PROGRAMMING and REPERTOIRE

Timothy Reynish

During the past century, and especially the last five decades, a host of incredible pieces for wind, brass and percussion have been created, most still not known in our festivals, radio programmes or even on disc. Why is the public perception of Wind Orchestra music still that its natural home is only in ceremonial, education or entertainment?

Re-brand band

Perhaps we shall never live down the name of "band". "Band" has connotations that we cannot escape, and perhaps we need to re-brand ourselves and use the terms Wind Orchestra or Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Winds, Wind Sinfonia or whatever, but somehow the "Wind Ensemble of the Coldstream Guards" does not have the same ring.

Gunther Schuller articulated this problem in a letter some time ago:

Unfortunately the situation is worse because of the social/professional context to which wind music is relegated. As long as wind ensembles and bands are located primarily (almost entirely) in schools and academic institutions, the rest of the music world will never take wind and band music very seriously, no matter how good the music is and how well its performed. They see it as relegated to students and amateurs, and just ignore it, don't give the field any respect

When ignorance is bliss

Another big problem for me is the ignorance of the "profession" about our repertoire. Many of the best works for wind are not published and are not programmed regularly. I would love to see BASBWE or WASBE or some other body representing the world of wind music, engage a public relations officer who regularly made contact with the musical press, with radio and television, with festivals, agents, administrators, conductors, professional ensembles, conservatoires, to keep them informed of new commissions, new recordings, new initiatives as well as the repertoire already in existence.

It is risky, espousing causes, and Warren Benson challenged us to take these risks in discussing "Aesthetic Criteria for Selecting an International Repertoire", when he proposed three very personal issues: commitment, exposure and risk:

Sooner or later, we have to take the responsibility in our own hands for the progress of WASBE, individually. It's not an international conscience that we're talking about. We're talking about individuals and, when we all do that, there's going to be a glow. I don't want WASBE to turn into a dispensary where people come every two years to get lists that they can go home and file and forget about and do the same old stuff they've been doing before

Compromise

All of us tend to play safe when we programme in case the Honours Band is less good than last year, or the wind ensemble we are conducting is not as good as it sounds on disc. We pick music which we are sure will work, perhaps without exposed solos, perhaps, indeed, scoring with safe doublings, as in the more traditional middle-of-the-road repertoire. Also, whereas our orchestral colleagues tend to guest conduct an entire programme, we will guest conduct one or two pieces, so that the programmes tend to be less well-planned as a whole entity, but turn out to be a gallimaufry of periods and styles, dependent on the occasion or the whim of a couple of conductors, rather than the artistic growth of the players and audience.

Thus my suggested title for our 2003 WASBE Conference Wednesday discussion was *Compromise*. We compromise the artistry of our programme selection according to the event (attracting alumni, getting a big audience through a "pops" formula, following thematic links which lead us into less than excellent music). We compromise our artistry by agreeing to programme a new work which might turn out to be terrible, or by working with a faculty member on a really poor concerto, because he/she, and probably we ourselves, knows no better solo repertoire for that instrument. We compromise our artistry by relying on tried and trusted old favourites which now, viewed objectively, need to be replaced by better pieces. We compromise our artistry by recklessly mixing genres, playing masterpieces by Holst or Hindemith, Schoenberg or Schwantner, alongside old-fashioned transcriptions of standard orchestral repertoire or brilliant Hollywood-style arrangements of hit tunes from film or musical, and we must include a march because that is part of our tradition.

Jimmy Tarbuck as King Lear

The actual mix of a programme has often been likened to putting together a good meal. A substantial course often needs a sorbet to follow, but a whole succession of sorbets is self-defeating. I found the decision of Keith Allen at the BASBWE Conference to follow the one substantial work, Daugherty's *UFO*, with a short bonne-bouche, so that we were left, some of us, with the feeling that the whole evening had been spent with short entertaining pieces which detracted from each other. As one colleague put it, "It was like inviting Jimmy Tarbuck to play

King Lear; nothing wrong with Jimmy Tarbuck, nothing wrong with *King Lear*, but together!

Encores

The same care has to be taken with encores When at the WASBE Conference in Lucerne, the United States Marine Band followed a great performance of *Lincolnshire Posy*, (itself a suite of six short movements), with three marches as encores, I found this completely satisfying and natural. When the National Youth Wind Orchestra of Holland at WASBE Boston played an arrangement of *Daphnis and Chloë*, and the Dallas Wind Symphony gave a superb *Symphony in B♭* of Hindemith at CBDNA in Denton, I did not need a James Barnes encore after Ravel, nor a Sousa march after Hindemith. A group of marches, or a lighter piece, would have been perhaps appropriate earlier in the programme. And when one of our top professional wind bands at Lucerne played *Selections from Abba* followed by *Brass Explosion* after a programme that verged on being light, I and many others were irate. The band claimed that it showed their versatility and also that the audience loved it. I believe very strongly that our preoccupation with playing "something for everybody" or "sending people home with something they can whistle" often results in programmes which send mixed messages to the public.

