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Intro to Research in Music

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Final Research Proposal

Band, Choir, and Orchestra Literature Programming Trends in Public Secondary Schools (2019)

Problem Statement

Music education in America has many specific implications and expectations regarding its widespread and standardized administration in public school systems. Music is as far reaching and broad as humanity itself, yet music is expected to be instructed in a very specific and codified manner that is approved by a larger governing body. The types of pieces that are accepted as canon, and expected to be taught, has severe implications regarding the repertoire that teachers may program. Pieces that are chosen to be taught truly define the meaning of each musical experience for all students, and therefore must be chosen carefully and with many factors in mind. Many educators focus on a seemingly objective standard of musical worth based on categories created under a more classical and historical model of assessment—creating a body of acceptable literature that is almost forced upon future teachers, regardless of the cultural setting. This phenomenon raises the following question: What exactly is being programmed in band, orchestra, and choir programs in public schools today? In reviewing the literature, how have researchers conducted surveys of repertoire in the past, and what can these reveal about the methodology, findings, and viability of conducting such a study?

A problem emerges when students are being required to learn the music that is given to them, without much say or understanding in the genesis of the music itself, how it relates to their life, and what implications performing a piece may have on one's culture, beliefs, and expectations. Although students should be exposed to a well-learned teacher's opinion of historically "great" works, one must also realize the possible potential for bias towards specific ideals, cultures, and behavioral expectations that these pieces create. Therefore, music educators must put great effort into understanding the culture, background, and importance of a wide body of literature that can be applied to differing classroom situations. *This understanding must first come from an analysis of what is truly being programmed today, and current trends in this educational body of literature.*

Need/Purpose of the Study

Both as a participant and instructor of music in Virginia, I informally noticed many similar trends of music programmed in traditional band, choir, and orchestra classrooms. Most specifically, I noticed that band music has a very small body of accepted literature, which frequently favors specific composer nationalities, musical devices, and styles of organizing the band. This study is necessary to create categorical data on these trends, before moving forward with understanding possible problems that can emerge from a static and unchanging body of literature that is governed by higher powers.

This widespread standardization of acceptable literature in music classrooms has sparked much debate among differing cultures of teachers, students, and parents, and much generalization begins to seep into the debate. Both formal and informal articles have been written by researchers, parents, students, teachers, and administration on the kinds of music a

school band has, can, and should program, without much proof behind any claim of universality. The purpose of this study My goal is not to make value judgements, to have opinionated or biased analysis, or to prove any specific point, but to shed light on specific data of exactly what pieces are performed, in what frequency, and to analyze and categorize this data to better understand the current programming trends, and how we may move forward to better reach more future music students in America.

Research Questions

The following questions hope to be answered in this study:

1. **Data:** What pieces were programmed by middle and high school bands in the past 5 years? What specific pieces, composers, and dates have been performed in public school classrooms today?
2. **Cultural and Historical Categories:** How do these pieces favor and ignore certain genres, styles, eras, musical elements, cultural attitudes, narratives, and nationalities?
3. **School Demographics:** How does the demographics of each school affect its literature selection? Does it correlate or deviate from cultural demographics of each school?
4. **Director Personal Opinion/Bias:** What variables does each director personally associate with or prefer? Does it corelate or deviate from their actual repertoire selections for their students? What do music educators think about the trends in literature programming, and does this correlate with the actual data?
5. **Ensemble Types:** Do ensemble types affect the data? I.e., do choirs lean toward a certain variable, and bands the opposite?

Literature Review

Upon researching previous endeavors for this study, I came across many articles that advocate for cultural responsive teaching in the music classroom—programming music from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and social praxes, and generating ideas for this endeavor. However, not many articles have truly analyzed data specifically regarding current repertoire trends in public schools. A study by Reames (2001) analyzed and described appropriate literature for high school choirs. Data on demographic information, repertoire selection criteria, literature sources, and types of literature performed were collected, organized, and categorized. The author made it clear that the essential need for teachers to create and maintain a successful program is tied to the literature they select. The research found that many of the same pieces were being programmed all around the state of Virginia. Within these pieces, teachers with more years of experience tended to program more Baroque literature, while more than 2/3 of the pieces actually programmed were written in the 20th century. Technical and aesthetic criteria seemed to be equally weighted in teachers' selection processes, but the study did not delve into specifics of the composer's nationality, cultural expectations, and technical categorizations of the actual music. The study did shed light on previously defined Western categories of era and the frequency of programming, but failed to create more specific categories detailing the actual music and its aesthetic principles, ethical implications, cultural backgrounds, and technical categories. This was not the purpose of the initial study, but provided a substantial starting point.

