# "THE MERMAID OF ZENNOR" – Philip Harper

## (Published by Harper Music Publications )

## 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.

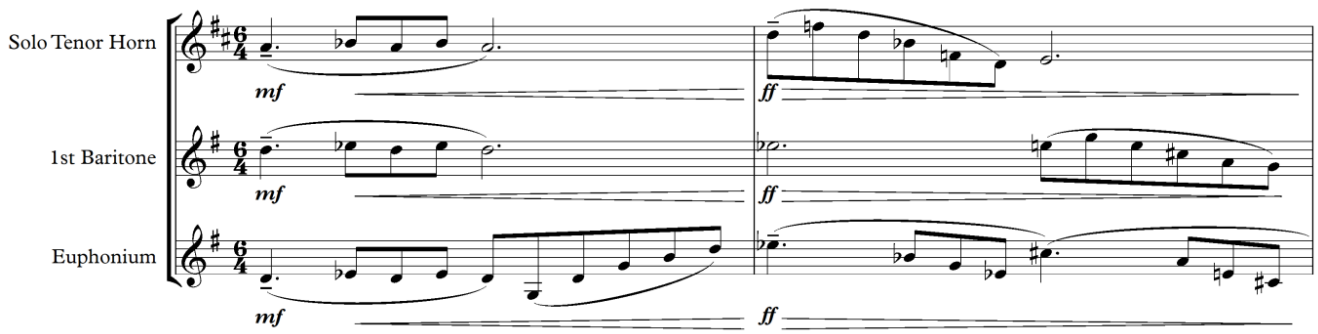
This synopsis must not be understood as a 'blue print' for success but as a guide to how adjudicators analyse the inner elements of the score in order to define the accuracy of a performance. Therefore, this is offered as an example only and conductors should delve further into the score in order to 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"!

### 1. 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.

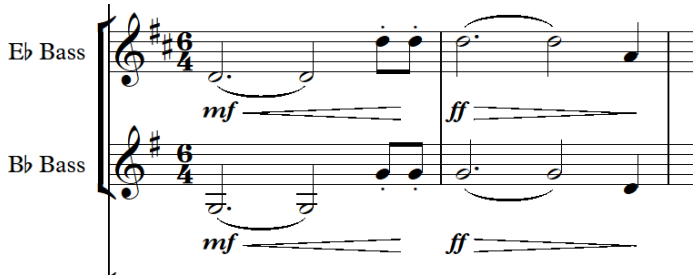
The opening figures to Letter D should suggest the swell of the sea and the composer has provided adequate compositional material to allow this to be developed. Attention should be paid to the dovetailing of the quaver figures (example 1) and the control of the crescendo/diminuendo's that should be evenly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

Example 1




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

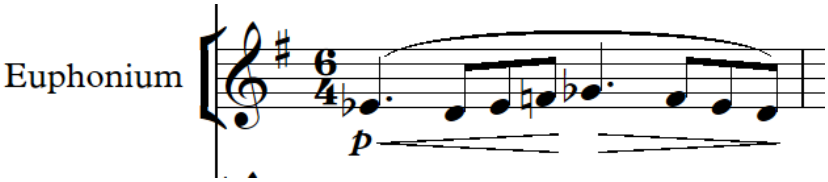
Example 2




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).

