

All-State: New Music Reading Session Recommendations

*The New Music Reading Sessions are always an important part of the All-State Teachers Workshop. Here are the comments and suggestions compiled by Janet Anderson, Beth Becker, Cassandra Herold and Mary Beth Vach. The * for each piece indicates how many of the contributors mentioned it.*

***Brian Balmages, *Ice Sculptures*.** \$50. Gr 3. String crossings in positions. B \flat major. Piano has moving notes at the beginning to fill out the sound; the overall tune was very pretty.

*****Brian Balmages, *Into the Sky*.** \$40. Gr 1. 2nd violin/viola double. Viola part fairly decent; all parts are playable at this grade. Nice piece. Suitable for 5th grade honors or 6th grade. Key of D, $\frac{4}{4}$, triplet rhythm in piano, easy rhythms. Once again we had a nice, full sounding piece with incredibly boring viola and cello parts. The piano part was crucial. Like *Haunted Carousel*, possibly a nice piece to throw together for an impromptu performance or to round out a program?

***Borodin/arr. Monday, *Into the Steppes of Central Asia*.** \$50. Gr 3. Long held chords in various sections with the melodies held over. Needs to be played by a mature group that can develop the sound. The tunes could be taught first.

****Philip Clark, *Hobgoblin*.** \$40. Gr 3. Meter changes between $\frac{5}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{4}$. Various novel challenges in each section for interesting parts. A difficult 9th grade piece with meter changes, tricky rhythms, left hand pizzicato and running eighth notes. One can definitely say there is a lot of variety in this piece.

*****Sandra Dackow, *Burgundian Carol*.** \$40. Gr 1. Lots of C string in viola! Selection goes by fast, really works the low strings for note reading. Good teaching piece. Suitable for 5th grade honors or 6th grade. Sweet and simple piece, percussion parts, centered around key of D with no sharps, melody passed around, hooked bows, ties, bow lifts, double stops. This was my favorite piece of all of the sessions and the one I'd most likely to use at my school. It was in minor (which I love), had lots of percussion (which the kids love), was appropriate for the winter concert without an obvious religious theme, the violas got the melody and they get to play on the C string without really awkward fingerings (usually when they finally get to the lower strings there are tons of high three fingerings). It seemed a bit short but maybe a repeat could be added or percussion could start alone.

****Sandra Dackow, *Dance Bacchanale*.** \$85. Gr 4. Incredibly boring 2nd violin

part, very long piece, and repetitious. A short melody at the end was not enough to make this piece interesting for the second violins or the violas. A very neat piece for 8th grade that is a difficult, challenging piece. It is in 2 and the key of g minor. Staccato rhythms present a challenge. The viola part is interesting.

*****Susan Day, *Mystic Rhapsody*.** \$45. Gr 3. F Major, parts are good. The piece itself was not very interesting, it does not really go anywhere, but the parts are well-written. Nice piece. Suitable for 8th or 9th grade orchestra. $\frac{4}{4}$ nice resolving chords, arpeggios throughout cello part, rhythmically interesting, melodic parts in 1st and 2nd violin parts. I liked the minor feel and especially how the chords had some dissonances that resolved in interesting ways. There were 2 flats in the piece but pretty much the same finger pattern throughout which would make it a good teaching piece.

****Susan Day, *Shores of Ireland*.** \$47. Gr 2.5. Cello—lots of extensions. No shifting. Possibly harder than a 2.5. Interesting parts and nice tune. A beautiful, skillfully written piece for 8th grade. It is a great piece for developing legato skills, in $\frac{6}{8}$ time. The viola part has low F \sharp and the cello has shifted F \sharp and G \sharp .

