

# Hymn Without Words

## For Symphonic Band

Hymn Without Words was written to offer to the wind band movement the type of music that has been available to brass bands for many years. Challenging music has become the cornerstone of the contest arena for the brass band genre since original music started to be composed for it during the early Twentieth Century. Usually, wind band contest music is essentially tonal in nature; the opportunities for experimentation for the composer lie elsewhere. The work was conceived to be playable by bands of middle standard and above.

This work introduces an original hymn tune that, after a short bridging passage, is presented in five variations with a closing coda section. The variations form was chosen to demonstrate the potential of wind bands, their tone colours, moods and technical possibilities in a single, coherent work of one movement.

The hymn tune that has been written as the theme is in four, two-bar phrases. The latter two phrases are full of suspensions, both for their intrinsic musical appeal and for the potential for later development offered by the natural tension and resolution of these chord progressions.

One aim of the composer was to avoid doubling a voice wherever possible, except where the doubling process offers interesting tone colour possibilities. Where a thickening of the texture is called for, perhaps to contrast with a previous more subtle section, the new parts will tend to be new material, either thematically or rhythmically. This new material need not be complex.

## The Instrumentation

The percussion section is rarely used so that it has the maximum impact wherever it enters the music.

The usual symphonic band instrumentation has been used, except that there are no cornet parts, since these parts are often incorrectly played on trumpets; the second oboe doubles on cor anglais; and the 4<sup>th</sup> clarinet doubles on alto clarinet.

The fourth variation includes a section for a clarinet quartet. The tenor part of it is too low for the B<sup>b</sup> clarinet, which causes some orchestration difficulties. Writing the entire section up and octave would not have worked aesthetically and most bands do not have access to either an alto-clarinet or two bass clarinets, which meant that a compromise had to be reached. The compromise taken was to write an alto-clarinet part, but to have that part cued into other instruments which could play it if needed, enabling bands to perform the work even if they do not have access to that instrument.

A similar problem occurs in the same variation where a double reed quartet is wanted. Bands rarely have a cor anglais, therefore its part is also cued.

There is an E<sup>b</sup> clarinet part; it can be dropped if there is no access to that instrument, but it is hoped that one player will be on the part.

There are four clarinet parts - the players should be distributed evenly between them.

Although written for large band, there are many cues to allow the piece to be played by bands with smaller forces.

## Introduction

The hymn appears twice at the start of the work: once as a clarinet quartet and once in the brass (trumpets and trombones *senza vibrato*), with phrases clearly marked by pauses that help to create the initial relaxed atmosphere. Presenting the hymn twice in this way establishes from the start that the woodwind and brass are to be treated as separate sections, unlike many older "brass and reed" pieces that often merely double one section with the other; for example, melodies that simultaneously appear in the clarinets and cornets/trumpets. By separating the tone colours of woodwind and brass, one of the aims of the piece has been met. The repetition in brass uses shorter pauses (*poco*) to give a gentle sense of moving forward when compared with the full pauses used by the clarinets. The second time that the hymn appears, all trumpets and trombones are used rather than as a quartet (two trumpets and two trombones), which fills the sound, thereby adding to the contrast with the first presentation. The effect is further enhanced by the dynamic difference.

Strictly speaking, either the hymn should have an anacrusis of three beats that would put the final chord into the first beat (the strongest beat of a 4/4 bar) giving a strong masculine perfect cadence at its end, or it should have been written in 2/4. By starting with a single upbeat, the final cadence resolves on a less accented beat, the third beat. The placing of the accents in the hymn in this fashion gives a more dramatic effect, which lends itself to better development.

The 6/4 bars in the hymn, for example bar 6, help to maintain the rhythmic smoothness and ensure a correct interpretation during its performance. The extra two beats in the bars allow crotchets in the alto voice rather than quavers that performers may otherwise rush. By writing crotchets against a minim pause, the suspension will be given a fuller value. A phrase-mark appears after each pause to ensure that performers do not "breath through"; otherwise, the performers may not phrase together at the end of each line of the hymn. It is important that the composer's requirement for the performers to phrase together as a group of vocalists would, is always honoured to emphasise the chorale-like presentation.

