Ask Her To Dance

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ASK HER TO DANCE
for Wind Ensemble

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Music and Dance
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
John Casados
December 2010
The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

ASK HER TO DANCE
for Wind Ensemble

by

John Casados

APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DANCE

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2010

Dr. Pablo Furman School of Music and Dance
Dr. Brian Belet School of Music and Dance
Dr. Diana Hollinger School of Music and Dance
ABSTRACT

ASK HER TO DANCE
for Wind Ensemble

by John Casados

Ask Her To Dance is a work for Wind Ensemble. It is composed in three sections and is based upon two themes, one rhythmic and one melodic.

The pitch material of this piece is built from various transpositions of a nine-note synthetic scale. This scale is essentially a major scale with two additional notes: the minor second above the tonic and the tri-tone above the tonic.

The first section of the piece, lasting approximately three minutes, features a rhythmically augmented, and somewhat modified form of the main melodic theme. The second section is the largest of the piece. The music features various “dances” based on the rhythmic and melodic themes. The final section begins about ten minutes into the piece. It features one final “dance” built upon the rhythmic theme.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Pablo Furman. His insight, advice, and encouragement have guided me through the creation of this work, and so many other compositions, during my course of study. His humor and patience, as well as his vast knowledge of the art and craft of composition, have deeply influenced my development as a musician and a composer.

My sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Brian Belet, who has been a constant source of support, knowledge, and motivation. His enthusiasm, encouragement, and instruction were invaluable to my growth as a composer.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Dr. Diana Hollinger for her wonderful insights in composing for Wind Ensemble. This piece could not have been composed without her help.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my family. It is from my father that I gained a love for music. It is from my mother that I gained a love for creativity. It is from my stepfather that I gained a love for higher education. And from my brother I learned to fearlessly devote myself to music.

This piece is dedicated to my wife. It was inspired by her, supported by her, and composed for her. She is my muse, my friend, my partner, my other half.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Her To Dance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INSTRUMENTATION

Piccolo
2 Flutes
Oboe
English Horn
4 Clarinets in B-flat
Bass Clarinet in B-Flat
Bassoon
Contrabassoon
2 Alto Saxophones
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in B-flat
3 Trombones
Euphonium
Tuba

Timpani

Percussion (9 Players)
1. Snare Drum
2. Bass Drum
3. Temple Blocks
4. Tom-Toms
5. Crotales, Suspended Cymbal
6. Tubular Bells
7. Glockenspiel
8. Marimba
9. Vibraphone

Piano
Ask Her To Dance is a piece for Wind Ensemble. It is written for a highly skilled ensemble with a large rhythm section. It is composed in three large sections, and features two prominent themes. One theme is primarily rhythmic, while the other is melodic. The pitch material throughout the piece is made up of notes derived from various transpositions of a nine-note synthetic scale. The duration of the piece is intended to be approximately 15 minutes.

The Rhythmic Theme and the Melodic Theme appear in all three sections of this piece and are designed to work together while maintaining clear, separate identities. At times, other melodies appear, especially in the second and third sections. However, these other melodies merely follow the rhythms of the Rhythmic Theme and are not designed to exhibit a strongly distinct personality separate from the Rhythmic Theme.

The Rhythmic Theme can be heard quite clearly in measure 77, played by the Timpani and Bass Drum. It is made up of a cycle of four patterns consisting of quarter notes and dotted quarter notes. Pattern 1 is dotted quarter, dotted quarter, quarter, dotted quarter. Pattern 2 is dotted quarter, dotted quarter, dotted quarter, quarter. Pattern 3 is dotted quarter, quarter, dotted quarter, dotted quarter. Pattern 4 is quarter, dotted quarter, dotted quarter, dotted quarter, dotted quarter. When subdivided into eight notes, these four patterns become 3+3+2+3, 3+3+3+2, 3+2+3+3, 2+3+3+3, respectively. Another way to consider the four patterns is in groups of five and six eighth notes. Thus, Pattern 1 is 6+5. Pattern 2 is 6+5. Pattern 3 is 5+6. Pattern 4 is 5+6. Viewed this way, the Rhythmic Theme is a
palindrome with the following pattern: 6, 5, 6, 5, 6, 5, 6. While the palindromic nature of the Rhythm Theme is not intended to be directly perceived by the audience, it is intended to give the Theme an internal logic.

There is a total number of 44 eighth notes in the Rhythmic Theme, however much of the time throughout the piece, this cycle of patterns is followed by an additional four eighth notes (two quarter notes). This further extends the palindrome as the Rhythmic Theme is repeated and brings the total number of eighth notes to 48, producing 6 measures in 4/4.

The Melodic Theme can be heard quite clearly in measure 83. It is made up of a rhythmic pattern totaling 44 quarter notes. The Melodic Theme consists of a melody made up of 5 groups of 7 quarter notes (always in a 3+4 pattern), followed by a group of 9 quarter notes (2+3+4). The Melodic Theme and the Rhythmic Theme are designed to be rhythmically distinct but consistent enough that they can match up easily.

