

Teaching Music Through Performance

Literature/Listening Review

Sam Beeson

Table of Contents

Grade One

Midnight Sky - Brian Balmages	1
The Tempest - Robert Smith	2
Song for Winter Moon - Walter Cummings	3
Air and Dance - John Kinyon	4

Grade 2

Abracadabra - Frank Ticheli	5
All the Pretty Little Horses - Anne McGinty	6
The Seal Lullaby - Eric Whitacre	7
Whirlwind - Jodie Blackshaw	8

Grade 3

Elegy for Albinoni - Shelly Hanson	9
My Jesus! Oh what Anguish - Alfred Reed	10
Voices of the Sky - Samuel Hazo	11
El Camino Real - Alfred Reed	12

Grade 4

Of Sailors and Whales - Francis McBeth	13
Be Thou My Vision - David Gillingham	16
Beyond - Wataru Hokoyama	17
Daughter of the Stars - Warren Benson	18

Grade 5

Vesuvius - Frank Ticheli	19
Rapture - Patrick Harlin	20
It Perched For Vespers Nine - Joe Puckett	21
The Solitary Dancer - Warren Benson	22

Grade 6

A Child's Garden of Dreams - David Maslanka	23
Moth - Viet Cuong	25
Hivemind - Peter Van Zandt Lane	27
Urban Requiem - Michael Colgrass	28

Midnight Sky - Brian Balmages

Midnight Sky by Brian Balmages is an excellent entry level piece designed in a way that will help young performers develop their ensemble musicianship. Some sections that would require special attention would be unified attacks and releases (within the entire piece), attention to dynamics, intonation (especially at softer dynamics), and breath control. The general form is an A->B->C, with the climax of the piece being about 2/3rds of the way through its duration.

The expressive nature of the piece is straightforward, but perfect for an introduction to ensemble musicianship, allowing students to cast a wider net with their listening, and hopefully beginning to understand how their part is just one part of a larger whole. Musical awareness is a requirement for the successful performance of this piece. It seems like a very Brian Balmages work. High quality, not a lot of technical content, but very achievable and musically effective, allowing students who might lack technical prowess at their developing age to approach an intimate work and create a connection between the ensemble and the audience members.

The Tempest - Robert Smith

This exciting, high speed work would work exceptionally well as a concert opener or closer.

Opening with a slow, mysterious chord progression, it then suddenly leaps into a fanfare-esque passage. This work strikes me as something that would potentially be a challenge piece for a middle school group, considering the speed, polyrhythm between the flutes and clarinets in the A section. Speaking of form, *The Tempest* follows an Intro->A->B->A form.

Some things that would require extra preparation in order to get the piece to performance level would be dynamic contrast, stylistic interpretation, vertical alignment, and consistency in tempo. Additionally, when the trumpets have the melody in the return of the A section, it will be important to make sure that the woodwinds are supporting, but audible over the trumpets, and that they still have motion and phrasing in their lines, as the 4 bar melody isn't terribly interesting after you've heard it on its own once or twice.

I am a fan of the dramatic character that this piece portrays, I envision the tempest more as an emotion than an actual physical tempest, and I think that many middle schoolers would be able to relate to the feeling of intense anger that this piece can channel.

Song for Winter Moon - Walter Cummings

Song for Winter Moon is another intimate work, slightly more challenging for all sections than Balmages *Midnight Sky*. That being said, it offers a little more expressive opportunity to students. Some things to work on with this piece would be the clarinet entrance at the very beginning, effective layering of voices making sure one isn't overpowering, low brass intonation, making sure the ensemble changes notes together to avoid. Another thing to work on would be the trumpet soli, in terms of tempo, intonation, and sound quality. Another spot would be controlling the build during the accelerando. Overall, the most important thing in this piece is balance between voices, so that is likely where I would spend the majority of my time in rehearsal.

The form of the piece is A->B. It offers a lot of built in dynamic expression, but the ensemble that plays this most effectively will go beyond the written phrasing and continue to balance and blend within the ensemble. I really like the way that the melodic lines move between the woodwinds, brass, and percussion.

