

# Criteria, Composition, And Compliance: Concert Band Directors' Perception of Concert Band Publisher Grading Systems

**Mark Lortz, Ph.D.**  
Director of Music  
Stevenson University  
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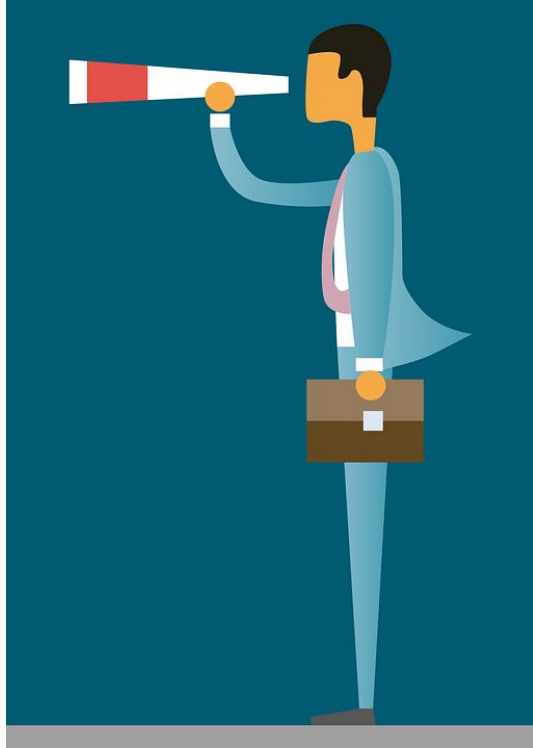


# Presentation Summary



- Present my study that identified areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band music publishers' difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program concert band music.
- Discuss why this is an issue.
- Discuss how to select grade-level-appropriate literature.

