

Hearing Your Band in Technicolor

A Three-Dimensional Approach to Balancing Your Concert Band

James Barnes, Professor Emeritus
The University of Kansas

General thoughts:

1. Some basic concepts about ensemble balance should be clarified before we continue this discussion:

a. **Good individual tone** production is the true secret to developing a first rate concert band. The better each of your student's individual tones are, the better your band will sound. The reason professional orchestras and bands have such a wonderful sound is because *every player in that ensemble is playing with a beautiful sound* all the time.

b. **Good tone also cures a multitude of pitch problems in a band**, because, artistically speaking, *it is impossible to play out of tune and still have good tone*.

c. **Blend** refers to the overall quality of tone in sections of the same instrument. That is to say, 12 good, characteristic clarinet sounds playing simultaneously give a band's clarinet section a *good blend*.

d. **Balance** should be defined as the satisfactory mixture of blended sections at any given point in a piece of music. **Balance does not stay the same**; it changes constantly from phrase to phrase. Careful manipulation of dynamics is a very useful tool in attaining balance at any one point in the performance.

2. By using a very simple set of musical priorities, we can constantly redefine the necessary balance in our bands as the musical score progresses. Over a period of time, students will begin to instinctively hear these priorities and balance the music in a particular section without any sort of mechanical manipulation.

There are Five Priorities That Almost Never Change in Music:

1. Rhythm
2. Melody
3. Bass
4. Counterpoint
5. Harmony

Explanation:

1. **Inaccurate rhythmic performance in an ensemble makes for the kind of sloppy, blurry sound that we so often hear.**

2. **Melody** is a series of pitches organized by *rhythm*. **Nothing has priority over the melodic line.** Remember that the melodic line is not always in the soprano register of the ensemble. Wherever it is present, it should be brought to the forefront.

3. **Bass line** usually defines key and harmonic progression in a passage: in most music, *it is the second most important line in any setting*, large or small; low, medium or high. **Whoever has the lowest voice in a passage constitutes either an inverted melody or the bass line.** Most bands sound so harsh, bright and out of tune because they lack a solid bass line.

4. **Counterpoint is usually subservient and/or complimentary to the melody and bass line.** There are times, especially late in a work when the melody has been repeated many times, that the counterpoint might be balanced louder than the tune, but most of the time, it is good advice to **make sure that the counterpoint is not more prominent than either the melody or the bass line.**

5. **Harmony** is the most over-rated facet of musical scoring. Most band works have far too much "chord" scored most of the time, traditionally because band composers have been hesitant to score middle voice assignments only in the horns. Because of this well-earned "middle voice paranoia," composers tend to double all these notes in saxophones and, oftentimes, in trombones also. This really overloads the middle of the music with far too much harmony and makes for muddy balance. A little judicious editing and some sensible musical choices about what section should supply the harmony in a particular passage help to alleviate the situation somewhat, but it is certainly one of the most problematic areas for any conductor who is really serious about balancing a school band. All this **"safe doubling" is what makes so much Grade III and IV music sound so "gray."** *One solution is to look for compositions that are safely cued but not so heavily doubled.*

So long as these five characteristics appear in a passage, the priorities seldom change.

If one keeps these factors in the proper order when balancing any given passage, the conductor and the player both have something quite definite to grasp.

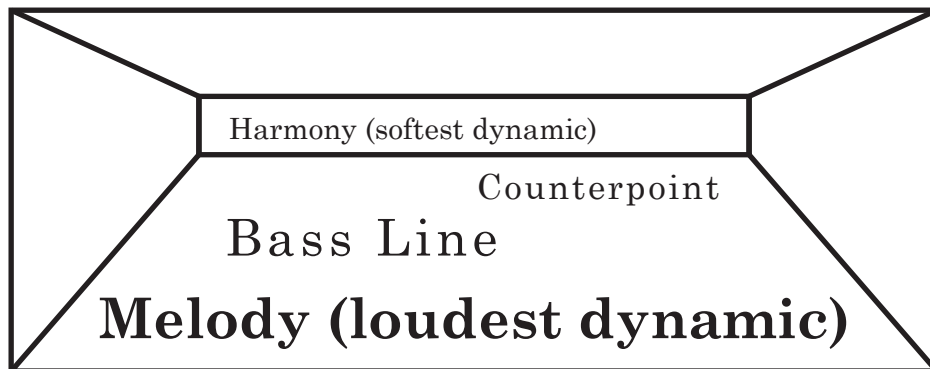
Hearing the Ensemble in Three Dimensions:

1. **Think of pitch and intonation as being a vertical concept.** Pitches played in an ensemble constantly move higher or lower. The way we shape these constant entrances by the employment of subtle dynamic changes form what we call phrases. The same goes for intonation: we tune by deciding whether each pitch is higher or lower than the ones that are played simultaneously. Playing in tune is going from one pitch level to the next in the *exact* interval (i.e. a perfect 4th or 5th, a major seventh or what have you.)

2. **Rhythm is a horizontal concept**, defining time and speed from left to right across the score page. Accurate placement of pitches at a precise point within the time duration of a work makes the sort of vertical agreements that we call harmony. Some conductors refer to this accurate simultaneous placement of pitch within the rhythmic scope of a work as *verticality*.

3. It might be well to **consider balance in a particular passage in depth**, that is to say that in any particular musical phrase, we normally bring the melody to the forefront, followed by bass line, then the counterpoint and, finally, as far back-stage as we can place it, the chord or harmony. These are everchanging priorities, sometimes within a measure, sometimes from one measure to the next or through a half-phrase or phrase, but the priorities are always there. The better we explain to the players what is important and what is not so important, the better they will "stage" a passage. This is what makes balance work.

Envision it as a deep sound shell:



4. Think of the various instruments and sections as if they were actors in a drama: when certain characters have something important to say, they are brought to the front of the stage. All others remain in the background until the end of that character's speech.

5. Using the phrase "can you bring that melody to the foreground" or "I think these are really background figures---after all they are just repeated chords" or "let's make sure that the counterpoint is supporting the melody here---don't downstage the tune" help to make this concept more practical and feasible to the players.

6. You will note that **percussion** have not been independently mentioned within the framework of this discussion. That is because **percussion should be balanced by precisely the same priorities as the winds**. That is to say, if a percussionist has a melodic line, then it should be heard above any bass note, counterpoint or harmony played by percussion in that passage.



Some Other Tips On Balancing a Musical Passage:

1. **Make sure everyone is playing correct and precise rhythms.** *Nothing* works until everyone is *putting the right note at the right place at the right time*.

2. **Determine what instruments have the melody.** Don't ask them to play louder; *ask everyone else playing in the passage to play softer*, so they can hear the tune. Do this on a consistent basis and you will begin to hear your double reeds, the low clarinets and all of the other "color instruments" that are otherwise covered up by predominant sections like trumpets, saxophones, flutes and trombones who are normally playing too loud most of the time.

3. Find all the instruments providing the bass line at this point in the piece and **rehearse the bass line and melody together for balance and shape**. Bass lines are often overdubbed and must be edited. The more you eliminate the bass voices in combination, the more the bass line takes on an individual character, instead of the "blah" heaviness that we so often hear in band music.

4. **Determine who has the counterpoint**, if there is any. Rehearse these players for blend, pitch, rhythmic precision and dynamics. Then rehearse the melody, the counterpoint and the bass line together to make sure the priorities are correctly played. Leave the harmony out at this point, then add it back in once you have the first three priorities the way you want them. **If you must, cut down the harmony to one section.**

5. Work out the rhythms, balance and intonation, then rehearse the whole ensemble, *making sure that the five priorities remain in order.*

6. If you want your band to play with better balance, ask them to play **softer, not louder.**

7. Has anyone ever heard a band that plays *too softly*?



Things for Which to Listen When the a Phrase Really Sounds Bad:

Isolate the section which seems to be causing the overall balance problem. Then check to see if:

a.) **someone is playing a wrong note.** It is either by mistake or it is wrong in the part; be sure to check both.

b.) ... **someone is playing an incorrect or unprecise rhythm.** Here again, if it is wrong over and over again, it may be printed wrong in the part--check both.

c.) ... **someone is not playing the correct articulations in the passage.** Many times the articulations are not accurately indicated in the part, so be sure to check. Matched articulations make for much better blend.

d.) ... **someone is playing with bad tone and, thus, is also playing out of tune.** Work for a better characteristic instrument sound and you'll at least have a start at attaining better pitch.

e.) ... **someone is playing too loudly.** It only takes one player to ruin the balance in a soft passage. Whoever is playing loudest sets the dynamic for the entire phrase.

