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AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION FOR SYMPHONIC WIND ENSEMBLE IN CONTEMPORARY STYLE

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Patrick Ellis Thompson
August 1969

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The band is a curious phenomenon in that the mere mention of the word brings forth a multitude of definitions and attitudes that result in utter confusion and sometimes arouse a variety of emotions. The confusion is caused primarily by a misunderstanding of function and purpose that is associated with the term "band," an all-inclusive word that can be applied to any group of musicians regardless of size or instrumentation. As a result, despite the efforts of many dedicated musicians, educators and composers, a concept still prevails that "band music is not to be taken seriously." It is hoped that the introduction of new and better literature will help change this unfavorable concept.

Statement of the problem. The following definition of a band is given in an old Webster Dictionary: "A number of musicians who play together upon portable instruments, especially those making a loud sound, as certain wind instruments, (trumpets, clarinets—also drums and cymbals)" (5:6). There has been much activity since then to perpetuate this ambiguous definition; that the band exists to perform simple types of popular music, present cadences for marching, or provide entertainment for a long list of

extramusical activities. This diversity of functions presents a problem, then; that of developing and maintaining the high degree of performance excellence needed for serious wind music.

In recent times, the term "band" has been added to or replaced by more specific terms, such as, wind band, chamber band, wind sinfonietta, symphonic wind ensemble, et cetera, terms which clearly indicate the intent of the concert performing group, as opposed to the more general term "band" which Dr. Frederick Fennell claims is a group that "should be uniformed in the tradition of the band, should be able to march and perform in the open air in the tradition of that band, and maintain those time-honored traditions and associations to which the public and its institutions have become so rightfully accustomed" (5:138). The fact remains that a majority of bands in the United States today are not only concert ensembles, but as stated before, serve in other capacities, most of which are not essentially musical. Therefore, when the band's intent is to perform art music, the exclusion of the term "band" will likely clarify its purpose.

A major contribution to improving one's attitude toward the band or wind ensemble would be the elimination of invalid comparisons as to the aesthetic merits of the band and orchestra. The comparison is not well founded, because bands and orchestras are the results of different histories and purposes. The band evolved from a role of diversified functions, while the orchestra was the outgrowth of several centuries of conscious art. The present-day wind ensemble is a unique group and should be accepted as such.

Additionally, the composer could make an extremely important contribution to increase the musical stature of the wind ensemble. He must be dissuaded from subscribing to the notion that the band, or wind ensemble, is a phenomenon of "popular" or light music. Instead, he must realize that the wind ensemble is technically and musically capable of expressing musical ideas that are entirely satisfying to the discriminating ear.

<u>Purpose of the composition</u>. The purpose of the composition, <u>Overture for Symphonic Winds</u>, is to contribute to the list of works designed exclusively for wind ensemble performance.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF RECENT CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE FOR SYMPHONIC WINDS

Since World War II there has been a steady and increasing output of works written expressly for the symphonic wind ensemble. Not counting the amount of commercial and educational music plus orchestral transcriptions that has been the bulwark of the wind band literature, however, the total number of original band works of quality is considered modest compared to other media. It should be noted that most of the significant works for wind band have been written by American and European composers for the American wind band concept-the European band not generally being considered as advanced in aesthetic terms. The following is a partial list of representative works composed for the wind band in the early 1940's:

> Roy Harris: Cimarron Overture William Schuman: Newsreel Morton Gould: Jericho Legend Paul Creston:

Leo Sowerby: <u>Spring Overture</u>
Aaron Copland: <u>An Outdoor Overture</u> Henry Cowell: Festive Occasion (5:233)

Although this new surge of writing wind band music had its start in the early 1940's, the new style of idiomatic wind band writing is credited to earlier compositions. The suites for military band of Gustav Holst, the <u>Toccata</u>

<u>Marziale</u> of Ralph Vaughan Williams, and the numerous works
of Percy Grainger are monuments of early wind literature.