There is a need for a 6/4 bar at letter B immediately after the second presentation of the hymn tune, to readjust the pulse to the more natural 4/4 feel in the bridging passage.

The bridging passage between the introduction of the hymn and the first variation consists of a number of statements of four notes ending on a masculine cadence, this time presented in the more classically correct cadencial emphasis for 4/4: weak, medium, weak, strong. This rhythm emphasises the harmonic progress through the keys of the bridging passage. The bridge is used from letter B to reinforce the separation of the two primary sections; the wind is answered by the brass and *vice versa* as the tension rises through harmonic and dynamic progression ending in a 4/3 suspension into the first variation at letter C.

## Variation 1

The first variation develops from the dischords produced by the suspensions of the third phrase of the hymn. The trumpets and horns at letter E show this dischordal idea with D against E appearing throughout the bar, that bar deriving from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> beats of the tenor and bass parts of the 5<sup>th</sup> bar of the hymn. This idea then forms a new motif from which the variation was written (see figure 1).



Figure 1 – horns bar 68

This motif is used as a rhythmic accompaniment against which a new melody is written (see figure 2). This melody is the principal melodic idea of this variation.



Figure 2 –oboe bar 34

Initially it had seemed that the rhythmic motif would appear best in the tenor saxophones. Their incisive sound can cut through and lead the rhythm forward. However, there is a practicality issue with this idea, since tonguing on reed instruments for extended periods is tiring and double-tonguing, which is required at this tempo, is far more difficult with woodwind than with brass. The option of moving this line to the French horns was considered, but ultimately splitting this line between the horns and trumpets was finally chosen. Splitting the line, and using quavers as well as semiquavers, helps with the issue of stamina in performing extended periods of semiquavers on brass instruments. It also gives a gentler lilting feel than one would otherwise expect with 11/8, which is reinforced by the accents in the trumpets and horns.

The motif of figure 1 does not appear at the start of the variation. It is first appears in a stripped-down version in the third bar of letter C. The stripped-down effect is not produced by removing notes: the only difference is four semiquavers being replaced by two quavers; it is achieved by dovetailing the line between the horns and trumpets. By withholding the full appearance of the motif, a sense of development is achieved when the full figure appears at letter E. This sense of development helps to give shape to the variation as a whole. This is achieved by writing backwards: starting at the goal and working towards the beginning, in this case at letter C (see figure 3).

Figure 3 shows the musical notation for bars 32 of the 1st Eb Trumpet, 2nd Eb Trumpet, 3rd Eb Trumpet, and 1st & 2nd Horn parts. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The 1st Eb Trumpet part starts with a melodic line marked *mf* and *dim*. The 2nd Eb Trumpet part follows a similar pattern. The 3rd Eb Trumpet part has a more active line. The 1st & 2nd Horn part provides a harmonic accompaniment. A rhythmic pattern (3+3+2+3) is indicated above the first staff.

Figure 3 – trumpets, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> horns bar 32

This melody first appears in the oboe in bar 34 against the rhythmic figure, which is missing some notes to give a lighter feeling that has the useful side effects of preserving stamina and giving more urgency and development when the full figure appears at E. The three-figured rising ostinato in the bass line mirrors the falling bass line motif from the hymn's first bar. The oboe melody is then developed throughout this variation.

The variation grows in range as higher and lower instruments are introduced, as dynamics and rhythmic complexity increase and an idea we may name "busyness" appears as lines that are more independent are introduced. This peaks at letter E, which has six lines:

- flutes;
- oboes, clarinets, alto saxophones and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpets;
- tenor saxophone;
- horns;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet, horns, trombones and timpani;
- bass instruments.

At letter E, the rhythmic figure is fuller; recall that the process of composition for this variation began by writing the material of letter E. Some of the quavers are replaced by semiquavers, which also heightens the urgency and busyness.

