

Analysis of ***Sketches on a Tudor Psalm***  
— Fisher Tull

I believe that musicians are the products of their environments; and I know the principle applies to my evolution as a composer. While in high school I began experimenting with simple arrangements for our student dance band and (on at least one occasion) for the marching band. While an undergraduate student at the University of North Texas, I wrote dozens of jazz arrangements for the Lab Band plus many commercial arrangements for several of the “big bands” in the Dallas area where I regularly played on weekends. I even made a short arrangement of a Gershwin tune which was used as an encore on a university orchestra concert. When I joined the faculty at Sam Houston State University in 1957 as director of the Jazz Ensemble and the Brass Choir, it seemed natural to compose and arrange music for these groups.



My first “serious” compositions were *Liturgical Symphony* and *Variations on an Advent Hymn*, both based on sacred music. These two works represent a link between my arranging and the emergence of actual composition techniques. *Liturgical Symphony* uses six borrowed tunes with little development (almost a medley in fact) whereas *Variations on an Advent Hymn* consists of a theme with four extensive variation sections.

Encouraged by the acceptance of *Toccata* (the 1970 A.B.A. Ostwald winner) I was motivated to try my hand at another band work in theme-and-variation form similar to *Variations on an Advent Hymn*. I considered using a number of tunes found in the Episcopal Hymnal but always seemed to gravitate to Thomas Tallis’ setting of the second psalm. My reluctance to finalize this choice was caused by the awareness that Ralph Vaughn Williams had used the same material for his “Fantasia” for Double String Orchestra (1910), a work with which I was quite familiar. Nonetheless, against the advice of some of my colleagues, I decided to take the plunge.

After locking away my Vaughn Williams score and record, my first step was to consult Tallis’ original setting which is found in *Musica Diciphina*, Vol. II, pp. 189-199. In this version the melody is in the tenor voice, but otherwise the harmony is essentially the same as the setting in the Episcopal Hymnal (No. 424, second tune). Example 1 shows the first phrase of each version.

Original setting



Hymnal setting



The second phase of the process was to seek out elements in the music that would lend themselves to variation techniques. The most obvious rhythmic characteristic was the uneven measuring of the phrases which prompted the use of multimeter in the variations. Harmonically, Tallis' music was quite consonant and typical of 16th century modal style. Of interest, however, was the juxtaposition of major and minor triads over the same root resulting from the application of *musica ficta* principles at cadential points. This feature gave rise to the harmonic motif used in the introductory measures and in several linking passages throughout *Sketches*:



F min. F maj. 7

The most abundant and promising thematic germs were the melodic fragments that lent themselves so readily to motivic and sequential development. They are identified by number in example 3. The parenthetical notes represent modification of given pitches which were occasionally used.



Choosing appropriate tempi for the two sections is perhaps the fundamental and most perplexing problem to be solved. The allegro tempo initiated at measure 88 is best determined by a comfortable, but not rapid, double tongue rate for the trumpets at measure 110. I find this to fall within the bounds of  $mm.=132-144$ , so my indication on the score is slightly on the slow side.

Conversely, my indication for the opening section,  $mm.= ca. 88$  should be considered on the faster side of a very flexible pace calling for considerable rubato and stretching of the beats as dictated by the conductor's sensitivity. My own preferences are mentioned in several instances that follow.

In conducting the opening 5/4 measures, one must be cognizant of the division into 3+2 or 2+3 and the use of appropriate beat patterns. For example, the first two measures demand 3+2 whereas, in the third measure, the stress requires 2+3. The pattern can usually be discerned by observing the notation and the harmonic rhythm.

The introduction calls for a degree of exaggeration of the dynamic swells. In both statements of the harmonic motif, a clear climax should be reached at the third measure of the passage. Note that the woodwinds receive support by the addition of saxophones plus the muted trumpets which should be brought to the fore in measure 8.

At measure 11, the woodwinds tender a transparent background which should diminish to the softest possible level at measure 12. The alto clarinet is essential to the composite texture;

therefore, if it is not available, the notes must be assigned to a second bass clarinet player. The tessitura of the opening theme for solo saxophone is admittedly not in the most gratifying register; however, it allows for a certain pungent tone quality when played softly but with full support. The subsequent passing of the melody from saxophone to horns, then to oboes and finally to clarinets must be accomplished with smoothness and perception by the entering players. I usually make a slight *rallentando* into the cadence at measure 34.

