

Suggested Citation: Geudens, Thomas & De Baets, Thomas (2023). What are we playing today? Musicians and repertoire of amateur string and symphony orchestras in the Netherlands and Flanders. *üben & musizieren.research*, 3, 63–79. Available online on: https://uebenundmusizieren.de/artikel/research_2023_geudens_debaets

What are we playing today?

Musicians and repertoire of amateur string and symphony orchestras in the Netherlands and Flanders

Was spielen wir heute?

*Musiker*innen und Repertoire in Amateurorchestern in den Niederlanden und Flandern*

Thomas Geudens, Thomas De Baets

Abstract

The participating musicians, their instruments and the music they perform are defining characteristics of instrumental amateur ensembles. The aim of this study was to map the instrumentation and repertoire of Dutch and Flemish amateur orchestras. Early in 2021, through a web survey, string and symphony orchestras (N = 67) in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) shared insights about their musicians and repertoire. Findings show that the orchestras' instrumentation is derived from the standardised configuration of professional orchestras, but also depends on the availability of players. Difficulties in finding viola, double bass and several brass players emerges. The results shed light on the musical identities of the orchestras and their players who favour historical art music and, to a lesser extent, soundtrack over other genres. Only 18.2% of the pieces is written by a living composer. Although European composers have written the lion's share (85.7%) of the repertoire, Belgian and Dutch composers only account for a small percentage (6.1%). Only 1.7% is written by female composers.

Zusammenfassung

*Die teilnehmenden Musiker*innen, ihre Instrumente und die von ihnen gespielte Musik sind entscheidende Merkmale instrumentaler Amateurensembles. Ziel dieser Studie war es, die Instrumentierung und das Repertoire der niederländischen und flämischen Amateurorchester zu erfassen. Anfang 2021 gaben Streich- und Sinfonieorchester (N = 67) in den Niederlanden und Flandern (Belgien) im Rahmen einer Onlineumfrage Auskunft über ihre Musiker*innen und ihr Repertoire. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sich die Instrumentierung der Orchester aus der Standardbesetzung professioneller Orchester ableitet, aber auch von der Verfügbarkeit von Spielerinnen und Spielern abhängt. Es zeigt sich, dass es schwierig ist, Bratschist*innen, Kontrabassist*innen und mehrere Blechbläser*innen zu finden. Die Ergebnisse geben Aufschluss über die musikalischen Identitäten der Orchester und ihrer Spieler*innen, die die historische Kunstmusik und in geringerem Maße die Filmmusik gegenüber anderen Genres bevorzugen. Nur 18,2% der Stücke wurden von lebenden Komponist*innen geschrieben. Obwohl der größte Teil des Repertoires (85,7%) von europäischen Komponist*innen stammt, machen belgische und niederländische Komponist*innen nur einen kleinen Teil aus (6,1%). Nur 1,7% der Werke stammen von Komponistinnen.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Instrumental ensembles in an ecology of amateur music making

Amateur music making is a widespread leisure activity in the Low Countries. In the Netherlands (NL), 19% of the population over 6 years old engages in non-professional music making (LKCA, 2021). In Flanders (BE-VLG), the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, 11.4% of the population over 14 years of age engages in a form of non-professional music making (OP/TIL, 2020). Music making happens in many forms (e.g. singing, playing an instrument, rapping), and contexts (e.g. individually, in unofficial groups, in organised societies, in schools). In the past decades, the music pedagogical debate has rightfully included these non-formal and informal contexts outside schools where music is played rather than learned (Folkestad, 2006). In this view, all music makers are seen as learners, or as *aesthetic agents* through individual and collective music making (DeNora, 2000). To illustrate the musical ecologies (de Bruin & Southcott, 2022) of music making, several scholars have described its many possible ways within a certain region or town, including instrumental amateur ensembles (DeNora, 2000; Finnegan, 1989; Palmer, 2008; Pickert, 1997; Reimers, 1996).

In NL and BE-VLG, the vast majority of amateur ensemble playing takes place outside schools, although music schools and universities do have ensembles or ensemble lessons. Amateur orchestra participation is relatively widespread: the individual members of the Flemish (VLAMO) and Dutch (KNMO) umbrella organisations for amateur instrumental ensembles account for about 1.0% (VLAMO, 2017) or 0.6% (KNMO, personal communication, March 25, 2022) of the total population. Apart from publications featuring nationwide descriptive statistics of the amateur music and orchestra sector, there is little literature on music making processes in non-professional ensembles in the Low Countries.

There are strong connections between music schools and independent ensembles, albeit in other ways than a formal dependency. In BE-VLG, earlier research has shown that 79.1% of amateur ensemble musicians followed lessons in music schools (Vanherwegen et al., 2009). Many independent ensembles in BE-VLG are affiliated with one or more music schools and function as an ‘alternative learning context’, replacing the music schools’ ensemble lesson (Buelens & Geudens, in press). Conversely, in NL, music professionals have pointed out that ensembles have problems finding players, as a direct result of music schools disappearing due to funding cuts (Herblot, 2021). Dakon and Cloete (2018) have described how participation in a Flemish string orchestra combines and transcends characteristics of formal and non-formal music learning. Due to their ecological interwovenness in the Low Countries, a systematic division between formal ‘music school-based’ and non-formal ‘independent’ orchestras is hard to maintain.