Musical Examples for Hearing Your Band In Technicolor

From *Heatherwood Portrait* by James Barnes
published by Southern Music

Ex. 1. Working with blends in unison passages.



Ex. 2.a. Balancing melody octaves in the soprano voices.



Ex. 2.b. Balancing melody octaves in the bass line.

Ex. 2c. Double octaves in a canon.

Ex. 2d. Horns in octaves.

Ex. 3. Balancing and blending in three and four octaves.

1 **+Picc., Bells**
mf (Low W.Ws. continue)
sim.
cresc.
cresc. (+Hns.)
cresc.
Timp. *sim.*
sim.
1 S.D. *sim.*
2 *sim.*
3 Tamb. *sim.*
4 B.D.

Ex. 4. Balancing thirds in (a.) solo voices and (b.) tutti passages.

+A. Saxs. 1., 2. *cresc.*
+Tpt. 2. *cresc.*
+Cl. (sostenuto) *cresc.*
+A., T. Saxs. *cresc.*
+Obs. *cresc.*
+Picc.

Ex. 5.a. and 5.b. Balancing triads.

HEATHERWOOD PORTRAIT

James Barnes
 A. S. C. A. P.

Allegro vivo - ma non troppo
Fls. (stagger-breathe)
mf Cls., Obs., A. Sax.

(+Bells)
secco

Ex. 6. Harmonized melody doubled at the octave.

5 (Bells out)
legato arpeggios

Tpt. 1.
+Tpt. 2, 3.
Tpts.
Hns., A. Sax.
T. Sax., Euph.

Ex. 7 a. Balancing a woodwind chorale.

8

Ob. 1., Cls., A. Sax.
Bsn., B. Cl., Low Sax.
+Fls.

Ex. 7b. Balancing a brass chorale.

15

Tpts. 1, 2.
1., Hn. 1.
Trib. 1.
Euph., Hn. 2. (T. Sax.)
Trib. 3., Tuba, D. B. (Ca. Cl.)

Ex. 8. Melody, bass line, counterpoint and harmony in motion.

16

Hns., Trbs. alternate sord.
Hns., Trbs. alternate sord.
Hns., Trbs. alternate sord.

Ex. 9. Accompaniment "set-ups."

11

B.C. B.Sax. *f* *dim.*

(continues) *mf*

(Picc.) *mf* +Cl.3., Bon., T.Sax., Euph. 8va bassa

Timp. *f*

Bells *mf*

1 S.D. *mf*

2

3 Tamb. *mf*

4 B.D. *mf*

Ex. 10. When the counterpoint has the priority.

15

Fls., Obs. *mf*

Tpt.1., A.Sax.1. *mf*

1,3., A.Sax.2., Hrn., Euph. *mf*

Timp. *mf*

+A.Sax.1.,2. *cresc.*

+Tpt.2. *cresc.*

+Cl. (sostenuto) *cresc.*

Ex. 11. Stylistic balance.

18

(Bells continue) *f*

(Bells out) *f*

Timp. *f*

Timp. Solo *ff*

1 S.B. *f*

2

3 B.D. *f*

4

James Barnes

(Born Sept. 9, 1949 in Hobart, Oklahoma)

James Barnes' contributions to wind band repertoire span five decades. He has spent a large majority of his creative life providing well over one hundred pieces for wind band; from nine massive symphonies to works for middle school children. He served as Associate Director of Bands and Staff Arranger for The University of Kansas Bands for twenty-seven years before moving to full-time teaching in Theory and Composition, where he served as Division Chair for ten years. He has guest conducted in Europe, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan (where he has traveled over 30 times.)

Barnes is the only living composer to contribute major commissioned works for all five of the major American military bands in Washington, D.C. He is the only American composer to have the distinction of conducting and recording with all three of Japan's finest professional wind bands: Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra, Sienna Winds and Osaka Shion Wind Orchestra.

