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Source: *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (June 2010), pp. 43-47

Published by: [Sage Publications, Inc.](#) on behalf of [MENC: The National Association for Music Education](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40666428>

Accessed: 18/01/2014 11:24

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# Incorporating Wind Excerpts in the School Band Curriculum

Professional musicians and college students commonly study orchestral excerpts, but a similar practice has yet to be implemented in the band field. (In this article, the term *band* will be understood to include the wind ensemble.) Due to their widespread use in orchestral auditions, excerpts have been incorporated as a tool for musical development. Many college professors regularly assign excerpt study as part of their curricula. In addition, professional musicians teach master classes based solely around the playing and interpretation of these passages.

Because of the limited number of professional bands in the United States today, musicians may not think of wind excerpts as a vehicle for technical and musical growth. A well-considered approach to wind literature, however, will open up new material for technical development in an authentic musical context. Additionally, band students at the high school and college levels can reap important musical benefits by adopting the methodology of our orchestral colleagues.

## The Use of Excerpts

Excerpts of standard literature are important components of orchestral auditions because they enable an audition panel to quickly evaluate aspects of a musician's playing ability. These segments allow musicians to demonstrate technical facility, tuning, dynamic range, and articulation along with expressive playing and other factors. Such passages allow pro-

spective performers to demonstrate familiarity with the repertoire that they would likely encounter as members of an orchestra.

At the public school level, band directors can use excerpts of standard wind literature as a vehicle for developing aspects of student performance. For example, younger flutists can improve their tone in the low register by practicing a conventional exercise (Figure 1),<sup>1</sup> or they can rehearse the beginning of *Incan-tation and Dance* by John Barnes Chance (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> Both procedures will allow students to work on the same concept. However, the band excerpt will motivate players by having them practice a musical work rather than just by drilling low notes.

Another example involves the development of legato playing in young trombonists. Since a smooth legato is traditionally the most difficult for trombonists to develop, several étude books have been written as practice material. The most widely used étude book is *Melodious Études for Trombone* by Joannes Rochut,<sup>3</sup> a collection of nineteenth-century vocalises. Nevertheless, it would be more advantageous to use Percy Grainger's "Irish Tune from County Derry" (Figure 3) because the melody is more familiar to students.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the melody lies in a more comfortable range for young students, enabling them to focus on lyrical playing instead of worrying about range challenges.

Many other pieces from the wind repertoire contain passages that can be used to

*Learning wind band literature can help students both immediately, as they audition for college, and later in life if they decide to join a community band.*

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evaluate and develop aspects of musicianship, with the added benefit of learning within a musical framework.

### High School Use

The concept of using band excerpts in private or sectional lessons is not a new one. Directors who have time in their

schedules for small-group instruction will often devote a portion of this time to refining difficult musical passages for upcoming concerts. Instead of cramming for performances, however, some planning will enable directors to use excerpt study as a proactive approach to developing young musicians.

Directors with small band programs may not be able to program certain works due to a lack of available instrumentation. As an example, a shortage of tuba and euphonium players should not deny students the opportunity to study Gustav Holst's *First Suite in E-Flat*. Students should also not be prohibited from exam-

**FIGURE 1**

**Conventional Low-Note Exercise for Flute**



**FIGURE 2**

**Incantation and Dance, Flute mm. 1–15**



Note: Copyright 1963 by Boosey and Hawkes. Used with permission.

**FIGURE 3**

**“Irish Tune from County Derry,” Trombone 1, mm. 1–16**



Note: Copyright 1994 by Southern Music Company. Used with permission.

ining “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” our national march, because of a lack of piccolo players. Using passages from the larger work and employing the method discussed will enable students to experience these fine pieces.

In another scenario, a director can use excerpts to challenge musicians who would not be challenged by current programming. For instance, level 3 and 4 band pieces often provide fewer technical challenges to low brass and percussion players than they do to woodwind and trumpet players. Band works at these levels also provide fewer opportunities for those playing bass instruments to play melodic lines. By combing through wind music for excerpts, directors can find a rich source of material to help these musicians improve both technical and expressive playing.

