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An Original Composition for Brass Choir

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AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION FOR BRASS CHOIR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Music
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
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APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The brass choir is a unique organization in that it incorporates instruments of only one family. The need for ensemble of this type is important to the development of good brass playing. The sonorities produced by this ensemble enable the performer to grasp the most basic tonal concepts of brass instruments. Since the development of modern brass instruments was delayed by mechanical difficulties, composers have been unable to write intricate parts for the brass until fairly recent times. Thus the amount of material is comparatively scarce. The modern brass choir is potentially a fine performing idiom. It sounds best when performing literature composed specifically for it. Therefore, its future development rests on the imagination and efforts of composers.

Statement of the Problem. Brass choir literature is in its infancy. The majority of brass literature is made up of transcripts of other ensembles fitted to the techniques of brass players and their instruments. Since the brass ensemble is comparatively new in the field of performance, there has been much criticism of its validity as a serious means of performance. If the criticisms are based on its use of music composed for other idioms, then there are grounds for objection. If the criticisms stem from the objection to the nature of brass instruments as a serious performing group, then the objections and criticisms are valid.

The composer is the key person who will effect the eventual development of the brass choir. The field has just
begun to interest serious composers and future development cannot be predicted. There is little or no history of the brass choir, because we are at the beginning of its development as a performing medium. It is the feeling of the writer that the field of brass choir literature should be viewed with an open mind; one which is receptive to all new innovations in composition and performance.

**Purpose of the Composition.** The purpose of this composition, "Suite For Brass Choir", is to make a contribution to the growing amount of literature for brass choir. It is composed in contemporary style with the expressed wish to further the musical thought and understanding of brass choir members.

**Definition of Terms.**

- *runes* ............ Characters of an alphabet of ancient Germanic peoples.
- *staccato* ............ A manner of performance calling for a reduction in a note's duration.
- *interval* ............ The difference in pitch between two tones.
- *perfect fourth* ...... The interval of three and one-half steps between two tones.
- *major seventh and ninth chords* ....... Chords containing the root, third, fifth, seventh and ninth scale steps.
- *pedal point* .......... A bass note sounding against changing harmonies in the other parts.
- *chromatic* ............ The use of tones extraneous to the diatonic scale.
- *low brass* ............ In this paper it refers to the trombones, baritone horn and bass.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE BRASS CHOIR AND ITS LITERATURE

The use of brass instruments can be traced to early Greek and Roman times. Horns two thousand years old have been found in Ireland and Denmark which were used by the Vikings. "In 1639, two Danish golden horns belonging to the bronze age were discovered, some thirty-three inches in length, and inscribed with early runes." (2:72) These early horns were used in war as their terrible din struck fear in the hearts of the legionaires.

The brass trumpet has long been known for its emblem of royalty and nobility. It is frequently mentioned in the Bible as the Hebrews made extensive use of it on all occasions from grave to gay. It is said that during the time of Solomon some 200,000 trumpets were in use.

As time passed, the brass instruments became more refined; however, the complications and drawbacks were many. The early brass instruments had no valve and with the exception of the slide trombone were restricted to the natural overtones of the horn. By inserting various slides in the horn, it could be changed in pitch, but chromatic harmonies were still beyond the instrument. In the year (1760), "Kolbel, at that time hornist at the Chapel Royal of Russia, placed a key on the bell of the horn, the opening of which raised the pitch a semitone...." (2:75) Through this invention, brass instruments began their period in the use of keys such as used on the woodwinds. Such instruments as the "ophicleide, serpent horn, and keyed bugle" (1:263), were early attempts at chromatic brass instruments.
The use of the valve (piston or rotary) did not come into use until the second decade of the nineteenth century. It is not certain whether Heinrich Stolzel or Friedrich Bluhmel was the first to originate the valve system, but it was developed in Berlin. The actual date was about (1815). This one innovation created a whole new dimension of brass playing. Once the problem of chromatic change had been solved, brass instruments could assume an important role in any performing organization.

Early composers wrote little music specifically for brass because of its lack of facility. A popular way of scoring was to write the trumpets and horns in chordal overtones and have the trombones play the moving diatonic and chromatic parts. The use of brass, particularly the trumpet, produced a feeling of pomp and ceremony. Many selections by composers such as, Torelli, Corelli, and Vivaldi incorporate brass with chorus.

