



New Zealand Inspirations

→ **Paul Hindmarsh previews the test-pieces selected for the 1st and 2nd sections in the forthcoming Regional Championships**

On a superficial level, *The Land of the Long White Cloud* and *Rhapsody in Brass* have a lot in common. Both were composed with elite level brass band contests in mind, but have since become established in the lower sections. *The Land of the Long White Cloud* draws inspiration from the imposing land and seascape of New Zealand when first encountered by Polynesian settlers. *Rhapsody in Brass* was composed by a New Zealander, whose musical horizons were directed more towards European classical traditions and those English composers who had been persuaded to write for the National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain at The Crystal Palace - Holst, Ireland and Howells in particular.

Perhaps more pertinent to this preview is the fact that both composers were in their 20s at the time of composition. Philip Sparke (b. 1951) was 28 when, in 1979, he received a commission from the New Zealand Brass Band Association for a test-piece to mark the centenary of the New Zealand National Championships (1980). Later that year it was also the set for the European Brass Band Championships, held at the Royal Albert Hall. Sir Dean Goffin (1916-1984) was just 25 when he started to compose *Rhapsody in Brass* in January 1942. He was in Syria on war service with the 20th Battalion of the 4th Infantry Brigade, forming and training its band. The suite took him six months to write and was finished in Egypt. For both composers, these were their first extended pieces to be published for brass band contest use. Indeed, the publication of Dean Goffin's *Rhapsody in Brass*, for the 1949 Belle Vue September Contest (now the British

Open), marked his debut as a published composer and was his only work not to be published by The Salvation Army. Delving a little deeper, the work of any emerging composer, as Goffin and Sparke were at the time when they wrote these pieces, tells us a great deal about the roots of their 'voice' as a composer - what inspires them, what has impressed them, what they have drawn upon in terms of technique, style and expression.

At the time of writing *Rhapsody in Brass* Dean Goffin was largely self-taught in the techniques of composition, but it's clear from the writing that he'd learned much from studying the European classical and baroque masters - Bach, Haydn and Schubert in particular perhaps. The contrapuntal skills he revealed in *Rhapsody in Brass* and highlighted further in its sequel from 1950, *Symphonic Variations*, set him apart from other Salvationist composers of the time. This latter work was eventually published by The Salvation Army (SA) under the title *Rhapsodic Variations: My Strength, My Tower*. It's his masterpiece. This was also the year when Goffin graduated, as a mature student, from the University of Otago. He was the first Salvationist composer to hold a university music degree, and one might have expected that the great promise shown in these two rhapsodies would have led to even greater things as an original voice in the brass band world. However, shortly after graduation, Goffin followed his Christian vocation and trained to become a full-time SA officer. He served for a short time in New Zealand, and then for a decade (1956-66) in the UK Territory, where the impact of his cultured musicianship as composer, arranger and conductor was significant.

The wider brass band world's loss was certainly The Salvation Army's gain. The shorter pieces created between

the late 1930s and the early 1960s, particularly his marches and meditations, are among the most technically refined in the entire SA literature, but there were no more major works after the *Symphony of Thanksgiving* (1951), composed for the International Staff Band. In the 1960s, as the burden of administration increased, Goffin composed less and less.

In 1966, he was transferred back to New Zealand and was appointed to a number of administrative roles. In 1980, he was appointed Territorial Commander and received a Knighthood for services to his country in 1983, a year before his death. Goffin's best music came early and, rather like the music of another Salvation Army 'great' Wilfred Heaton, but for very different reasons, there was little by way of stylistic evolution or trajectory to follow.

Nevertheless, *Rhapsody in Brass* is a refined and skillful composition, in which Goffin combines the balance and poise of classical form and a harmonic vocabulary that looks back even further to the modality of the English renaissance, viewed perhaps through the 'prism' of Crystal Palace test-pieces of recent vintage - the tuneful modality of Holst's *A Moorside Suite*, the elegance of Ireland's *Comedy Overture*, the contrapuntal and rhythmic energy of Howell's *Pageantry*.

We shouldn't think of the title *Rhapsody* as indicating anything loose in construction or rambling in argument. The work is admirably organic in its organisation and argument, founded on the three-note figure announced by the cornets at the start. It's repeating, ostinato character embeds it in our minds, unobtrusively connecting all the musical threads together. Example 1 shows how the themes of each of the three movements derive from it. The character of this opening movement contrasts joyful dance,

Ex. 1: *Rhapsody in Brass* thematic derivations

Ex. 2: *Rhapsody in Brass* - 2nd movement 'song without words' (solo horn, written pitch)

Andante con moto

Ex. 3: *The Land of the Long White Cloud* - main theme (bar 5)

Maestoso

with crisp ensemble work, with robust, syncopated chordal interjections. The minor mode imparts a serious rather than melancholy air and the pattern of the chord sequences - no inversions or added notes - all relate directly to the main motif. In classical terminology, it's a monothematic movement, but Goffin extracts maximum contrast from his ideas, and it's as hard to bring off now as it was in 1949! The form is unorthodox, hence the use of *Rhapsody* rather than *Symphony* or *Sinfonietta*. Goffin offers an exposition (32 bars) followed by a developing variant (52 bars), with textural layers extended reversed. The leaping euphonium part first time round is delicately embellished with some 'air varie' trickery second time round by solo cornet. A new developmental sequence (letter E), builds to the climax of the movement, with a balancing but suitably enhanced reprise (also 32 bars) to conclude the movement. The brusque final chords follow the main motif.