Air and Dance - John Kinyon

Air and Dance is a great expressive work. Opening with a soli clarinet section, then branching into a full ensemble chorale section. I'm a fan of the interplay between the second clarinet soli and the flute section. I also really love the harmony in the third clarinet soli. It seems to go back and forth between A and B sections, A being clarinet/flute soli, and then B being brass Chorale. The chorale section is a great vehicle to link musicianship from warm up exercises into the repertoire, and eventually link that further into the lyrical playing from other selections. The transition into the last soli section is harmonically interesting for students, giving them a chance to explore what's different about their music that time compared to previous repetitions.

The "Dance movement has a great opportunity for trumpets to show off a little bit. Dynamics and stylistic differences in this section are going to be something that needs work in rehearsal, but overall this is a very approachable piece for beginning bands. Due to its repetitive nature, notes and rhythms should not be a terribly difficult learning process, which will allow students to then develop their tone and ensemble musicianship.

Abracadabra - Frank Ticheli

I was a really big fan of the contrasting styles of this work, and the more I got through the work the more I imagined myself as a spectator to some grand magic show in a carnival tent. Part of that is the title leading me, but I think it would be appropriate even without the title. The andante section gives a sense of pause and bewilderment, as soon as it starts it is replaced with a return of the A section. I also am a big fan of how instruments interject in this piece. The end is also very exciting, with the isolated attacks reminding me of romantic era finale type progressions.

I think that overall, this piece is achievable, but it would be either a *really* good 7th grade group, or an 8th/9th grade ensemble. Asking 6th graders to do this would be far too much in my mind, both in terms of range and technical capabilities for the amount of time they've had instrumental experience. Some things that would take some work to get concert ready would be ensemble timing (especially those li, listening/awareness (knowing who to listen to and when). Also, the clarinet section needs to be strong so that their sound carries in the moments that the whole ensemble is playing. I also think there's a lot of potential in the low voices for the development of a rich, deep, and complex sound.

All the Pretty Little Horses - Anne McGinty

This is one of my favorite pieces from when I was a student in 8th grade band, and it still holds up years later. The wistful clarinet solo at the start demands attention from the audience. The layering of voices into the melody/countermelody is a great way to develop ear training. The key change/B section when the brass enters is always great to hear, it makes you feel nostalgic in a way, and being able to provide that experience to an audience despite a young age was always one of my favorite aspects of band. The saxophone solo in the return of the A section. I'm also a huge fan of the harmonic movement in this piece, where it sometimes feels like there's just somebody playing the organ and moving all these block chords around.

A few things that I would need to rehearse and work on in class is intonation, as I think the bulk of the musical effect goes away if you aren't playing in tune. Tone/tuning are always going to be the first non-negotiable aspects of this type of work. Low voices, in my opinion anyways, are what make this piece so impactful. For many of the previous works in this review, including this one, I have been listening to the Rutgers Wind Ensemble recordings, and hearing the low voices wash over and around me is a cathartic experience that I would want my ensemble to be able to hear within the ensemble.

The Seal Lullaby - Eric Whitacre

This is another one of my favorite works (and composers), and I think there's a lot of good that would come from playing this. One unusual part of the instrumentation is the fact that there's a piano in this work. In a perfect world, a percussionist would have enough piano training to be able to play it, but if not my first thought is potentially transcribing the piano part to be played over two keyboard instruments.

As the name suggests, this piece evokes a sense of calm, and almost a sensation of longing from the listener. It just makes you want to close your eyes and shut down every other sense besides hearing. There's so much texture in this arrangement, which I feel is great for a developing musician to hear and begin to understand. The use of dynamics in this work is very well done, as it gives an ebb and flow feeling to the piece. As if the listener is being rocked to sleep.

One of the biggest challenges of this work is going to be getting the students comfortable with suspensions and tension between instruments. Being able to sit in that tense, unresolved note for just a moment more than the audience might like is such an important skill (both for the conductor and musician). None of that can happen without intonation and ear training, however. With not a lot of rhythmic challenge in this piece, the primary responsibility of the ensemble is expressive musicianship.

Whirlwind - Jodie Blackshaw

This interesting work, beginning with a mysterious percussion feature, commands the attention of those who listen to it, being a great intermediate work for the developing band. The layering of solos is interesting as well, as afterwards it goes back to just percussion. This entire work is very percussion centric, which is great, as that's the section that gets a lot of attention for "just standing around." The unison melody between sections is great for the development of unison playing across an ensemble, forcing the players to listen further than they otherwise might. After the second feature, the piece moves into a pseudo-fuge between each section.

