

What Rings your Bell?

by Tim Reynish

Phil Ellis of the Hertfordshire County Music Service writes in *Winds Winter 1998/1999* of the need for longer pieces of wind music, symphonies and concertos of 25 minutes plus

We do have programming problems; the old 'meat and two veg' symphony orchestra programme is no format for the wind. Think of a typical Summer Prom:

Overture: <i>Die Meistersinger</i>	Wagner
<i>Walk through a Paradise Garden</i>	Delius
<i>Second Piano Concerto</i>	Rachmaninov
<i>Symphony No. 9 The New World</i>	Dvorak

I suspect however, that some of our problems are caused by ignorance, fuelled by the lack of broadcasts, recordings and proper public concerts, and so a lack of knowledge of the repertoire, worldwide.

"That Rings My Bell"

Jim Croft, wisest of elder wind band statesmen, divides repertoire into 'music that rings my bell' and the other sort, which is as good a way of developing ideas on repertoire as any.

Bad Beethoven

I suspect that we tend to accept some music as masterpieces, because there's nothing else; for instance, if the Beethoven *Horn Sonata* were one of 20 classic masterpieces for horn and piano, who would play that rather ordinary little piece? I have spent a sleepless night contemplating the unthinkable - because many of the major wind works of the mid and late century just don't ring my bell at all.

Richard Franko Goldman wrote in *Musical Quarterly* in 1958 a review of the Fennell recording of the Hindemith, Schoenberg and Stravinsky masterpieces, and uttered what even today must seem heresy: "All band people are grateful to Schoenberg and Hindemith, it is in a sense ungracious to wish that they had written better ones; the Hindemith, indeed, sounds very much like a poorly done transcription - no amount of special pleading will ever make the *Theme and Variations* very interesting." Goldman ends his article full of enthusiasm for the Stravinsky *Symphonies of Wind*: "in contrast to the other two, warm and life lit, a pleasure to hear, with beautiful ideas and beautiful sounds." If we jettison these two masterpieces as Emperors without any clothing, what do we put in their place?

Hopeful Holloway

A chance meeting with composer Robin Holloway at a performance of his superb new *Concerto for Clarinet and Symphony Orchestra* led me back to his work commissioned by an American consortium - I played it again to my wife, a viola player it must be admitted, and we agreed that it was full of what we miss in much wind music, lyricism, inventive scoring, wit, drama - well yes, beauty. It is finely scored, emotional, inventive, Mahlerian in scope, a sprawling catch-all giant of a piece, and I played in the first performances in the city of Birmingham SO of Mahler 5 and 6 with Dorati in the sixties. For three days of rehearsal we thought they were mad, trivial, grotesque, too big - then we were captivated, and now Mahler is played by student orchestras and can fill any hall.

The American works which I tend to programme are those which accentuate the more lyrical side of the wind ensemble; there is plenty of traditionally aggressive music, with the stress on brass and percussion, but I absolutely love the sound world of the early works of Colgrass, Schwantner and Maslanka, three pieces which would grace any symphony orchestra concert.

Colgrass	<i>Winds of Nagual</i>	Kjos	22 00
Schwantner	<i>... and the Mountains Rising Nowhere</i>	Helicon/EAM	11.00 minutes
Maslanka	<i>A child's garden of dreams</i>	Carl Fischer	35 00

Lost Songs

WASBE has over the years provided a platform for some great additions to the repertoire, but works often lost and forgotten. A wonderful piece from the first WASBE Conference in 1981 was Warren Benson's *Symphony 11 - Lost Songs*, surely our equivalent to *Das Lied von der Erde* with a magical ending of the greatest beauty, whilst in Schladming, Warren again provided a highspot with *The Drums of Summer*, again a piece imbued with wit, energy, beauty, and without some of the trivial

repetition that disfigures so much wind music. And along with Warren amongst senior composers strides Karel Husa, whose *Music for Prague* received an epic performance in Schladming, his *Apotheosis* in Hamamatsu. Colgrass has written two other long pieces, *Urban Requiem* for solo saxophone quartet and band, and *Arctic Dreams*, an evocation of life with the Eskimos. Maslanka writes nearly everything on an epic scale, and both have written wonderfully evocative, lyrical music.

