

Concertino For Concert Band

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2019

Composed by James Banner in collaboration with Two Rivers Concert Band for Adopt A Composer, 2018-2019.

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Background and Performance Notes

Introduction

As with all the Adopt A Composer collaborations the pieces are composed for specific ensembles, and in many cases as the process unfolds, specific people within those ensembles. This results in a unique piece that is developed with and tailored for these people. These notes have been compiled with the aim of explaining elements of performance, notation and orchestration for the première performances by the Two Rivers Concert Band in 2019. As well as this, they should give clarity for potential future performances by other bands, and provide performers and band directors with a better understanding of the written music.

General Background

Composing this piece presented a unique challenge, mainly in that the instrumentation was not that of a 'traditional' concert band. For example, there was one trumpet where there can be up to six. This was not at all a bad thing, it just required a different approach which pushed me to explore different directions, especially that of the larger concert band being made up of smaller chamber ensembles. This is something I was keen to explore anyway, given my background in small ensemble performance in jazz and improvised music. Partly inspired by this idea, the overall approach to the piece is that of interlocking and contrasting music written for changing chamber groupings mixed in with a more traditional full ensemble approach. This brought me to the title of the piece, 'Concertino For Concert Band', the word concertino being both a 'little concerto' as well as the group of soloists in a Baroque 'concerto grosso', which is often treated in a contrasting role to the 'ripieno' and 'tutti' larger groups of the ensemble.

Inspiration

During our initial meetings to discuss themes for the piece, the idea of contrasts and opposites came up several times. For the band this was represented mainly in the local area and its history, especially the contrast between the industry and nature, between Bradford/Leeds and Ilkley/The Moors. This is something I have also thought about a lot recently in my approach to improvisation; how can contrasts and opposites actually serve to make music sound more unified? How are they used often unknowingly as a foundation for the music? As a bass player (in a jazz context) often I am aiming to do much less than the other players in order to provide a context for everything else. I ended up using these ideas as my main inspiration throughout the whole piece. This was furthered by the discussion of what the band wanted musically in a new piece; a melody (or melodies) that could tie the piece together and emerge at different points was important. Something 'pastoral(e)' in its nature that could fit alongside or contrast with other things that were happening. In the end, these short melodies are the foundation for all of the music in Movements I and II, alongside a more 'industrial' sounding counterpart. The two parts are equally as valuable; sometimes in conversation, sometimes at odds with each other, not representative but perhaps evocative of the disparity between industry and nature present in the North of England. I was also interested in how I could allow the percussion to play a stronger role in the concert band, rather than a group that in some cases only plays a supportive or time keeping role. Here it has quite an independent part which eventually turns into a 'solo' feature right before Movement III.

Movement III is an attempt to draw the audience into a new way of listening; to see how individuals are contributing to a much bigger overall being. The attention is repeatedly drawn to and from individual people and the overall sound world. Again the inspiration from this comes from the approaches found in chamber music and jazz, where each person contributes their efforts to a greater whole.

Fire and floods are elements of nature that are present in the recent memory of Ilkley. They are something also becoming increasingly common and deadly during the current climate crisis. These words from Two Rivers Concert Band inspired Movement IV, alongside the desire to make my own contribution to the band's range of chorale repertoire. For me it is the climax of the Concertino, and can be performed as a piece in itself, making it a 'detachable chorale'. The call of the Curlew features here too. I owe the initial idea of creating a chorale for wind instruments to Igor Stravinsky.

Performance Notes

Notation

I have used the following elements of notation throughout. It aims to reduce ambiguity, especially between slurs and phrases, and is based on research into existing conventions for wind band notation.

Phrase mark - to show phrasing of the music. A dotted curve has been used to avoid ambiguity between slurs/phrases

Breath mark - breaths can in any case be taken between phrase markings, but these are used as a reminder and/or where there may be a passage that has no phrase mark

rit. Più mosso ♩ = 70

213 214 215

Excerpt from Flute 1, bars 212-215

Regular slur, two notes within the same breath without articulating each note

Dots within a slur indicate a slight emphasis/re-articulation of the note within the same breath. This should create a *portato* - smooth and pulsating - articulation within one breath without any gaps between notes

These notes are individually articulated

First note of a slur does not need an articulation dot as it will naturally be articulated

In the case where a phrase is completely slurred (where the phrase and the slur would be exactly the same length), I have chosen not to include a phrase mark in order to improve legibility. When an instrument is 'divisi' and there is only one phrase marking above or below the staff, the marking applies to both parts. If there is a breath mark within a phrase marking, usually during longer phrases, this shows the optimum place (musically) to breathe, as this may not always be right before a bar line.