1.2 Amateur orchestras in a sector dominated by bands

In NL and BE-VLG, wind ensembles such as concert bands, brass bands, fanfare bands or marching bands dominate the amateur sector. String and symphony orchestras form only a small minority. The Dutch Federation of Symphony and String Orchestras (FASO) currently has 210 members, or 8.6% of the 2450 KNMO members in 2015 (KNMO, personal communication, March 25, 2022). In BE-VLG, there are 41 string- and symphony orchestras or 3.8% of a total of 1073 VLAMO members (VLAMO, 2022). A comparable ratio can be found in other countries as well. In Germany, for instance, there are 1170 or 5.7% symphony and string orchestras on a total of 20660 secular instrumental amateur ensembles (Reimers, 2019).

Nevertheless, string-based orchestras are an interesting niche for research about amateur orchestras, because they have well-established professional counterparts to which they can be compared, with which they share an elaborate historical repertoire (see below). No specific research on the instruments of the musicians of amateur orchestras could be identified, but published scores show that the instrumentation of non-professional orchestras is commonly based on the instrumentation of professional orchestras of the same type and size. However, other than in the professional world where orchestra places are hard-fought jobs, setting up an amateur orchestra also depends on the availability of players and their willingness to join the ensemble.

1.3 Amateur orchestra repertoire

Research on orchestra repertoire outside the USA is scarce and no research on amateur orchestra repertoire in NL or BE-VLG can be found. The repertoire of professional orchestras in the USA, however, has undergone a considerable amount of analysis. Additionally, Austin Griffiths (2020) explored the repertoire of ten major orchestras in the United Kingdom. In both countries, historical art music written by European white, male composers dominated the repertoire. A limited and relatively consistent group of composers accounted for the majority of the pieces performed in most studies. In the USA, a ‘top 4’ emerged from multiple studies. The landmark analysis by Kate Hevner Müller (1973) showed that, from the forties until 1970, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky were consistently the most popular composers in quinquennial repertoire lists from a sample of 27 major American orchestras. The same ‘top 4’

can be seen in an analysis of the 1982-1987 seasons (Price, 1990), the 1995-2001 seasons (Heilbrun, 2004), and 2016-2017 season (O'Bannon, 2016) of professional orchestras in the USA.

Research also gives fragmented insight into the repertoire of non-professional orchestras in the USA. The repertoire of university orchestras is similar to that of professional orchestras, with Beethoven and Mozart as most popular composers in the 2005-2011 seasons (Neves, 2014), and the 2016-2017 season (Ting, 2019). A few researchers have explicitly addressed the repertoire of youth orchestras. As in professional and college ensembles, historical art music dominates the repertoire (Pickney, 2000; Pope, 2019). Pickney (2000) used repertoire lists from 174 youth orchestras in the United States at various performance levels. She found the three most performed composers by youth orchestras between 1995 and 1999 were Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and Bach. Pope (2019) further illustrated the historical nature of youth orchestras' repertoire, identifying 1904 as the average year of composition in a study of 39 youth orchestra programmes in the United States. Zabanal (2021, 2022) investigated longitudinal datasets from the Midwest Clinic and the National Orchestra Festival, both aimed at American school orchestras. Dvořák and Tchaikovsky were the most popular composers for full orchestra; in string orchestra repertoire, the most popular composers were Mozart, Meyer and Bach.

Amateur and school orchestras sometimes play published arrangements that are more suited to the instrumentation or the level of the ensemble. Zabanal (2021, 2022) found that 33.4% of the repertoire performed at two school orchestra festivals had been arranged. Pickney (2000) pointed out that orchestral arrangements are likely to be close to the original composition, as directors pay attention to their musical integrity and artistic merit. Orchestra directors can also add or alter parts themselves, or can select unpublished arrangements written especially for the orchestra. We could not identify any research into this latter practice.

1.4 Role of repertoire for music making and current study

Rather than a set of notated music objects, orchestra repertoire should primarily be seen a catalyst of music making activities, which Small (1998) has called musicking. As such, repertoire choices of amateur orchestras are not only aimed at an audience, but also take the preferences, abilities or learning opportunities of the musicians into account. Repertoire choices strongly interact with an ensemble's artistic and educational goals, and shape its 'curriculum' (Apfelstadt, 2000; Fried, 1997; Reynolds, 2000). Ensemble leaders should reflect on the musical and pedagogical significance of the music they play, in this case often a canon of historical art music, for their students' music making (Elliott, 1995). As an important example, the notable underrepresentation of female and non-White composers in orchestra repertoire, as opposed to the gender and cultural diversity of musicians and audiences, is a growing concern in recent literature (see e.g. Griffiths, 2020; Pope, 2019; Zabanal, 2021, 2022). Repertoire choices and arranging practices can be better understood with a clear view on the orchestras' musicians and their instruments.

