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Electric Horizons: Advancing the Wind Band in Modern Art Music
A research project by Joseph R. Bozich

Introduction

The dominance of the Symphony Orchestra in Western Art Music is a fact clear by even the most superficial observation. The best classical performers of today and yesterday have been judged in part by which orchestras they have performed solo with, which large orchestral concertis they have tackled, and which conductors they have collaborated with. For better or worse, "classical" and "orchestral" music are essentially synonymous for a great portion of the population, and the great majority of classical masterworks known to the larger population—the opening of Beethoven's 5th Symphony, the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's 9th Symphony, the Adagietto from Mahler's 5th Symphony—are (as their names would suggest) symphonic in scope.

In recent decades, the Wind Ensemble as a form of high-level music-making, mostly in the music schools of large universities. At the dawn of the twentieth-century the Band was merely a form of basic entertainment, playing marches by Sousa and contemporaries, transcriptions of popular orchestra pieces, or otherwise more military-oriented, audience-pleasing and popular literature. Essentially extensions of the idea of the military or field band, the old bands--and the literature composed/arranged for it--made use of multiple instruments to a part, and for the most part played to the basic strengths of an ensemble of outdoor wind instruments and field percussion: volume, mechanical articulation (as opposed to the generally softer, more imprecise stroke of stringed instruments), and rhythmic drive from the Bass and Snare Drums.

This is not to say that a high level of artistry was not present in the Bands of the past. The devotion to musicianship, and to the style in which they played, was certainly very present, and the unique characteristics of marches demand a set of artistic principles all to their own. And composers attempted to craft works in a more high art-music style, much like their symphonic peers. Among these we may count Percy Grainger, Gustav Holst, and Paul Hindemith. However, it was not until mid-century that a true and concerted effort was made to expand the artistic horizons of the band, and to make it more on par with the musical demands of symphonic repertory.

Frederick Fennel, director of bands at the Eastman School of Music, established the concept of the Wind Ensemble, a stripped down version of the band with flexible instrumentation ranging from chamber to full-scale, more traditionally symphonic band compositions. Most importantly in his conception, however, was the idea of the group not as a field band, with multiple players on a part, but as an ensemble of soloists, with one player performing each part unless otherwise specified by the composer. In essence, the Wind Ensemble became a sort of hybrid between the military bands of the past and the wind section of a standard symphony orchestra (the notable additions to this orchestral concept being the saxophones and euphonium, in addition to a great deal more percussion). With fewer players, the musical ability of the group could be higher, as well as the dynamic and orchestrational possibilities available in performance, and a new body of complex, more contemporary literature could be composed to match it.

The popularity of the Wind Ensemble grew rapidly, and as mentioned early, most collegiate institutions today have an ensemble of like-structure to Fennel's original, and many High Schools have followed suit (though often they tend to lean towards the more traditional doubled instrumentation to compensate for weaker players). However, despite these advances, the Wind Ensemble has had only limited success entering the professional arena. There are certainly professional groups that have made the model work: the Dallas Wind Symphony, the Cincinnati Wind Symphony and the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra. Part of the reason for this is very basic:

given the limited history of the Wind Ensemble, there is an equally limited quantity of high-quality, standard repertory that can compete with that of the symphony orchestra (which has existed now for several hundred years). In other words, most standards of the orchestral repertory are of a higher artistic development than the standards of the band, simply because of the time composers have had to practice the craft of writing for the ensemble. This bottlenecks the capacity of the Wind Ensemble, and given the great propensity of many composers to write "academic" or "educational" works for High School and Collegiate ensembles (a necessary, and certainly not to be discredited goal), limits the lengths to which a composer might stretch and experiment with the ensemble.