Working with the percussion will be critical to the successful execution of this piece. Even when the focus isn't necessarily on the percussion, they provide a foundational soundscape for the rest of the ensemble to stand on. Rhythmic understanding in every section, not just the percussion section, is also important, because every section has the melodic material at some point, so it will be critical to have a unified understanding of how it needs to be played. Also dynamic control and balance will be important, so that each section can be heard, and the percussion can continue to be heard the entire time.

Elegy for Albinoni - Shelly Hanson

Hence the name, this mournful work is very similar to Albinoni's style, who is one of the composers that made me wish I could play a string instrument well. I love the development of the motive in the first theme, and the flute melody as it transitions to the B section. It's just heartwrenching, and I think that feeling is something that everyone can relate to, and even if there aren't a ton of notes and a lot of rhythmic complexity there's still a lot of depth in this work. I also love the expression of harmony between the brass and woodwinds in this piece, with the brass getting involved as the grief of the piece comes to its apex. This is contrasted with the oboe and flute duet, followed by a crescendo into the main theme. One of my favorite traits of this piece, as well as most of Albinoni's use of tension and dissonance. In general, there's not a lot of release in this piece, and I would argue that the final notes of the piece leave that tension unresolved.

Something to work on is quarter note triplets in the low brass, maintaining the tempo through expression and dynamic change, intonation. As well as the standard intonation and quality of sound comments that come to this piece simply by its style, balance is incredibly important here. Keeping the brass in a position to support the melody, and then really bring the tension when it's time to do so. The overall expression is going to be a project as well, to be able to nonverbally communicate the experience of grief and weeping is the goal of this piece in my mind.

My Jesus! Oh what Anguish - Alfred Reed

This piece, written after Bach's *Mein Jesu! Was Für Seelenweh*, is a great example of timeless works being adapted into modern day ensembles. I've always been a fan of the tense, brooding pieces of band literature. I'm particularly fond of the way the melody moves and transforms between voices, starting soft and growing into what I interpret into an incessant cry for *something*. The masterful expression in the writing and orchestration of this piece makes it just get heavier and heavier as it goes on, without it feeling overdone, until finally ending with a Picardy third. My high school played the original chorale as a warmup every so often in high school, so I'm familiar with this work, but love the way that Reed adapted it so that every voice has meaning throughout the piece, as often these requiem-esque works can become unengaging to both the audience and musicians.

One of the primary things to work on here is expression and phrasing, both from the conductor and ensemble. The same intonation and balance challenges apply here, and making sure things don't get too loud too fast is a large part of the successful performance of this piece. Another thing to do that the recording I was listening to didn't is find the climax of the piece and rallentando into it and just sit on that note for a few moments, and just live in that moment. Getting the ensemble to buy into the emotion of the piece will be important, as well as getting them to link the music to personal experiences. Whenever I hear pieces similar to this, I always relate it to my own personal experiences, but it might take some teaching to convey to the students that it is both encouraged and okay to link emotion to music.

Voices of the Sky - Samuel Hazo

This work by Samuel Hazo is meant to translate the many qualities and appearances of the sky into musical context. There are a lot of isolated solo/soli sections in the beginning that are written reflective of the free flowing nature of a clear sky. There's a lot of consonant harmony in this opening section, but it slowly turns to something more "sinister" in the words of Hazo through a sustain. This second section is much faster, in which I see the imagery of a large stormcloud barreling down on me, the low brass leading this ominous charge. The woodwind flourishes during the sustain remind me a lot of marching band-esque writing. After all that tension, we finally return to the main theme through a large crescendo, this being my favorite part of this piece. I think that the way this work is paced provides a great experience. The last few harmonic changes have this rich density to them that is irresistible, overall this piece is a wonderful teaching tool.

A few things worth working on for this piece that stick out right away are emotional pacing and overall timing. Being able to understand where the peaks and valleys of the piece are, and being able to accurately perform the emotional tasks the music is asking for will be the thing that elevates this work in performance. Also, with all of the solo sections, being sure that students accurately approach their responsibilities, and ensuring quality of sound and ensemble blend and balance is at the forefront of each performer's mind.

