BRASS BAND HISTORY AND IDIOMATIC WRITING IN BRASS MUSIC

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The purpose of this research was to explore historical perspective of brass music. There is a brief history of brass bands in Britain. Furthermore, the paper examines the differences between two brass band pieces in the repertoire, *A Western Fanfare* by Eric Ewazen and *Brass Symphony* by Jan Koetsier. Both of these pieces were compared and contrasted against the author’s newly composed work for brass, *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*. The paper covers different techniques commonly used in brass writing and points these techniques out in all three pieces.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF MUSICAL FIGURES</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PART I: ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1  Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2  Brass Band History</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3  A Western Fanfare</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4  Brass Symphony</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5  Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5  Conclusion</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART II: TWO COMPANION PIECES FOR BRASS</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement I</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement II</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF MUSICAL FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Measure three of Eric Ewazen’s <em>A Western Fanfare</em> showing use of fifths</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Measures 24-25 of Ewazen’s <em>A Western Fanfare</em> showing the melodic movement of fifths and fourths.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Measures 21-22 of <em>A Western Fanfare</em> (Ewazen, 1997), showing the circle of fifths progression.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Measures 34 and 35 of <em>A Western Fanfare</em> showing the “interjecting” Horn I and II.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Measure 19 of Ewazen’s <em>A Western Fanfare</em> demonstrating a rising cascade in the trombone, horn, and trumpet.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Measures 13-15 of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony showing the overlapping motive.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Measures 10-11 of movement II of Koetsier's Brass Symphony showing the five-note pick-up gesture.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Movement III of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony measures 9-10 showing a six-note motive.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Measures 19-20 of the second movement of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Movement I of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony measures 33-35 showing the augmentation of the quarter note line, with intervallic alterations.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Measures 1-2 depicting theme A of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony movement I.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Measures 11 and 12 of <em>Two Companion Pieces</em> Movement II showing the stacked fifths in the ostinato line.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td><em>Two Companion Pieces</em>, Movement I, measures 61-63.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td><em>Two Companion Pieces</em>, Movement II, measure 77-78 depicting the segment of four sixteenth-notes being used as a transition back to A.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Measures 105-107 of <em>Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble</em>, Movement I.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>Measures 102-105 of <em>Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble</em>, Movement II.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>Measure 30 of <em>Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble</em>, movement I showing the various cut off times for the horns and trumpets.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 18: Measures 25-29 of *Two Companion Pieces* Movement II showing the layering of the quarter and eighth note motive. ................................................................. 23

Figure 19: Measures 52-54 from *Two Companion Pieces* showing the first iteration of the ritornello that repeats throughout the entire movement. ................................................. 24

Figure 20: Measures 1-4 of *Two Companion Pieces*, movement I showing various time signatures............................................................................................................. 25

Figure 21: Measures 84-87 of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, movement II depicting changing time signatures, including irregular ones.................................................. 25

Figure 22: An excerpt from the section B melody in *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, movement I with tritones bracketed, measures 50-51................................................................. 26

Figure 23: Measures 54-56 of Movement I of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* depicting the octatonic scale. ............................................................................................ 26

Figure 24: Octatonic scale built on C# .......................................................................................................................... 26
PART I

ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE
Chapter 1

Introduction

*Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* is a new work for brass that integrates various styles and techniques into its framework. Some of these techniques are drawn from traditional tonal harmonies, practices common to brass writing, and contemporary harmonic structures. The composition of this piece provided an opportunity to research the history of brass bands and to examine a selection of works for brass.

Compositions for brass ensembles have only garnered popularity in the last century-and-a-half, and therefore have a smaller overall repertoire in music history. In the past, brass instruments have traditionally been used in both military events and in civilian life, such as the British brass bands of the 19th century and early 20th century.

There are certain idiomatic techniques that are found in many works for brass, many of which can be found in *A Western Fanfare* (1979) by Eric Ewazen and *Symphony for Brass* (1970) by Jan Koetsier. The application of these techniques is evident in my own piece, *Two Companions Pieces for Brass Ensemble* (2012), but there are additional aspects not often seen in brass band repertoire such as quickly changing time signatures.
Chapter 2
Brass Band History

The history of brass bands and ensembles is deeply rooted in England. Brass bands can be traced back to medieval times, when towns would have their own group of musicians, known as waits.¹ These small bands would play in churches, for the military, and at circuses. In addition, they would also serve as watchmen in palaces to sound alarms for daybreak. These positions with royalty were often paid in land and were envied by the wandering minstrels of the time.

