

Final Repertoire Project - EDUC 5053 SU01

***Dusk* by Steven Bryant**

Ashley Brockway

General Information

- 1) Title: Dusk
- 2) Composer: Steven Bryant
- 3) Publisher: Hal Leonard
- 4) Year Written: 2004 (revised in 2008)
 - a) Duration: 5 minutes and 15 seconds
 - b) Level: Grade 4
 - i) The piece appears on many state and provincial festival lists in the Grade 4 category, but occasionally is listed as Grade 3 (Florida), Grade 5 (Maryland), and Grade 6 (Georgia).
- 5) Composer Background Information
 - a) Steven Bryant grew up in Arkansas, and studied composition at Juilliard with John Corigliano, as well as at the University of North Texas with Cindy McTee and Ouachita University with Francis McBeth. He has composed over thirty works for wind band, and has arranged several of his pre-existing works for adaptable ensembles as well. Steven has been the recipient of the National Band Association's William D. Revelli Composition Award three times: in 2007, 2008, and 2010.

6) Reception History

- a) Dusk was premiered in April of 2004 at the MENC National Convention by the Langley High School Wind Symphony, conducted by Andrew Gekoskie. While I was unable to find any reviews or reactions to the premiere itself, in 2011 choral composer Eric Whitacre described the piece as “THE primer on how to orchestrate for concert band” (Whitacre, 2011). Since its initial release in 2004 the piece has been adapted for solo instrument with piano or video accompaniment, with versions for nearly every concert band or orchestra instrument, as well as for adaptable concert band instrumentation, woodwind quintet, saxophone ensemble, brass ensemble, and symphony orchestra.

7) PERSITAG

- a) Political: N/A
- b) Economical: The piece was commissioned by the Langley High School Wind Symphony, meaning that the composer would have already received payment for the piece before it was premiered. The fact that it was premiered at a national music convention also implies that sales for the piece could have been quite strong from the conductors and educators in attendance.
- c) Religious: N/A
- d) Social: Steven Bryant is a member of a consortium of composers called BCM International, which also includes Eric Whitacre, Jonathan Newman, and Jim Bonney. Together they “strive to create high-quality literature for all concert and educational mediums. While diverse in background and stylistic approach, [they]

share a desire to enrich the repertoire with music unbound by traditional thought or idiomatic cliché.” (BCM International, 2010)

- e) Intellectual: N/A
- f) Technological: The score and parts were printed and published using digital notation software, and all iterations and versions are available to order online through the Hal Leonard website.
- g) Artistic: The piece is heavy in metaphorical and artistic content as it strives to depict the visual beauty of dusk through sound.
- h) Geographic: It can be argued that a piece of music depicting dusk could be universally enjoyed and interpreted, as dusk occurs everywhere in the world.

Recording Reviews

- 1) One recording you like. Why do you like it?

Austin Symphonic Band. (2013, November 23). *Austin Symphonic Band Performing Dusk by Steven Bryant* [Video]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3GVNbS83mQ&ab_channel=AustinSymphonicBand

The Austin Symphonic Band was founded in 1981, and has a long history of performing throughout Texas as well as at the American Bandmasters Association Convention, the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic, and many other prestigious conventions. This performance was from a 2013 concert titled “Song and Dance.”

This performance of *Dusk* was filled with artistry and passion, as well as many intensely still moments despite the grand size of the ensemble. Even the most simple melodic lines were shaped beautifully, beginning with the horn soloist at the very top and the way their line was so carefully answered and shaped by the clarinet soloist immediately following. Each release resonated beautifully throughout the space, and patience was given to every entrance. The players did a wonderful job of shaping their phrases into moments of tension, preparing the listener appropriately for the unique harmonic moment. The crescendo into 32 was handled so beautifully, ensuring to hold something back for the climactic moment at 42 without sounding hesitant at all. The ensemble showed such great control coming down from the climactic moment into the serenity of 53; intonation was never sacrificed, and rhythmic integrity stayed intact beautifully. It is evident in this performance that the ensemble listens well both horizontally and vertically as they move through a piece, and that they are able to follow their director closely.

