

# ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH!

AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE REPERTOIRE CLINIC AT THE 1995 CONFERENCE,  
CAROL CONDLIFFE EXPLORES THE CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING SCHOOL REPERTOIRE

In his article in the Autumn 1995 edition of *WINDS*, Brian Duguid exhorted us to choose quality music for our young bands. As music educators we have a tremendous responsibility to our students and we must not fail them. Our responsibility is to provide the best educational and aesthetic experiences, to inculcate a love of the best music, and to provide our students with the opportunity to experience the satisfaction and joy of performing to the highest possible standard.

The first stage is to find the best original band music - how? By going to concerts, festivals and conferences, reading reviews, and in particular forming a network of fellow teacher/conductors with whom ideas can be shared.

And what does one look for? A successful piece will display a high degree of compositional craft and be of an appropriate level of difficulty for the range of ability in the band. This can be difficult to assess just by listening, so try to get hold of a score from your music shop, the publisher, or from another conductor. The American grading system is a useful guide, but assigning grade levels is tricky and can be misleading. However, they are helpful, and there is a useful explanation of the criteria used in "Best Music for Young Band: A Selective Guide to the Young Band Repertoire" by Thomas L. Dvorak, along with useful reviews of many school band pieces.

Specific points to consider when choosing music are the instrumentation and doublings of rarer instruments, the keys, the ranges, and the featured instruments. Ask yourself if the orchestration will encourage and develop independence, both of individuals and solo sections. Without some transparent scorings, musicians cannot fully develop

**There is much music to explore, and the choices can be confusing.**

**At the end of the day, one will choose music which does something for you - it has *Tingle Factor*.**

We must also remember that we are not just band directors but teachers, and from the sight reading of the first few bars to the eventual performance, we should be teaching. Ideally chosen compositions should contain musical constructs necessary for the development of musicianship, though not all in one work.

A piece containing unusual or constantly changing meters will challenge the young players, as will unpredictable rhythms and articulations. Warm up routines based on

such rhythms and articulations help with understanding, and similarly, could be devised on melodic or harmonic fragments from the piece.

Surprisingly, young people are frequently very conservative about modern harmonic styles, and it is good to challenge these attitudes. Teaching listening skills through playing is invaluable, and students seem to find appreciation of contemporary compositional developments such as aleatoric music, much easier having played something of that genre. Similarly, graphic notation can be tackled through playing.

Music requiring uninhibited involvement - be it singing, shouting, clapping, stamping, or whatever - can do wonders for young players' self-confidence, once the initial self-consciousness has been overcome. Playing instruments in an unconventional way does not represent the same problems, but this compositional technique, like the others, challenges their preconceived ideas of how a band should sound, challenges their ears, and may even give them inspiration for their own composing. It is important to tackle a variety of styles of music, even if they are all from the 20th century. The playing of pieces with legato melodic lines which demand controlled breathing and careful phrasing with slight sensitive changes in volume is most rewarding and worthwhile in that it encourages careful listening in order to maintain good tone and intonation.

There is much music to explore, and the choices can be confusing. At the end of the day, one will choose music which does something for you - has *Tingle Factor*. If we as teacher/conductors and our young students are giving up our time, then the result must be rewarding, enjoyable, and the very best we can achieve.

**BASBWE  
Commission  
Consortium Project  
enquiries:  
Richard Jones, Director of  
Music, Richmond School,  
Darlington Road, Richmond,  
North Yorkshire  
DL10 7BQ**

I remember being told a story of how the artist Burne-Jones pointed out to a friend that the blackened stone of the Oxford College buildings was beautiful. The young friend had, up to then, taken it for granted with everybody else that the colour was ugly. Now any fool can see that the Oxford Colleges are black, but it required an artist to see that this black colour was beautiful  
-from Ralph Vaughan Williams' *National Music*