

PICKING MUSIC FOR ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL ORCHESTRA

Michelle Ewer

Jefferson County Schools

mewer@jeffco.k12.co.us

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PIECE

- ▶ Choosing Music for all groups is important, but I feel it is especially crucial in the early years.
- ▶ If you pick music that is too hard your groups will not experience success. Everyone likes to feel good about their playing
 - ▶ In judging Festivals I find the following to be a common norm.

KEY SIGNATURES

- ▶ Pick Music in a Key your students can handle. Do not pick a song that is in a key your students are not ready for.
- ▶ For years one and two stick with the keys of D and G. (Possibly C)
- ▶ Don't pick music that changes keys if your students are not ready for this

RHYTHMS

- ▶ Pick music that has rhythms your students know how to play.
- ▶ Year One students should play in Quarter Notes –Half Notes-
Eighth Notes
- ▶ Do not change rhythms too fast.

KEEP THE SKIPS SIMPLE

- ▶ Choose music that has scale patterns
- ▶ Do not pick music that skips all over the fingerboard
- ▶ Keep to one or two strings
- ▶ Open String Double Stops are fine

SPARSE SCORING

- ▶ Stick with Block Chords
- ▶ Picking Music that is scored too sparse puts pressure on sections that may not be capable of playing
- ▶ Your group will sound stronger with Block Chords and Like Rhythms

KNOW YOUR GROUP

- ▶ If your Cello section is weak don't pick a song that has a difficult cello part
- ▶ If you do not have strong basses pick music that the basses double the cellos or at the least simple half notes or quarter notes

STYLE

- ▶ Pick and Play Music that your group can handle stylistically
- ▶ If you are going to take Mozart to contest play off the string.

MUSIC TOO EASY

- ▶ Do not pick music that is way too easy for your group just because you
- ▶ want a good rating Judges know-
- ▶ Honor your work and your students


MUSIC TOO DIFFICULT

- ▶ Do not pick music that is too hard to impress the judges
- ▶ It is easy to spot these groups
- ▶ It is not fair to your students
- ▶ Respect both your students and yourself

SHIFTING

- ▶ Pick music that involves shifting only if your students understand the basics mechanics of shifting

COLLEGE LIST OR EGO

- ▶ Do not pick a piece of music just because it was on your College List of recommended pieces
 - ▶ If your students are not ready for it do not play it
 - ▶ Don't pick a piece because your ego says this is where my students should be at
 - ▶ We all have up and down years
- 

FINGER PATTERNS

- ▶ Pick Music that has finger patterns your students understand
- ▶ No Shnarps or fnaturals

CONTRASTING STYLES

- ▶ I am a firm believer that if you go to Contest pick pieces that have contrasting styles
- ▶ Don't go with 2 Higher faster Louder pieces

STRING TEACHERS BIBLE

- ▶ Stringing Along-Albert Stoutamire and Kenneth Henderson Alfred Publishing



KENDOR CONCERT FAVORITES

VOLUME 1



KENDOR CONCERT FAVORITES VARIOUS COMPOSERS VOLUME 2



STRING PREMIERE WINGERT JONES



TAKE THE TIME TO PICK YOUR MUSIC

- ▶ So many times directors panic and pick a piece
- ▶ Give yourself permission to change if a piece is not working
- ▶ Let your students have input

USE YOUR RESOURCES

- ▶ Listen to a piece
- ▶ Play through it ahead of time

GOOD MUSIC=HAPPY STUDENTS

- ▶ Remember your students are human
 - ▶ They want to have fun
 - ▶ Pick music that they will remember
 - ▶ Be flexible and enjoy
- 