Ten Original Compositions of Progressive Difficulty for Clarinet Choir an Analysis and Evaluation of this Work

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The University of Montana
TEN PIECES
FOR
CLARINET-CHOIR
by Harold Harvey

1. 2 PIECES
   TO A FIR TREE
   TO A BLACK KITTEN

2. SPHEROICITY
3. MELOWLARK
4. STILT DANCE
5. FUGUE FOR FIVE
6.ALTO FANTASY
7. MODAL TUNE
8. RONDO 99
9. INTRODUCTION AND NOCTURNE
10. ZWOLFTONMUSIK
ALTO FANTASY

Solo E♭ Alto

1st B♭

2nd B♭

3rd B♭

B♭ Bass

Solo E♭ Alto

1st B♭

2nd B♭

3rd B♭

B♭ Bass
29
TEH ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS OF PROGRESSIVE DIFFICULTY
FOR CLARINET CHOIR
AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THIS WORK

by

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INTRODUCTION

Performance in an ensemble group is one of the most important experiences in the musical growth of any student. An ensemble member has an individual part he must play with accuracy to make the ensemble sound well, while a larger group may easily carry along several of its weaker members. The director, in working with a smaller group, has much more time to spend helping each individual member than with a larger group. The improvement of an ensemble member is bound to be greater than that of a non-ensemble member because of the additional more personal experiences involved, and anything that improves the individual members of a large organization such as a band or orchestra is going to improve the entire organization.

More and more band directors are turning to ensembles to strengthen the different sections of their bands. Yet, while the clarinet section may be considered the very heart of the band very little music is available for this group, and most of what is available is transcribed and not sufficiently difficult to challenge the musicianship of the pupils. The only materials for the
clarinet choir which are at present known to the author are a set of rather easy transcriptions and two original compositions. The ten original pieces which are included have been written in an attempt to provide interesting and practical music for the development of the clarinet section as an ensemble.

A clarinet choir may be defined as any group of five or more clarinets. In the easiest set (counted as one piece) only B flat soprano clarinets are necessary, a B flat bass clarinet is necessary in succeeding pieces, and number nine of the set calls for a minimum of seven B flat soprano, one E flat also, one B flat bass and an optional part for B flat contrabass clarinet or string bass.

This set of pieces does not in any sense constitute a cycle but any number of pieces in any order may be performed as a group at the discretion of the director. For instance, a group used successfully by the Montana

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The transcriptions are by James De Jesu, are published by Edwin H. Morris and Company and copyrighted between 1951 and 1955. One original composition is "Adagio" by Mozart and published by the Mercury Music Corporation. The other is the "Caribbean Suite" by Alfred Reed and was copyrighted in 1955 by the Chas. H. Hansen Music Corp.
State University Clarinet Choir was "Introduction and Nocturne," "Spheroidicity," "Rondo 99," and "Zwolftonmusik," in that order.

The order of progressive difficulty in which these pieces were placed could easily be challenged as in some respects an "easy" piece may be harder than one following it. For instance, although the last piece, "Zwolftonmusick," is easier in the technical aspects of tonguing, range and fingering than any of several pieces preceding, it has been placed last because of the greater difficulty in hearing and phrasing music which uses the twelve tone scale. For the most part, however, the difficulty of the compositions is progressive from number one through ten.
I

Two Pieces

("To a Fir Tree" and "To A Black Kitten")

These two short numbers are intended for use by grade or junior high school groups. Neither composition is at all complex from a performance standpoint, but both contain harmonic usage not usually found in easy pieces. Both can be played by groups using only B♭ soprano clarinets.

The first piece, "To a Fir Tree" uses only major and minor triads, has no notes higher than the throat B♭, and uses no rhythms faster than the eighth note. Thus the parts may be played by children who have had only a few months experience. The piece was written in the manner of a concerto grosso with three easy solo parts added to the regular clarinet choir to heighten interest and encourage outstanding players. Alto and bass clarinets are not necessary for performance and so the piece may be played with a minimum of eight B♭ clarinet players.

The second piece, "To a Black Kitten," requires some of the players to go above the register break, as the first and sometimes the second clarinet parts are written in the high register. This piece calls for a
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knowledge of some of the more common accidentals but is playable by inexperienced players.