His numerous works for concert band and orchestra have been extensively performed throughout the world in such venues as Tanglewood, Boston Symphony Hall, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center and Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, Tokyo Metropolitan Concert Hall and Symphony Hall in Osaka. The world-famous Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra recorded three CD's of his works. Barnes' more recent music can be found on a CD from Mark Records. A new recording of a live concert of his music by Sienna Winds (Tokyo) became available in 2016. The University of Kansas Wind Ensemble recently recorded his Visions Macabre on their new album released by Klavier Records. Osaka Shion Wind Orchestra produced a new recording of his Eighth Symphony in 2018. His Ninth Symphony has been recorded by the University of Kansas and University of North Texas Bands. Barnes has also written works for the Kansas City Symphony.

Along with many other awards and prizes, Barnes twice received the coveted American Bandmasters Association Ostwald Award for his First Symphony (1978) and Visions Macabres (1980.) In March 2016, Barnes was awarded honorary lifetime membership in the Japanese Bandmasters Association. One of the instrumental rehearsal rooms at KU was named in his honor in 2017. He has been a member of the American Bandmasters Association since 1988 and a member of ASCAP since 1974.

After teaching for forty-one years, Barnes retired as Professor Emeritus of Music Composition from The University of Kansas in August 2015. He still resides in Lawrence, where he continues to compose.

James Barnes

Band Publications



Arioso Op. 127 HL3779005

One of the most exceptional graduate students during the composer's more than thirty years teaching at the University of Kansas was Naoya Takizawa, who came to KU from Tokyo, Japan in 1995. Since his graduation and return to Japan, Mr. Takizawa has served as an interpreter when Mr. Barnes travels there to conduct. In 2006 Naoya Takizawa and Haruko Nakayama announced their plans to be married. When Barnes asked Haruko what she wanted for her wedding present, she requested music to be written in honor of their wedding. "Arioso" was premiered by the Edelweiss Brass Orchestra at the newlywed's wedding reception on July 1st, 2007 in Tokyo, with the composer conducting.

Autumn Soliloquy (Fl., Ob. or Cl. and Band)..... HL3777706

A delightful tone poem composed as an oboe solo with wind orchestra accompaniment and dedicated to Susan Hicks Brashier. Later versions for solo clarinet and flute, and orchestra and band accompaniments followed. Each solo instrument with piano accompaniment is also available for recitals and contest. Grade 3, ca. 7'.

Burnished Brass: A Concert Opener..... HL348185

Written in a quick two, this "Show-Style Opener" lives up to its title with much of the thematic materials in the opening theme falling to the brass while the woodwinds interject flourishes and counterpoints. The woodwinds come to the fore during the middle section until the brass take over again when the original theme returns, leading to a rousing finish.

Commemoration HL294814

Commemoration was commissioned by the members of the Northwest North Carolina Bandmasters Association to recognize the distinguished career of Dr. William A. Gora, the longtime Director of Bands at Appalachian State University, who passed away in 2015. Bill was loved by his students, respected by his peers and cherished by his many friends. A brilliant musician, a fine conductor and a warm human being with a marvelous sense of humor, Bill has been sorely missed by all.

Dream Journey Op. 98 HL3778185

Commissioned by the Austin, Texas Independent School District for the 25th Anniversary of their All-City Honor Band.

Eaglecrest - An Overture HL3777523

This overture opens with the Walt Whitman quote, "Skyward in air a muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagle..." Commissioned by the Explorer Wind Symphony.

Eisenhower Centennial..... HL3777877

This march in 6/8 was commissioned by All My Friends in The 312th U.S. Army Reserve Band.

Fanfare and Processional..... HL277819

Fanfare and Processional by celebrated composer James Barnes is a rousing concert opener for younger bands in the vein of the familiar Pomp and Circumstance by Edward Elgar. With generous cross-cuing in parts, careful consideration has been given with respect to the technical requirements of beginning musicians in this score. As suggested by the title, the work is also ideal as an occasional piece at ceremonies.

Fanfares and Alleluias HL3778015

Fanfares and Alleluias was commissioned by the Fort Walton Beach (Florida) High School Band, and its conductor, Mr. Ernest Hebson, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the opening of that high school. The premiere was conducted by the composer in May 1994.

Fantasy Vars. on a Theme of Paganini HL3777785

Commissioned by the United States Marine Band, the set of twenty variations is based on the famous theme of Paganini's 24th Caprice in A Minor for solo violin, which is the same theme used by Brahms and Rachmaninoff for their famous compositions. The composer's overall concept was to use the variation technique to showcase every solo instrument and/or every instrumental section of the modern wind band. In doing so, creating a piece that could be played almost anywhere for almost any kind of audience: a piece full of energy, drama, and even a little humor.

