

Band Music Reviews (December 2007)

Carolyn Barber

Director of Bands

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Although you're reading this after the holiday craze has subsided, I'm writing in the thick of egg nog chugging and shopping mania so it seems appropriate to begin with a new collection of Christmas carols compiled by Keith Christopher and distributed by the Dallas Brass. ***A Merry Christmas with Brass*** includes 14 carols arranged for brass quintet with optional percussion and keyboard with an accompanying demo CD. Everything about the product speaks to a successful effort to balance quality with flexibility and accessibility. The arrangements are fun and interesting for both listeners and players alike, with a variety of styles, textures and keys represented. The difficulty ranges from grade 3 to 5 and is appropriate for high school or college players. All instruments have an opportunity to shine with melodic material, so the ability to perform independently is a must. The trumpet parts sit mostly on the staff with an occasional visit to C above the staff for Trumpet I. The horn part lies almost exclusively on the staff extending only to G just above. One particularly thoughtful feature is an optional/alternate bass clef, concert pitch substitute part for the horn. The percussion part calls for diverse instruments, from set to timpani, triangle, finger cymbals, wood block, etc. As with the horn part, the arrangers have wisely written the percussion part so that a convincing effect can be achieved with a single player and selected instruments, or multiple players when available. A full score is included for rehearsal purposes (if performing in a chamber setting), or to provide a great opportunity for student conductors to get some podium experience. The parts are presented in spiral-bound books with plastic covers for durability. In summary, it's a great product presented in a smart and user-friendly manner. Visit www.dallasbrass.com to learn more, and also check out ***Brass Grooves***, 12 original compositions for brass quintet and drums by John Wasson.

For those with musicians of more limited means, Kjos has just released two solid young band arrangements from the dynamic duo of John Edmonson and Anne McGinty. ***Jingle Bells***

on Parade is Edmonson's straightforward presentation of the holiday classic. I'd recommend spicing up the percussion a bit to draw attention from the unremittingly four-square rhythms in the winds. McGinty brings us **Sussex Carol**, a pleasant compound meter tune with some refreshing variety of texture and a convincing dynamic contour. Also in the grade 2 category is Timothy Broege's **Forest Green**, a medley of traditional European Yuletide carols published by Grand Mesa. The piece is another in a long line of quality efforts for younger bands by this composer. His choice of material is particularly noteworthy as he avoids the hackneyed standbys in favor of a multi-national trio: *Forest Green* (England), *Still, Still, Still* (Austria), and *Une Jeune Pucelle* (France).

Leaving the realms of the festive, I'd like to bring to your attention the works of Australian composer David Stanhope. For those who are fans of his countryman Percy Grainger, Stanhope is as near a kindred spirit as you'll find in polite society. With 18 concert band compositions to his credit, most published by Southern, he is one of the most prolific lesser known figures in the band world. Of particular note are his **Folksong Suites (Nos. 1, 2, 3)** and **The Little Ripper March**. The suites range in difficulty from grade 4 to 6 and are as close to *Lincolnshire Posy* without actually being *Lincolnshire Posy* as you can get. While the derivative nature of Stanhope's work could be construed as a cheap knockoff, nothing could be farther from the truth. His orchestration is beautifully varied, his melodic treatments are delightfully quirky, and he is a master craftsman in his own right. The march is a 3 minute, grade 3.5 romp in compound meter. This light hearted piece was originally written for brass band. Stanhope, an accomplished hornist, occasionally transfers pieces from one medium to another much as Grainger did. Another such work is **Retreat and Pumping Song** which was originally intended for horn choir. The retreat takes full advantage of an evocative call and response texture with wonderfully complex harmonies (but not difficult – this is a grade 3.5). The pumping song is a simple sea chantey with funky bumps in the rhythm that will make any audience smile.

Another composer with a chameleon-like ability to speak in the voice of musicians past is Johan de Meij. Perhaps best known for his *Symphony No. 1: Lord of the Rings*, the lion's share of de Meij's talent is demonstrated through his work as an arranger. His catalogue includes

Ratatouille Satirique, a deft orchestration of three piano works of Eric Satie (grade 3); ***Funeral Music from the Melodrama Bergliot***, a dark, rich rendering of a piece by Edvard Grieg (grade 2/3); ***Jazz Suite No. 2***, a jaunty anachronism by Dmitri Shostakovich (ranges from grade 3 to 5); and ***Aladdin Suite***, an oddly fascinating oriental character piece by Danish composer Carl Nielsen (grade 4). Most of de Meij's work is published by Amstel Music or Molenaar, and his list of transcriptions is prodigious. Thanks to him, young musicians have a window into some of the great compositional minds of the 20th century, including a number of Scandinavian and European personalities little known in the band community.