2) One recording you don't like. Why don't you like it?

Merion Concert Band. (2017, November 30). *Dusk - Steven Bryant* [Video]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5PsPg4TxD0&ab_channel=MerionConcertBand

The Merion Concert Band is a community wind ensemble from Pennsylvania that has a board of directors and committed volunteers, as well as a current membership of 90 musicians. They are very active in their community giving frequent performances throughout the state. This video was uploaded to YouTube in 2017, but it is unclear what the date of the performance was.

I don't love this performance of Dusk for two main reasons. The first is that the conductor and ensemble seem very glued to the quarter note pulse throughout the piece, and it causes the music to sound very rigid and chunked, especially during the recurring half note motifs. The shaping of phrases in the opening sections was minimal, and felt very much like a series of notes on a page rather than artistic statements. It often feels as though there is a lack of forward momentum, as well as a hesitancy to pull back in the moments that could use that kind of dramatic emphasis. I also feel that the cutoffs of phrases are too abrupt, and don't allow the chord to fully resonate in the space. The ensemble did have a full, rich sound in bigger moments of the piece, but I did find the first trumpet to be too overpowering at 42, distracting from the rest of the chord. Ultimately it felt like a safe performance - there was very little wrong with it technically, but it didn't move me as a listener.

Teachable Elements

1) Structural Elements

a) Time signature

i) Alternates often between 2/4, 4/4, and 3/4 in the opening

ii) Phrases are mostly in 4/4 time

b) Key signature

i) C major

c) Phrasing

i) Phrasing is somewhat irregular due to changing time signatures and varying lengths of phrases.

2) Musical Elements

a) Shaping

- i) The marking of “non vib” at measure 13 for the trumpets is an interesting and deliberate stylistic choice. Players are asked to be very careful about the way they shape this phrase as the composer is asking for clarity and stillness.

b) Intonation

- i) Intonation plays a crucial role in this piece as there are many exposed melodic and harmonic moments, as well as unique harmonies that require precise intonation. Breath support will be an important teachable element in the rehearsal of this piece to help achieve good ensemble intonation throughout.

c) Melodic Elements

- i) The melodic line first presented by the horn soloist in measure 2 returns three times throughout the piece to help establish us in a new key centre. The horn repeats this motif in Eb major in measure 24, and this time is joined by the oboe and alto sax to continue the motif further. The final iteration happens three measures from the end, joined by the euphonium, guiding us back home to Bb major.
- ii) The trumpet and horn chorale at 13 returns at 53 in the flute, clarinet, and bass clarinet sections

What about form? You almost address it in your discussion of “melody”, above, but orchestration, repetition, dynamic contour, and phrasing are all embodied in the form of

the work....where are the “moments”? Where is “the moment”? And what does this mean about pacing? How do you stack the moments together via phrases so the audience is getting a coherent expression?

d) Rhythmic Elements

- i) The piece consists of simple rhythms throughout, including the use of whole notes, dotted half notes, half notes, quarter notes, and eighth notes.

- (1) Eighth notes are often used to create forward motion during a drawn out crescendo. A strong example of this would be the section at 36 leading into the climax at 42.
- (2) The use of tied notes adds subtle syncopation in some places (ie the Flute 2 and 3 parts in measures 8 and 9.)
- (3) Beginning a phrase with two half notes followed by a longer note (lengths vary) is a common motif in this piece, first presented by the trumpets and horns at 13, then echoed by all the winds and keyboard instruments at 21. The ensemble repeats this figure again at 32 and the climax at 42, resembling strength and stability in its full dynamic and powerful use of the full ensemble. Finally, it makes its last appearance in the upper woodwinds at 53.

e) Harmonic Elements

- i) While the piece doesn't use a key signature (perhaps a commentary on how the sky is a blank slate that nature can add colour to), after close

examination it's clear that there are general key centres throughout.