Movements and Rehearsal Marks (General)

All of the movements should flow together without pause; the transition from Movements I to II (beginning at letter **E**) should be indistinguishable. Rehearsal marks often don't delineate 'sections' in the traditional sense and are used mainly just to facilitate rehearsal. Where numbers are used after a letter in Movements I and II, this reflects some element of the musical material being connected to the previous rehearsal mark, for example **J** to **J2**. Rehearsal mark **Z** in Movement II should already feel like the beginning of Movement III, and the first clue that you are in Movement III should be the sequential cueing of the solo instruments at **1** - the snare and bass drum part continue from **Z** through to the end of Movement III to help facilitate this. Movement IV is cued during the last seconds of Movement III. Movement IV can also be performed as a standalone piece in itself having a duration of approx. 2:30-3:00 - this would be possible by making Flute II

(which hangs over from **16** of Movement III) tacet for the first 4 bars. There are no bar numbers in Movement III; the last bar of Movement II is 180, and the first bar of Movement IV is 181.

Movement III

Movement III represents a figurative (emotional) or literal (physical) journey, with different moments happening throughout. Overall the Movement should grow and develop, generally speaking starting very sparsely and by the end being busier and more intense. There should be no sudden transition between sections.

Ideas for realisation:

- Players should not wait for the cue for the next section and then begin to play at the same time; this is to be avoided as much as possible - instead, try to leave some space and listen to others before playing your phrase. Think of your part as one continuous idea that changes slightly over the course of 5 minutes, not 16 different parts that must change as soon as the cues are given.
- It is encouraged that the given length of time is left between phrases to reinforce the idea of sparsity becoming more dense as the movement progresses.
- If you are in the middle playing a long note/phrase, for example in section **3**, then section **4** is cued, don't suddenly stop or immediately change the note to fit section **4**, just hold it, leave some space, then continue in **4**.
- When the Saxophones enter with their long held notes (from **9**), they are underpinning the harmony that is already happening in the instruments that play 'moving' phrases creating a carpet that reinforces and supports the rest of the band. Their entries can be 'dal niente' (from nothing) or independent in order to avoid a sudden influx of sound. Players should breathe alternately to create as sustained a sound as possible.

Notes on Movement III:

At **1**, each instrument that plays should be cued individually over the duration of the section.

The overall direction of this movement is one of growth (dynamically) as rising and falling tension (harmonically). The descriptive words are there to aid or remind the player during performance.

The times in boxes e.g. at **15** 4:55 are the times at which the cue happens. This is mainly to aid the director of the band but can also be useful if the ensemble plays with timers/stopwatches, allowing them to perform without a director, and is also useful in representing the length of each section.

The phrases which use melodies from earlier movements are only played once on cue in each section.

Tutti Flutes from **7** - the descending phrase can be any pitches which are comfortable to play at a fast rate. They diverge from unison(ish) to independent to create a busier feeling, like a drip becoming a stream, or like one bird being joined by a whole flock. Other instruments with this figure are also free to choose their own pitches.

Those who fade/diminuendo should begin to do so immediately upon reaching **15** and not wait for any cue.

There is always the possibility that someone can choose to go away from the written material and then return to the page, creating an occasional surprising moment and momentary textural change.

The 'tutti' instruments could also be played by a single instrument, where the band is not large enough to provide a 'tutti' section.

Orchestration

As mentioned in the introduction, the nature of the piece means that it is tailored specially for the Two Rivers Concert Band. Performances by other bands may require adjustments to dynamics and number of players on certain parts in order to achieve the same sonic result. In addition there are some overall dynamic markings which may appear misleading upon looking at the score. These two points are particularly relevant at the following moments:

Movement II letter **E** - where the alternating Ab Eb motif is introduced, this is often accompanied by a reduction in dynamic. This coincides each time with the instruction of a new instrument on this part (Flute II, Clarinet I, Trumpet), meaning the overall dynamic level of the motif in the ensemble should actually remain constant until letter **F**, rather than decrescendo. Depending on the number of players in the band, this may need to be adjusted.

Movement II letter **F** - although there are 3 different dynamic markings, the two musical elements (the chordal part and the alternating Ab Eb motif) to this part should be as audible as each other. Again, the number of players in the band may dictate the dynamic markings beyond the detail in the score.

