

Frank L. Battisti

AMERICAN COMPOSERS FOR BANDQU

The availability of high quality music for intermediate level band students has always been limited. Music lacking expressive substance limits what a conductor/music teacher can teach students about music. I think conductors/music teachers who value artistic expression would agree that the selection and use of high quality music is crucial in achieving the following music education objectives:-

1. to assist students in developing their aesthetic potential to the utmost
2. to give students a source of enjoyment/ enrichment that will enhance the quality of their lives
3. to provide an outlet for creativity and self-expression
4. to increase the satisfaction students derive from music by enabling them to deal with sophisticated and complex music.

(From The Music Educators National Conference publication, *The School Music Program: Descriptions and Standards*)

In order for students to develop their creative potential, understanding and appreciation of music, conductor-music educators must select and use music that stimulates them musically, intellectually and emotionally and heightens their interest in music

Many pieces composed and published for school bands are often trite, contrived and calculated. Others emphasize the commercial and popular elements in society including movie theme music, rock and roll, pop, etc. School music libraries are filled with "bestsellers of the day" (sometimes advertised by publishers as "band masterpieces"). Most have a short lifespan (like pop music) - often performed once or twice and then filed away or discarded. Composer Francis McBeth labels this type of music, "paper plate music" - music used once and then thrown away. Study, rehearsal and performance of music with low musical content offers few opportunities for students to develop deep understanding and appreciation of quality musical art. What is needed is music that is artistically stimulating and educationally appropriate, not merely entertaining.

The kind and quality of music studied and performed by students truly matters.

Commissioned by the American Composers Forum
OLD CHURCHES

MICHAEL COLGRASS (ASCAP)

The musical score is for the piece "Old Churches" by Michael Colgrass, commissioned by the American Composers Forum. It is written for a large school band. The score includes parts for Flute 1, Flute 2, Oboe, Bassoon (Optional), Piccolo Clarinet 1, Bb Clarinet 2, Bb Clarinet 3, Bb Bass Clarinet, Alto Sax 1 & 2, Bb Tenor Sax, Eb Baritone Sax, Bb Trumpet 1 & 2, Bb Trumpet 3, Horn 1 & 2, Trombone 1, Trombone 2 & 3, Baritone E.C., Tuba, Bell 1, Bell 2, and two sets of Euphonium (Euphonium 1 & 2). The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 60. It features various dynamics such as *pp*, *ad lib*, *fl*, *tr*, and *tr*. There are also performance instructions like "Alto Sax 1 & 2" and "Bb Trumpet 3". The score is divided into measures 1 through 7.

HLA402009
Old Churches - 1

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While the study and rehearsal of any piece can help students develop basic musicianship and technical skills, only music that is expressive and imaginative has the potential for influencing the development of a student's interest and appreciation of music as an expressive art. In musical terms, students become what they experience.

In 1957 the Ford Foundation (in the United States) undertook a project, the purpose of which was to examine the relationship between the arts and humanities and society. Composer Norman Dello Joio suggested that a project be initiated that would involve talented young composers with students and teachers in public school music.

BANDQUEST PROJECT

Stimulates composing of literature of high musical quality for intermediate level bands

programs Two years later (1959) the Young Composers Project was inaugurated as part of 'The Contemporary Music Project for Creativity in Music Education' administered by the MENC under a \$1,630,000 grant from the Ford Foundation. This project placed composers under 35 years of age in public schools to write music for school ensembles. A large body of contemporary music was created for school age musicians, including band students. Among the young composers participating in this program were Stephen Albert, Donald Erb, Arthur Frankenhof, Charles Fussell, Ron LoPresti, Martin Mailman, Peter Schickele (later the discoverer of P. D. Q. Bach) and Philip Glass. In all, seventy-three composers participated in this project.

