Unit Plan Rationale

I am planning a concert for an 8th grade class B band. I was assigned Snake Charmer by Randall Standridge for my ensemble. I have a very strong brass section because we have a great brass culture here and a few very talented upper woodwind players. Our members are generally well-rounded musicians. Our weaknesses as an ensemble are chorale-like slow and lyrical work. The students are so accustomed to rhythmically interesting faced paced music. This year I want to incorporate more lyrical and color blend skills into the student’s musical diet.

Snake charmer is a fantastic piece to create a theme around. This concert is going to be themed “Around the World in 25 Minutes.” I have decided that snake charmer has an exotic and mysterious sound so I will take the students through other cultures by using repertoire. It gives me the opportunity to teach geography, history, world music, and tradition in addition to musical skills this semester. I will be completing the program with Gysydance by Holsinger and Kenya Contrasts by Himes.

The order of our program will be:

Kenya Contrasts

By William Himes

Gypsydance

By David Holsinger

Snake Charmer

By Randall Standridge

I searched through the WMU band library for ethnic pieces or works of the sort that could fit the theme. I think that Kenya Contrasts fits our ensembles strengths very well with brass ostinato and staccato rhythmic motivation but it addresses our weaknesses as well. Atop of the ostinato is a melody that is legato that requires good listening skills and solid chorale-like blend and balance. It also gives me the opportunity to take a step into Kenya and teach a little musical tradition of another area of the world. The listeners at the concert will also receive a brief Kenyan lesson. It is based on two simple children’s melodies from Kenya. It is marked as “easy” on J W Pepper and is on many middle schools basic music lists so I can at least assume that it is a solid choice for our concert.

As I perused the library I came upon Fire Dance and thought that a dance-like tune would be great for this concert but it is very lengthy so I decided on a short piece called Gypsydance by Holsinger. This piece is in F Dorian mode and has a variety of styles that will contribute to the students overall musicianship. It does move quickly so the students will need to get used to that as well as become familiar with hearing the modal European folk song sound. Using this work will let me expose my students to gyspy musical traditions as well as society traditions. I will also be able to educate the audience on what they are hearing and why it sounds like that. Aside from educating the entire community on world traditions this piece is great fun and provides a perfect Segway into our final tune, which will be snake charmer. Gypsydance is on many basic music lists for middle school as well as marked “easy” on the J W Pepper website. I know that it is a good choice as well as an attainable musical goal for our group.

The final piece of snake charmer is a great choice because it has all the aspects of middle school work that I want for this ensemble. Rhythmic interest, mysterious chorale section, and the Middle Eastern sound that is present. It also incorporates Chinese, Japanese and Indian sounds. It is a programmatic work that begins with the image of a snake charmer setting up for an act in the street, moves to the opening of the lid where the snake appears to dangerously sway and then return into the darkness of its basket. It has two optional endings. One is fast and one is slow. I think that we will go with the fast finish because this will be our closing piece.

All three of the chosen pieces require a very active percussion section. We want to expose our percussionist to a wide variety of auxiliary instruments by borrowing some equipment from the high school and further engage the percussionist in our program. I think that giving them such unique parts will help with retention in high school band class. If I can inspire them this year they will want to stay for next year to see what is in store for them at the high school level.

This material is all very much attainable. The Holsinger and Himes pieces are both fairly short at 1:40 and 2:24 in length. The Snake Charmer will be our big project for this semester. Its performance time is 5:40. Altogether the students will be performing 10 minutes of music. Add in five-minute speeches before each piece, on the music about to be performed, and that makes 25minutes. In that time the community will have been exposed to a huge variety of styles and genres from across the world and the audience members will know much more about world music and history. Only the kids will have learned all of the music theory concepts that go into the modal music they will have performed.