Cultivating Collaborative Musical Expression in Instrumental Ensemble Rehearsals

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LINK

What does “expressive” really mean?

What does expressive mean?

Nobody has responded yet.

Hang tight! Responses are coming in.

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Why is expression important?

Why is expression important?

- Avoid “Paint-by-Numbers” performances
- Students connect meaning through sound
- Develop students’ musical agency

Creating Interpretations

Interpretation #1

Interpretation #2

Session Overview

- Preparation techniques
- Classroom environment
- Rehearsal strategies
- Student & program outcomes

Preparation to Inform Expressive Interpretation

In your current music preparation process, what do you look for beyond the “nuts and bolts” of what is on the page?

Poll Everywhere

(Previous question)

Preparation to Inform Expressive Interpretation

- Understanding the “nuts and bolts” of what is in the score is only the first step.
- As you prepare, ask yourself, “Why did the composer make this choice?”

Asking “why” reveals the composer’s intent

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Start with what you observe in the score, then ask “why” to imagine beyond the printed page

Ask “why” to imagine beyond the printed page

- Form
    - Why is this phrase length 9 measures instead of the expected 8?
- Harmony
    - Why are there more non-chord tones when the phrase returns?

Ask “why” to imagine beyond the printed page

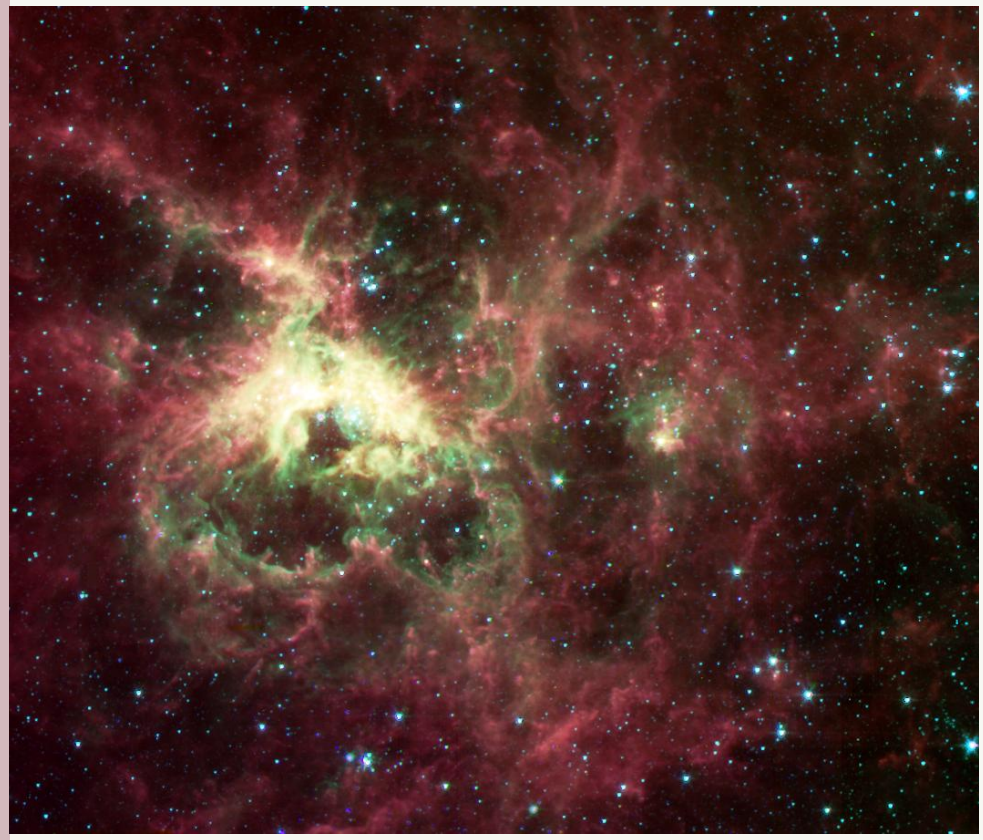
- Articulations
    - Why did the composer include accents in m. 45 but not in m. 2 ?
- Texture
    - Why is this only orchestrated in the woodwinds in these measures?