The average music lover is given a clear choice by orchestras, and can go to a concert knowing that he/she will hear a traditional classic/romantic/modern programme, a "pops" programme, an experimental programme or a parks programme. With our continuing tradition of compromise, our concerts are too often an uncomfortable mélange of all of these styles.

Johan de Meij and Warren Benson

In the superb WASBE Journal of 1998, edited by David Whitwell and subtitled "On the Role of Emotion in Music", Johan de Meij wrote:

I think there are several reasons why most audiences remain unmoved by the average band concert

First, the programming consists of too many short works in different styles, including entertainment works, marches etc., while substantial works of high artistic quality are often missing

Second, conductors pay too much attention to technical aspects and spectacular effects.

Third, I have seen too many mechanical, non-emotional conductors, with whom technique and precision prevail over emotion and musical depth

Fourth, I do not enjoy concerts if there is a lack of quality in non-professional players, or a lack of passion with professional players

In the same edition, Warren Benson wrote:

I wish I could hear more wind conductors and instrumental teachers using better and larger vocabularies that relate to beauty, aesthetics, to charm, to gentleness, strength and power without rancour or anger, to useful tonal vibrancy, live sound, to grace of movement, to stillness, to fervour, to the depth of great age, the exultation of great happiness, the feel of millennia, the sweetness and purity of lullabies, the precision of fine watches, the reach into time-space of great love and respect, the care of phrasing, the delicacy of balance, the ease of warmth, the resonance of history, the susurrus of wind in the pines and whisperings in churches, the intimacy of the solo instrument, the kind weight of togetherness and the rising spirit of creating something, bringing something to life from cold print, living music, moving music

More recently still I heard a wind band at a university famous for its contemporary music following a performance of Martin Ellerby's *Paris Sketches* with what I considered to be a painfully crude, poorly-balanced, out-of-tune performance of a rock arrangement of the *Bach Toccata in D Minor*. Dramatically mixed messages again! I don't go clubbing much (never did), but I find the rock idiom exciting, and thoroughly enjoyed the CBSO and Simon Rattle performing *Blood on the Floor* by Mark-Anthony Turnage, and I loved conducting Christian Lindberg's funky, post-Zappa *Concerto for Wind Orchestra*. However, can anyone take us seriously, if we mix up so many types of music? Does it matter if they don't? Why not simply go on dumbing down our medium, providing a quick fix with fast food repertoire, which eventually exhausts the interest of both players and audiences?

WILLIAM REYNISH MEMORIAL COMMISSIONS

Tim and Hilary Reynish initiated a series of commissions in memory of their third son William, who tragically died while on a mountain in the Pyrenees three years ago. It is a wonderful tribute to the memory of their beloved son and has already produced some impressive scores.

2001 Matthew Taylor *Blasket Dances* (14mins)

2002 Judith Bingham *Bright Spirit* (7mins)

2003 Christopher Marshall *L'homme armé* (16mins)

2003 Adam Gorb *Dances from Crete* (19mins)

2004 Fergal Carroll *Song of Lir* (7mins)

Commissions for 2004 and 2005 are as follows:

Kenneth Hesketh
Singapore Wind Symphony December 2004

Larry Bitensky
Joint commission with Murray State University, Kentucky, March 2005

Richard Rodney Bennett
Concerto for Saxophone Quartet, International Consortium March 2005

Edwin Roxburgh – New work for 2005

Tim Reynish briefly reflects on the pieces already completed in this impressive and moving commissioning series.

Bright Spirit is agonizing in its restraint, shifting chords, little ostinati, just two climaxes, the last after a steady pile-up of repeated phrases.

Chris Marshall is a New Zealand composer whose orchestral music I heard out in Christchurch; I immediately got in touch and commissioned a school band piece *Aue*, followed by *L'homme armé*, a work loosely patterned after the Dvorak Symphonic Variations with great solo parts for everyone, a Maori War Haka, a Funeral March, snippets of jazz, a terrific piece for both audience and ensemble.

Perhaps Adam Gorb's most successful piece to date is *Yiddish Dances* written for my 60th birthday. *Dances from Crete* bids fair to be equally successful with its theatrical use of traditional Cretan dances, ending in a plate-smashing dance to end all dances.

