

## **Band Music Reviews (June 2007)**

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It's not often someone is offered a "bully pulpit" the likes of this column, and I am proud to follow Dan and the other great NMEA band music reviewers of the past. In nine hundred words or fewer, four times a year, I hope to highlight some of the best compositions available – new and old, original and transcribed, simple and complex. We'll leave the superhighway of publisher's demos and annual catalogues to the national magazines. My goal is to wander off the beaten path and point out fruitful byways and soon to be developed areas among the more familiar classics of our genre. With luck, we'll find a little something for everyone along the way.

### ***Pacem: A Hymn for Peace***

**Robert Spittal**

**Boosey & Hawkes \$60.00**

**Grade 3 (3:30 min.)**

Although original to the band medium, *Pacem* is a reflection of the imitative motet style of the Renaissance. Spittal's somewhat cinematic approach to orchestration provides satisfying crests to the predictable flow of the form. Pleasantly irregular phrase lengths and interesting counterpoint hold the listener's interest while the harmonies remain comfortably in E-flat Major. Rhythm is one of the primary challenges posed throughout the work, but the *adagio* tempo keeps all within the grasp of intermediate musicians. The more transparent sections are easily adaptable if the given solo instruments are not available, and most of the work provides enough coverage for bands of modest proportions and/or irregular instrumentation. *Pacem* is a 2005 addition to the Windependence series.

### ***Star Voyage***

**Gene Milford**

**Great Works Publishing \$45.00**

**Grade 1 (3:00 min.)**

A little overture with a big dream, *Star Voyage* sets out to “portray the vast expanses of interstellar space.” The composition springs from a germinal motive that undergoes various transformations (inversion, augmentation, transposition, retrograde) as it travels through F Mixolydian and B-flat Major landscapes. With up to seven parts, the percussion provides much of the timbral variety and connective material throughout the work. Milford has packed a great deal of teaching material into a small package, but the work requires a clever and resourceful conductor to make the most of it. The work is apt to be somewhat pedantic without insightful leadership. *Star Voyage* was composed in 2005 and will be featured in *Teaching Music Through Beginning Band*, volume 2 (due out in December, 2007).

**First Essay, Op. 12****Samuel Barber, arr. Joseph Levey****G. Schirmer \$85.00****Grade 5 (8:00 min.)**

Employing the same germinal motive strategy as seen in *Star Voyage*, Barber composed three essays for orchestra. He created the first while working on his *Adagio for Strings*, and Levey's transcription finally gives the band community an opportunity to get to know one of the great twentieth century American masters (with all due respect to *Commando March*). The premiere of *First Essay* was conducted by Arturo Toscanini in 1938, and it marked the iconic conductor's first performance of a work by an American composer. Although the instrumentation of the transcription is conservative, there is an integral piano part. A mature woodwind section is also essential. The harmonic language is clearly the sibling of the *Adagio*, but the *Essay* is far more rhythmically complex. The extensive *allegro molto* B section is maniacal but attainable through patient, persistent effort (and a slightly modified target tempo – but don't go too far or the character is lost). *First Essay* is well worth the investment for any advanced ensemble.

**Hambone****Libby Larsen****BandQuest \$60.00**

### **Grade 3 (3:48 min.)**

As the preface to the score indicates, *Hambone* draws on three important African-American cultural traditions: a hand clapping game (known as “hambone”), the cakewalk dance, and rock and roll music (developed from rhythm and blues). Using call and response patterns packed with syncopation, the entire ensemble shares in the percussive spirit (there are four true percussion parts). Brief, spirited solo jaunts are interspersed with full band unison textures providing a safe and secure environment to cut loose and have some fun. Larsen’s devotion to American vernacular music infuses the score, and Bo Diddley figures prominently. Composed in 2001, *Hambone* is a part of the BandQuest series and as such includes a wealth of associated teaching materials including a CD-ROM.

#### **Keep an eye out for:**

**Kimberly Archer** – Kim already has an extensive catalogue of grade 2-5 works available through C. Alan Publications. She is currently working on her third symphony for band (a consortium commission spearheaded by a high school in Wisconsin). A member of the faculty of Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, Kim has been studying recently with David Maslanka.

**Carter Pann** – Carter has just finished his latest band composition, *Four Factories* (four movements, 15:45, available through Shattinger Music) and is in progress with his second piano concerto (piano and winds, due Spring 2008). Currently on the faculty of the University of Colorado-Boulder, Carter’s skillful and nontraditional handling of instrumental color promises great things for the band repertoire in years to come.

**Jonathan Newman** – Jonathan is a witty and versatile composer whose works for wind band range from funk to klezmer to poetic ballads. His next work, an expansion of *Rivers of Bowery*, is in progress (due Fall, 2007). Jonathan is a founding member of BCM, a consortium of composers “unbound by traditional thought or idiomatic cliché,” which includes Steve Bryant, Jim Bonney, and Eric Whitacre.