English Bells

What else rings my bell on the symphonic side from the UK? I must declare self-interest; I commissioned three works from Richard Rodney Bennett, and I believe that they are major masterpieces. His scoring is delicate, his structures sure and his imagination runs riot with the colours of Fennell's Wind Ensemble concept. The 1991 WASBE Conference heard premieres of the *Four Seasons*, and workshops on the Holloway and Maw. The Bazelon and Musgrave I also commissioned, the Wilby is an exciting almost avant garde commission from Larry Sutherland, MacMillan was premiered by John Paynter at the Glasgow BASBWE, Tippett was another US consortium commission and the Maconchy is just another very beautiful, wonderfully constructed work.

Bazelon	<i>Midnight Music</i>	Novello	20 00
Bennett	<i>Trumpet Concerto</i>	Novello	20 00
Bennett	<i>The Four Seasons</i>	Novello	19 00
Bennett	<i>Morning Music</i>	Novello	17 00
Holloway	<i>Entrance; Carousing & Embarcation</i>	Boosey	25 00
MacMillan	<i>Sowetan Spring</i>	Boosey	12 00
Maconchy	<i>Music for Wind & Brass</i>	Chester	10 00
Maw	<i>American Games</i>	Faber	23 00
Musgrave	<i>Journey through a Japanese Landscape</i>	Novello	23 00
Tippett	<i>Triumph</i>	Schott	15 00
Wilby	<i>Sinfonia Sacra</i>	Chester	15 00

This repertoire includes several pieces I would recommend to Simon Rattle or any other conductor to be played by orchestras in lieu of the usual nod towards the wind in Mozart *Gran Partita*, *Lincolnshire Posy* or Stravinsky or Messiaen. But what about the good High School Band, the small college band, the Community Band? Must they stick with the 7-14 minute rattle-raising hard-hitting audience pleaser, or can they find repertoire to extend the emotional responses of audience and performers? This is where I think WASBE has a major part to play. Here is a regrettably short list of largescale works I have come across which seem to me to be at Grade 3, 4 and easy 5 level and have the emotional impact of those above that are mainly Grade 6.

Connor	<i>Tails aus dem Woods Viennoise</i>	Maecenas	18 00
Ito	<i>Gloriosa</i>		18 00
Putz	<i>Meltdown</i>	Mundana	

The Connor is quite easy, Grade 3-4, and is the closest students of that calibre can get to playing a sustained work almost Mahlerian in impact. Has anyone tried Bill's *Concerto for Four Saxophones* again? It was premiered at the Huddersfield Festival. Ito I knew from his excellent *Saxophone Concerto* and his folk-song potpourri, *Festal Scenes*, but *Gloriosa* is a major contribution to the repertoire. Marco Putz is a saxophone player in Luxembourg, and his music for large band is well worth exploring, and is happily now available.

At our last BASBWE Conference Jonathan Good introduced works by Nelson, Maslanka, Gibson, Camphouse and Holsinger who at their best are writing for school band with sensitivity. Add perhaps Mahr, Broege and Boysen - who else from Europe, USA, South America and Australasia? Now this ramble led me to wonder whether as we approach our 18th BASBWE, and 10th WASBE conferences, and our two associations end our teen years, everyone could pitch in with information from round the world on what rings or rang their bell in past conferences, or even more important at the CBDNA, NBA, BASBWE, JBA, ABA and CBA conferences which have not yet been reported. I suspect that many of those pioneering works by Leslie Bassett or Ross Lee Finney were just too far ahead of the audiences, players and perhaps conductors, and some of the performances I have on tape were very heavy-handed. Are we ready for them now, and the best of the Eastman Wind Ensemble, the National Wind Ensemble Conferences, the commissions Frank made at Ithaca or the Boudreau commissions? We forget, if we ever knew about them, the works by Jean Morel, or Gunther Schuller. Meanwhile, I shall go on exploring the gentler sounds of the repertoire to tinkle my bell as I slide into old age.