

Clinic: Creating a Meaningful Concert Program

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reported by Faith Farr

In planning concert programs, it is a challenge to choose repertoire that will inspire both our musicians and our audiences. Instinctively we feel music should stand on its own. However, since our culture doesn't understand the value of music education, we should take some time to talk to the audience about the tangibles.

Talk about engaging the brain to play one note — its pitch, dynamic, length, whether it belongs to the melody or harmony, how it fits with the conductor's gestures, how it fits with the ensemble. Talk about athletes — the energy and vigor it takes to play. Talk about character — it takes responsibility to show up on time every time, to keep an instrument clean and handle it with care. Point out that music teaches delayed gratification and patience because you can't learn it in one sitting. Ensemble playing builds self-esteem and cooperation. Explain that practice requires analysis and creativity — you must listen and notice a mistake; identify and isolate the spot; invent and implement a solution. Point out that music performance teaches humility — sometimes silly mistakes are out of your control, but they are also out there in public.

We need to allude to these human development traits at each concert. Get the word out that music is life enhancing and life giving. Audience members will feel their time is well spent at a concert if they are entertained, engaged, inspired, challenged and learn.

To create a meaningful concert program, you need:

- a snappy title
- drama
- a mix of the familiar and the new

- outstanding student performers
- verbal commentary
- visual elements
- interesting collaborations

Your program must have a title, theme or connecting thread. It is the hook that draws your audience in. Titles can show that music is all around us and is organic. *Fairy Tales, Animals and Underwear* is the SPCO program that sold out earliest this year; the title names three things loved by all kids.

Use drama at the beginning — walk out and start briskly. Or use a brass trio to play a fanfare. Use drama at the end of the program with a loud, fast or uplifting piece or movement that will send the audience home singing, dancing or thinking. Use drama in unusual ways. Once on a really hot outdoors concert in New Orleans, Marlene's conductor gave a downbeat and dove into the water! You can use water glasses and spoons in the Toy Symphony. You can space groups throughout the auditorium for drama. Even if your beginners are only playing D and A, it will be dramatic if they march through the hall as they play.

Offer household names such as Mozart and Haydn, then expand minds with something new, then return to the more familiar.

Use young soloists to demonstrate to kids that music is in them too. Students will remember hearing and seeing kids play.

Use verbal commentary, but keep it well organized, succinct and interesting. Audiences crave information; satisfy their craving.

In our highly visual world, provide visual stimulation. Audiences like watching young soloists. A brass trio is visually inter-

esting. Try enhancing a piece with dance. This year GTCYS will show the Disney *Silly Symphonies* version of *March of the Trolls* before performing it on their concert.

In schools, collaborate with the art teachers and phy-ed instructors. In youth



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orchestras, collaborate with other organizations interested in children's concerts; find them by surfing the web. Use student composers. Or have students come up with a theme and collaborate with a professional composer to create a piece.

This type of concert takes energy and planning. The music you choose must serve the players of course, but a well-organized concert gives another layer of excellence. If parents can enjoy the concert at many levels they will spread the word; recruitment will be easier, and salaries may be more stable.

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Faith Farr has served as editor of this magazine since 1997. †