When these composers wrote for combinations of brass "Musae Sioniae" (5: cover), these rules are explained. When the parts are written too high for human voices, cornets, viols, and a tenor voice can be used for the upper three parts. For the lower parts, a male viol could be used with the organ. All of these works were based on chorales, and in this style the words were as important as the music. Therefore, at least one voice was used on each part.

The original brass choir, for which many composers
wrote, was very different from the modern version. Today's ensemble consists of only brass instruments with added percussion parts if needed. The early brass choirs included other instruments quite frequently and the organ was considered a basic part of the group. Early compositions for brass choirs have been transcribed for the modern instrumentation and present a very impressive sound. However, the composers did not have this sound in mind when writing for the early brass choirs.

To produce a complete overview of the development of the brass choir, another ensemble incorporating the brass, woodwind, and percussion sections must be included - the wind band. The band began its popularity in the early part of the nineteenth century. "The development of the band was more profoundly influenced by the French Revolution than by any event before or since" (3:20). These early bands were organized by the people and played for patriotic celebrations and open-air festivals. The concept of a musical organization that could perform outside was new and exciting. In (1790) the French composer Gossec (1734 - 1829) became the leader of the band of the National Guard in France. This band consisted of seventy top musicians selected from the surrounding bands and orchestras in the country. In 1972 this band was dissolved and became the nucleus of the famous National Conservatory of Music in Paris.

The average size band of the Napoleonic era consisted of nineteen reeds and twenty three brass with five percussion. The reed instruments in general use during the first half of the nine-
teenth century suffered from clumsy mechanisms and poor construction. Such people as Theobald Boehm (1793 - 1881) and Adolphe Sax (1814 - 1894) perfected the woodwinds almost to the degree of today's construction. With the advent of good instruments the rise of the wind band was inevitable. "The modern wind band, therefore, may be said to date from about 1850...." (3:22).

The last group of people to accept the wind band has been the composers. First-rate composers did not become aware of this medium of musical performance before the twentieth century. Only a few works written for band before this time such as -- the "Grand Symphony for Band" by Hector Berlioz and "Trauersinfonie" by Richard Wagner have any significance at all and even these are lesser compositions of the composers.

The English composer, Gustav Holst, laid the cornerstone for band literature in (1909) with his "First Suite In Eb". His acute awareness for composing in the military band idiom is still respected today. The early military bands gave way to the professional concert bands in America of Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore (1829 - 1892) and John Philip Sousa (1854 - 1932). This was the beginning of the wind band movement in America.

Along with the wind band development, the brass band was a popular ensemble. Although the brass band and brass choir certainly are not synonymous, the development of brass playing carried through the brass band. These bands were of simple variety and played for such occasions as out-door ceremonies and military affairs which involved marching.
The history of the modern brass choir is extremely difficult to trace. Possibly there is no direct connection with the past. Much of today's brass library consists of transcriptions of works for other ensembles. Only in the past two or three decades has specific music been composed for our modern brass ensemble. This would certainly explain the lack of material in the brass choir field for it is extremely difficult to build a wealth of material in a period of only thirty years.

Composing for the brass ensemble must follow certain rules. "It must be conceived in its medium, it must be imaginative, and it must be scholarly in its harmony and form" (8:56). These fundamentals are the same for any ensemble and must be kept in mind.

Even with the advent of modern brass instruments, there are many restrictions and drawbacks which face the composer of brass literature. Because the brass alone does not offer a wide range of tonal colour, as compared to the symphonic band or orchestra, it presents a difficult problem to the composer. The instruments of the brass choir are divided into two categories—conical and cylindrical bored construction. The conical bored instruments—french horns and baritone horns—possess a mellow tone quality and the horns used by themselves in harmony produce a self-contained sound unequalled by any other instruments. The cylindrical bored instruments—trumpets and trombones—produce a sharp, brilliant effect. The combination or separate use of these two groups comprise the extent of tonal
colour available to the composer. Weaknesses in composition cannot be bypassed with just skillful orchestration.

Today there is a strong tendency to compose for the full band or orchestra and ignore the sections within it. The brass ensemble is worthy of the concentrated efforts of modern composers. Perhaps this family of instruments, the first conceived and built by man, may someday be the leading exponent of contemporary literature.
CHAPTER III
ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOSITION
SUITE FOR BRASS CHOIR

"Suite for Brass Choir" is written in four movements - Allegro, Maestoso, Grave, Andante. The main theme of the first movement is played by the French horns. This theme is more rhythmical than melodic and is repeated by the trumpets.

