

PAC-TEN WIND ENSEMBLE PROGRAMMING TRENDS

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Abstract

In this study, which is a replication and extension of earlier work by Powell (2009), I sought to investigate the recent programming practices of the Pac-Ten universities' top wind ensembles. I contacted the directors of all Pac-Ten band programs and requested their premier wind ensemble's concert programs from fall 2002 through spring 2009. I then entered 1166 total performances of individual compositions into a database. With 13 performances each, *First Suite in E-Flat* by Gustav Holst and *Blue Shades* by Frank Ticheli were the most frequently programmed compositions. With 47 performances of 19 various pieces, Percy Aldridge Grainger was the most performed composer. During the seven-year period examined here, these ensembles premiered 26 works. Hopefully, these findings concerning recent programming trends can provide beneficial information about wind literature of merit and perhaps inform selections for future study, performance, or commissioning.

Pac-Ten Wind Ensemble Programming Trends

Among conductors, teachers, and students, the topic of wind band literature has generated much discussion. Numerous articles, books, essays, and conference presentations have been dedicated to the subject (e.g., Battisti, 2004; Berz, 2001; Cipolla & Hunsberger, 1994; Reynolds, 2000; Votta, 2006).

Over the years, much of the conversation concerning literature for the wind band has focused on establishing a standard repertoire. Across several decades of investigations, a number of scholars have utilized various research instruments (questionnaires, rating scales, surveys) as a means to ascertain pieces of the highest artistic merit and thus define the repertoire (e.g., Berry, 1973; Hayward, 2004). In a 1978 dissertation, Ostling sought to identify the wind band literature's most important works. For the study, he developed 10 criteria for selecting music of significant artistic value. Twenty evaluators, selected through nomination by college band directors, applied the 10 attributes to 1,481 compositions and identified 314 pieces as meritorious in the medium. A similar investigation by Olson (1982) attempted to define the term "wind ensemble" and subsequently delineate a core repertoire. Via a researcher-devised survey, 19 university wind ensemble conductors indicated their evaluations concerning 68 of the "choicest" pieces for such groups. In 1993, Gilbert replicated and updated Ostling's experiment. Twenty college band directors evaluated 1,261 compositions for wind band and characterized 191 works as meeting the study's criteria for music of the highest quality. (For a complete listing of the compositions identified in each examination as works of serious artistic merit, readers are encouraged to consult the aforementioned investigations). Since that time, some researchers have employed Ostling's benchmarks to examine literature appropriate for performance in diverse venues, including the secondary schools (e.g., Rhea, 1999; Thomas, 1998).

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As an additional means to gather information concerning wind band literature of significance, other investigators have examined the programming practices of various wind groups, including those in middle and high schools (e.g., Bauer, 1996; Hopwood, 1998). For over half a century, researchers have been reviewing such trends at the collegiate level. In 1955, Odegard tabulated the performance frequency of college band repertory as notated on concert programs covering a ten-year period. Percy (1958) used over 100 university band programs to compile a list of the 75 wind band compositions performed most frequently between 1950-1957. A decade later, in response to a request from CBDNA President Manley Whitcomb, Holvik (1970) attempted to determine if a band repertoire was emerging. He studied the concert programs of 78 CBDNA members for the five-year period, 1961-1966, and considered those pieces that had been performed ten or more times to be the most significant. In 1983, Hornyak undertook a research project in which he detailed the music performed most frequently by university and college bands from 1975 to 1982. At that time, based on the data he garnered from examining hundreds of college and university wind band concert programs, Hornyak concluded there was not a core repertoire of any merit common to all university and college wind bands.

In an effort to ascertain if a band repertoire had emerged since Holvik's (1970) investigation, Kish replicated that study in 2005. As in the original examination, the data utilized represented diverse sizes and types of institutions as well as varying styles of music (i.e., formal programs, tour, and festival concerts). Using program listings from the 1998 to 2002 CBDNA *Report*, Kish compiled compositions that had been performed 15 or more times. When compared to Holvik's list, results showed that 53 compositions were common to both. As a result, Kish concluded those works should be considered among those of the highest artistic merit for the medium. For a summary of Kish's findings, readers are encouraged to peruse his study.

