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Scoring for Brass Band: I

Author(s): Denis Wright

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name! There is nothing horrid in Sibelius's newness, in which we get many queer glimpses of a fascinating mind, moulded (it is a convention to say) by his land.

We in this country hear little about Finland. You figure it as a land the size of the British Isles, with a second Ireland thrown in, a land of waterways and forests—half of it woods, and a third lakes and marshes (its people call it 'Suomi'—Marshland). In the workable spaces of this country you scatter the populations of Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow—twenty people to a square mile, keep the temperature down to less than 30° Fahr. in the north, and under 40° in the south, and cover it with snow half the year. Give these Lutheran fishers and farmers an Englishman for a patron saint (so it is said), and you have Finland—a country whose people, fought over and ruled by Sweden and Russia since heaven knows when, have suffered much and often, and recovered quickly. There is a wild spark in them, and Sibelius has evidently got a light from that, and never ceased to burn with the double fire of national and personal spirit. Folk-lore colours much of his programme music, and shapes some of his songs, which seem marked with the mint of the ancient *runo*, the earliest Finnish folk-ballad, running in five-time, in a small compass. Nearly all the poets whose words he has set are compatriots of his. There are some songs of the superior drawing-room type, such as 'Aus banger Brust' (Englished as 'O wert thou here'), 'Frühlingszauber' ('The Spell of Springtide'), 'Sehnsucht' ('Longing'), and 'Im Feld ein Mädchen singt' ('A maiden yonder sings'). These, with their Straussian or Moussorgskian derivations, are not to be despised, but there is stronger stuff from the man's heart in 'Der kahle Baum' ('The Tree'), in which echoes the stark truth of the born realist; and 'Wenn ich traume' ('When I dream') is a fine task for the keen interpreter. Now and again a song appears to be stuck together rather clumsily: Sibelius the craftsman does not always bring it off. Such is 'Eitle Wünsche' ('Idle Wishes'), harder to play than it is worth. The accompaniments always need care, a vivid sense of tone-colour, and of the pianoforte's importance as a partner with the voice—and not often a junior partner. 'War es ein Traum?' ('Was it a dream?') is a song of which the dangerous word 'masterpiece' may, I think, safely be used. This comes from Op. 37, and the next set of songs forms Op. 38 (just before the first Symphony). These five contain some of the composer's subtlest translations of what the Northern nature-moods have suggested to him. The nip of caller air often comes in, sometimes, as in 'Mai' ('May') just clearing the drawing-room atmosphere neatly, at others calling up a landscape and a life so different from ours that we may find it difficult at first to get its full savour. But the effort is always worth while. 'Lenzgesang' ('A Song of Spring') is like a knotty oak for strength. 'Frühling schwindet eilig' ('Spring is flying') is another seasonal song, in a gentle, engaging mood.

The writing for pianoforte is often bold and adventurous. If the voice wants its way, or just does not need accompanying, the pianoforte part is cut down to the bone, as in 'Wellenflüstern' ('Lapping Waters'), where there is a mere

left-hand trill, with a few bare fifths, or else a chromatic scale. In such songs as 'Jubal' and 'Theodora,' too, the accompaniment seems only a background, bare to the eye, yet found to be highly significant. In 'Theodora' there is no easy illustration of emotion; the permeating idea in the root of all matters most. In a word, Sibelius almost always sees the poem steadily and sees it whole. Sometimes the vocal melody is suave, the accompaniment rugged; usually the two assimilate astonishingly, but occasionally fusion fails, and the composer overleaps himself, or tries to do what the pianoforte cannot do: for after all, as his symphonies have taught us, he is a born orchestral handler. Indeed, it is surprising how well he handles the pianoforte, for most fine orchestral thinkers do not.

He can sketch a mood or stir an emotion with a few strokes, as in 'Das Mühlrad' ('The Millwheel') which holds the spirit of eld as few song-writers have done. In 'Die stille Stadt' ('The Silent Town') the spirit of Schubert descends on him, and we admire the simplicity of the rising voice part, all *mezza voce*. 'Sacht wie vom Abendrot' ('Shall I forget thee?') is a beautiful evocation of the pathos of memory, with no weakness in it. The Romanze, 'Du bist die Prinzess' ('A princess art thou') is a queer, stark, recitative song, that touches the heart of a mediæval plaint, and 'Ingalill' is a magnificent piece of drama. 'Doch mein Vogel kehrt nicht wieder' ('But my bird is long in homing') has a stab in its sadness. It is in the same set (Op. 36) as 'Black Roses,' which is much sung but not easily spoiled.