Therefore, the aim of this exploratory study is to describe the participating musicians and repertoire of amateur orchestras in NL and BE-VLG:

- Which instruments do the musicians play? What is the sizes of the orchestras and the different sections?

- Which music do the musicians play and who composed the pieces? Does historical art music play a dominant role? To what extent do the musicians also play other genres, newly-written music or music from compatriot composers?

2. Method

2.1 Research design

To map the repertoire and the musicians of amateur orchestras, a web survey was distributed among non-professional orchestras in NL and BE-VLG, both Dutch-speaking regions. The survey was aimed at orchestras with a majority of non-professional members, and with frequent rehearsals between January 2019 and March 2020. Because the survey did not aim at string quartets or other small ensembles, only ensembles with string sections were considered an orchestra. These ensembles could be independent, or part of an organisation or school.

The initial survey design was made by the authors. The items about instrumentation were derived from standardised orchestra instrumentation (Adler, 2016). To make the survey more user-friendly, respondents first indicated the number of players for each instrument family, before moving on to the more specific instruments of the selected families. The survey items concerning the repertoire were based on Pope (2019) and Zabanal (2021), extended with some questions on genres. Considering the survey did not ask for personal data, the Social and Societal Ethics Committee of the university confirmed that no ethical review was necessary. The survey was then checked for relevance and wording by secretaries of the umbrella organisations FASO and VLAMO, four research colleagues and three voluntary orchestra administrators.

The survey was distributed using QualtricsXM. The instructions specified that the survey should be completed by the conductor of the orchestra or someone familiar with its musicians and repertoire, and suggested keeping a list of the musicians and the recent repertoire nearby.

2.2 Data collection and sample

The final version of the survey was distributed with the aid of the two umbrella organisations. Firstly, VLAMO (BE-VLG) sent an email invitation in March 2021 and, after five weeks, one reminder to all its members that fitted the inclusion criteria (41 orchestras, $n = 17$, response rate 41%). Secondly, in an email to all its orchestra board members in March 2021, FASO (NL) included an invitation followed by one reminder six weeks later (206 orchestras, $n = 34$, response rate 17%). The emails were written by the organisation secretaries in the wording and layout of their usual communication. By operating in this way, we tried to maximise proximity and recognizability, hoping to encourage more receivers to answer. The response rate among VLAMO members can be considered high for an online survey. FASO indicated that it had recently sent multiple online surveys, which could have decreased the willingness to participate, resulting in a lower response rate.

The Flemish, but not the Dutch, government keeps a list of music school contact details. The survey was therefore also sent to Flemish music schools, some of which have weekly rehearsing orchestras. This single email invitation to 163 music school administrations yielded answers

from 16 additional orchestras. The music schools could have no, one or multiple orchestras, and we do not know if all administrators forwarded the email to the orchestra teachers, so it was not possible to calculate a meaningful response rate.

The survey was sent in the spring of 2021, when all rehearsals were interrupted due to COVID-19, but we clearly indicated that the survey would focus on the period before March 2020. Due to the sample method and response rate, the sample cannot be considered representative for the entire population of amateur orchestras in NL and BE-VLG. Nevertheless, the results provide strong indications concerning the participating musicians and repertoire of amateur orchestras.

2.3 Sample description and accessory data

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0. The data from one concert band were discarded because it did not have any string players in sections. One orchestra only had a single player for each string part, but these were electronically amplified to balance with the wind section, and the orchestra was therefore included in the sample. The final sample consisted of 67 orchestras ($N = 67$).

Orchestra administrators provided information about the ten most recently rehearsed compositions, mentioning title, composer and arranger. General descriptions without mentioning a specific composition were excluded. Of the 67 orchestras, six did not include any pieces and four orchestras only partially provided their repertoire, resulting in a list of 588 compositions. This list was manually checked on divergent spelling and abbreviations. We corrected obvious errors, which consisted mainly of switched title and composer name, falsely attributed compositions (e.g. the Adagio by ‘Albinoni’ or the Toy Symphony by ‘Mozart’ or ‘Haydn’), or mentioning the performer rather than the composer (a common error for pop music). In some cases, no composers were mentioned, but they could be manually added based on an unequivocal title. For five traditional melodies and two incomplete entries, no composer could be determined.

Composer gender, year of birth, and country (current names and borders) were added to each composition in the data set. We also determined whether the composer was still alive in the spring of 2020. Information was found in the Oxford Music Online database (Root, n.d.). For composers not included in this database, online searches on their personal website, editor websites or other websites were used to verify their gender, year of birth, and country. In the case of multiple composers, the data from the first composer were included. If a composer was active in more than one country, their country of birth was mentioned. In the case of traditional music, no composer information was available but the country where the tune originated was added and we assumed that the composer was not alive anymore. For five traditional melodies and six more works, no composer birthyear could be identified. For five pieces, no country could be established. For eight pieces, we could not determine whether or not the composer was still alive.

