or international anniversaries, historical events, or dates of institutional significance, allow these to inform your programming.
- Consider compositional premiere anniversaries for works in the core repertoire; allow these dates to inform your programming.
- Consider studying the concert programs from honor ensembles from across the United States (many times a simple Google search will find the concert programs online). This is often a great place to begin your investigation into works previously unknown to you.



## FIFTH COURSE:

- **Benefits of Thematic Programming:**
- Thematic programming allows for an increased ensemble and audience experience, as well as a variety of ways to expand the concert experience, and allows for the audience and ensemble to be taken along a journey throughout the concert-going experience.
- Conductors should think “outside of the standard concert program”, and look to provide their ensemble and audience with unique concert going experiences. Perhaps unique pairings of works to perform, trying new ways to immerse an audience in a piece, or including innovative ideas to take the concert experience outside the norm.

## SIXTH COURSE:

- **The Act Of Programming – The When & The How:**
- Programming for the next concert season should begin in earnest in the late winter of the current concert season, and follow a “macro – micro” approach. Conductors should begin the process simply by laying out a calendar, and brainstorming how and when concerts are planned (as well as all sectionals, dress rehearsals, and necessary extended rehearsals). Once the date planning process is complete, conductors should begin to think in large terms of programmatic themes, as well as collect the scores of works generally interested in conducting.
- Once thematic ideas are organized, the act of what to program becomes central. The conductor should spend time considering/studying each piece for each concert – considering the rehearsal experience for their students, ensemble ability level as it pertains to each piece, and consider the concert outcome for ensemble and audience.
- Questions to consider: What is the trajectory of your concert season? Is there a “high point” to your concert season? If so, when? How does this affect the concerts before, or after this high point?

# SIXTH COURSE , CONTINUED:

- **The Act of Programming, Continued:**

- **Consider what I call “The Programmatic Arc”:** The relationship each concert has with each another. Are there works selected for one concert that will in some way prepare the ensemble and audience for the next concert? Is there an overall journey we can take our students and audience on through our concert season programming on a macro level?
- By mid-spring concert programming should begin to crystalize (yet there is still time for additions and subtractions). The conductor should formally list (type) the entire concert season, with concert and rehearsal dates, and sectionals listed. The conductor should study the completed programmatic “map” of the concert season. Also at this point, the conductor should critically question each concert against the criterion above. It may be prudent for conductors to invite suggestions from trusted colleagues.
- By late spring, the entire concert season is complete, with all initial study and concert season forecasting complete. At this point parts should be ordered and copied, along with all necessary scores required for each piece. If needed, dates can be set for concert session part reading, part distribution, etc.
- By the last day of school: All music is copied and prepared for distribution. The concert season is set and posted with all requisite information for ensemble comprehension. The conductor now has the entire summer (which is hopefully “down-time” for music educators) to complete in-depth score study of the coming season’s literature.



## THE DESSERT COURSE:

“Children should be taught with only the most musically valuable material. For the young, only the best is good enough. They should be led to masterpieces by means of masterpieces.”

-Zoltan Kodaly