Where semiquavers appear in the woodwind, for example bars 58, 59 and 62 (see figure 4), the lines have been marked on the score to be played slurred, which overcomes the tonguing problem raised above; only repeated notes, and some which merit it on musical grounds, have been marked to be tongued.

Figure 4 shows the musical notation for bar 68 of the 3rd Eb Clarinet part. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The part features a melodic line with a slurred section and a tongued section.

Figure 4 – 3<sup>rd</sup> clarinet bar 68

This variation is the most technically demanding movement with its 11/8 metre and contrary rhythms throughout the variation. However, it should not be beyond many bands and conductors. Each line has its own rhythm, and the cross rhythm will of course cause some difficulties before the conductor and players feel at ease. The melody is 3+2+2+2+2, the bass line is 3+3+3+2, changing to 2+2+2+2+3 at letter E, whereas the accompaniment is mostly 3+3+2+3. Individual lines rarely change rhythm, which will aid the players. To aid the conductor, all except two bars have been presented as 3+3+2+3. All of the parts have been typeset to be consistent with this beat, which helps to make the parts easier to rehearse and learn since the beat of the conductor should always match the part that the players are reading.

The end of the movement, after the *fortissimo* climax at bar 71, is short as the number of players and lines reduces quickly. The rhythmic figure is important, so it is stated until the last two bars, although the number of instruments stating it reduces.

## Variation 2

The second variation starts at F and has been written to provide a strong contrast to the first variation, the melody of the hymn being shared amongst the brass, three notes at a time, against a rhythmic dominant pedal in the saxophones. This heralds the first full appearance of the percussion section, which features prominently in this and the next variation. This variation is in ABA form; the second subject, introduced at letter G (see figure 5), is of new material that is designed to contrast with the first subject.



Figure 5- 1<sup>st</sup> flute bar 91

### Variation 3

The rhythm used in the dominant pedal in the first section of the second variation has prominence in the third variation, which is a slow movement that grows in intensity to a climax about three-quarters of the way through the variation at letter L. The variation features a tonic pedal, which is used by the flutes to relieve the tension of the dominant pedal of the second variation. This tonic pedal remains at *pianissimo* even as the rest of the band plays louder. The atmosphere of this opening of this variation is created by the flute pedal and tubular bell.

The rhythmic pedal motif from the second variation is re-introduced in the tenor saxophone and bass clarinet where it acts as a pivot, closing the second variation and setting the atmosphere for the third. The variation is then opened by the trumpet and euphonium reintroducing the last phrase of the hymn in its original form before it appears in the clarinets and is built on in the *crescendo*.

As the number of instruments playing increases, so the range and harmonic tension increases toward a major 7<sup>th</sup> chord on the tonic at the second bar of letter L. Then as the tonic pedal remains in all of the woodwind, so the tension is reduced as the brass slides down a tone to form a minor 7<sup>th</sup> chord on the supertonic against the woodwind and finally a chord of the tonic major. Untuned percussion (cymbals and tam-tam) focus the increase and release of the tension. The tone colour is hardened by the use of hard sticks on the suspended cymbal roll at letter L and the triangle roll at bar 164, where the piccolo also joins.

Finally, a series of slow, falling figures appear as the band returns to *pianissimo* ready for the start of the fourth variation. These figures are derived from the final phrase of the hymn tune, here presented in the major mode, which balances with the use of the phrase at the start of this variation.

### Variation 4

The fourth variation is a fugue with an ABCDA structure. B and D represent a series of episodic features comprising a number of short figures. These figures have been labelled as separate episodes, though it could equally be thought that B and D are single episodes consisting of a number of features; the difference is only in the analysis. C is a short fugue on a different subject, whose answer appears earlier than the answer does in the A fugue, therefore producing an implied *stretto* effect.