3. Results

The participating orchestras ($N = 67$) were situated in NL ($n = 34$), BE-VLG ($n = 32$) or both ($n = 1$). Although no specific age data were gathered, youth ensembles are clearly a minority in the sample: 38 orchestras (57%) indicated that ‘many’ of their members were above 25 years old, 31 orchestras (46%) did not have any members younger than 18. In ensembles with younger musicians, fifteen orchestras were part of a school: three Dutch ensembles were part of a university, and twelve Flemish orchestras were part of a music school. Forty orchestras had two hours of rehearsal a week, sixteen had a three-hour rehearsal and eight rehearsed for one hour.

3.1 Participating musicians

3.1.1 Orchestra types and sections

The average number of musicians in each orchestra was 38.91 ($SD = 19.40$). The ensembles had eight to 80 members, with two large ensembles of 92 and 105 musicians standing out. Ensembles identified as a string orchestra ($n = 17$, $M = 26.18$, $SD = 16.11$) and/or chamber orchestra ($n = 17$, $M = 29.41$, $SD = 7.53$) and/or symphony orchestra ($n = 38$, $M = 48.53$, $SD = 19.47$). All chamber orchestras and symphony orchestras reported wind players, in varying numbers. Four out of the 17 string orchestras reported a limited number of wind players. As Figure 1 shows, there was a size difference, but no clear distinction, between the instrumentation of chamber and symphony orchestras.

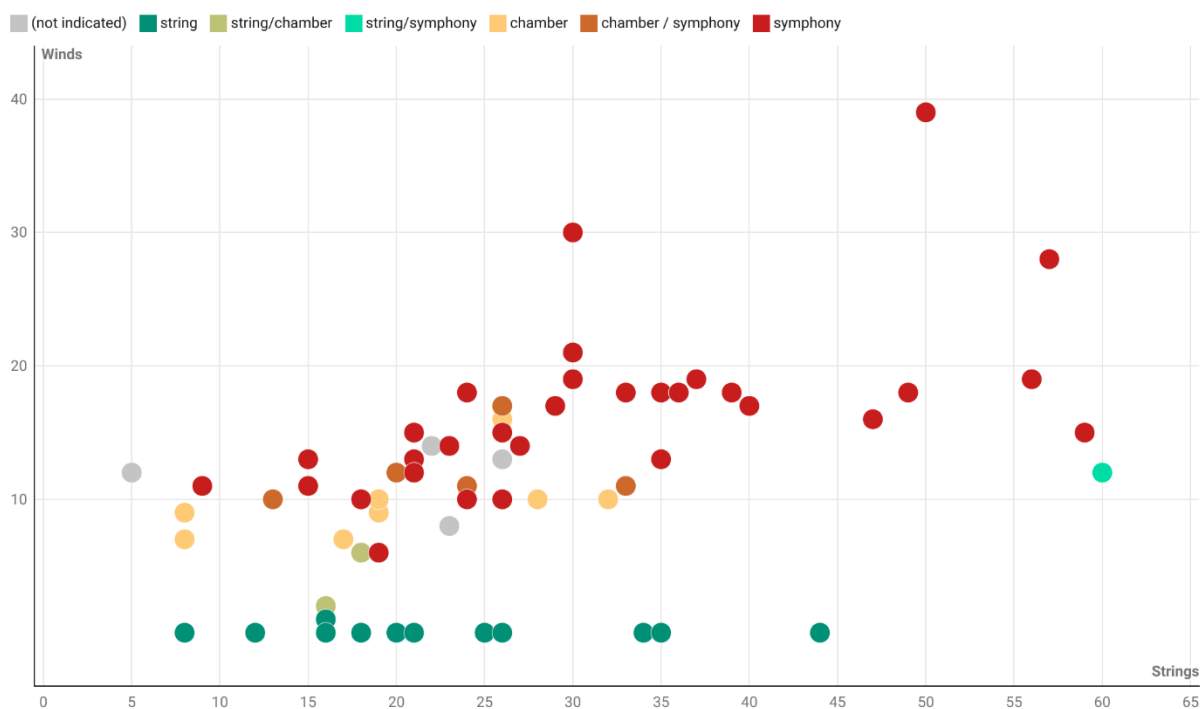


Figure 1: String versus wind section size for each reported orchestra type (created by Datawrapper)

With regard to the instruments the musicians played, the 67 orchestras fell into two groups: string orchestras without wind players ($n_s = 13$, of which 12 were in BE-VLG) and all (string, chamber and symphony) orchestras with wind players ($n_w = 54$, of which 20 were in BE-VLG, 33 in NL, and one in both countries). The orchestras without wind instruments ($M = 23.69$,

$SD = 10.98$) were considerably smaller than orchestras with wind players ($M = 42.57$, $SD = 19.26$). Figure 1 illustrates that the ratio between the size of the strings and winds section varies.