A director can also use this procedure as a way to lay the groundwork for future performances of difficult works. For example, a band director who decides to perform a challenging piece for next year’s concert season can incorporate excerpts from that piece into the current year’s lesson curriculum. This will enable teachers to prepare the players techni-

cally and to shift the focus of ensemble rehearsals from rote drill to ensemble performance and interpretation. This practice could potentially save rehearsal time that could then be devoted to additional training, such as theory and sight-reading.

### Introducing Wind Excerpts

To implement a wind excerpt program, begin by considering lists of band literature at the high school and early college levels for high-quality works.<sup>5</sup> After reviewing this music, choose eight to sixteen works that can be studied over the course of four years (one or two pieces per semester). After making the selections, isolate the important themes, soloistic passages, and other challenging sections for each instrument. Arrange these excerpts progressively so that a student prepares one or two works per semester (Table 1). This method will broaden students’ exposure to wind music by adding eight to sixteen pieces to their personal repertoire in addition to concert and contest music rehearsed with the full band. As a way to evaluate progress, a director can hold a mock audition at the end of each year and require that the students play all pas-

sages studied to date. This procedure will provide insight into the performer’s world by replicating a real-world scenario.

In addition to physical preparation of passages, successful orchestral musicians also prepare by analyzing scores and listening critically to recorded performances of the complete work. This practice allows performers to understand the context of the extracted passage and develop greater familiarity with the complete work. In the same way, band directors should provide access to full scores and recordings of the pieces to be studied to supplement the physical performance of the piece. This will enable students to conceptualize the entire work rather than merely their own part. With the addition of listening and score study, students will develop insights into techniques of orchestration, use of tone color, and compositional techniques, such as those found in Grainger’s use of the saxophone (particularly, soprano saxophone) and Vincent Persichetti’s percussion writing.

Guided questioning (verbal or written) about aspects of these assignments will also provide valuable insight into the construction and performance practice of the work (Table 2). Student-conducted

**TABLE 1**  
**Sample Excerpt Program**

Student Name: John Smith Instrument: Trombone

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>Semester 1</b>	<i>Kentucky 1800</i> Reh I–L  <i>Shepherd’s Hey</i> mm. 65–80	<i>1st Suite in E-flat</i> Mvt. I, B–C, F–end Mvt. III D–end  <i>Molly on the Shore</i> mm. 123–131, 139–147	<i>Stars and Stripes Forever</i> Dogfight and Grandioso strains  <i>Incantation and Dance</i> mm. 57–69, 88–100, 207–215	<i>2nd Suite in F</i> Mvt. I beg–E, G–end Mvt. III beg–A, B–C Mvt. IV E–F
<b>Semester 2</b>	<i>Irish Tune from County Derry</i> mm. 1–32  <i>Country Band March</i> mm. 131–143, 160–end	<i>William Byrd Suite</i> Mvt. I reh 8–12 Mvt. II reh 1–end Mvt. III reh 5–6 Mvt. IV beg–reh 1 Mvt. VI reh 7–8	<i>Russian Christmas music</i> mm. 32–38, 43–49, 63–76	<i>Rolling Thunder</i> —all  <i>Chester</i> mm. 17–33, 62–86, 145–170

**TABLE 2****Sample Guided Listening/Score Study Questions**

General Questions	
1.	What is the general mood of the piece?
2.	How does your part help to set the mood?
3.	Historically, what style is this piece?
4.	List some characteristics of this style period.
5.	What role does your instrument traditionally perform during this period?
6.	Has the method of construction for your instrument changed since the time of this composition? If so, describe how. How would the sound of your instrument be different?
Specific Part Questions	
1.	Is this excerpt at the beginning, middle, or end of the piece?
2.	Is your part a melody, harmony, countermelody, or rhythmic motive?
3.	Do any instruments play your part before or after you? If so, does the composer want it performed the same way?
4.	What instruments double your part? Which instrument should dominate?
5.	What are other instruments doing while you play this passage?

research about the composer's biography and compositional practice would also be an excellent way to supplement an excerpt program.