Fergal Carroll responded to my quest for a major work at Grade 2/3 with a miniature tone-poem of about seven minutes, a beautifully crafted little fantasy on a traditional Irish tune. I believe that this is a major addition to the middle school band repertoire.

Approaching *Rhapsody in Blue*

Catherine Parsonage

Arguably the most famous piece in the jazz-influenced genre, *Rhapsody in Blue* was commissioned by Paul Whiteman for a concert entitled 'An Experiment in Modern Music' on 12th February 1924. The orchestration was made by Ferde Grofé, who was one of Whiteman's arrangers, and drew on the multi-instrumental capabilities of Whiteman's reed players. The piece was later re-orchestrated for symphony orchestra, but it is the original band version that concerns us here. For more detail on all aspects of the piece, I highly recommend David Schiff's book published in the Cambridge Music Handbooks series.

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Due to the rapid speed with which *Rhapsody in Blue* was composed and orchestrated (Gershwin apparently only began work on the commission having read a newspaper report announcing it in January), the original manuscript score of the band version of *Rhapsody in Blue* is rather sketchy. A facsimile of the score is published by Warner Brothers, and shows Grofé's use of shorthand rather than writing out repeated passages, indicating that this was a working document rather than a fair copy. Also notable is that the score is dated 4th February, just over a week before the first performance. The piano part, which was probably partially improvised by Gershwin at the first performance, is only roughly represented in the score. The details that we now expect as part of the piece are often missing and one entire cadenza (before the central slow section) is not written out at all, merely giving the direction to the conductor to 'wait for nod'.

The subsequent number of printed versions in which the *Rhapsody* exists causes problems when trying to define the precise identity of the piece, and has given importance to various recordings in preserving the detail and sense of the work. Recording has always played an important role in preserving and disseminating performance practice in jazz, an orally based and improvisational art form. In the case of *Rhapsody in Blue* recording has played a vital part in the ongoing development of the work in performance, to the extent that certain features of the work seem to have originated almost entirely from recorded rather than notated sources. A famous example of this is the opening, which was performed by clarinettist Ross Gorman as a glissando as a joke in rehearsal. Gershwin, however, liked the sound and instructed Gorman to perform the theme with as much of a wail as possible at the première (Schiff, 1992:102). The glissando is not indicated on the score produced by Grofé but is present in the early recordings of the piece.

Similarly, recordings have clearly influenced the progressive standardisation of interpretations of the central slow section (*Andante moderato*) of the piece, described by Schiff as 'the most famous melody in twentieth century concert music' (1992:22), which is rarely played as written today. The piano rolls that Gershwin made of the piece, in which he performed both the solo and ensemble parts (issued in 1927 but probably made in 1925 and now available as CD transfers) demonstrate free use of *rubato* where the tempo varies constantly and widely. However, in most modern performances the first two bars of the theme are usually performed at half the speed of the following six bars in which the counter-melody appears, a practice that Schiff suggests appears to have resulted from crude mechanisation of the *rubato* in Gershwin's performances (1997:22).

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The recording of the *Rhapsody* made by Michael Tilson Thomas in which Gershwin 'performs' the solo piano part through a playback of the piano roll using a modern pianola equivalent may be regarded as the most 'authentic' modern recording of the piece. But even here, there is a typical 'mechanised' interpretation of the initial part of the *Andante moderato* section performed by the ensemble alone (not following the way in which Gershwin performed this *tutti* section on the original piano roll). Hence, when 'Gershwin' enters in the repetition of the melody the tempo almost doubles and the band has to conform to his flamboyant *rubato*. This performance can sound uncomfortable in the tutti sections with piano, as the band races to keep up with Gershwin, and the concept has the inherent flaw that a solo recording has been transported into an ensemble context.

Indeed, recordings made by Gershwin with the Paul Whiteman Band provide evidence that Gershwin performed the piece differently with a band accompaniment. Such performances suggest that the slow section should be interpreted as a foxtrot (a popular dance of the day) in 2/2 (Schiff, 1997:23), albeit with some flexibility in recognition that the *Rhapsody* is a jazz-influenced concert piece rather than *actual* dance music. This is an important distinction, as in the 1920s the very nomenclature of the decade - the 'jazz age' - indicates that jazz was not only popular music but also an aesthetic movement that permeated to the core of society. As jazz rose to prominence and extreme universal popularity in the 'jazz age' of the 1920s, it became the soundtrack not only to the underground clubs and bars of America, but also in Europe and as an important influence on both high art and mainstream culture. It is this atmosphere that I believe Gershwin's *Rhapsody* expresses so wonderfully. It is clearly not an accurate representation of jazz of the period, and does not preserve history like a photograph or recording. It does, however, clearly express the spirit of the 'jazz age' seen through the eyes of this composer and as such is fundamentally authentic as a personal expression.