El Camino Real - Alfred Reed

This Latin fantasy by Reed is an exciting work that is perhaps a little above grade four, but is a wonderful challenge piece for a mature ensemble. It is based on traditional chord progressions used by Spanish flamenco guitarists. Things finally slow down around 2 and a half minutes into the piece, and after the driving introduction it makes the audience wait on the edge of their seats. I love the way the oboe solo starts and how the clarinets blend with their chord underneath it.

The entire lyrical section of this work has a haunting beauty compared to the festival-like character of the opening material, and the orchestration is excellent. The use of clarinets in their lower tessitura provides a wonderful texture

The third section speeds up just a little bit, turning into a dance and opening up a little more dynamically with the rest of the brass. I love the way the key change just feels so lush, and the horn soli is wonderful. The textures in this section are enchanting to listen to, and I really enjoy the simple solo at the end of this section with its increasing intervallic jumps, and then brass fanfare signaling a change between sections.

The final section is just as exciting as the first, except this time the instruments slowly layer back in as the festival begins once again. I got chills once everyone was back in, it was just so much fun to listen to overall.

Of Sailors and Whales - Francis McBeth

Ishmael starts with a sustain underneath a low-range clarinet soli and shimmering chimes, giving the impression of a sparkling sea in the morning. I love the way the build up resolves into the new key at the A section after the introduction. I really enjoy Ishmaels main motive with contrary motion. Also, the power of the horn calls is something that just continues to feed into the imagery of a ship calling for port. The way that block chords are used in the context of major climactic points just makes it feel like I'm sitting in the stands of

Queequeg is a sprint in the opposite direction of Ishmael, being faster and more technically challenging than the first movement. Percussion also plays a much larger role in this movement. The *FF* low brass sections bring a sense of foreboding, which lends itself well to the transition into the third movement.

Father Maple starts with a solo bell being rung. Sung lyrics in a large piece is interesting, with the words being set in a way that is similar to chant. This whole movement reminds me of a funeral procession, ending the way it started with the solo bell.

Ahab to me feels like what would happen if you gave a jaws theme to the great whale. The use of tritones in the horns brings a great sense of doom and foreboding to the movement. The B section also evokes a similar feeling, but with the upper woodwinds being featured a little bit more than the A section. The staggered attacks into the cluster chord are also an effect that I really enjoy and like to write in my own music. After the caesura, the two notes into the brass chord put the last nail in the coffin that the whale is *huge*.

The Great Whale's fanfare is a lot more regal than I would have expected, not having heard this piece more than once before, with the contrast between the featured brass section and woodwind flourishes representing the sea. At the A section, then it feels like a battle is taking place between the crew and the whale. At the tempo change, everything starts to get hysterical and out of hand, and the woodwind dissonance and seemingly out of time muted trumpet solo being indicative of the chaos on the Pequod. Though the piece ends in a way that I didn't think it would, as at the end of the novel the ship is destroyed and everyone drowns, save for Ishmael. Despite that, I really enjoy the theatrics of a theme piece, and there is a plethora of musicianship to be explored here.

Be Thou My Vision - David Gillingham

I seem to consistently have a thing for picking pieces that begin slow and quiet with lower register clarinet, but I love the way that this piece begins and develops harmonically. The harp/clarinet/flute ostianado with the stopped horn solo is gorgeous. The way the flute solo just soars over the rest of the ensemble feels cathartic, as if you're being told to rest. By contrast, the low brass chorale over the woodwind flourishes is beautiful but far more intense, and arguably maybe a little overdone in the recording I listened to. After the climax though, I love that it settles on a low marimba roll. The second half of the piece is my favorite, as it feels like this massive chorale being played among birds flying around (with the woodwinds being the birds with their flourishes). Also the extended chord progression right before the horn solo is something that I think is worth dragging out as long as humanly possible.

As a side note, the instrumentation could make this difficult to play for a high school band, being that a harp is a major part. There could be a piano part to cover that perhaps, but I'm not sure how effective that would be. I'm also not sure how many other options there are that would even come close to the sound of a harp.