Although a complete list of composers is by no means possible, the following should be mentioned as having distinguished themselves as wind band composers: Aaron Copland, Paul Creston, Norman Dello Joio, Vittorio Giannini, Morton Gould, Paul Hindemith, Alan Hovhaness, Gordon Jacob, Peter Mennin, Darius Milhaud, Vaclav Nelhybel, Vincent Persichetti. H. Owen Reed. Arnold Schoenberg, Gunther Schuller, William Schuman, Igor Stravinsky, and Clifton Williams. In addition, there has been a number of works by other distinguished composers since World War II. Some of these composers are Robert Ward, Don Gillis, Walter Hartley, William Russo, Erik Leidzen, and Alfred Reed. Among composers and arrangers who have contributed a useful portion of the educational material for younger wind ensembles are Clare Grundman, Frank Erickson, Eric Osterling, Paul Yoder, Harold Walters, David Bennett, John J. Morrissey, and Philip Lang.

Undoubtedly, many of these composers realized at one time or another that the wind band is a good commercial outlet for their compositions. Consequently, a great bulk of band music has been motivated for economic purposes rather than by musical integrity, the musical result being less than the highest possible achievement by the composer.

However, the problem is being remedied slowly with the recognition and performance of the better works for winds by college and university bands.

Another handicap to developing a worthwhile list of contemporary literature was encouraging major composers to write seriously for the wind ensemble. It was not until 1949 that the idea of commissioning new works on a steady basis was put into practice. This provided impetus for enriching the "new" repertory. The League of Composers and American Bandmasters Association began to commission on an annual basis. Most of the following commissioned works were scored superbly and have since become standards of the literature:

> 1949: Virgil Thompson, A Solemn Music

Walter Piston, <u>Tunbridge Fair</u> Peter Mennin, <u>Canzona</u> 1950:

1951:

Robert Russell Bennett, Mademoiselle 1952:

1953: Vincent Persichetti, Pageant

Howard Hanson, Chorale and Alleluia
Paul Creston, Celebration Overture
Morton Gould, Santa Fe Saga
William Bergsma, March with Trumpets 1954:

1955:

1956:

1957:

Vittorio Giannini, <u>Praeludium and Allegro</u> Douglas Moore, <u>The People's Choice</u> 1958:

1959:

Norman Lloyd, A Walt Whitman Overture 1960:

Among the significant works that have been commissioned by other groups are:

> William Schuman, Chester Vincent Persichetti, Psalm for Band Darius Milhaud, West Point Suite Morton Gould, Symphony for Band Vittorio Giannini, Symphony for Band Vincent Persichetti, Symphony for Band Clifton Williams, Symphonic Suite

Richard Goldman has said the following about the Persichetti Symphony for Band:

This work, in four movements (I. Adagio-Allegro; II. Adagio Sostenuto; III. Allegretto; IV. Vivace). . . represents a major contribution to the art of writing for band. In its way, it represents how greatly the concept of band sound and texture has changed in recent years. In general, Persichetti's score is spare in texture, with carefully calculated balances, and an important (and subtle) role assigned to the percussion. The movements are generally taut and rhythmic, the slow sections full of sustained lyrical inspiration (5:239).

About the Gould Symphony he states:

(Symphony for Band) is a two-movement work of large proportions and is, in my opinion, one of the finest works he has composed in any medium. The scoring for band is extremely brilliant; it ranks with the scores of Grainger as an outstanding example of original and imaginative treatment of band sonorities (5:238).

In these remarks, Goldman implies that large scale works, such as these symphonies, are worthy treatments and practical for the modern wind ensemble. Of course, other major works of symphonic proportions, such as Persichetti's <u>Divertimento for Band</u>, and H. Owen Reed's <u>La Fiesta Mexicana</u>, also demonstrate the wind ensemble's ability to produce instrumental colors and sonorities within a large form that are totally unique.

As other composers write works of high quality and further enhance the wind ensemble's value as a distinct, artistic medium, the earlier mentioned confusion of terms and variety of attitudes toward the band will hopefully disappear.

With a sincere desire to write a work for symphonic wind ensemble that will enjoy at least a modest musical success, the following Overture for Symphonic Winds has been undertaken.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOSITION

Overture for Symphonic Winds is a single-movement work which is divided into four smaller sections; Andante Rubato, Allegro, Andantino, and Allegro Vivace. It was composed for a full instrumentation of wind and percussion instruments. The principle thematic and rhythmic material used in the composition are noted in Example I.

EXAMPLE I



The piece opens with a slow, legato statement of the main theme by the contrabass clarinet, baritone and tuba. The theme is short and is characterized by its first six tones. It is presented in this fashion many times throughout the composition.

