

## **Band Music Reviews (December 2008)**

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The recent NMEA Conference provided a golden opportunity to comb through bins of scores and sheet music and to touch base with the merchants who have the unenviable task of lugging those bins from state to state. Next time you're visiting the exhibits at a conference, take a moment to thank the folks at the various booths for supporting the event. Glamorous as it may seem to stand cheerfully in a ballroom for hours on end making small talk, there is both literal and metaphorical heavy lifting to do behind the scenes at every stop on the convention circuit. In gratitude, I'd like to highlight two of the smaller publishers who I hope will be regulars at our events.

The first is Grand Mesa Music of Grand Junction, Colorado. Several of their scores caught my eye, including Timothy Broege's *Bartok Variations* (grade 2, 3:00) which effectively offsets large choirs for a varied texture (percussion/brass/woodwinds as well as high/low). The gentle, modal harmonic material is surprisingly reminiscent of early American writing (e.g. Billings). If you're not well acquainted with Broege's work, do yourself a favor and check out *Headless Horseman* (grade 2, 2:00), *Theme and Variations* (grade 1, 3:00), *Rhythm Machine* (grade 2, 4:00), *Grizzly Bear Rag* (grade 2.5, 4:00), and his twenty-one *Sinfonias* which are somewhat akin to Persichetti's *Parables*.

Another Grand Mesa composer is David Weirich, whose *Freedom* (grade 5, 9:30) is a tone poem that provides comfortable solo opportunities for trumpet, and evocative percussion writing reminiscent of *Incantation and Dance*. As in Chance's work, acoustic space in the beginning (timbral and registral differences as the theme is passed around the ensemble) could make intonation a challenge. John Bogenschutz recently added *Red Rock Fanfare* (grade 4, 2:10) to the GM catalog. A piece in the style of the cliché but effective openers customarily performed by the US Air Force bands, the fanfare is cinematic in a rated PG sort of way.

David Bobrowitz's latest effort, *American Gothic* (grade 5, 7:05), was inspired by the writings of Steven King. I wish I liked this more. The unison material and unified rhythms give it a blocky, heavy quality, and the form is episodic without effective linking material to provide flow. A better choice from this composer would be *Travelin' Hat Rag* (grade 4.5, 2:46) which captures delightfully the ragged rhythms of the Charleston-crazed Jazz Age. For more information, including a discussion forum (a great pedagogical opportunity to ask questions of the composer), audio samples, and composer information, visit [www.grandmesamusic.com](http://www.grandmesamusic.com)

The second exhibitor I'd like to highlight is a relative newcomer to our event: Alliance Publications of Sinsinawa, Wisconsin. In their catalog is the wacky *Three Marches for Dr. Kabyl* by Jan Vicar (grade 3, 3 movements, each c. 2:00). This piece reflects Alliance Publications' devotion to the Czech Moravian spirit which is alive and well here in Nebraska. It has been featured in the Wind Repertory Project, a Wikki format online resource that includes general information about each work, analytical and biographical materials, instrumentation, audio links, ratings, works lists, and more: [www.windrep.org](http://www.windrep.org)

For those fond of Reynolds' transcriptions of Lauridsen, the AP catalog features Tomas Luis de Victoria's famous Renaissance motet *O Magnum Mysterium* arranged for symphonic winds by Andrew Mast (grade 3.5, 4:30). According to [windrep.org](http://windrep.org), the work features several characteristics of Victoria's style, which included an unusual amount of chromatic harmonies and unusual, abrupt contrasts. Among the new works on the AP list are quite a few oldies, including *El Anillo Guatemalteco* by Robert J. Dvorak (grade 6, 15:00). Premiered by John Paynter in 1970, *El Anillo* brings to mind Roger Nixon's *Fiesta del Pacifico* although the cultural foundation is different. The program behind this challenging work is as compelling as the musical content.

For younger bands seeking adventure, Alliance Publications features Joel Blahnik's *Inventions*, each composed for one of his three children. *Invention No. 1* (grade 2.5, 7:20) is my favorite and it was the first piece to be placed on the Wisconsin permanent Class C list. Modal and atmospheric, it provides a great deal of variety in texture and mood. *Invention No. 2* (grade 3, 8:12) is one of Blahnik's best works. It is very well built, and thus useful for exploring the craft of composition with your students. *Invention No. 3* (2 movements, grade 3, 6:00) Includes

pentatonic improvisation. It has a lighter quality than Nos. 1 or 2, but similar quality. For more information, including complete analyses of works, visit <http://apimusic.org>

[Coda] I have recently come across an unique approach to teacher support at <http://bcminternational.com> The site was created by a consortium of composers: Eric Whitacre, Steven Bryant, Jonathan Newman, and James Bonney. From the home page, go to “The Educator’s Library.” Here, along with programming guides and articles penned by the composers, are suggestions of which of their works might be effective to teach lyricism, humor, modern techniques, and/or modern styles. It’s a thought provoking approach but beware: when they say “easy” it translates to about a grade 3.5. Be that as it may, the site pointed me to a very pretty, lyrical work by James Bonney that’s worth a look – *Reflections in a Tidal Pool* (grade 3, 2:14).