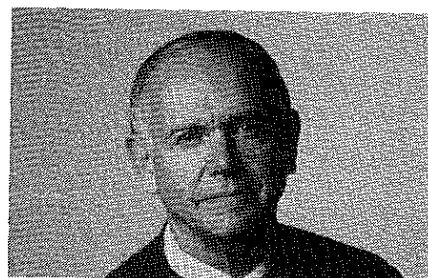


The Battisti Interview — 4

# What is 'Good' Music?



In this final part of a long conversation with the Editor at the Royal Northern College of Music during last year's WASBE Conference, Frank Battisti gives some guidelines to help tell the good from the not-so-good.

*Apart from instinct, how can one tell a good composition from a bad?*

Holding as I do the Chair of the WASBE International Repertoire Committee, I am looking for compositions possessing *artistic merit*. Here are the guidelines I have laid down. They are borrowed from Acton Ostling Jr, who used them in the evaluation of literature for his Ph.D dissertation *An Evaluation of Wind Band Literature According to Specific Criteria of Serious Artistic Merit*.

### Criteria for Judging a Composition for Artistic Merit

**1. The Composition has form – not 'a form' but form – and reflects a proper balance between repetition and contrast.** This addresses the overall organization of the piece. The criterion in this instance should not be an identifiable or specific mould as in the standard classic forms (e.g. rondo, song and trio, sonata, fugue) but form in *music* – an orderly arrangement of elements, given the stylistic context. Grove's Dictionary states that repetition and contrast are the twin principles of musical form. This criterion asks an evaluation based on judgement as to whether or not they are in balance in the composition.

**2. The composition has shape and design, creating the impression of conscious choice and judicious arrangement.** In *Perspectives in Music Theory*, Paul Cooper speaks of control in organization. Likewise, this criterion seeks to address the craftsmanship of the composer in controlling dynamic and static gestures; controlling phrasing and cadencing in context, the pacing of musical events, and internal arrival points.

**3. The composition has craftsmanship in orchestration, demonstrating a proper balance between transparent and tutti scoring and between solo and group colors.** In *The Art of Orchestration*, Bernard Rogers establishes an analogy between the artist's palette and selection of instrumental colors in music; single families and solo instruments are transparent; mixtures produce secondary shades; and increased mixing and doubling leads to neutrality and greyness

in color. Factors of musical color and texture must be in proper balance in the judgement of the evaluator.

**4. The composition is sufficiently unpredictable to preclude an immediate grasp of its musical meaning.** If the tendencies of musical movement are directly apparent and totally predictable upon a first hearing of the composition, the value of the music is minimized. This does not imply that only complex music can meet the standards of serious artistic merit: a composition which is not complex might provoke a unique response from the listener, placing it in the category of being sufficiently unpredictable to preclude an immediate grasp of its meaning and being able to sustain its intrigue through repeated hearings.

**5. The route which the composition travels in initiating its musical tendencies and probable musical goals is not completely direct and not completely obvious.** Leonard B. Mayer states the following principles: if a work establishes no tendencies, it will be of no value; if the most probable goal is reached in the most direct manner, given the stylistic context, the musical event will be of little value; and if the goal is never reached, or if the tendencies activated become dissipated in the press of overelaborate or irrelevant diversions, the value of the music will tend to be minimal.

**6. The composition is consistent in its quality throughout its length, and throughout each of its sections.** This criterion would apply, for instance, to the various sections of a single movement composition; in a suite, the movements should not be alternately profound and trivial; and in a symphony, the final movement should reach the same level of quality as the opening and middle movements.

**7. The composition is consistent in its style, reflecting a complete grasp of technical details and displaying clearly conceived ideas while avoiding lapses into trivial, futile, or unsuitable passages.** In *The Beautiful in Music*, Eduard Hanslick states that a composer shows his 'good style' by

avoiding everything futile or unsuitable as he carries out a clearly conceived idea and brings every technical detail into artistic agreement with the whole. Any eclecticism in the music must be justified by its reflection of the artistic concept behind the whole composition rather than existing as a chance happening indicating either incompetence or lack of care in the arrangement of technical details.

