

PMEA D7 Professional Development Day - October 9, 2023 - 9:30 AM

Strategies for Diversifying & Enriching Concert Programs in the School Ensemble

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Resources

- Main resource page for this clinic: jordanrsmith.com/strategies

Overview

- Our concert programs are better when the composers we select are a reflection of our community, our nation, and our world.
- We enrich the musical quality of our ensembles when we increase the diversity of the repertoire we explore. **Diversifying is Enriching.**
- Programming with diversity, equity, and inclusion in mind is not easy, but no more difficult than programming for any other factor (instrumentation, difficulty, solos, styles, duration, etc.). And, we do it already (nationality, era).
- The Programming Pyramid is a frame for evaluating programming practices and inserting excellent music into the process at every phase.

Level 1: Discovery

General Idea:

- Discovery encapsulates the broadest possible reception and audition of all of the music we are exposed to on a daily basis.
- It begins when we are born, it often reaches its peak during high school and college, and it continues throughout our lives.

Challenges:

- We were not exposed to a diverse repertoire as students.
- Resultantly, our most beloved pieces tend to be heavily overrepresented by white men.

Key Strategies:

- Hack your free listening time by inserting quality playlists by a diverse range of composers into your music diet.
- Forget about the instrumentation or needs of your ensemble. Listen only for curiosity and fun. Enjoy yourself!

Starter Resources:

- Playlists: jordanrsmith.com/strategies
- Database: composerdiversity.com

Level 2: Data Collection

General Concept:

- Data Collection begins as an effort to go deep rather than wide on specific composers, and then specific compositions.
- As specific composers begin to catch our attention, we make a mental note. (Later, we write it down.)
- Data Collection takes place naturally when you do a deep dive on a composer that interests you. Read up, then listen to more.
- Title, duration, available arrangements, solos, difficulty, where/how to look at the score, etc. (Everything you typically collect to select music for your students.)

Challenges:

- State lists, publishers, and music stores (data sources) have not caught up to our needs.
- Underrepresentation (sometimes severe underrepresentation) results.

Key Strategies:

- Avoid: letting music store inventory, state music lists, and publishers determine what you program. They are great resources, to be sure. Make sure to use all of your resources.
- Seek help in online communities.
- **Share what you learn:**
 - Keep lists. (Make them yourself). Share them!
 - Turn a specific composer into a personal project. Share it!
 - Be prepared to become a resource for others.

Starter Resources:

- Example of notes on Florence Price: jordanrsmith.com/florence-price
- Example of a project: pricefest.org

Level 3: Scaffolding

General Concept:

- Moving from repertoire in the abstract to programming constraints in the concrete.
- Laying in some of the broader set pieces and themes that will drive the year ahead.
- Anniversaries, major events, constructed projects, soloists, etc., seasonal, thematic, etc.
- Who are my strong players? Who are my strong and weak sections? Divisi?

- Endurance, technique, sound quality.

Challenges:

- Seasonal concerts are heavily over-represented by music by white men.
- Many concert themes like “heroism” tend to tilt towards works by men.

Key Strategies:

- Good: filling a concert a concert with African American composers.
- Better: also celebrating women or other groups throughout the year by integrating great music in *each* concert in a season.
- Best: finding terrific repertoire for every conceivable scenario *over time*.

Starter Resources:

- Reason to hope: Margaret Bonds, *Ballad of the Brown King*
- Community: [facebook.com/groups/blackcomposersmusic](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackcomposersmusic)
- Community: [facebook.com/groups/419265905254246/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/419265905254246/) (Friends of ICD)

Level 4: Sifting

General Concept:

- Now is the time to marry your newfound interest in the music of a more diverse range of composers with your specific programming needs and constraints for your ensemble.
- Deeper research as you narrow concert candidates.

Challenges:

- Many composers from historically marginalized groups lack the typically expected online resources necessary to decide if works are playable by specific ensembles.

Key Strategies:

- Investigate. Sometimes, lesser-known composers will have older websites buried in Google results. Seek them out. Dig a little deeper.
- Go to the library. Request it!
- Lean into music by living composers. Email them directly!
- Consider making your own arrangement or edited version.

Starter Resources:

- Zinfonia.com
- Florence Price: *Ethiopia's Shadow in America*

Level 5: Selecting

General Concept:

- The moment of truth: a zero-sum concert program to finalize. Parts must be purchased, rehearsals must be planned, and programs must be printed. Time to choose!

Challenges:

- Directors are busy.
- Doing the extra work is time-consuming.
- Structural inertia.
- The rest of our Programming Pyramid hasn't yet caught up to our goals.

Key Strategies:

- DON'T get discouraged when your next concert program comes up a little short. Instead, commit to steady progress with achievable goals. If last year was all-white, see if you can make a dent in that. If last year saw better representation, try to make this year *even* better. (It's like learning an instrument: the necessary knowledge and skill take time to develop.)
- DO program your entire season or academic year at once in order to be more intentional in the portion of your season that can go to composers besides white men.

Starter Resources:

- Engage with friends and colleagues. Ask them for ideas. Share your own.
- Let's talk: jordansmith.com/contact

For many more additional resources, visit jordansmith.com/strategies.