This changed when Elizabeth I decreed that the vagabond musicians were rogues and were required to be in service to a specific person and to make that service known. Because of this, musicians began to settle down and form guilds to protect themselves.² Villages began to see their own bands form. These bands had clarinets, ophicleides,³ serpents, and valve-less trumpets and horns.

Any wait that had continued beyond Elizabeth’s reform and the Napoleonic Wars in mainland Europe was completely disintegrated by the Municipal Reform Act of 1835. The end of these waits brought about the formation of brass bands, with reed instruments phased out by the 1830-40s. One of the performance venues for these all-brass bands was playing carols in the streets at Christmas, a tradition that is often still practiced today.⁴

¹ Bainbridge p. 4.
² Bainbridge p. 5.
³ An ophicleides is “a keyed brasswind instrument, the bass member of the family whose soprano is the keyed bugle” Morley-Pegge (1); a serpent is “a lip-energized wind instrument with side holes and a cup-shaped mouthpiece, sometimes called the ‘bass of the cornett family’” Morley-Pegge (2); Newsome, Roots p. 1.
⁴ Tuba Christmas is an annual gathering of euphonium and tuba players that play Christmas tunes during the holiday season. The event has been held for almost thirty years.
Brass bands began thriving with the development of public transportation infrastructure, most notably railways. This allowed for many people to travel further distances in a shorter amount of time for less money. Local bands would visit neighboring cities to play for each other and a great rivalry was born from these meetings.\(^5\) From these small contests with two bands came larger competitions that served as the foundation for an abundant growth period for brass bands in England.

The first of these band competitions may have occurred as early as in 1818 in Sheffield. Of greater historical certainty, bands were involved with other important occasions such as the coronations of King George IV in 1821 and Queen Victoria in 1838. The first recorded competition was at Burton Constable in 1845.\(^6\) Six years later in 1851, the first major brass band competition, which would become known as the Open Brass Championship (hereafter referred to as Belle Vue) was held at Belle Vue in Manchester, England. This competition at Belle Vue would go on to be one of the largest competitions in England for the next 150 years.\(^7\) The other major competition in England is the National Brass Band Championship that are held in London at the Crystal Palace. The first national championship was held in 1900 and continues to this day.\(^8\)

Up until this point, the majority of music written for brass band was a mix of arrangements of opera, orchestral, oratorio selections and whatever the musicians themselves brought with them such as dance tunes (polkas, gallops, and waltzes) and marches.\(^9\) There were two things that brought about the rise of music written specifically for brass bands:

\(^5\) Brainbridge p. 16.  
\(^6\) Gammond p. 13-14.  
\(^7\) Newsome, Roots p. 31.  
\(^8\) Gammond p. 48.  
\(^9\) Gammond p. 45.
commissions for test pieces at competitions and major English composers writing for brass bands.

A test piece was a single piece of music that every band at competitions across the country would play so judges had an equal platform for judging.\textsuperscript{10} Prior to any original test compositions, pieces were drawn from the same pool of arrangements made up from the repertoire of the time. In 1913, John Iles\textsuperscript{11} commissioned Percy Fletcher to compose the first original test piece, titled \textit{Labour and Love}.\textsuperscript{12} This piece, and newly composed test pieces similar to it, would eventually become the “symphonies of the brass band repertoire.”\textsuperscript{13} These works were appealing due to the challenge they presented brass musicians.

