

REP TALK by DeeAnn Brown

WMMTA Newsletter Article

Issue: August, 2005

Hello! Welcome to “Rep Talk.” Our President, Wendy Stevens, asked me to write an on-going column concerning repertoire for the newsletter. The world of repertoire has always been a fascinating, challenging and exciting area for me. I am pleased to share my thoughts about repertoire and hope to stimulate ideas for your future use.

It is my strong belief that a teacher’s choice of repertoire is critically important for the success of each student. Every student will be affected in several ways by your decisions on repertoire:

1. Level of interest for practicing
2. Technical comfort level
3. Success in accomplishing musical demands
4. Retention—excitement for other music

The teacher will want to balance repertoire so that the student always has music that they want to practice. This will generate interest and make a deeper connection for expressing themselves through music.

Because I organize my teaching year into three units (Sep-Dec; Jan-May; Jun-Aug), there are three distinct times prior to these time segments that I set aside time to think through the repertoire needs and possibilities for each student. I consider long and short-term performance opportunities such as festivals, recitals, auditions, school or church-related activities. Long-term planning is especially important as students learn longer, more difficult repertoire. The students will be more comfortable and successful when given ample time to prepare, learn, and polish a piece. Success is a great motivator!

Every term, I look forward to teaching something new. It is impossible to become bored if we keep growing by challenging ourselves. Sometimes I choose a composer I haven’t taught. Other times I will select a different Sonatina or Sonata from a familiar collection. Listen and learn with fresh ears and eyes.

If you do not own a copy of “The Pianist’s Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature” by Jane Magrath, I urge you to add this excellent reference guide to your library. The book is organized by historical period and contains descriptions from elementary teaching pieces to moderate-level standard piano works. Most helpful, I think, is the use of a 10 level grading system that is assigned to each piece. The listing of grading increments assists us in choosing repertoire that supports gradual, systematic progress of technical and musical growth. Ms. Magrath defines each of the 10 levels by naming recognizable examples of music that correspond. The book is a treasure of information. It is published by Alfred and retails for \$29.95 for paperback or \$39.95 for hardback.

In future columns, I’ll be featuring ideas on using etudes, repertoire “substitutions,” favorite pedagogical sheet music, sure-fire standards for the older student, and pathways to contemporary repertoire. I hope my forty-plus years of teaching experience and my enthusiasm for the wide world of classical music will address some student repertoire challenges you might be facing.

Happy and successful planning!