The purpose of this research then, was to study several large-scale, more symphonically-crafted Wind Ensemble works, derive from them their successes and failures, and write a work of my own that would hopefully provide at the very least the experience to craft a high-level, highly-artistic piece of wind literature to fill this vacuum. In addition to this, I sought to incorporate the idea of electronics into the ensemble, seeing it as an opportunity to expand the colors of the Wind Ensemble in ways hitherto impossible. As reference, I studied David Maslanka's *Symphony No. 4*, Michael Colgrass' *Winds of Nagual*, Paul Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat* (originally for concert band but still fulfilling my requirements as a piece of large-scale, symphony-oriented composition), Karel Husa's *Music for Prague*, Olivier Messiaen's *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* and *Oiseaux Exotiques*, and Steven Bryant's *Ecstatic Waters* (a recently composed, large-scale outing for winds and electronics that has proved very popular with college wind orchestras across the county). The piece composed was a four movement, thirty-five minute *Chain-Symphony for Small Wind Ensemble and DJ*.

On the Standards

The first work studied as part of this project was David Maslanka's *Symphony No. 4*, a piece approximately thirty minutes long in a single movement, dedicated in part to the great expanses of Montana, Maslanka's home state. Having set upon this project with a predefined form of my own (more on that later), I decided to focus more upon Maslanka's orchestrational techniques and handling of the dynamics of the Wind Ensemble over the course of the large work. Also, given that my melodic and harmonic material are related specifically and also predefined, I was less concerned about his use of keys, etc., than by his voicings of specific instruments in their registers.

Maslanka's *Symphony No. 4* is unquestionable episodic, given its sense of form more by a use of alternating soft and loud sections than by the concrete units of a conventional symphony. Masterfully, he does not allow every single instrument in the ensemble to play *tutti* full bore until the very last, loudest section, giving clear scope and trajectory to the work. In terms of orchestration, Maslanka makes particularly effective use of percussion, specifically in the mallets, mixing xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, and piano to color the winds and provide their own material to the sonic image. The harmonic voicings of his winds are distinctly organ-like, blending splendidly with the actual organ included in the scoring. His most striking orchestrational effect, however, occurs when he requests that the clarinets separate the barrels of their instruments from the rest of the body and play with just that portion of the instrument, bending pitch with their finger to create the sound of a baby crying or siren. Though I incorporated much of Maslanka's mallet and wind orchestration into my own work, I did not use this last technique, finding it not quite within my style of composition.

The next work attended to was Paul Hindemith's *Symphony in B-Flat*. As noted above, it was conceived along the lines of a concert or military band, rather than a Wind Ensemble, and as such I was less concerned with the handling of orchestration here and more interested in voicing and contrapuntal control. Hindemith being a master of post-tonal counterpoint, I was directly interested in his development of the fugue in the final movement of his symphony.

Sadly, I must confess some disappointment with Hindemith's command of the band in this work. The colors of the piece generally fade into sort of a gray-wash, clearly demonstrating that the composer himself was less concerned with orchestration than the contrapuntal lines. Likewise, his formal notions are somewhat predictable, being more "neoclassical" than modernist. That being said, his ability to keep the principle material present while still keeping an active texture behind is quite skillful throughout all the movements, and the dichotomy he presents at the very beginning between the brass fanfare and the staccato sound-screen of the woodwinds clearly defines Hindemith's dialectical use of the two families. His fugue, though fairly conventional in structure, was still meticulously constructed, especially as it turned to a double fugue of the two themes of the last movement, and it was partially by this inspiration that I crafted a fugal movement of my own in the *Chain-Symphony*.

The third work I looked at, Michael Colgrass' *Winds of Nagual*, is based off the writings of Carlos Castaneda, and proved probably the most influential of the works upon my own composition. The work seems incredibly predisposed in the delivery of color, with metallic percussion and bright flourishes from woodwinds and brass alike creating a surrealist, almost timeless flexibility to even the most aggressive sections. One specific, unique orchestrational technique I requisitioned for my own use was the Flugelhorn solo found near the end of Colgrass' work, a not-often heard sound in the Wind Ensemble, along with harp accompaniment. In the third movement of my *Chain-Symphony*, I make use of a similar texture, though the motivic and harmonic materials remain my own.