While many of the composers of these test pieces are only known in the circles of brass band repertoire, there are a few composers who, through the works they wrote for brass ensembles, helped elevate writing for brass to a new level. Gustav Holst wrote the test piece for the 1928 contest at Belle Vue (\textit{A Moorside Suite}) and Edward Elgar wrote the \textit{Severn Suite} for the same competition in 1930.\textsuperscript{14} Malcolm Arnold could very well be considered the Mozart or Beethoven of the brass band world due to his output of brass works including Little Suites for Brass Band, Fantasy for Brass Band, and Symphony for Brass Instruments.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{10} A first instinct would be to comment how boring that must be to hear the same piece twenty or more times, but brass band competitions were so popular at the time that observers had no problems listening to a work over and over again. Tickets were sold months in advance to these competitions, attendees would buy copies of the test piece so they could follow along, and there were even some people who made bets concerning what band would take home the top prize. Brainbridge p. 32, 50.
\textsuperscript{11} A major name in the world of brass bands. John Iles was the man behind the idea that eventually grew to be the National Brass Band Championship. Gammond p. 77.
\textsuperscript{12} Gammond p. 50.
\textsuperscript{13} Gammond p. 57.
\textsuperscript{14} Gammond p. 51, 69.
\textsuperscript{15} Piers.
Both World Wars put a halt to many competitions in Britain, such that the few bands that remained intact after World War II found hardships in maintaining their existence. A decline in the economy and employment in Britain and a decreasing interest in bands caused the demise of many of the ensembles.\textsuperscript{16} A halt on production of brass instruments during the war and high taxes on these instruments after the war further hindered the progress of bands.\textsuperscript{17}

After the war there were changes in instrumentation, more opportunities for new music, and the number of players was increased.\textsuperscript{18} In addition to this increase, a major change to the brass band during these years was the addition of percussion, even though ceremonial fanfares had been using percussion and brass instruments together for years. These fanfares date back to at least the 18th century and were usually used for celebrations such as coronations or weddings of royalty, holidays, or any other large ceremony. Often these early fanfares would be for trumpets and kettledrums, with more brass instruments added later. During the 20th century some of the major works for brass and percussion included Aaron Copland’s \textit{Fanfare for the Common Man} (1942) and Gunther Schuller’s \textit{Symphony for Brass and Percussion} (1950).\textsuperscript{19}

Despite the already-widespread use of brass and percussion, brass bands usually only had one percussion player. This single percussionist generally played snare drums, bass drums, cymbals, castanets, wood blocks, or whistles.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, if scores had percussion parts at all, it was not allowed in any contest setting. It wasn’t until the 1969 British Open

\textsuperscript{16} Newsome Modern p. 16.
\textsuperscript{17} Newsome Modern p. 61.
\textsuperscript{18} Newsome, Modern p. 65.
\textsuperscript{19} Tarr.
\textsuperscript{20} Newsome, Modern p. 63.
Championship at Belle Vue that percussion instruments were allowed. This was due to the fact that the test piece that year, Spectrum by Gilbert Vinter, included percussion parts. This encouraged other contests to allow percussion, which by 1973 became a requirement for most contests.21

Religion also played a part in the growth of brass bands, the most influential being the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army Organization was founded in 1865, originally called the East London Christian Mission, and later changed to the Salvation Army in 1878.22 The organization chose the name “Salvation Army” because they wanted to be known as an army for God. Many of the Salvation Army’s rules and regulations were demonstrative of this doctrine. In 1878, bands were introduced by Charles Fry, a Wesleyan Methodist choir director and cornet player.23 It was thought that employing musicians in the Salvation Army would attract attention from the general mass, hopefully bringing more people into the fold of Christianity. Fry also chose to incorporate brass bands specifically because the instruments were well suited to outdoor performances, durable and by the 1870s, inexpensive.24 The repertoire played by the Salvation Army included popular songs to further attract people to the cause.25

Another way religion influenced brass bands was through Protestant churches, and Methodist sects in particular,26 which would encourage music in their services, such as singing hymns. This push for music in services spilled over to cultivating the formation of brass bands

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21 Newsome, Modern p. 64.
22 Herbert p. 189.
23 Herbert p. 190.
24 Herbert p. 191.
26 Brass ensembles can be seen today in the Methodist church, especially for special Christmas and Easter services.
in Sunday Schools and missions. Because of the strains of the work week (Monday – Friday plus a half-a-day on Saturday), Sundays were the only chance musicians had to rehearse and give concerts. This caused some concern among conservative Christians, who viewed these performances as working on the Sabbath. Nevertheless, open-air performances in gardens and parks on Sunday afternoons thrived during the Victorian era in Britain; despite the antagonism from those who opposed the “work,” these performances drew thousands to hear the brass bands, even so many as 20,000 at some concerts in Bristol Downs.

