

Words of Encouragement from Tony Brackett

One of the many hats I have worn during my career was that of high school clarinet choir director. All of the players were my private students and I thought it would be fun for us to get together once a week to read through the standard clarinet choir repertoire. It also allowed the younger students to hear and play with the older, more experienced students.

My students were very motivated and eager to learn. Almost everyone was accepted into Regional, All-State, New England bands/orchestras. Several were accepted into MENC All-Eastern Honors groups, John Philip Sousa National Junior & Senior Honors Bands and Hershey All-USA High School Band. Some went on to study music in college. Most graduated with a profound appreciation for music and the performing arts in general.

These kids were talented, academic superstars with SAT scores off the charts, but for the most part had not been exposed to standard classical music. That got me thinking that I should write arrangements of these standard works. Needless to say, the group was a hit, not only with the kids, but also their parents and the district arts chair. We performed on every band concert and were received with thunderous applause.

I encouraged these kids to learn how to play all of the clarinets: Eb soprano, alto, bass and contra. I was lucky that the school owned a complete consort of clarinets. Where are those school music budgets now???! When the group became very large I needed a better balance and ended up finding good student-level instruments on eBay, paying very little for them. For some of these kids, playing "harmony" clarinets was a wonderful experience and the "voice" they had been looking for. The Eb, alto and contra sections of the Region, All-State and New England bands were usually my kids. Unfortunately, the leadership of many State level music Education organizations decided that these harmony clarinets are no longer worth having in their festival concerts. I found this very upsetting, especially when composers such as Percy Grainger loved to have "full choirs" of like instruments and scored most of his works to include Eb, Bb, alto, bass and contra clarinets. What a loss to the timbre of the modern day band to no longer include these instruments. I remember participating in these festivals as a kid and having five alto clarinets and a couple of contras as well! Those were the good old days.

My transcriptions are approachable by most clarinet choirs and are scored for Eb clarinet, Bb clarinets 1-3, alto clarinet, bass clarinet and Eb contra. I also include alternate parts for basset horn in place of alto clarinet, and Bb contra in place of Eb contra. I have graded the level of difficulty for each piece as Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced.

I invite all choirs to send me mp3s of performances of my transcriptions. My mp3s are computer generated and don't sound nearly as good as a live performance. I would be honored to add your performances to this website. Send me your programs. I will gladly post them under "upcoming events," especially if you are playing one of my charts.

Thanks for visiting. If you have some suggestions for arrangements or have any questions, please drop me a note. I would love to hear from you. Keep practicing!

– Tony Brackett