So the list goes on, with abundant variety, often with striking originality and power, and almost always with the fertilizing strength of fine imagination. Here are a round hundred songs for singers with taste and gusto. There are fairly easy as well as very difficult ones. The best service I can do anyone is to send him or her to Breitkopf, who publishes most of these, and to leave to the singer's good sense the choice of songs that ring the bell of his spirit. I believe I shall be thanked by those who do not yet know the full riches of Sibelius!

#### SCORING FOR BRASS BAND—I

BY DENIS WRIGHT

Recent correspondence in the *Musical Times* and elsewhere indicates that many musicians are now taking an interest in the brass band, as distinct from the military and brass and reed combinations.

Whether this awakened interest is due to the frequent broadcast performances by good bands, or to the lead given by Elgar, Holst, Bantock, and others who in recent years have written important works for brass, is immaterial. That there is this new interest is the thing that matters, for although in some respects the brass band may be musically many years behind its cousin the amateur orchestra (though often considerably more competent technically), there are tremendous possibilities in a movement which holds a far greater number of devotees than do the amateur orchestras or choral societies in this country.

The following notes may be of assistance to those wishing to score for the wholly brass combination, who may be uncertain as to the instruments actually employed. But before discussing the

instrumentation it may be as well to consider the styles of music most suitable.

The music played by brass bands is often condemned on the score of its lacking style and originality and of being harmonically uninteresting. That the band repertoire does revolve very much in well-worn grooves, such as operatic fantasias and florid solos with the slightest of accompaniments, cannot be denied, but this is partly because it has been found, by a process of elimination, that these are eminently suitable types of music both for the players and their melody-loving audiences.

But the charges of constructive and harmonic weakness are not well founded, for although broad melodic outlines and mainly diatonic harmonies are desirable, for reasons which will be explained later, composers and arrangers have shown a great deal of enterprise even within these limitations.

There will, of course, be plenty of incidental chromatic work. The mention of diatonic harmonies does not imply the constant tonic-dominant scheme beloved of our grandparents; vague melodic outlines and harmonic complexities should be avoided chiefly because the bands as a whole cannot understand this style of music at present, and do not particularly wish to. Lest the foregoing sentence seem a sad confession to make, it should be borne in mind that the brass-bandman is an amateur who plays purely for the love of the thing, and if a new piece of music sounds pleasing and effective at the first run through, well and good. If, however, it is a study in uncertain tonalities such as would need a trained musician to appreciate at first hearing, the music will soon find its way to the shelf.

The brass band's strong points are breadth and dignity. Diatonic writing lends itself to these, but the whole-tone scale and its derivatives have not yet become accepted facts in the band world, nor are they likely to do so. For the bands look on themselves, quite rightly, as a means of providing entertainment and enjoyment rather than education. Theirs is the music of the workers; factory hands, pit hands, those whose lives are often far removed from artistic environment, all find in the music of the brass band what they can appreciate and enjoy. That is the reason why one hears so many operatic and other pot-pourri, with their wealth of familiar tunes, and if a great deal of the music is old-fashioned, it is at least music which the players can understand and do justice to.

That there need be no lack of harmonic variety has been amply proved in recent years. Holst, in the second movement of his 'Moorside' Suite, showed what could be done in the way of diatonic discords, and in the 'Severn' Suite Elgar wrote music which never sounds dull harmonically even though it keeps practically within the bounds of text-book harmony. Ex. 1 gives the opening bars; nothing 'modern,' but how dignified and solid!\*

Musically, the brass band should be considered on much the same footing as the amateur orchestra. A good amateur orchestra will successfully tackle the 'New World' or the 'Pathetic,' but will be stumped by Stravinsky and sometimes by Debussy, even though the purely mechanical difficulties incidental to putting in the right number of notes in a bar

Ex.1 *Pomposo* ♩ = 112

Musical score for Ex.1 *Pomposo*, marked *f*. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of ♩ = 112. It consists of two systems, each with a piano (right hand) and bass (left hand) staff. The music features a strong, rhythmic accompaniment in the bass and a more melodic line in the piano.

may be greater in the older works. Similarly, brass bands will revel in a heavy Wagner selection or a difficult arrangement of some well-known classic (though the purist may hold up his hands in horror at such a transcription), and they will surmount very considerable technical difficulties and achieve sometimes amazingly good results. But give them an idiom that they cannot understand, something vague or harmonically complex, and they too are stumped. Moreover, they instinctively dislike such music because they know it is not suited to their needs; it fails to 'come off' on the brass on account of the lack of tone-colour variety compared with the orchestra, and the greater inflexibility of an all-brass combination when it comes to dealing with discords.