Measures 1-21 are in Bb major, ending with an Eb major chord in measure 19 to help us transition to the next harmonic section. The three chords in measures 21 and 22 are interesting, in that they all have an added ninth (Bb9, G9 and Eb9), signaling something new and perhaps less stable. The melodic material that follows introduces Ab's, transitioning us into Eb major by the time we reach measure 27. The moment at 32 closely resembles measure 21, only this time our third chord is a pure Ab major chord with no added ninth, setting us up nicely for a transition into Ab major leading into the climax of the piece at 42. We stay in Ab major until the last moments of the piece, when we finally return to a Bb major chord in the last measure. Simply put, we are taking a trip around the circle of fifths with our key centres, beginning in Bb, then Eb, reaching Ab, and finishing with Bb.

- ii) Bryant will often place neighbouring notes within a section of the ensemble to create more tension, instead of sending the “crunchy” part of the chord into a different section. Examples of this include Flute 2/3 in measures 19 and 20, Alto 1/2 in measures 24 and 25, and the French Horns in measures 34 and 35.

f) Interpretive Goals / Story

- i) The piece is meant to depict the period of time between sunset and complete darkness, otherwise referred to as twilight. The intensity

presented through dynamic contrast and rich harmonic progressions depict the vibrant colours of a sunset.

- ii) The opening figure in the French horn solo could depict the falling motion of the sun that occurs before dusk, and the sparseness of the parts that follow resemble the quiet tranquility of this time of night.
- iii) The main theme presented at 13 continues to emulate stillness but with a sense of coming together and the players present their simple melody in unison.
- iv) As the piece builds into 32 we can imagine the colours of the sunset intensifying and darkening, becoming more vibrant and the sun gets lower in the sky. This building continues into the climax at 42 continues on this trajectory, and gives the audience the most intense moment of beauty yet.
- v) As we come down from the climax and move into 53, we are presented with the theme one final time before we see the last hues of the sunset fade to darkness.

What Makes *Dusk* A Great Work?

I feel that this is a great work, first and foremost, because it encourages a strong sense of artistry and beauty in ensemble music making. Each part looks so simple on paper, but when it comes together it is transformed into something unexpected and glorious. Being a part of an ensemble requires a kind of devotion to togetherness that not all works are able to capture, but

Dusk does a beautiful job of that. The piece brings to life the idea that just because something happens every single day in every corner of the world, it doesn't make it any less beautiful or any less miraculous. What could be seen as mundane is vividly brought to life, and has the potential to awaken musicians to recognizing that the daily occurrences in their own lives are just as beautiful.

Suitability to the Ecole McTavish Senior Concert Band

Our ensemble played at the Grade 4 level in a festival setting for the first time in the 2021/2022 school year, and was able to handle the challenges of the repertoire quite well. In general our areas for growth include ensemble unity, phrasing, and intonation in lyrical music, and I feel that this piece would be a great candidate as a teaching tool for those concepts.

I appreciate that the piece will challenge the range of some of our players, not only requiring them to hit the note but also sustain it at very full volumes (ie the Trumpet 1 holding a high B flat in measure 42 with a *fff* dynamic marking.)

Our instrumentation will be an additional challenge we will face with this piece in the upcoming school year, as we will only have one French horn, two trombones, and a generally small low brass and woodwind section. We will need to make a conscious effort to balance the ensemble appropriately in light of this.

Finally, I feel that this piece will really help to solidify the concepts of tone colour and timbre in ensemble music making as we explore musically representing dusk. As mentioned earlier, the experience of seeing a beautiful sunset fade into the night sky is something very universal, and it has the potential to really bring the ensemble together to create a unified vision.

Four Tasks

1) Skills Objective (Psychomotor Domain)

- a) Scales and Arpeggios (Concert B flat Major, Concert E flat Major, and Concert A flat Major)
 - i) Students will perform all three scales and arpeggios individually at the tempo requirement for their grade level (120 BPM in eighth notes)
 - ii) Students will perform all three scales and arpeggios as an ensemble first slowly to focus on tuning between each interval, then with a variety of articulations applied (all slurred, all tenuto tonguing, etc.) Ensemble scale exercises can be applied including playing in rounds to build chords.