There are a lot of really difficult musical things to be rehearsed here, but I think consistency in the woodwind flourishes, dynamic control, and emotional sensitivity on the part of the conductor and musician are the most important things in my mind. There's so much potential, but if an ensemble doesn't work on how it approaches every atom of ink on the page intentionally, then there's a half decent chance the ensemble will just kind of say "Okay, that sounded alright." Figuring out how to keep each note charged with passion the entire performance is the objective, and I hope to play this work one day and generate that effect.

Beyond - Wataru Hokoyama

This is a piece I had not heard before this assignment, but there's so much musicianship in the way it was written that I would love to play it on a concert. The opening fanfare reads a lot like a John Williams theme, and the horn parts written here make me wish I was a horn player. In general, the hollywood-esque style would appeal to a lot of school-age musicians which is a great selling point. It's a lot easier to buy into a piece when it sounds like other things you like. The lyrical section is gorgeous, the harmonic structure brings this sense of wonder and nostalgia, kind of like what you get when you look up at the sky in the middle of nowhere. The entire finale of this work, and the way it wanders around back to the first key of the piece between loud fanfares and reflective passages, back to intense fanfares really make you feel like you're watching a movie. Overall, this would be an excellent opener (though perhaps a little too long).

I think dynamic pacing is one of the most important aspects of this piece. The way it was written, it would be really easy to overplay the whole time, but that would be exhausting to both the audience and the musicians, so having a grasp on proper balance and pacing is paramount to the success of the ensemble.

Daughter of the Stars - Warren Benson

This work is incredibly musically sensitive, and like most of Warren Benson's works, is a slow burn. This is to say he doesn't give anything away early, which is a blessing and a curse. There are a lot of traditionally non-western tonalities in this piece, which is great for ear development and training of the rounded musician. I can't find any way to view the score online without paying for it (as much as I'd like to spend the money I'll wait until I have a budget for that), but there sound like there's some strange rhythms contrasting with the slower lyrical style of the work. There is a *lot* of dissonance between parts of the same instrument, which is *great*. It will be a wonderful opportunity to teach students to not shy away from that, and in fact that surface tension is where the thrilling effect will come from. The saxophone soli about halfway through the work has such interesting harmony, I would love to try an analysis of it (and the whole piece). The hairpin technical section to forte was surprising in a great way, and was a great transition into a more tense section. Minutes six to eight just feel like something trying to break through a layer of surface tension, but can't quite get through until almost minute 10 of the piece where there's only deceptive resolution, and then what feels like a plagal/ending on a 4 kind of cadence. After a short caesura, the piece moves to a kind of harmony and rhythm that feels like a church organ processional in the clarinets and percussion, which finally ends on the softest but fullest chord I think I've heard. This work will take a lot of emotional and musical intelligence/stamina to be able to deliver everything the composer envisioned from start to finish.

Vesuvius - Frank Ticheli

This work is very close to my heart, having played it in several contexts and was my introduction into the world of high school band. The constant tension with running 8th notes propels this work into perpetual motion, giving the sensation of something unavoidable approaching. Only after a full minute into the piece do we get one moment of silence, only to be interrupted by the first main theme being played by an alto saxophone. The groove created by the 9/8 feels like a dance, but I can't say that I've ever danced in that meter before. The way the motive develops between sections is interesting and logical, nothing seems forced, and the main theme always finds its way back through the ensemble, but with variations in articulation or dynamic.

The slower section that's played in one (but written in 3) gives me the feeling of somebody watching something be taken away, but feeling resignation at being unable to do anything, so you just watch. Personally, the image I always used was watching lava cascade down the mountainside. Eerily beautiful, but absolutely terrifying in its implication.

We immediately jump into the second main theme as a jarring jump from the lyrical high point we just crested over. The way that the melody gets passed around each subsection is really nice developmentally, and provides students a chance to get used to matching styles in difficult contexts like this.

One thing to work on in this piece is timing/meter, especially given that the division of 9/8 is most often not 2+3+2+2. Another thing is the quality of sound. This piece gets *very* aggressive, and rightfully so, but it doesn't mean anything if the ensemble can't create a great, rich sound while being "aggressive".