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Often, additional contextual research is

necessary to provide greater depth of understanding of the performance style that we might encounter on recordings in which composers perform or conduct their own music. The development of recording technology in the twentieth century has allowed us unprecedented access to many composers performing and conducting their own work. It is tempting to give such documentary evidence unequivocal importance as the 'authentic' readings of the work to which we should aspire in our own performances. However, although it is possible to replicate the details of a recording exactly ('authentically') this does not necessarily ensure a convincing performance – it may be historically accurate but dull!

In addition, it may be argued that since time has elapsed since the original performance, whilst it may be re-performed physically it is actually impossible to replicate aesthetically, as it will be tainted by our new knowledge and experiences as performers and audience. Interestingly Tilson Thomas, in a later recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* with orchestra in which he performs the piano part himself, reverts wholesale to a typical romantic interpretation. As Schiff points out, 'it seems hard for any performers, no matter how historically informed, to give up the full-blown romantic approach to the theme in favour of a more authentic rendition that usually sounds saccharine' (1992:68). It seems that Tilson Thomas' later interpretation, although it may be criticised for a lack of historical authenticity is arguably *more* authentic emotionally. Thus, it seems that the most sensible approach is to use 'authentic' sources such as composer's recordings in our preparation for performances to help us to produce an interpretation that is faithful to the score and the composer's intention (as far as this can be determined) but yet we must remain true to our own creativity and integrity as musicians.

In jazz, the phenomenon of performer/composer is extremely common, as many musicians compose their own material and improvisation, which may be regarded as a form of composing, is inherent in the style. As a result, recordings and, of course, live performances are obviously extremely useful sources when learning about jazz. Although the practice of 'sitting in' jazz bands and learning from other musicians on the job is less common today, jazz musicians continue to copy other musicians, often to the extent of transcribing and learning improvised solos from recordings. Ideally, these various influences should be absorbed into a musician's personal style. For musicians beginning to play in jazz and popular styles, listening is an important aspect of the learning process. Through using jazz recordings to absorb stylistic elements, musicians are already engaged in responding to aural stimuli that is a basis for successful jazz performances. Recordings allow easy access to the largely un-notatable aspects of the music, particularly the various different 'feels' and 'grooves' and analysis of improvised material can yield melodic ideas and structural concepts for creating solos.

I have found recordings invaluable when working with Dr Jazz and the Cheshire Cats, both as a stimulus for improvisation and familiarity with various styles, but also more directly as an insight into the pieces that are currently being rehearsed. Publishers such as Warner Bros provide a recording of the piece when the set of parts is purchased. I have found that it is useful, particularly for the rhythm section, to be able to hear the piece prior to the rehearsal. This goes against the traditional method of a conductor forming an interpretation through working with the score, which is then communicated to the players in rehearsal. However, I believe that with the quality and quantity of recordings available today, recordings in all genres, but particularly popular genres, often become part of the history of that work and critical evaluation of recorded performances can be important in helping us to find our own reading of a piece. In addition, the big band conductor, and to an extent the community ensemble conductor, is more accurately a director, providing the necessary resources and guidance to facilitate the performances of the group, and this may well include recordings as a supplement to rehearsal time.

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Whilst the big band is the most conventional ensemble format for jazz, and as indicated earlier, is easy to form from within a pre-existing wind ensemble, it has been criticised for the lack of creative improvisation possibilities and stylistic variation. For this reason, it may be desirable for big band players to listen to recordings from other areas of the genre to broaden their knowledge and awareness. Jazz has evolved into a musical style in which eclecticism is itself a significant feature, hence jazz may be considered more as an approach to the handling of these materials. Indeed, attempts to define jazz precisely as a musical style can be extremely problematic to the point of being a pointless exercise. Jazz has a peculiar history in which a conventional linear view fails to acknowledge the continuation of forms even though new ones have evolved. For example, the be-bop movement pioneered by musicians such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie failed to entirely wipe out the big bands popular in the 1930s and 1940s; and traditional or 'Dixieland' jazz remains popular all over the world almost a hundred years since its formation. Modern big band and jazz-influenced wind ensemble compositions may draw on any and many aspects of the relatively brief but yet continually evolving history of jazz, and hence an understanding and acquaintance with these different forms of jazz is clearly desirable.

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