3.1.2 String players

The average number of string players in all orchestras was 26.45 ($SD = 12.64$), divided between violin I ($M = 7.07$, $SD = 3.40$), violin II ($M = 7.39$, $SD = 3.67$), viola ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 2.40$), violoncello ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 3.23$, and double bass ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 1.57$). Eight orchestras indicated they had a violin III section.

3.1.3 Wind players

All orchestras with wind players ($n_w = 54$) indicated the number of players for each family of wind instruments. All orchestras had instrumentalists from at least four wind families, apart from one orchestra featuring only an alto saxophone, and one other with only two flutes. Except for two more orchestras which did not have any brass players at all, all orchestras included woodwind as well as brass players. Six orchestras had French horns as their only brass instrument. The frequencies of the orchestras' answers are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency table of the number of players for each wind instrument family

Instrument family	$n = 0$	$n = 1$	$n = 2$	$n = 3$	$n = 4$	$n > 4$
Flutes	1	2	32	12	5	2
Oboes	3	10	35	6	0	0
Clarinets	4	4	32	11	2	1
Bassoons	5	12	35	1	1	0
French horns	10	7	14	7	14	2
Trumpets	17	10	22	2	3	0
Trombones	27	8	13	6	0	0
Tubas	37	15	1	1	0	0

Note. All rows total $n_w = 54$. The highest frequency other than for $n = 0$ is highlighted in bold.

Regarding the four woodwind families, we assumed that the majority of players would play the most common instrument in their family (flute, oboe, clarinet in Bb and bassoon). Apart from this, orchestras indicated if there was at least one player who played a less widely-used woodwind instrument. Piccolo was mentioned by 46 orchestras (85%), English Horn by 36 (67%), clarinet in A by 33 (66%) and bass clarinet by 25 (46%). Twelve orchestras (22%) mentioned at least one saxophone player, eleven of which were situated in BE-VLG. This saxophone section always involved at least one alto saxophone (12), but tenor (8), soprano (6) and baritone (5) saxophone were mentioned as well. Contrabassoon (12 orchestras, 22%), piccolo clarinet in Eb (11 orchestras, 20%) and alto flute (9 orchestras, 17%) were less common.

Brass instrument families often have multiple common instrument types. Of the 37 ensembles with trumpet(s), 28 indicated they had at least one player with a trumpet in Bb, and 21 said they had at least one C trumpet player. In the 27 ensembles with trombone(s), 18 mentioned they had at least one bass trombone player. For the tuba family, the answers were mixed and incomplete: from the 17 ensembles with tuba(s), eight had a C tuba, which is also standard in professional symphony orchestras (Adler, 2016), four had a Bb tuba, three had an

Eb tuba, and one an F tuba. Some orchestras had additional brass instruments: five orchestras mentioned at least one piccolo trumpet, four mentioned euphonium, two cornet, and one flugelhorn.

3.1.4 Other instruments

Within ensembles without wind instruments only string instruments were reported, except for one percussion player, one keyboard player, and one section of multiple keyboards. Of the orchestras with wind instruments ($n_w = 54$), only 23 had at least one keyboard player, and 19 at least one harp player. Only slightly more than half of them had one (14 orchestras), two (10 orchestras) or three or more (nine orchestras) percussion players. Other instruments mentioned were bass guitar (four orchestras), electrical guitar, bass guitar, accordion, and celesta (each one orchestra).

3.2 Repertoire

3.2.1 Music genres

Orchestra administrators ($n = 67$) indicated whether their orchestra played music of a particular musical genre ‘never’, ‘rarely’ or ‘often’. Participants were presented a list with seven genres: historical art music, contemporary art music, soundtrack, musical, folk music, pop/rock, and jazz (see Table 2). Only a few orchestras made small amendments to this.

Table 2: Appearance of music genres in the orchestral repertoire

Genre	Never		Rarely		Often	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Historical art music	1	1.5	3	4.5	63	94.0
Soundtrack	10	14.9	26	38.8	31	46.3
Contemporary art music	2	3.0	41	61.2	24	35.8
Musical	28	41.8	21	31.3	18	26.9
Folk music	30	44.8	27	40.3	10	14.9
Pop/rock	39	58.2	20	29.9	8	11.9
Jazz	42	62.7	21	31.3	4	6.0

Note. All orchestras ($N = 67$) chose one frequency for all genres.

3.2.2 Works and composers

Participants were asked to name the ten most recently rehearsed pieces. Their answers resulted in a list of 588 titles, containing 459 different pieces by 246 different composers (and seven anonymous or unidentified composers). 84 pieces and 86 composers appeared more than once. All compositions that were rehearsed by more than two orchestras are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Compositions rehearsed three times or more.