******Ralph Ford, *Dervish*.** \$40. Gr 1.5. Lots of C \sharp /F \sharp extensions. Syncopated rhythms could be taught by ear. Printed bowings are not great. Additional triangle part, substantial piano part. Lively piece for 8th grade in $\frac{2}{4}$ in g minor. Fingering challenges include high 3's. The violin has the melody and viola has after beats. OK piece. Suitable for 7th grade orchestra. Bowings not clear, DC al coda, hooked bowing, extensions, accidentals, syncopation. This piece also included percussion and piano but lacked the catchy tune of the previous piece. In fact, I found the tonality confusing. It kept switching back and forth from G natural to G \sharp but in a way that did not sound musical to me. There were also many awkward fingerings.

****Carrie Lane Gruselle, *Basses Loaded*.** Gr 3.5. Although this is a nice feature for basses, it was difficult. The piece had three very different sections and lot of chromatic material. I felt that it was too long and that it should have focused on developing

one section instead of trying to cover three different styles. A fun piece, however is 9th grade or higher. It has difficult rhythms and a challenging bass part.

*****Arr. Carrie Lane Gruselle, *Loch Lomond*.** \$45. Gr 2.5. Cello parts go up to the harmonic. Violin has 3rd position. Challenging parts for the grade indicated. Good rich, sound. A lovely piece in $\frac{4}{4}$ in a minor. It is suitable for grades late 8th–9th. The rhythm of sixteenth-dotted eighth presents a challenge. The viola part is good. Very nice piece. Suitable for 7th and 8th grade orchestra. Key of C to key of D, goes to harmonic A in cello, dotted rhythms, nice melodic material in each instrument. Carrie Lane Gruselle is another one of my favorite composers for middle school. I really liked the sound of this piece and enjoyed all the lower string parts. Cello players said they had to shift but to a harmonic which would be not very difficult. Also a couple tricky notes (I think it had some stretch 3 notes to a low I?)

****Handel/arr. Gruselle, *Music for Royal Fireworks*.** \$45. Gr 1.5. Cello/bass double. The parts are nice, but this may not be the best or most interesting arrangement. OK piece. Suitable for 6th or 7th grade orchestra. Key of D, $\frac{4}{4}$, easy rhythms.

****Handel/arr. Monday, *Water Music Dance*.** \$48. Gr 1.5. No shifting; notes are basic for this grade. This arrangement offers nothing special—I would likely find a different arrangement with more interest. A 7th grade piece, however has some built in challenges. Starting on a pickup and terraced dynamics present a challenge, as do the many repeats in the short piece.

*****Handel/arr. Newbold, *Hallelujah Chorus*.** Gr 1.5. An excellent piece for 7th–8th grade. The piano is important to the performance of the piece. It is in $\frac{4}{4}$ in the key of D major. Had a lot of appeal, no naturals, and would be a nice concluding piece on a holiday concert. Nice piece. Suitable for 6th or 7th grade orchestra. Catchy tune, balanced parts, good use of 16th-note rhythm. As is typical of this genre of music, all the parts were moving and interesting. The piece was nice and full-sounding and I think students would enjoy it. I was surprised that the piece did not “play itself.” It definitely needed phrasing and shaping to

make more musical sense. In that regard, it would be a good teaching piece. Since the notes are fairly easy, students could really focus on dynamics and phrasing. I was not happy that my absolute favorite sections—the fugue towards the end (“And He shall reign for ever and ever...”) and the section right after that (“King of Kings...”)—where everything moves up a whole step at a time were cut out to keep the piece at an easy level. There seems to be quite a compromise going on here. How much do you simplify pieces to make them accessible? (especially when cutting out sections takes away an essential element of the piece—i.e. polyphony—which just might be why you like the piece so well in the first place?)

* **Holst/arr. Wagner, *Planets***. \$55. A great, interesting piece with key changes and changes meters of 3 and 2. The piano part is integral and had an interesting viola part.

