

Repertoire Selection: Programming with Purpose and Impact

Virtual Winter Workshop, January 25, 2026

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“Performance is a co-creation between performers and audiences.”

“Programming is the art of trimming—the thoughtful act of choosing what to include and what to leave out, shaping an experience that connects your ensemble with your listeners.”

1. Why Programming Matters

Thoughtful programming is not about choosing music we like or find impressive. It is about shaping a meaningful musical conversation between your performers and the audiences.

- a) Performers bring music, interpretation, energy, and intention.
- b) Audiences bring attention, emotion, cultural context, and response.
- c) Repertoire becomes the medium through which we converse with our audience.
- d) Our choices guide how that conversation unfolds and resonates.

2. Understanding Your Ensemble

Identify key traits of your group to select music that fits and inspires:

- a) Size of group
- b) Age range and experience
- c) Skill level (sight-reading, rhythm, techniques)
- d) Available instrumentation (bells, chimes, percussion, etc.)
- e) Rehearsal schedule and timeline

Tip: Choose music that highlights your ensemble’s strengths and introduces manageable challenges for growth. Ask yourself: Which strengths do I want to showcase—and which challenges are realistic right now?

3. Understanding Your Audience & Context

Who are you playing for?

- a) Church
- b) School
- c) Community
- d) Festival

Setting and expectations

- a) Venue size and acoustics
- b) Audience familiarity with handbells
- c) Cultural or situational settings

Tip: Program tone and message should match the moment. The same ensemble may require very different programs in different contexts.

4. Thematic Programming & Narrative Flow

Build a program that tells a story, invites reflection, or takes listeners on a journey.

- a) What is your theme or message? (e.g., hope, nature, celebration, remembrance)
- b) Balance flow and contrast (tempo, key, style, mood).
- c) Use transitions to maintain momentum and narrative direction.

Tip: A theme adds cohesion. A story builds emotional connections.

5. Rehearsal Planning & Flexibility

Programming must be realistic. Consider:

- a) Preparation time required for each piece. How much time do you have per piece?
- b) Technical or musical risk areas. What are the challenges in this program?
- c) Flexibility to revise or substitute repertoire.

Tip: Build buffer time into your timeline and be prepared to cut a piece if necessary.

6. Musical Elements to Consider

Use this chart to assess potential pieces for your program:

Elements	Considerations
Key	Tonality, modulations, how key affects mood/difficulty/ flow
Rhythm	Simple vs. complex patterns, syncopation, transitions
Dynamics & Expression	Expressive range, climaxes, contrast
Techniques	Legato sounds, stopped sounds, sound effects (vib, gyro), etc.
Style & Character	Classical, sacred, jazz, narrative, meditative
Voicing & Instrumentation	Bells only, with chimes, other instruments
Emotional Tone	Reflective, energetic, solemn, joyful, whimsical
Pacing	Balance between fast/slow, dense/light, loud/quiet pieces

Tip: List these elements in a table to see the full picture of your program at a glance. This visual overview allows you to creatively shuffle pieces, identify contrasts or gaps, and shape a well-balanced program with intention.

7. Illustrations of Program: Purpose & Narrative

These examples are provided to illustrate intent, flow, and decision-making, not as templates to copy. Click on the link to see the full document.

- a) [Distinctly Bronze East](#) - "A Tapestry of Unity" - Purpose

"A Tapestry of Unity" threads through our repertoire, where each composition becomes a unique strand intricately woven to craft a harmonious whole.....Each musical note resonates like a thread in the realm of handbell ringing, and collectively, we weave a vibrant tapestry of harmony. Just as a tapestry culminates from many threads, the unity in our ensemble is the beautiful synergy of unique individuals, creating a collective masterpiece.

- b) [Emily Li Pinnacle Musician Showcase](#) - “Tradition. Virtuosity. Innovation”- Narrative

Pinnacle is a celebration of innovation and artistic elevation. “Tradition. Virtuosity. Innovation.” reflects my journey as a handbell soloist—rooted in tradition, shaped by years of disciplined artistry, and propelled by a continual desire to explore new possibilities. This program tells my story: how I have traveled this path, grown through the art of handbell ringing, and arrived at this moment.

8. Mini Exercise: Build a Mini Program

This exercise supports intentional repertoire selection by considering ensemble strengths, audience, and performance context. You may use your own music or choose from the list [here](#).

Step 1: Choose a Scenario

- Community concert
- Church service or faith-based event
- School performance
- Festival or outreach performance

Step 2: Define the Context

Ensemble level: _____

Rehearsal time available: _____

Audience familiarity with handbells: Low Medium High

Step 3: Build Your Mini Program (3–4 pieces)

Theme/ Message/ Intention ((one phrase or idea)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Reflection

- i. What story or journey does your program suggest?
- ii. What guided your repertoire choices?
- iii. What did you leave out, and why?

9. Closing Thoughts

“Music becomes meaningful when it moves people.”

“Program with intention—and your audience will feel the difference.”

- a) What stood out to you in the planning process?
- b) What’s one programming idea you want to try next?
- c) How can your programming better reflect your ensemble’s voice and values?

10. Resources for Repertoire Planning

Resource	How to Use It for Programming
Handbell World www.handbellworld.com JW Pepper – Handbell Music https://www.jwpepper.com/handbell Sonology Music https://sonologymusic.com/	Browse a wide range of handbell repertoire using search filters to compare difficulty levels, instrumentation, and styles. Clear difficulty ratings, audio previews, and editorial notes support efficient repertoire discovery, balanced programming, and accurate level assessment.
Handbell Publishers’ Websites (From The Top, Hope, Beckenhorst, Alfred, AGEHR, Grassy Meadow etc.)	Go directly to publishers for official score previews, full recordings, and repertoire descriptions.
YouTube.com	Listen to live performances to hear how pieces work in real contexts. Observe tempo choices, ensemble size, acoustics, and audience response.

Programming Tools & Practice

Tool	Purpose
Create a Playlist of Your Program	Build a playlist (YouTube or personal recordings) and listen in order. This helps you assess flow, contrast, pacing, and emotional journey without looking at the score.
Music Speed (App)	Adjust playback speed to evaluate technical difficulty, rehearsal time needs, and musical clarity before committing to a piece.

Tip: Listening away from the score—especially in sequence—often reveals balance issues, redundancies, or emotional gaps that aren’t obvious on paper.