**8. The composition reflects ingenuity in its development.** In *The Art of Judging Music*, Virgil Thompson discusses the ability of a composition to hold a listener's attention, enabling him to remember it vividly. The terms 'development' and 'ingenuity in development' are not restricted to a specific sense, as in the development of a sonata; music of high quality which is not conventionally melodic will have some developmental aspects which characterize the composition. The ingenious element might be melody, but might also be in the area of orchestration, harmony, rhythm and other elements.

**9. The composition is genuine in idiom.** This statement seeks assurance that the composition is true to the concept either implied by its title, or to the composer's intent in presenting the work as one of artistic merit. While it is theoretically possible for a fine piece of music to be totally mistitled by the composer – logic dictating that the composer's selection of a title has no bearing on the quality of the music – this criterion seeks to guard against defects which are more basic to the quality of the music than the mere incongruous nature of the title in comparison with the music. There is much wind band music which is permeated with melodic and harmonic clichés, exuding the sound of commercial music while attempting to parade as a serious composition under the banner of artistic respectability. While often well-crafted in its orchestration, such music is falsely alluring and should be avoided in considering a repertoire of artistic merit.

**10. The composition reflects a musical validity which transcends factors of historical importance or pedagogical**

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**usefulness.** An evaluator should rate a composition only upon the basis of its significance as a composition of artistic merit. Care must be exercised to prevent such factors as the historical importance of a composition from contaminating an evaluation on a basis of merit. An evaluator should also avoid high ratings for a work which suits the wind band medium well but which might not withstand close musical scrutiny.

In summary, the primary goal for utilizing these criteria in an evaluation of compositions is to identify a wind band repertoire which an open-minded conductor would treat with respect. However, the selection of compositions does not preclude the inclusion of programmatic and/or humorous music. The standard should be musical quality, and the model should be the great variety of compositions considered in the term 'standard wind band/ensemble repertoire'

*Is any lasting recognition likely to come to a composer who writes in a traditional style?*

My answer has to be no. We need music with fresh ideas and sounds. We don't want imitations. My criterion is *create; don't imitate*.

*In thanking you for your time, patience and courtesy for this long and (for me) absorbing conversation, I want to ask you as my last question: what is the next practical step we can take on this journey which is to last for a couple of centuries and more?*

We can realise that we need excellent music. Therefore we need to get the best composers we can to write for us and to see that composers like Benjamin Britten don't die before we can get to them. We should try to get to all the recognised great music creators in the world. Once they're gone, that's it! It all starts with somebody asking 'That's the responsibility of individuals and of organisations.'

We need to invest our energies in trying to advocate the best possible training for teachers and conductors. The sooner we can develop that for those responsible for leading people through the study of music in wind bands, the sooner we'll produce a generation of young people who appreciate music.

If we can do that, then the things that we're so concerned with - the survival of music as an important component in our society - in the lives of people - will be accomplished.

We all need to do as much as we can to try to elevate the performance level, the appreciation level and the knowledge of all people who are involved in wind band/ensemble activity. Let's create a situation where people who *want* to improve will have the *opportunity* to develop and grow.

**Concluded.**

### Music Should Be Fun

As always, I found the last edition of WINDS to be fun with a great deal of information on personalities, not much about music. If I were a band director in a school, I would look to BASBWE or WASBE for leadership and guidance. Do either give it? Perhaps this is one reason why membership does not climb as it did at the start. Still you provide a good professional service which WASBE is unlikely to be able to match.

I was delighted to be featured conducting on the front cover of WINDS, Summer 1992 - an honour indeed! But my ego took a nasty knock from the heading immediately below: *Conductors! Do We Really Need 'Em?* It's lucky we conductors are thick-skinned.

