

THESIS

A GUIDE TO KEVIN POELKING'S
BY THE HANDS THAT REACH US

Submitted by

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School of Music, Theatre, and Dance

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Music

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2019

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ABSTRACT

A GUIDE TO KEVIN POELKING'S

BY THE HANDS THAT REACH US

This thesis is written to accompany the full score of Kevin Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us* for wind symphony. The first chapter includes studies and expert opinions that attempt to define quality music. It begins with a brief synopsis of the recent (post World War II) increase of wind band repertoire and the difficulties that conductors encounter as a result. Quotations from conductors and composers throughout history are included in an attempt to shed light on the topic.

The second chapter is a detailed biography of composer Kevin Poelking. It discusses personal, professional, and musical experiences that have shaped his compositional voice. There are also specific music examples given with explanations as to how they affected Poelking in his development as a composer.

The final chapter is a detailed summary of Poelking's compositional process when writing *By the Hands That Reach Us*. The chapter includes original sketches, score excerpts, and specific compositional techniques that were used throughout the work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you first of all to Professor Wes Kenney, Dr. Jim David, and Antonette Aragon for serving on my committee for this thesis. Additional thanks are due to Dr. Jim David for his patience, expert guidance, and willingness to facilitate this project. Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Phillips for the countless hours she has invested not only in this project, but in my continued growth and development as a musician, conductor, student, professional, and person.

Thank you to the students and faculty of Colorado State University who helped make my two years in Fort Collins some of the most enjoyable of my professional career. To my fellow graduate students Andrew Gillespie, William Gamache, Heather Ewer, Sheridan Monroe, Rebecca Stapfer, and Shannon Weber: thank you for your continuing friendship and support. You all continue to inspire me to become a better teacher and musician, and I am proud to be associated with such outstanding people and professionals.

Thank you most importantly to my wife Caitlin Poelking who has supported me in the pursuit of my degree and continues to help me enjoy my career and life.

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Chapter I – A Recent History of the Wind Band Repertoire

Introduction

This writing is to accompany the wind symphony piece, *By the Hands That Reach Us* composed by Kevin Poelking. The purpose of Chapter One is to trace the cultural and economic changes in the United States after World War II and how these led to a dramatic increase in the wind band repertoire. It also discusses the process of determining music of high artistic merit that is worthy of performance. This also opens the discussion of what should be programmed and performed based on our definition of quality literature, audience enjoyment, ensemble member growth, and personal taste as conductors. Chapter Two is a biography of the composer. It follows significant life events that contributed to Poelking's compositional style. Multiple examples of influential works as well as excerpts from the composer's repertoire are included in this section to inform the reader of specific developments in Poelking's style. Chapter Three discusses Poelking's new work *By the Hands That Reach Us* and provides a history and analysis of the piece.

Cultural and Economic Changes after World War II

Throughout the twentieth-century, societal changes across the world were bringing about an enormous diversity in the styles of art and music. Following World War II (WWII), the United States and Western Europe experienced an economic boom. Expendable income became more common, especially to those in the middle class. A large portion of this "newfound" money was spent on entertainment, including music and the arts. The "cultural practice" of families

gathering around the radio paid dividends in the music world after WWII, as these pre-war listening habits had now made attending concerts more popular than going to baseball games.¹

Increased funding for music allowed composers to expand their craft and supplement their careers. As a result of the expanding technology of the time (radios, television, etc.), international communication was becoming more common and accessible. Because of this, musicians and artists were now able to increase their own exposure to different styles and ideas. Rock and roll, jazz, country music, musicals, film music, rhythm and blues, wind ensembles, chance composition, electronic music, and increasing complexity in serialism were popularized or developed during this time period.²

Many composers were hired as faculty at large colleges and universities, offering them compositional freedom by making a number of in-house student and faculty instrumentalists easily accessible. These employment opportunities were a new way for composers to achieve financial stability. There was a growing diversity of compositional styles within the country, thanks to composer-teachers like Darius Milhaud, Paul Hindemith, and Walter Piston who took up posts at various universities throughout the United States. Other composers, such as Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland, were able to support themselves with the growing music market through commissions, royalties, and conducting performances.³

The Development of Wind Band Literature and Ensembles after World War II

Following WWII, many talented military musicians were returning home. These experienced and educated instrumentalists found work in the increasingly-funded music schools

¹ Hansen, Richard K.. *The American Wind Band: A Cultural History*. (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2005), 92.

² Peter J. Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*. (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 906.

³ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca. *A History of Western Music*, 921–2.

of American universities, orchestras, and military bands. In 1951, The National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors was founded, and the following year the National Association of Secondary School Principals officially voiced their support for students to rehearse during the school day or receive private instruction.⁴ These were important developments in establishing and raising the standard of wind musicians throughout the United States.

While new music for wind instruments was increasing, these works had not become standards and transcriptions were still the most performed in the genre. Conductors were looking for different ways to continue to entice great composers to write for the medium. In 1951, Frederick Fennell founded the Eastman Wind Ensemble. While much of the recent music for winds had been written for full “military band,” this flexible ensemble instrumentation offered composers the opportunity to write for any combination of wind instruments they desired. In 1952, Fennell sent out a letter to 400 composers informing them of this new ensemble he was organizing, receiving replies from many, including Percy Grainger, Vincent Persichetti, and Ralph Vaughan Williams.⁵ A few years later, in 1957, the American Wind Symphony Orchestra was established by Robert Austin Boudreau, who commissioned over 350 works.⁶

Many composers took note of these investments in the wind band medium and responded accordingly. Within the 1950s alone, the wind repertory attracted compositions from Hindemith (*Symphony in Bb*, 1951), Morton Gould (“*West Point*” *Symphony for Band*, 1952), Persichetti (*Symphony No. 6*, 1956) and Alan Hovhaness (*Symphony No. 4*, 1958.) This explosion of new music for winds was foreshadowed by Richard Franko Goldman (assistant conductor at this time

⁴Hansen, *The American Wind Band: A Cultural History*, 93.

⁵Frank Battisti, *The Winds of Change*, (Galesville, MD: Meredith Music Publications, 2002), 56–7.

⁶Donald Hunsberger, “The Wind Ensemble Concept,” In *The Wind Ensemble and its Repertoire*, ed. Frank J. Cipolla and Donald Hunsberger, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 17.

to the Goldman Band under his father Edwin)⁷ only a few years before in 1946, in the *Modern Music Journal*: “It is, however, important for the future bands and for the enlargement of the musical horizon, that interest has spread to a large number of composers, who represent many tendencies... Most of the new band works... can stand on their own merits...”⁸

As Frederick Fennell’s idea of the wind ensemble took hold, programming changed to include large band works as well as small chamber works. Programs from the 1960s and 1970s show the inclusion of both categories on the same concert: Richard Strauss’s *Suite for 13 Instruments* with Karel Husa’s *Music for Prague* (Hartt Symphonic Wind Ensemble, 1969;) Josef Triebensee’s “*Echo*” *Partita* with Hindemith’s *Symphony in Bb* (San Fernando Valley State College Symphonic Wind Ensemble, 1970;) Antonin Dvorak’s *Serenade in D minor*, the Stravinsky *Octet for Wind Instruments*, with *Music for Prague* (New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble, 1971).⁹

The Development of Music for Wind Instruments as a Legitimate Genre

Composers saw the benefit and appeal of flexible instrumentation and, as a result, the output increased in the number of works for wind instruments. Composers composing for the wind ensemble in the 1960s included, Olivier Messiaen (*Colors of the Celestial City*, 1963), Iannis Xenakis (*Akrata*, 1965), and Lukas Foss (*For 24 Winds*, 1966.)¹⁰ Each of these composers wrote in unique ways as they discovered their voice for combinations of winds and percussion.¹¹

As more quality composers recognized the potential of writing for winds, there began a divide between educational and artistic music. Soon, many pieces were beyond the technical

⁷Battisti, *The Winds of Change*, 40.

⁸ Hansen, *The American Wind Band: A Cultural History*, 88.

⁹ Battisti, Frank. *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble: History, Development and Literature*. (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Meredith Music Publications, 1995), 31.

¹⁰Battisti, *The Winds of Change*, 90.

¹¹ Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble*, 30.

abilities of high school bands, creating a new gap between secondary schools and university or professional ensembles. Conductor Timothy Reynish says of this trend:

Major composers give primary thought to the compositional process while minor composers offer useful teaching tools. We must therefore continue to build upon the tremendous repertoire of the past decade and expect within the next two decades to see a tremendous upsurge of wind orchestra and wind ensemble music of the highest caliber... I look forward to a new and different repertoire that will... extend the canon of significant works for winds by such illustrious predecessors as Mozart, Dvorak, and Strauss.¹²

In 1970, conductor H. Robert Reynolds similarly stated, "...many of us...are working (and I believe succeeding) to help us shift the role of the university band from a provider of 'situational' music to a medium primarily for the performance of music of aesthetic worth."¹³

Between 1975 and 1989, four different Pulitzer Prize winning composers wrote their first works for wind ensemble: *Consorts* by Mario Davidovsky (Pulitzer Prize in 1971 for *Synchronisms No. 6 for Piano and Electronic Sound*), *Winds of Nagual* by Michael Colgrass (Pulitzer Prize in 1978 for *Deja Vu for Percussion and Orchestra*), *Symphony No. 3* by Gunther Schuller (Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for *Of Reminiscences and Reflections*), and *...and the mountains rising nowhere...* by Joseph Schwantner (Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for *Aftertones of Infinity*.)¹⁴

Other works of this time were commissions of composers who were less familiar with writing for winds alone which often resulted in composers writing for the more solidified instrumentation of the full band rather than specific and smaller chamber instrumentation.¹⁵

Schuller said of commissioning wind music from quality contemporary composers: "This will take some enterprise and some money! But it will be money well spent and will eliminate

¹² Reynish, Timothy. *British Music for Band and Wind Ensemble*. In *The Wind Ensemble and its Repertoire*. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 191–2.

¹³ Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble*, 32.

¹⁴ Battisti, *The Winds of Change*, 105–7.

¹⁵ Reynish, Timothy. *British Music for Band and Wind Ensemble*, 189.

the misbegotten notion by some that wind band music is music of a lesser stripe, composed by lesser composers, and thus performed by lesser musicians.”¹⁶

Defining Quality Literature

As the wind band genre gained this reputation as a legitimate performing medium, the literature available increased dramatically, both the good and the bad. Frederick Fennell commented on the matter: “Choosing music is the single most important thing a band director can do...made more important because of the substandard repertoire continually being published. So many publishers in the business today are printers who don’t care about quality, but only about what will sell. We must not allow them... to make our decisions for us...”¹⁷ So now conductors were faced with a new challenge when selecting large ensemble works: defining and selecting quality literature.

From 1973–1978, Acton Ostling, Jr. set out to define repertoire of serious artistic merit by answering the following question: “What available compositions, from a selected list of compositions for wind and percussion instruments in ensemble combination, utilizing a conductor in performance, most closely meet identified criteria of serious artistic merit?”¹⁸ His research was purely literature based, as opposed to other lists that account for ensemble ability level.

This criteria defined ten characteristics for judging a composition on the basis of “serious artistic merit”:

¹⁶ Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble*, 55.

¹⁷ Frederick Fennell. “Foreword.” in *Best Music for High School Band* (Brooklyn, NY: Manhattan Beach Music, 1993), 7.

¹⁸ Acton Eric Ostling Jr.. “An Evaluation of Compositions for Wind Band According to Specific Criteria of Serious Artistic Merit.” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1978), 13.

1. The composition has form - not “a form” but form— and reflects a proper balance between repetition and contrast.
2. The composition reflects shape and design, and creates the impression of conscious choice and judicious arrangement on the part of the composer.
3. The composition reflects craftsmanship in orchestration, demonstrating a proper balance between transparent and tutti scoring, and also between solo and group colors.
4. The composition is sufficiently unpredictable to preclude an immediate grasp of its musical meaning.
5. The route through which the composition travels in initiating its musical tendencies and probable musical goals is not completely direct and obvious.
6. The composition is consistent in its quality throughout its length and in its various sections.
7. The composition is consistent in its style, reflecting a complete grasp of technical details, clearly conceived ideas, and avoids lapses into trivial, futile, or unsuitable passages.
8. The composition reflects ingenuity in its development, given the stylistic context in which it exists.
9. The composition is genuine in idiom, and is not pretentious.
10. The composition reflects a musical validity which transcends factors of historical importance, or factors of pedagogical usefulness.¹⁹

Ostling selected 312 conductors in the United States to nominate ten other conductors who they believed programmed music of “artistic merit.”²⁰ Ostling sent out a list of music to

¹⁹ Ibid., 23–31.

