

## **Band Music Reviews (June 2009)**

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June is bustin' out all over, and new products are in bloom in music publishing houses nationwide. Bruce Pearson and the folks at Kjos have released the new *Standard of Excellence Enhanced* edition. For those who have been using the original version you may wonder if the new edition is worth the investment. The new features include two CDs of audio accompaniment recordings for all full band exercises and Interactive Pyware Assessment Software (iPAS), for Windows or Mac, which takes students through the entire book and provides numeric performance scores. It also has a tuner and metronome built in. The *iPAS Teacher's Edition* gives directors objective assessment and record-keeping tools. This is impressive, unless you're already hip to SmartMusic ([www.smartmusic.com](http://www.smartmusic.com)). The SmartMusic practice system comprises more than 30,000 solo and ensemble titles and 50,000 exercises, including *Standard of Excellence* and ten more complete methods. What's more, SmartMusic is continually upgrading and adding new titles. It works via online subscription rather than print material. In the long run, it is the more economical, flexible, and comprehensive choice.

The Bandquest team has added Dana Wilson to their ranks. His new *Odysseus and the Sirens* is a grade 2.5 and comes with an abundance of teaching material ([www.bandquest.org](http://www.bandquest.org)). Also new to the team is Chris Brubeck (Dave's son), who will present a new work for young band in September. Of special note in the Bandquest series is Gunther Schuller's *Nature's Way*. Every bit as turbulent and variegated as one would expect, Schuller's foray into the grade 4 literature is a gem along the lines of John Paulson's *Epinicion*.

The FJH Music Company has several nice additions, including a pretty if somewhat cliché grade 2.5 ballad by Brian Balmages entitled *Rain*. Timothy Loest's *Traffic Jam* is a fun little grade 1 blues romp, and Erik Morales' *The Hive* is an intriguing, if somewhat over-dramatic grade 4 portrayal of a day in the life of a honeybee. Morales' program brings to mind Tom Duffy's

metaphysical tone poem *Butterflies and Bees*, a delightful and creative addition to the grade 5 literature. If you haven't explored Tom's website recently, you're missing a wealth of great material for bands of all shapes and sizes: [www.duffymusic.com](http://www.duffymusic.com)

At Grand Mesa Music, Jim Mahaffey's grade 3.5 setting of *La Boutique Fantasque* is worth a listen. Respighi's original ballet was based on an earlier opera by Rossini, and this new arrangement presents an opportunity for students to explore the works of two master composers as well as two musical media (ballet and opera) as they relate to the modern concert band. For those with older library resources, look for Dan Godfrey's classic 1922 transcription. Beginning bands might check out Greg Danner's *Siyahomba*, a grade 1.5 setting of a Zulu folk tune with an idiomatic vocal break that adds character and interest. David Bobrowitz's *The Iron Horse Across America*, grade 2.5, takes a similar if simpler approach to Pierre La Plante's *American Riversongs* in combining classic American folk tunes linked by a common theme.

Over at Brolga Music, Brian Hogg's *Camel Train* is a fun and kitschy grade 2 that presents a great opportunity to begin a discussion on modality with a young band. Other quirky Aussie pieces are Roger Perrin's grade 2 *Wombat Shuffle*, and Brian West's grade 1 *Bunyip Blues* and grade 2 *Gumleaf Rag*. For those of you who also work with young string groups, look into the works of R. Anne Svendsen, another member of the Brolga team.

The Aussies are making waves over at Manhattan Beach as well. Jodie Blackshaw's *Whirlwind* won the beginning band category of the Frank Ticheli Composition Contest in 2006. To cut to the chase, *Whirlwind* is a grade 1 tour de force. As a supplement, Manhattan Beach provides material called "Know Your Stuff" to help the youngest of bands acquire the tools they need to succeed ([www.manhattanbeachmusic.com](http://www.manhattanbeachmusic.com)).

On a different tack, I was reminded recently of the depth and breadth of Alfred Reed's catalogue of transcriptions of the works of J.S. Bach. With fifteen titles from which to choose, odds are at least one of them is in a library near you. Among the most popular are *Come, Sweet Death* (grade 3), *If Thou Be Near* (grade 2), *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* (grade 2), *My Jesus! Oh, What Anguish* (grade 3), *Sheep May Safely Graze* (grade 3), and *Sleepers Awake!* (grade 3). Most are published by C.L. Barnhouse ([www.barnhouse.com](http://www.barnhouse.com)). Stay tuned to Carl Fischer for the

impending publication of David Maslanka's settings of 117 Bach chorales in a flexible format that enables performance by any combination of 4 or more instruments.

Last but not least, the United States Army Field Band ([www.army.mil/FIELDBAND](http://www.army.mil/FIELDBAND)) has produced a series of educational reference recordings featuring the works of various seminal figures in American band music. The latest release is *The Legacy of Robert Russell Bennett*, and for those whose acquaintance with Bennett is limited to *Suite of Old American Dances* it's an eye-opener. Of special note are three compositions: *Four Preludes (George, Vincent, Cole, Jerome)*; *Autobiography*; and *1939 World's Fair – TNT Cocktail*. I suspect all are out of print, but your library may still have them. If so, treat them well and enjoy. To hear these gems, visit <http://www.emusic.com/album/U-S-Army-Field-Band-The-Legacy-of-Robert-Russell-Bennett-MP3-Download/11040815.html>