Ask “why” to imagine beyond the printed page

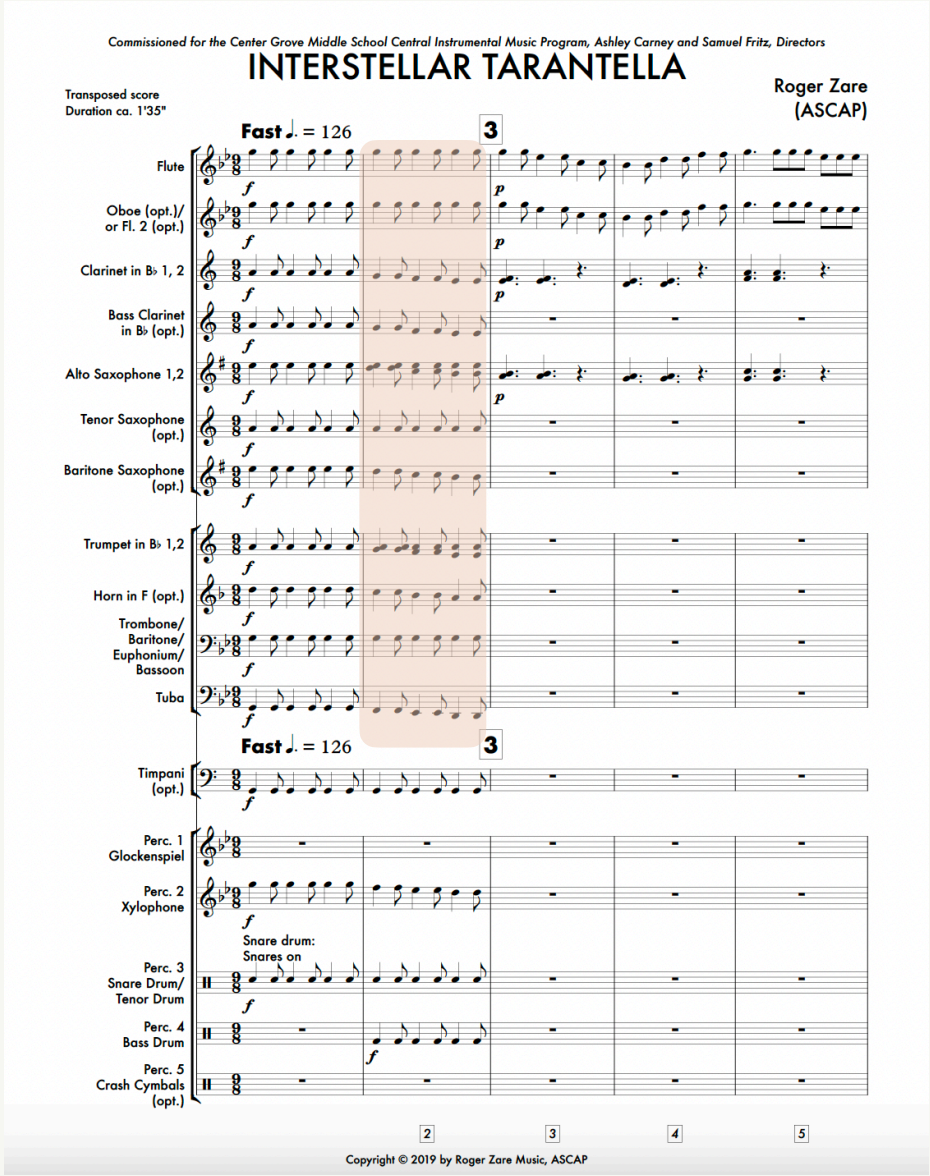
- Expressive Markings
    - Why does the opening section have terraced dynamics?

