

All-State: New Music Reading Session — J.W. Pepper Editor's Choice grades 0.5–2

reported by Michael Sloane, Cassandra Herold, Anastasia Verdoljak

The first reading session went very smoothly, and we did get through all pieces in the easier grades, encompassing roughly Grades 0.5–2.0, according to the J.W. Pepper scale. We had many different genres to work through and plenty about which to speak to each other regarding the different instrumental parts: how well they were utilized throughout the various pieces, e.g. how often they were featured with the melody or harmony, the difficulty, e.g. what positions were needed, and how balanced was the use of repetitive notes, rhythms and passages. Our conductor did a nice job of moving smoothly through the pieces, although we could still perhaps read a bit less of the piece, and perhaps there could be more discussion to help directors make a choice of the value of the piece for teaching in the school programs. This session was a helpful and practical way to get ideas, do some playing in the section for perspective on how the students see it, and have some fun with colleagues in the process.

***Arco-ology* by J. Compello**

Beginner level string orchestra music with significant use of open strings will be appropriate for 1st year players. This piece reinforces bow lifts, quarter/half combinations of notes and rests. It may not “wow” concert audiences but would be a good teaching piece.

***Quest for the Throne* by Larry Clark**

Combinations of quarter notes and eighth notes at a driving tempo make this exciting for 1st year players. In the key of G major, every section will get an opportunity to play the melody. I like the legato sections with the use of crescendos to add a little expressiveness to an otherwise predictable form.

***Edge of the Horizon* by J. Woolstenhulme**

Written in a style similar to Elliot Del Borgo arrangements, this music will be fun for the students with reinforcements of bow lifts and an accessible key of D major. I especially appreciated the description in the score of what a horizon is and the suggestion to have students draw, write or create a poem about their own version of a horizon. 2 of 4 stars

***Sky Islands* by Todd Parish**

With the use a much staccato and slurs, *Sky Islands* was a pleasant sounding piece for younger groups at a grade 1 level. The contrast of staccato and legato bowing is similar to a baroque style bowing and would be a good reinforcement of that style music. The use of low 2 fingers for violins and violas will be useful for teaching different finger patterns, although unfortunately, the viola part left something to be desired with its repetition. 2 of 4 stars

***A Vikings Tale* by Chris Thomas**

In the Key of E minor with lots of open 5th chords *A Vikings Tale* has an additional part for anvil and some verbalized sounds to add to the feeling of the life and times of the Vikings era in history. Some use of vocal “huhs!” will add a fun element for students and the audience. Very nice block rhythms across the sections will help an ensemble be able to play together with more security. 2.5 of 4 stars.

A (Very) Short History of Music D. Wagner

A medley of excerpts from various genres of music such as *Gymnopedie*, *Autumn from the 4 Seasons*, *Beethoven Symphony #9* and others. The duration is about two and half minutes, which is rather abrupt in transitions. Nice job arranging these excerpts.

***Zombie Dance* by M. Story**

The Zombie movies and TV shows are popular, so this title may peek the interest of young string players. Some G string notes and C naturals will challenge young players, but the easy piano and percussion parts will make the piece have a full and complete sound.

***Ring of Fire* by K. Griesinger**

This was a great piece in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and potentially, a fast tempo if you choose. It had a big sound, and rhythmic driving which students would enjoy. Lots of D and G string note reading for the low strings. The melody was shared around a bit for each section. I would consider this for my beginner groups perhaps at the end of the year concert. / It should be accessible by 2nd year players, towards the end of the 2nd year. [opinions of different reporters. ed] 3 of 4 stars

***An Appalachian Carol* by J. Zook Cunalata**

A traditional song taking gospel-inspired tunes and beautifully coordinating the cello and violas to get their fair share of the substantial parts of the piece. A grade 1.5 piece was very fun to play with the opportunity to teach and reinforce the ♯♭ combination. All sections have some interesting parts with melody and accompaniment that will be fun for students to play for an audience.

***Enter the Laureates* by Doug Spata**

Written in the key of G major it is appropriate for 2nd year players who can read accidentals, hooked bowing and ties. Very march-like in style. Uses staccato bowing. Medium tempo.

***The Hunt* by W.A. Mozart arr. by Ben Clinesmith**

One of Mozart's famous String Quartets; a joyful tune written in $\frac{3}{4}$ in the key of G major. It has exciting scale patterns running up and down the fingerboard and incorporates the violas conversing with the violins nicely toward the end of the movement. Viola has brief time of melody, and bass part is enjoyable to play.

***Coronation of the Queen* by S. Day**

Many open string double stops give it a regal sound. Grade 1.5 is listed, which is accurate, but could be used for advanced 1st year players who understand C/F naturals. Not overly exciting. Use of tremolo at the end of the piece.

***Huevos Rancheros* by G. Frueh**

Latin flavor, with a fun cello/bass line giving a rumba type groove to it. Written in D major, but many accidentals. Viola is not the same part as the 2nd violin.

***Centrifuge* by K. Griesinger**

Stimulating viola and cello part with many accents and articulations for teaching and reinforcement. Potential to be a student favorite with these ingredients.

***Tangled Tango* by S. Rosenhaus**

Labeled as grade 2 and written in the key of D minor. Great arrangement! 3 of 4 stars. All parts written well and with melodic material. Switches to D major before ending

in D minor. Tango style of writing. Extensive use of eighth rests. Definitely has rhythms that would pique student interest. Violas and cellos have shared melody. All instruments have some options for position work that would fit smoothly into the piece. There are repeated motives—so for challenging aspects, there would be some ways for students to really learn those challenging rhythms and be successful.

***Sparks* by C. Bernotas**

E minor rock style jam with repeated eighth notes and a few finger snaps. All parts written well with violas having a lot of chance for the melody. Gets everyone involved. Good way to end a concert.

***GPS* by arr by R. Meyer**

A novelty piece with narration using the melody of *Eine Kline Nachtmusik* by Mozart. The narration simulates the type of talking and directions heard on a GPS used in cars. Clever and funny. However it will require some work and rehearsal time.

***Northwestern Skies* by Alan Lee Silva**

A beautiful sounding piece but does not really go anywhere and tends to be on the boring side. Did not finish this one.

***Stony Bridge Escape* by Kirt Mosier**

Really should be a grade 1.5. Written in the key of E minor and accessible by most 2nd year ensembles. Has a nice cello part and smart use of bowing.

***A Caravan of Kings* arr. by R. Meyer**

We Three Kings in $\frac{4}{4}$ time signature. As usual Meyer put a nice development section with accidentals and time signature changes. Optional small percussion parts. Has the option of a faster tempo to make it more exciting sounding and challenging.

Michael Sloane lives in Pine Island and teaches in Faribault. Cassandra Herold teaches in the Stillwater School District and serves MNSOTA as President-Elect. Anastasia Verdoljak teaches at City of Lakes Waldorf school. ‡