2) Skills Objective (Psychomotor Domain)

- a) Warm-up Exercises in all three keys
 - i) A tuning exercise will be performed by the ensemble in all three keys, moving through a I - IV - V7 - I chord progression each time. (Exercise sample in Concert B flat is attached in reference section, and is borrowed from conductor Ken Rogers)
 - ii) The exercises will be performed in a variety of dynamics, helping to emulate the dynamics found throughout the piece.

3) Knowledge Objective (Cognitive Domain)

- a) Circle of Fifths
 - i) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the circle of fifths, with the end goal of being able to complete the full circle without assistance.

- ii) Students will work together to determine how the circle functions within the piece.

4) Affective Outcome (Affective Domain)

a) Photography Challenge: Capture a photo of “dusk” in Fort McMurray.

- i) Students will be tasked to capture a photo of dusk that they feel illustrates a specific moment of the piece.
- ii) The photo will be accompanied by a journal reflection explaining the corresponding moment(s) in the piece that the photo represents to them.
- iii) All photos will be shared with the class, and may be used in rehearsal to help provide inspiration.

1 -preamble about the class/ensemble, grade(s), performance setting, etc

(a) title/composer/arranger ✓ ok

(b) publisher ✓ ok

(c) year written/arranged ✓ ok

(d) duration ✓ ok

(e) level/class ✓ ok

(f) PERSITAG cultural analysis.

✓ Your work here is very good. I encourage you to consider the artistic implications of Bryant’s musical language, and the symbolism of the topic of “dusk” in social and interpersonal ways. This work is performed a lot not just because it is “pretty”, it touches people..

(g) Recording review: find a recording you like, and if possible, a recording you dislike. What causes you to like/dislike each one?

✓ good work

2 -tell why is it a great work of art; why you choose it; how & when you heard/discovered it

-How would you explain why it is included in your program to parents or administrators? How does it suit your students and school and program?

✓ good work

3 -complete a thorough teaching-analysis, looking for elements that are signatures and provide you with “teachable moments”

-hypothesize about why the composer made certain choices, when appropriate

✓ FORM is key to performing this work with depth and meaning. See my notes above for ideas.

4 -design a series of 4 tasks that will help students to learn more about “Music” as a topic through the preparation of this work for performance

-supply both formative and summative evaluation procedures for the repertoire cycle

✓ This area of arts leadership is a “work in progress” for all of us, Ashley. I return to the central question—WHY:

Why is it a great work?

Why does it speak to performers and audiences?

And then, WHAT, HOW, they serve the central idea of why.

FINAL REP PROJECT

A poet (who passed away early in the pandemic) came to my first performance of this work (maybe it was 2008?) She hand-wrote two poems, which I share whenever I perform Dusk. I am gifting it to you, to use if you wish, or not...

Two poems by Heather Pycrz
Inspired by Steven Bryant's *Dusk*

Dusk

Andante

the sun sinks below the clouds
bathes the birch, gilds its leaves
hovers there, burns scarlet
crimson, tangerine
it turns heads, stops the hand
a quietude descends diminishing
the cacophony of human sounds
birdsong, even the wind; into
this tranquility; this vespertine retreat
the world enters, breathes, darkens
slips into silence, nakedness, divine vulnerability.

Dawn

It begins —a mere thought
a long elegant unfolding told
in the narrative voice of light.
See now, it's coming, a flare,
a pale infusion of fission,
a lightness at the base of trees
a hint of hope in the soft air.

Fingers of light flush out a bird
waiting there on a bough black
against the sky, waiting for a sign,
the baton; bright beams of light ignite
the bird, the branch, the tree.
Unleashed, the sun bursts forth—all
is swathed in radiance, the bird sings.

References

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