Both compositions have sufficient measure numbers in all parts for adequate rehearsal purposes and have been carefully checked for awkward fingerings. Approximately five hours were spent in the rehearsal of these numbers with the Bonner, Montana Grade School clarinet group. The pieces proved easy to play, for the most part, and attractive to the children in spite of the non-traditional harmonic usage. The only difficulty seems to lie with the trouble little fingers have in getting the low notes on the clarinet. To remedy this, the stronger clarinet players of the group could play the fourth and fifth parts while the weaker players get the third and second parts.
II

Spheroidicity

The difference in complexity between this composition and the preceding "Two Pieces" is due to the availability of transcriptions for the easy high school level of difficulty. The author is only aware of the 2 transcriptions by James De Jesu which fall in this category. This number is meant to be good practice and program material for young high school musicians.

"Spheroidicity" was written with several common problems of young clarinetists in mind, the main ones being those of phrasing and breath control. To combat these problems the piece uses long phrases, many long slurred passages and a long tutti crescendo from measure 50 to the end. Other problems will be encountered by immature clarinetists including the time changes and tempo changes and the long rests that must be counted in all the parts except the first.

The composition may be played using the first three B flat clarinet parts and the Bass and Alto Clarinet parts, or the fourth B flat part may be used with or in place of the Alto Clarinet. The second clarinet section

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
must be advanced enough to play the accidentals between measure 9 and measure 14 easily. Two unusual solos are included to heighten the interest of the group; the Alto Clarinet (or fourth B flat) counterpoint at measure 14 and the second clarinet solo at measure 46. Other difficult spots that may give the immature group a little trouble are the slurs over the register break such as in the first clarinet part at measure 17 and the key change to A minor concert at measure 28. However, the composition is to be taken fairly slowly; it contains no subdivisions beyond the eighth note, and no parts are written above high C.
This composition is intended for the use of young high school clarinet quintets or full choirs. The alto and bass clarinet are required for the performance of this number, along with three $B^\text{b}$ soprano clarinets.

The composer feels that because of the jazz idiom, teen-agers will like this composition very much. The piece is valuable from an educational standpoint as it will encourage good reading habits. "Meadowlark" must be played exactly as written in order to sound and will thus discourage many of the bad habits formed by the playing of much jazz. Few fingering problems are present in the composition but accidentals are present in all parts. The piece is very easy to hear and the student should know at once when he has made a mistake. Since very little guidance or inspiration is needed from the teacher, "Meadowlark" should make a worth-while student project.
This composition is intended to be used by second year high school clarinet sections and choirs primarily. "Stilt Dance" provides concentrated practice material at the register break, on staccato and legato tonguing and on extreme dynamic ranges. The piece can be performed using only B♭ soprano clarinets; or Alto and Bass clarinets can be used, depending on availability.

Special emphasis has been placed on problems in the usage of the register break as it is a big problem for all clarinetists. Because of this emphasis, "Stilt Dance" will make excellent reading material for advanced groups.
V

Fugue for Five

This composition is intended for the use of more advanced high school clarinet choirs. Due to the nature of a fugue, each part is as melodically interesting as the others and at the same time each part is about as difficult as the others. Several different keys have been utilized and solos have been given to each voice to insure good educational values.

"Fugue for Five" is playable with a minimum of four B♭ soprano clarinets and Bass Clarinet. The alto clarinet has an independent part which may or may not be used without materially affecting the composition. Additional soprano and bass clarinets may be added at the discretion of the director.
VI
Alto Fantasy

This composition is intended to enrich the field of solo literature for the much neglected alto clarinet. The bass clarinet and three soprano clarinet parts are not difficult and could be played by almost any clarinet section. The solo alto clarinet part, on the other hand, is rather difficult and would require a good high school or college musician to do it justice.

The number is built on an exotic scale which repeats itself at the twelfth, thus the fingerings are the same in both the low and high registers of the solo instrument.
VII
Rondo 99

While this is one of the most difficult pieces in the collection from a technical standpoint, it is also one of the easiest to hear. "Rondo 99" (so named because it contains 99 measures), requires great tongue and finger dexterity, especially from measure 80 to the end. However, the composition may be taken at a somewhat slower tempo than indicated on the score and will still sound.

