

Choices and Voices

Repertoire Selection at the 2023 OBA Provincial Band Festival

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February 2023 saw the return of the OBA's premiere performance event, and the sounds of the first ensembles arising from the stage was another signal that music education was moving closer to "normal". Although the venue was different – the festival having relocated to the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto and its beautiful auditorium – many of the hallmarks of what has made the OBA festival attractive were back in full force. The high-quality adjudications from professionals from across Canada and the US, the tireless student volunteers, the logistical smoothness of the hall schedules and secretaries... for it being the first time a huge event was flexing its muscles again, it was an impressive feat, all overseen by Mark Caswell in his final year as the festival director.

The 2021 and 2022 festivals were virtual events, consisting of recorded submissions that were adjudicated remotely. The lower number of participants and the ability of ensembles to prepare repertoire to the same degree as before meant that it was not practical to look very deeply at what was being performed.

During the long run from 2003 to 2020, a post-festival analysis was prepared looking at what music was being performed. It's a unique snapshot of what ensembles within and around the GTA are choosing to perform, what repertoire the conductors value, and which composers are being represented. Some of this is shaped by the OBA Syllabus, since every group must perform at least one selection from this list, or, for the 2023 festival, from the companion syllabus published by MusicFest.

The published analysis was intended to serve the interests of many types of ensemble directors. For those just starting out, taking note of the popular choices and recurring favourites provide a direction towards repertoire that is "tried and true". Other directors have found musical value in these pieces, and it's likely they will serve you well too.

More experienced directors might be interested to see what is not being performed, either to search for a gem on the syllabus that has been overlooked, or a reminder of an older classic that might be waiting to be rediscovered in a dusty filing cabinet somewhere.

The list of most-performed composers also shows the trends in compositional styles, the names who are capturing the ears of our current young musicians. New names rise, older ones disappear, others seem to return after a short festival vacation.

And, of course, there's *Creed*. The timeless classic by William Himes that has been the single most performed piece at the OBA festival with an average of five performances every year. Is there a more burning question than whether *Creed* would survive the pandemic and continue to be a stalwart choice of B200 level ensembles?

Well, yes, there is a more burning question.

There were a lot of big social movements happening during the pandemic. The #MeToo movement continued its important work in advancing the causes of women in the workplace, and female representation. The death of George Floyd highlighted the ongoing problems of racism for Black Americans, and this had resonance with Black Canadians too. The pandemic brought waves of Anti-Asian racism. We struggled to confront a sober rethinking of the Residential School System and the trauma that continues to flow from it. An awareness of “cultural appropriation” meant we all started to look more carefully at what was behind the notes we were playing.

In the year 2023, with social awareness more prominent, the question is: would the selection of repertoire reflect any of these changes? Or would the concerns of “rebuilding” a music program encourage directors to fall back on the “tried and true”? Or would the idea of a “fresh start” reveal itself in a more diverse selection of compositions and composers?

Past analysis reports have included longitudinal data too (ie. number of years the title has been represented as a top selection). We’re taking 2023 as a reboot, and starting the counting anew. This means that lists of “never performed” selections won’t be shown this year.

Part One: Choices of Repertoire

Overall Most Performed Composers

Across all grade levels, the number of times a composer was represented by any of their original compositions. Usually excludes arrangements done by the composer.

Number in brackets indicates the total number of performances of a composer’s work. Percentage indicates the ratio of representation against all other compositions performed at the festival.

Analysis lists the top three positions, with tied rankings if necessary.

1.	Brian Balmages	(15)	5.3% of all repertoire performed
2.	Cait Nishimura	(14)	4.9%
2.	Robert Sheldon	(14)	4.9%
2.	James Swearingen	(14)	4.9%
3.	Samuel Hazo	(13)	4.6%

All told, these five composers were represented 70 times across 285 repertoire selections, for a total of 24.5% of the festival selections.

Overall Most Performed Compositions

Across all grade levels, the number of times a specific composition was performed.

Number in brackets indicates the total number of performances. Percentage indicates the ratio of representation against all other compositions performed at the festival.

The analysis lists at least the top five compositions, allowing for extras if a tie exists for the fifth unique composition.

1.	<i>Chasing Sunlight</i> , Nishimura	(7)	2.5%
2.	<i>Colliding Visions</i> , Balmages	(6)	2.1%

3.	<i>Creed</i> , Himes	(5)	1.8%
4.	<i>Counterbalance</i> , Stalter	(4)	1.4%
4.	<i>Crusade</i> , Gassi	(4)	1.4%
4.	<i>Filum Vitae</i> , Kristofferson	(4)	1.4%
4.	<i>Matters of Kindness</i> , Kristofferson	(4)	1.4%

Taken together, these seven compositions accounted for 34 of 285 repertoire selections, for a total of 11.9% of the performances.

Most Performed Composition by Grade Level

The most performed piece at each grade level. “Grade level” is taken directly from the ensemble’s self-designation at the festival. If the ensemble plays a B200 syllabus piece but registers themselves as a B300 band, the composition will be counted as B300 selection for the purposes of this analysis.