²⁰ Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble*, 45.

these top nominated conductors and asked them to evaluate a selection of music based on his list of criteria. These conductors were as follows:²¹

| Conductor | Institution |
|---------------------|---|
| Frank Battisti | New England Conservatory |
| Harry Begian | University of Illinois |
| Frank Benscriscutto | University of Minnesota |
| Paul Bryan | Duke University |
| Frederick Ebbs | Indiana University |
| Frederick Fennell | University of Miami |
| Charles Gallagher | University of Maryland |
| Robert Gray | University of Illinois |
| Donald Hunsberger | Eastman School of Music |
| Donald McGinnis | Ohio State University |
| James Matthews | University of Houston |
| Kenneth Moore | Oberlin Conservatory of Music |
| James Neilson | G. Leblanc Corporation, Educational Dept. |
| John Paynter | Northwestern University |
| H. Robert Reynolds | University of Michigan |
| William D. Revelli | University of Michigan (Emeritus) |
| Richard Strange | Arizona State University |
| Robert Wagner | University of Oregon |
| David Whitwell | California State University-Northridge |
| Keith Wilson | Yale University |

²¹ Ostling Jr., “An Evaluation of Compositions for Wind Band According to Specific Criteria of Serious Artistic Merit,” 42–61.

After Ostling published his study, Robert Garofalo reviewed it in the *Council for Research in Music Education* (1980), saying: “Ostling’s criteria for judging musical quality on the basis of serious artistic merit are well thought out and comprehensive.” The legitimacy of the ten characteristics Ostling chose were further confirmed when they were used to define quality literature in Kenneth G. Honas’ 1996 study on wind music with six to nine players, and two updates to the Ostling study (one in 1992 by Jay Gilbert and the other by Clifford Towner in 2011). In 1998, Raymond Thomas used a slightly modified version of Ostling’s criteria in a study on high school appropriate literature.²² While music in the genre was being judged on its “artistic merit,” others were also considering the selection of quality repertoire in the academic environment.

In their 1993 publication *Best Music for High School Band*, Thomas L. Dvorak (The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Robert Grechesky (Butler University), and Gary M. Ciepluch (Case Western Reserve University) compiled a musical selections appropriate in this educational setting. They define their criteria with three points:

- (1) “Compositions must exhibit a high degree of compositional craft.
- (2) “Compositions must contain important musical constructs necessary for the development of musicianship.
- (3) “Compositions must exhibit an orchestration that, within the restrictions associated with a particular grade level, encourage musical independence both of individuals and sections.”²³

The studies previously mentioned were based on defining *what* quality literature is, and then finding music to fit the description. Conductor Frank Battisti takes this a step further, claiming that the wind band repertoire “... can be established through the identification and

²² Towner, Clifford. “An Evaluation of Compositions for Wind Band According to Specific Criteria of Serious Artistic Merit: A Second Update.” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2011), 20.

²³ Thomas L. Dvorak, Robert Grechesky, Gary M. Ciepluch, ed. Bob Margolis, *Best Music for High School Band*, (Brooklyn, NY: Manhattan Beach Music, 1993), 10.

repeated performance of the best works in the literature.”²⁴ Studies by Robert Hornyak and Richard K. Fiese would explore this hypothesis that quality literature could perhaps be defined by *how often* a composition is performed.

In 1983, Robert Hornyak of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music compiled a list of the twenty-four most performed works in colleges and universities. Hornyak claims that this study suggests that there was no substantial repertoire common to all of these programs. Many of the works listed in Ostling’s study were not present in Hornyak’s data. Most of the pieces in Hornyak’s study were “...generally for standard wind band instrumentation, technically less demanding, shorter and lighter in character.”²⁵ This suggests that music defined as having artistic merit was not necessarily the most frequently performed.

Richard K. Fiese conducted a similar study called the “Frequency of Performance Report Form” where responses from college and university bands were requested to indicate what compositions from a designated list they had performed from 1980-1985. A great number of works from Ostling’s list are completely omitted.²⁶ Fiese concluded his study by stating:

These works, for better or for worse, represent what was taught to collegiate wind musicians in their ensemble experiences. Those aspiring to teach as wind band conductors may wish to familiarize themselves with the works identified by this study so that they better understand the depth and constitution of the repertoire.²⁷

These studies highlight the fact that a composition being defined as “of artistic merit” does not necessarily correlate to performance frequency. Musicians would continue to invent their own criteria and definitions of quality music, using their own observations and experiences.

²⁴ Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble*, 45.

²⁵ Ibid, 48.

²⁶ Ibid, 49-50.

²⁷ Richard K. Fiese, “College and University Wind Band Repertoire 1980–85,” *The Journal of Band Research*, (Fall 1987):18.

James Neilson wrote *What is Quality in Music?* when he was Educational Director at the G. Leblanc Corporation. He defines nine separate factors that “determine the presence of quality in music”²⁸ as (1) rhythmic vitality; (2) genuine originality; (3) melody; (4) harmony; (5) craftsmanship; (6) a sense of values; (7) emotion justified; (8) quality and personal taste; and (9) standing the test of time.²⁹

In his writing, *What is Good Music?*, conductor Eugene Ormandy defines “good music” as (1) standing the test of time; (2) “the core greatness in [the composer] will be projected in one way or another”; (3) the judgement of the musician and critic; (4) personal taste of the musician; (5) by comparing the music to “masterpieces.”³⁰

Both Neilson and Ormandy allude to the idea that identifying quality music is not an exact science. Ormandy states this very blatantly by saying, “If there were one definitive answer to this provocative question, how simple a conductor’s lot would be!”³¹ When attempting to define what creates a “good” melody, Neilson offers, “The elements in melody which make for quality and originality are intangible and difficult to pin-point. It is said that a good melody is a gift from heaven. This may well be true.”³² This idea is certainly far from a fact-based scientific statement.

With all of the systems and definitions for quality music devised over the years, conductors have been unable to firmly identify exactly what it is about compositions that will determine if they are of the highest artistic merit. This is especially evident in new music, which perhaps cannot even be considered as quality music by those who use “standing the test of time”

²⁸ James Neilson, *What is Quality in Music?*, (G. LeBlanc, 1988), 1.

²⁹ Ibid, 1–5.

³⁰ Eugene Ormandy, “What is Good Music?,” in *Perspectives in Music Education*, ed. Bonnie C Kowall. (Washington, D.C.: MENC, 1966), 99–100.

³¹ Ibid, 99.

³² James Neilson, *What is Quality in Music?*, 1.

as a parameter. In Jay Gilbert's 1992 update of Ostling's study, the conductors evaluated a number of works, including 285 which were rated as works of "serious artistic merit" in the 1978 study. In the 1992 study, 171 of these were not re-selected. Yet twenty three works which were not rated as of "serious artistic merit" in 1978 were now worthy of this list.³³

In the Ostling study and the 1992 update by Gilbert, both included new works of music that many of the evaluators were unfamiliar with, causing both researchers to question the validity of the reviews of these pieces. In the 2011 update, Clifford Towner included only works that were composed before December 31, 2007 in the hopes of eliminating this issue. This brings into question the ability to truly judge a piece of repertoire that is a new composition. Is it simply not possible to tell if a piece of music is of great artistic merit before it has withstood the test of time? After comparing the three studies, Towner comes to an interesting realization:

"... It appears that as the wind-band repertoire grows, the standard of serious artistic merit has possibly risen. Additional repertoire may have created a higher expectation of excellence..."³⁴ This may cause one to question if all composed music is impossible to judge without the appropriate amount of time passing.

Paul Bryan, conductor at Duke University, had already come to this conclusion years before the original Ostling study, saying: "History shows there are few musical absolutes. Masterpieces of one period are later forgotten and judgements of even the most astute critics frequently prove unsound. In other words, each of us will decide for himself as to the quality of the literature..."³⁵ So Bryan reflected the sentiments of Eugene Ormandy, offering the solution

³³ Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/ Ensemble*, 60.

³⁴ Towner, "An Evaluation of Compositions for Wind Band According to Specific Criteria of Serious Artistic Merit: A Second Update," 210.

³⁵ Paul R. Bryan, "Band Literature Developed by Band Associations," in *The College and University Band*, ed. David Whitwell and Acton Ostling Jr. (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1977), 47.

that each conductor must ultimately decide for themselves what is worthy of performance. Yet as the conductor makes these decisions, they must consider not only themselves, but their ensemble members and audience.

William A. Schaefer, Director of Bands at the University of Southern California, discusses repertoire selection in the academic environment, going beyond what the conductor prefers, and taking into account what the ensemble needs:

(1) All music performed in concerts should be musically worthwhile. (2) It should fit the group performing it. (3) Music should not be repeated during a student's continuing participation in a school organization. (4) Commercial music does not belong in the context of a serious concert. (5) Though the audience is important, those the conductor faces while conducting are much more so.³⁶

In all the definitions on finding quality literature discussed thus far, very little importance has been placed on audience reception. When defending his claim that the judgement of the musician and the critic helps to define "good music," Eugene Ormandy states: "Their judgement frequently clashes with that of the audience, but the listeners must be grateful for informed guidance in musical matters."³⁷ He goes on to claim that it is important for critics and musicians to use their advanced knowledge to help guide audience members to find great music, much like conductors did for Mahler after his death.³⁸ Certainly, this is important, but without being able to attract and retain an audience, is there really a purpose in performing music outside of the rehearsal hall?

In 1977, bandmaster Harold Bachman discussed programming when reflecting on the "twilight of the Gilmore, Sousa, and Goldman era:"

³⁶William A Schaefer, "The Emerging Band Repertoire," in *The College and University Band*, ed. David Whitwell and Acton Ostling Jr. (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1977), 67.

³⁷Eugene Ormandy, "What is Good Music?," 99.

³⁸Ibid.

Their success depended on the ability to secure profitable bookings and please their audiences. Some called this ability ‘showmanship.’ I prefer to think of it simply as using good judgement in choosing literature and in programming it.

I note that in the criteria used in selecting outstanding original compositions for band, the CBDNA uses the term ‘audience appeal.’ These directors were skilled in selecting program material that had ‘audience appeal.’ This does not mean that the programs were cheap and trivial. But they geared to the music tastes of their times.

... For the concerts to be successful there had to be audiences and to attract audiences the music had to appeal to the basic facets of musical interest. An examination of band concert programs over the past seventy-five years reveals that they contained some music that had only temporary popularity. But even the earliest of them contained selections that are still played by bands, are still enjoyed by audiences at band concerts, and have certainly earned the right to be considered part of the permanent repertory of any concert band.³⁹

Bachman also acknowledges the importance of the feelings of the director’s personal taste: “Although the concert band library must contain music that will appeal to a wide range of musical interests, it should reflect the personal tastes of the director.”⁴⁰

Conductors must take a number of factors into account when programming a concert for public consumption. Yet a piece of music cannot be “fixed” by a talented conductor if the composition is doomed from the beginning. Whether or not audience members or musicians will enjoy a piece of music starts with the composer. Sergei Prokofiev once wrote:

Today vast crowds of people have come face to face with serious music and are waiting with eager impatience. Composers, take heed of this: if you repel these crowds they will turn away from you... But if you can hold them, you will win an audience such as the world has never before seen. But this does not mean that you must pander to this audience. Pandering always has an element of insincerity about it and nothing good ever came of that...The masses want great music...They understand far more than some composers think and they want to deepen their understanding.⁴¹

³⁹Harold Bachman, “Band Repertoire from the Tradition of the Professional Bands,” in *The College and University Band*, ed. David Whitwell and Acton Ostling Jr. (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1977), 36–7.

⁴⁰Ibid, 40.

⁴¹Serge Prokofiev, “Flourishing of Art,” in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 101.

Here, Prokofiev tells the composer that they must find a delicate balance between writing substantial and meaningful music, while at the same time not alienating the audience members; thoughtful composing must strike a balance between the two.

Benjamin Britten, when speaking about music created for specific occasions, describes the importance of composing for the purpose of simply pleasing our audience:

Some of the greatest pieces of music in our possession were written for special occasions, grave or gay. But we shouldn't worry too much about the so-called permanent value of our occasional music. A lot of it cannot make much more sense after its first performance, and it is quite a good thing to please people if only for today. That is what we should aim at - pleasing people today as seriously as we can, and letting the future look after itself.⁴²

Paul Hindemith as a composer was determined to nurture the relationship not only with the audience, but more specifically the amateur musicians by writing "Gebrauchsmusik" ("music for use" or "utility music.")⁴³

The composer... would have to provide the music needed and appreciated by the amateur... Once a writer's technique and style is organized in this direction, so that music which satisfies the amateur's wishes can be created, his approach to his entire work will inevitably undergo a radical change... and now he will talk with a different spirit to the general public.⁴⁴

On the other hand, many composers denounce the importance of the public's opinion of their music. Elliot Carter believes that a composer should be true to himself and avoid writing only to please audience members, critics, and colleagues:

The struggle to be performed and to be recognized makes it very hard for one not to become... some kind of system-monger... Obviously the only way to withstand the disturbing prospect of being swept away by a change in fad is to plunge into the even more disturbing situation of trying to be an individual and finding one's own way... not

⁴²Benjamin Britten, "On Winning the First Aspen Award," in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 120.

⁴³ The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Gebrauchsmusik," In *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (Encyclopaedia Britannica, November 2, 2006) <https://www.britannica.com/art/Gebrauchsmusik>.

