
REVIEW

James P. McCrann – Band, Wind Ensemble Review Editor

FROM TRADITION TO TRANSFORMATION: ECLECTIC AND EMERGING VOICES IN THE WIND BAND REPERTOIRE

Inasmuch as what constitutes a core repertoire for the wind band is ever evolving, at the very core of what we should be teaching is great music. Doing so not only reflects our values and ideals but also fosters positive outcomes for our students and communities.

Of course, whenever we make recommendations about specific works or composers, or include them on state festival lists, there is always the risk that we will overlook others that are equally noteworthy. The composers and works mentioned here are but one attempt to diversify our repertoire and consider new realms of musical experience from a vast array of emerging and traditional voices.

Valerie Coleman

All other considerations aside, Valerie Coleman would be at the forefront of anyone's list of prominent composers in the field today. When not fulfilling commissions by leading ensembles, such as the Philadelphia Orchestra, she has recently been making major contributions to the wind band repertoire.

In December 2021, Courtney Snyder at the University of Michigan premiered Coleman's *Let Woman Choose Her Sphere* as part of a performance highlighting the ongoing struggle for equal rights in America. This *Performance Today* "2020 Classical Woman of the Year" award recipient also composed *Roma*, commissioned by the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA). These are sophisticated compositions for advanced ensembles.

Jennifer Higdon

In addition to the music she composed for major orchestras in Cleveland, Chicago, and Philadelphia, Brooklyn-born, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon has several works for the band world. *Rhythm*

Stand is a fun and energetic piece for young students who, using pencils, turn their music stands into a percussion instrument.

More advanced works include *Fanfare Ritmico* and *Road Stories*. Emerging as a staple in the contemporary orchestral repertoire is Higdon's *Blue Cathedral*, which was transcribed by Ryan Nowlin, the acclaimed Staff Arranger and current Director of The President's Own Marine Band.

Joan Tower

Among the most notable composers of the past century is GRAMMY winner Joan Tower. Though her works for winds are few, they are impressive. Advanced ensembles might consider *Fascinating Ribbons* or the transcription of her *Celebration Fanfare* by Jack Stamp, whose own composition career was influenced by Tower.

With the inspiration of Aaron Copland, Tower composed a series of six pieces entitled *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*. These works for brass and percussion serve as both an homage and response to Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*.

Kevin Day

Award-winning composer Kevin Day is the son of a prominent Gospel singer mother and hip-hop producer father. His eclectic musical background is manifest in a uniquely inspiring voice that continues to gain widespread acclaim. Though Day's monumental *Concerto for Wind Ensemble*, premiered in the fall of 2021 by the University of Texas Wind Ensemble, would be too far of a stretch for most school ensembles, works such as *Ember Skies* and *Rocket Ship* are accessible to student musicians. Many of his works, including *Hymn for Peace* and *Dancing with Fire*, are also available in flex band settings.

Kathryn Salfelder

A recipient of four prestigious composition awards, Kathryn Salfelder continues to earn accolades for her imaginative contributions to the band, orchestra, vocal, chamber, and solo repertoire. She received the Frederick Fennell Prize in 2008 for *Cathedrals*, which utilizes antiphonal brass choirs emulating the call and response nature of the music that inspired it (namely, Gabrieli's *Canzon Primi Toni*). *Apotheosis* conveys a palpable sense of foreboding tension while *Reminiscence*, written in honor of Frank Battisti, is more wistful and restrained. With its limited technical demands, novice musicians can focus more on musical expression.

Ayatey Shabazz

Ayatey Shabazz is a prolific composer of works for symphonic band, jazz ensemble, marching band, and even drumline. His music is highly emotional, most notably in *Till Earth and Heaven Sing*. The song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, initially sung in 1900 by five hundred children (in honor of Abraham Lincoln), serves as the primary source material for this stirring work. *Red Tails*, his inspiring tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen, is available in both full band and flexibly-scored settings.

Jennifer Jolley

Jennifer Jolley's innovative music, while prominent on the world stage, is also performable by younger students through vehicles like *Last Stage to Red Rock* and the fusion-inspired *Think About It*. *Through the Looking Glass Falls* is reminiscent of *Pictures at an Exhibition* in its conception but musically interprets the graphic notations of elementary students responding to Maurice Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*. More advanced ensembles might consider the more solemn and pensive *Ash*.

Carol Brittin Chambers

Carol Brittin Chambers's burgeoning compositional output includes an array of works for bands and flexible instrumentation at all levels. Innovative and captivating pieces include the moving *Rainbow in the Clouds*, and the rollicking *The Rusty Bucket (and Other Juke Joints)*. Her energetic *Byzantine Dances* is rapidly becoming a staple of young band literature.

