

Bold Steps

By Matt Conaway

Bold Steps is another excellent composition by Matt Conaway. In the opening measures, Matt presents the modal theme of this new work for Beginning Band. An expert educator for beginning groups, he lays the groundwork for this exciting young band composition using each set of instrumental voices married with a simple yet interesting percussion part that will definitely hold your section's attention throughout. The piece will draw the students in, and keep them interested from the first bar to the last. This is the type of piece that is well worth your time and your band will love it.

General Notes

- This piece is geared toward the halfway point of beginning band. (We use the Standard of Excellence band method published by Kjos, and this is in alignment with page 24 of book one)
- The E-natural concert pitch throughout is critical – let the students know ahead of time (or better yet, ask them to figure this out) that there are no Eb's in the entire piece.
- This is a loud piece, but ask the band to keep a lid on its volume and tone! In our groups, after the students make an inappropriately loud sound, I ask things like “Would you pay to go to a concert and expect to hear a sound like that?” or “If I played a sound like that when I was in beginning band, my band director would have thrown my horn out the window!” (And NO, Mr. Gross would NEVER have done that, but it gets the point across, doesn't it? J)
- The bells part throughout is an etude on repetition. When you get right down to it, this part is basically a snare part on tonal instruments. This is very deliberate – I've found that most of our percussionists at this level are scared to death of mallets. A part like this is easy to understand, just about as rhythmically intense as the snare part, and provides a good confidence boost to those who play the part. If you have a mallet player who wants a challenge, give them a reduction of the flute and clarinet parts from 12-21 (clarinet in the left hand, flute in the right hand)!

Specific Sections

mm. 1-13

Make sure the quarter notes in m. 2 are separated, but not staccato.

Please connect measure 11 to 12... no breath!

In measures 12-13 (and onward), slightly accent the quarter notes and ensure they are played somewhat legato. The 8th notes should be lightly tongued.

mm. 14-21

The melody in the brass and saxes should be fairly smooth. This is a great first opportunity for simple melodic phrasing and contouring.

Initially, your flutes and clarinets may not see the minimalist pattern change in measure 19 – as a preparatory exercise, you may ask them to inspect their music and tell you when something finally changes.

mm. 22-27

Pay particular attention to the accent pattern in measure 27. Try asking the students to remove the middle two 8th notes and just play the accented notes. This often helps the dynamic difference between an accented and non-accented note.

mm. 28-35

Our trombonists get a little lazy moving from 4th to 6th position when they know that 1st position is coming soon! Ask them to stop on the C and check the tuning before letting them go back to Bb.

Check to make sure the clarinets and flutes see their minimalist pattern change at measure 35.

mm. 36-end

Nothing really new here – I would just suggest a slight crescendo on the last measure.

If your kids are at all like mine, they love playing music that is fast and loud. The trumpets in particular really dig having the melody the whole time. My goal in writing this piece was to provide an exciting first-year piece that was a bit darker than the normal stuff, but at the same time give an opportunity to learn restraint and good tone at the louder levels. I hope you find this piece to be helpful as your students develop into outstanding band musicians!



Matt Conaway is the Director of Bands for the West Lafayette Community School Corporation in West Lafayette, Indiana. Originally from Woodhaven, Michigan, Conaway completed his undergraduate degree at Indiana University-Bloomington, earning his Bachelor of Music Education-Teaching Area degree with distinction. Following graduation, he served as the Graduate Assistant Director with the Purdue University Bands. In that capacity, he served as an assistant with the "All-American" Marching Band and the concert bands. In addition, he served as a director of the "Gold and Black Sound" women's basketball pep band.

Conaway is currently on the board of directors for the Indiana University Alumni Band and was recently elected to the state board of the Indiana State School Music Association. He is a member of MENC, Indiana Bandmasters Association, Indiana Music Educators Association and Tau Beta Sigma. Matt is also active with the Lafayette Citizens Band and Lafayette Civic Theatre. He has over 150 arrangements and compositions to his credit, including works for the Bloomington "Pops" Orchestra, Indiana University, Purdue athletic bands and several high school and university ensembles in the Midwest.