******Arr. Bob Lipton, *Mist Shrouded Memories***. \$47. Gr 3. Plenty to do in all sections. Arrangement of Chinese Folk tunes; parts have good interest. An appealing, fun 8th grade piece that has a viola solo. It is in the key of a minor and would be a challenging piece. Nice piece. Suitable for 8th or 9th grade orchestra. Tempo changes, interesting parts throughout. Finally a piece with a viola solo and melody at the beginning. However, the 2nd violin was uneventful and there was nothing melodic for them. The piece was not memorable as a whole (I forgot what it sounded like...)

*****Arr. Tim McCarrick, *Beaumont Rag***. \$45. Gr 3. Violin solo in 3rd position, otherwise all in 1st position. Viola part not interesting, violin part moderately challenging. Not interesting enough to keep sections on task. OK piece. Suitable for 7th grade orchestra. Key of D, $\frac{4}{4}$, nice solo in cello, boring viola part, syncopated rhythms, slurs with string crossings, pizzicato. Catchy tune but only the first violins get it and the rest of the parts are pretty boring. Unless you have a handful of strong violin players you'd like to feature and everyone else in your orchestra is at a lower skill level, you will have a hard time keeping lower strings interested in this piece (a couple sharp third-fingered notes won't be enough to keep them on task).

******Richard Meyer, *Ludwig's Tango***. \$42. Gr 2. Percussion Meyer; accents on and off the beat in all sections; well written. Fairly catchy tune. A very cute, neat 7th or 8th grade piece in $\frac{4}{4}$ and the key of G. Challenging aspects include low 1's, lifts and syncopation. The viola part is interesting. Great

piece. Once past the humorous reference to a famous piece by Beethoven there are some catchy rhythms for the lower strings and the piece has an overall pleasant sound.

* **Mozart/arr. Dabczynski, *Rondo Presto***. \$42. A fun, lively piece for late 7th grade. The rhythms are easy, however, is in cut time. Range is doable, key is C major and f naturals and syncopated rhythms would be challenging.

*****W. A. Mozart/arr. Siegler, *Mozart Variations***. \$47. Gr 2. Key of G, $\frac{4}{4}$, varied finger patterns including B_bs. Good parts for all sections. Nice quarter note section in the middle. Has lots of variety. Challenges would be string crossings, staccatos, and slurs. The viola part was interesting. Nice piece. Suitable for 7th or 8th grade orchestra.

******Soon Hee Newbold, *Gaelic Castle***. \$45. Gr 1. Second violin and viola double. All parts get melody—good for young players. The tune is catchy. Good piece in $\frac{4}{4}$ time in the key of D major. Suitable for 5th grade honors or 6th grade; very playable by 7th grade. The viola has melodic parts, a major plus. Alternates between pizzicato and arco, double stops, accents, nice dynamics, use of open C string. I enjoyed the beginning of this piece (there was a modal tone set at the beginning) but as it progressed it seemed repetitious and lost the initial character.

*****Soon Hee Newbold, *Haunted Carousel***. Gr 2.5. Suitable for 7th grade orchestra. An awesome piece for 8th grade. The piano is integral to the performance of this piece. The notation is excellent, such as reminders of low 1 and low 2, and cello and bass are featured. Would be a fun fall piece. Good teaching piece. The minor $\frac{3}{4}$ melody is haunting and lovely, lots of accidentals, easy rhythms, tempo change. But violins have the tune the whole time and everyone else is relegated to rhythmic or background stuff. Putting it together will sound nice but will be unfulfilling for strong players in the viola and cello section. The lower strings had some interesting chromatics but that was it. This piece really needs the piano to hold it together, which make it even more problematic to hold students' interest.

Soon Hee Newbold, *Persus. Gr 5. Good piece. Suitable for high school orchestra. $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ position work in violins, interesting parts throughout.

Niehaus, *Pirate's Voyage. \$48. Gr 3. Very cute, upbeat opening melody with nice interaction between the violins vs. viola/cellos. Nice vehicle for teaching low 1 finger patterns. I was expecting some good contrast in the slow section but the

melody there was very disappointing. If the slow section had been more interesting, and especially if it would have featured the violas or cellos I would purchase this piece for \$48.