Title	Composer	<i>f</i>
<i>Carmen Suite (Nos. 1 and/or 2)</i> ^a	Georges Bizet	6
<i>Symphony No. 7</i>	Ludwig Van Beethoven	6
<i>Egmont Overture</i>	Ludwig Van Beethoven	5
<i>Pavane pour une infante défunte</i>	Maurice Ravel	4

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<i>Peer Gynt Suite (Nos. 1 and/or 2)^a</i>	Edvard Grieg	4
<i>Serenade for String Orchestra op. 20</i>	Edward Elgar	4
<i>Symphony No. 3 ('Eroïca')</i>	Ludwig Van Beethoven	4
<i>Symphony No. 8</i>	Franz Schubert	4
<i>The Barber of Seville Overture</i>	Goachino Rossini	4
<i>Capriol Suite</i>	Peter Warlock	3
<i>Clarinet Concerto</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	3
<i>Danzón No. 2</i>	Arturo Márquez	3
<i>Finlandia</i>	Jean Sibelius	3
<i>Hungarian Dances</i>	Johannes Brahms	3
<i>Masques et bergamasques</i>	Gabriel Fauré	3
<i>Orphée aux enfers</i>	Jacques Offenbach	3
<i>Pavane</i>	Gabriel Fauré	3
<i>Piano Concerto No. 2</i>	Sergei Rachmaninoff	3
<i>Schindler's List</i>	John Williams	3
<i>Symphony No. 3 ('Scottish')</i>	Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy	3
<i>Symphony No. 5</i>	Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	3
<i>Symphony No. 6 ('Pastoral')</i>	Ludwig Van Beethoven	3
<i>Symphony No. 8</i>	Antonín Dvořák	3
<i>Symphony No. 9 ('From the New World')</i>	Antonín Dvořák	3
<i>The Lark Ascending</i>	Ralph Vaughan-Williams	3

Note. Only works rehearsed by more than two orchestras are included. For longer works, orchestras frequently only played one movement, passage or selection.

^a Not all participants mentioned which of the two suites was played.

Table 4 shows the most often mentioned composers. For 96.1% of the pieces, a male composer was mentioned; 1.7% of the composers were female. Three compositions had both a female and male composer; for 10 pieces the composer identity or gender was unknown. Only one female composer was mentioned twice (Anita Hewitt-Jones). All female composers were born after 1925.

Table 4: Composers mentioned most frequently in the repertoire list

Composer	<i>f</i>	%
Ludwig Van Beethoven	38	6.5
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	26	4.4
Antonín Dvořák	15	2.6
Franz Schubert	14	2.4
Johannes Brahms	13	2.2
Edward Elgar	13	2.2
Joseph Haydn	12	2.0
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy	11	1.9
Georges Bizet	11	1.9
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	11	1.9
Camille Saint-Saëns	10	1.7
John Williams	10	1.7
Gabriel Fauré	9	1.5
Edvard Grieg	9	1.5
Johann Sebastian Bach	8	1.4
Georg Friedrich Händel	8	1.4

Giuseppe Verdi	8	1.4
Ralph Vaughan-Williams	7	1.2
Goachino Rossini	7	1.2

Note. Only composers mentioned more than six times in the repertoire list ($n = 588$) are included.

Only 18.2% of the repertoire was written by a living composer. The most played living composers were John Williams ($f = 10$), Alan Menken ($f = 6$), Arturo Márquez ($f = 3$), and Hans Zimmer ($f = 3$). Pieces by living composers rehearsed by more than two orchestras were *Danzón No. 2* (Arturo Márquez, $f = 3$) and *Schindler's List* (John Williams, $f = 3$).

Composers were born between 1632 and 1998, with one exceptionally early composition by the fifteenth century Franco-Belgian composer Josquin des Prez. The average composer year of birth was 1847 ($SD = 80.65$), the median was 1843. The composer year of birth per piece is shown in Figure 1. German composers authored 19.7% of the repertoire, followed by composers from the United Kingdom (11.4%), France (11.2%), the United States of America (10.5%), Austria (10.4%), Italy (8.2%), Russia (6.1%), the Czech Republic (4.3%), Belgium (3.2%), the Netherlands (2.9%), Norway (2.0%), Argentina (1.4%), Finland (1.4%), and Spain (1.2%). 85.7% of the composers were from a European country, 11.2% from North America and 2.0% from Latin America. Apart from Australian composer Bruce Lawrence and South Korean composer Yiruma, who both spent many years in the United Kingdom (Lawrence, 2010; Yiruma, n.d.), no Oceanian, Asian or African composers were mentioned.