EXAMPLE II



In measure seven, the clarinet choir provides a low harmonic backdrop for the oboe's solo statement of the theme. Tension is achieved by fragmentary presentation of the theme as well as other important compositional features. This starts in measure fourteen with muted trumpets and trombones, who also introduce the quartal harmony idea to the composition.

EXAMPLE III



The theme is then given to solo cornet in measure sixteen, and finally to the bass instruments before coming to a momentary rest in measure twenty-two. Bitonal harmony, which is used frequently throughout the composition, is

first introduced in the flutes through embellishment. The resulting harmony is Db Major over Cb Major.

EXAMPLE IV



In measure twenty-three, the second theme is introduced by solo baritone. In contrast to the main theme, it
moves about more freely and is longer in duration. The
cornets and trumpets are the accompanying element taking
the first six notes of the main theme and continuing in
tangential variation. The harmony is achieved by the use
of parallel major seventh chords voiced tightly in third
inversion. The resulting dissonance is created by the
minor second between the third cornet and trumpet. Refer
to Example V on page 12.

EXAMPLE V



A four-octave spread of woodwinds, minus saxophones, carries on the tangential variation to measure thirty-two where the remaining ensemble contributes rhythmically and harmonically to the climax. Tension is achieved by the use of the E^b minor ninth chord over a suspended fourth in measure thirty-three. The unstable quality of this harmony is increased by the root appearing in the melodic line. Further tension is achieved as the same material is sounded in sequence a minor second higher.

EXAMPLE VI



The Allegro section begins with a positive statement of the main theme by unison horns over a pedal point which

is sustained by the tuba, string bass and timpani. At this time an important rhythmical device is introduced which is very significant to the composition. Paul Creston calls it "regular subdivision overlapping," that is, the organization of a group of measures into equal beats overlapping the barline. The effect here is a distinct feeling of "three" with an eighth-note pulse (3/8) contained in a larger structure of 4/4 with a quarter-note pulse.

EXAMPLE VII



In measure forty, the cornets pick up the main theme continuing the feeling of 3/8, then in the trombones and baritone in a stretto-like imitation. As each voice enters, a chord by fourths is constructed, furthering the quartal harmony idea introduced earlier. After the pyramid is completed, the timpani exchanges rhythmic figurations with the woodwinds voiced in quartal harmony. This texture serves as background for the brief, but emphatic, statement of the

theme in the low brass in measure forty-seven. The overlapping 3/8 is again brought out by the timpani solo at measure fifty.

EXAMPLE VIII



The quartal harmony is rearranged and given to the trumpets, trombones and cornets in measure fifty-three.

Although this harmony is heard as an added-tone chord based on G Major, it is actually a chord by fourths built on B.

EXAMPLE IX



In measure fifty-six, a variation of the main theme is presented in the woodwinds who continue the overlapping 3/8. In measure sixty-one, the snare drum changes the

previous 3/8 into 3/4 creating the overlapping on a larger scale.

EXAMPLE X



The cornets and trumpets exchange statements of the main theme with the horns, again in a strett-like imitation, the timpani reinforcing the 3/8 and at measure seventy-one, and the 6/4 (actually two measures of 3/4) measure bringing the section to its peak. The clarinets, trumpets and cornets descend on a G^b Major chord over C Major sustained in the low brass, again the bitonal idea.

At measure eighty-one, solo bassoon has the second theme with a background of Bb clarinets and alto clarinet voiced in parallel major sevenths as before. At measure eighty-seven, solo oboe presents the second theme in slight variation. The accompaniment for full clarinet choir is derived from harmony based on the notes of the main theme. They are all major seventh chords as before, however the progression is partwritten instead of parallel, an important variation of the major seventh idea.

EXAMPLE XI



At measure ninety-four, all three ideas, the main theme, second theme, and major seventh harmony based on the main theme, are combined. The main theme is taken by unison horns, the second theme by high woodwinds, and the harmonization by the remaining ensemble. More rhythmic movement is given to the harmonization, and, combined with the first and second themes, results in a full harmonic texture.

EXAMPLE XII



At measure one-hundred, the clarinet choir gives a bitonal statement of the main theme in augmentation serving as an introduction to the cornet solo at measure one hundred four. The melodic line at this point is derived from elements of both themes. At measure one hundred ten the climax of the section is reached and quickly subsides as the horns sound a fragment of the main theme as an introduction to the last section of the overture.