⁴⁴Battisti, *The Winds of Change*, 26-7.

bothering too much about about what is or will be sanctioned at any given moment by the profession and the public.⁴⁵

When asked if a bad review from a critic disturbs him, 1970 Pulitzer Prize winner Charles Wuorinen responds, “Certainly, in the sense that one would rather be complimented than criticized. But certainly not because one could ever take seriously something a critic said. They’re just too stupid for that.”⁴⁶

Milton Babbitt takes this even further in his essay entitled “Who Cares if You Listen?” He believes that a lack of understanding from the audience is good for both the composer and the public:

Towards this condition of musical and societal ‘isolation,’ a variety of attitudes has been expressed, usually with the purpose of assigning blame, often to the music itself, occasionally to critics or performers, and very occasionally to the public. But to assign blame is to imply that this isolation is unnecessary and undesirable. It is my contention that, on the contrary, this condition is not only inevitable, but potentially advantageous for the composer and his music.⁴⁷

He goes on to explain that this isolation is necessary to move music to “universes of diverse practice.” He believes that composers should not concern themselves with the opinions of audiences, as it would disallow the art to move forward. Babbitt also makes his point in downplaying the importance of public appeal by bringing into question the credentials of the casual audience member:

Imagine, if you can, a layman chancing upon a lecture on ‘Pointwise Periodic Homeomorphisms.’ At the conclusion, he announces: ‘I didn’t like it.’ Social conventions being what they are in such circles, someone might dare inquire: ‘Why not?’ Under duress, our layman discloses precise reasons for his failure to enjoy himself; he found the hall chilly, the lecturer’s voice unpleasant...If the concertgoer is at all versed in the ways

⁴⁵Elliott Carter, “Shop Talk by an American Composer,” in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 264.

⁴⁶Charles Wuorinen, “An Interview with Barney Childs, 1962,” in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 372.

⁴⁷Milton Babbitt, “Who Cares if You Listen?,” in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 244.

of musical lifemanship, he also will offer reasons for his 'I didn't like it' - in the form of assertions that the work in question is 'inexpressive,' 'undramatic,' 'lacking in poetry,' etc., etc., tapping that store of vacuous equivalents hallowed by time for: 'I don't like it, and I cannot or will not state why.' The concertgoer's critical authority is established beyond the possibility of further inquiry.⁴⁸

A composer's concern about the public reception of their music is of no importance if there is no performer(s) willing to play it in the first place. Composer Lukas Foss says, "The methodical division of labor (I write it, you play it) served us well, until composer and performer became like two halves of a worm separated by a knife, each proceeding obliviously on its course."⁴⁹

Richard Maxfield comments on the relationship between composer, performer, and audience:

For one reason or another performers frequently find themselves playing music they don't like but go through with it because after all it's their job. This hostility projects itself to the audience and the public and the music are done disservice. Well-meaning artists who have an extensive training in the standard repertory but no understanding of new music sometimes believe that it is their duty to introduce contemporary fare (which it is not!) and dutifully offer with equal probability something of good or vulgar taste and perhaps play it with style, but in greater probability not to an audience with their minds elsewhere dutifully sitting it out; and this is a disservice.⁵⁰

In an interview with Roger Reynolds, John Cage talks about the difference between composing, performing, and listening, and what these have in common:

We normally think that the composer makes something, the performer is faithful to it, and that the business of the listener is to understand it. Yet the act of listening is clearly not the same as the act of performing, nor is either one of them the same as the act of composing. I have found that by saying that they have nothing to do with one another, that each one of those activities can become more centered in itself, and so more open to its natural experience. Referring to what we said earlier, about people generally thinking

⁴⁸Ibid, 247-8.

⁴⁹Lukas Foss, "The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship: a Monologue and a Dialogue," in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 326.

⁵⁰Richard Maxfield, "Composers, Performance and Publication," in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 350.

that something is being done to them, well, when they listen, they think that the composer, through the performer, has done something to them, forgetting that they are doing it themselves.⁵¹

Composers will often place as much music as possible before the conductor in the hopes that one of the pieces speaks to them and is selected for performance. While it may not be (and perhaps should not be) of much concern to the composer, music created in this way adds to the amount of repertoire the conductor must sift through in order to find that of high artistic merit.

Richard Maxfield attributes the amount of music being produced to match our societal norms, and offers another approach:

One is made to feel that to be a part of our society one must fit into the general picture: It is everyone's business to make things as fast as possible then sell them somehow: employ psychologists, promoters, statisticians; advertize; distribute. POUR the products out. There's a market for anything.

And so we have too much art, too many concerts, records, radio broadcasts, like we have too many potatoes, newspapers, city-dwellers. Consequently, things are of little value, and never built to last.

But it seems to me that the time allotted to each of us is so short that it becomes a serious waste to spend it in the slightest superfluous act; if art is worth producing...it must be of superior quality. It will require great ingenuity to compete with all the rest. Looked at in this way, what is worth doing is worth our best concentration, discipline, integrity, style. We might try to do less and better and take care that our effort counts for more and be happier and healthier...if instead of hustling to push themselves into public consciousness they were to become more modest and more proud, then people would start seeking them out.⁵²

In order for the large wind band repertoire to continue growing, conductors and composers must share in the responsibility of increasing the amount of quality repertoire in the genre. Conductors must encourage and incentivize talented composers to continue writing, yet at the same time conductors must act with discretion and avoid rewarding composers with consistent performances of compositions that do not reflect their ideals of artistic merit.

⁵¹ John Cage, "Interview with Roger Reynolds, 1962," in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 341.

⁵² Richard Maxfield, "Composers, Performance and Publication," in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, 351–2.

Ultimately, a composer must make their own decision in how they approach writing a new piece. Is their main goal to further the art form, please the audience, educate the performer, hear as many performances as possible, or simply to fulfill their own personal desire to create? Having knowledge of the information included in this chapter helped to guide Kevin Poelking's creative process and intended audience when composing *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The first classical music that Poelking recalls hearing was from the Disney movie *Fantasia*, which featured cartoons and visual depictions of music. Poelking would continue to watch *Fantasia* throughout his childhood life, familiarizing him with the works in the film, mostly: *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* by J.S. Bach; *The Nutcracker Suite* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky; *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas; *Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky; *Symphony No. 6* by Ludwig van Beethoven; *Night on Bald Mountain* by Modest Mussorgsky.

Instrumental music became available as a formal class to Poelking in Alpharetta, Georgia during 6th grade, where he chose to play percussion. His education began with reading rhythms on snare drum with a classroom of about ten other beginning percussion students. Poelking, like most others in the class, looked forward to Fridays when the teacher would give them all a turn on the school drum set. Poelking created his own makeshift drum set at home with various household items to practice the patterns he learned at school. After an extended period time on this contraption, Poelking's parents purchased him a very basic CB brand drum set for Christmas. Poelking played for no less than eight hours that Christmas day, and continued practicing everyday for the years to come. After learning basic beat patterns, he began playing along with 90s rock and pop albums as well as jazz and big band CDs, most notably the Glenn Miller orchestra. He would also accompany his brother, a middle school saxophonist, on play-along CDs for movie soundtracks.

It was around this time that Poelking's parents purchased a simple Casio 44-key piano keyboard. The instrument was equipped with a small display screen that highlighted the keys played on each of the ninety-nine preloaded songs. Poelking would play along with the visual display of the keyboard, often playing the melody alone, all of this without knowing how to read

pitches in musical notation. In addition to this, Poelking would often try to invent new melodies and attempt to pluck out very simple tunes by ear on the keyboard.

When he was in eighth grade, Poelking began using *Cakewalk Music Creator 2003*. This simple notation software allowed for him to write a number of parts out on staff lines, and then play the music back. Often frustrated and confused by the MIDI keyboard, Poelking instead opted to input every note with the computer mouse. In many of his compositions, he would explore possibilities in creating melodies by randomly clicking around the music staff with combinations of different durations of rests and notes. He would then listen to the MIDI playback and slowly organize the notes into a more comprehensive melody. Poelking would rarely stick with an idea for long. He would often become stuck on what to do next in a composition and simply start a new project, ending up with a huge number of computer files with incomplete ideas.

It was around this same time that Poelking's older brother was discovering and exposing him to techno music. Poelking was particularly drawn in by the variety of electronic sounds as well as the energy, drive, layering, and tension that led to climaxes or "beat drops" of the music. Poelking was underwhelmed by the synthetic sounds of the acoustic instruments with *Cakewalk*, and became fascinated with the timbres of the available synthesizer sounds like "sawtooth" and "square" (named for the shape of the sound waves they produce). Poelking continued experimentation with layering (a common characteristic of techno music) in *Cakewalk* by recording live sounds through the computer's microphone. Poelking would improvise vocally, with humming, singing, and percussive noises to create music that could be played back and combined one on top of the other.

Poelking's childhood friend Tom Hayford (who would later receive a Master's in Aerospace Engineering from Cornell University) was an accomplished piano student at this point and had the same notation software. The two collaborated on simple pieces, often emailing the music file back and forth, with Hayford supplying the melodic and harmonic material and Poelking contributing the rhythmic percussion parts while adding various other elements. Poelking was struck by the sound that Hayford was able to achieve with the simple homophonic harmonies (often simple triads) that he had learned as a pianist. Despite his fascination with this sound, Poelking was unsure of how it was accomplished, due to his lack of formal training and theory knowledge.

High School Years

Poelking joined the marching band when he entered high school and played marching tenors all four years. He was consumed by the world of rudimental percussion, watching videos of top drumlines and drum corps; collecting and practicing as much music in this genre as possible. Because of his emphasis on battery percussion, he did not develop his fluency in reading pitch notation. Up to this point, Poelking had composed much of his music by ear and experimentation, so reading pitches at sight was not something he was properly prepared for.

Poelking continued writing with *Cakewalk Music Creator 2003* throughout high school. He began to create "albums" by exporting the MIDI playback to audio files and writing them to compact discs. These CDs generally had about five to eight pieces, with each one lasting anywhere from thirty seconds to five minutes. He began sharing his music with family and friends, at times trying to sell his annual CD's for twenty-five cents, purchased by a total of one loyal customer (a friend from the percussion section).

Late in his high school years, Poelking began writing drumline and percussion music, notating by hand in his free time. Poelking discovered Finale Allegro 2005 notation software where he would transcribe his hand notated works into the computer. He brought them to his high school teacher one day to listen to the MIDI file, yet he never realized a live performance.

By the end of his junior year in high school, Poelking decided on a career in music education and enrolled in piano lessons at the suggestion of his high school band director. Poelking took a year of piano where he learned basic keyboard skills that would facilitate his composing later in his career. As he worked his way through beginner books, his piano instructor encouraged him to bring in music he was interested in playing. At this time, he was discovering the genre of 70's and 80's classic rock, and began bringing rock ballads into lessons. Poelking was drawn to this genre by the close harmonies sung by his favorite rock groups of the time (including Chicago, Journey, REO Speedwagon, Styx, and Boston) with these simple harmonies being emphasized with powerful chords from the amplified instruments.

Influenced by his piano books of rock music, Poelking experimented with arranging for his high school basketball pep band. Through this process he discovered that arrangements for the pep band could be made by assigning a different instrument to each note of a chord in the piano part. Again, Poelking never heard his arrangement live.

College Years

Poelking graduated high school in May of 2007, and began his studies in music education at the University of South Carolina (USC), where he graduated in 2011. Poelking earned a spot on the drumline where he played tenors for the next three years. The USC Marching Band set aside one rehearsal during every year to read new arrangements composed by students. Marching band members would then vote for their favorite and the winning arrangement would be played

during the quarter break of the final football game of the season. During his freshman year, Poelking worked with a fellow marching band member to arrange a piece they had both played in high school. This arrangement received the most votes and was the first public performance of any of Poelking's works.

As he continued his undergraduate music history classes and his studies in percussion with Dr. Scott Herring, his interests turned to orchestral and concert band music. In his freshman music history class, he was assigned to listen to J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5*. Poelking found the piece immediately appealing due to the consistent use of a recognizable ritornello which more closely resembled the form of the popular and rock music that he had grown up listening to.

CONCERTO V.

127

Allegro.

Flauto traverso.

Violino principale.

Violino di ripieno.

Viola di ripieno.

Violoncello.

Violone.

accompagnamento

Cembalo concertato.

Figure #2 - mm. 1–8, (Ritornello section) of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D major, BWV 1050*.⁵³

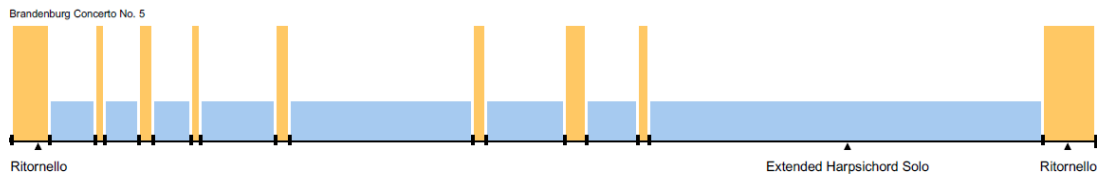


Figure #3 - Form of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5* - Ritornello material represented by the vertical columns.