Interstellar Tarantella

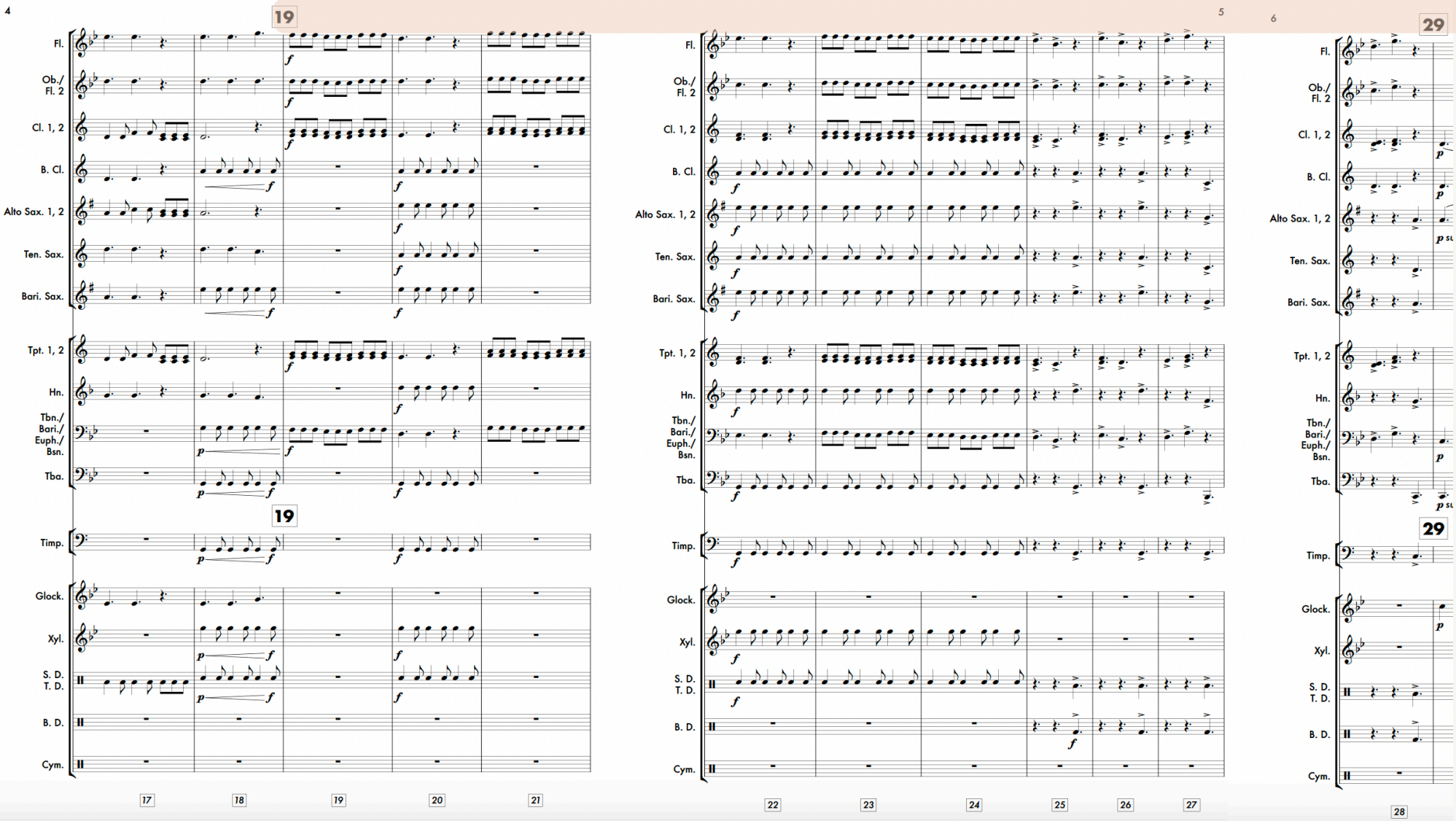
Roger Zare



Why do some voices remain on the same pitch while others descend?