Given the more in-depth look at the above three pieces, the rest of the works can be summed up each in a few terms, since I was able to fairly quickly get a scope of how these composers were approaching the wind ensemble, and was beginning to more clearly see how I could approach my own. I found Husa's *Music for Prague* to be a sort of orchestrational link between Maslanka and Hindemith, but with a sort of dramatic intensity in use of very martial percussion that I found quite inspiring. The two Messiaen works, *Et exspecto* and *Oiseaux exotiques*, were each textbooks of atonal wind voicing and the use of more exotic percussion, and I borrowed several of Messiaen's rhythmic devices in my own composition (including non-retrogradable rhythm and the juxtaposition of a singular rhythmic device against an otherwise unrelated texture), in addition to some of his harmonic language.

Steven Bryant's *Ecstatic Waters* was the one work from the set that actually incorporated electronics, as my piece does, so I was mostly interested in his use of those than any other field. He reserves them until a ways into the work, allowing the wind ensemble to act on its own, and first uses the electronics for their textural capacities, though soon turns them to some sort of beat. His set-up with Laptop and Ableton Live (outlined on his website) seems very streamlined and ergonomic, something which my previous outing for large ensemble and electronics (*Concerto for Baritone Saxophone, Small Orchestra, and DJ*) lacked. However, I found Bryant's rhythmic language somewhat stunted in favor of the electronic regularity, as well as being tied to more bland film-like scoring and sound-effects. For my own work, I sought to write as I normally would, treating the electronics merely as another set of voices with which I could work and color

the wind ensemble, emphasizing my previous compositional impulses rather than changing those impulses based upon the introduction of the electronics to the form.

At this point, my own ideas had sufficiently coalesced to be a mixture of all the materials I had thus-far encountered, hopefully overcoming my own perceived shortcomings in any of the works I saw and replacing them with the strengths of others.

The Chain-Symphony

Since in recent compositions I have been particularly interested in the construction of form and the influence of form upon the rest of the compositional process, I should begin by outlining my formal plan for the work I composed in synthesis for this project, which in the process will explain the title.

To begin, I composed a melody derived from a single motive, which I refer to as the "Chain" for the piece. This melody is itself four distinct rhythmic and melodic cells which each map onto a specific movement. By mathematical processes including inversion, retrograde, and rotation, I crafted individual sub-chains of varying lengths which each represent the material for each of these movements. The presentation of musical material is thus predefined, so that each motive must occur in the order it appeared in the chain before it can be developed. In this way, I institute a sort of formal teleology upon the work that is directly tied to the opening motive. This can be best seen in the following examples:

A

CHAIN
Motive 1

Motive 2

Motive 3

Motive 4

B

Sub-chain, Movement I
Motive 1

Motive 1b

Motive 1c

C

Sub-chain, Movement II
Motive 2

Motive 2b

Motive 2c

Motive 2d

D

Sub-chain, Movement III
Motive 3

Motive 3b (undeveloped)

E

Sub-chain, Movement IV
Motive 3

Motive 3b

Motive 3c

I allowed some rhythmic flexibility, but held to a close paraphrase of the proportions, and certainly held to a literal recreation of pitches.

This Chain-form, of course, does not manage all elements of material for the work, most especially in terms of movement style and any motivic repetition that I wished to occur. To that end, I constructed the piece in accordance with the following outline:

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Internal Form (Nn = motive; _t = transition)</i>
Chant I	[Chain][Chain']
I. Chain	[Sub-chain I] ₁ _t 1 _b 1 _c [Development]1[Sub-chain I']
II. Chorale and Fugue (HOUSE)	[Chorale][Fugue 1(Sub-chain II)] _t [Fugue 2(Sub-chain II')] _t [Double Fugue][Chorale']
Chant II	[Chain"][Chain"]
III. Aria (In Christ, All Things are Made New)	[Sub-chain III]3[Sub-chain III']
IV. Scherzo (after Mahler)	[Mahler][Sub-chain IV]44b[Mahler']4c4[Mahler"]4c _t [Chain][Mahler"]

Though from the outline above the appearance is given of a six-movement work, in execution Chants I and II are attached without pause to the succeeding movements, acting as introductions that present to or remind the audience of the fundamental material of the whole work. In this way, the work is a more conventionally symphonic four-movement form on the surface, though internally obviously operating by the Chain-form principles I outlined above. I shall now proceed to outline the substance of each movement so that my own goals can be made clear with each in terms of the materials I discovered and synthesized from the research.