⁵³Johann Sebastian Bach, *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D major, BWV 1050*, ed. Willhelm Rust, The Six Brandenburg Concertos and the Four Orchestral Suites. (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), 127.

Poelking was also exposed to the genre of minimalism in his college years beginning with Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*. Reich's use of a consistent groove with the introduction of new colors, like bass clarinets fading in and out of the texture, can be seen in Poelking's *Terra Nocte* (2016) for orchestra. In Figure #4, the vibraphone and divisi violins maintain a consistent pulse while the horns crescendo and diminuendo in four-part harmony.

The musical score for Figure #4, measures 63-70 of Poelking's *Terra Nocte*, features the following parts and markings:

- Hn. I-III:** Horns I-III, marked *normal* and *p* (piano).
- Hn. II-IV:** Horns II-IV, marked *normal* and *p* (piano).
- Vib.:** Vibraphone, marked *p* (piano).
- Pno.:** Piano, marked *p* (piano).
- Vln. I:** Violin I, marked *p* (piano).
- Vln. II:** Violin II, marked *p* (piano).
- Vc.:** Viola, marked *sul tasto* and *ppp* (pianississimo).

Figure #4 - mm. 63–70, of Poelking's *Terra Nocte*.⁵⁴

An even more obvious example of this effect is seen in Poelking's score *Embers in the Black* (2018) where the clarinet color fades in and out of driving eighth notes in the percussion part.

⁵⁴ Kevin Poelking, *Terra Nocte*. (2016), 12.

27

119

The musical score for measures 119-122 of Poelking's *Embers in the Black* features the following parts and dynamics:

- Picc.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- Fl.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- B♭ Cl. 1**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *p* and *f*.
- B♭ Cl. 2**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- B. Cl.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *p* and *f*.
- Cb. Cl.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *p* and *f*.
- S. Sax.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- A. Sax.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- T. Sax.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- B. Sax.**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *f*.
- Perc 1**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *ff*, includes a "to Tam-Tam" instruction.
- Perc 2**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *ff*.
- Perc 3**: Measures 119-122, dynamics *ff*.

Figure #5 - mm. 119–122 of Poelking's *Embers in the Black*.⁵⁵

Poelking would eventually discover more influential works by Reich, including *Different Trains* and *Nagoya Marimbas*, the latter of which he programmed on his senior recital.

⁵⁵ Kevin Poelking, *Embers in the Black*, (2018), 27.

Poelking also took time to analyze Philip Glass' *Opening* from *Glassworks* for piano, learning to play the piece in an effort to better understand how the music was composed. It was fascinating to him how such consistent repetition in music could continue to sound fresh with such simple progressions and subtle changes, as the mind begins to focus on different aspects of such a small amount of music.



Figure #6 - mm. 1–6, of Glass' *Opening* from *Glassworks*.⁵⁶

For example, the listener could find their attention drawn to the rhythmic interaction of the 3:2 hemiola at first and the harmonic progression from measure to measure. Yet as the music continues, the focus may move to more specific characteristics, such as the bassline alone, or just the upper notes of the triplets in the treble clef.

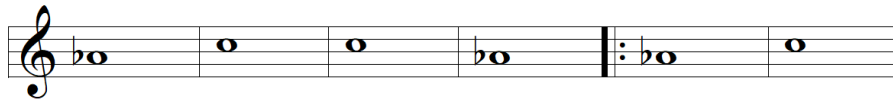


Figure #7 - mm. 1–6, “melodic” line created by highest notes in Glass' *Opening*.

In *By the Hands That Reach Us* (2019), Poelking writes in a similar way for the piano, marimba, and vibraphone (discussed in Chapter 3).

⁵⁶ Philip Glass, *Opening* (1982), (New York: Dunvagen Music Publishers, 1982), 1.



Figure #8 - m. 50 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.⁵⁷

The summer following his freshman year at South Carolina, Poelking attended a concert by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra where they performed Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. Shortly after, Poelking purchased a collection of all nine Beethoven symphonies performed by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Leonard Bernstein. Poelking spent significant time with these recordings. He was most interested in Beethoven's use of thematic material, repeating the same idea again and again to offer the listener a feeling of instant familiarity, but with enough variation to keep the music from becoming stale. Just after college, he would analyze the first movement of Beethoven's 6th Symphony, trying to understand Beethoven's form. He would not realize until later in his formal studies that this was often the result of sonata form.

⁵⁷ Kevin Poelking, *By the Hands That Reach Us*, (2019), 11.

of Stephen Layton. Poelking's only true exposure to choir music up to this point was from church choirs singing mostly hymns. Whitacre's music, by contrast, seemed fresh and unique. Without knowing the theory or notation at the time, he was fascinated by the sounds of the close minor and major seconds and how they were often emphasized at cadential points, contrasting with the series of triads that often preceded them.

Root position triads ----- Major 2nd

pp Ab fm cm Bb gm Ab cm Bbadd4

Figure #10 - mm. 1–6 reduction of Whitacre's *Sleep*.

He spent years simply listening to this piece until just after his college career when he finally purchased the score to study the theory and structure behind the music. This piece opened up Poelking's interest to contemporary choral works from composers like Ola Gjeilo and Morten Lauridsen. Studying these works inspired his composition *Lucy* (2015) for SATB choir and piano. Poelking even borrowed a progression from Lauridsen's *O Magnum Mysterium* in his own piece, using the raised fourth of the tonic as an added second.

Tempo primo
pp

f# minor (iii)
add maj. 2nd

Vir - go, cujus

Vir - go, cujus

Vir - go, cujus

Vir - go, cujus

38 39

Figure #11 - mm. 38–39 of Lauridsen's *O Magnum Mysterium*.⁵⁸

g# minor (iii)
add maj. 2nd

p *f*

In lands be -

p *f*

In lands be - yond

p *f*

In lands

p *f*

In lands be - yond

66 67

Figure #12 - mm. 66–67 of Poelking's *Lucy*.⁵⁹

As Poelking performed in the ensembles at the University of South Carolina he continued to draw influence and inspiration from the concert repertoire. While originally one of the most

⁵⁸Morten Lauridsen, *O Magnum Mysterium*, (New York: Southern Publishing Company Inc., 1995), 12.

⁵⁹Kevin Poelking, *Lucy*, (2015), 10.

inexperienced concert percussionists in his studio, Poelking soon embraced this side of the percussion world, enrolling in extra lessons and a senior recital to fulfill the qualifications for a Performance Certificate (often considered a minor in music performance at the University). While performing in the USC Percussion Ensemble, Poelking became interested in Charles Griffin's piece *Persistence of Past Chemistries*. Throughout the piece, Griffin uses a consistent motif which is often interrupted with aggressive, irregular, crescendoing chords.

Figure #13 - mm. 62–64 of Griffin's *Persistence of Past Chemistries*.⁶⁰

Poelking's use of this technique can be seen in *Embers in the Black*, when a dissonant quarter note quintuplet interjects with with a statement of the main theme.

⁶⁰ Charles Griffin, *Persistence of Past Chemistries* (Key Gardens, NY: Coriolis Press, 1998), 6.

Figure #14 - mm. 61–5, of Poelking's *Embers in the Black*.⁶¹

In his senior recital, Poelking performed the percussion duet *Gyro*. This piece, written by Tomer Yariv, combines the patterns played by the percussionists into a single composite rhythm, giving the aural illusion of being played by one player.

Figure #15 - m. 91 of Yariv's *Gyro*.⁶²

Figure #16 - m. 91 composite rhythm of Yariv's *Gyro*

⁶¹ Kevin Poelking, *Embers in the Black*, (2018), 16.

⁶² Tomer Yariv, *Gyro*, 7.

Poelking use of this same idea is shown in *Embers in the Black*, where the marimba and vibraphone combine to state the variation of the main motif.



Figure #17 - m. 137 of Poelking's *Embers in the Black*.⁶³



Figure #18 - m. 137, composite of only accented notes between vibraphone and marimba of Poelking's *Embers in the Black*.

While auditioning for ensembles at USC, Poelking was regularly exposed to various orchestral excerpts including *Scheherazade* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *Carnival Overture* by Antonín Dvořák, and *Petrushka* by Igor Stravinsky, increasing his knowledge of the orchestral repertoire.

While playing in the Symphonic Winds, under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Phillips, Poelking played the timpani part to a transcription of Ottorino Respighi's *Pines of Rome*; his first time playing in a large scale symphonic work. This experience opened his ears to how instruments, especially percussion, can contribute in such a purposeful way, even when they are used sparingly. This was continuously reinforced throughout the rest of his career as an

⁶³Kevin Poelking, *Embers in the Black*, (2018), 30.

orchestral percussionist, and informed his conducting and composing when making musical decisions.

Poelking also played in the USC Wind Ensemble under the direction of Dr. Scott Weiss. Weiss' repertoire selection exposed Poelking to a number of masterworks of the wind band genre, the first being Aaron Copland's *Emblems*. At this point in his life, Poelking was already familiar with Copland's more consonant "American" style writing from pieces like *Appalachian Spring* and *Rodeo*. However, *Emblems* sounded to Poelking like a completely different composer. It was striking to him that one composer could sound so different and write in such different styles. In the Wind Ensemble's initial read-through of the piece, Poelking was underwhelmed by the music, yet by the end of the concert cycle, it became a piece that he grew to truly enjoy which developed his appreciation for music that he found difficult to grasp at first listen.

The second piece from this ensemble that had a significant impact on Poelking was Karel Husa's *Music for Prague 1968*. Poelking was influenced by the sheer power of the composition, the dissonant harmonies, and the unique orchestration. In the fourth movement, starting in the seventh measure of rehearsal mark D the flutes are playing eight different pitches at the same time.



Figure #19 - Flute entrance after rehearsal mark D of Karel Husa's *Music for Prague*, Mvt. IV.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Karel Husa, *Music for Prague 1968*, (New York: Associated Music Publishers, Inc., 1969), 61.

During rehearsal, Weiss was addressing this moment and balancing the notes, urging the musicians to avoid playing this passage with an overly-aggressive tone, stating that they should allow the orchestration to create the “harshness” for them. This was the first time Poelking had considered just how much a composer can do to help the rehearsal process, and how a carefully orchestrated piece of music can more adequately facilitate a successful performance.

In 2011, during his student teaching, Poelking composed *Zahvalnost*, a solo piece for 4.3 octave marimba, and dedicated it to his parents (“zahvalnost” meaning “gratitude” in Croatian). He wrote this entire piece with pencil and paper, composing at the marimba in the band room between classes at the middle school where he was assigned.

In 2008, (his second year of college) Poelking met Caitlin Delaney, a biology major who he would eventually marry in 2015. When they both graduated in 2011 they decided to relocate to the Washington, D.C. area, Caitlin’s home, as it provided better work opportunities for both of them. Poelking also found the presence of the U.S. Military Bands and professional orchestras, and more performing opportunities very appealing.

Professional Life

Poelking began work in January 2012 as an Instrumental Music Teacher for Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, which borders the northern part of Washington, D.C.. This position involved working with fourth and fifth grade students in both band and orchestra. Continuing a habit from his semester of student teaching, Poelking invested a number of hours every week playing wind and string instruments during his planning time and in class with his students in order to improve his pedagogical abilities. In the process, he became more familiar

While settling into his new career as an educator, Poelking continued studying various scores and music, printing them off of free public domain internet databases. Significant scores he studied at this time were Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*, Holst's *The Planets*, and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Most of the analysis of these pieces were on the micro level with quick, unrefined markings often focusing on orchestration and harmony from note to note.

Handwritten musical score for "THEME D". The score is written for a large ensemble, including:

- Cor. III, IV
- Trbn. I, II
- Vln.
- Vcll.
- Cb.
- Fl.
- Ob.
- Clar. in A
- Fag.

The score is marked with various dynamics and articulations, including *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *a 2* (allegretto). There are handwritten annotations throughout the score, including "A MAS ALSO UNISON" and "ATTENTION OF THE CUR". The score is written in a single system, with the title "THEME D" prominently displayed at the top.

39

In Figure #21, Poelking makes educated guesses as to how Holst creates a long, eighteen measure crescendo in *The Planets*.

Handwritten musical score analysis of Rehearsal IV from Holst's *The Planets*, Mvt. III. The score consists of three systems of staves. The first system has a handwritten note "STACKED OSTINATO CHANGES TO LONG TONE TO BUILD CREC" with an arrow pointing to a specific measure. The second system has a handwritten note "STARTS PADDING LOW F. H. INS. TO HELP CREC" with an arrow pointing to a specific measure. The third system has a handwritten note "senza word. Tutti" with an arrow pointing to a specific measure. The score is marked with "IV" and "55".

Figure #21 - Poelking's analysis of Rehearsal IV, of Holst's *The Planets*, Mvt. III.