Why is the last phrase of the opening section 10 measures long?


19
Fl.
Ob./ Fl. 2
Cl. 1, 2
B. Cl.
Alto Sax. 1, 2
Ten. Sax.
Bari. Sax.
Tpt. 1, 2
Hn.
Tbn./ Bari./ Euph./ Bsn.
Tba.
19
Timp.
Glock.
Xyl.
S. D. T. D.
B. D.
Cym.
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
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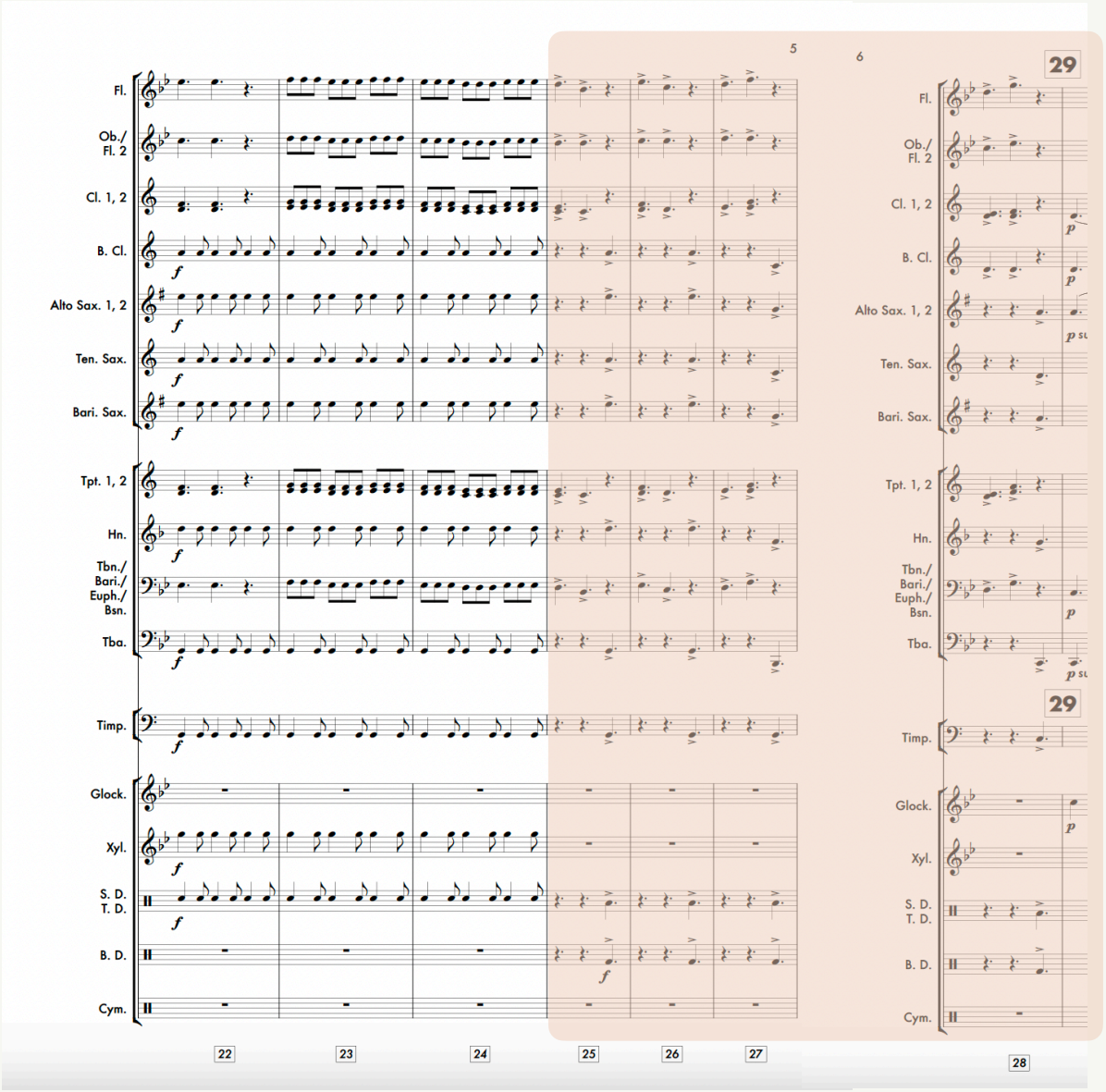
26
27
28
29

Why is this the first time the composer includes accents?