Julie Giroux

Julie Giroux is among the most influential wind band composers of our time, adapting her dramatic music writing skills for television (think the epic 1980s soap opera *Dynasty*) to creating engaging music for players of all ages. From her five symphonies to pieces that are more modest in scope, such as *Bonsai Tree* and *Dream Dance*, Giroux is especially adept at writing programmatic music with highly emotional content in almost any conceivable musical style. *Let Your Spirit Sing*, *Vigil's Keep*, *One Life Beautiful*, *Khan*, and her fourth symphony, *Bookmarks from Japan*, are compelling and transformative works for performers and audiences alike.

Omar Thomas

Omar Thomas is emerging as a prominent voice in the contemporary music scene, not only in the wind band medium but also as a composer of jazz, choral, and orchestral music. His music conveys the timeless message of transcending divisions and coming together as a society while also remembering the anguish and hardship suffered in pursuit of this goal.

While only the most mature musicians may be ready to uncover the deeper meanings of his powerful *A Mother of a Revolution* and *Of Our New Day Begun*, less experienced high school students are ready to explore the introspective yet sometimes menacing setting of the folk tune *Shenandoah*.

His *Caribana Afterparty* is one of those rare gems that captures the rhythm, vitality, energy, and appeal of his most sophisticated works in a setting that can be performed even at the advanced middle school level. It provides an opportunity to unleash a percussion section of up to 10 players with a vast array of both concert and Latin percussion to further render the feel of Caribbean dances, with specif-

ic influences from both Soca and Calypso music. The "Afterparty" subtitle identifies this piece as an outgrowth of his original *Caribana* work, with more accessible but similar thematic material and grooves that are indigenous to the region.

The score further provides guidance in how to teach the piece, complete with suggested scale warmups, essential questions, and recommended listening. With the music rooted in Eb major, requiring limited ranges and few technical passages, the primary focus can be directed on interpreting the syncopated rhythms, balancing the different layers of skillfully interwoven lines, and general style of the music. This work is destined to be a staple of the repertoire for developing bands.

Although its technical and aesthetic demands are geared to the most mature ensembles, while discussing Omar Thomas one would be remiss in forgetting to mention what is arguably his most famous and groundbreaking work. The award-winning *Come Sunday* is a one-of-a-kind convergence of classical, jazz, and rhythm and blues influences with a nod to Duke Ellington and his passion for classical music.

The ecstatic joy of Black worship services is palpable and comes to life as the composer brilliantly orchestrates the wind band into the timbre of the Hammond organ. This glorious composition communicates a message from Omar Thomas: "To all the Black musicians in wind ensemble who were given opportunity after opportunity to celebrate everyone else's music but our own - I see you and I am you. This one's for the culture!"

Jodie Blackshaw

Australian composer Jodie Blackshaw is as enthusiastic about empowering students through music education as she is about her own music. Her works for younger musicians foster discernment, creativity, and higher-level thinking skills in children.

The tranquil soundscape of *Whirlwind* epitomizes Blackshaw's incomparable ability to combine simple ingredients, such as pitch material never exceeding four notes in any instrument part, with ethereal special effects like whirling tubes in a manner that is highly sophisticated and engaging for young performers. This work received first prize in the 2006 Frank Ticheli Composition Contest.

The composer refers to the movements of her *13 Moons* as "composing pieces" as she provides the pitch material, while the performers create the other elements of form, timbre, and texture. It is a rare work that can be age-appropriate for both novice and seasoned musicians.

More advanced ensembles can experience a different kind of Outback journey along Australia's imposing and formidable Murray River in Blackshaw's *Twist*. Six continuous movements aptly subtitled "Survival, Reflection, Discovery, Obsession, Carnevale, and Ascension" capture the life, culture, and spirit of the Indigenous Wiradjuri People who reside along its banks. There are few moments in the band repertoire that are as frenzied and raucous as the "Carnevale" section.

Terpsichorean Dances is a modern spin on the Renaissance Era music of Michael Praetorius with a little Australian bush country rhythmic flair via the lagerphone part. Since the typical American band is devoid of this instrument, which is essential to the Australian bush band, Blackshaw includes easy-to-follow instructions on how to build one.

Nicole Piuanno

In her flexibly-scored, five-part work (with optional percussion) titled *You Decide*, composer Nicole Piuanno empowers young performers to think like composers. The piece, in the style of a march, contains "Option A" and "Option B" choices, which allow the students to select the consequent phrase they deem most suitable for the music they wish to create. The composer recommends that the students learn all the options to make informed artistic decisions.

Among her other works worthy of program consideration are *Solace Dance*, also scored for flexible instrumentation, and *Safely Rest*, which solemnly juxtaposes *Amazing Grace* with *Taps*. *Beauty Broken* is a moving work for more mature musicians. The brass chorale, which serves as the foundation of the work, appears in a variety of emotional states ranging from joyous and triumphant to melancholy and somber — in essence, "broken."