Sunday performances were not the only controversy that has surrounded brass bands. Throughout the years, many have thought that putting bands up against each other in competitions might seem inappropriate, especially in relation to the notion that music is first and foremost an art. This disagreement is still prevalent, especially among educators who feel that putting students up against each other, whether it is individually through chair tests, or as a group at marching or concert band competitions, takes away from the heart of performing music for its own sake, and instead puts an undesirable level on the importance of being the “best.”

Brass bands have thrived in the past century and a half due to the rise in prominence of competitions for the ensemble. Because of this, composers have begun to write even more music for the ensemble in the form of symphonies, fanfares, and other works.

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27 Bainbridge p. 16.
28 Bainbridge p. 19.
29 Bainbridge p. 20.
Chapter 3

*A Western Fanfare*

*A Western Fanfare* (1997) by Eric Ewazen (b. 1954) is a short one-movement work written for four trumpets, six horns, three trombones, bass trombone, tuba, and optional percussion. It was written in the spring of 1997 and performed the following summer as a concert opener at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California. The Music Academy commissioned this work for its 50th anniversary, and Ewazen dedicated the piece to the Academy. The piece has become a standard example of brass ensemble writing due to the common techniques it uses in its melodic, harmonic, and motivic style.

The piece makes extensive use of the fifth, in both melody and harmonic progressions. Even within the opening measures of the fanfare, the open fifth of Bb and F sets the stage for the piece’s basis in quintal harmonies. All the instruments have some form of the open fifth of Bb and F in their parts, whether it is the held long notes between the trombone and tuba or the ostinato in the horn and orchestral bells. There are also numerous examples of intervallic fifths (and its inversion, the fourth) being used such as this example of a rising fifths bass line, which contributes to the quintal harmony. In conjunction with this bass line, there are tonal progressions that follow the circle of fifths. This circle of fifths progression helps to move the music forward harmonically and creates a further sense of unity throughout the piece.

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30 There is also an arrangement done by the composer for brass quintet.
31 Ewazen p. 2.
Figure 1: Measure three of Eric Ewazen’s *A Western Fanfare* showing use of fifths.
Another common technique often found in brass ensembles are “interjections,” sudden and unexpected bursts of sound interrupting the main flow of the melody and accompaniment, such as the sixteenth-notes in the following example.
Up until this first instance of the figure, other instruments only play quarter or eighth notes, so the sixteenth-note line played by Horn I and II provide a contrast. It is common for only one or two voices to interject with a divergent figure that opposes the other voices’ long notes or moving melodic lines.

Cascading notes by layering instruments over one another as all ascend or descend in pitch together creates a general feeling of rising or lowering in the music.
Figure 5: Measure 19 of Ewazen’s *A Western Fanfare* demonstrating a rising cascade in the trombone, horn, and trumpet.

These overlying collections of notes allow for a seamless connection that gives the audience a general feeling of lift.

*A Western Fanfare* illustrates many techniques often seen in works for brass instruments, but these aren’t the only idioms for brass ensembles. Koetsier’s *Brass Symphony* demonstrates other common practices in his three movement work for brass ensemble.
Jan Koetsier’s Brass Symphony was commissioned by Phillip Jones and premiered on February 21, 1980. It was first recorded by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble in 1981 and is a staple of brass ensemble literature.\textsuperscript{32} It is scored for four trumpets, horn, four trombones, and tuba.

Koetsier uses three eighth pick-up notes as a motive throughout the first movement of the Brass Symphony and also references this motive in the other movements.

Figure 6: Measures 13-15 of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony showing the overlapping motive.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{koetsier-motive.png}
\caption{Figure 6: Measures 13-15 of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony showing the overlapping motive.}
\end{figure}

This four-note motive occurs throughout the entire piece, including the second bar of the first movement in the second and fourth trumpets and the accompanying trombone line in measures 116 and 118, just to name a few examples. In the second and third movements, the four-note motive has transformed into six notes.

\textsuperscript{32} Koetsier p. 2.
Figure 7: Measures 10-11 of movement II of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony showing the five-note pick-up gesture.

This motive also occurs throughout the third movement.