Forbes (2001) studied a variety of parameters dealing with the nature of choral repertoire chosen in high school groups—how it was selected, what factors influence director decisions, and the relationship between repertoire selection and perceived success in choral music education. This study was broad in scope, as it surveyed high school choral music

educators from six different states (including Virginia) and included more discourse and personal interview than a simple survey of data. Demographics of school enrollment, choral enrollment, curricular choruses, minority populations, and teacher experience were compared to variables on the style and era of each piece. Most interestingly, the results showed that a small positive correlation existed between student enrollment and number of classical, folk song, and jazz compositions performed. Significant negative correlations were found between pop/rock selections for advanced students and school enrollment/socioeconomic composition of the school's student body. These results have wide-reaching implications for the nature of music education in different socioeconomic areas, and the importance of fitting the needs of each student body when selecting literature that may not be considered *great* classical masterworks. Another correlation was found between directors identified as outstanding, and choosing classical, folk, and non-Western music. Directors not identified as "outstanding" tended to select more popular/rock music. Finally, director interviews were analyzed and six criteria were identified as most important: Can my choir perform it? Does it meet the needs of the ensemble? Will it work as part of the program that I have planned? Is it a high-quality composition? Will the students like it? Forbes found that directors chose literature for beginners that will (a) bring quick success, (b) that students will like, and (c) meet the developmental needs of beginning students. It was also noted that personal appeal was an important factor in director decisions on the quality of a composition, and most directors agreed that popular music does not contribute to positive musical growth. These director opinions have, again, great implications for analysis of the methodology behind literature selection, and perhaps to re-evaluate and define the important *why* of choosing pieces as a music educator.

A choral study by Hedden and Daugherty (2009) attempted to create further categories by surveying repertoire performed by public and private children's choirs in North America. Deeper philosophical/aesthetic categories were created, focusing more on the civic development of children and the implications of music selected for children, while analyzing the function, genre, language, composer, and material culture of each choir's literature. The text and accompaniment were analyzed of each piece, and the results shed light on many specific associations in religious affiliation, era of composition, languages, composer frequency, and geographic location of each choir. Hedden and Daugherty mention that compositions are not fairly distributed among genres or periods in America, and perhaps this is the purpose of collecting data on the subject—finding the majority and minority, and how to best serve both as a music educator (based on any given population of students handed to you).

Prickett and Bridges (2000) analyzed a different, but related topic—the basic song repertoire taught to vocal/choral and instrumental music majors at the university level. This study is useful in its unique methodology—a tape was played, and participants were asked to correctly identify songs to determine their understanding of the literature. Although this does not survey current literature programmed in public school programs (more so, answers Question #6), this presented a new idea of the types of assessment that could be administered in a survey, and leads to new questions. Do directors that recognize Holst's Suites for Band immediately by ear have a different repertoire tendency than those who do not? Do bands, choirs, and orchestras have different understandings of repertoire and songs based solely on their university schooling? What significant repertoire differences exist among directors the three ensemble categories in the public school? The possibilities for asking survey questions to directors through audio means provides a more honest response. In the study, 25 folk songs were performed and respondents

were asked to identify each. The results showed that vocal/choral and instrumental majors had no significant difference in score—61% - 63% of songs were presumed to be known by all. This somewhat implies that all three ensemble types share similar understandings of important standard melodic repertoire, regardless of their specialization.

A study by Price (1990) analyzed the orchestral repertoire performed by 34 major orchestras in the U.S. and Canada from 1982-83 and 1986-87, providing the most global view on programming throughout all studies found. 34 orchestras, 10,500 works, 600 composers were examined, and frequency/duration of works were compared. This study, although not directly dealing with public schools, perhaps sheds light on the professional programming culture, which invariably affects the culture of music educators. Large tables were compiled organized by frequency of composer and work. The results showed that Mozart and Beethoven were clearly the most performed composers, with essentially the entire list of music falling under the traditional Western white male canon of composers. The researcher did not delve into any specific categories of each piece and did not attempt to find relationships between any other variables—simply noticing the frequency was the goal. Price wrote that the information available in the data could be used by future musicologists to examine trends in literature, composer, and nationality selection, and may wish to examine representation of different musical eras and genres on programs. This data and methodology could easily be compared and analyzed in relation to public school repertoire cultures, noticing similarities and differences, as well as how programming culture may have changed in the past 20 years since the study.