Whereas the first thematic statement by solo saxophone is taken in fairly strict time, the restatement beginning in measure 41 allows for considerable *rubato* since it is without an underlying rhythmic accompaniment. I stretch the three quarter notes leading into measure 43, then press ahead with the woodwinds in measures 43-44, slowing the pace in measure 45 via a *tenuto* on the third beat, and continue in similar fashion to measure 56 where a pronounced *allargando* is appropriate. At measure 58, the breath should be taken rather quickly. I ask the brass to fade well into the fourth beat of measure 60 to ensure a smooth connection with the woodwinds.

For me, the soaring horn obligato at measure 62 is one of the highlights of this section; but care is required to see that the horn does not overpower the melody in 1st flute, 2nd oboe, 1st clarinet, and tenor saxophone. Again, the woodwinds should fade well into the last beat of measure 64 to achieve an uninterrupted transition. In measures 65-66, I ask the 2nd horn to articulate clearly the syncopated pedal point.

The contrapuntal section for solo woodwinds in measures 72-78 offers a playful contrast to the preceding material and presages the *allegro* development section to follow. A strict pulse at *mm.=88* is appropriate here. Observe that the solo E-flat clarinet is assigned the melody in measures 80-83. Cues appear in the 1st oboe part but, if the E-flat clarinet is lacking, the notes are best taken by the second chair 1st clarinet player. The subtle reference to motif no. 2 by the 2nd and 3rd clarinets in measures 84-85 should emerge clearly.

In the establishment of the *allegro* tempo beginning at measure 88, the timpani should be played *molto staccato* in order to match the effect stated by the tenor drum and timbales. At measure 95 the trombones must be encouraged to imitate the articulation of the percussion with equal weight and attack on both sixteenth notes. I ask for a “tat-tat” as opposed to the jazzier “tah-dat” which one often hears. Also, the bass trombone G-flat in measures 98, 99, and 100 demands a pronounced *marcato* style so that the composite trombone figuration results in this rhythm:



In measures 101 and 103 (and later in 164 and 166) the timpanist should strive to imitate the articulation of the horns from the preceding beat. By judicious dampening, the timpanist can approximate the effect. The tambourine, beginning at measure 111, should be played head up

on a flat surface and struck with a hard mallet. [The only reason for performing this part in this manner is if one player is playing the tambourine and tenor drum (ms. 131) to make the rhythmic imitation of the timbales easier. ed.]



Beginning at measure 111, the long line derived from the retrograde notes of the theme (see example 4) requires careful control as it ascends in pitch and volume to a peak at measure 136. The clarinets should imitate the line very softly and should increase only slightly to measure 199. The addition of the saxophone timbre at measure 199 should be suppressed by asking them to begin as softly as possible. Specific points of crescendo are measures 121, 125, and 128-129. Flutes, oboes, and E-flat clarinet should enter at measure 130 at a volume soft enough to allow a pronounced crescendo at measures 134-135. Woodwinds should stress heavily the quarter notes in measure 136. All of the above must be supported by the punctuations of the brasses which should build to a savage quality by measures 134-138.

At measures 160-161, strongly defined articulations are required from the woodwinds. In order to achieve this, I ask the players to mark their parts:

A similar style is mandatory for measures 172-175.

The imitative brass pyramid on motif number 4 at measures 202-205 necessitates a degree of stress on each beat in order to delineate the asymmetric meter. The concerted climax to this section at measure 206 calls for sustained legato tonguing from the brasses. At measure 210, the "whip" demands a large slapstick constructed from hinged slats. The whip stroke at measure 210 should be played, as marked, at fortissimo but the note in 211 should be reduced to mezzo forte.

Due to the rapid tempo, the grace notes in measure 219 must be played as quickly as possible before the beats. At measure 222 the conductor should use every means at his disposal to bring forth the figure in horns and saxophones. At measure 225, a diminuendo culminating in a piano at measure 226 should be inserted for all brasses. The sustaining pedal is required for the chimes at measures 235-236. Here, the horns must pierce through the mass of sound as must the 1st trombones at measure 238 in order to capture the full dramatic impact prior to the return to the allegro tempo at 239.