Most of the episodes appear only once; some are derived from the material of the subject, the others being inspired by the style, that is to say the spirit, of the subject rather than the notes. There is scope for development of some of the episodes that only appear once and perhaps for more interplay between them and the subject or answer (the first counter subject).

The form used in this variation explores the use of tone colour for enhancing counterpoint and *vice versa*. Predominantly the variation is in the woodwind section, with short figures from the brass and percussion sections. The exploration is in the interplay of three subsections of the woodwind: clarinets, double reed and saxophones.

The A fugue's subject (see figure 6) is based on the first phrase of the hymn extended to four bars. It is presented as a clarinet quartet, the tenor part being played

on an alto clarinet to cover all the notes of the subject down an octave beyond the low E, which is the bottom of the range of a clarinet.



Figure 6 – 1<sup>st</sup> clarinet bars 185-189

Moving all of the voices up an octave, perhaps using the Eb clarinet, could have solved the register problem, but that would not have produced the desired tone colour. Alternatively, either different instruments or a second bass clarinet could have been used instead of an alto clarinet. No solution to this problem was ideal, so a compromise of adding a cue for the alto clarinet part into other parts was chosen for bands without access to an alto clarinet.

Sometimes fugues can cause simple syntactic problems that need attention and time to correct, often with the replacement of many bars. A sketch of this fugue had such a problem, namely a false relation coming from last note of the subject. The last note is the leading note, which in a minor key would normally be sharpened in an imperfect cadence. However there is no D<sup>#</sup> in the dominant of E minor, *i.e.* B minor, which leads to the false relation between a D<sup>#</sup> and D. This was corrected by using a D natural in the final imperfect cadence, reminding us of the flattened leading note in the horns in variation one's rhythmic accompaniment.

After the exposition, the first episode appears at letter N (see figure 7). The first episode is based on a running quaver figure that is derived from an inverse of the subject. This figure is presented four times in a double-reed quartet, each entry being a tone lower than the previous. Since the register is too low for the second oboe, the alto line of the quartet is played on the cor anglais. The episode is then mirrored in a saxophone quartet; this time each entry is a tone higher than the previous forming a V shape to the episode.



Figure 7 – 1<sup>st</sup> oboe bars 201-205

The second episode follows immediately after the first, at letter Q (see figure 8). It is a simple melody with accompaniment. The melody begins with new material appearing twice as a sequence, and finishes on an idea developed from the second counter subject, with the third counter subject appearing in the bass line.



Figure 8 – 1<sup>st</sup> clarinet bars 209-211

The third episode, letter R (see figure 9), is a trio where the middle voice is derived from the answer, presented in half time (as crotchets rather than the original quavers). It is presented twice with different instrumentation.



Figure 9 – 1<sup>st</sup> flute bars 217-221

Writing for concert bands can cause problems of balance between the brass and woodwind, particularly in lighter scored passages where the lead is in the wind section, and the brass provide accompaniment. An example of this is letter X, where small numbers of clarinets (each part in turn) are accompanied by horns and trombones. The tone of the trombones has been softened by the use of cup mutes. Straight mutes are more often used than cup mutes are, but they can give a harsh sound that could have worsened the problem rather than easing it. The horns' sound will blend in better if they are open. Finally, marking the clarinets one dynamic higher brings the problem of balance to the attention of conductor.

## Variation 5

In the fifth variation, the finale, after a short introduction the brass plays the hymn's melody against florid lines in the middle and upper woodwinds.

Stamina is a large problem when orchestrating sections such as this with long *fortissimo* passages. To help to alleviate this problem, the middle section gives a rest for many of the woodwinds and the trumpets. The florid line is then given to the saxophones, which were given less physically demanding lines earlier in the variation. Moving the florid lines down an octave gives a contrast to the music, but does cause balance problems that have been overcome by doubling the lines.

## Coda

The coda of Hymn Without Words does not re-use any material. It is percussive with a strong rhythm in the piccolo, flutes, trumpets and percussion against a series of rising chords that increase the tension until the final tonic major chords from bar 381 to the end.