******Offenbach/arr. Dackow, *Barcarolle from Tales of Hoffman***. \$50. Gr 3. Divisi cello part—the bottom cello part is different from the bass part, 1st position extensions, melody throughout parts. The tune was quite nice, although this piece is possibly more challenging than its Gr 3 indication. Suitable for 7th and 8th grade orchestra. It has tricky rhythms and high 3 for viola, which would present a challenge. Nice piece. This would be a great piece to teach phrasing and $\frac{6}{8}$ and I especially liked the interaction between first and second violin.

*****Arr. Bob Phillips, *American Fiddle Melody***. \$45. Gr 2. Challenging bariolage in the viola part. All parts are fairly playable and interesting. Very nice piece. Suitable for 6th grade orchestra. This would be a fun piece to start out the year with 7th grade. Key of D, cut time, catchy fiddle tune but nothing special, students will like the rhythms, C naturals, slurs. Fun melodies, melody moved around to different instruments, interplay between violins vs. viola/cello.

****Arr. Bob Phillips, *Led Zeppelin Medley***. \$60. Gr 3. Three of the tunes were *Kashmir*, *Stairway to Heaven* and *Rock and Roll* (I'm not sure if there was a fourth). *Kashmir* and *Rock and Roll* feature rhythmic drive and the requirement of an edgier, percussive style. I have some 7th grade boys who would absolutely love to play this next year. A great piece for 8th grade, perhaps a year-end concert. It is in the key of G, in $\frac{4}{4}$ time has lots of shifting accents, repetitive driving rhythms and appeal. The students should really love this one.

Rimsky-Korsakov/arr. McCashin, *Russian Easter Overture. Gr 4? This was an extremely difficult version of this piece, especially for first violin. Why was it even arranged/changed from the original?—because the original is for full orchestra and this version is just for strings? Some full orchestra pieces are playable with or without the wind parts. I'd like to see more writing of this nature—wind parts doubled so that even only a few winds could be added depending on what is needed to complement your ensemble. This would aid in working on intonation, especially if the keys of C and D can be used. So often full orchestra pieces seem to cater to the keys

of the winds. I would especially like to see composers putting their efforts towards creating some entry level full orchestra music in keys for strings.

*****Thom Sharp, *Mambo Amabile / Mambo Amabile***. \$40. Gr 1. Decent parts for all sections. Requires percussion. Catchy tune. Nice piece. Might be harder than a Gr 1. Suitable for 5th grade honors or 6th grade orchestra. Percussion parts, tempo of $\text{♩} = 132$, interesting rhythms, F# on C string in viola. This is a piece that I really liked the sound of, and also had excellent 2nd violin/viola melody.

*****Thom Sharp, *Shadows In the House***. \$45. Gr 2.5. Good piece. A fun, jazzy piece. Suitable for 7th and 8th grade orchestra. $\frac{4}{4}$, first position, accidentals, swing tempo, catchy tune. It would be a good way to introduce jazz to students. It is in the key of B \flat which will present some challenges. Includes percussion.

****Woolstenhulme, *Nordic Invaders***. \$50. Gr 3.5. Metric challenges such as $\frac{7}{8}$, $\frac{8}{8}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ time. 3rd position in violins, rhythmically interesting, melodic parts in 1st and 2nd violin parts. The viola part was running eighth notes throughout, not really a catchy

tune or theme presented. Very repetitious. OK piece. Suitable for 8th or 9th grade orchestra.

****Zimmer and Howard/arr. Wagner, "Dark Knight" Selections**. Gr 2.5. Read through music. Suitable for 7th and 8th grade orchestra, with eighth notes, some sixteenths, low 1st fingers, mixed meters in the key of a minor. Written for full orchestra, 3rd position in violins. Dark.

***Guracha Gotcha** is a good piece for 8th grade. It has tricky syncopated rhythms that are repetitive enough to be manageable. The fingerings for viola include G#s. †