**Tim Reynish**  
RNCM, Manchester

### Vote of Confidence

The latest issue of WINDS is terrific! Everything is so appealing that it is difficult to take leave from reading it. I have really worried at times that BASBWE takes your inspiring work for granted for where would the Association be without WINDS? Where indeed is WASBE without WINDS? I was delighted at the surprise presentation made by our new Chairman on behalf of the membership to the Publisher and the Editor of the magazine at the Conference Dinner at Warwick, amid loud applause from the large number of members present. It is a honour and a vote of confidence so richly deserved.

**John A. Stanley**  
Northwood, Middlesex

### The Lusty Horn

I am a long-time fan of euphonium soloist Brian Bowman, whose article in the Autumn issue of WINDS I enjoyed immensely. I was particularly pleased that someone of Brian's stature has finally taken a stab at trying to sort out what exactly we mean when we refer to a euphonium, baritone horn, tenor tuba and so forth. However, I think Brian's definition is a wee bit too facile when he states that the word 'euphonium' should be used to include 'the American "baritone horn" ... as well as similar instruments with other names (filocorno, saxhorn, tenor tuba, tenor horn, etc.)' The problem is that different composers mean very different things when they orchestrate for these instruments.

For example, when Bruckner scores for two tenor tubas in his homage à Wagner Seventh Symphony (and Ninth), he is referring to that very different beast, the *Wagner tuba*, which Wagner states in the score of Siegfried 'corresponds best to horns in F and therefore should be played by ... the 3rd and 4th horns.' Likewise, in *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky had in mind Wagner tubas

when he called for two tenor tubas. On the other hand, Holst (*Planets*) definitely means euphonium when he scores for tenor tuba; Janacek (*Sinfonietta*) definitely means euphonium when he scores for tenor tuba; Richard Strauss definitely means euphonium when he scores for tenor tuba - sometimes. In the tone poems *Don Quixote* and *Heldenleben*, Strauss writes for a tenor tuba which is intended to be played by a euphonium. But in *Elektra* and *Alpine Symphony* he writes for two tenor tubas that enables the 5th and 7th Horn to pick up a doubling fee on Wagner tuba. And the heroic solo that Mahler gives the tenor horn in his Seventh Symphony has nothing to do with the brass band tenor horn (which, just to confuse things a bit more, the Americans call the *alto* horn). It is to be played on a euphonium - as Brian says, the larger bore euphonium - not, in my opinion, the small-bore baritone horn/euphonium which is often used (because the part says *tenor horn* and not *tenor tuba*?)

And what did Shostakovich want the solo in the 2nd movement from *The Age of the Gold* to be played on when he scored for a *baritono*? Large bore or small? A former orchestra manager of the CBSO adamantly insisted that a French Horn must have been intended 'because a euphonium can't play as high as a D' (!) The *Bydlo* solo in *Pictures*, by the way; did Ravel really intend for this to be performed on a euphonium? And what about the ophecleide? I'm not going to touch that one, not with a ten-foot barge pole (nor even a ten-foot alphon for that matter); nor the bombardon, whatever the helicon that is!

**Ken Shifrin**

Principal trombone - City of Birmingham  
Symphony Orchestra

### Going for Gold

I must take issue with various points made by Philip Sims (WINDS, Autumn 1992, page 38). No matter how you promote the National Concert Band Festival as a 'festival' as long as Gold, Silver and Bronze awards are given, there are going to be 'Winners and Losers'. No one goes to the Olympic Games to get a silver medal; everyone wants the Gold. If Boosey & Hawkes wants a 'Festival', then awards must be stopped and *everyone* given a standard certificate. If you give awards, then it is a competition, no matter which way you look at it. If one school band plays *Mazama* and another plays *Circus Suite*, then of course the adjudicators will compare the different bands' performances and standard of repertoire. It's only human nature.

I agree we don't want too many stuffy rules, but better guidelines *have* to be given and I agree with Mr Paton that a band made up of mostly Local Education instruments and pupils should be in the