If the opening movement is all about the clarity and precision of the musical argument, precisely articulated details and well-tuned chords (nothing overblown), the second is about elegance and poise in a lyrical style. Goffin

presents his opening variant, with its inescapable 'memory' of the second movement of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, as a rather plaintive 'song without words' for solo horn (Ex. 2). A more expansive middle section begins in a jauntier style heralding a remembrance of the sequences first encountered at letter E in the first movement. An imposing reprise leads to a nostalgic coda, tinged with regret (or so it seems to this writer). The rumbustious finale elaborates a rondo form. This movement is often played separately as a concert item, and this writer has sat through many performances that set off too fast, and where the rhythmic profile and character is lost as the tempo gathers out of control in the 'helter-skelter' passages. The character is of a fast march, with a beautifully arched lyrical trio section and a second expansive hymn tune episode, whose irregular five and six bars phrase lengths remind us that Goffin knew his Haydn! It's in the extended final section where the band can be let off the leash, but never out of control, as Goffin winds up the music to a characteristically feverish ending. The basses remind us of the second movement melody and the chords of the first movement cut a syncopated

dash - but we need to hear how unstable this is with quality sound. The piece ends in rather stern character with a plagal cadence drawn from the work's governing motif.

Rhapsody in Brass is elegant, poised, beautifully composed and as fresh now as it was in 1949. It will require some playing for the 2nd Section bands to master all its subtleties, as will Philip Sparke's colourful test-piece debut *The Land of the Long White Cloud* in the 1st Section. This work requires more reserves of stamina and power than the Goffin and also confident techniques right round the band, not just in the principal players.

In complete contrast to the work of Dean Goffin, we can trace the creative evolution of Philip Sparke's work through a sustained and prolific span of 40 years. Whilst there is no denying the confidence and assurance with which he marshalled what he knew about in 1978 - hints of Walton, a suggestion of Stravinsky, colours of Ravel, more than a nod to Leonard Bernstein and, perhaps, the music of Gilbert Vinter, whose last work, *James Cook - Circumnavigator*, also opens with an imposing seascape - *The Land of the Long White Cloud* was just the start. We can hear the maturing 'voice'

Ex. 4: *The Land of the Long White Cloud* - dance tune 1

Molto vivace

Ex. 5: *The Land of the Long White Cloud* - dance tune 2

Molto vivace

Ex. 6: *The Land of the Long White Cloud* - letter L, soprano cornet (written pitch)

Larghetto

through subsequent extended pieces like *Year of the Dragon*, *Variations on an Enigma* through to *Harmony Music*. The control exerted over his ideas and their working out is fascinating to observe for those who enjoy dissecting the nuts and bolts of a developing composer's technique.

In the second half of his career, from the transitional work appropriately called *Between the Moon and Mexico* onwards, Philip's music has taken a different tack. The 'voice' is unmistakably still there, but the way he exploits the brass or wind band has become more resourceful and perhaps less predictable. He has spoken of the way he let his instincts and experience control much of the surface elements of the music, certainly in his major pieces; so, while *Land of the Long White Cloud* and later works like *Music of the Spheres* and, most recently, the scintillating *Raveling*, *Unraveling* sound, to these ears, like the work of the same musical mind, they are a world apart in their ambition, range and imagination.

Nevertheless, *The Land of the Long White Cloud* is a colourful and extrovert work, demanding quality sound, crisp articulation and precise rhythmic

profile. Philip added the subtitle *Aotearoa* as a reference to the Polynesian settlers, whose first sight of the islands of New Zealand was a long, flat cloud lying low over the land. Although, he doesn't give us any descriptions of programme to associate with the episodes, the music seems pictorial in character, certainly the expansive opening section, where the evocative colour of added-note harmony in the cornets and surging syncopations suggest a seascape image of some kind. This majestic opening section contains within it, set in the middle of the band, the work's main theme, from which all the other thematic elements derive (Ex. 3). There are subtle nuances of rhythm - a written-out rubato in essence - that need to be precisely delivered but sound spontaneous. The tempo increases for a lilting close harmony middle section, full of anticipation for the climax to come and the return of the opening music. One might imagine that land has been sighted or reached when the top D resounded in triumph on cornets and trombone.

A return of the opening bars winds down to a brilliantly scored and energetic dance episode. It's crucial that the crispness of articulation, clarity of

texture and precision of the pulse are not lost in an effort either to impress or excite, especially when the lively big tune arrives (Ex. 4). The deft syncopated interjections that provide a bridge to a more dissonant, rhythmically unstable second dancing theme (Ex. 5) should retain a lightness of touch and control. There are relatively few moments for soloists to make their mark in *The Land of the Long White Cloud*. Like Dean Goffin, Philip's first test-piece is organic in the way that the players serve the music, rather than the reverse. Having said that, the soprano cornet player is placed briefly in the spotlight at the start of the slow section with a haunting Ravel-inspired melody (Ex. 6), answered by the evocative tone of the flugel horn in a brief by wide-ranging cantilena. A poised and stately central passage builds to a passionate and texturally elaborate reprise of the soprano cornet's melody on the full band, but the tension soon dissipates in anticipation of a full reprise of the opening material in reverse order. The addition of a determined fugato treatment of the main dance tune adds to the drama, and a rumbustious Walton-esque treatment of the opening seascape material brings the fresh, exciting and demanding work to a joyful close.

