

Band Music Reviews (February 2011)

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Snow is in the air, and on the ground, and on my car, and in my office (don't ask), and for some reason I am inspired to take a clearinghouse approach to this edition of the Band Music Review. Maybe I'm just eager to see the piles disappear – any piles, even if they are electronic and metaphorical. So here we go, in no particular order.

For Grainger lovers, a recent addition to the family of transcriptions is *The Widow's Party* (grade 4, 3:30, RBC). Leroy Osmun succeeded admirably in transforming the original piano and choral material with an instrumental color palette reminiscent of Grainger's own *Children's March*. *The Widow's Party* is a jaunty little tune in the style of Stephen Foster, and it would be particularly effective programmed with Walton's *Crown Imperial*, or any of Kenneth Alford's marches.

For those of a more sentimental nature, Michael Oare's *To Dream in Brushstrokes* (grade 3, 5:00, Boosey & Hawkes) is a poster child for compositions unlikely to have a life beyond the specific circumstances of their commission. I found the work to be lugubrious and maudlin, however those drawn to compositions such as Boysen's *I Am*, and Camphouse's *Whatever Things* may find that it has greater appeal.

Randall Standridge comes through with *That Old Hound Dog Rag* (grade 2, 2:45, Grand Mesa). It's goofy and derivative: *Lassus Trombone* meets *Yakety Sax* via Spike Jones. In this same vein is Ben Aldridge's *Take a Swing!* (grade 1, 3:00, AWM). This is a fun, dorky little piece, a bit like *Blues for a Killed Kat* but with pep. It also provides some nice opportunities to open up for solos. Another similar tune is Schoenberger's *Winds A' Whispering*, arranged by Pierre La Plante (grade 1.5, 2:00, Daehn). This tune was popularized by Paul Whiteman in 1920, then picked up by Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey. It's a cute, easy fox trot that's a bit corny, but of its time and place. Well worth a look, particularly for those who are drawn to Leroy Anderson's popular tune-smithing style.

Franco Cearini's *Mountain Majesty from "Poema Alpestre, Op. 21"* (grade 4, 6:00, de Haske) is well crafted but overbearing and tedious in a pseudo-Wagnerian way. If you need a dose of Teutonic music, better to go with the man himself. Try Wagner's *Huldigungsmarsch* (grade 4, 6:00). There are several fairly recent arrangements, but if you can get to the 1864 original it's worth it.

Not worth it would be J. Derek Jones' *Impressions on an Old Swedish Air* (grade 3, 3:00, TRN). It's not often that a piece of music makes me angry, but this one did the trick. Cliché in the extreme, this material has already been worked over by a dozen other musicians who did a far better job of it (e.g. Grainger, Grundman, Stuart, Vaughan Williams, Daehn, Ticheli, Grantham, La Plante...). Similar but less egregiously irritating is Gene Milford's *Fantasy on English Folksongs* (grade 3, 5:30, Daehn). Milford uses tunes drawn from Cecil Sharp's 1916 collection in a flat-footed and predictable setting. There is nothing new here – the scoring is similar to Hugh Stuart but with darker colors a la *Mannin Veen*, and the percussion writing brings to mind Guy Woolfenden (see *Gallimaufry*). Contrast Jones' and Milford's efforts with Timothy Broege's *Three Scenes for Band* (grade 2.5, 6:24, Daehn). The opening is familiarly modal and "bandy," but the transitional material is unexpected. The piece holds your attention and builds suspense. The scoring is old fashioned (think 1960s) and the harmonies in the middle section evoke John Barnes Chance, yet the third section leans toward Broadway ("I can do that" from *A Chorus Line*). *Three Scenes* is not a blockbuster, but it shows greater imagination and craft than its counterparts.

Roberto Sierra's *Tumbao from "Sinfonia No. 3, La Salsa"* (grade 5, 7:12, Subito Music) has been transcribed by Mark Scatterday. In fact, the entire *Sinfonia* – all 29 minutes of it – is available. Sierra's music is fun yet substantial, with a great groove. If you're in the market for rhythmic challenges, another good choice is *RIFFS* by Jeff Tyzik (grade 4 ensemble/6 solo, 10:00, available as a rental from Macaroni Music). This is a nicely crafted drum set feature in which the soloist is clearly present without being overbearing. There are also some great opportunities for dialoguing between the soloist and the ensemble percussion section. For young bands looking for percussive opportunities, Mike Golemo's *Medal of Honor* (grade 1, 2:30, Daehn) is a good choice. This dignified, Jager-esque little march has an improvised aleatoric section for several snare drummers. *On the March* by Ronald Knoener (grade 2.5, 2:40, Daehn) combines shades of *Hogan's Heroes*, the main title from *The Great Escape*, *Midway March*,

and *Colonel Bogey*. It is pleasant, unpretentious, and optimistic with a great tune in an era when tune writing is all but dead.

Romany Life from "*The Fortune Teller*" by Victor Herbert, arranged by Larry Daehn (grade 4, 1:25, Daehn), is a flamboyant closer along the lines of Tchaikovsky's *Dance of the Jesters*, with kitschy xylophone and woodwind countermelodies. And speaking of kitsch: check out Carl Strommen's *Broken Bow* (grade 2, 2:40, Alfred). It's an evocative Western romp with the energy of *The Magnificent Seven* in an easily accessible package.