



“THE MERMAID OF ZENNOR” – Philip Harper

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Guidance Notes – David Hirst

For those familiar with the work of Philip Harper, all will be assured that this work is indeed both interesting and a test for all bands in their section. The “Mermaid of Zennor” is programmatic in style, with brief notes about each movement in the foreword to the score and should be rehearsed and performed with this narrative in mind.

All performances should attempt to capture the descriptive character and the mood of the music and will test both conductors and players alike in bringing the music to life.

The percussion requirements are relatively modest but very well written and all the parts are integral to the score and the overall performance. Conductors should rehearse the piece with percussion in mind rather than an ‘add-on’. The various percussion effects are there to enhance the performance and can be important in producing an imaginative and musical whole.

This synopsis must not be understood as a ‘blue print’ for success but as a guide to how adjudicators analyse the inner elements of the score in order to define the accuracy of a performance. Therefore, this is offered as an example only and conductors should delve further into the score in order to reveal other detail not covered in this critique. Moreover, it is expected that conductors will be as musically creative as is possible within the bounds of the score and enable the adjudicator to “hear what we see”!

I. The Sea and Seafaring

This movement is marked ‘Grandioso con moto’ and this descriptor should be kept at the forefront of the approach in the performance. The tempo is crotchet=132 and conductors should attempt to be as accurate as possible, but more importantly allow the music to flow from phrase to phrase without hesitation.

The opening figures to Letter D should suggest the swell of the sea and the composer has provided adequate compositional material to allow this to be developed. Attention should be paid to the dovetailing of the quaver figures (example 1) and the control of the crescendo/diminuendo’s that should be evenly balanced over the two bar sequences.

Example 1

Musical score for Solo Tenor Horn, 1st Baritone, and Euphonium. The score is in 6/4 time and G major. The Solo Tenor Horn part starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a half note D4. The 1st Baritone part starts with a half note G3, followed by a quarter note F#3, a quarter note E3, and a half note D3. The Euphonium part starts with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F#2, a quarter note E2, and a half note D2. The score is divided into two measures. The first measure is marked *mf* and the second measure is marked *ff*. The Solo Tenor Horn part has a slur over the first measure and a slur over the second measure. The 1st Baritone part has a slur over the first measure and a slur over the second measure. The Euphonium part has a slur over the first measure and a slur over the second measure.

Look for the added detail e.g. basses staccato quavers bar 1 and 3 (see example 2).

Example 2

Musical score for Eb Bass and Bb Bass. The score is in 6/4 time and G major. The Eb Bass part starts with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F#2, a quarter note E2, and a half note D2. The Bb Bass part starts with a half note G1, followed by a quarter note F#1, a quarter note E1, and a half note D1. The score is divided into two measures. The first measure is marked *mf* and the second measure is marked *ff*. The Eb Bass part has a slur over the first measure and a slur over the second measure. The Bb Bass part has a slur over the first measure and a slur over the second measure.

Percussion should play an integral role here and conductors should experiment with the suspended cymbal (size and sticks) to achieve the best effect possible!

Dynamics play an important role in the dramatic quality of this opening and conductors should work hard to achieve as these contrasts in dynamic range. Bar 5 is piano but there are subtle dynamic changes which should not be ignored e.g. bar 7 Euphoniums/Baritones (example 3).

Example 3

Musical score for Euphonium. The score is in 6/4 time and G major. The Euphonium part starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a half note D4. The score is divided into two measures. The first measure is marked *p* and the second measure is marked *p*. The Euphonium part has a slur over the first measure and a slur over the second measure.

Solo lines should be played with confidence and the imitation between soprano (bar 11) and horns (bar 13) should be consistent in style.

At letter D there should be a smooth transition between the 6/4 and 4/4 with no change of Tempo! There are a number of effects that need to be controlled to enhance the performance e.g. bar 3/4 etc... (see example 4)

Example 4

The musical score for Example 4 consists of four staves for different cornet parts. The Solo Cornet part starts with a rest in the first measure, followed by a half note in the second measure, and a quarter note in the third measure. The Repiano, 2nd, and 3rd Cornet parts all play a half note in the first measure, followed by a half note in the second measure, and a quarter note in the third measure. Dynamic markings include *f* (forte) and *pp* (pianissimo) with hairpins indicating crescendos and decrescendos. The Solo Cornet part has a *f* marking in the second measure and a *p* (piano) marking in the third measure. The other three parts have *f* markings in the first measure and *pp* markings in the second measure.

The melody line (Euphoniums bar 37) is a pastiche ‘Hornpipe’ and needs attention to rhythmic detail and the expressive effects i.e. accents, crescendo etc... (see example 5)

The contrasting section at Letter F gives scope for expressive playing with musical shapes in Euphoniums and Baritones (bar 51/52).

