

5. *The route through which the composition travels in initiating its musical tendencies and probably musical goals is not completely direct and obvious.*

Meyer, in his book *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, states: 1) a work which establishes no tendencies... will be of no value. 2) If the most probable goal is reached in the most direct way, given the stylistic context, the musical event, taken in itself, will be of little value. 3) If the goal is never reached, or if the tendencies activated become dissipated in the press of over-elaborate, or irrelevant diversions, then the value will tend to be minimal.

6. *The composition is consistent in its quality throughout its length and in its various sections.*

This criterion seeks to assure that quality is maintained throughout the composition, whether within or between movements, or in a single-movement composition. In a suite, the movements should not be alternately profound and trivial. This also applies to various sections of a single-movement composition.

7. *The composition is consistent in its style, reflecting a complete grasp of technical details, clearly conceived ideas, and avoids lapses into trivial, futile, or unsuitable passages.*

Style may be defined as describing a composition in terms of its consistencies with, and differences from, other compositions relating to the historical periods of music. Any eclecticism reflected in the music must be justified by the artistic concept behind the work, rather than existing as a chance happening which indicates either incompetence, or a lack of care in the technical details.

8. *The composition reflects ingenuity in its development, given the stylistic context in which it exists.*

The stylistic context in which the composition exists indicates that the development, and the ingenuity in development, is not restricted as with the development section of sonata form. The ingenuity indeed might be melodic, but also might be in the area of orchestration, harmony, rhythm, and other elements. Music which is not conventionally melodic in its orientation, if it is of high quality, will have some developmental aspect which characterizes the composition.

9. *The composition is genuine in idiom, and is not pretentious.*

This statement seeks assurance that the composition is true to the concept implied either by its title, or the intent on the part of the composer in presenting the composition as one of serious artistic merit. This criterion seeks to guard against defects which are more basic to the quality of the music than the mere incongruous nature of the title in comparison with the music. There is much wind-band music which is permeated with melodic and particularly harmonic clichés, exuding the sound of commercial music while attempting to parade under the banner of artistic respectability as a work of serious artistic merit. It is often well crafted in its orchestration. Such music often is falsely alluring, and should be avoided in considering a repertoire of serious artistic merit.

10. *The composition reflects a musical validity which transcends factors of historical importance, or factors of pedagogical usefulness.*

Evaluators should rate a composition only on the basis of its significance as a composition of serious artistic merit. Care must be exercised to prevent such factors as the historical importance of a composition from contaminating an evaluation on the basis of its merit in quality. The evaluators also should avoid high ratings for a composition which might suit the wind-band medium well, but which might not withstand close scrutiny by musicians in general.

An Evaluation of Compositions for Wind Band According to Specific Criteria of Serious Artistic Merit

Adapted from the original Eric Ostling study.

Operational Definition: "Serious Artistic Merit"

Serious: The work "serious" is used in its meaning as demanding earnest application, requiring considerable care and thought, sincerely motivated, important and significant. It is not used in grave or somber context and can therefore include the cheerful and/or humorous vein which is not trivial.

Artistic: The adjective "artistic" is used in its meaning as conformable to the standards of art, characterized by taste, discrimination, judgment and skill in execution, satisfying aesthetic requirements—modern dictionaries still give the preferred definition of aesthetic as relating to a sense of beautiful. (What stirs a heightened response of the senses and of the mind on its highest level—a pleasing quality associated with harmony of form or color, excellence of craftsmanship, truthfulness, originality, or another often unspecifiable property.)

Merit: The noun "merit" is used in its meaning as a claim to commendation, excellence in quality, and deserving esteem.

Criteria for Judging a Composition: "Serious Artistic Merit"

Ten basic criteria statements.

1. *The composition has form – not 'a form' but form – and reflects a proper balance between repetition and contrast.*

This statement addresses the overall organization of the piece. It seeks to clarify that the criterion in this instance should not be an identifiable or specific mold as in the standard classic forms (rondo, sonata, fugue, etc.), but form *in* music—an orderly arrangement of elements (always given the stylistic context). Wallace Berry states, in *Form in Music*, that it is "the sum of those qualities in a piece of music that bind together its parts and animate the whole." Repetition, contrast, and variation are the building blocks of form. Having only one of these in a work makes it incomprehensible.

2. *The composition reflects shape and design, and creates the impression of conscious choice and judicious arrangement on the part of the composer.*

This criterion seeks to address the craftsmanship of the composer in phrasing and cadencing (again given the stylistic context), the pacing of the musical events, and control of internal arrival points.

3. *The composition reflects craftsmanship in orchestration, demonstrating a proper balance between transparent and tutti scoring, and also between solo and group colors.*

This criterion applies to the composer's control over texture and color. Rogers, in *The Art of Orchestration*, indicates that single families and solo instruments are transparent, and that mixing produces secondary shades. Increased mixing and doubling leads to neutrality and grayness in color. Factors of musical color and texture must be in a proper balance in making a judgment of serious artistic merit.

4. *The composition is sufficiently unpredictable to preclude an immediate grasp of its musical meaning.*

If the tendencies of musical movement are totally predictable, and directly apparent upon first hearing the composition, that value of the music is minimized. This does not imply that only complex music can meet standards of serious artistic merit. It is true that a complex composition requires several hearings to grasp its intricacies in musical meaning, but a composition which is not complex might provoke a distinctive and unique response from the listener which of itself places that composition in the category of being sufficiently unpredictable to preclude an immediate grasp of its meaning, thus sustaining its intrigue through repeated hearings.