Fifth Symphony: Phoenix HL3778708

Commissioned in 2000 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force Central Band in 1951 at the conclusion of Allied occupation. Scored for a very large band, including six antiphonal trumpets, the work is in four movements: I. Eulogy, II. Scherzo, III. Reverie, and IV. Jubilation. Subtitled "Phoenix", the composer writes: "Like the legendary Phoenix bird, which self-immolates, then arises from its own ashes more resplendent than ever, Japan has recovered from the massive devastation of World War II to become a greater and more respected nation than ever before."

Impressions of Japan HL3777971

A tone poem in three sections expressing the composer's personal portrayal of his experiences in visiting Japan: I. Joetsu Asahi (Dawn in Joetsu), II. Todaiji (The Great Buddha at Nara), III. Askusa Matsuri (Festival in Asakusa)

Lightning Brigade, The HL277815

The Lightning Brigade celebrates John T. Wilder, an Indiana historical figure in the Civil War, and his unique mounted infantry brigade that proved themselves decisive in several Western Campaign battles. The march begins with dramatic bugle-like fanfares, moving quickly into its menacing main theme, where the minor-key melody is carried in the low brass and winds. The B section by contrast is light and breezy, in the relative major led by the upper voices. The music modulates to an unusual key for the trio, accompanied by the galloping brigade in the percussion.

Maracas from Caracas HL3778614

Omaggio HL3778865

Pagan Dances HL3777847

The "Pagan Dances" completes the cycle of four "primitive" works for symphonic band that also includes "Visions Macabre", "Invocation and Toccata" and "Torch Dance". All of these works employ highly dissonant harmonies, repetitive melodic material and driving rhythm. The work was premiered by the University of Central Arkansas. Movement titles: I. Ritual, II. Mystics, III. The Master of the Sword

Prairie Winds Festival, Op. 152 HL172766

Prairie Winds Festival is a fast, happy-go-lucky "opener." It is very carefully scored and cross-cued, so that almost any size band can perform it. The Piccolo, 2nd Oboe, 2nd Bassoon, Contra-Alto Clarinet, 3rd Trombone and Double Bass parts are all optional, but if you have these instruments, it will sound more full.

Ritmico HL277817

Ritmico is a driving, energetic overture for symphonic band. Singing melodic lines are underpinned by infectious rhythmic grooves in the percussion and bass instruments which define the main theme. The middle section is a chorale that builds gradually to a sweeping climactic statement which transitions into a final recapitulation of the opening theme. This is a fine addition to concert and contest repertoire that will showcase your band's stylistic versatility and have your listeners leaning forward in their seats!

Romanza HL3777843

Mostly in 4/4 time signature with all of the standard duple subdivisions one would expect, one section in the band will play in 12/8 against that, starting in the clarinets, then moving to the horns before the entire band settles in the same 4/4 time signature.

Second Symphony, Op. 44 HL3777640

Premiered by the University of Kansas Symphonic Band with Robert E. Foster conducting, this work was presented the 1982 Neil A. Kjos Memorial Award for the most significant contribution to wind band music. It consists of three movements: an "Elegia" in sonata form, "Variazioni Interrotte" (Interrupted Variations), and a "Finale" in classic sonata form concluding in a coda which ends the symphony in a final, dramatic, colorful outburst—the sort of pure musical energy that only a modern symphonic band can produce. Movements: I. Elegia, II. Variazioni Interrotte, III. Finale

Symphonic Overture HL3777921

A Romantic-Style work of large proportions and challenging instrumental parts, Symphonic Overture was commissioned for the 50th Anniversary of the USAF Band in 1991 and has been performed since then at the band's anniversary concert.

Symphonic Requiem (7th Symphony)..... HL137324

When James Barnes was commissioned to compose a work for the United States Army Band to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War, he decided to combine two massive structures into one: a requiem and a symphony. The result is this work, which is intended to portray the heartbreak of three of the most dramatic battles of the war, concluded by an apotheosis, a hymn of respect and praise for the 668,000 soldiers, Confederate and Federal alike, who gave their lives during this monumental conflict.