I have been asked why I did not notate measure 242 in 6/8 meter with the upper woodwinds playing the characteristic rhythm:

as opposed to the more complex notation in the the score. The answer is seen in the 3rd clarinet and bassoon line which maintains the triple-simple meter; nonetheless, the upper woodwinds should adhere to the agogic stress on the fourth eighth note of the measure. At measures 243-246, the woodblock should be felt only as a support to the accents of the muted horns. On the other hand, the snare drum and whip at measure 251 serve as a springboard for the horns and saxophones which should enter with the utmost authority at measure 252.

The inclusion of the percussion section in a bit of antiphonal interplay at measures 256-260 acknowledges this group as the third “choir” of the wind band. Now, almost a decade later, I would substitute roto-toms for the snare drum, and tom-toms for the tenor drum to produce a more literal imitation of the melodic motif initiated in measure 256. The conductor may feel free to modify the parts as shown in example 5.

The timpanist should, once more, strive for a staccato effect by dampening each tone as quickly as possible at measure 260. At measure 267, care should be given toward achieving equal balance among the solo woodwinds with special attention to the triplet figuration for 2nd flute. The expansion of motif number 2, in trumpets and trombones, at measures 173-237 (and later in 187-290) presents rhythmic problems which are best solved by rehearsing first without the ties.

If one is aware that measures 298-299 represent the ultimate climax of the work, then the material from measure 267 forward is recognized as a gradual ascent to this peak of intensity. The surge in measures 294-296 consisting of octave A's and quickening Phrygian scales serves to create a feeling of anxiety prior to the brass entrance at 297. In order to enhance this, the duration of measure 297 may be greatly lengthened as long as the tension continues to grow. Notice that the trumpets and trombones are held in reserve until measure 299 where they serve to prolong and augment the climactic effect. I must confess to a preference for a more dramatic pace (mm.=ca. 69) at measure 298 followed by a slight pressing ahead at measure 302 with an establishment of the indicated tempo (mm.=88) by measure 306.

In this section, the upper woodwinds should not breathe with the brass lest the continuity of this significant passage be broken. Apart from “sneak breaths” while sustaining the high A's, piccolo, flutes, oboes, 1st and 2nd clarinets should break only after the dotted half note in measure 301. It is especially important to maintain the integrity of the line throughout measure 302 when the brass break for a breath. Bass instruments assigned a whole note followed by a quarter rest should sustain their pitches into the fifth beat of measure 302. The two choirs should again cling to their phrase endings during the antiphonal exchanges in measures 306-309. A slight rallentando in measure 310 preceding the cadence is appropriate but the strict tempo of mm.=88 should be respected at measure 311.

I have had several conductors tell me that they felt the ending of this work was too abrupt. Curiously enough, my original draft of the ending located the final chord one measure sooner but I decided later to delay it by inserting the timpani solo. It should be observed that the final Phrygian cadence of the recapitulation occurs at measure 311, the remaining material serving as cadential prolongation in the form of a coda. Nevertheless, I understand this concern and have no argument with those who slow the tempo at measure 333 (as I do) or even with some who play this measure twice prior to the final chord.

In conclusion, I reassert my respect for all conductors who approach the score with the proper balance of scholarly intellect and musical instinct. In my opinion, there is no such thing as a single, definitive interpretation of any work; there is, rather, an ongoing collaboration between composer and conductor, both seeking a common goal. It is my hope that these comments will encourage this objective.

#### Brief Thematic and Structural Analysis:

##### Introduction (1-10)

1-5 Harmonic motif (brass) followed by motif 2

6-10 Harmonic motif (woodwinds) followed by motif 2

##### Theme (11-87)

12-33 Theme (sax, horns, oboes)

34-40 Harmonic motif followed by motif 2

41-67 Restatement of theme

67-87 Harmonic motif, development of motif 5

##### Development by continuous variations (88-266)

88-100 Ostinato (percussion, trombone)

101-104 Motif 1 (horns, cornets)

111-150 Melody derived from retrograde of theme (see ex. 4)

151-176 Developments of motifs 1, 1a, 2

177-199 Development of motif 6

200-212 Development of motifs 5, 1

243-261 Conclusion of development with harmonic motif and motifs 2, 6

##### Recapitulation and Coda (262-335)

262-268 Harmonic motif (woodwinds), motif 6 (chimes)

269-298 Theme in augmentation followed by motif 2

299-310 Last half of theme (tutti)

311-335 Coda based on motifs 3, 1