

Band Music Reviews (February 2009)

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'Tis the season for competition, it seems. Here at the university prospective students are vying for admission and scholarship consideration, school ensembles are gearing up for spring contest season, the Academy Awards ceremony is this weekend (remember we're on a late night talk show type schedule – I'm writing this in February, but you won't read it until April). This atmosphere inspires me to consult some of my favorite and most rewarding sources for new literature: the major composition contests devoted to bands. The Wind Repertory Project maintains a list of the most prominent competitions at www.windrep.org/Awards

Perhaps the granddaddy of them all (at least for bands) is the American Bandmasters Association Ostwald Award. The first award went to Clifton Williams in 1956 for *Fanfare and Allegro*, and ever since the prize has tended to reflect the tastes and values of the main stream. One doesn't look to the Ostwalds for the most inventive or cutting edge works, but one can always count on the winner to be solidly crafted and enjoyable to a broad spectrum of listeners. The track record of the award has been spotty in the 21st century, with only three awards given since Donald Grantham won in 2000 with *Southern Harmony*. 2002 saw Peter Graham take the prize with *Harrison's Dream*, 2005 went to John Mackey for *Redline Tango*, and 2007 was Michael Daugherty's year for *Raise the Roof*. No announcement has been made for 2008; check americanbandmasters.org/award/ for updates and a complete listing of winners. They tend to land in the grade 5-6 range, although there are some grade 4 classics that are noteworthy.

The biannual Walter Beeler Memorial Composition Prize and the ASCAP/CBDNA Frederick Fennell Prize for 2008 both went to Kathryn Salfelder for *Cathedrals*. This six-minute, grade 5 work is a fantasy on Giovanni Gabrieli's *Canzona Primi Toni*. Salfelder writes, "*Cathedrals* is an adventure in 'neo-renaissance' music, in its seating arrangement, antiphonal qualities, 16th century counterpoint, and canonic textures. Its form is structured on the golden

ratio, which is commonly found not only in nature and art, but also in the motets and masses of Renaissance composers such as Palestrina and Lassus... The work is a synthesis of the old and the new, evoking the mystery and allure of Gabrieli's spatial music, intertwined with the rich color palette, modal harmonies, and textures of woodwinds and percussion." Visit www.kathrynsalfelder.com for more information and a recording. Don't let the grade level scare you off – this is a piece well worth exploring for many high school and college ensembles. Visit www.ithaca.edu/music/ensembles/windensemble/beeler/ for the complete list of Walter Beeler Prize winners. Following *Cathedrals*, honorable mention for the ASCAP/CBDNA Fennell Prize went to Jonathan Bartz for *The Valley of Dry Bones*, David Biedenbender for *Stomp*, Andres Carrizo for *Ecos Y Remansos*, Michael Cortes for *Europa Fanfare* (for concert band and pipe organ), Elizabeth Kelly for *Ice* (for electric guitar and band), Douglas Pew for *8 Bagatelles*, and Anthony Suter for *As We Shine, Singing, Over Waterless Seas*.

According to Tim Reynish, the band world's devoted British correspondent, the finalists for the British Composer Awards include Adam Gorb for *Adrenaline City*, and Gavin Higgins for *A Forest Symphony*. Also from the UK is news that composer Emily Howard has won a Paul Hamlyn Foundation award (similar to a MacArthur Genius Grant). Howard's wind work, *Deep Soul Diving*, is published by Maecenas Music.

For the second year running, Steven Bryant has won the National Band Association/William D. Revelli Award. The 2007 winner was *Radiant Joy* (grade 5, 5:00), and for 2008 it was *Suite Dreams* (grade 4, 8:30). Of the two, my tastes lean towards the latter for its more inventive structure and subtler approach. However, *Radiant Joy* is entertaining in a Sam Hazo meets Jens Wendelboe sort of way. The official list of winners for the NBA/Revelli Award can be found at www.nationalbandassociation.org/contests/revelli.asp

For those devoted to the development of younger musicians, look to the CBDNA Young Band Composition Competition for grade 3-3.5. This prize is itself a youngster as it was established in 2003. Finding information about this contest is a bit like tracking down a floating craps game, but I do know that the winner in 2007 was John Carnahan for *...and the antelope play* (grade 3). Another prize designed to highlight works for younger ensembles is the

NBA/Merrill Jones Memorial Young Composers Band Composition Contest. This award focuses on works in the grade 3-4 category. The winner in 2007 was Ryan Main for *The Clash* (grade 4+, 4:10). The complete list of winners for this biennial award can be found at www.nationalbandassociation.org/contests/jones.asp

Although not a prize winner (yet), one more work I'd like to bring to your attention is Carter Pann's *Hold this Boy and Listen* (grade 3, 6:00). Composed in 2008, Pann describes his work as "an unusually soft and subdued song for band, written for my third nephew, David Paulus, Jr. I sat down at the piano and wrote a lyrical work where the melodies and harmonies return, creating a structure not unlike standard song structure. The sentiment is at times innocent or wistful and at other times haunted and serene." It's a beauty, and very accessible – including 5 percussion parts for those ensembles currently enjoying a surplus in that area. Visit www.carterpann.com/works_holdthisboy.htm for more information and a recording.