The project's chief objective was to provide opportunities for young composers to develop their craft, to receive performances of their music and to involve students in the study and performance of music written specially for them. The resulting interchange of musical ideas, techniques and attitudes between composers, conductor-music educators and students, the establishment of creative artists within the cultural life of communities and the creation of a body of literature which affected the musical tastes and standards of both conductor-music educators and students brought about a new vitality in the musical life of communities and schools. It was a very important project and I think re-instituting one like it at the beginning of the twentieth-first century would be a very good thing for music education.

Eight years ago (1997) the American Composers Forum (largest and oldest composers' organization in USA, website: www.composersforum.org) undertook a two year study to investigate the needs and challenges facing music education. The Forum was committed to undertaking a project that would help the teaching of music to young students. A committee made up of local and national music professionals, including composers, conductors and teachers studied this topic and recommended that school bands be the primary focus of the project because "through bands the largest and most diverse cross-section of students can be reached"

As a result, the BandQuest project was created with the objective of broadening the musical experience of intermediate level band students through exposure and involvement with contemporary American composers in the creation of music written specially for them. The American Composers Forum commissioned and assigned composers to work with specific intermediate bands throughout the country while writing their pieces. It was hoped that this collaborative experience would help students gain valuable insights regarding the cross-fertilization of creative ideas and offer composers an opportunity to discover how exciting it was to compose music for young musicians.

An examination of BandQuest's objectives and activities reveal it to be a 21st century variation of the 1960s MENC/Ford Foundation Young Composers Project, described above. To date, 13 American composers of diverse gender, ethnic background and geographical location, some rising stars and others already prominent, have composed works for middle-school and/or junior high school band students. Listed below are the works generated through the BandQuest project.

	Performance time
A+: A "Precise" Prelude and an "Excellent" March Thomas C. Duffy	3:17
Hambone Libby Larsen	3:48
Spring Festival Chen Yi	3:02
Old Churches Michael Colgrass	5:20
Ridgeview Centrum Alvin Singleton	2:48
City Rain Judith Zaimont	3:30
Alegre Tania Leon	2:30
Grandmother Song Brent Michael Davids	3:05
New Wade 'N Water Adolphus Hailstork	3:30
Alligator Alley Michael Daugherty	5:00
Smash the Windows Robert Xavier Rodriguez	2:30
Mosaic Stephen Paulus	3:00
Rhythm Stand Jennifer Higdon	2:30

To date Michael Colgrass's *Old Churches*, Libby Larsen's *Hambone*, Thomas Duffy's *A+: A "Precise" and an "Excellent" March* and Michael Daugherty's *Alligator Alley* have received the most performances.

Writing excellent music for middle school ensembles is a very challenging assignment. Composer Michael Colgrass describes his experience in composing *Old Churches* for the BandQuest project as follows:

"It struck me that Haydn and Mozart wrote a lot of simple music for amateurs without 'dumbing down'. The question: am I a good enough composer to write a simple theme that can be genuinely exciting, the way the great masters did? Well, this project was the

most humbling of any experience I've had as a composer. I think writing for young bands should be a required project in our university composition programs. Writing for eighth grade band is like walking in four-pound shoes - if you can move gracefully with that weight on your feet, you'll fly when you put on the four-ounce runners. The whole experience of working with the young students was so rich - albeit frustrating - and finally so fulfilling, that I have to say it was one of the most satisfying events of my musical career."

Colgrass's comments are evidence that writing simple, enduring, expressive music for young players is extremely challenging, but one that is very rewarding.

BandQuest publications also include curricular materials to complement each piece. These materials, contained on an interactive CD-ROM, are designed to stimulate and encourage creative ways of teaching and learning. Throughout the learning process students are offered instruction designed to promote their understanding and performance of the music as well as a deeper appreciation of how the music relates to other aspects of life and learning. Further information about the BandQuest project may be found at www.bandquest.org/music/series.shtm. All BandQuest pieces are published by the American Composers Forum and distributed by Hal Leonard Corporation. A free CD containing 10 BandQuest pieces is available by contacting Hal Leonard Corporation, 777 W. Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213, USA (www.halleonard.com).