
Composing and Arranging

For Beginning Musicians
Jason A. Taurins
www.jasontaurins.com

Overview

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- You have an advantage already!
- Orchestration
- Musical form
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Meet Your Presenter

Jason A. Taurins (ASCAP)

- Music educator, composer
- B.M. in Education, Western Michigan University (2015)
- Have taught 5-12 band, orchestra, choir
- Currently instrumental music teacher at Prescott High School
- Published with Excelcia Music, Wingert Jones, T.U.X. People's Music, Carl Fischer
- www.jasontaurins.com



What this presentation isn't...(and what it is)

- There's no formula to good composing
 - It is, rather:
 - Ways to overcome the limits of the medium (beginning instrumentalists)
 - Allowing your work to have pedagogical purpose
 - What publishers look for
 - Disclaimer - based on my experience in the industry
- A literature selection/quality guide
 - That's a whole other subject!
- I'm using my own music because I have copyright permission and I know it pretty well
 - There are tons of other great examples out there too.

You have an advantage already!

- There are few full-time composers out there
- Like many others in the industry, I got my start writing for my kids
- You understand your student's musical development - you know what they can do at different stages
- Can't find something in your library? Write something for your students!

How to compose

It's different for everyone, but it's important to find a consistent way to do it.

Fundamental skills which help:

- 1) Music theory
- 2) Aural skills
- 3) Improvisation
- 4) Counterpoint
- 5) Orchestration

Why this medium?

You have an audience that will:

- 1) Enthusiastically commission and perform new music
- 2) The money can be decent
- 3) You'll get lots of performances!

Aesthetics

Let your music tell a compelling story...

Think of your favorite pieces for beginning musicians: *Dragonhunter*, *Prehistoric Suite*, *Midnight Mission*, *Burst!*, etc.

Write music that excites your inner child:

- 1) *Secret Mission*: a short spy-movie-inspired work
- 2) *Zombie Attack!*: a brief scary movie
- 3) *Canterbury Sketches*: a Renaissance fantasy (inspired by the organ music of J.S. Bach)

Consider music that connects to other subjects students are learning about: science, history, etc.

Musical Form

Beginners: a piece may be ca. 50 bars in length

Intro (4-8 bars) | A section (8 bars) | A' (8 bars) | B (8 bars) | Retransition (8 bars) | A'' (8 bars) | Coda (4-8 bars) |

Total of ca. 52 bars

Example: *Dark Matter* for beginning strings

Example: *Secret Mission* for grade 1 band

Musical Form

Form can grow in length and complexity as musicians advance:

Example: *Zombie Attack!*

- Long, slow introduction, followed by faster contrasting material

Example: *Canterbury Sketches*

- Inspired by Baroque dance suites: Prelude, Allemande, and Galliard, with extended coda

Pro-tip: concert marches and Christmas music sell well. Write for beginning strings! They need more good music

Orchestration

When you repeat something, change something: orchestration, dynamics, counterpoint

Be creative - spread the melody around to all voices

Example: *Dark Energy* for grade 1 strings

The overtone series is your friend! (It'll make your small ensembles sound bigger)

Orchestration

What makes good counterpoint? CONTRAST!

While one line is static, make the other move, vice versa

Contrary motion

Consider your harmony - fill in chord tones, esp. on strong beats

Example: *Secret Mission*

Review 4-part chorale writing - good voice leading makes good music, even in modern harmonic language

Harmony

Eight-bar phrase:

T | T | PD | D (half cadence) |

T | PD | D | T (authentic cadence) |

or

T | PD | D | T |

T | PD | Secondary D | D (half cadence) | this might resolve in a second 8-bar phrase (*Zombie Attack!*)

Harmony - the B section

Think of the second strain of a march - it often doesn't start on the tonic

Example: *Mt. Wrightson March*

D | T | Secondary dominant | D | (half cadence)

D | T | PD D | T (authentic cadence)

Might switch tonal centers? (i.e., relative major, dominant, closely related key)

Example: *Tombstone Galop*

Other considerations

Young orchestra: 3-part orchestration

- Violins in at least rhythmic unison
- Violin 2 may double viola
- Cello and bass double

Example: *Dark Matter*

Everyone gets the melody

Other considerations

Young band: 4-part writing

Don't count on every beginning band having every instrument

Always double the flute somewhere (and not just bells)

Other common doublings: all low brass and reeds; horn/tenor sax; trumpet/alto sax; trumpet/clarinet; double or cue any double reeds

Balance between allowing players rest, and keeping them engaged (esp. perc.)

Example: *Secret Mission*

Working creatively around limitations

What to do when you lack the leading tone?

Music is ultimately tension and release

Sus4 chords (dominant seventh minus the leading tone) - *Dark Energy*

Power chords - *Secret Mission, Dark Energy*

Non-functional harmony - consider the backdoor cadence; VI-VII-i; Andalusian cadence

Clusters - *Zombie Attack!*

Aleatoric elements - *Secret Mission*

What publishers look for

Follow their submission rules

Follow their grading rubrics (use ABC's as a guide)

Have some kind of contrast in your piece - i.e., fast vs. slow, rhythmic vs. lyrical

Suites don't sell well

Come up with a better title

- The original for *Canterbury Sketches* was *Prelude, Allemande, and Galliard*
- Make the title unique - search it on JW Pepper (still can't believe I'm the first *Secret Mission* on there!)
- Be culturally sensitive with titles

What publishers look for

Consistency of difficulty between parts - grade 5 woodwinds and grade 2 low brass is a no-no

Don't give up - it may take time for a piece to find the right publisher

Accept advice - rewrite something to make it both better and sellable; publishers almost always want revisions

A shameless plug...

The Hotshots - grade 3 march honoring firefighters

Information on my website

\$50/ensemble, half of proceeds going to
firefighting charities

Performance exclusivity thru end of the school
year - then publicly available

Honoring the Granite Mountain Hotshots on the
10th anniversary of their tragic deaths



Musical Samples Used

Dark Matter - grade 1 strings, Wingert-Jones Publications

Dark Energy - grade 1.5 strings

Secret Mission - grade 1 band, Carl Fischer

Zombie Attack! - grade 1.5 band, Excelcia Music Publishing

Canterbury Sketches - grade 2 band, Excelcia Music Publishing

Mt. Wrightson March - grade 4, T.U.X. People's Music

Tombstone Galop - grade 4, T.U.X. People's Music

Thank you!



Q&A?

Find the slides on my website: www.jasontaurins.com