Alex Shapiro

Alex Shapiro continues to forge beyond the traditional boundaries of wind

continued on next page

band orchestration with the integration of pre-recorded, electronic tracks alongside live winds and percussion. Her three-part, flexibly-scored *Count to Ten* is accessible for beginner band students ready to move beyond simple meters and melodic structure. The built-in drone and percussion accompaniments can confidently coax young performers up to 9/4 meter, thereby easing the future transition to more complex time signatures.

Other innovative and approachable works built upon electronic soundscapes are *Rock Music* and *Paper Cut*. Essential instruments in these pieces are rocks and sheets of paper, respectively, manipulated to create surprisingly artful timbres. In *Suspended*, her recently-premiered second symphony, Shapiro takes pioneering orchestrations to even greater heights.

Katahji Copley

Katahji Copley's promising compositional output includes 25 works for the wind band. Copley writes with the creative vision of an artist but with the heart and mind of an educator. In *Unspoken*, Copley captures the almost indescribable five stages of grief, yet his chosen compositional elements can be realized by advanced middle school students.

Starlight is another emotionally gripping composition, while *Victory* conveys the uplifting sense of prevailing over adversity that we need in these challenging times. *Grosso Blue* is an inventive, jazz-influenced tour de force that features a concertino of two clarinets and one bass clarinet.

Cait Nishimura

Canadian-born composer Cait Nishimura is another emerging writer who capitalizes on her experiences as an instrumental music educator, striving to compose sophisticated works geared to musicians at all levels. Many of her works, such as *Into the Blue* and *Autumn*, are also available in flexible settings for young bands that do not have complete instrumentation. More advanced students can appreciate the heightened emotional content of her *Night Light*, depicting, in the words of the composer (and self-described "insomniac and anxiety-ridden optimist"), "the experience of being awake in the night while the surrounding world is at rest."

Arturo Márquez/Oliver Nickel, arranger

Among the most unique of the great symphonic composers of our day is the Mexican-born Arturo Márquez. His *Danzon No. 2*, which gained notoriety in performances by Gustavo Dudamel and the Simón Bolívar Orchestra of Venezuela, is now becoming a modern wind band staple through the deft transcription by Oliver Nickel. More recently, Nickel adapted another Márquez orchestral classic for winds and percussion—*Conga del Fuego Nuevo*, an exhilarating work inspired by the fiery, rhythmic nature of Afro-Cuban dance music. While challenging, it is accessible to many high school bands. It is a work that is destined to become a favorite for years to come.

Xi Wang

Chinese-born composer Xi Wang is a compelling voice highly sought by such prestigious ensembles as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, and the Shanghai Philharmonic. Her two works for winds and percussion are suitable for performance by only the most advanced ensembles. *Winter Blossom*, composed in memory of composer Steven Stucky, and *Music for Piano, Percussion, and Wind Ensemble* offer a visionary juxtaposition of Eastern and Western influences.

While band directors understandably spend the preponderance of their limited time in rehearsal, carving out a few moments in the classroom to listen to Wang's compositions can offer an evocative example of how seemingly disparate forms of music unite in a profoundly beautiful manifestation that eclipses any single, cultural influence.

Leroy Anderson/R. Mark Rogers, arranger

Sometimes a concert program needs a little levity and fun to engage the audience. Nothing epitomizes that style more than the king of light classical music, Leroy Anderson. There are numerous settings and arrangements of his famous pieces for band, but pay special attention to the series of incomparable arrangements by the legendary R. Mark Rogers.

Known for his numerous editions of historically significant works including Sousa marches, Rogers's attention to clarity, detail, and authenticity are manifest in his recently released series of band arrangements of the music of Leroy Anderson. Among these are newly minted versions of *China Doll*, *Belle of the Ball*, *The Penny Whistle Song*, *Jazz Pizzicato*, *Jazz Legato*, and *The Phantom Regiment*.

Although Anderson is perhaps most remembered for his holiday classic *Sleigh Ride*, he composed a lesser-known but equally delightful sister piece. *Horse and Buggy* embodies the spirit of a sprite gallop through the countryside. Suitable for both holiday-themed concerts or at any time of the year, it can be performed by advancing middle school and developing high school ensembles, so long as there is a euphonium soloist who can handle more lyrical melodies, a temple block player with a steady beat, and an aggressive percussionist who knows how to crack the whip.

Conclusion

In a world sown with division, beautiful music is a unifying force. Each composer, regardless of background, culture, or identity, brings a distinct voice and a unique perspective that enriches our body of music and our human experience. In bringing such music to life, we inevitably draw closer to one another and can endeavor to achieve a deeper sense of empathy through the transformational music that reminds us of the humanity we all share.