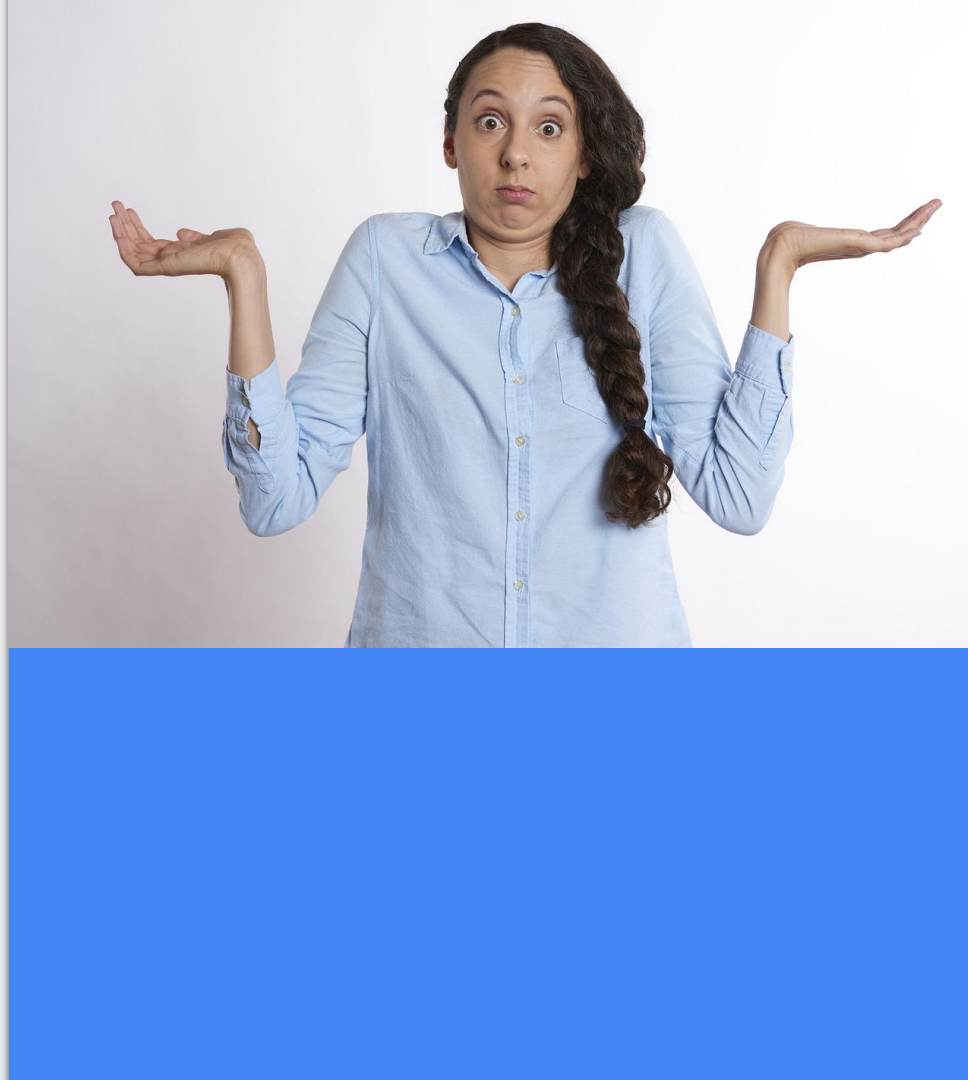
# Presentation Overview



- Repertoire Selection & Philosophy
- Theoretical Framework
- What is Grade Appropriate Repertoire?
- What Are Publisher Difficulty Grading Systems?
- Study & Results

# In simpler terminology...

- Have you ever looked at a piece of music and wondered why the publisher said it was a specific difficulty level?
- Have you ever wondered why publishers have different rating systems?



# Statement of the Problem



- No standard difficulty scale (Hagg, 1986; Saville, 1991; Wareham, 1967)
- Grade-appropriate repertoire selection (Apfelstadt, 2000; Del Borgo, 1988; Forrester, 2017; Intravia, 1972; Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985; Reynolds, 2000)
- Understanding difficulty (Ralston, 1999)
- Publisher list inconsistencies (Beckwith, 2018; Hagg, 1986; Miller, 2013; Stevenson, 2003)
- Research is scant and only focused on quality literature (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Towner, 2011)

## Research Questions



The research addressed the following questions:

1. Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' and music administrators' personal perceptions of this music's difficulty level?
2. What criteria do instrumental music educators use to select level-appropriate music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level?

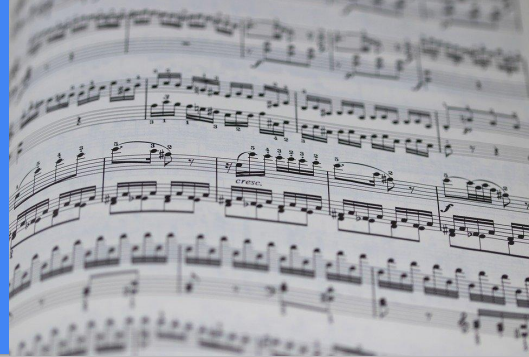
## Significance & Rationale



The current study aimed to:

- Verify the existence of discrepancies between the assessments of music by publishers and music educators
- Analyze the magnitude of these discrepancies
- Identify potential causes of these discrepancies

# Why is repertoire selection important?



“The selection of repertoire is the single most important task that music educators face before entering the classroom or rehearsal room. Through the repertoire we choose, we not only teach curricular content to our students, but we also convey our philosophy in terms of what we believe students need to learn to achieve musical growth.”

Hilary Apfelstadt (2017)

Associate Director at The Ohio State University School of Music

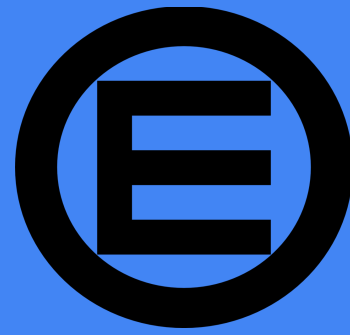


# Importance of Repertoire in Music Pedagogy

- Teacher's repertoire choices (Forrester, 2017)
- Repertoire quality (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Towner, 2011)
- Repertoire selection is about defining a curriculum for students' overall music education (Kirchhoff, 2010).
- "Effective music education experiences depend on the quality of musical materials used to facilitate instruction" (Sheldon, 2000, p. 10).

*An Interesting philosophical discussion....*

## Goldwin J. Emerson's Egalitarian Paradox in Public Education (1979)



One of the paradoxes of our society is that the more we treat people equally, the more we increase their inequality. Conversely, if we want people to end up with equal status, equal positions, and equal achievements, we must treat them in an unequal manner. (p. 53)

# Paradoxes & Robin Hood



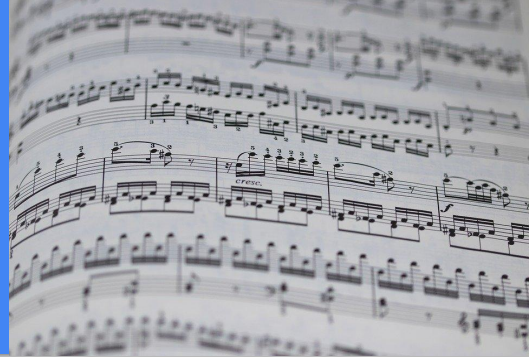
- When all students receive equal treatment, inequality increases.
- Conversely, to achieve equal outcomes among the players, teachers must treat them unequally.
- Arlin (1984) called this problem the “Robin Hood” approach -Taking teaching time from the academically rich and giving it to the academically poor.
- What happens if the repertoire does not appropriately match the students’ ability levels?
- Teachers risk an outcome of frustration, stagnation, and loss of motivation among some of their students

