The Kentucky String Orchestra Music List

Part One — Why?

Philosophy: Selection of appropriate string literature is one of the primary responsibilities of orchestra directors. The required music list for Kentucky orchestras is a selective list representing the very finest literature composed or arranged for string orchestra.

Purpose of the List: The purpose of the list will be to serve as a guide for Kentucky school orchestra directors in selecting appropriate and high quality literature that should serve as the prime performance focus for their ensembles. In accordance with the rules of the Kentucky Music Educators Association Festival Commission, the classification of orchestras is determined by the selection of one composition from the required list to be performed by the ensemble as part of their assessment event. The proposed list will serve as the vehicle for classifying orchestras using only high quality literature. It may also serve as an important reference for Kentucky school orchestra directors in selecting the best and most appropriate literature for their ensembles.

Guiding Principles for Selecting Music for the List:
According to Bennett Reimer, (A Philosophy of Music Education) “good” music should be

... the primary material for study at every stage of development. The word “good” as should be clear at this point, does not refer to any particular type, style or medium of music, but to qualities of excellent construction and genuine expressiveness. These qualities are found in music of all types and all levels of Complexity (p 114).

In a discussion of quality literature for band and orchestra, the term “quality literature,” or “good music,” must have guidelines. James Neilson outlines a number of attributes of good music in his booklet, What is Quality in Music? These factors, although not mutually exclusive, include:

- Rhythmic Vitality
- Genuine Originality
- Melody that has the qualities of economy
- Logic and inspiration
- Harmony that is consistent with and is suitable to the style
- Craftsmanship
- A sense of values (meaning that everything is in balance and proportion and that there is a sense of continuity)
- Emotionally Justified
- Quality and Personal Taste
- Has stood the test of time
- Does this piece have good melodies, harmonies, and textures?
- Does this piece contain a variety of keys, styles, meters, and technical complexity in proportion to its level of difficulty (grade)?
- Does this piece represent one of the finest examples among all similar works within the repertoire?
- Other guiding factors include, music that reinforces skills and concepts being taught, presents technical challenges for all instruments, as well as interesting parts for all instruments to play.

When selecting music for the list, some music that may meet these criteria was purposefully excluded. Concertos, concerto grossi, and other works which feature primarily solo elements with orchestral accompaniment, arrangements of popular or cinematic music, and holiday arrangements have all been left out. While these styles have their place in a well-rounded music program, this list is designed to highlight quality music for the entire ensemble. These pieces may still be used at a KMEA assessment performance, but may not be used as the required piece.
Part Two — How?

Basic List:

The original list was developed by comparing the string orchestra lists from the Teaching Music through Performance in Orchestra, volumes 1-3 (ed. Litrell, GIA publications), the String Orchestra Super List (ed. Mayer, MENC, 1992), which was a compilation of lists from 15 states and 3 professional organization, and the lists of string orchestra music used by Indiana*, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Music that appeared on at least six lists was chosen for the initial Kentucky String Orchestra List.

Determining Grade Level Classification:

Assigning a grade level designation to a musical work is certainly not an exact science. The technical demands of a piece are usually the principal consideration in assigning a grade level. However, other factors such as the musical maturity of a piece, transparent scoring, or unusual solo demands, should also be considered. There is much quality literature at all grade levels, and directors should become familiar with a wide range of fine literature.

Grade classification for this list uses the commonly accepted definitions for each grade level. Grade One is typically used for first-year players; Grade Two for second-year players; Grade Three for middle school or junior high and less experienced high school players; Grade Four for most high school ensembles; Grade Five for advanced high school ensembles and college or university ensembles; and Grade Six for exceptional high school, advanced college, and professional ensembles.

In order to classify the literature into 6 grade levels, the classifications set forth in the American String Teachers Association String Syllabus (ed. ???, 20??) will be used. (grade level classifications will be listed here).

Changes to the Orchestra Music List:

The Orchestra Chair-elect will select and chair a committee of KMEA orchestra directors whose own performance literature selections represent the ideals set forth in this document to oversee the Kentucky String Orchestra Music List. Regional representation should be considered in the selection of the committee. If there is not an Orchestra Chair-elect, the Orchestra chair will appoint a member to select and chair this committee. This committee will meet annually to review new publications and evaluate recommendations received for possible addition to the Kentucky String Orchestra Music List.

The committee may vote to add, delete, or make corrections to the Basic Music List on the recommendation of committee members or other KMEA members. An updated list will be posted on the KMEA website in August.
Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio each have separate lists for middle school and high school orchestras. These lists were combined into one list for each state and pieces on both high and middle school lists were only considered once.