Rapture - Patrick Harlin

This work has wormed its way into my top five pieces. I'm a massive fan of how the syncopated attacks come out of the dissonance of the woodwinds and how the descending rhythm gets passed around the upper to the lower woodwinds. I've always been a fan of melodramatic and intense pieces, and this one ticks so many boxes for me. The subtle groove that's always kind of there in the background. We pass through a transition into the B section through an atonal interlude into a low woodwind undertow texture. In general, the use balance in Woodwinds and Brass here is really nicely done, not just making one section or the other a gimmick, making each voice matter. That being said, that's also one of the challenges of this piece, being that it's aurally challenging, but despite that everyone *must* know their part. Another thing to work on is pacing in the slower section, as the writing certainly doesn't play itself. By which I mean if it's played too loud too quickly, the effect and mystery goes away, leaving the audience feeling like the section just goes and goes. Though near the end, I really enjoy the use of muted brass chords beneath the cacophony the woodwinds are playing. The immediate transition to new material is also really interesting, it took me by surprise, and the really high horn solo gave me chills just sitting in my chair. As a trumpet player, the trumpet melody before minute 8 of the piece is just awesome, it's so out of the texture, and it reminds me of Kinetic Noise (as dumb of an analogy as that is, it's just the first thing that came to mind). I also really enjoy how we find our way with the piano back to the groove that was introduced in the beginning of the piece. Overall, the unpredictability of this piece is enthralling, and I really hope to perform it some day.

It Perched For Vespers Nine - Joe Puckett

The dissonant harmony of the introductory statement demands the attention of the listener, and I enjoy how it develops a little more each repetition, as I would have likely otherwise been bored by the third time through. The fact it was different the second time evoked an expectation from me that it was going to be different if it repeated, and that uncertainty is such a strong element of this piece. After all that quiet development, the sudden percussion honestly made me jump, as without a video there was no way to expect it, and it clearly achieved the effect it was written for. The entire introduction is such an unsettled ethereal experience (and at times made me think more of a rapture than *Rapture* by Patrick Harlin did). Something to work on to continue to develop that uncertain feeling in the audience would be dynamic pacing, really exploring the softest dynamics and getting comfortable with them. About halfway through the piece we're reintroduced to the opening motive, this time with the brass involved as well, after which clarinets get a melody to play over ebbing and flowing dissonance. After almost 7.5 minutes, we get our first "consonant" chord (used very loosely, as there are still dissonances involved), and it's such a release point after so long in wandering in harmonic limbo, "in the mists" to quote the program notes.

In my mind, the true climax is at 8:10 (in the University of North Carolina recording anyways), but instead of the mists clearing, it sounds more like they're converging, giving me more of a feeling of loss and dread to the unknowable. I liked this piece already, but after reading the program notes I have become utterly arrested by it and the story of its genesis, its references to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Puckett's attempt to find what ill-fortune is swirling in the mists.

The Solitary Dancer - Warren Benson

Another one of my favorite works, after having performed it with WMU's Symphonic Band several semesters ago. The transparent orchestration is very characteristic of the piece, which intends to reflect a solitary dancer's inner music and poise. The parts are C Piccolo, Flute I-II, Oboe I-II, E-flat Soprano Clarinet, B-flat Soprano Clarinet I-II-III, E-flat Alto Clarinet, B-flat Bass Clarinet, B-flat Contrabass Clarinet, B-flat Soprano Saxophone, E-flat Alto Saxophone, B-flat Tenor Saxophone, E-flat Baritone Saxophone, B-flat Trumpet I-II-III, Flugelhorn I-II, Horn in F I-II-III-IV, Trombone I-II, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba. String Bass, Piano. Timpani, and Percussion. The most interesting and dangerous part of this, both as a listener and from experience, is the groove between the String Bass, percussion, and Piano. If the groove falters, so does the rest of the ensemble. As a whole, this piece brings me such an intense focus it's almost comical. I might have pavloved myself into finding a flow state whenever I hear this piece, just because if you lose focus as a performer in here, it's often far too late to hop back on. One of the defining features of this piece is the quiet "surface tension" that's present in the whole piece, as if every muscle is gently tensed, ready to react at any moment. The way that motives are developed between solo instruments and carried into new sections is just so seamless. The only emotion I can think of listening to this piece is a quiet intense burn. If I were to give it an image, this piece reminds me of a pilot light. Always on, always ready whenever it might be time to start something. The end comes out of nowhere, as you don't really notice the groove fading away until it's gone (at least, I didn't), and the tension as a listener comes back, as rhythmically the solos that play the same five notes don't line up in tempo with each other all the time.

