Dakota Cavanaugh

Dr. Tracz

Conducting – Music 518

3/27/18

Unit Study – “Prairie Dances” by David Holsinger

**Unit 1: Composer**

David R. Holsinger was born December 26th, 1945 and is one of the most prolific composers of music for wind band, with over eighty published works to his credit. Mr. Holsinger earned a bachelor of music degree from Central Methodist University in 1967, and a master of music degree from Missouri State University in 1974. Holsinger did additional graduate study at the University of Kansas, where he was the staff arranger for the University Bands, and conductor of the Swing Choir.

For fifteen years, he worked at Shady Grove Church in Grand Prairie, TX as music minister, worship leader, and composer-in-residence. In 1999, he joined the School of Music faculty at Lee University, Cleavland, TN, as the conductor of the Lee University Wind Ensemble: his duties include teaching advanced instrumental conducting and composition.

Holsinger has won the ABA-Ostwald composition prize twice in 1982 and 1986 for “The Armies of the Omnipresent Otserf” and “In the Spring at the Time when Kings Go Off to War” respectively. Holsinger has won many other honors for his composing and teaching; he is affiliated with or has been made an honorary for most major organizations in his profession, including American Bandmaster’s Association, Kappa Kappa Psi, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, and the Women’s National Band Director’s Association (honorary member).

In addition to his university duties, Holsinger spends much of his energies as a guest composer and conductor with all-state organizations, professional bands, and university ensembles throughout the United States. When not composing or conducting, he models HO scale trains.

**Unit 2: Composition**

As stated in the score notes:

Settled in 1876, Wichita Falls, Texas, became a cattle and grain shipping center after the arrival of the railroad in 1882. One can imagine the hustle and bustle of this cowboy town in those railroad days where the ‘rambunctiousness’ of the cowhand came face to face with the businesslike demeanor of the mercantile owners and the frontier gentility of the Ladies Society. For my good friends in Region II, I offer this ‘celebrative’ cowboy dance to commemorate the rip-roaring history that surrounds this portion of the Texas portrait.

“Prairie Dances” is an up-tempo, single-movement work with a duration of approximately 3:00. It is published by TRN Music Publishers and is listed as a Grade 3 Level piece at the TRN website.

**Unit 3: Historical Perspective**

In the mid 1860’s, American settlers arrived and began to form cattle ranches. The city was officially titled Wichita Falls in 1872. On that day, a sale of town lots was held at what is now the corner of Seventh and Ohio Streets – the birthplace of the city. The city began to pioneer advances in food processing, retailing, flour milling, railroads, cattle, banking, and oil. As the rise of the railroad empire began to overtake America, so did the culture of gunslingers, cowpokes, and the wild, wild west. Musically speaking – there is a very distinct sound that defines this era, which comes from the music of (primarily) Aaron Copland. This piece includes ideas, motifs, and harmonic ideas that give a distinctly “wild west” kind of sound, and gives a vision to the listener of wide open spaces and ropin’ some cattle.

**Unit 4: Technical Considerations**

**“**Prairie Dances” is scored for full band:

Flute (no divisi)

Oboe (no divisi)

Clarinet 1 & 2

Bass Clarinet

Bassoon

Alto Saxophone 1 & 2

Tenor Saxophone

Baritone Saxophone

Trumpet 1 & 2

Horn

Trombone 1 & 2

Baritone

Tuba

Timpani

Percussion 1, 2, & 3

Most of the “obscure instruments” are doubled. For instance, the oboe is doubling the clarinet part, as well as the bassoon doubling the bass clarinet part. These simple part doublings add richness to the sound and allows bands without perfect instrumentation to still perform the piece. The percussion parts include snare drum, bass drum, crash cymbal, suspended cymbal, tambourine, triangle, timpani, xylophone and will require a minimum of at least 4 percussionists to cover the essential parts, which would even require some intense moments of switching between instruments (less than a bar). The timpani part includes a few re-tunings between C and B-flat, as well as G and A-flat.