Three B♭ soprano, bass, and either alto or fourth soprano clarinets are required for the performance of this number although it is recommended that both fourth soprano and alto clarinets be used. The work is meant for the use of advanced high school, or college groups.
Modal Tune

This composition is intended for the use of advanced high school, or college clarinet choirs. While there are few fingering problems in the number, the key changes and the fast tempo present some difficulty. Although the number is not as dissonant as many contemporary works, the chords built in seconds will present problems if the choir is unaccustomed to these sounds. The time changes may give both the choir and the conductor trouble and the extremely high solo clarinet part from measure 77 to the end will be difficult for all but the most experienced clarinet player.

The piece requires a minimum of two soprano clarinets each on the first and second parts, one on the third, bass clarinet and either fourth soprano or alto clarinet.
IX

Introduction and Nocturne

This composition is intended for the use of large clarinet choirs on the very advanced high school or college level. A minimum instrumentation of seven B♭ soprano clarinets (two each on first, second, and third parts and one on fourth) one alto and one bass clarinet is required in the number and it is recommended that more alto and bass clarinets be used and that either or both of the optional parts (contrabass clarinet and string bass) be used.

The large number of accidentals and many unusual rhythms make this piece quite difficult, and the rests in the second section must be counted carefully as the entrances here are difficult.
Zwolftonmusik

This composition is intended for the use of advanced clarinet choirs. Although it is not as technically difficult as several of the preceding numbers, because of the use of the tone row, this piece requires mature musicians to make it sound well. The phrasing and interpretation of this composition is very difficult and it will sound almost barbaric to those who are not well acquainted with contemporary composition.

It may be interesting to note that other modern techniques used in this number are irregular rhythm, tone clusters and polytonality.

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3 A melodic arrangement of the tones of the chromatic scale.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the writing of this paper, seven of the compositions submitted had been publically performed, and the audience response, it seemed to the composer, was good.

The group used in the performance and rehearsal of these pieces received them very well with the exception of numbers three and ten. Number three ("Meadowlark") was not sophisticated enough for the college students who played it, but for that very reason the composer feels it will go well with younger high school students. Number ten ("Zwolftonmusik") was too abstruse and dissonant for the tastes of a number of the performers but the composer was happy to note that a number of the more mature people in the choir and audience were very pleased with this composition.

Effective use may be made of the B contrabass clarinet in any of these compositions but because of the rarity of this instrument only one special part was written (Number 9). While no special attention was paid to the E contrabass clarinet it can be used effectively in number

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4 Numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10.

5 Montana State University Clarinet Choir.

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nine by adding three sharps to the string bass part. The string bass was found to be an effective addition to the clarinet choir and is highly recommended when a contrabass clarinet is unavailable.

It is the belief of the composer that using the clarinet section of the band as an individual group, playing music written especially for it, greatly strengthened the Montana State University band. Each player became increasingly conscious of tone quality, intonation, dynamics, attacks, and ensemble movement. This, of course, meant that the band director had to spend much less time on these important aspects of playing. Also, giving each person an independent part seemed to greatly encourage individual improvement.

It would seem that there are very few practical limits to the size of a clarinet choir. Thus if a music director had only a few capable clarinet players, a small choir would sound well, or if a large clarinet section were used, judicious doubling and a proportionate number of alto, bass, and contrabass clarinets would also give an excellent sound.

An entire program of instruments of the same tone color such as a clarinet choir might become monotonous. However, since the clarinet choir could become a wonderful accompanying group for any brass, string, or
percussion instrument, it is hoped that transcriptions or original compositions will be written to fill this need.

There is a great need for much more original material for not only the clarinet choir, but for most other ensemble groups that would help a director strengthen his instrumental music program. The use of transcriptions is excellent to help fill the gap while needed music is being written. It is strongly recommended, however, that original material is used when possible as transcriptions do not sound as they were originally intended; they usually present technical problems not present in the original version, and because of these two facts they are not as interesting to the group as original compositions would be.

At the time of this writing there are only two known published compositions written for clarinet choir. It is hoped that this set of compositions will help to fill the void and that it will encourage directors, composers, and publishers to make further use of this and other excellent ensembles.