Longyear (1970) delved further into this topic by writing on the characteristics and reasons behind changes in musical taste that result in *neglected musical repertoire*. This study was more speculative and narrative in nature—it did not include any numerical or quantitative

data, and only attempted to categorize, list, and analyze case studies on why standard repertoire exists, and why others are neglected. Other than specific, anecdotal, and educated opinion writing on specific composer eminence over others, the researcher came to many conclusions. The “human” side of music must be analyzed to understand this phenomenon—(1) music is taught as a succession of masterpieces and creates a quantitative history of music, rather than qualitative, (2) particular musical styles are embraced over others based merely on fashion, (3) strong reactions often exist against the immediately preceding musical style, (4) idiomatic writing is *secondary* to its survival or rebirth through countless historical examples, (5) negative pedagogical attitudes attributed to composers based on their “teaching music,” (6) the nature of each composition’s premiere—that of “large audiences” or “serious listeners,” (7) the sheer expense of a musical production, and (8) the impossibility of reviving performing media that are no longer in natural vogue. On the reasons that neglected repertoire may be revived, Longyear found that (a) increasing the repertoire of a particular instrument in development of worthwhile literature, (b) a lack of competence and a desire to build reputation from conductors defeated by new leaders, (c) the pedagogical benefits of easier pieces outside of the standard repertoire, (d) a greater insight into “great musical figures” by studying their lesser contemporaries, (e) the nationalistic and ethnic connotation behind music, and (f) a constant review and revision of the history of music. These lists provide great value in the implications outside of the raw data—how can music teachers move forward after the data is analyzed and trends are found? What are the reasons behind reviving neglected repertoire, and what is the purpose of re-evaluating our “tried and true” selections? The researcher’s work, although dated, provides an excellent voice of reason behind the problem statement and future implications of this study from a classical perspective that may be more respected than other modern views.

Method

Participant suitability will be determined under the following conditions: (1) the participant is a current or retired middle/high school band, orchestra, or choral director in a public system in Virginia, (2) the participant has and is willing to share accurate concert programs, (3) the participant is willing and able to accurately respond to survey questions in use for a study. A sample of around 200 participants will be taken from the larger population of all instrumental/vocal music teachers in the U.S. This study is not totally random in nature, as I am targeting a specific job occupancy in a specific state, and all members of the sample will be hand chosen through online searches of school district websites and Facebook groups. Online surveys and data collection will be administered through email and Facebook. The cost of participation is totally free, although the time commitment of finding old concert programs, typing them up/digitizing them (if they aren't already digital), and submitting information will be a factor. Participants will sign a consent agreement before beginning the survey, noting that they release all information gathered throughout the survey to the researcher and later publication. If the participant does not consent, their data will be nullified and deleted from the sample.

Instrumentation of this study will be an online survey questionnaire and file dropbox. Validity, the extent to which the survey will measure data properly, will be ensured through direct, multiple-choice, quantitative questions about the amount and type of repertoire a director has programmed in the past. This data is only valid as the participant is honest. Qualitative and open-response questions will also be included on the survey and later analyzed and categorized into different response types, and evaluating these responses in relation to the larger group and expected outcomes. Reliability, or the consistency of measurement, will be ensured after receiving responses and analyzing the internal consistency of results in relation to the

quantitative response data to their actual programs collected. Variables will be categorical in nature, and therefore, require no numerical data of grading or scale factors. Costs are completely free, other than time. Survey questionnaires are the most appropriate for my sample and data analysis, as this study attempts to categorize data points from individual human perspectives—each teacher has a different philosophy and therefore will take different actions on their programming. An online survey is the most feasible and appropriate measure to realistically gather large amounts of opinion data from hundreds of individuals in a specific job field. Data will be collected over the course of many months, to give participants as much time as possible to respond.

Data will be collected exclusively through email and Google Forms, gathered from school district website staff directories and Facebook groups. Data collection will be ongoing over the course of many months, with no set deadline or time. The researcher will respond to the amount of teachers actually participating, and end the survey's data collection after at least 200 responses have been received. If this number is never reached, the researcher will arbitrarily end data collection 6 months after opening the survey. The researcher will fully conduct all data collection individually, through responses given on Google Forms, dropbox submissions of concert programs, and later analysis of correlation. Concert programs will be submitted as the primary method of data, and the researcher will then analyze each piece on each program, fitting it into categorical variables such as composer ethnicity, style of music, length of work, year of composition, etc. Data collection will have no costs other than time.

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