The first movement, *Chain*, is the longest and perhaps the most aesthetically conventional, taking its directions from traditional symphonic practice. Though obviously constructed to meet the demands of the Chain, it is also structured in such a way that it recalls traditional sonata principles. After each motive of the chain is developed in turn, there is a full development section that develops all three simultaneously, followed by a brief recapitulation of the first material and its own isolated development. As a sort of coda, the entirety of Sub-chain I appears in a triumphant, conclusive statement--not as conclusive, however, as the end of the entire piece will be some twenty minutes later. It takes some of its contrapuntal directions from Hindemith, but in approach is very much my own and takes Maslanka and Messiaen's percussion and woodwind orchestration to heart.

The *Chorale and Fugue (HOUSE)* that is the second movement is most directly influenced by Hindemith, though the abstract chords of the chorale certainly stem from Olivier Messiaen. The "HOUSE" portion of the title refers to the traditional electronic dance beat that accompanies the fugues as they run their course, the only time until the last movement that I allow the electronics to assume a more predictable, ostinato-like role, and certainly the only time in the work that this ostinato-like role is influenced by popular electronic music. In constructing my Chorale, I layered all of the motives on top of each other for the motive, so that when the fugues overlap later the harmonies have already been forecast by the opening. This is especially true when the double fugue occurs, bringing together the Sub-chain and Sub-chain' (the second half of the original Sub-chain).

Chant II and the *Aria* most clearly come from my study of Colgrass' *Winds of Nagual*, full as they are of harp, flugelhorn solos, and general dream-like state. However, the idea of putting a cello soloist with the ensemble in the third movement is entirely my own idea. Taking an approach similar to Mahler with his soprano soloists, I call for the cello soloist to be tacet for the first movements, but unlike Mahler allow them to continue playing, albeit as a double of the String Bass, for the concluding movement.

In the last movement, *Scherzo (after Mahler)*, I decided to include a quote from the Scherzo to one of the most important symphonies for orchestra, Mahler's Fifth, using the horn call almost

as a Rondo refrain. I chose it more for its attitude, that of a heavy object moving very lightly, than for its motivic structure, though of course the prominent B-flat in the concluding passage (which duals the concluding passage of the Mahler) maps nicely onto the prominent B-flat of my own Chain. As a last recollection of the entire structure of the piece, I present the entire Chain again at the end in its most triumphant form.

As alluded to earlier, the structure of the electronics for this piece is tied more to color and expanding the number of voices to the ensemble than beat-oriented, even though I refer to the live musician who controls the prerecorded electronics as a "DJ." The idea of a live performer manipulating the recorded material is one very important to me, since that allows for the flexibility of rubato, as well as real-time interaction with the sounds being produced in regards to blend and balance. For instance, the saxophone solo in the first movement that presents the third motive is run through effects processors manipulated by the DJ, giving it a sort of ethereal quality in counterpoint with the electronics themselves.

This work is certainly my most ambitious yet, and certainly long and difficult. Whether or not it manages to help flesh out the wind band repertory, it has at least provided me with the experience necessary to sometime write a work that would be a valuable addition to ensembles, and hopefully, help allow the Wind Ensemble to step from the background into a more firm professional setting. Though I do not disagree that symphony orchestras are among the highest institutions of western art music, I do not believe that the wind orchestra should be relegated to a completely negligible position, and look towards the days when, perhaps, symphony orchestras might have wind programs as part of their regular concert cycle. The only way that will happen, however, is if the literature can measure up to the masterworks of orchestral history. And only by trying will that goal ever be achieved.

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