

***WE ARE WHAT WE EAT –  
BETTER REPERTOIRE FOR A HEALTHY MUSICAL BODY!***

**By  
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We have all heard the phrase – “We are what we eat”. Yet rarely do we apply this axiom to our everyday lives as music educators. Even worse, is that we rarely think of this idea in terms of the repertoire that we present to our students, whether it be within the context of the large wind band, chamber wind ensemble or solo performance.

“Better repertoire for a healthy musical body” means exactly that! In order for our students to grow intellectually, we must be extremely careful about what repertoire we feed them. I am constantly appalled at the music I find in student band folders as I travel around the world. If our goals are to teach them music in an ABA form, written in the key of Eb/F/Bb, with limited range technically and zero range emotionally, then we are succeeding beyond our wildest imaginations. But if our goals are to present to them a balanced diet of composers ranging from the medieval period to those of today, then we are failing miserably.

We need to first define what we want our students to learn, just as a teacher of math, English, history or science defines their subject matter. Just as much care needs to be spent on “how” we teach this music as to “what” music we teach. That most of our students only learn the contemporary band music of (fill in the blank) is just as terrible as if we only teach them marches or transcriptions. So let us focus on what some of these healthy musical foods are...

**1. Every meal needs balance......that would include:**

- historical period
- composers (men and women)
- formal structure (not just ABA, but theme and variations, fugue, passacaglia, etc.)
- key structure (venture into the keys of G, D, A, polytonality, etc.)
- ensemble size (not just full band 100% of the time)
- original works for wind band (from all time periods)
- transcriptions (today’s transcribers are far superior to those of the 1920’s)
- marches (different styles – British, Italian, Spanish, fast, slow, technical, lyrical)
- world music (Japan, South America, Canada –oops, England, Africa, etc.,)
- aleatoric music (learn about contemporary notation)
- jazz (and not just contemporary syncopations!)
- vocal music (collaborate with your choral director or a vocal soloist)
- dance (contemporary dance or traditional ballet)
- art (music depicting a particular art style...impressionism, abstract, cubism, etc.)

architecture (compare the formal designs of a building to that of music form)  
movies (explore the music of film composers)  
literature (music based on books or plays)  
politics (especially meaningful at election time)  
guest soloists (venture into unusual instruments: violin, harp, guitar, percussion)  
guest/student conductors (get a different viewpoint or train the next generation)  
guest composers (commission a work, bring the composer to school)

This list can go on and on...but hopefully you get the point.

The next step is to identify worthwhile repertoire to give your meal substance...don't forget your vegetables and fruit! For example:

Guest soloists – *Nymphalin* by John Philip Sousa...a beautiful solo for small woodwind section and violin – only about 5 minutes long and hauntingly beautiful! Also emphasizes a completely different work from what we expect from the March King!

Architecture – *George Washington Bridge* by William Schuman...a perfect piece to explore formal structure of this famous bridge, while also introducing the concept of polytonal music from the 1950's

Dance form – *Suite of Old American Dances* by Robert Russell Bennett...one of the cornerstones of our repertoire, and since it is a multi-movement suite, you can pick and choose the movements best suited for the needs/abilities of your ensemble

Historical period – *Canzon Noni Toni* by Giovanni Gabrieli...a wonderful example of early brass choir writing from the late 1500's that will expose your students to multi-choir writing that was famous during the Venetian influence...don't be afraid to substitute instruments for one another if you need to

Politics – *Lincoln Portrait* by Aaron Copland and transcribed by Walter Beeler...a wonderful vehicle to explore the life and times of this important figure in American history...pair this piece with the music of a black composer or with music dealing with racial history

Formal structure of the fugue – *any piece by Bach!* Or compare the formal structure of a Bach *passacaglia* to a *chaconne* by Holst

Marches – *Little English Girl* by D. Delle Cese...a great way to study the Italian grand march and include a little Italian opera while you are at it!

Vocal Music – *Celebrations* by Vincent Persichetti...one of Persichetti's best works and includes SATB chorus...based on the poetry of Walt Whitman...again a multi-movement work for you to pick and choose what works for you...get your choral director to conduct some movements or rehearsals!!!!

Transcriptions – *Three Dance movements from "Spartacus"* by Aram Khatchaturian and transcribed by Donald Hunsberger...a little known work by our best American transcriber for wind band – this is a work that will knock your socks off!

These are just helpful ideas...the rest is up to you, but the more you do it, the more fun it becomes!