### Lifelong Musicianship

By using excerpts as part of the band program, directors can prepare students to continue making music after graduation. Many colleges and universities have band programs that are open to all majors. In spite of this, these schools still often require auditions for inclusion and placement in their concert groups. A thorough grounding in wind literature, assisted by excerpt study, will greatly improve a student's chances of success.

For those musicians who do not aspire to a professional career but still wish to play for the love of music, there are many fine community bands available. In the United States, such groups include the Northshore Concert Band [Illinois], the Keystone Wind Ensemble [Pennsylvania], the National Concert Band

of America [Maryland], the Atlanta [Georgia] Wind Symphony, the Cedar Rapids [Iowa] Municipal Band, and the Tallahassee [Florida] Winds, to name just a few. Many of these groups also require players to audition and sight-read standard band literature in order to demonstrate familiarity with the genre. Therefore, to encourage our students to continue with lifelong music making, it is imperative that they be prepared for these kinds of ensembles through a wind excerpt program.

When contemplating a professional performing career, most musicians usually think of orchestral playing due to the prevalence of symphonic and operatic orchestras in the country. However, these groups are not the only options for wind players. Military bands, notably, the "premier bands" located in Washington, D.C., and at military academies, require the performance of band excerpts at auditions in much the same manner as orchestras. In addition, the Armed Forces School of Music uses band pieces as sight-reading material for entrance audi-

tions and as graduation requirements for military schooling.<sup>6</sup> An aspiring military musician who develops familiarity with band literature through excerpts will have a distinct advantage over other players. Although professional orchestras are more numerous, professional concert bands and wind ensembles, such as the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra in Japan, the Dallas Wind Symphony, and Keith Brion's New Sousa Band (a touring band based in Cambridge, Massachusetts), have raised the profile of the wind band/ensemble as a musical medium. This higher profile has increased the demand for well-prepared, knowledgeable wind musicians.

### A Recipe for Success

A thorough study of wind excerpts will allow students to explore a greater number of pieces throughout their high school career. Excerpt study will also expose students to important literature in detail, despite differences in their playing ability or limitations in the instrumen-

tation of a given ensemble. These passages can also challenge strong players and prepare less-skilled players for more demanding works. Directors will be able to generate time in rehearsal for other aspects of musical development and prepare students for continuing their musical growth. Early exposure to these excerpts will be a great advantage for those musicians who wish to continue making music throughout their lives. They will be better prepared to succeed in college and community bands or, for those that aspire to a performing career, will have enough experience with excerpts to make preparing for auditions an easier path.

## NOTES

1. This is a universal low-register flute exercise that is regularly assigned by Deborah Egekvist, professor of flute at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. My colleague Sergeant Jennifer G. M. Duerkoop recommended this exercise to me.
2. John Barnes Chance, *Incantation and Dance* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1963).
3. Joannes Rochut, *Melodious Études for Trombone: Selected from the Vocalises of Marco Bordogni* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1928).
4. Percy Aldridge Grainger, "Irish Tune from County Derry," ed. R. Mark Rogers. (San Antonio, TX: Southern Music Company, 1994).
5. Acton Ostling Jr. compiled such a list in 1978 as a doctoral research project. The project was replicated and updated by Jay W. Gilbert in the early 1990s.
6. The Armed Forces School of Music in Little Creek, Virginia, houses the U.S. Army School of Music and the combined Navy and Marine schools of music. All musicians in these branches who are not assigned to premier military bands are trained here. Air Force musicians do not attend the Armed Forces School but receive on-the-job training. The Coast Guard Academy Band is the only band for that branch of service. Those musicians, as members of a premier band, also do not attend the Armed Forces School of Music.

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