Movement II letter **S** - similar to above there are two melodies (both marked 'forte') which should be equally as present, with an accompaniment part (marked 'mezzo forte') developed from **R**. The accompaniment part is designed to support both melodies until bar 130, where one of the melodies joins the accompaniment, leaving a singular overriding melody until **V**. There are some instances where the accompaniment may be marked 'forte' too (e.g. Bass Clarinet) usually in cases where an instrument (usually solo) may have to play louder to match the volume of others.

'Solo' and 'divisi' (where 'divisi' utilises less than the full group of instruments e.g. '2 fl. div.') - these parts are designed to be shared out amongst ensemble members where desired, so that each individual player in the ensemble has the opportunity to perform in more soloistic or exposed role. Having said that, this is not a requirement and it is also possible to leave these moments to the first two people in each instrumental section in a more conventional way.

Curlew calls

Movement IV letter **I** (bar 247) - 2 Flute I, Oboes and Trumpet have the roll of playing the call of the Curlew, a bird found in the moorland areas of Yorkshire. The notation is an approximation of their call; the best way of representing this on the respective instruments is by listening to recordings of the call which can be found online and trying to replicate this. Based on the examples I found, the interval of the call is usually always a minor 6th and throughout its repetitions remains quite constantly on one starting pitch (in the example below, concert A). The performer should repeat the call independently or in conversation with the other performers as they see fit - the bird repeats their call on average 5-8 times in one phrase but also has moments of calling just once or twice. The performer is free to decide this, as well as the starting pitch of the call.

n.b. - some instrumentalists may find the first acciaccatura more difficult than others, especially as it should be performed very quickly (e.g. instruments in the concert band vs string instruments), in this case it's fine to leave it out



Percussion

The percussion section is divided into 4 roles in Movements I, II and III, and is tacet in Movement IV.

Movement I + II - 1 person playing both cymbal and triangle. 3 people for bass drum, snare drum and glockenspiel.

n.b. at Movement II letter **Y** - the cymbal and triangle parts in combination are rhythmically quite difficult for one person to perform. As the snare drum and bass drum are tacet here, one person from that role may opt to play either the triangle or cymbal part either by quickly moving to the cymbal/triangle already present on stage or by having an additional cymbal/triangle set up next to them

Movement III - 4 people for glockenspiel, xylophone, snare and bass drum

Movement IV - tacet - option to join the winds/brass for those who play a second instrument

Miscellaneous

‘optional 8vb’ ‘optional 8va’ ‘tacet when too low’ ‘play 8va if necessary’ etc. - in all cases, the written notes are preferred. ‘Tacet when too low’ is specific mostly to Trombone 3, e.g. bar 25; the low part is covered by another instrument (usually Tuba), and simply playing another part, e.g. Trombone 4, would disrupt the balance of the chord/orchestration.

n.b. To give context for other bands, the Trombone 3 in Two Rivers Concert Band covered low material that is present in existing repertoire, usually that which is written for Bass Trombone. This also means that the Trombone 3 part could be much more easily played by a Bass Trombone.

In no cases (unless specified) should the written notes just be taken up or down the octave to increase playability.

In Movement IV there is no percussion. This is purposely so that the Movement is flexible enough to be performed as a standalone piece by other ensembles which may not have any percussion, and also to provide contrast to the percussion heavy middle of the piece. For Two Rivers Concert Band, this means that the percussionists who play other wind/brass instruments can join the ensemble at this point.

The accents in Movement IV only indicate a slight emphasis.

Several instruments in The Two Rivers Band are solo when in other bands they may be more numerous (e.g. the French Horn, Trumpet, Bass Clarinet, Soprano Sax). In parts of the music where these instrumentalists play solo, I have included a ‘solo’ marking anyway in order to signify an overall reduction in instrumentation at that point (which may affect approach the performer uses when compared to ensemble playing), and in order to provide clarity should the instrumentation of the Two Rivers Concert Band change, or for future performances by other ensembles. The ‘solo’ or ‘tutti’ markings are valid until the next marking.

Sometimes there are 2 breath marks shown in ‘divisi’ passages, this is to denote when each voice (upper or lower) should breathe.

Dotted bar lines (Movements I and II) indicate a change in texture, new phrase, or feeling of a new downbeat without changing time signatures.

Movement IV bar 230 *sfzmp* - this is not a traditional suddenly accented note and immediate reduction to mp, rather an emphasis on that beat and diminuendo to mp by beat 2