

## Audible Music-Like Repertoire

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Arts. Dr. Lourens holds a Doctorate in Conducting and Masters degree in Euphonium Performance from Indiana University, where he studied conducting with Ray E. Cramer and Euphonium with Daniel Perantoni, M. Dee Stewart and Harvey G. Phillips. He received a coveted Performers Certificate for the quality of his Masters recital. Prof. Lourens has many articles and music publications to his credit, including analysis contributions to the Teaching Music Through Performance in Band series of books, recent contributions to the US Based MBM Times and in 2010 co-authored several books on the planning, policy and development of Universities. Cimarron Publishing has released his arrangements for both band and orchestra.

**C**elebrity Chef Jamie Oliver's most recent efforts have been challenging the food we offer students at schools in the UK, US and Australia. He argues that our food choices for students are based on expediency, a cheap price and all too often ignorance of food choices that can be fun as well as nutritional.

In music classes, we too face a trial. Few would argue, in food or music, that our students deserve the best; the best effort, the best resources, and the best options. However, when we examine the market, particularly for band repertoire, we see many works that are based on expediency, profit and an audience of band directors who are not discriminating good music from bad.

US Food expert Michael Pollan describes the US food market as being flooded by "edible food-like substances." These products are manufactured to look and taste like food, but are in fact simply a collection of chemicals that are of great attraction, but ultimately don't offer us what we need. Some of them can be quite fun and very attractive (such as the "Twinkie"), but that doesn't make it good food.

We can borrow this phrase for "audible music-like repertoire."

"Audible music-like repertoire" looks like real music. It has melody, some kind of form and instrumentation. What it lacks is inspiration, substance or any real thought. Like "edible food-like substances" it can be made in bulk with cookie-cutter accuracy. Write an eight-bar melody, plug it into the template and "voilà" you have a piece that may sell. What's more it is cheap and easy to produce.

Like "edible food-like substances" they can be very enjoyable for the uninformed. They feel to the novice like a piece that has a substance. It usually has an enjoyable, syncopated rhythm, a pretty middle section in 3/4 and a cut-and-paste return to the

opening before the big finish (often with a flat VI-flat VII-I ending, or a flat II in the bass against the tonic in the upper voices). They can build to some excitement by following simple rules. Slow down at the end of the phrase. Overplay the accents.

They are the McDonald's of music. Impossible to get away from, appalling effects to be found in those who eat it every day. Sluggishness, weight gain, lack of energy. It is the same for the musical taste of those who ingest only "audible music-like repertoire." They lose the ability to distinguish good music from bad, view excitement in terms of beats-per-minute, and believe that all music is in ABA (or one of the minor variations allowable). One of the conceits of technology is to give us music much of which is *literally* cut-and-paste. Same music, same scoring. Ctrl-C, Ctrl-V, pay me my money now please Mr. Publisher.



I suggest you view "audible music-like repertoire" in the same way as fast food. It can be consumed as a guilty pleasure. Put one into a concert once a year to throw your other repertoire choice into sharp relief.

But whatever you do don't feed them to your students on a daily basis.

The obesity epidemic that is sweeping the western world is evidence of the appeal of fast food; and in the music world, the large sales of this music demonstrates that we can make our students musical minds bulge with this music as well.

So how do we identify good music from "audible food-like music"?

Good music is, of course, in the eye of the beholder. However, good music has many of the same characteristics:

**Good Music has a good form.** Of course ABA is a form. Great works in ternary form, however, don't just cut and paste the recapitulation. Great composers bring something different to the restatement. Other composers use standard forms in unique ways; sonata form, rondo, binary, these are a discipline that great composers place on themselves and compose excellent music.

Beethoven's **Fifth Symphony** opens with a solid sonata form that is both textbook and inspirational. Or witness the use of motivic ideas of Berlioz or Tchaikovsky.

(Of course, I hear some of you yelling about the few truly inspirational works that are through composed—the exceptions that prove the rule).

**Good Music is composed from inspiration,** not to complete a contract. Of course great composers wrote music to a deadline; note both Haydn's and Bach's enormous output. However they combine equal parts inspiration and perspiration, not just writing for a paycheck.

**Good Music is never formulaic.** Composers do develop their own recognizable voice. The music of Mozart or Wagner is in their distinctive voice. However within their output they *never* compose to a formula. Mozart many times sets up the listener with a formulaic work - and then interrupts the flow with a witty turn.

**Good Music is hardly ever written simply to provide "good teaching material."** Be it music for first-grade violin or university saxophone ensemble, the best music was written by composers who were probably not thinking "this will be great to teach with." Usually they were thinking "this will be a great piece." even if written within self-imposed limitations. In his fun and compelling article for **The Washington Post** (January 30, 2005), Stephen Budiasky wrote about music as a parent. He makes the point that we hardly ever provide students with the music that inspired generations. Instead, we play watered down versions for our bands. Instead of playing Mozart, we play pieces "inspired by" Mozart; instead of African drumming, we provide poor imitations of African drums.

**Good Music says something...** other than "Please pay me now." Be it fun, tragic, exciting, scary or intellectual, good music communicates something that *only* music can communicate. If we only define music by non-musical ideas (such as notation, or winning a contest) then music education will die. Music is the *only* means to communicate certain ideas, defined only by music. As music teachers we need to champion music as a subject; you cannot do that by choosing music that cannot stand up for itself.

Part of our job is to educate our audiences as well. Allowing our audiences to define the music we always play abrogates our responsibility as teachers. Of course we need the support of our audience, and we cannot ignore their response to music. However, it is possi-

ble to present even "way out" music to an audience in an interesting and exciting way, if you believe in the music. Next time you are on the net go to **YouTube** and type in "4'33" BBC" for a truly riveting performance broadcast by the BBC of one of the most difficult pieces to perform well.

So to say "I won't do this because my parents won't like it" is to give control of your music program over to people who potentially have no understanding of music.

We are all part of the culture around us. There is much in music that students will hear in their day-to-day lives, and through the popular media. Our role as educators is to broaden our students' experience; to offer them both an understanding of the music around them *and* music they would likely not usually encounter.

Most young minds are more receptive than you would expect. I have met few students, for example, who are not excited by Berlioz' **March to the Scaffold** from **Symphonie Fantastique**, or (much more surprisingly) who don't find Bach's **Little Fugue in G Minor** a terrific piece. So stretch your students. Take them outside their comfort zone, and perhaps yours, and introduce them to a kind of music that may be new to them.

"Audible music-like repertoire" will always be with us. Like fast food, it meets the need for quick easy-to-play, easy-to-understand music, and there are many who will profit by our ignorance. It can only thrive as long as we let it.

There should be no compromise.

Students deserve *the best* repertoire we can give them.

Not taking the time to find and learn the best repertoire we can play in any given situation or budget is simply not good enough. Our responsibility to the students begins *before* they walk in the door, and must include talking to colleagues, listening to music and studying scores.

Find the time, and learn about great music. You'll be surprised how quickly your audience comes to love it. And you might just find that it is not just your students who are enriched by great repertoire.

You, your students and your audience may even come to love your rehearsals and concerts even more.