# Theoretical Framework



- Flow Theory (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009)
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1987)

# What is Grade-Appropriate Repertoire?



- Music that is suitable for the ensemble's experience and ability and conform to curricular standards
- Music that balances composition difficulty with students' skills
- Repertoire that is beneath students' skill level could bore them
- Repertoire that exceeds their skill level could diminish their enjoyment of the music-making process

[illegible]

- Your philosophical approach and textbook (Apfelstadt, 2017)
- Balancing composition difficulty with students' skills (Saville, 1991)
- Perceptions of a composition's difficulty level (Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985)
- Compositional elements (Sheldon, 1996)

How is  
scholastic  
repertoire  
difficulty  
determined?



# Concert Band Literature Grading Systems

Concert Band Publishers use 3 general approaches to grade young band music. (Hagg, 1986)

- Curriculum-based
  - Correlates to a method book's concepts and sections
- Criterion-based grading
  - Pre-defined parameters of range, rhythm, key, tempi, and appropriate style for each difficulty level
- Standards-based grading - Related more to method books
  - Grew out of the 1994 National Standards for Music Education
  - Dr. Deborah Confredo's "Measures of Success" (2010)



# Global Concert Band Literature Grading Systems

## Concert Band Literature Grading System Example from Dissertation

*Band Music Guide (The Instrumentalist, 1996)*

Grade Level	Definition
1	Mainly for the first-year instrumentalist
2	For those beyond the beginning stages
3	For those who have acquired some technique
4	For more advanced instrumentalists
5	Mostly for college players
6	For the skilled professional

# Music Publisher and Retailer Rating Systems

Belwin	FJH	Hal Leonard	J.W. Pepper
5 Difficulty Levels	6 Difficulty Levels	6 Difficulty Levels	7 Difficulty Levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grade ½</li><li>• Grade 1-1 ½</li><li>• Grade 2-2 ½</li><li>• Grade 3-3 ½</li><li>• Grade 4+</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grade .5</li><li>• Grade 1</li><li>• Grade 1.5</li><li>• Grade 2-2.5</li><li>• Grade 3-3.5</li><li>• Grade 4-5</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grade 1</li><li>• Grade 2</li><li>• Grade 3</li><li>• Grade 4</li><li>• Grade 5</li><li>• P-Professional</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• B</li><li>• VE</li><li>• E</li><li>• ME</li><li>• M</li><li>• MA</li><li>• A</li></ul>

# Methodology

Research Design

Recruitment

Data  
Collection

Instrumentation

Data  
Analysis

Quantitative  
Research Design

Three-month  
recruitment period

Google Forms  
Survey

Survey Sections

Response  
comparisons

U.S. Elementary-  
College Band  
Directors & Music  
Administrators  
( $N = 171$ )

**Section 1:**

Demographic  
information

**Section 2:**

Repertoire selection  
perceptions

**Section 3:** Difficulty  
perception of music

# What grade level is this excerpt?



# Compositions and Participants' Difficulty Perception Ratings

*Published Band Compositions*

Selection	Title	Composer	Year
#1	<i>Conviction</i>	Clark	2012
#2	<i>Ballade</i>	Jenkins	2003
#3	<i>Africa: Ceremony, Song and Ritual</i>	Smith	1994
#4	<i>Circus Maximus</i>	Corigliano	2006
#5	<i>Ghost Fleet</i>	Sheldon	2001
#6	<i>In a French Garden</i>	Meyer	1998
#7	<i>Invictus</i>	Balmages	2000
#8	<i>Corps of Discovery</i>	Owens	2010
#9	<i>Pablo!</i>	Meyer	2002
#10	<i>Contempo</i>	Story	2004

*Descriptive Statistics for Example Compositions (N = 168)*

Selection	Grade Level	Mode	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
#1	1	2.00	1.76	0.75
#2	3	3.00	3.01	0.68
#3	4	4.00	4.36	0.73
#4	6	6.00	5.76	0.58
#5	3	3.00	3.07	0.65
#6	2	2.00	2.02	0.74
#7	5	5.00	5.15	0.64
#8	1	2.00	1.77	0.70
#9	4	4.00	4.36	0.71
#10	2	2.00	2.11	0.58

*Note.* Ratings were based on a six-point scale: 1 = *Very Easy* to 6 = *Very Difficult*.