Bar 59 is a good solid band tutti which needs to be managed carefully to bring all elements into play and demonstrate a good balance. There is an interesting percussion line here which can add greatly to the effectiveness of this section (bar 59).

Letter G will present some challenges with the detail required in the cornet carillon (example 5 letter G) and conductors should pay as much attention to the cornet effects here as the melody line in Baritones/Trombone. The melody should be expressively played and there is an opportunity to add dynamic shape to enhance the playing.

Example 5

The musical score for Example 5 consists of three staves for different cornet parts. The Repiano Cornet part plays a quarter note in the first measure, followed by a quarter note in the second measure, and a quarter note in the third measure. The 2nd and 3rd Cornet parts play a quarter note in the first measure, followed by a quarter note in the second measure, and a quarter note in the third measure. Dynamic markings include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and instructions for 'metal mute'. The Repiano Cornet part has a *mp* marking in the first measure and 'metal mute' instructions above the staff. The 2nd and 3rd Cornet parts have *mp* markings in the first measure and 'metal mute' instructions above the staff.

At H the continuous time changes should be played seamlessly and the effects in terms of dynamic shape and accentuation should all be detailed throughout. This should all be rhythmically secure which can be assisted with a good side drummer keeping the rhythmic structure fully controlled.

J sees a fragmentary return to the 'hornpipe' theme leading to a full tutti which should demonstrate the bands quality of sound – aim for a homogenous blend of sound that is controlled and balanced. This leads to a return at L of the wave effects and then a much freer hymn-like section at letter M.

At M the cornets are marked 'lontano' (in the distance) and it is worth experimenting with cup mutes (if the adjustable type) to achieve the right effect. The term 'legato' is important!

This section features solo lines which can be delivered with relative freedom but should be in context with the music and not overdone!

2. At the Church

This is a wonderfully reflective section which develops the ideas at Letter M. Take note of the 'Misterioso' marking and attempt to convey this in the music. Although the tempo is crotchet = 60 the music should flow from phrase to phrase without becoming stagnant. Last year many performances in slower sections were marked down because conductors often went far below the tempo mark and lost the flow of the music!

There are a number of percussion effects which are integral with the music should be carefully managed within the performance. Combine this with the muted chords in lower cornets (example 6) and this makes for an interesting backdrop to the melodic ideas in Solo Cornet, Baritone and Horn.

Example 6

The image shows a musical score for three cornets: Repiano Cornet, 2nd Cornet, and 3rd Cornet. The music is in 4/4 time and features a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic marking. The Repiano and 3rd Cornet parts have a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures and a trill (tr) in the third measure. The 2nd Cornet part has a similar melodic line but with a trill in the second measure. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb).

Intonation and tune is of prime importance here (as everywhere in the piece) and needs players to be confident in production of the notes and conductors to spend time on tuning and balance. This is exposed stuff and will expose weaknesses in the overall performance.

This is an extremely difficult movement and will test all bands in, not only tuning and intonation, but in balance, control and, above all musicality and expression!

3. Return to the Waves

Marked as 'Vivo' (energetic) conductors should be careful not to overdo the tempo! There are some tricky passages which will expose weaknesses in technical execution and rhythmic control. There should be a meticulous attention to detail in dynamics and a real consistent feel to the 6/8 time signature.

Solo lines should be confidently played with a sense of style with most instruments contributing.

Letter U has a nice contrasting section with trombones marked 'quasi chorale' (example 7) which recaps some of the material from movement 2 bar 156.

Example 7

The image shows a musical score for three trombone parts: 1st Trombone, 2nd Trombone, and Bass Trombone. The music is in 6/8 time and marked *mf quasi chorale*. The 1st Trombone part is in the treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The 2nd Trombone part is also in the treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Bass Trombone part is in the bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The score consists of four measures, each containing a single half note. The notes are: 1st Trombone (G4), 2nd Trombone (F#4), and Bass Trombone (Bb3).

Much of this movement is relatively straightforward but at letter Z the dual time signature of 6/4 and the suggestion of 4/4 in the solo cornet line et. al, will require attention in order make the opposing time signatures marry together as a whole. The solo cornet line recaps the melody from movement 1 (bar 136) and movement 2 (see letter Q).

There is also a final reiteration of a melodic fragment from movement 1 and 2, played by soprano cornet with a final cadenza like flourish from solo Euphonium.

BB is a momentary Maestoso link before the recapitulation of the Vivo melody. Again, careful not to overdo the tempo and make sure the effects of the dynamics are brought to bear.

Again, overall quality of band sound should be at the forefront

Further information regarding the Association of Brass Band Adjudicators performance assessment criteria (PAC) can be found on the AoBBA website (<http://www.aobba.com/performance-assessment-criteria-pac-a-guide-for-conductors-and-bands/>)

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