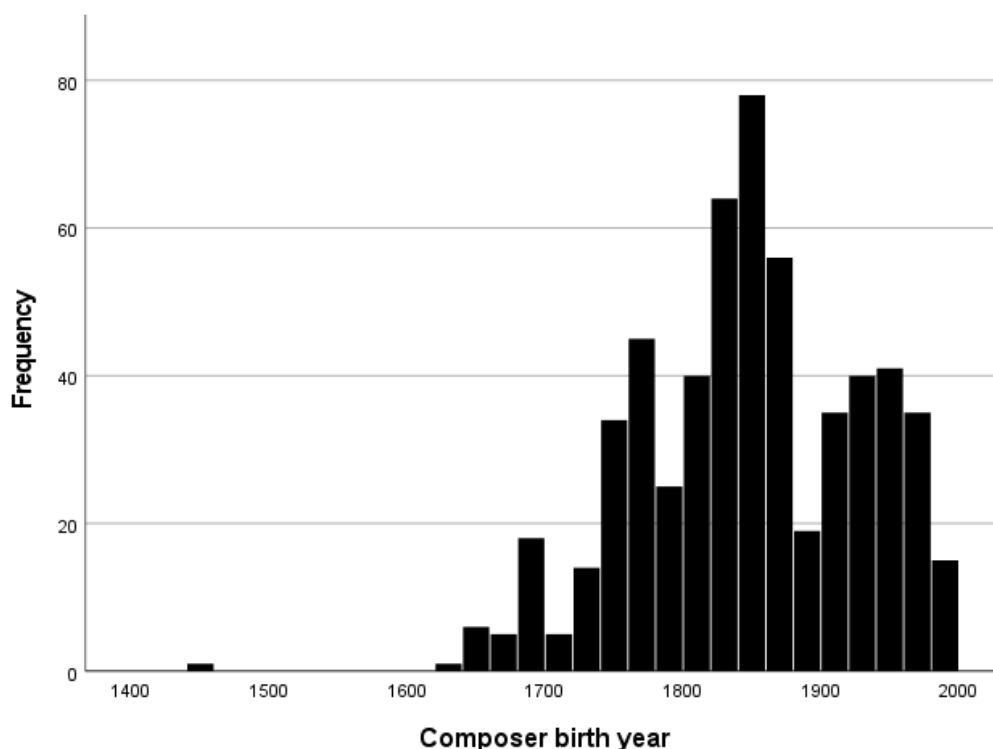


Figure 2: Composer year of birth histogram for all rehearsed pieces

3.2.3 Arranging practices

Only in a minority of the 67 orchestras, administrators indicated altering or changing parts. Administrators from 27 orchestras indicated that, for 19.1% of the pieces, one or more parts

were adapted by the orchestra. For 8.2% of the pieces, noted by 20 different orchestras, new parts were added. New arrangements, written specifically for the orchestra, accounted for 4.8% of the repertoire (only indicated at least once by 15 orchestras).

Administrators were asked which instruments most often had extra parts written for them; they gave very heterogeneous answers, mentioning most instruments, several instrument groups, or ‘all instruments’. Ten mentioned the simplification of parts, most often string parts. Seven mentioned adding a Violin III part to complement or replace the viola section. On the other hand, 38 others (56,7%) left this question unanswered or explicitly wrote that they never alter or add parts.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to disclose the participating musicians and repertoire of Flemish and Dutch amateur orchestras. This study did not constitute a purposive sample based on internet visibility (Pope, 2019) or festival participation (Zabanal, 2021, 2022), as these authors indicated that their sampling method might have been biased toward high-end ensembles. Instead, the orchestras were listed through their umbrella organisation or through music schools.

4.1 Participating musicians

An ideal string section has just over two times more violins than violas; and slightly more violas and slightly less double basses than violoncellos (Adler, 2016). In our sample, many ensembles suffered from a relative shortage of viola and double bass players. This corresponds with the enrolment numbers in instrument lessons in Flemish music schools (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2021; no comparable data available for NL), which are considerably lower for viola (0.6%) and double bass (0.7%) than for violin (7.3%) or cello (3.2%). Some ensembles had a Violin III part, most often created by the ensemble itself to complement or replace the viola section.

In the winds section, the average number of players was lower for brass than for woodwind instruments, and lower for lower-pitched instruments. These findings, too, match the enrolment numbers in Flemish music schools (flute 4.8%; oboe 1,1%; clarinet 3.0%; bassoon 0.5%; French horn 0.9%; trumpet 2.6%; trombone 1.0%; and tuba 0.1%; Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2021). The frequency of wind instrument types showed a remarkable parallel with their standardised order on the orchestra score (see Table 2). Despite their low number of students in music school, oboe, bassoon and French horn are relatively well represented. A prevalence of the ‘paired woodwind’ configuration was visible; as for all woodwind families the majority of the orchestras featured two players. Because much repertoire has two parts for each woodwind instrument, ‘doubling’ winds were not very common in the surveyed orchestras.

Most orchestras did not have enough musicians to reach the large contemporary brass instrumentation of four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones and one tuba (Adler, 2016). For French horns, the number was usually two or four. Orchestras featuring trumpets or trombones most often only had two players each. Many orchestras lacked trombone players. Few orchestras had a tuba player. This could be explained by the relatively low number of music

school students choosing to play certain brass instruments, but it is also possible that brass players are more likely to join a wind ensemble.