Figure 8: Movement III of Koetsier’s Brass Symphony measures 9-10 showing a six-note motive.

This pick-up note motive, whether it is in its four-note or six-note form is something that connects the first and third movement together creating a sense of cohesiveness throughout the piece.

Another way Koetsier transforms a section of music is by augmenting the rhythm. A straight quarter note line is introduced in the 1st trumpet part and repeated throughout other instruments near the beginning of the piece.
But later, Koetsier subsequently adds a dot to some of the quarter notes to create a sense of unbalance from what he has already presented to the listener.

This is another way that the composer gives the listener the unexpected. It also provides variation from the previous quarter note to keep the piece from being stagnant.

The form of Koetsier’s first movement is a loose Sonata-Allegro form as evidence by the repeat of the exposition (measures 1-50) and the obvious recapitulation of the following main theme in measure 140.
This segment is transposed many times over the course of the movement to various tonal regions and it isn’t until the Tempo I at measure 140 that it returns in its original form.

Koetsier uses common techniques both in brass writing and general compositional techniques. Many of these methods have stood the test of time and continue to be used in contemporary works.
Chapter 5

Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble

Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble (Kahler, 2013) was written in the fall of 2012 and completed that winter. It is scored for four trumpets, four horns, three trombones, and one tuba. Although each movement can be performed individually, there are threads running between both movements tying them together and creating a cohesive piece. This piece was commissioned by Dr. Guglielmo Manfredi and the WTAMU Brass Choir. I drew inspiration and ideas from various brass works such as Aaron Copland’s Fanfare for the Common Man, Paul Hindemith’s Music for Strings and Brass, and my own work for brass, To the Stars, which was written in 2010. However, the most inspiration came from the two pieces discussed above, A Western Fanfare (Eric Ewazen, 1997) and Brass Symphony (Koetsier, 1979). In this chapter I will compare and contrast aspects of my piece, Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble, with the Ewazen and Koetsier pieces.

Although there is a section in the first movement that is based on the octatonic scale, the harmonic structure of my piece is largely quintal and quartal. Similar in fashion to A Western Fanfare (Ewazen, 1997), I also used the interval of an open fifth throughout both movements of my piece.

Figure 12: Measures 11 and 12 of Two Companion Pieces Movement II showing the stacked fifths in the ostinato line.
This circle of fifths progression helps to move the music forward harmonically and creates a further sense of unity throughout the piece.

Like the interjecting lines in *A Western Fanfare* by Ewazen, *Two Companion Pieces* has a similar figure that functions a different way. Instead of interjecting commentary, the trumpets or horns will completely interrupt the flow of the music.

Figure 13: *Two Companion Pieces*, Movement I, measures 61-63
However, in addition to being an interrupting motive, I take it one step further and use it as a retransition from section B going back to section A in the first movement of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*.

Figure 14: *Two Companion Pieces*, Movement II, measure 77-78 depicting the segment of four sixteenth-notes being used as a transition back to A.
Using this segment in both capacities creates a stronger sense of cohesion throughout the
movement. If this sixteenth note figure had only appeared as in interruption like in measure 62
(Figure 13), it would have not had as much impact.

Cascading is another aforementioned technique previously discussed that I used in both
movements of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*.

Figure 15: Measures 105-107 of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, Movement I.

Figure 16: Measures 102-105 of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, Movement II.
Both of these examples show the use of a descending cascade in each movement. Using this descending cascade in both movements creates a sense of unity between the two. I also use a different style of cascading by having instruments cut off long notes at different times. This aids in creating a feeling of the sound dying away.

Figure 17: Measure 30 of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, movement I showing the various cut off times for the horns and trumpets.
The section A motive of Movement II of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* is introduced slowly by the horns and trumpets (m. 8, 15, and 19). The motive is subsequently repeated over a repetitive bass line, but with less time between each appearance of the motive segment.

Figure 18: Measures 25-29 of *Two Companion Pieces* Movement II showing the layering of the quarter and eighth note motive.

By increasing the frequency of a motive over time, the momentum of the piece is pushed forward in an exciting manner. Jan Koetsier also used this technique in his Brass Symphony as shown in Figure 6 in chapter three.