A Child's Garden of Dreams - David Maslanka

This piece is close to me personally after the summer of 2022, it brings up so many formative memories of my favorite people and favorite experiences.

The opening brass fanfare just brings a smile to my face every time I hear it, and there's such a sense of heavy intensity for the first half, like it's the wrong gesture personified. There's a lot of challenge here, and making sure the ensemble explores the full dynamic range gives the audience a complete sonic experience in the first movement.

The second movement's dissonant opening gesture introduces feelings of uncertainty and. I *adore* the unison duet between oboe and bass clarinet, it is a combination I would not have thought of. The gentle percussive nature of entrances here makes everyone that isn't a soloist feel like they're a part of the harp part, which is such an interesting aural experience, even more interesting because I didn't realize there was a harp in this piece to begin with until that forced me to listen harder. Much like *The Solitary Dancer* by Warren Benson, there's a consistent pressure being applied to the listener, keeping them on the edge even in a more lyrical serene passage. All of the oboe solos bring me the image of a bird flying alone in twilight. The ending being a solo scale is an interesting choice by Maslanka that brings a sense of closure and containment to the movement.

The third movement's percussion feature at the very beginning into several cold attacks and licks brings the pressure from the last move and turns it from surface tension into active tension. This is the movement that makes your heart race, as if you're a part of a chase. The lush brass chords repeating louder and louder making a cacophony of sound is an interesting texture. The loud attacks felt like they would never end, throwing any expectations I had out the back door. I always forget just how loud this movement is, and the ending with the quiet percussion groove always makes me scared that there's going to be one last attack that's going to jumpscare me.

The fourth movement dials the pace back more, beginning with woodwind harmonies in the opening gesture, not necessarily easing tension (as there's a lot of dissonance still), but making it far more serene than the previous movement. The percussive effects in this movement are also very interesting, and it sounds like there is a prepared piano part involved as well. This part gives me the sensation of exploring unknown territory in the dark with only a lighter as a light.

The fifth movement starts with a recall to the opening material, but slightly reimagined and played by the oboe over other woodwinds. The low brass in the recording I'm listening to sounds like a synth, and the brass as a whole makes me grin. It's all just so grand, and though my experience is slightly different than most with this piece, I think it would read like a festival to anybody. After a brief interlude, the slow build delivered me into a sea of sound from the brass. After which we immediately break into pandemonium, underneath a trumpet solo, almost like dissonant whispers. After that section, and a longer build, another festival-esque section begins (though it's not traditional as there's still the chaos of the woodwinds. It's not until just before 8 minutes into the 5th movement that we find a moment of rest from the volume with an oboe solo over a woodwind interlude that slowly fades to the end of the piece. As a whole, there's so much nontraditional material in this piece, and the ending is no exception, as after all of that I would not expect it to slowly fade into nothing, but it left me satisfied and awestruck nonetheless.

Moth - Viet Cuong

Another personal favorite of mine after performing it with symphonic. The beginning of this piece, especially the winding woodwind runs, reminds me a lot of watching moths and other bugs dancing around a fluorescent light, just standing there wondering what's going through its mind. The way the horns build is wonderfully written, and is such a great contrast to the woodwinds and leads into the full ensemble arrival very well. Immediately into the secondary theme, it evokes feelings of spiraling down intentionally to find *something*, be it perhaps a light, or whatever that light. The layered trumpet part is a really interesting transition (and was really hard to figure out the timing of for a while), and functions as a good way to lead into the second arrival point. This piece has this consistent tension and momentum being applied to it. The fanfares into the fast section is another great charged moment. Personally, I don't know that a horn section could play the part at 3:56 (on the North Texas Wind Symphony recording) loud enough. That to me just screams blow the house down, and as a listener has me listening for how the horns lead into the rest of the ensemble. The full ensemble moments into the small two or three person solo sections back and forth brings this feeling of suspense during the solo sections, because by contrast, the two or three instruments playing seem *miniscule* compared to the full volume of the rest of the ensemble. After that section is arguably one of the coolest solos that I've heard in the alto saxophone over percussion and brass and low woodwinds and brass. The way the muted horn harmony is explored is really interesting, as it reminds me of another of Viet Cuong's works, *Diamond Tide*, it has a very liquidy quality to the orchestration.

