

Sheltering Sky

(2012)

John Mackey

Commissioned by Traughber Junior High School Band, Rachel Maxwell, Director, and
Thompson Junior High School Band, Daniel Harrison, Director
Oswego, IL

Instrumentation

2 Flutes
Oboe(s)
Bassoon(s)

3 Clarinets in Bb
Bass Clarinet in Bb

Optional:

Eb Contra-alto Clarinet (part identical to double bass, transposed and octave-shifted as needed)
Bb Contrabass Clarinet (part identical to double bass, transposed and octave-shifted as needed)

2 Alto Saxes
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax

3 Trumpets in Bb
French Horns
3 Trombones
Euphonium
Tuba

Double Bass

Percussion:

Marimba (one instrument, two players)
Vibraphone
Suspended cymbal
Bass drum

Program Note

The wind band medium has, in the twenty-first century, a host of disparate styles that dominate its texture. At the core of its contemporary development exist a group of composers who dazzle with scintillating and frightening virtuosity. As such, at first listening one might experience John Mackey's *Sheltering Sky* as a striking departure. Its serene and simple presentation is a throwback of sorts - a nostalgic portrait of time suspended.

The work itself has a folksong-like quality - intended by the composer - and through this an immediate sense of familiarity emerges. Certainly the repertoire has a long and proud tradition of weaving folk songs into its identity, from the days of Holst and Vaughan Williams to modern treatments by such figures as Donald Grantham and Frank Ticheli. Whereas these composers incorporated extant melodies into their works, however, Mackey takes a play from Percy Grainger. Grainger's *Colonial Song* seemingly sets a beautiful folksong melody in an enchanting way (so enchanting, in fact, that he reworked the tune into two other pieces: *Australian Up-Country Tune* and *The Gum-Suckers March*). In reality, however, Grainger's melody was entirely original - his own concoction to express how he felt about his native Australia. Likewise, although the melodies of *Sheltering Sky* have a recognizable quality (hints of the contours and colors of *Danny Boy* and *Shenandoah* are perceptible), the tunes themselves are original to the work, imparting a sense of hazy distance as though they were from a half-remembered dream.

The work unfolds in a sweeping arch structure, with cascading phrases that elide effortlessly. The introduction presents softly articulated harmonies stacking through a surrounding placidity. From there emerge statements of each of the two folksong-like melodies - the call as a sighing descent in solo oboe, and its answer as a hopeful rising line in trumpet. Though the composer's trademark virtuosity is absent, his harmonic language remains. Mackey avoids traditional triadic sonorities almost exclusively, instead choosing more indistinct chords with diatonic extensions (particularly seventh and ninth chords) that facilitate the hazy sonic world that the piece inhabits. Near cadences, chromatic dissonances fill the narrow spaces in these harmonies, creating an even greater pull toward wistful nostalgia. Each new phrase begins over the resolution of the previous one, creating a sense of motion that never completely stops. The melodies themselves unfold and eventually dissipate until at last the serene introductory material returns - the opening chords finally coming to rest.

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Sheltering Sky

John Mackey

$\text{♩} = 42$ ($\text{♩} = 84$)

for Elizabeth Smart

rit.