Most recently, Powell's (2009) investigation focused on the programming practices of the Big Ten universities' premiere wind ensembles. In contrast to a majority of the previous studies, where researchers gathered data from a large number of college and university programs that varied in both size and purpose, Powell focused on those ensembles whose performances could be considered among the highest levels. Through examination of concert programs from fall 2002 through spring 2006, he provided various information, including most frequently performed compositions and composers as well as premieres. From his results, Powell concluded that the Big Ten wind ensembles' programming practices were only somewhat similar to the national trends reported in Kish's (2005) study. Since no compositions were performed more than 10 times (and only four were performed 10 times), Powell suggested wide variety in programming may have contributed to a relatively small core repertoire represented in this sample.

The purpose of my investigation was to use Powell's (2009) study as a basis for examining recent programming practices of the top wind ensembles at all of the Pac-Ten universities (University of Arizona, Arizona State University, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Los Angeles, University of Oregon, Oregon State University, University

of Southern California, Stanford University, University of Washington, Washington State University). As in Powell's work, I compiled information concerning the most frequently performed compositions and composers, the ratio of original wind band works to arrangements and transcriptions, and the pieces these ensembles premiered. Although Powell's project reviewed concert programs from 2002 through 2006, it seems reasonable to extend the current data to contain programming trends through the last available concert season. Consequently, the results found in this examination were inclusive of fall 2002 through spring 2009.

Method

I contacted the directors of bands at each Pac-Ten university and asked them to provide concert programs (fall 2002-spring 2009) for their premiere wind ensemble. Ultimately, I achieved a 100% response rate. As in Powell's investigation (2009), I entered each composition from every regular concert performance into a computer database, omitting information from special concerts (i.e., alumni band, commencement). When the ensemble gave several performances of the same piece within a short period of time (i.e., during a festival), I only included the composition once. Performances of a multi-movement work and a separate performance of one movement from that piece were notated as discrete entries. Every entry contained the following information: title, composer and/or arranger/transcriber, and if applicable, an indication of a world premiere performance. To insure correctness, a graduate conducting student used the exact protocol and entered the same information into a separate database. Visual comparison of the two databases revealed 100% accuracy.

Results

I entered 1166 performances of individual compositions into the database. Of those, 827 (70.93%) were original wind band works. With 13 performances each, Gustav Holst's *First Suite in E-Flat* and *Blue Shades* by Frank Ticheli were the most frequently programmed pieces. Four works were played seven times each: *Irish Tune from County Derry* and *Lincolnshire Posy* by Percy Aldridge Grainger, *Symphony in B-flat* by Paul Hindemith, and *October* by Eric Whitacre. For a tallied listing of the 189 works played at least two times, see Table 1. The compositions are presented in order, beginning with the most frequently programmed and including the number of performances calculated during the seven-year period.

As can be seen in Table 2, Percy Aldridge Grainger--with 47 performances of 19 various compositions--was the most frequently programmed composer, and Frank Ticheli was the next most regularly performed composer (34 performances of 14 different wind works). Gustav Holst was third, having 6 different pieces programmed a total of 28 times, followed by Leonard Bernstein, with 27 performances of 10 varying compositions.

The Pac-Ten band directors and programs are actively involved in commissioning and premiering new compositions for the wind band. During the time between fall 2002 through spring 2009, the wind ensembles investigated here premiered 26 new works (see Table 3).

Discussion

In this study, I examined the recent programming trends of the Pac-Ten universities' premiere wind ensembles. For the period inclusive of fall 2002 through spring 2009, I documented information about the most performed composers and works, computed the ratio of original wind band pieces to transcriptions and arrangements, and notated the compositions these ensembles premiered. As in Powell's investigation of the top Big Ten wind ensembles (2009), the four most frequently programmed composers were Grainger, Ticheli, Holst, and Bernstein (between the two studies, Holst's and Bernstein's rankings were inverted). In addition, results from the current examination are also consistent with those from Kish's (2005) survey of colleges and universities, which reported Grainger, Ticheli, and Holst amongst the most frequently played composers. Only three of the ten most programmed works in Powell's (2009) research are also included in the top ten from the present study: *Lincolnshire Posy* by Grainger, *Symphony in B-flat* by Hindemith, and *Hammersmith* by Holst. However, comparison with the top ten most frequently performed compositions from Kish's (2005) overview reveals five pieces in common with the current list: *Blue Shades* by Ticheli, *First Suite in E-flat* by Holst, *Irish Tune from County Derry* and *Lincolnshire Posy* by Grainger, and *Suite Française* by Milhaud. It should be noted that Kish (2005) did not include tallies concerning compositions appearing on fewer than 15 performances, and the scope of his project was much more expansive (both geographically and in types of institutions surveyed) than that of either Powell (2009) or my investigation. In addition, Powell's data comprised programming trends from 2002-2006 (four years inclusive), and this study researched 2002-2009 (seven years inclusive).