B100	<i>Colliding Visions</i> , Balmages	5 performances from 64 total
B200	<i>Creed</i> , Himes	4 performances from 94 total
B300	<i>Chasing Sunlight</i> , Nishimura	7 performances from 81 total
B400	<i>Autumn</i> , Nishimura	3 performances from 28 total
B500	<i>Hounds of Spring</i> , Reed	2 performances from 17 total
and	<i>Mouvement Frenetique</i> , Dagenais	2 performances from 17 total

Since this analysis is starting from a clean slate, there will be no reporting on syllabus pieces that were not performed this year (“The Neglected”), nor will it report on pieces that have sat unplayed for a number of consecutive years (“The Sleepers”).

Performance Anomalies

Grading of pieces can be notoriously flexible. One piece might be “B200” in rhythmic complexity, but “B300” in terms of musical demands, for example. Directors make their repertoire choices and self-select their grade designation. The following pieces showed up at multiple grade levels. The analysis shows the number of performances at each different grade level. If the piece has been graded according to the OBA or MusicFest syllabi, this is shown at the right.

<i>Celtic Air and Dance #1</i> , Michael Sweeney	2 x B100, 1 x B200
<i>A Child’s Lullaby</i> , Robert Sheldon	1 x B200, 1 x B300
<i>Colliding Visions</i> , Brian Balmages	5 x B100, 1 x B200 (MusicFest B100)
<i>Counterbalance</i> , Todd Stalter	1 x B200, 3 x B300 (OBA B300)
<i>Crusade</i> , Vince Gassi	3 x B100, 1 x B200 (OBA B100)
<i>Filum Vitae</i> , Kenley Kristofferson	1 x B200, 3 x B300 (OBA B300)
<i>Horkstow Grange</i> , Grainger/Sweeney	1 x B200, 1 x B300 (OBA B200)
<i>Matters of Kindness</i> , Kenley Kristofferson	1 x B200, 3 x B300 (OBA B300)
<i>Of Gentle Spirit</i> , William Owens	1 x B100, 1 x B200 (MusicFest B200)

The following selections are anomalies because they were performed outside of the designated grading of the OBA or MusicFest syllabi.

<i>Little Concert Suite</i> , Alfred Reed	1 x B400 (OBA B300)
<i>Rocky Mountain Lullaby</i> , Christiaan Venter	1 x B200 (MusicFest B300)
<i>Flashing Winds</i> , Jan van der Roost	1 x B300 (OBA B400)
<i>Jubilant Overture</i> , Alfred Reed	1 x B500 (OBA B400)

Part Two: Voices Represented

As we have become more aware of the importance of the perspectives coming from the composers, and the cultures, lived experiences, and social and ethnic backgrounds they represent, we have decided to take a look at whose voices are being heard from the festival stage.

The list of composers was examined, and where we knew, or could reasonably assume, that the composer was part of an identifiable category, we counted their performances within that category. Such identifications are going to be imperfect, since it is presumed the individual composer has the right to self-identify. Our attempts to put such categories in place is in no way intended to slot people into pre-defined roles or claim they represent the views of an entire culture, gender, or ethnicity. We hope our efforts to highlight the names and compositions from a wider range of talent beyond the faces that have represented band music for the past 100 years can be refined and improved in the years ahead.

The categories established for this analysis were as follows: Canadian, Female, Black, Asian, South-Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous. Categories are not mutually exclusive, and composers can be seen as members of multiple communities.

There was a total of 285 performances tallied.

Canadian Composers

Canadian composers accounted for 20% of the festival performances, with a total of 57 pieces. By far, the leading Canadian composer was Cait Nishimura with 14 performances, followed by Kenley Kristofferson with 8, and Vince Gassi and Robert Buckley with 7 performances each.

Female Composers

There were 28 performances of pieces written by female composers, representing 9.8% of the festival selections. Cait Nishimura's compositions were half of those. Other notable female composers whose music was performed included Jodie Blackshaw, Tawnie Olsen (also Canadian), Yukiko Nishimura, and of course Anne McGinty.

Asian Composers

A total of 18 performances of compositions (6.3%) written by composers whose biographies indicated they associate with an Asian heritage. Cait Nishimura, who self-identifies as Japanese Canadian,

dominated here. Other Asian composers included Dong-In Danny Choi (Korean Canadian), Quan Le (Vietnamese Canadian), and Naoya Wada (Japanese).

Black Composers

Music by Black composers consisted of 7 festival performances, for a total of 2.5% of the repertoire selected. Six of those performances were from Black American composer William Owens, with the other piece by Omar Thomas.

Latinx Composers

The Latinx category consists of 6 performances of pieces by Richard Saucedo, totalling 2.1% of all festival repertoire.

Indigenous Composers

There was no direct representation by a known Indigenous composer in the festival, however, we did include the performance of "Raven (The Trickster)". Programme notes credit the song to Bob Baker of the Squamish First Nation, although the piece was further developed for the concert band by Robert Buckley. Baker has collaborated with Robert Buckley on three other pieces, for directors interested in pursuing this entry point to Indigenous-composed music.

There were no identified South-Asian composers in the festival selection this year.