4.2 Repertoire

To stay close to everyday music making, the study focussed on rehearsal instead of concert repertoire, although both are probably largely identical. Historical art music accounted for the majority of the performed music, confirming repertoire studies of professional as well as non-professional orchestras in the USA cited above. Contemporary art music was also played by almost every ensemble, but to a much lesser extent. The choice of genres other than art music (often soundtrack, but also, to a lesser extent, musical, folk, pop/rock or jazz) was only made by a limited number of orchestras. The dominance of art music, combined with the relative popularity of soundtrack, musical, and folk over a mainstream genre such as pop/rock, indicates that amateur orchestras in our study focus on a peculiar combination of certain niches of the Western music repertoire.

The composer list is similar to lists resulting from repertoire research in the USA. The high number of Beethoven pieces (6.5% of the repertoire) in our sample is remarkable, because, for instance, Pope (2019) and Zabanal (2021) did not have Beethoven in the list of the 10 most performed composers in non-professional (youth) orchestras. A plausible explanation is the 'Beethoven year' in 2020, commemorating the 250th birthday of the composer. The relative popularity of Schubert (2.4%) is also somewhat surprising, as he was not among the most popular composers in the orchestral repertoire research cited above.

As in previous studies (Neves, 2014; Pope, 2019; Ting, 2019; Zabanal, 2021, 2022), female composers were overwhelmingly outnumbered by male composers. Music written by female composers before the half of the twentieth century was not mentioned at all. Caution is warranted when interpreting the data related to composer gender. Although we attempted to determine composer gender using previously used protocols (Shouldice & Eastridge, 2020; Zabanal, 2021, 2022), the assumed gender may not match their identified gender. Orchestra leaders could pay more consideration to gender diversity of their programmes.

The *Carmen* Suites were the most popular pieces in this study. *Carmen* Suite No. 1 was mentioned as the second most performed piece by Pope (2019) and Pickney (2000) as well, and was also among the most popular pieces in the study by Zabanal (2021). No other piece was mentioned more than twice in more than two of these four studies. Apart from four Latin American composers and one Australian and South Korean composer, all composers were mainly active in Europe or North America. Within Europe, the music performed shows a large geographic variation, in which German-speaking countries Germany and Austria are notably prominent (together 30.1%). Strikingly, music from Dutch or Belgian composers only accounts for a relatively small percentage (6.1%) of the repertoire.

4.3 Limitations, implications and perspectives

Due to its exploratory nature, this study does not allow for strong conclusions throughout. A qualitative approach, impossible at the time of the study due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, might have provided more detailed insight into the everyday practices of the ensembles and the personal experiences, perspectives and values of its participants and leaders.

The conservative attitude towards existing scores, for instance, might be an interesting focus for such an investigation, as would the sources of musical repertoire. The preferences from musicians, director and audience and their role in the decision making concerning repertoire would also make a promising topic for further study. Future research might focus on demographic characteristics of musicians, their rehearsal attendance, and on access mechanisms such as auditions, if musicians are sent away when too many players of their instrument are already taking part, and if 'extra' musicians are invited for important rehearsals or concerts.

Unfortunately, repertoire data were inconsistent concerning specific movements and arrangers. Often, orchestras did not indicate if they played one or all movements from a larger piece. Moreover, the relation between alterations to an original piece in (published) arrangements and further adjustments or additions made by the orchestras themselves remained unclear. In future research, the survey setup should include fields addressing this information. Future qualitative and practitioner research could help to discern the different aspects of 'arranging' in the context of non-professional orchestras.

Moreover, researchers could compare our results to other large amateur ensembles, notably wind bands. The findings of this study can inform music publishers as to which parts they can include in their orchestra sheet music, especially for the Dutch and Belgian market. Given their presence in more than two thirds of the participating orchestras, piccolo and English horn parts could be provided, if musically relevant. As digital sheet music takes paper saving considerations away, clarinet parts for works in 'sharp' keys could be foreseen in Bb and A. Optional parts for bass clarinet, contrabassoon and different saxophones would be useful to many ensembles. Publishers should consider limiting the number of brass parts in their arrangements to two (with an optional divisi to four) French horns, two trumpets, two trombones and one (optional) tuba. Both C and Bb parts should be included for trumpet, and tuba parts should be offered in at least three (C, Bb, Eb) or even four (F) transpositions. Although the number of desired percussion parts can vary for each piece, the number of required parts should be limited to two and optional or optionally-split parts. Harp or keyboard parts can be included, possibly as optional parts.

The strong canonisation of orchestra repertoire, even in amateur orchestras, should be a reminder to orchestra leaders to keep considering the pedagogical implications of repertoire choice for the groups they work with. Teacher and conductor education can support them in their reflective development. Music schools, especially, should be encouraged to critically reflect upon the direct consequences of repertoire choice for their curriculum. On a more practical level, this study can encourage Dutch and Flemish music schools to promote viola and double bass playing, and prompt (older) students to play low brass instruments. Dutch and Belgian orchestras and sector organisations should encourage compatriot composers to write for symphony orchestra. Policy makers might consider targeted funding to stimulate and promote such initiatives.

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Keywords for keywording: *amateur orchestra, instrumentation, orchestra repertoire, string orchestra, symphony orchestra*

Reviewers: Martin Eibach, Ute Konrad