The pitch content and harmonic palette of the entire piece is derived from a nine note synthetic scale that was initially created by combining the B Major and D-Flat Major scales. This combination essentially produces a major scale with two added tones: the minor second and a tri-tone above the tonic, respectively. The pitch material in most sections of the piece has been chosen from this scale or a transposition of it. With every transposition of this nine note synthetic scale, three notes from the 12 chromatic pitches are not heard. They are the minor third, the minor sixth, and the minor seventh above the tonic, respectively. These 3 missing tones appear occasionally throughout the piece to provide harmonic contrast (see, for example measures 129 to 131).
The first section of the piece begins with a short introduction made up of a suspended cymbal roll and then a blast of rhythms at fortissimo from much of the ensemble. This rhythmic blast is an alteration of the Rhythmic Theme and is heard a number of times later in the piece (most notably at measure 336). Immediately following the introduction, the contrabassoon begins a statement of the Melodic Theme. Here, the theme is rhythmically augmented and slightly altered. The contrabassoon is eventually joined by the tuba and low wind and brass instruments as the Melodic Theme is restated a number of times, always rhythmically augmented or altered. The other instruments in the ensemble play pitch material derived from the Melodic Theme, with quite a bit of alteration, abbreviation, and added ornamentation. As the opening section progresses, the Melodic Theme is heard more and more clearly, but a complete and unaltered version is not ever heard. The Rhythmic Theme can be heard in the opening, beginning at measure 3. Like the Melodic Theme, it is rhythmically augmented.

The opening section begins to wrap up starting at measure 53 with a brief section designed to evoke solemnity and majesty. It is the moment “she is asked to dance.” It is preceded by another rhythmic burst (as heard in the second measure), and it leads us to the second section. The material here is briefly foreshadowed beginning in measure 45.

The second section begins at measure 77 and continues to measure 318. This is a section of “dances.” It opens with a statement of the Rhythmic Theme, and soon the Melodic Theme is introduced as well. As the two themes are restated, more and more instruments are added to create forward momentum. At measure 108 the idea of building forward momentum by adding instruments to the texture is continued with material that
foreshadows music that will appear at measure 215. Measure 113 features trumpet calls that were heard in the first section starting at measure 47, and will be heard again in the third section at measures 458, 465, and 478.

The first “dance” appears at measure 121. The harmonic material is derived from the synthetic scale transposed to A-flat. At measure 129, there is another brief rhythmic burst similar to the ones from measure 2 and measure 52, overlapping with a brief moment of harmonic contrast that continues in measures 130 and 131. The harmony here is made up of the three “missing tones” created by the synthetic scale based on G-flat. Those tones are D, E, and A. The “dance” continues at measure 131, with the harmonic material derived from the synthetic scale transposed to E-flat. Another rhythmic burst appears at measure 138, and another moment of harmonic contrast occurs, this time beginning on the “missing tones” of D, E, and A, and then shifting to the tones B, G-flat, and D-flat. The “dance” continues again at measure 141, this time with harmonic material derived from the synthetic scale transposed to E. The rhythmic bursts at measures 150 and 152 signal the end of the section, and a new “dance” begins at measure 153.

The music at measure 153 features an ostinato texture created by the piano, vibraphone, and marimba. The ostinato texture is further expanded with the crotales, tubular bells, and glockenspiel, playing a pattern that foreshadows the music starting at measure 215. The Melodic Theme appears in the winds at measure 154, and is developed with additional material as the section continues. At measure 175 a new rhythm appears in the timpani, creating a transition to the next “dance.”
The next “dance” begins as melody appears at measure 179 that follows the patterns of the Rhythmic Theme. There is a brief moment of harmonic contrast at measures 185 and 186 that is similar in harmony to the music beginning in measure 138, and then the melody continues. The English horn, the saxophones, and the marimba play an accompaniment pattern beginning in measure 187 that is similar to the rhythmic bursts already heard throughout the piece. This “dance” continues to evolve melodically while growing in orchestration until most of the winds and brass are playing starting at measure 238. The sections ends at measure 251, and at measure 252 there is another ostinato texture similar to the music starting at measure 153.

In this final “dance” of the second section, the Melodic Theme is juxtaposed with music similar to the melody developed in the previous “dance.” The ostinato texture created by the piano, vibraphone, and marimba is further expanded with a reoccurring figure in the temple blocks. At measure 282, the ostinato texture changes and is strengthened by the addition of the flutes, oboe, English horn, and two clarinets. In measure 292, the trumpets play the Melodic Theme, while the saxophones join with a rhythmic pattern similar to what they played beginning in measure 187. The section ends at measure 300, as the ensemble begins a short transition section that ushers in the final section of the piece.

At measure 318 the Rhythmic Motive returns to begin the third and final section of the piece. Measure 324 features music evocative of the first “dance” that began in measure 121, and measure 336 begins a short section of the rhythmic blasts that have been heard throughout the piece. At measure 343 the Rhythmic Motive begins again, and
the Melodic Motive joins at measure 349. As the music progresses more and more
instruments are added to create forward momentum, while the two themes are restated
numerous times until measure 385.

Measure 386 begins the final push to the end of the piece. The Rhythmic Theme
is repeated as an ostinato for most of the rest of the piece, and melodic material is
introduced at measure 398 that leads us into the final section. At measure 422, many of
the winds and the low brass play a melody based on the Rhythmic Theme. This melody
continues to develop to the end of the piece. Elements heard in the first section of the
piece (the trumpet calls from measures 47 to 51, and measures 113 to 115) combine with
elements similar to the first “dance” to interrupt the Rhythmic Theme and the developing
melody. At measure 499, the entire ensemble takes up the Rhythmic Theme in a
climactic final statement that carries the piece to its conclusion.

Ask Her To Dance is a contemporary work for Wind Ensemble. It shifts in focus
from material based on the melodic theme in the first section, to material based on the
rhythmic theme in the final section. The two themes share a number of “dances” in the
middle section. The themes can be thought of as a pair in a relationship. Both themes are
fundamentally different, but are able to function quite nicely together. This piece is
intended as an example of how opposites not only attract one another, but that they
compliment and complete one another as well.
Ask Her To Dance
for Wind Ensemble

Joie Casados

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horns in F 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Horns in F 1, 2</td>
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<td>Bari. Sax.</td>
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<td>Alto Sax.</td>
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</tbody>
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