The ritornello form was chosen to diverge from forms I have used in the past such as a rondo or sonata type form. *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* has an introduction with a growing motive, a ritornello part (shown below), and various melodies with returns of the ritornello interjecting between each melody.
The ritornello part returns two more times throughout the course of the movement at various pitch levels, orchestrations, and rhythmic variations. Koetsier also uses a ritornello, bringing the theme shown in Figure 10 in Movement I of the Brass Symphony back multiple times and at various pitch levels.
While *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, has much in common with Ewazen’s *A Western Fanfare* and Koetsier’s Brass Symphony, there are features in my piece that differ. In *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, time signatures change often, sometimes to irregular meters, so the listener can not easily anticipate the introduction of different instruments.

Figure 20: Measures 1-4 of *Two Companion Pieces*, movement I showing various time signatures.

![Figure 20](image)

Figure 21: Measures 84-87 of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, movement II depicting changing time signatures, including irregular ones.

![Figure 21](image)

This is in direct contrast to Brass Symphony (Koetsier, 1979) and *A Western Fanfare* (Ewazen, 1997), which rarely change meter at all. Ewazen’s work remains exclusively in 4/4 or 3/4 while the Koetsier work is entirely in 4/4 or 6/4.

Harmonically, *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* has much in common with Ewazen’s *A Western Fanfare* and Koetsier’s Brass Symphony, especially in the use of quintal harmonies. However, quintal harmony is not the only harmonic language I use. The B section
of movement I of my piece makes heavy use of the octatonic scale and a melody based off of the tritone.

Figure 22: An excerpt from the section B melody in *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble*, movement I with tritones bracketed, measures 50-51.

The use of the tritone is in sharp contrast to the mostly consonant sounds from the A section of movement I. The sound is expanded on in the sixteenth-note runs first heard in the horns, then trumpets, both built on the octatonic scale.

Figure 23: Measures 54-56 of Movement I of *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* depicting the octatonic scale.

Figure 24: Octatonic scale built on C#

These differing harmonic sounds in the A and B sections of Movement I create a stark duality, indeed, a nearly bipolar effect not seen in the Ewazen or Koetsier pieces.

*Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* blends common techniques found in brass writing with other ideas inspired by works of other instrumentations.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The number of compositions for brass bands, as well as brass ensembles, brass quintets, and other brass chamber ensembles, has increased dramatically and continues to do so into the 21st century. While there are many idiomatic styles in brass writing that have stayed constant over the years, composers are expanding the world of brass band repertoire to include new techniques and ideas both borrowed from other genres and created for the ensemble itself.

Because of this, brass bands and ensembles continue to flourish with competitions still held around the world, and high schools and colleges provide even more opportunities for new music to be written and performed. Works like *A Western Fanfare*, *Brass Symphony*, and *Two Companion Pieces for Brass Ensemble* contribute to the repertoire for the ensemble and will hopefully encourage more ensembles to perform. Brass bands and ensembles have made their mark on music history and will continue to do so in the years to come.


PART II

TWO COMPANION PIECES FOR BRASS
Two Companion Pieces for Brass

No. 1

Transposed Score

Elyse Kahler

Horn I in F

Horn II in F

Horn III in F

Horn IV in F

B♭ Trumpet I

B♭ Trumpet II

B♭ Trumpet III

B♭ Trumpet IV

Trombone I

Trombone II

Trombone III

Tuba

*=70

Players may breathe discreetly whenever necessary.

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Con moto \( \frac{1}{2} = 80 \)

Hn. I

Hn. II

Hn. III

Hn. IV

Tpt. I

Tpt. II

Tpt. III

Tpt. IV

Tbn. I

Tbn. II

Tbn. III

Tba.
Two Companion Pieces for Brass

No. 2

Majestically \( \frac{d}{m} = 72 \)

\( \frac{d}{m} = 116 \)

*Players may breath as necessary
Hn. I
Hn. II
Hn. III
Hn. IV
Tpt. I
Tpt. II
Tpt. III
Tpt. IV
Tbn. I
Tbn. II
Tbn. III
Tba.
Slower $\textit{j} = 88$

Hn. I

Hn. II

Hn. III

Hn. IV

Tpt. I

Tpt. II

Tpt. III

Tpt. IV

Tbn. I

Tbn. II

Tbn. III

Tba.