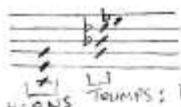
Given the complexity of the score of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Poelking utilized a new tactic shown in Figure #22. Here Poelking marks "26" surrounded by two small circles, which was used as a reference point. On a separate paper (see Figure #23), he would make the same

marking, and write detailed notes or reductions of the notes in order to more easily comprehend Stravinsky's complex style.

The image displays a handwritten musical score for Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, with extensive annotations. The top section shows a horn part with the instruction "STOPPED HORN" written above it. Below this, a note is circled and labeled "bouche". Further down, the instruction "EMPHASIZE DOWNBENT" is written across several notes. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, key signatures, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*. The bottom section of the image shows a series of staves with the instruction "pizz." (pizzicato) repeated multiple times. A handwritten box containing the number "40" is visible, along with a circled sequence of notes: $E b G B b D F \sharp C G$. The overall style is that of a detailed musical analysis, with handwritten notes and markings overlaid on the printed score.

Figure #22 - Poelking's analysis of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

0240
 VIOLAST CELLO A DESCENDING
 2 COUNT PATTERN OVER
 AND OVER, WHILE CHANGING
 THE FIRST NOTES, BUT KEEPING
 THE SAME DESCENDING
 CHROMATIC INTERVALS.
 F F^b E^b G E^b A E^b F


0250

 HORNS: TROMBES; FIRST INVERSION
 C MAJ CHORD E^b7 CHORD

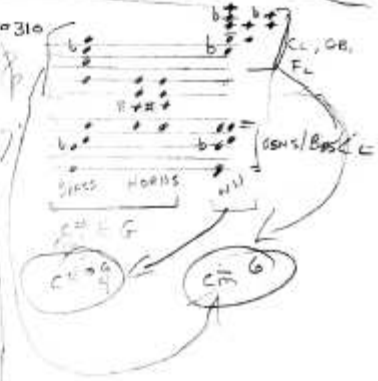
0260
 E^b7 CHORD, SAME CHORD AS #250
 RETURNS. THE HORNS ARE THE
 ONLY INSTRUMENTS NOT IN
 THIS CHORD AND ARE BOTH
 D → A, A BEAT EMPHASIZED
 WITH ACCENT, INSTRUMENTATION,
 AND HARMONY (A IS THE TRITONE
 OF E^b, THE ROOT OF THE CHORD)

0270
 DESCENDING PARALLEL MAJ-7TH
 CHORDS IN FIRST INVERSION (4)

0280
 DIVISI VIOLINS ARE PLAYING
 MORE PARALLEL MAJ-7THS
 IN FIRST INV.
 CELLOS AND DIVISI VIOLAS ARE
 ON PARALLEL ROOT POSITION
 TRIADS

0290
 LOTS OF CLOSE INTERVALS
 WITH PARALLEL MOTION
 GIVES THE LINE DIRECTION
 BUT A RAUNCHY SOUND, ALMOST
 NON-PITCHED PERCUSSIVE
 WRITING

0300

 G⁷ CHORD + G^b TRIAD

0310

 CL, CB, FL
 G⁷ CHORD + G^b TRIAD
 HORNS
 C⁷ MAJ CHORD C⁷ MAJ CHORD

ONCE AGAIN, 2 CHORDS
 SEPARATED BY A SEMI-TONE
 HORNS ARE USED TO
 BRIDGE THE ORCHESTRATION
 OF LOWER TO UPPER.

Figure #23 - Poelking's analysis of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

In addition to studying scores, Poelking decided to spend the first few summers of his teaching career learning more about landmark composers. Every morning he would pick a different composer, and would scavenge the Internet for information, creating a timeline of their life while listening to their greatest works.

Poelking also began attending concerts at nearby venues like the Kennedy Center, Strathmore Music Hall, as well as a number of free concerts on the National Mall from the U.S.

Military bands. Within a few short years, Poelking had attended concerts by the National Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Pops Orchestra, the U.S. Air Force, Army, and Navy Bands, chamber group Eighth Blackbird, and The National Philharmonic. Poelking attended a number of these concerts with his wife Caitlin, and her reaction and enjoyment of this music would strongly influence his writing.

Caitlin had no formal training in music, and had little interest in classical music when the two first met. As she was exposed to more and more of this genre, Poelking often took note of music that she enjoyed and did not. He used this as a barometer for what non-classically trained musicians may find enjoyable, hoping that he could understand and compose music that this population would find entertaining. His observations led him to believe it was often music that she had heard at least once before, or pieces with material that became immediately familiar due to the use of repetition. One of these pieces was *Scheherazade*, which states and repeats a number of themes throughout the entire work.

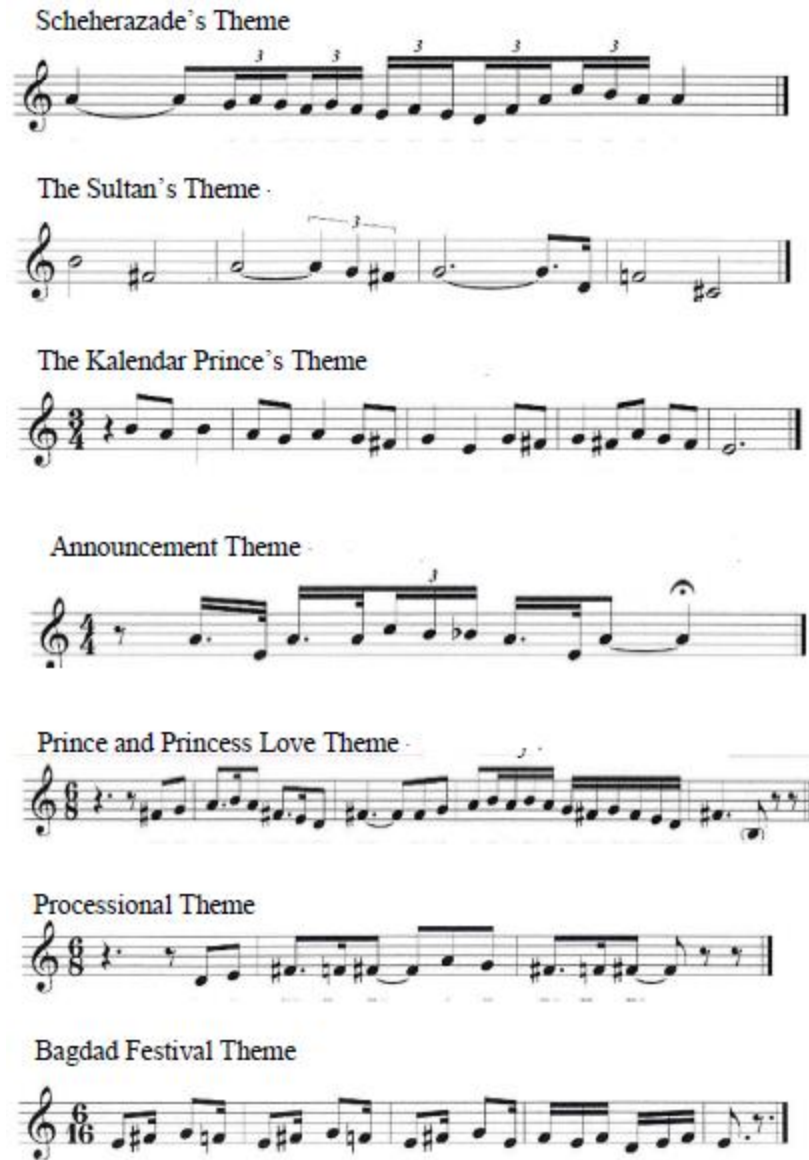


Figure #24 - Themes from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*.⁶⁵

As Poelking continued to understand the role of familiarity in music, he began writing his first serious composition for concert band. He composed *Above the Clouds* in 2014 with the idea of

⁶⁵San Diego Symphony, "1001 Symphonic Tales: The Magic of Scheherazade," October 19, 2017, https://www.sandiegosymphony.org/static/media/uploads/Education/YPC/1718ypc01_scheherazadeteacherguide.pdf

using a simple melody as the central material in the work, and recycling it over and over again throughout the piece. This theme is first introduced in the bass clarinet in m. 2.

Above the Clouds

Kevin Poelking

Score ♩ = 92, floating

Figure #25 - mm. 1–5 of Poelking’s *Above the Clouds*.⁶⁶

Figure #26 - mm. 11–14 of Poelking’s *Above the Clouds*.⁶⁷

For the contrasting “B section,” Poelking inverts the melody, alters it rhythmically, and puts it in the minor key. This was inspired by Gustav Holst’s inversion of the melody in the first movement of the *First Suite in Eb*, which Poelking discovered when conducting during his semester of student teaching.

⁶⁶ Kevin Poelking, *Above the Clouds*, (2014), 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 4.



Figure #27 - mm. 64–67 of Poelking's *Above the Clouds*.

At the same time, Poelking was playing as a percussionist with the Capital Wind Symphony where he was exposed to more great works in the wind repertoire being played at a high level. He also performed frequently with the Avanti Orchestra of the Friday Morning Music Club, including the ensemble's Masterwork Festival every summer, which invited musicians from all over the country to participate in a short rehearsal cycle and concert. During these rehearsals, Poelking would bring his own scores and study and take notes during his long moments of rest as a percussionist on pieces including Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 5*, Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 5*, and Mahler's *Symphony No. 1* and *4*.

Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* was the first experience Poelking had playing with an orchestra of such high quality. He was fascinated by Mahler's orchestration, especially his use of "chamber ensembles" within the orchestra.



Figure #28 - Rehearsal mark 6 of Mahler's *Symphony No. 4, Mvt. III*.⁶⁸

He also found other effects by Mahler so convincing, he used them in his own compositions. For example, Mahler's use of a glissando in cellos to an open string in his first symphony.

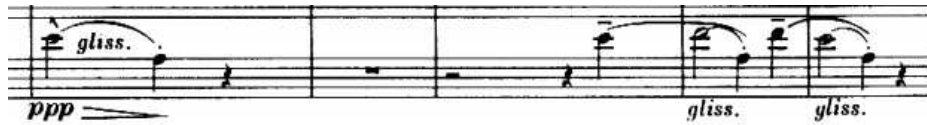


Figure #29 - mm. 167–171 of Mahler's *Symphony No. 1, Mvt. I*.⁶⁹



Figure #30 - m. 22 of Poelking's *Terra Nocte*.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Gustav Mahler, *Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1989), 314.

⁶⁹ Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 1*, (Michigan: Luck's Music Library, 1905), 19.

⁷⁰ Kevin Poelking, *Terra Nocte*. (2016), 6.

In Mahler's *Symphony No. 1*, he makes use of the tune *Frère Jacques* in the third movement. Poelking discovered this symphony around the same time that he was becoming more familiar with the compositional styles and band music of Ives, Grainger, and Vaughan Williams that made use of outside material, like folk tunes, in their music. It was at this point in Poelking's life that he first heard Stravinsky's use of a famous quote: "Lesser artists borrow, great artists steal."⁷¹ This continued to open the idea to Poelking that quotations and borrowed material were more common than he thought in substantial music.

Poelking had spent significant time reading orchestration books, yet there was very limited information on composing for band. So he began expanding his collection of band scores, studying works by composers like Gustav Holst, Alfred Reed, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Percy Grainger with special interest in modern composers like Frank Ticheli, John Mackey, and Steven Bryant.



Figure #31 - Poelking's handwritten reduction of Holst's *First Suite in Eb* at letter A.

⁷¹ UVU School of the Arts, "Great Artists Steal," November 7, 2018, <https://www.uvu.edu/arts/applause/posts/stealing.html>.

Handwritten musical score for "Asphalt Cocktail" by Mackey, showing a reduction of the original score. The score is written on five staves, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The title "MM 1-11 BY CHOIR" is written at the top. The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing multiple notes and rests. The notation is dense and includes many accidentals and dynamic markings.

Figure #34 - Further reduction of Mackey's *Asphalt Cocktail*.

Study of Mackey and other composers' scores convinced Poelking of the importance of horizontal motion in music, as opposed to the vertical harmonies he continuously analyzed. This new idea can be seen in Poelking's 2018 work *Fanfare for a New Tomorrow*. The tubas and euphoniums imply a minor dominant 7th with a suspension, implying a return to the tonic of F-minor. The trombones reinforce this with three separate pitches, each of them only a semitone away from their arrival on a second inversion of the tonic chord (see Figure #35).

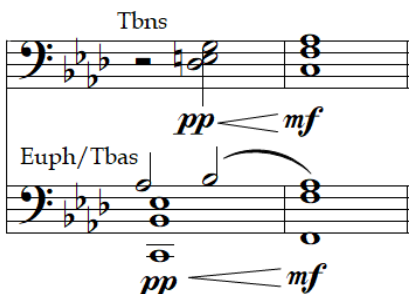


Figure #35 - mm. 37-38 of Poelking's *Fanfare for a New Day*.