Ex.2 *Maestoso* ♩ = 108

Musical score for Ex.2 *Maestoso*, marked *f*, with a tempo of ♩ = 108. The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of brass instruments and drums. The instruments listed are: Eb Soprano, Bb Solo Cornet (Repiano & Flugel), 2nd & 3rd Eb Cornets, Solo, 1st & 2nd Eb Horns, 1st & 2nd Bb Baritones & Euphonium, 1st & 2nd Bb Trombones, Bass Trombone, Eb Bass, Bb Bass, and Drums. The music is characterized by a strong, rhythmic accompaniment in the bass and a more melodic line in the brass.

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Music which sounds well on the pianoforte without undue need of the sustaining pedal for subtle effects will, as a rule, score well for brass. Better still will be music written as though for the organ.

Good 'fat' chords are most impressive, the whole band moving together and the harmony rich and sonorous (see Ex. 2, p. 801).

A smartly-tongued Allegro can be very effective, the crisp staccato style being a strong feature in band music :

**Ex. 3 Allegro animato ♩. = 76**

Going to the other extreme, a solo instrument supported by a legato accompaniment can be extraordinarily artistic, refined, and pleasing (Ex. 4).

Rapid passages, provided they are not kept up for too long, can be played by good brass players nearly as fluently and cleanly as by wood-wind. Quick scale-passages up to an octave in length are possible on all instruments, from the basses upwards.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

Due chiefly to the need for putting brass bands on a footing of comparative equality at the many competitive contests which are held yearly throughout the country, the number of players in a full band has become fixed at twenty-four, excluding drums. The majority of these, like the brass players in an orchestra, are virtually soloists; except for an occasional doubling of the euphonium or first trombone, only in the cornet and bass departments do we find a part entrusted to two or more players. The actual number of different types of instruments employed is seventeen, not counting the drums (which are not used at contests) so it will be seen that there are seven extra players to help fill out the important parts. There will almost invariably be two of each type of bass, and the remaining five will usually be extra cornets.

**Ex. 4 Moderato**

In Exx. 2, 3, and 4 a condensed form of score is used in order to save space. In the full score the instruments will appear in the following order, downwards, the number opposite each indicating the probable number of players to each part :

- 1 E flat Soprano Cornet
- 3 or 4 B flat Solo Cornets
- 1 B flat Ripieno Cornet
- 1 or 2 B flat 2nd Cornets
- 1 or 2 B flat 3rd Cornets
- 1 B flat Flugel
- 1 E flat Solo Tenor Horn
- 1 E flat 1st Tenor Horn
- 1 E flat 2nd Tenor Horn
- 1 B flat 1st Baritone
- 1 B flat 2nd Baritone
- 1 or 2 B flat Euphoniums
- 1 or 2 B flat 1st Trombones
- 1 B flat 2nd Trombone
- 1 G Bass Trombone
- 2 E flat Bases (or Bombardons)
- 2 B flat Bases

(In some scores the flugel is not given an independent part; it then doubles the ripieno, any flugel solo passages being marked as such.)

In writing for this combination the first thing to decide is the key in which the work is to be scored. Bands favour flat rather than sharp keys; in any case extreme keys should be avoided. One has to study the melodic compass, and see that in the chosen key the melodies will lie comfortably for the various melodic instruments without exploring the extreme limits of their range.

If one were setting out to transcribe a work which was originally in, say, E major, it would be

best to use the key of F for the B flat instruments ; the E flat instruments' key would be C, and the actual pitch of the work would be lowered a semitone to E flat. But were the original in B flat, for instance, there would be no harm in adopting that as the key for the B flat instruments and treating them as though they were non-transposing. The E flat instruments would then virtually be in F compared with the original key of the work ; the bass trombone—the only instrument in the band which employs the bass clef and which is not a transposing instrument—would have to be considered as a transposing one, and its key set a tone lower than the original, since by giving the original key, B flat, to the B flat instruments, the actual pitch of the work is lowered to A flat.

## RELATIVE PITCH

Assuming that a normally transposed arrangement is being made from a pianoforte or other score, B flat cornets and flugel will be written a tone higher than they are required to sound (Ex. 5a).

The E flat soprano is pitched a fourth higher than the B flat cornet, so to produce a given note at concert-pitch its written note must be a minor third lower than the required note, or a fourth lower than the B flat cornet's note, to produce a unison with the cornet (Ex. 5b) :

Ex. 5 *actual pitch, written notes*