EXAMPLE XIII



The final section begins with the percussion setting the quick pace. As the ensemble enters, the stretto idea is again introduced by the trumpets and cornets in octaves, imitated by the horns in unison, and then by the baritone and third trombone. The overlapping idea is also evident in the rhythm used as each voice enters. In measure one fifty-five, the timpani reiterates its previous rhythmic pattern of overlapping, and also the quartal structure used before in other instruments. At measure one fifty-eight, the trumpets, cornets and first trombones, in fanfare

style, announce the finale by exchanging implied measures of 3/4 with the low brass. The treble instruments are added as the high and low instruments exchange chords several more times in 2/4. Through a process of overlapping, a strong feeling of "three" has been evident throughout the composition. At measure one sixty-seven, that feeling is realized by an actual change of meter to 3/4. The rhythmic phrase contained in the final measures make the change quite evident. Although the change of meter appears academic, it serves to accent the pulses in a clear manner. After a brief final statement of the main theme by the horns in octaves, the timpani closes with its familiar solo figure over a sustained Eb Major chord with the major ninth sounded by the horns.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

There has been some confusion in recent years regarding the specific terminology and function of the symphonic wind ensemble as opposed to the band. This problem has been caused by (1) the inability to completely separate the purposes of the various wind instrumental groups, i.e., marching band, concert ensemble, and (2) the practice of incorrect comparisons of media and conjectures based on false aesthetics.

One important aspect of solving this problem is the composer of wind ensemble music. He must continue to realize to the fullest extent the potentials within the wind ensemble and continue to contribute quality literature to its repertory.

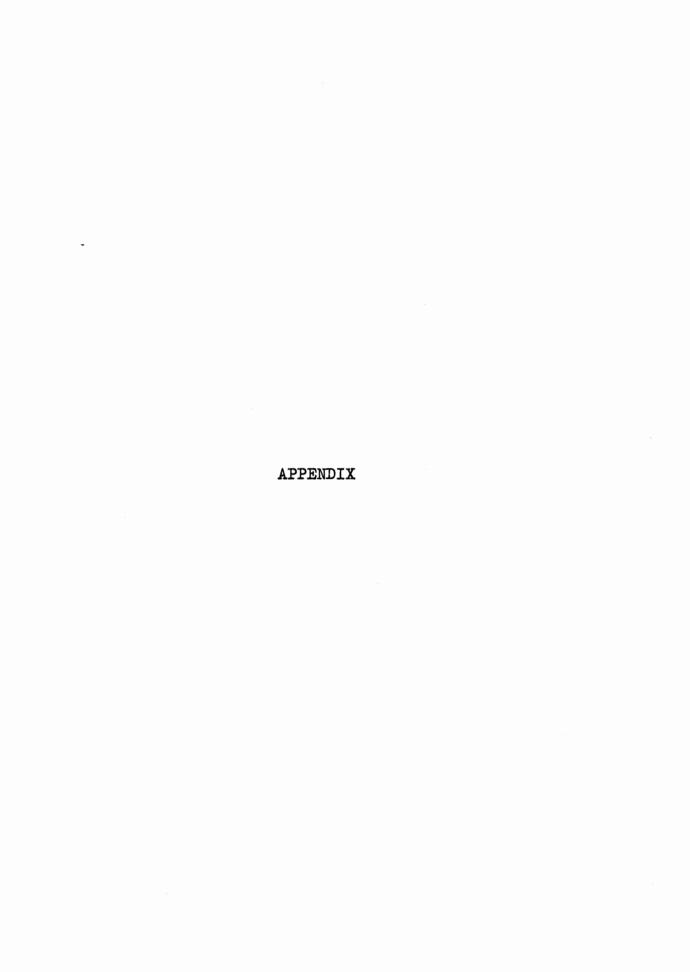
One problem of the past was the composer's recognition of the economic potential of the wind band. However, the commissioning of new wind band works on an annual basis since 1949 has helped in a small measure to offset the vast amount of commercial and training literature. Some of the major composers contributing to the wind band repertory are Paul Creston, Norman Dello Joio, Vaclav Nelhybel, Vincent Persichetti, H. Owen Reed, Vittorio Giannini, and Clifton Williams. The fact that these composers have written great

works of symphonic proportions for the wind ensemble clearly indicates the integrity and uniqueness of the wind ensemble medium.



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OVERTURE FOR SYMPHONIC WINDS

An Original Composition
For Symphonic Winds

Composed by Patrick Ellis Thompson