Flute 1 *pp*

Flute 2 *pp*

Oboe *4/4* *3/4* *solo pp* *tutti* *4/4* *3/4*

Bassoons *pp*

B♭ Clarinet 1 *pp* *stagger breath, 3 players max.* *tutti*

B♭ Clarinet 2 *3 players max.* *pp* *tutti*

B♭ Clarinet 3 *3 players max.* *pp* *tutti* *4/4* *3/4*

Bass Clarinet *pp*

Alto Sax 1 *solo pp* *3/4* *solo* *tutti pp* *4/4* *3/4*

Alto Sax 2 *pp* *solo* *pp tutti* *4/4* *3/4*

Tenor Sax *pp* *solo* *pp tutti*

Baritone Sax *pp*

Trumpet 1 *rit.* *Horn I pp*

Trumpet 2

Trumpet 3

Horns *p*

Trombone 1 *4/4* *3/4* *pp* *4/4* *3/4*

Trombone 2 *pp*

Trombone 3 *pp*

Euphonium *pp*

Tuba *pp*

Double Bass *opt. Sub arco pp*

Marimba 1 *4/4* *3/4* *pp* *4/4* *3/4*

Marimba 2 *pp*

Vibraphone *motor on, fairly slow bowed until indicated otherwise* *pp*

Sus. Cymbal *pedal down until indicated otherwise* *pp*

Bass Drum *always let ring, do not dampen* *pp*

A *a tempo, but very freely*

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob.

Bsn.

Clar. 1

Clar. 2

Clar. 3

Bs. Cl.

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Oboe

A *a tempo, but very freely*

Tpt. 1

Tpt. 2

Tpt. 3

Horns

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Tbn. 3

Euph.

Tuba

Bass

Mba 1

Mba 2

Vibes

Cymb.

BD

15

B

Fl. 1 *mp*

Fl. 2

Ob. *tutti* *p*

Bsn.

Clar. 1 *solo* *pp* *tutti* *p* *p*

Clar. 2 *p* *p*

Clar. 3

Bs. Cl. *p*

A. Sx. 1 *tutti* *p* *p*

A. Sx. 2 *tutti* *p* *p*

T. Sx. *pp* *tutti* *p* *p*

B. Sx. *pp* *tutti* *p*

Tpt. 1 *pp* *p*

Tpt. 2 *pp*

Tpt. 3

Horns *p* *mp*

Tbn. 1 *p*

Tbn. 2 *p*

Tbn. 3 *p*

Euph. *p*

Tuba *p*

Bass *p*

Mba 1 *mp*

Mba 2 *mp*

Vibes *mp* (do not release pedal)

Cymb.

BD

[illegible]

28

E with more motion

Fl. 1 *p* *mp* solo

Fl. 2 *mp* solo

Ob. *tutti* *p* *mp* solo

Bsn. *p* *p* solo

Clar. 1 *p* solo

Clar. 2 *p* solo

Clar. 3 *p* solo

Bs. Cl. *p* solo

A. Sx. 1 *p* solo

A. Sx. 2 *p* solo

T. Sx. *p* solo

B. Sx. *p* solo

Tpt. 1 *p* solo

Tpt. 2

Tpt. 3

Horns *p* *tutti* *p*

Tbn. 1 *pp* *p*

Tbn. 2 *pp*

Tbn. 3 *pp*

Euph. *pp*

Tuba *pp*

Bass *pp*

Mba 1 *p*

Mba 2 *p*

Vibes

Cymb. *tea* *

BD

35

rit. **F** a tempo

Fl. 1 tutti cresc. tutti f

Fl. 2 cresc. tutti f

Ob. cresc. tutti solo f

Bsn. tutti mp cresc. f

Clar. 1 tutti mp tutti cresc. f

Clar. 2 cresc. tutti f

Clar. 3 cresc. tutti f

Bs. Cl. tutti mp cresc. f

A. Sx. 1 tutti cresc. tutti f

A. Sx. 2 cresc. tutti f

T. Sx. cresc. f

B. Sx. tutti cresc. f

rit. **F** a tempo

Tpt. 1 tutti mp cresc. f

Tpt. 2 mp cresc. f

Tpt. 3 mp cresc. f

Horns mp mf f

Tbn. 1 mp mf f

Tbn. 2 mp cresc. mf f

Tbn. 3 mp cresc. f

Euph. mp cresc. f

Tuba mp cresc. f

Bass mp cresc. f

Mba 1 mp cresc. (play "C" instead of lower notes if marimba range is limited) f

Mba 2 mp cresc. f

Vibes mallets mf mp f

Cymb. mp

BD mp