Asking “why” poses meaningful questions through which students will discover musical answers

Divergent Thinking

- Avoid rehearsals based on a singular interpretation
- Promote students' musical agency

Classroom Environment

- Safe environment to nurture expression
- Overcome fear of failure
- Cultivate curiosity and vulnerability

In what ways do you involve your **students** in making **interpretive decisions** in your ensemble rehearsals?

Poll Everywhere

(Previous question)

Rehearsal Strategies

Rehearsal Strategies

- Character
- Text
- Imagery

Character

Character

- Is this music a **song** or a **dance**?
- Sets the context to explore the answers to the "why" questions

Love & Nature

III. Slow Burn

Gala Flagello

Poll Everywhere

Song/Dance slider

Example "why" questions:

- Why are there accents on unexpected beats?
- Why is the motive passed rapidly between different sections of the ensemble?
- Why does the contour of the melody change between statements?
- Why is there a sudden diminuendo before the final cadence?

Character

- Asking “Is this a song or a dance?” helps set musical context
- Fosters connection between style and expression

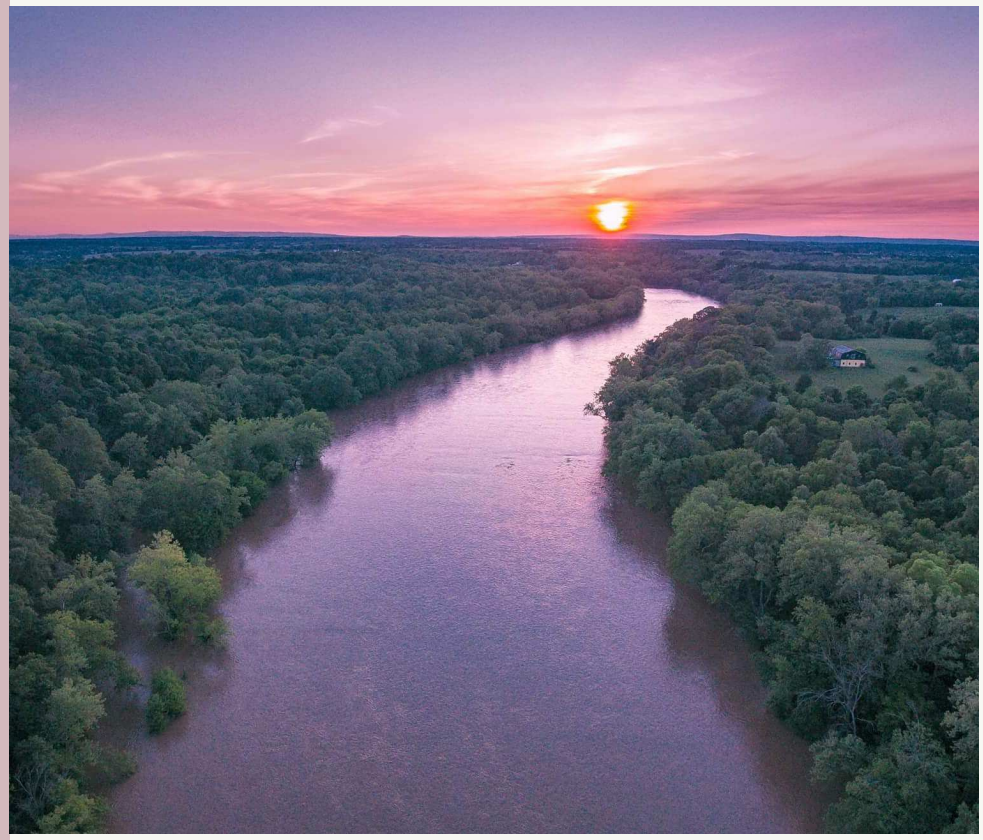
Text

Text

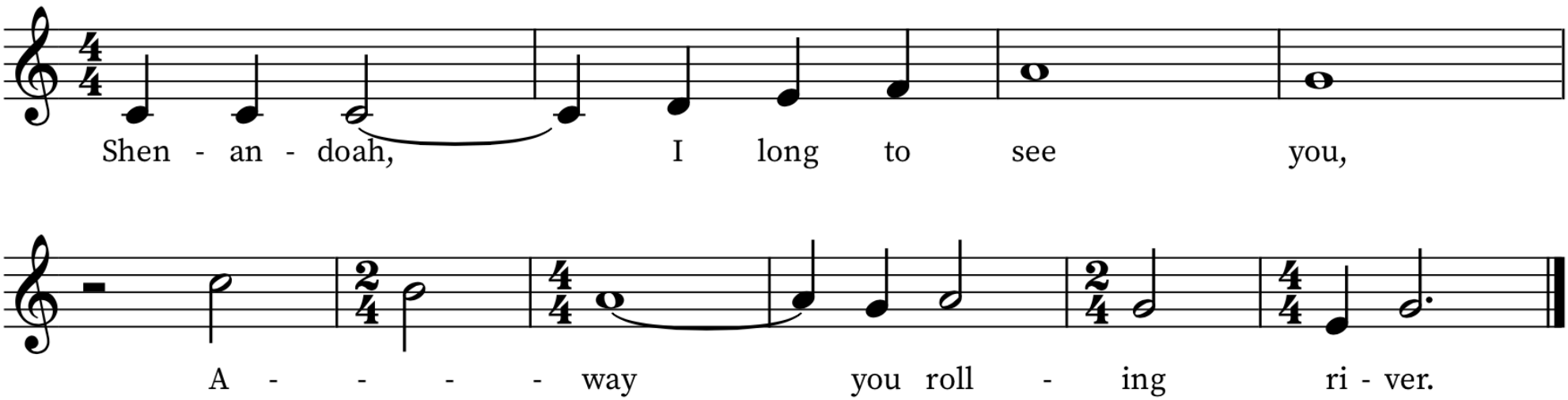
- Folk Songs & Choral Transcriptions
- How can the text provide musical answers to our “why” questions?