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Symphony No. 4: Yellowstone Portraits..... HL3778458

Ed. R. Mark Rogers

Commissioned by the Kansas City Youth Symphony, this work was intended to serve as a major contribution to the celebration of the orchestra's 40th anniversary. The wind band version of the symphony was completed in 2001. As the title suggests, the programmatic work is a musical landscape portraying the majestic beauty of Yellowstone Park. It is set in three movements depicting natural scenes: 1. Dawn on the Yellowstone River, 2. Pronghorn Scherzo and 3. Inspiration Point.

Symphony No. 9 HL294816

Premiered on 21 September, 2018 in Lawrence, Kansas by The University of Kansas Wind Ensemble (Dr. Paul Popiel, conducting), James Barnes' Ninth Symphony was composed between January and late June of that same year. This large work was commissioned by a consortium of twenty-one college bands, community bands, professional bands and individuals to help mark the 70th birthday of the composer (b. 1949). It is an expansive fortyminute work in four movements, of which the composer writes, "This is my last symphony...this work represents a compendium of all that I have learned during the fifty years of composing and scoring for this wonderful new medium: the modern wind band."

Texans, The HL3777632

Commissioned by the Lakeview Centennial High School Band in Garland, Texas, George Jones, Conductor, to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Great State of Texas (1836 - 1986). With a shouted "Yee Hah!" by the band at the end, this piece for intermediate band celebrates the state well.

Third Symphony Op. 89 HL3778090

The Third Symphony stands today as one of Barnes' most personal and emotionally charged works. Commissioned by the US Air Force Band under Col. Alan Bonner, it was begun in earnest shortly after the tragic loss of the composer's baby daughter Nataile. The work progresses from the deepest darkness of despair all the way to the brightness of fulfillment and joy. The massive structure encompassed four movements: Lento; Scherzo; Fantasia "Nataile"; and a joyful "Finale."

Toccata Fantastica Op. 106 HL3778454

This piece revolves around a theme that begins rather menacing and discordant in the large tutti sections. Nearly every section has the opportunity to shine as the melody is layered throughout the entire band. Additionally, the accents in much of the melody and accompaniment suggests a very changeable pulse, though most of the music is written in 4/4 time. A expressive and beautiful flute and/or oboe solo is offered in the middle before returning to the original melodic feel. Finally, the menace and discordant melody and harmonies resolve to a more triumphant feeling to end the music.

Valor..... HL3778610

The year 2002 marked the 200th anniversary of the United States Military Academy at West Point. This greatest of all military academies has produced many of the finest officers to ever serve in the United States military. This piece is a musical portrayal of the dogged determination, the indomitable spirit and the raw courage of the thousands of men and women who have passed through West Point for these past two hundred years. It was premiered by the U.S. Military Academy Band at West point in January 2002, with Lt. Col. David Dietrick conducting.

Westridge Overture HL3777929

This work for early intermediate bands is a wonderful selection for contest or a concert opening.

Wild Blue Yonder HL3778954

Yorkshire Ballad for Band, 2nd Edition HL364890

Yorkshire Ballad has become the most widely performed of all James Barnes' works, selling thousands of copies all over the world. In the last 15 years, he has rescored or approved arrangements of nine other settings of the work for various ensembles: from symphony orchestra to flute ensemble, along with three different versions for solo tuba (for Patrick Sheridan.) Although the piece sounds like a folksong, all musical material in the work is original. Having conducted this work so many times over the years, Barnes decided to complete a revised version to clarify and change a few things in the piece. This revised version simplifies some scoring problems in the original version.

Yuletide Suite HL294830

James Barnes masterfully scores a handful of the most beloved and famous Christmas carols in this short, three-movement suite for young band. Each movement can be performed individually or as a suite. Includes Good King Wenceslas, Greensleeves, Jingle Bells, and The Twelve Days of Christmas, which features some fun interplay between different sections of the band. Movements: 1. Holiday March, 2. Two Carols, 3. Partridge in a Pear Tree.

Zimmerman - Anchors Aweigh..... HL3778899

Arr. James Barnes

The director of the US Naval Academy Band commissioned this new setting for the 100th anniversary celebration of this march. Always a favorite, the official song of the United States Navy has been rescored for modern band instrumentation. Audiences will be delighted to hear the entire march, which would not be complete without its famous trio. An excellent way to honor our Navy heroes.





James Barnes

Composer

Professor Emeritus of Music Composition,
University of Kansas