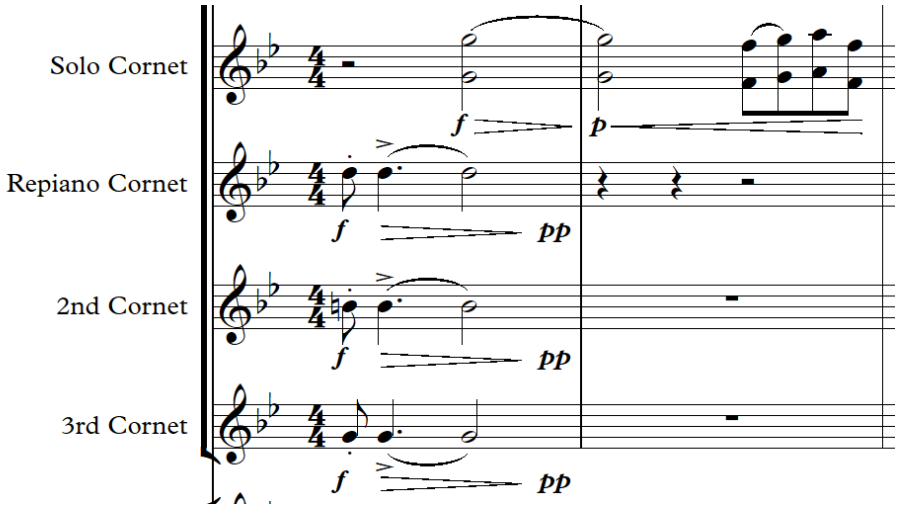
Example 3




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



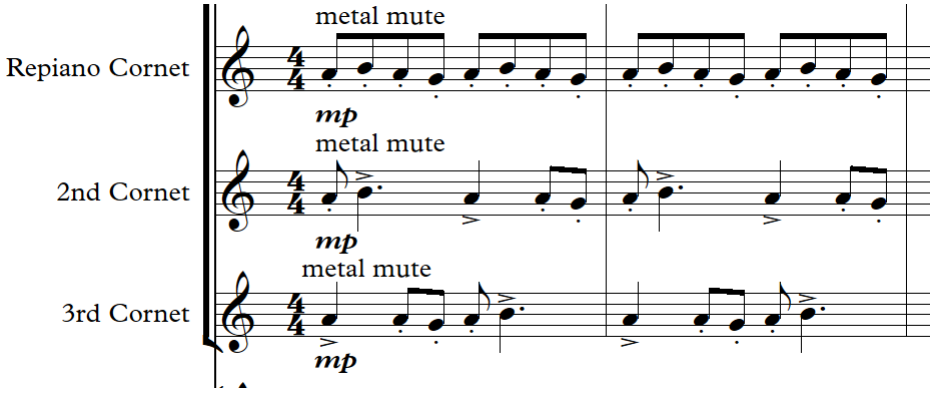

The melody line (Euphoniums bar 37) is a pastiche 'Hornpipe' and needs attention to rhythmic detail and the expressive effects i.e. accents, crescendo etc... (see example 5)

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



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!

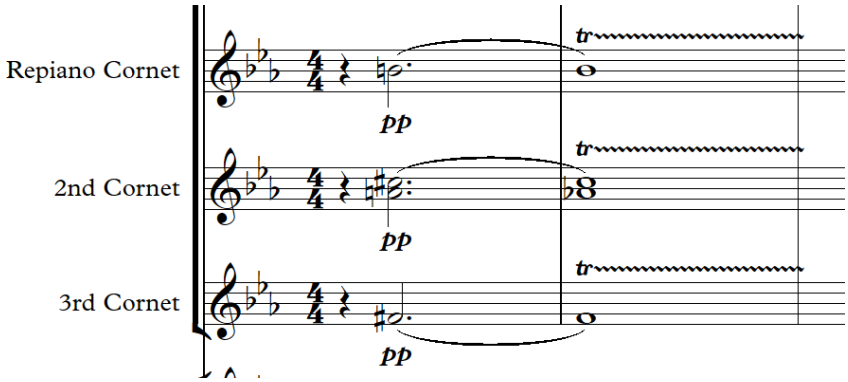
This section features solo lines which can be delivered with relative freedom but should be in context with the music and not overdone!

## 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




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!

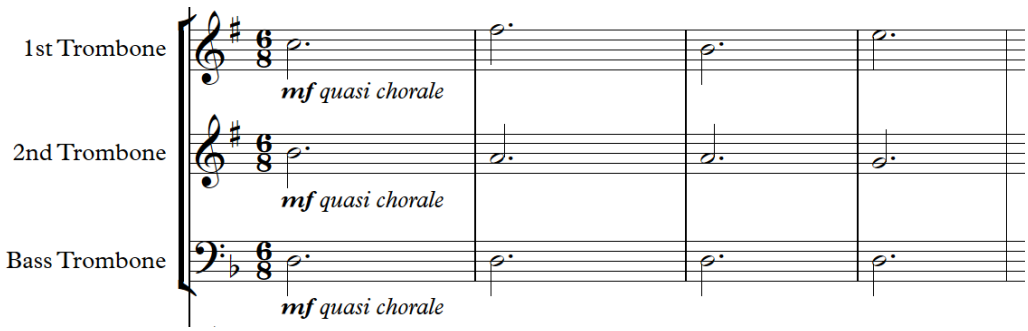
### 3. Return to the Waves

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




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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