“Prairie Dances” uses the key signature of E-flat major, with visits to F major and A-flat major. When modulating to other keys, or during chromatic ornamentations/ part writing there is use of accidentals.

The piece is primarily in an alternating pattern of 3/4 and 6/8. For a lyrical section in the middle there is an extended 3/4 section, starting at measure 80. There will need to be work spent on teaching the constant subdivision of eighth notes, groupings of 2 and 3 eighth notes, as well as the differing feel between 3/4 and 6/8.

Both clarinet parts move across the break, and do so quite frequently. Also, large slurs could be problematic for brass, such as in the opening trumpet part (slurring between A4 and down to C4 as well as back-up) which as at a brisk tempo. Flute tone in the extreme upper register (requires a G6 multiple times) may be an issue, work to achieve ease in the upper register in those passages.

**Unit 5: Stylistic Considerations**

To perform this music in a stylistically convincing manner, students must be trained to articulate lightly, as the immature players will tend to over-articulate. A clear contrast between slurred and tongued notes is essential. These often occur in a rapid succession of slur two tongue one slur two tongue one within the same melodic passage. Contrast in dynamics will help provide contrast between lyrical sections and the louder, more aggressive sections. These dynamics as well as proper counting/feel of the eighth note pulse will determine the students’ ability to play this piece effectively. Rapid meter changes and dynamic shifts move along the mood of the piece quite nicely, but will be difficult to achieve effectively by the average ensemble.

**Unit 6: Musical Elements**

*Melody:*

Holsinger employs primarily two main melodic ideas: The dance-like theme found scattered throughout the piece which premieres in the opening of the tune via trumpets, alto saxes, clarinets, and mallet percussion, and the lyrical melody starting with the clarinets in measure 87. The first melody is alternating between 3/4 and 6/8 and spans exactly one octave in range. It revolves around the idea of one bar of slurs between mi and lower sol, and one bar of three notes in the pattern of short, long, short. The lyrical melody is based in 3/4 time and has a pattern of dotted quarter, eighth, quarter, followed by a bar of 3 quarter notes. This second melody moves mostly in stepwise motion, in patterns of ascension then descent.

*Harmony:*

The harmonies in “Prairie Dances” are relatively traditional. Holsinger includes functional harmonies such as dominant seventh chords and modal inflection. Throughout, there are repeated patterns that are sequenced around the circle of fourths. The most common non-diatonic chords are centered around a F-major tonicization.

*Rhythm:*

The rhythms employed by Holsinger are pretty straight-forward within each respective time signature. There are frequent meter changes, but the thing in common is the eighth note subdivision between 3/4 and 6/8. Feeling the difference between groups of 3 and groups of 2 will provide rhythmic clarity, while light, easy articulations will also aid in the quick-moving eighth note lines.

*Timbre:*

Instruments are scored primarily in their middle registers for most of the work. This reflects a choice about tone color and recognition of where the strengths of young players lie. The flutes are used in a higher register during the lightly-scored passages to add a “shimmer” to the sound. Most instruments have doubled parts with another section, so there should be a high confidence level throughout.

**Unit 7: Form and Structure**

Introduction/A: Measure 1-24

Introduces main theme, with variations. Articulation is of the utmost importance.

B: Measure 25-50

New 3/4 melody, work with balance between sections.

A’: Measure 51-58

Vertical alignment will be an issue because trumpets have parts of rhythms that woodwinds have, but not the whole thing. Also, hits in the low brass will be an issue.

A’’: Measure 59-80

Transition: 81-86

C: 87-118

New 3/4 lyrical melody, look for dynamic contrast.

A’: 119-142

B’: 143- 164

A’’: 165-170

End: 171-173

**Unit 8: Suggested listening**

Aaron Copland: Rodeo

Aaron Copland: Hoedown

Aaron Copland: Appalachian Spring

Percy Grainger: Shephard’s Hey

**Unit 9: Additional References and Resources**

[**http://windrep.org/Prairie\_Dances**](http://windrep.org/Prairie_Dances)

[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\_frontier**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_frontier)

[**http://davidrholsinger.com/**](http://davidrholsinger.com/)