

# NEW TRIER HIGH SCHOOL MUSIC DEPARTMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF MUSIC

The New Trier High School Music Department believes in educating our students toward the realization of our school motto... ‘To commit minds to inquiry, hearts to compassion, and lives to the service of humanity.’ To that end, all repertoire studied and performed by student ensembles is selected solely on the basis of musical and artistic merits and includes literature spanning a wide variety of eras and genres.

## Criteria for the Selection of Music

A good composition, no matter what the level of difficulty, has qualities that are lasting. When selecting music for study or performance, the following criteria are considered:<sup>1</sup>

- overall musical quality of composition
- aesthetic and musical effect created
- potential for musical development
- characteristics of musical elements for study:
  - rhythm, melody, harmony, form, style, texture, timbre, expressive elements (contrast, variety, mood)
- appropriate difficulty for ensemble:
  - sophistication of composition, technical requirements, rehearsal time required
- individual strengths of personnel, voicing, instrumentation of ensemble
- variety and balance in programming:
  - length, audience appeal, balance of styles and genres, musical effect, uniqueness
- significance of composer or arranger
- text (for vocal composition):
  - literary value of text, poet/lyricist, language, tone painting, sounds for their own sake, musical setting of text
- accompaniment:
  - characteristics, difficulty, relationship of parts, musical opportunities for students

<sup>1</sup>(adapted from *Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance Project*, 1977)

## Rationale for the Study of Sacred Music

The **National Association for Music Education**, the nation’s leading association of music educators, has adopted the position that “the study of religious music is a vital and appropriate part of the total music experience in both performance and listening. To omit sacred music from the repertoire or study of music would present an incorrect and incomplete concept of the comprehensive nature of the art.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the First Amendment does not forbid all mention of religion in public schools, it does prohibit the advancement or inhibition of religion by the state. Taking a neutral approach concerning music with a sacred text, neither promoting nor inhibiting religious practices, the music program at New Trier High School exercises caution, sensitivity, and good judgment when selecting sacred music for study and performance.

Pieces chosen for study, whether sacred or secular, are significant examples of musical literature and are selected solely on the basis of their musical and educational value, fitting the criteria stated, not on their context. In addition, sacred music selections are presented objectively as a part of a secular curriculum. The following guidelines are used to ensure that rehearsals and performances at New Trier High School remain religiously neutral:

- The literature is selected to focus on musical, artistic, stylistic, historical, and cultural considerations.
- The neutral role, neither promoting nor inhibiting religious views, is emphasized in both rehearsals and performances.
- The use of religious symbols or scenery and performances in devotional settings are both limited.
- The traditions of diverse people and cultures are shared and respected.

- The various religious beliefs and sensitivities represented in the community are understood.

Studying art without the works with scriptural themes, architecture without the places of worship, or literature without the mention of the Bible, Koran, Talmud, etc. is just as incomplete a curriculum as studying music without sacred literature. It is important that the school music curriculum be more inclusive, not exclusive, and that it be comprised of music from all styles, forms, periods, and cultures. Since music with a sacred text or of a religious origin, particularly choral music, comprises such a substantial portion of music literature and has such an important place in the history of music, it should and does have an important place in music education.

<sup>2</sup>(adapted from *Religious Music in the Schools*, Music Educators National Conference, Reston, VA)

## Alternative Musical Experiences

The Music Department acknowledges religious and moral differences. Therefore, students and parents who express a significant concern about a piece of music presented for study may request an alternative musical experience. However, it must be noted, the activity will not be a comparable experience due to the unique nature of music performance. Therefore, an alternative activity will be assigned and accepted only after private discussion in which the student brings his or her concerns to the teacher’s attention.

Alternative musical experiences could include:

- musical analysis of similar literature
- research paper about a composer, historical period, genre, style, etc.
- taped evidence of individual practice during time away from rehearsal and/or performance
- concert or rehearsal critiques

## **Procedures for Seeking Alternative Musical Experiences**

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If a student is concerned about the study or performance of any piece of music:

1. The student should initiate a conference with the classroom teacher. Ideally, the student and teacher will reach an agreement which allows the student to be present during rehearsal and performance. The Department Chair will be informed of the agreement.
  2. If an agreement is not reached, the matter will be referred to the Music Department Chair.
- In an interview with the student, the Department Chair will evaluate the nature of the concern.
  - Alternatives will be considered if the Department Chair determines that the student has a legitimate objection to the music being studied. The selected alternative must be equivalent to the time and effort invested in the rehearsal and performance in the classroom.

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*This brochure was produced by the  
New Trier High School Music Department  
in conjunction with members of the  
New Trier High School  
Board of Education.*

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HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 203**  
Music Department

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