# Participant's Repertoire Selection Category Perceptions



*Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #1 (N = 163)*

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Rhythm Complexity	125	76.7
Tessitura	119	73.0
Part Independence	91	55.8
Wind Instrumentation	65	39.9
Key Signature	37	22.7
Musical Density	26	16.0
Percussion Instrumentation	23	14.1
Tempo	20	12.3
Articulations	18	11.0
Time Signature	5	3.1
Cross-Cueing	4	2.5
Composition Length	1	0.6

# Participant Demographics

**70%**

Had 11 or more years of experience

**65%**

Earned a Master's Degree

**52%**

Were high school band directors

**79%**

Stated their state had a prescribed music list

**20%**

Were trumpet players (largest percentage of participants)

**50%**

Taught in MD

- Years of Experience
- 16% - 6-10 years
- 13%: 2-5 years
- 1%: ≤ 1 year

- 26% Bachelor's Degree
- 9% Doctorate

- ( N=210)
- 46% Middle School
  - 15% Elementary School
  - 15% College
  - 3% Professional

- 11% No
- 10% Do not know

- 17% Percussion
- 14% Clarinet & Saxophone
- 10% Flute
- Less significant results for other instruments

- 19% PA
- 9% VA
- 2% DE, NJ, TX
- 1% for 20 other states



# Important Musical Elements

**98%**

## Tessitura

- 50% stated that trumpet tessitura is extremely important
- 28% emphasized clarinet and French horn tessitura
- 26% emphasized low brass tessitura
- Flute and double reeds tessitura considerations were moderately important
- Percussion tessitura was not considered important

## Rhythmic Complexity

- The role of rhythmic complexity in repertoire selection (Millican, 2019)

## Part Independence

- The more independent lines a piece of music has, the more challenging it will be for less mature players to perform (Watson, 2013).

## Wind & Percussion Instrumentation

- The more individual parts within a section, the more difficult a piece will be
- Number of percussion parts vs. number of percussionists (Millican, 2019)

# Perceptions

## Research Question #1:

Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' and music administrators' personal perceptions of this music's difficulty level?

## ● YES

- Lack of standardization among the rating systems. (Saville, 1991; Wareham, 1967)
- Has existed, and been previously documented (Saville, 1991; Wesolowski et al., 2016).

# Perceptions

## Research Question #2:

What criteria do instrumental music educators use to select level-appropriate music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level?

- Primary criteria for appropriate performance level ensemble music selection:

*In alphabetical order...*

- Part Independence
  - Rhythmic Complexity
  - Tessitura
  - Wind & Percussion Instrumentation
- 
- Cross-cueing suggested the largest number of varied opinions
  - Composition length was not a factor

# Discussion



# Interpretation of the Findings



- Current music grading system deficiencies
  - Lack of a discriminating repertoire selection method
  - Global ratings
- Profusion of music (Kirchhoff, 2010)
- Need for an objective rating system

# Implications for Music Educators



- Publisher difficulty ratings effectiveness
- Industry-wide standard difficulty rating system need
- Inclusion of level-appropriate repertoire selection in undergraduate curricula-Not just discussing repertoire quality
- Musical elements inclusion in lesson planning (Sheldon, 1996)
  - Part Independence, rhythmic complexity, tessitura, wind & percussion instrumentation, etc.

# Limitations of the Research



- State list difficulty assessment data
- National sample limitations
- Whole and half level grade levels
- The composition sample size was small with only 10 excerpts.

# Suggestions for Future Research



- Use full band compositions
- Expand the number of total publishers' compositions
- Use state and regional lists to determine geographical trends
- Include string and full orchestra repertoire
- Increase the number of participants
- Add additional open-ended questions
- Socioeconomic status (SES) differences
- Match students abilities to produce improved learning outcomes
- Determine why discrepancies exist



# Conclusions



- There **IS** a discrepancy between concert band publisher difficulty grading systems and band directors perceptions.
- There **ARE** inconsistencies between publisher, national, state, and regional graded music (Saville 1991; Wareham, 1967)
- Part independence, rhythmic complexity, tessitura, and wind and percussion instrumentation **ARE** music educators' main criteria in selecting level-appropriate repertoire.
- **MORE** novice teacher resources are needed
- **MORE** investigation is necessary to understand the rationale for the importance of music selection criteria
- Publishers tend to rate music **slightly** easier than band directors' perceptions

# Thank you!

Questions?



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