Poelking's study of scores and music history was fueled by his own curiosity, and his desire to fulfill what he deemed his "pre-graduate degree." Poelking knew that he would one day return to school to pursue a master of music, and he wanted to answer as many questions as possible on his own. He believed that this would allow him to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge at school and be able to ask questions that he could not figure out himself. In addition to score study, participation in ensembles, and the study of composer biographies, Poelking also studied books on musicianship (e.g., *Sound in Motion* by David McGill), conducting (e.g., *The Modern Conductor* by Elizabeth H. Green), musical style (e.g., *Examples for the Study of Musical Style* by William R. Ward), composition and theory (books by Hindemith, Persichetti, Schoenberg, etc.), and orchestration (books by Blatter, Adler, Rimsky-Korsakov, etc.) in addition to watching numerous performances and documentaries available through YouTube.com.

First Concert Works

In January of 2013, Poelking turned his attention to composing more serious works; music that would be performed by live musicians rather than simply played back on MIDI. To help him find those musicians looking for new music, Poelking joined the American Composers Forum (ACF), an organization which lists composing competitions and opportunities from around the world. Poelking premiered three works in 2014, two of which were a direct result of his membership with the ACF. The first piece performed was also his international premiere.

Scratch (2014) for string quartet, was premiered May 25, 2014, by the PASSIONE Quartet at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest, Romania. This piece was a submission to the Vox Novus Fifteen Minutes of Fame competition, which called for fifteen different one minute scores from composers around the world. Poelking had already been writing a string quartet, trying to learn more about composing for the ensemble by listening to influential works like Ravel's *Quartet in F Major* and Andy Akiho's *LigNEouS 1 for Marimba and String Quartet*. Poelking wrote much of this quartet during his lunch break at one of his elementary schools, experimenting with fingerings, techniques, and different sounds on a school violin. *Scratch* is an adaptation of the opening material to this string quartet, and was one of the one minute submissions selected for performance.

The second premiere of 2014 (also resulting from his ACF membership) was *Lucy* for SATB choir and piano. This work was premiered on Friday, November 14th at St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Roseville, Minnesota by The Academy of Voices.

The third piece *Grey Streaks* was premiered November 3, 2014 by members of the University of Southern Mississippi Percussion Studio Marsh Hall in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. This piece came about from Poelking's relationship with percussionist Grey Shealy, a friend from his years at the University of South Carolina. Shealy, who was now pursuing a graduate degree in percussion performance at Southern Mississippi with John Wooton, was familiar with Poelking's music and asked him to write a piece for his graduate recital. Poelking and Shealy collaborated by email, phone, and text during the composition and rehearsal process, often sending ideas for the vibraphone cadenza back and forth. Poelking traveled to Hattiesburg for the premiere without hearing the final piece until the day of the concert. While originally giving musicians greater artistic freedom in his scores, Poelking noticed that this lack of direction

caused players to take liberties he was not expecting. For example, with no written indication of style the performers took one section more lyrically and slowly than Poelking intended. While he had left much of this ambiguous to give the performer more artistic freedom, it convinced Poelking to be more specific in his notation and instructions in his compositions going forward.

Being in contact with Shealy throughout the entire writing process better informed Poelking's understanding of composing works for specific ensembles or performers where he learned to consider rehearsal time limits, other works programmed on the concert, and how both of these would affect the musicians' preparation. After the performance, Poelking asked the musicians what specific issues they encountered with their parts. Following this experience, Poelking began to more strongly consider the players specific techniques (in this case fingerings and stickings) rather than writing and expecting the players would be able to dedicate enough time to figure it out for themselves.

Poelking went a completely different route when he wrote *Stoolz you guyz* late in 2014, (premiered April 28, 2015 by the Emory University Percussion Ensemble). The ensemble at this time was organized by students and one of the members who Poelking had known from high school asked him to write a simple piece for four percussionists to play on barstools. Poelking sent off very basic parts to the ensemble. From this music, the group created extensive choreography, convincing Poelking of the great power that the performer can have in using their creativity to elevate a simple piece of music to the next level.

In 2015, Poelking attended the Mid-Atlantic Music Invitational hosted by the Shenandoah Conservatory. This weekend honor band for local high school students also included some basic workshops for teachers which in this year included a presentation by composer David Maslanka. During his session, Maslanka spoke of his compositional process while following

along with the score. After the presentation, Poelking approached Maslanka, seeking advice on improving himself as a composer. Maslanka told Poelking that the best thing he could do at this point in his career is to hear his music played live as often as possible by asking his friends and colleagues to play his compositions. Poelking would take this advice to heart, reaching out to a number of ensembles and musicians hoping to hear his music performed, often with little to no success.

Conducting

As he was composing, performing, and teaching, Poelking continued his pursuit of becoming a serious conductor, often simply practicing along with his favorite recordings of band and orchestral music. While performing as a percussionist and following along with scores, Poelking not only took note of the composer's techniques, but was also keen on observing rehearsals and listening for what the ensemble directors would correct. This experience helped Poelking to understand the pacing of rehearsals, what issues the ensembles would encounter, and continue to reinforce the idea that composers must strongly consider the living, breathing musicians they affect with the difficulty and logistics of their music.

Poelking's interest in conducting began while playing as a percussionist in the University of South Carolina Symphonic Winds, under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Phillips. He would often sit in the back of the rehearsal hall, even during pieces where he was not assigned to play, in order to fully immerse himself in Phillips' rehearsal style and conducting gesture. Poelking took note of her charismatic style and high expectations of her ensemble members, attempting to reflect these qualities in his own teaching later in his career. Poelking was also enrolled Phillips' level one undergraduate conducting class, where she continued to have an impact on his technique and understanding of conducting. During a Symphonic Winds rehearsal, she invited

Poelking to lead the ensemble in a Bach chorale. This was the first time that Poelking had been in front of a group of this size, and he was impacted by the powerful sound of the ensemble from the podium.

In 2014, Poelking met Emily Threinen (then Director of Bands at Temple University) at the Montgomery County Public Schools Honor Band where he was assisting with the percussion section. In a conversation after the concert, Threinen invited Poelking to assist her at the annual Temple University Wind Conducting and Teaching Workshop. Poelking served in this role every summer from 2014-2016, where he would spend time receiving feedback on the podium while taking part in tasks such as transporting the guest clinicians to and from their hotels. It was here he met and shared in conversation with H. Robert Reynolds, Craig Kirchhoff, and Kevin Sedatole. Poelking also attended the 2016 University of Michigan Conducting and Pedagogy Workshop, and the U.S. Army Band “Pershing’s Own” Conducting Workshop in its inaugural year (2014) and for two years after that (2015, 2017).

At these workshops, Poelking was inspired by what he observed in the human interaction with music and the bond that it created between the participants, clinicians, and musicians. Most of the music in these workshops was simple, often playable by middle school and high school ensembles, and yet Poelking would watch conductors overcome challenges in their conducting to connect on a more emotional level with the music. This convinced him that a composition does not necessarily have to be incredibly complex to connect with educated musicians. This was echoed at the 2014 Army Band Workshop where the participants had lunch with Ankush Bahl, Assistant Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra. Poelking was surprised to hear Bahl mention that although he works with some of the finest musicians in the world playing the

greatest repertoire ever written, some of his favorite moments in music have come from working with young people.

In 2015, Poelking received information that a local community orchestra was seeking percussionists to read through multiple orchestral masterpieces in their summer reading session. Poelking reached out to express interest, and also offered his help in conducting some of the repertoire if the music director would appreciate any help. The orchestra manager mentioned to Poelking the orchestra's opening for a conducting fellow. After a six week audition, Poelking was appointed conducting fellow of the Montgomery Philharmonic by ensemble vote.

During the summer of 2016, Poelking approached the orchestra's music director, Sandra Ragusa, with his composition *Terra Nocte* for symphony orchestra. Ragusa mentioned that they could find time to play the piece during the group's summer reading session so Poelking could hear a live performance of the work. Ragusa contacted him a few days later to inform him that she had decided to program the work for the ensemble's concert in May. *Terra Nocte* premiered May 21, 2017 under Poelking's baton with the Montgomery Philharmonic. Poelking once again found the most enjoyable aspect of this experience was the human interaction: working with the musicians during the rehearsal process, and talking with the audience and ensemble members after the performance.

Graduate School

Poelking had delayed his own graduate school while his wife Caitlin finished her degree at George Washington University to become a Physician Assistant. In 2017, Poelking enrolled at Colorado State University to pursue a master's degree in wind conducting, studying with Dr. Rebecca Phillips. During his first year at CSU, Poelking played percussion in the Wind Symphony and Percussion Ensemble, taking lessons with Dr. Eric Hollenbeck. In addition to

improving his technique, Hollenbeck led their conversations on multiple topics including phrasing, detailed listening, and guidance on Poelking's compositions. He asked Hollenbeck's thoughts on notation for a number of the percussion parts he had written over the years and performed his marimba solo *Zahvalnost* for Hollenbeck, receiving suggestions for revisions.

Poelking's conducting studies with Rebecca Phillips at CSU vastly improved his understanding of ensemble music, form, score study, and rehearsal technique. The hours Poelking spent observing and conducting band rehearsals at CSU greatly improved Poelking's knowledge of orchestration as it related to these ensembles in addition to improving his ears when assessing sound quality, intonation, balance, and ensemble accuracy. The CSU Wind Symphony performed new works like Steven Bryant's *Concerto for Wind Ensemble*, Cindy McTee's *Circuits*, as well as music by Dr. James David, composition teacher at CSU. These works had such a fresh sound to Poelking, especially in orchestration when compared to much of the older, more standard repertoire in the band genre. In his first year, Poelking conducted the band arrangement of Eric Whitacre's *Sleep*, H. Robert Reynolds arrangement of *Prelude Op. 34 no. 14* by Dmitri Shostakovich, Giovanni Gabrieli's *Canzon Septimi Toni No. 2*, and *Old Home Days* by Charles Ives (arr. Elkus). Poelking also enrolled in Wind Literature classes with Rebecca Phillips, exposing him to many unfamiliar small and large ensemble works for winds in addition to a detailed history of the ensemble and literature.

Composing Studies and Performances at CSU

Near the end of his first year at Colorado State University, Poelking asked Phillips for feedback on the music that he had written thus far in his career. After listening to a few compositions, Phillips encouraged Poelking to approach CSU composition teacher James David

with this music. David met with Poelking, and approved his enrollment into private composition lessons beginning in the fall semester of 2018.

When selecting music for his graduate chamber conducting recital, Phillips encouraged Poelking to feature some of his own compositions on the program. Poelking composed two pieces to include some of the more neglected instruments of chamber winds like bass clarinets, the saxophone family, euphonium, and percussion. He wrote the first piece in March of 2018 during his trip as the graduate teaching assistant with the CSU Pep Band to the Mountain West Championship Basketball Tournament in Las Vegas, Nevada. Poelking took advantage of down time by finishing a brass choir arrangement of his choral piece *Lucy*. Phillips had suggested this setting for the music after she had listened to the original choral version during their lesson a few months prior. This piece preserves the piano part from the original work and replaces the choir with two trumpets, two horns, three trombones, one euphonium, and one tuba. Over the summer, Poelking took some previously written material and combined it with new ideas to create his second composition, *Embers in the Black*. This piece utilizes piccolo, flute, two Bb clarinets, Bb bass clarinet, Bb contrabass clarinet, saxophone quartet, and three percussionists.

For his recital, Poelking conducted *Embers in the Black* and *Lucy for Brass Choir and Piano*, in addition to the first movement of Beethoven's *Octet in Eb, Op. 103*, *Consort for Ten Winds* by Robert Spittal, *Scherzo alla marcia* by Vaughan Williams and *Fanfare pour précéder La Péri* by Paul Dukas. Later in the semester, Poelking submitted *Lucy for Brass Choir and Piano* to the Colorado State University Graduate School Showcase, where he was awarded "Highest Achievement in the Visual and Performing Arts."

Poelking's private composition lessons with James David often involved extended conversation about composers, compositional techniques, theory, and specific ins and outs of the

profession. Poelking brought in scores of David's works he had heard performed by the CSU Wind Symphony, asking questions regarding mostly pacing and harmony. David guided Poelking's decisions in orchestration, form, and development of material while working on their first project together, the result of which was the piece *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

Poelking's formal and self-education in music increased his knowledge and understanding of the craft of musical composition. Shaped by these experiences, he continues his development as a composer-conductor, allowing each to inform the other.

Chapter III – *By the Hands That Reach Us*

At some point, a composer is asked to analyze or describe their music. Elliot Carter explains why this process can be difficult:

At some time or another, this sorting and combining of notes finally becomes a composition. By that time many of its conceptions and techniques have become almost a matter of habit for the composer and he is only dimly aware of the choices that first caused him to adopt them. Finally, in an effort to judge the work as an entity, as another might listen to it, he tries to forget his intentions and listen with fresh ears. What he is aiming at, after all, is a whole in which all the technical workings are interdependent and combine to produce the kind of artistic experience that gives a work its validity and in so doing makes all its procedures relevant. There is no short-cut to achieving this final artistic relevance. No technique is of much intrinsic value; its importance for the composer and his listeners lies only in the particular use made of it to further the artistic qualities and character of an actual work. If in discussing his works, therefore, he points out a procedure, he is bound to feel that he is drawing attention to something of secondary importance and by dwelling on it misleading others into thinking of it as primary. Schoenberg expressed such doubts...And he was right, for certainly the twelve-tone aspect of his works accounts for only a part of their interest, perhaps not the most important part.⁷²

Genesis of the Project

As Poelking was considering topics for his graduate thesis, his advising professor, Rebecca Phillips, suggested they combine his conducting and composition studies at Colorado State University into a single project. Phillips, Poelking, and composition professor James David decided on a piece to be premiered by the CSU Wind Symphony in April 2019. They eventually agreed upon a work that would last six to ten minutes and would best fit the concert theme of good vs. evil. The result of this project was *By the Hands That Reach Us*, which was composed under the guidance of James David from August 2018 to February 2019.

