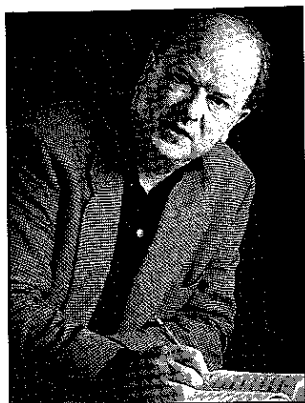


# Birthday Treat

a Grade 3 piece for Concert Band by Guy Woolfenden



A year or so ago Tim Reynish wrote to me and several other composer friends to ask if we would be interested in writing some Grade 3 or 4 pieces to celebrate his impending 60th birthday on March 9th 1998. I was keen to oblige, but needed advice and a good look at a selection of successful pieces at that level. Who better to ask than Carol Condliffe, who was extremely helpful and informative in her advice, and also sent me a clutch of scores to peruse, among which were:

Stuart Johnson	Overture: Spirit of Adventure	R Smith	Copland ar. Merlin Patterson	Down a Country Lane	B & H
arr Pierre La Plante	Lakeland Portrait	Kjos	Thomas C Duffy	Snakes	Ludwig
Dana Wilson	Sang	Ludwig	arr Frank Ticheli	Amazing Grace	Manhattan Beach Music
David Maslanka	Rollo takes a Walk	Kjos			

Carol also told me a few home truths about available instrumentation in school and youth bands, and, granted that, as a theatre musician, I have acquired a practical attitude to such problems, I was quite pleased to finally produce a score without cues, that makes sense even if Piccolo, E flat Clarinet, E flat Alto Clarinet, Baritone Saxophone and 3rd and 4th Horns are unavailable.

My next problems included finding enough hours in the day: I had just started work on a commission, *French Impressions*, for Metropolitan Wind Symphony in Boston, Mass., and was coming to terms with an alien monster called Sibelius, that was lurking in a back room, largely ignored by me, save for work on some Christmas Carol arrangements and teaching pieces for horn and piano. My wife Jane, however, had already tamed the monster, and had it eating out of the palm of her hand without taking her fingers off, and purring with pleasure as it spewed forth band parts for other Ariel Music publications in any key or clef required by the EEC! *Birthday Treat* was, therefore, my first attempt to use a computer to compose, and for Jane to produce the score (except for the outer cover) and parts completely "in-house".

As Tim had asked me to write something for his birthday, I assumed he wanted a piece that was both celebratory and personal, as well as being (hopefully) a useful addition to the repertory. On the day I got down to work in earnest, Sonny (as in *Sonny and Cher*) died - younger readers ask your mums and dads (or grandparents) - and snatches of his greatest hit, "I got you babe", were repeatedly played on the radio news bulletins. The catchy rhythm of those four syllables subliminally suggested the words "Happy Birthday" to me, and a theme which had possibilities of development and variation came into my head.

Example 1:

**Allegro amabile** ♩ = 116



A secondary theme, initially found in the first trumpet part, also emerged:

Example 2:



and I was in business.

This leads to a more reflective *poco meno mosso* passage which ultimately accelerates back to the Happy Birthday theme 1 (Tempo primo) and a change of key to C major.

I found to my delight that, with a bit of fiddling, the celebrated horn theme from Till Eulenspiegel fitted my tune as a counterpoint - very appropriate, as I first met Tim in the horn section of the National Youth Orchestra, and, later, played with him at Cambridge and in Sadler's Wells Opera. Tim went on to perform with distinction in the CBSO.

The coda to *Birthday Treat* involves pedal points, displaced accents, a rag bag of devices that, on reflection, owes some debt of gratitude to Manuel de Falla, Emmanuel Chabrier and Eric (Dam Busters) Coates, but absolutely nothing to William Shakespeare! I forgot to say that just before starting work on *Birthday Treat*, I decided to leave the Royal Shakespeare Company, and give more time to composing concert music and conducting, so writing the piece was a very happy experience for me, as it signalled a fresh start, a new way of composing (Sibelius) and a break from the Bard.

In its published form *Birthday Treat* ends with a united fortissimo shout of "Happy Birthday", which, it has been pointed out, can be changed to "Merry Christmas" without any alteration to the rhythm! Foreign language versions don't fit so well: "bon anniversaire!" or "Herzlichen Glückwunsch zum Geburtstag" are a bit of a mouthful, so sales in France and Germany, not to mention Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, may be disappointing.

I was very happy with the first performance of *Birthday Treat*, which had been expertly prepared by Adele Sellers with her gifted Northamptonshire County Youth Concert Band, and all I had to do as a guest conductor, after one short rehearsal, was to enjoy myself and remember to observe my own metronome marks! What I would be most interested to discover is whether *Birthday Treat* fits the bill as a true Grade 3 piece, and I would welcome some feedback from directors of youth bands, to help and encourage me and other composers to write original material that is technically possible and musically satisfying.

Guy Woolfenden