Eventually the trombones find their way back to the material played immediately preceding the very first full ensemble impact, but in a new key. Instead of the same impact, we have a cascade of bell tone-like quarter note triplets. The transitional material into the finale of the piece is one of my favorite woodwind moments of all time, the style and orchestration is just what I want to hear as a listener as a signal of “one more time” and leaves me waiting thinking “alright, how are you going to end this thing?” The accel is subtle but so important here, it puts me right on the edge, and really makes your pulse race as you’re swept away in the virtuosity of the performance.

I’m a really big fan of Cuong’s use of suspension in the brass in general, giving rips to trumpets as well to project into the audience. The syncopation of the theme is a great way to show the audience a full circle ending. Also, the pedal sustain of the clarinet and flute cluster is really intense and adds so much to the overall feeling of this section. The horn parts that Cuong writes makes me wish I was a horn player. The entire piece is incredibly exciting, and I hope that I get to perform this with an ensemble one day.

Hivemind - Peter Van Zandt Lane

The strange harmonies of the opening gesture bring me to some alien plane, and immediately invests me in the character the ensemble is portraying. There are so many different ideas happening until finally the clarinets take over as the primary thought. Though only temporarily, and the horns and trombones take over immediately after that. The percussion really adds to the effect, it makes me often feel like I could be in some rickety spaceship that's rattling causing the sounds they are performing. There's a lot of sounds that I could hear potentially being film sounds of stereotypical 90's aliens, like the sudden trumpet notes that decrease in speed and the trombone with its pitch descent. The saxophone solo around the 3:00 mark (of the Sydney Conservatorium recording) is unlike anything that I've ever heard, commanding my attention in awe. There are so many virtuosic skill sets being demonstrated, but they're all happening at once, giving the image of an actual hivemind with thousands of thoughts fighting for control. Things finally even out exactly halfway through the piece, forcing the listener to stay engaged, because it's such a stark contrast to everything that the previous four minutes had to offer. That doesn't last terribly long however, as more thoughts (and instruments) begin to creep back in, starting a cacophony of voices. After a brief harmonic interlude, that being the closest thing we get to consonance, we're back to the intense internal arguments of a hivemind.

As a whole, to sell this piece, confidence and understanding of every part is critical. There are no places to hide if you don't know your part. This is chaos, sure, but organized in such a way that if a part is missing, it stops making as much sense as it does and leaves the rest of the ensemble out to dry. This is an incredibly difficult work for nontraditional reasons.

Urban Requiem - Michael Colgrass

Perhaps one of the longest wind ensemble pieces that I've heard in a while, this gorgeous requiem starting with a saxophone quartet leaves me breathless, just at the beauty of both the writing and performance. Reading the program notes, Michael Colgrass wanted this piece to be a reflection of the souls living in urban cities, and using a saxophone quartet brought this piece to reflect both the tragedies that occur in cities daily as well as the energy that is there. I really love all of the different characters explored throughout the piece. Liturgical music, blues, freeform jazz, dance, romantic, baroque and a lot of in between, weaving in and out of each genre effortlessly. The "after hours" feel is what drew me to this piece the most I think, it just has a very noir feel to it before it begins to explore the sounds of a busy city.

This is the kind of piece that I would only program if I had a guest saxophone quartet or an *insanely* talented senior saxophone ensemble that could even make the sounds that this piece requires. It's no slouch for the other parts either though, requiring the winds to match the qualities the quartet is exuding. Also, timing is such a paramount factor of this piece, especially because the ensemble plays more of a supporting role than usual (though there are some parts where the ensemble is the primary material).

The work ends much like it begins, in liturgical requiem fashion, bells slowly fading into the ether. I think culturally, this piece is something that a lot of people could connect to. There are so many tragedies that happen in cities on a daily basis that affect the lives of people, likely only one or two degrees of separation away, very preventable tragedies. However, there's also the undeniable energy of cities, the thrum of possibility

and awe. There's a lot of content to dig into as well, and with a 31 minute run time, a lot of content to perform as well.