⁷²Elliott Carter, "Shop Talk by an American Composer," in *Composers on Contemporary Music*, 262.

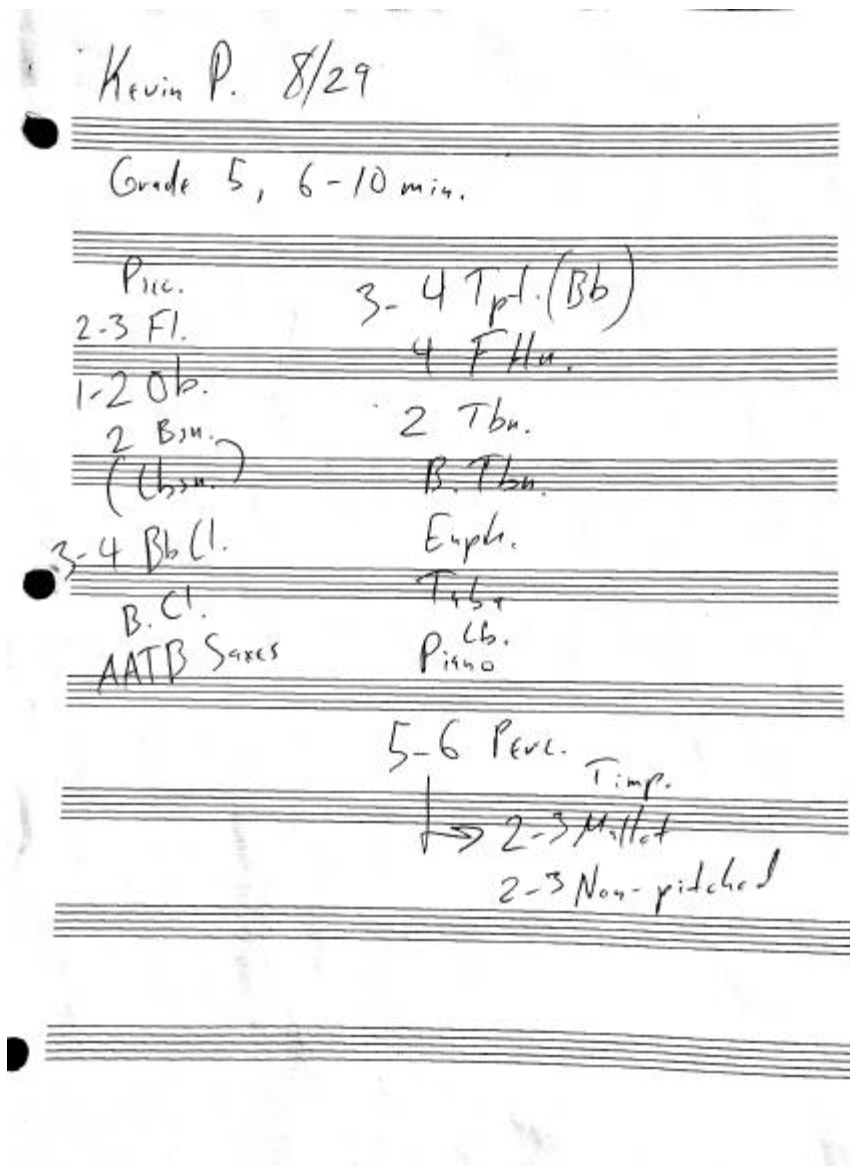


Figure #36 - Planning of instrumentation and length of project, dated Aug 29, 2018.

Initial Sketches and Development of the Structure

Poelking began the compositional process improvising at the piano, beginning with some simple sketches of different themes, harmonies, and ideas.

Handwritten musical sketches on a five-staff system. The sketches include notes, rests, and various annotations in pencil and ink.

Staff 1: Annotations include "LONG RIG", "EMOTIONAL", "SLIGHTLY", "HAPPY", "SETTLES INTO L PART CHORDS", and "BASS".

Staff 2: Annotations include "MAYBE ADD SOME M8A W/ BASS", "JOINS TO BASS OUT OF", "THIS IS SAD", and "OTHER CHANGES M8A SAD".

Staff 3: Annotations include "PAST", "DATE", "SUNSHINE", "RAINBOW", "THIS WILL SWELL, BUT NOT BEAR, WILL COME BACK IN BRASS ENJOY", and "THIS COMES BACK AGAIN".

Staff 4: Annotations include "NEXT SECTION IS (LOVE STORY?) COMFORTABLE", "METALLIC THUNDER", "WITH A SOLO", "A SECOND INSTRUMENT", "THEY INTERWIND & DANCE TOGETHER WITH THIS", and "THIS ENDS ON THE OSTINATO".

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Figure #37 - Initial sketches, page 1.

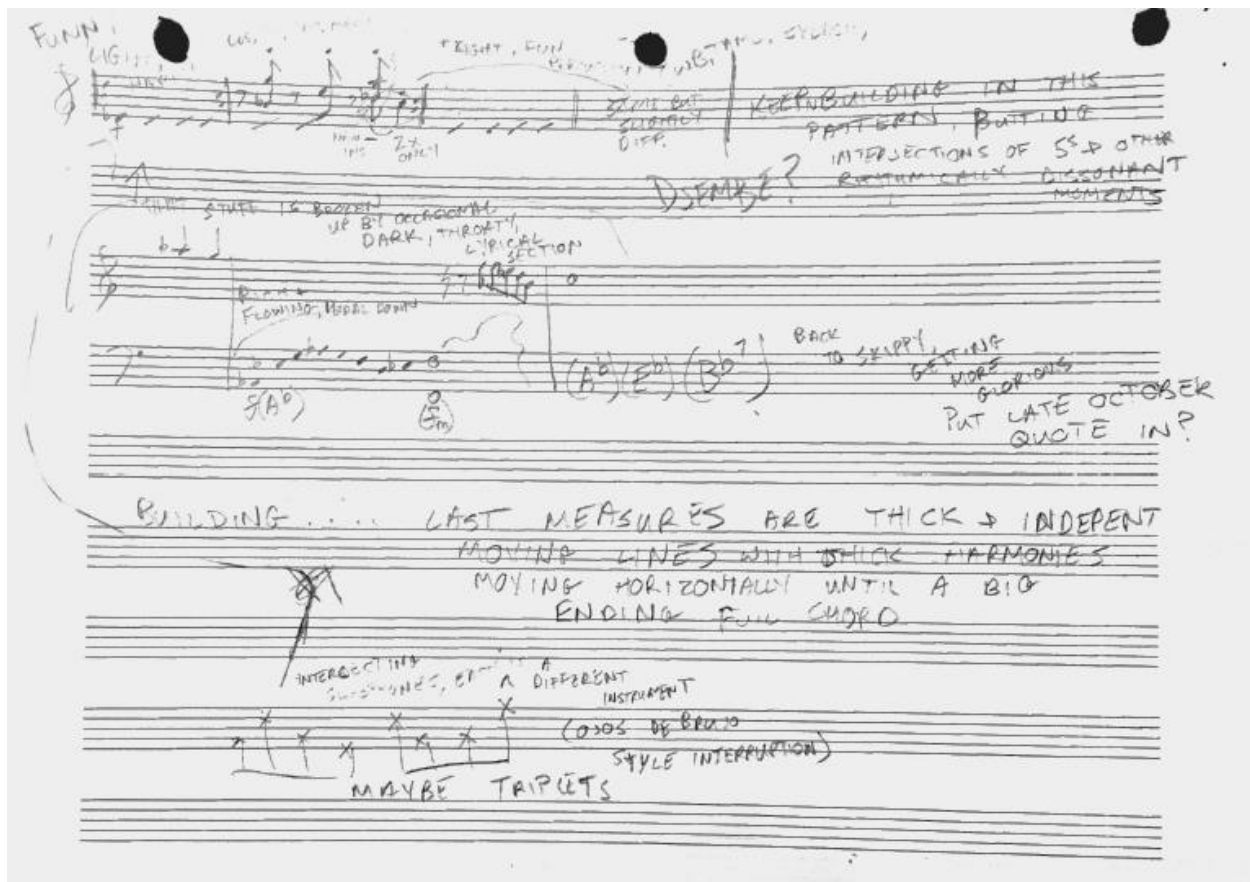


Figure #38 - Initial sketches, page 2.

As these sketches developed, Poelking considered how he would incorporate the good vs. evil theme of the concert into his work. He decided that the idea of two contrasting themes would fit the parameters, yet he wanted to incorporate a personal touch of his own that anyone performing or listening to the work could relate to. This was the first piece that Poelking wrote with a specific, non-musical concept in mind before composing a majority of the work. He wanted to write about the experience of being emotionally lifted by others. Reminiscing on when he arrived in Fort Collins to begin his graduate degree he realized the joy that came from interacting with faculty, fellow graduate assistants, and undergraduate students who shared the joy of music and learning.

Instead of a simple story of “good wins over evil” Poelking decided on two themes representing characters or states of mind, with one uplifting theme eventually influencing the second darker theme to become a more positive version of itself. With this in mind, Poelking began his “emotional architecture,” a technique he learned when reading a book⁷³ in which Eric Whitacre described his compositional process. This strategy involves using drawings, shapes, adjectives, descriptions, and scribbles to form the main “architecture” of the piece. As Poelking composed at the piano, this “blueprint” was used as a reference while he developed material and decided where, when, and how to transition to another section, giving the music a more purposeful direction.

⁷³ Eric Whitacre, “Eric Whitacre,” in *Composers on Composing for Band*, ed. Mark Camphouse (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2004), 263.

Figure #40 - Opening motif.

[illegible]

Figure #41 - Manuscript of introduction.

The introduction lacks a consistent melody or a deliberate tempo, and is driven by harmony, orchestration, and small motifs, two of which appear throughout the rest of the work.

Oboe 1

musical score for Oboe 1, measures 1-4. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The time signature is 4/8. The melody starts on a whole note Bb4, followed by a half note Eb5, and then a half note D5. A 'solo' box is above the first measure. The dynamic is 'p' (piano). The staff ends with a fermata over the final note.

Figure #42 - Motif #1, a simple descending half-step, stated here by the oboe.
mm. 4-5 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.



Figure #43 - Motif #2, stated compositely in divisi clarinets.
mm. 5-6 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

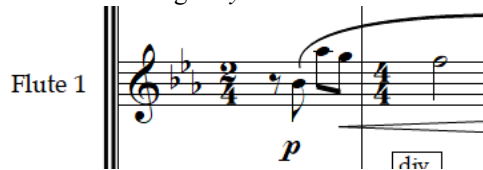


Figure #44 - Motif #2 stated in the flute.
m. 9 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The ending of the introduction is clearly marked with a fanfare-like theme stated first by the flutes and piano, and answered by a large portion of the ensemble.



Figure #45 - m. 18 of Poelking's, *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

Theme 1

While the material for the introduction was largely completed at the piano, Poelking created only the basic ideas for the next section by hand, developing and editing much of it at the computer. With an introduction in place, Poelking began composing the first theme: a simple chant-like melody in the tenor range over the top of an ostinato triplet pattern, unintentionally reminiscent of David Maslanka's style.

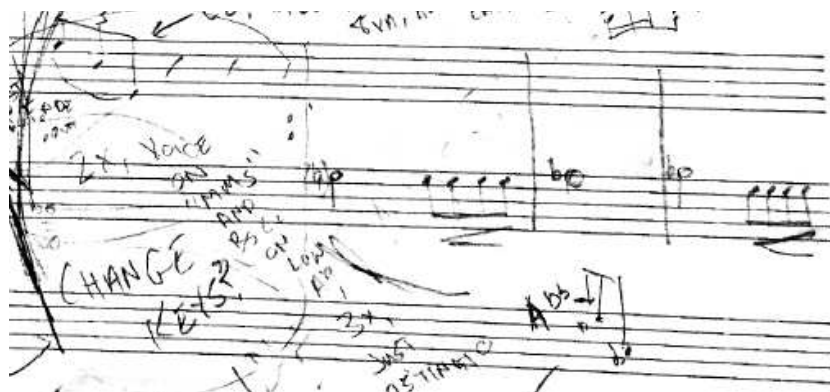


Figure #46 - Sketches of ostinato triplets with melodic line in tenor range. Poelking was also considering a key change at this point, but would delay this for later.