Although the majority of all works programmed by Pac-Ten wind ensembles are original repertoire for wind band, that percentage is lower than data from the Kish (2005) and Powell (2009) examinations (84% and 88%, respectively). Overall, it appears the Pac-Ten's top wind groups played a larger number of transcriptions and arrangements than did ensembles in the previous studies. Additionally, the current list of most performed literature includes five compositions that would be categorized as pop and film music, *Blackbird* by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, *Wizard of Oz* by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg, and *The Cowboys*, *Harry Potter Suite*, and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* by John Williams. Neither Powell (2009) nor Kish (2005) reported similar findings.

From fall 2002 through spring 2009, results show that Pac-Ten wind ensembles premiered 26 new compositions. Interestingly, none of these pieces was programmed more than once. These findings are similar to those in Powell's (2009) investigation. Several scholars (Battisti, 1995; Casey, 1993; Powell, 2009) have suggested that repeat performances, especially by the groups that premiered them, are important for these new works. By combining data from this study with results from Powell's research, band directors have information about 75 recent compositions, all by different composers. Perhaps this exposure will stimulate thought concerning future programming.

Seventy-nine of the compositions on the current list from Pac-Ten wind ensembles were also included on Powell's (2009) tabulation from similar Big Ten groups, and both inventories indicate the respective wind ensembles are programming works by current composers. However, in the present study, a larger percentage of the 11 most frequently performed pieces, those programmed six or more times, was written at least four decades ago (63.64%, $n = 7$). These findings include slightly more contemporary compositions than those in the Powell investigation, where nearly 82% ($n = 9$) were written before 1970. Seventeen of the 25 (68%) most performed composers, with 10 or more performances, in the current investigation are no longer alive. Many conductors and composers have long suggested that history will determine the canons of the wind band repertoire (Allen, 2003; McBeth, 1989). Current data appear to suggest that the "standards"--those compositions written before 1970 and also tabulated by both Kish (2005) and Powell (2005)--have stood the test of time and offer further support for the notion that they be considered core literature of the genre.

Results from this study should be considered with the context of its limitations. Data are based on frequency of performance, and wide appeal does not necessarily denote the work's significance in the literature. For instance, although most wind band conductors and composers regard *Music for Prague 1968* by Karel Husa as a masterwork in the repertoire, the tabulation here suggests it was only performed once by top Pac-Ten wind ensembles during the time period under consideration.

In this investigation, I tallied a large number of works for wind band ($n = 826$). However, only 189 (26.62%) were programmed more than one time and a mere 82 (12.55%) were played three or more times. During the seven years between fall 2002 and spring 2009, only two pieces were performed more than 10 times. These results signify a wide variety of programming choices among the Pac-Ten's premiere wind ensembles and consequently, tend to imply a relatively small core repertoire for these groups. The data here are similar to those in Powell's (2009) study concerning the top wind groups in the Big Ten, which he also determined to have broadly diverse programming practices and a limited core literature.

As we continue the effort to identify quality literature and search for those compositions that constitute the core in our medium, these findings lead to a number of questions for future investigations. For instance, would programming trends for these universities' second and third bands be different? If so, in what ways? When programming concerts, what criteria do these directors use? How would results from this study compare to those from premiere wind groups in other conferences or professional wind band organizations? How might identification and study of significant wind works impact future secondary school band directors? Ray Cramer, Emeritus Director of Bands at Indiana University emphasizes, "The issue of defining 'good' art seems to be an almost impossible task . . . However, even with this inherent difficulty, it is an especially vital question for wind band conductors since it is central to how we define ourselves" (in Berz, 2000, p. 31). Hopefully, investigations such as this can provide valuable information concerning wind literature of merit and perhaps inform choices affecting future study, performance, and commissioning.

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