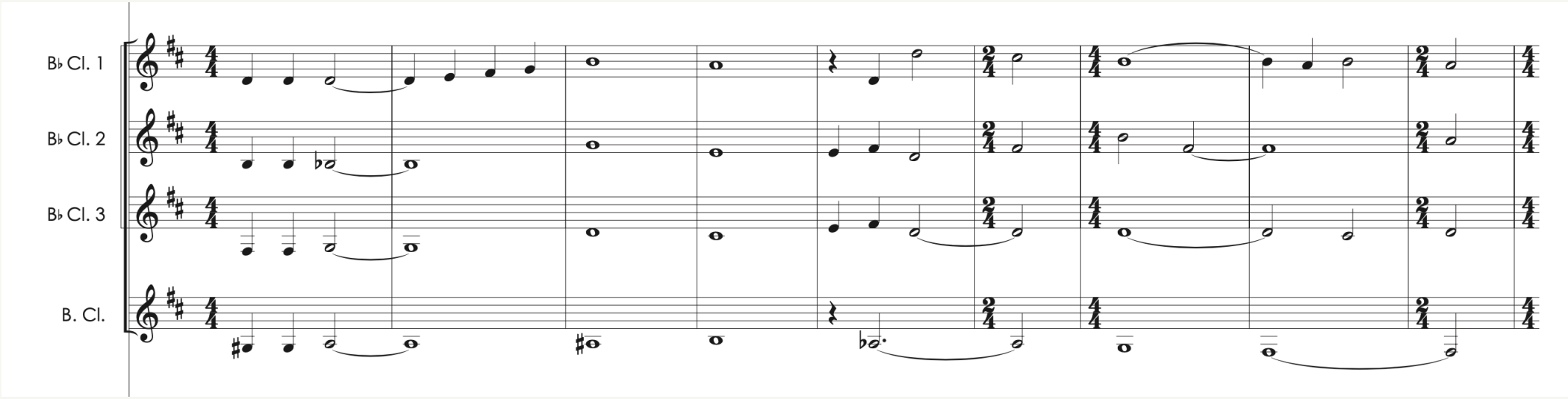
Shenandoah

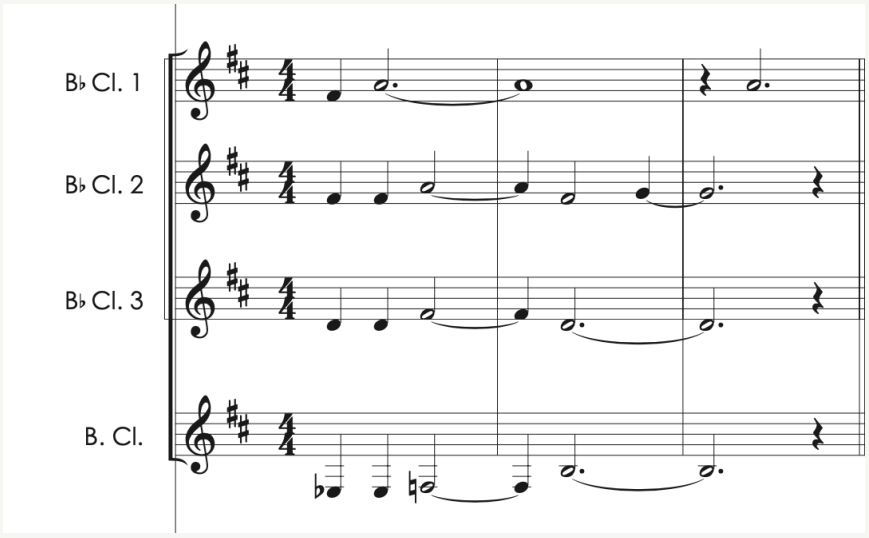
Omar Thomas



Oh Shenandoah,
I long to see you,
Away, you rolling river.
Oh Shenandoah,
I long to see you,
Way, we're bound away
Across the wide Missouri.


Shen - an - doah, I long to see you,
A - - - - way you roll - ing ri - ver.


B♭ Cl. 1
B♭ Cl. 2
B♭ Cl. 3
B. Cl.