Figure #47 - mm. 32–5 of Poelking's, *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

To achieve the effect of piano or vibraphone with a depressed pedal, Poelking divided the clarinets into five different parts. Poelking worked on a number of options to orchestrate this material effectively, ultimately deciding on a pattern that would lightly emphasize the quarter note pulse by having at least two parts articulating on each beat.

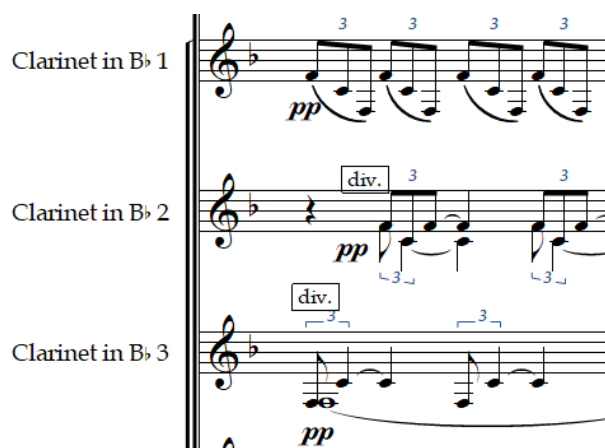


Figure #48 - m. 23 from Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The theme peacefully floats along, being stated twice before a key change to F-major. Other instruments enter, the musicians sing on the neutral syllable “ah,” and the flutes playfully

fill the rhythmic spaces in the melody. There is no sign of disturbance until an unexpected Ab clashes with the G in the melody, foreshadowing the less agreeable times to come.



Figure #49 - mm. 41–44 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The melody quickly returns to its peaceful character, but this moment of unrest has created doubt, and the remainder of the ensemble begins to enter with unsettling rhythms and harmonies that overtake the original theme, propelling the music into a chaotic, extended transition section.

Figure #50 - mm. 47–49 of Poelking's, *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

Transition Section in F Minor

Measure 50 marks the beginning of a new section in 12/8 time. This section was originally intended as a short transition before introducing the second theme, and while it still

serves in this musical role, it also takes on some independence, being able to stand alone as its own section. Here, Poelking implemented aspects of the minimalist music he grew to enjoy over the years, writing an ostinato which he would later orchestrate for piano, marimba, and vibraphone.

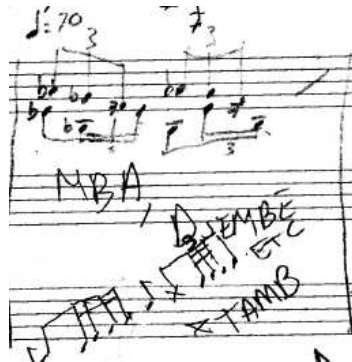


Figure #51 - Manuscript of the original ostinato in the transition section.

Figure #52 - m. 50 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

To increase the presence of this ostinato, Poelking borrowed from Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 1*. While Mahler used this gesture in a major key, it only makes use of the first, second, and fifth scale degrees and for this reason is able to fit seamlessly into this minor key setting.

Poelking also had to consider the wind players for which he was writing: while Mahler's string players can play this ostinato relentlessly, Poelking divided the wind players to pass this back and forth in pairs to facilitate consistency in rhythm and tone quality.

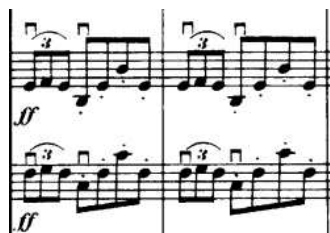


Figure #53 - Rehearsal 5 of Mahler's *Sym. No 1, Mvt. II.* ⁷⁴



Figure #54 - m. 50 from Poelking's, *By the Hands That Reach Us.*

As the ostinato motors along in the woodwinds and keyboard instruments, the brass and selected upper woodwinds exchange in an aggressive, rhythmic dialogue, highlighted in color and intensity by the percussion instruments.



Figure #55 - m. 52–53 of Poelking's *By the Hands that Reach Us.*

On the downbeat of m. 57 there is a dotted quarter note on A-natural, giving a brief glimpse of hope (alluding to the key of F-major) before descending to an Ab and back to the minor key, with some instruments continuing their descent to a G to create a more dissonant and even darker mood still.

⁷⁴ Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 1*, (Michigan: Luck's Music Library, 1905), 51.

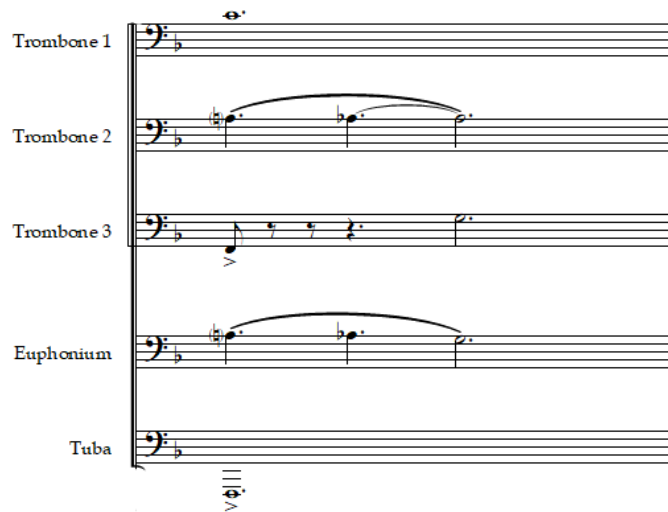


Figure #56 - m. 57 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The music continues, building more and more tension until the arrival at mm. 69-71. At m. 71, there is another appearance of the A-natural, this time for twice as long (a dotted half note), but this optimism is quickly stifled once again in a shift to Ab. Mm. 72-3 gives the listener a short glimpse of the second main theme before the descent into a feeling of complete despair.



Figure #57 - mm. 69-71 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

Theme 2

Measure 78 marks the beginning of the next section, where the second main theme is developed. Poelking initially wrote this second theme in the major key, introducing it before the transition section in F minor.



Figure #58 -Manuscript showing original use of Theme 2.

Poelking made the decision to save this theme for later in order to develop it further and have the change from minor to major become more notable. However, he left a fragment of this theme in the beginning of the piece, in m. 27, just before the introduction of Theme 1.



Figure #59 - m. 27 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

Figure #60 - Manuscript page 3.



Figure #61 - m. 78–80 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The music in this section represents a feeling of despair. With the strong statement of the second theme, Poelking also superimposes material from the previous section and the introduction to create an unsettled feeling. The end of the melody in the second theme is also reminiscent of material from the introduction: a half-step descending half-note.



Figure #62 - m. 78–80 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

In m. 90, there is an unexpected G-major chord with uplifting trills, once again representing the music's attempt to break free of the troubling mood. However, this escape is quickly smothered by a sharp return to the minor key in the next measure.

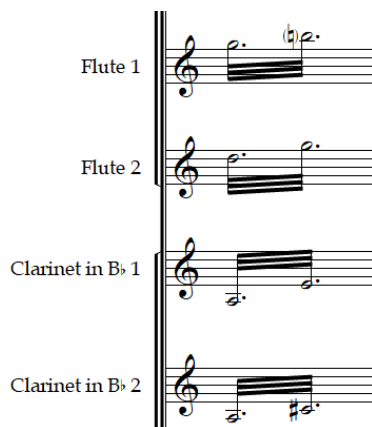


Figure #63 - m. 90 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The bassline rumbles along, chromatically ascending while other instruments build, one on top of the other, always at the interval of a perfect fourth. The first four pitches of Theme 2 are repeated relentlessly in a loop of triplets, building to a seemingly imminent climax.



Figure #64 - mm. 92–97 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

Poelking did in fact write this climax in his sketches, yet it no longer exists in the final score. Initially, the music was supposed to arrive at a climactic moment of despair on an F# minor chord with an added G# and a C natural in the bass, then slowly fade to nothing. This was to represent the moment of defeat for Theme 2, where the character it represents cries out in frustration before slithering away to a state of helplessness. It was at this point that Theme 1 was to re-introduce itself in the form of a solo instrument, slowly coaxing Theme 2 from its sad state. Theme 2 would slowly develop into the same melody but now in a major key, signifying a character that had become a more positive version of itself.

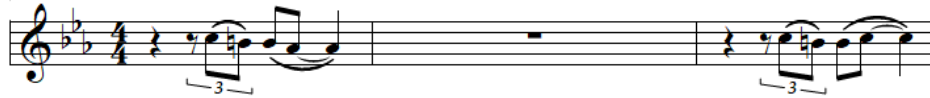


Figure #66 - mm. 99–101 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

By the third statement of Theme 1, Theme 2 seems more convinced, and as it moves to the final descending half step, it sheds any remaining doubt. The fanfare-like theme that marked the end of the introduction now returns, this time seeming to announce a change to better times ahead.

Final Section (Coda)

The final section begins a celebration. The marimba provides an energetic pulse of sixteenth notes while the other percussionists playfully interject. Suddenly, Theme 1 emerges in the vibraphone, with Theme 2 following closely behind, shyly emerging from the marimba line.

Figure #67 - mm. 110–112 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The two themes continue their dialogue as more instruments join. In the anacrusis to m. 125, the familiar fanfare theme sounds as the rhythmic drive intensifies. The music builds to a breaking point when suddenly it gives way to the new timbre of hand-played congas. The percussion quickly swells in an abbreviated $\frac{3}{4}$ bar to lead to the arrival at m. 132.

Figure #68 - m. 131 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

At this point, the two themes are no longer shyly conversing, but are joyously shouting out to one another. Theme 1 and 2 are rhythmically varied and superimposed to give the music a fresh and lively feeling.

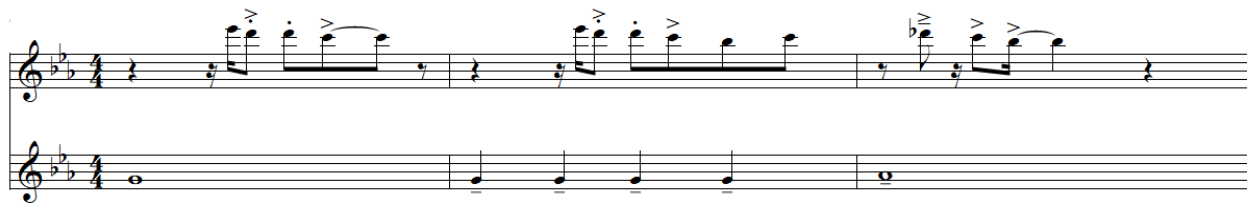


Figure #69 - mm. 132–134 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

At m. 141, the second theme is now fully immersed in jubilation, singing out in the trumpets above a flurry of woodwinds. The melody ends with a triumphant ascension to the high half-step half notes (Db to C resolution), rather than a general downward motion that had been typical thus far.



Figure #70 - mm. 145–147 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The fanfare theme makes its final appearance at m. 148, quickly at first, then stated powerfully and deliberately by the trombones, bassoons, and saxophone choir.



Figure #71 - mm. 148–150 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

This leads to a powerful statement of the quarter note triplet motif from the introduction, quickly followed by another familiar gesture of declamatory, strident eighth notes.

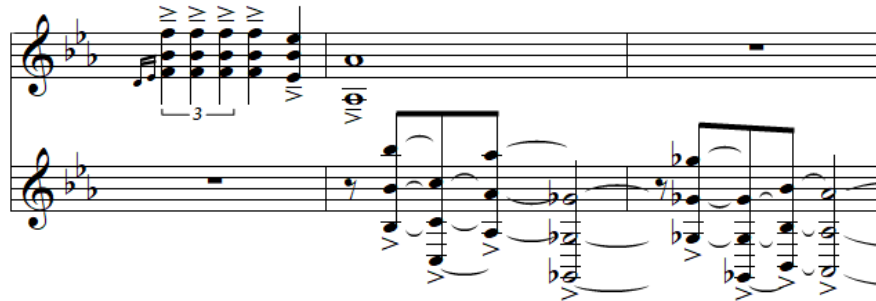


Figure #72 - mm. 150–152 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

As these notes are stated, the wind instruments sustain the pitches, creating a chord full of tension that resolves on the downbeat of m. 153, emphasized by one final piece of familiar material with the flourish of metallic percussion and piano.



Figure #73 - Harmonic reduction of mm. 152–153 of Poelking's *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

The low voices erupt on the next beat, releasing an explosion of notes in a 7/16 bar that crescendo to the final note of the piece.

Conclusion

As a composer is exposed to the ideas, opinions, and formal studies of respected musicians, they become more knowledgeable and considerate of the medium for which they

write. Because there is no definitive answer to the question “What is quality music?” the composer must continue to expose themselves to multiple definitions. As they further their understanding, they can define for themselves what they find most important in their career as a composer, or even just when writing a specific piece. Poelking was influenced by a number of factors in his education and career that shaped his ideas as a composer and how his music can affect conductors, performers, and audience. Using the information discussed in the first chapter, his personal background, and his ongoing education in music as a guide, he composed *By the Hands That Reach Us*.

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