

Band Music Reviews (June 2008)

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It's June and I'm about a month late setting the programs for the UNL Wind Ensemble's 2008-2009 season. The reason I mention this is not to impress you with my skill at procrastination, but to reveal that my inability to focus on programming has given me the great idea to help our younger colleagues who may be faced with programming an entire season for only the first or second time. In that light, I thought it might help to know which resources I go to when faced with this important task.

The Hal Leonard and Curnow catalogues arrived in the mail today. These aren't among the resources I will recommend, but you don't want to ignore them completely. Browse, listen to the demo CD, and remember the 1% rule (that's the average percentage of new publications that have any merit in a given year). Look for other publishers to offer their wares in the next few months too. I tend to have greater success with these publishing houses and series: Kjos, BandQuest, Windependence, the Donald Hunsberger Wind Library, Daehn Publications, Maecenas, and when I was a marching band director (hard to imagine, but true) Arrangers Publishing. More and more composers are self-publishing, and more and more "high end" composers are building a catalogue of music for younger ensembles. So, keep your eyes open and Google freely.

After a brief romp through what the publishers are pushing, I settle down to the hard work of combing through repertoire lists and "recommended music" texts. The principal resources I use, year in and year out, are the following (in no particular order).

1. The *NSBA Recommended Music List* and the *NBA Selective Music List*. If you're not a member of the Nebraska State Bandmasters Association or the National Band Association, you might want to consider joining. Among the perks are some really useful repertoire resources. Both organizations have a website, so while you're Googling composers look them up too. The lists are sorted by title, by composer, and by grade level.
2. Tom Dvorak's books: *Best Music for Beginning Band* (2000), *Best Music for Young Band* (both the original 1986 and revised 2005 editions are good and cover different material), and *Best Music for High School Band* (1993). Tom's books have detailed descriptions of the works, including challenging features to watch out for. Very useful to get a sense of pieces you don't know anything about.
3. Felix Hauswirth's books: *1000 Selected Works for Wind Orchestra and Wind Ensembles* (1986/1998), *333 Selected Works for Wind Orchestra and Wind Ensembles – Grade 2 & 3* (1998), and *500 Selected Works for Wind Orchestra and Wind Ensemble – Grade 2 & 3* (this is the expanded 2nd edition of *333 Works*). These books are published in German and English simultaneously, but don't panic. They're just lists sorted by composer's last name, and they're actually very user friendly. They include date of composition, grade level, publisher, and the nationality of the composer. These are very useful to get a good look at what's happening around the world. No descriptions here, so you'll need to do some follow up investigation before you're done. FYI: Hauswirth has a website – Google him too.
4. The *Teaching Music Through Performance In Band* series (volumes 1-6 are available, volume 7 will be released this fall). This set of texts and CDs is a double-edged sword. There are excellent articles on rehearsal techniques as well as some great information about a wide variety of compositions. There are also quite a few inaccuracies in the teacher's guides and the repertoire presented isn't always top notch. I say this as a contributing author. It's a matter of *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware). The series is a great launch pad, but shouldn't be the only source you rely on. Your best bet is to get

- some ideas from them, then find corroborating recommendations in other locales (e.g. Dvorak's books, or state lists). Always get a second opinion before you break out the checkbook. Note: the series has been expanded to include volumes for chorus, orchestra, and now jazz band.
5. Two international resources are Holland, Rundell, and Reynish's *British Wind Music of Four Decades (1951-1991)* and Michael Burch-Pesses' *Canadian Band Music (2008)*. The neat thing about *British Wind Music...* is that it covers the period after the classics we all know (Holst, Vaughan Williams, Jacob). As for the Canadians, we tend to forget they're up there. The Canadian band scene is small but very active and well worth a look. Like Dvorak's books and *Teaching Music*, these two texts include descriptions, biographical info, and analyses.
 6. Keith Kinder released a new and thought-provoking book in 2005: *Best Music for Chorus and Winds*. This book follows the model created by Tom Dvorak and includes quite a bit of information about each piece. There's more of this music out there than you might think, although it tends to be for high school or college ensembles.
 7. Finally, for those who are fans of chamber music or who are challenged with unusual instrumentation, there is a very helpful book by Rodney Winther called *An Annotated Guide to Wind Chamber Music (2004)*. The book is arranged according to the size of ensemble, from six to eighteen players. It includes descriptions of each composition, historical data, and detailed information about instrumentation. It also lists wind chamber music with voices, and wind chamber music with soloists. This is an invaluable addition to any resource library.

Happy hunting!