The meter changes frequently from 4/4 to 2/4 throughout the entire movement. In measure nine the secondary theme is sounded by the low brass.

The smoothness of the line is broken up by a staccato passage in the trumpets in measure fifteen. The original line is then resumed. In measure twenty-five a rhythmical figure enters in the trumpets and trombones.

This rhythmical figure serves as a background to the announcement of the main theme of the second movement played by the horns.

In measure forty-two, the main theme from the third movement is sounded by the trumpets while the horns are playing fragments of the secondary theme from the third movement.

The ending is accomplished by a pyramid effect using
the interval of a perfect fourth. The horns sound the main theme in the second to the last measure and the movement ends on a tonic chord with the third omitted.

The second movement, maestoso, begins with a quartet - trumpet, horn, trombone, and baritone. The entire ensemble enters at measure five. This movement makes extensive use of the major seventh and ninth chords. In measure ten the mood of the music changes with an agitated figure written for the ensemble.

measure fifteen finds the main theme now being played by the whole brass choir harmonized in major seventh and ninth chords.

In measure twenty-three a pedal point is established by the low brass. Over this pedal point an augmentation of
main theme is played by the trumpets and horns. A *subito piano* four measures from the end begins the last phrase. The movement ends on a major ninth chord.

The third movement, Grave, begins with a dissonant muted trumpet figure. The effect is extremely alarming and demands immediate attention from the listener.

The same figure is carried through by the horns and repeated in augmentation by the trombones. At measure twelve a whole tone scale section is heard as the main theme is begun.

The main theme is presented by the baritone over a pedal point in the bass part. The melody is made up of melodic skips of a fourth.

The baritone plays the main theme once through. It is then repeated in octaves by the trombones and bass. While the low brass is playing the main theme, the horns enter with the second theme. This is written in a traditional horn figure.
The third theme is introduced by the trumpets. This is a majestic sounding section. The melody is doubled in the first trombone part and the horns are playing the second theme superimposed over the third theme. The final section ends with all the themes being heard once again. The first dissonant trumpet figure heard in the very beginning ends the movement.

The fourth and final movement begins with a difficult rhythmical theme introduced by the first and second trombones. This theme is the basis for the entire movement and is heard frequently under all secondary themes.

![Example I](attachment:image1.png)

The second theme begins in measure two and is introduced by the trumpets playing in unison. In measure seventeen, a new rhythmical device is begun. This section produces a percussive effect which breaks up the smooth chromatic line played by the trombones.

![Example II](attachment:image2.png)
This rhythmical effect is followed by a staccato answer by the first and second trumpets. In measure thirty-one the first trumpet has a muted solo. The melody is that of the second theme which has been augmented.

Beginning in measure forty-six a harmonic device using a D augmented chord is heard. The low brass begins the chord tones and four measures later the chord has passed through all sections in a pyramid effect. After a dramatic climax, the first theme is heard again in the trombones. The movement ends with the same pyramid device used previously.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

The brass choir of today occupies a minor position in the field of musical literature and performance. To many, it is a cumbersome ensemble trying to perform music which is characteristic to another idiom. Much of the literature for brass is comprised of transcriptions. When attempted by the brass choir, the original intent of the music is lost and many objections are raised. The problem here stems from the listener attempting to make a comparison to what he is used to hearing. The brass ensemble must be accepted for what it is and not as a substitute for another idiom.

There is a great need for original music composed for brass choir. The day of the "brass band" has passed and a new and contemporary ensemble has emerged. Composers are becoming aware of this new sound in brass, and works composed strictly in this idiom are striking in their contemporary effect.

It is not the feeling of the writer that music transcribed for brass choir should not be played. There is a wealth of material which lends itself well to the brass choir. This material is extremely important for providing a solid background to the young brass player. It is the belief of the writer that the future of the brass choir lies in the contemporary idiom and not in the transcribed works of past composers.

New works are being composed everyday. Perhaps these modern composers have yet to find the ultimate in brass composition, but the field of study has only begun to open. How can any facet of music be developed unless given a chance? The brass choir
must be looked upon as a new medium of expression in music. Its ultimate success will depend upon the efforts of composers, performers, and people who believe in it.
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