

KMEA Brian Balmages Session

"Rethink, Rediscover, Refuel: composing and choosing music for all levels"

Educational music created to sell and get directors on an email list

Composers can make a career out of "educational music"

Must have the MUSIC part, a lot do not

Should teach about musicality, thus any piece with significant musical value is educational

Challenge for composers is to write artistically viable works regardless of grade level

Artistic music: musically engaging and not overly predictable ("I Got Your Home Right Here Festival Overture"), stimulates the imagination, provides an artistic experience in which the ensemble can emotionally identify with the piece, students and conductors become better musicians as a result of working on the piece (don't forget to find pieces that fire you up as well as your students)

Melody: while easy to learn (and easier to compose) exact repetition of melody in all voices is not necessarily a viable musical option, 8 measure phrases are not always viable for young players either

Harmony: even six note pieces can have interesting harmonies, challenge for composer is to blend notes in unique and interesting ways, harmonic development like Wagner (slow harmonic development/rhythm) to Grainger

Rhythm: can be exciting but can easily become cliché and repetitive, repetition needs to be musically justified (not necessarily "easy to learn"), rhythmic development can play a crucial role when a piece is based heavily on rhythmic ideas

Texture/Orchestration: sparseness/chamber music, use of interesting doubling/scoring techniques (even a string orchestra has a lot of interesting colors available, but it requires much more thought when orchestrating!), unique interesting sounds/color combinations, use of cuing!

"Small to All" (Or "All to Small"?): consider that a beginning or young ensemble (band or string orchestra) has no more restrictions than a professional brass quintet or string quartet. Rather, it is a different performing medium.

Form

Composition as a vehicle for teaching/conducting