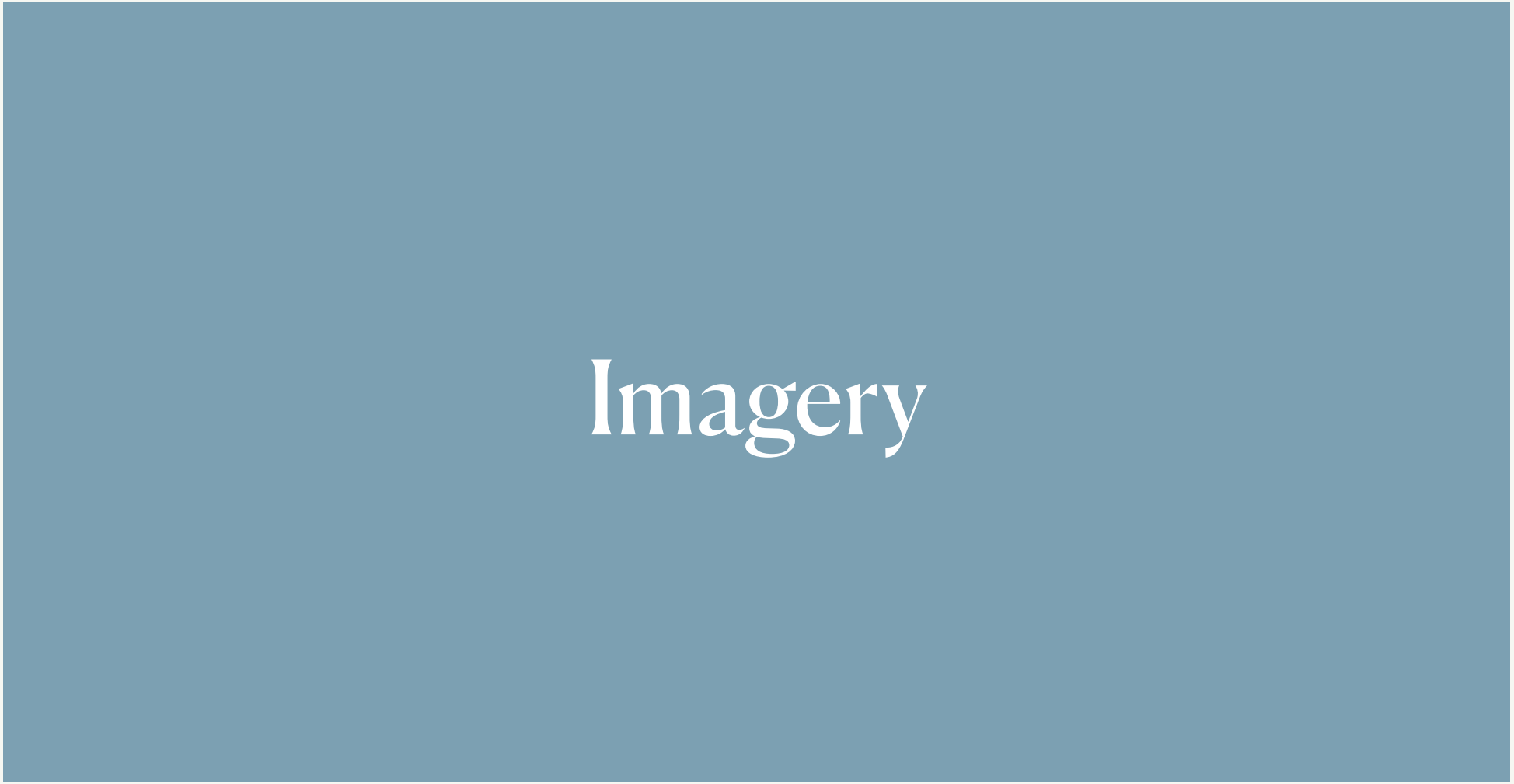

B♭ Cl. 1
B♭ Cl. 2
B♭ Cl. 3
B. Cl.

Example "why" questions:

- Why are there meter changes in the second half of the phrase?
- Why are some notes elongated?
- Why is this phrase played only by the woodwinds?
- Why is the opening phrase marked *mp*?

Text

- Singing and analyzing text deepens interpretation
- Removes technical distractions to focus on expression
- Enhances overall musical understanding


Imagery

Imagery

- Inspired by art or color
- Programmatic works
- How can imagery provide musical answers to our “why” questions?

Parhelion

Roshanne Etezady

Poll Everywhere

Why questions that allow students to connect imagery to interpretation

Example “why” questions:

- Why are the themes passed between different sections?
- Why do the accents align with the suspended cymbal?
- Why are there repeated dynamic swells?

Imagery

Visualizing the composer’s inspiration connects students’ imagination to expressive possibilities

Rehearsal Strategies

- Character
- Text
- Imagery

How do you know if you reached ALL of your students?

Reaching All Students

- Think-Pair-Share
- Collaborate in small groups
- Chamber music
- Sectionals

Check for Understanding

- Formative Assessments
  - Exit slips
  - Journal entries
- Summative Assessments
  - Performances
  - Presentations
  - Podcasts

Outcomes

- Promoting divergent thinking and encouraging curiosity
- Developing students' musical agency
- Lifelong musicianship

Questions?

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