

Station Merrimack by David Schumacher

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Piccolo
Flute 1 & 2
Oboe
Clarinet 1, 2, & 3
Bass Clarinet

Alto Saxophone 1 & 2
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone
French Horn
Trumpet 1, 2, & 3

Trombone 1 & 2
Baritone
Tuba
Timpani
Percussion 1, 2, 3, & 4

Station Merrimack was commissioned by Tony Beatrice for the combined Pentucket Regional High School and Middle School Concert Bands. Supported by Massachusetts Cultural Council grants, it was premiered as part of an interdisciplinary project celebrating local ties to the Underground Railroad involving the Pentucket High School history, videography, and music departments in November of 2011. The piece is one of hope and determination taking inspiration from the well-known spiritual "Follow the Drinking Gourd". Though its authenticity as a song complete with encoded lyrics to guide those on their journey through the Underground Railroad remains unconfirmed, the folklore surrounding its history continues to spark our collective imagination.

The first half of the piece is purely programmatic. I introduce the Drinking Gourd theme as a work song in the clarinets. They represent a solitary voice that is punctuated by the anvil strikes of the percussion section. Depicting the transformation of that solitary musing to the collective voice of an empowered community yearning for freedom, I begin to add voices, timbres, and increasingly rich re-harmonizations that evolve into the unified block chords at m. 21. This section personifies that tension and yearning, and culminates in the driving tempo beginning at m. 25. This new driving tempo signifies the communal decision to risk the journey north.

The remainder of the piece draws on earlier motives set primarily within the minor pentatonic sound implied by the original melody. This simple melodic structure, along with the rich jazz harmonies supporting it, provides a fresh and engaging color palette for the musicians. The industrial colors of the highly involved percussion section add an edge and sense of urgency throughout. The yearning and exhilaration of the piece are wrapped up in a flurry of activity as the dramatic descending melody in m. 83 is passed from the flutes on through to the tuba on its way into the closing harmonic pyramid that leaves the listener on the edge of their seat.

CONDUCTOR NOTES: Take care in your interpretation of the opening rubato section. The accel/rit/a tempo indications are a guideline. The section should feel organic and vocal in quality. Pacing should reflect the programmatic nature described above with greater space between phrases at the beginning and less toward the Driving Tempo section at m. 25. Please take note of the implied metric modulation (based on the dotted quarter notes) found between m. 77 and m. 82. Make use of this intrinsic element during your ritard at the end of the section.

Many other works of various style, instrumentation, and level of difficulty are available from this composer. Commissions for new works, orders for existing works, and information about guest artist residencies should be directed to David Schumacher at stroderode@earthlink.net or 617-970-1177.

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