

Mulberry March

Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr.

Program Notes

About the creation of this piece the composer states, "The Mulberry March was named for the small Indiana town of Mulberry where my wife and I lived with our children for about 10 years. On one sunny June morning I woke up with a tune in my head that would not go away. That afternoon I took my 6th grade daughter, Jessica, to her weekly trumpet lesson and took a pad of music paper with me. I sketched out the song that was rolling around in my head and, after the lesson, hurried home to orchestrate it and get it ready to try with our summer beginning band. Our band performed it later that summer at its first concert and I was very proud of both the band's performance and that Jessica and her twin brother, Chris, were able to play on that first performance together."

Performance Notes

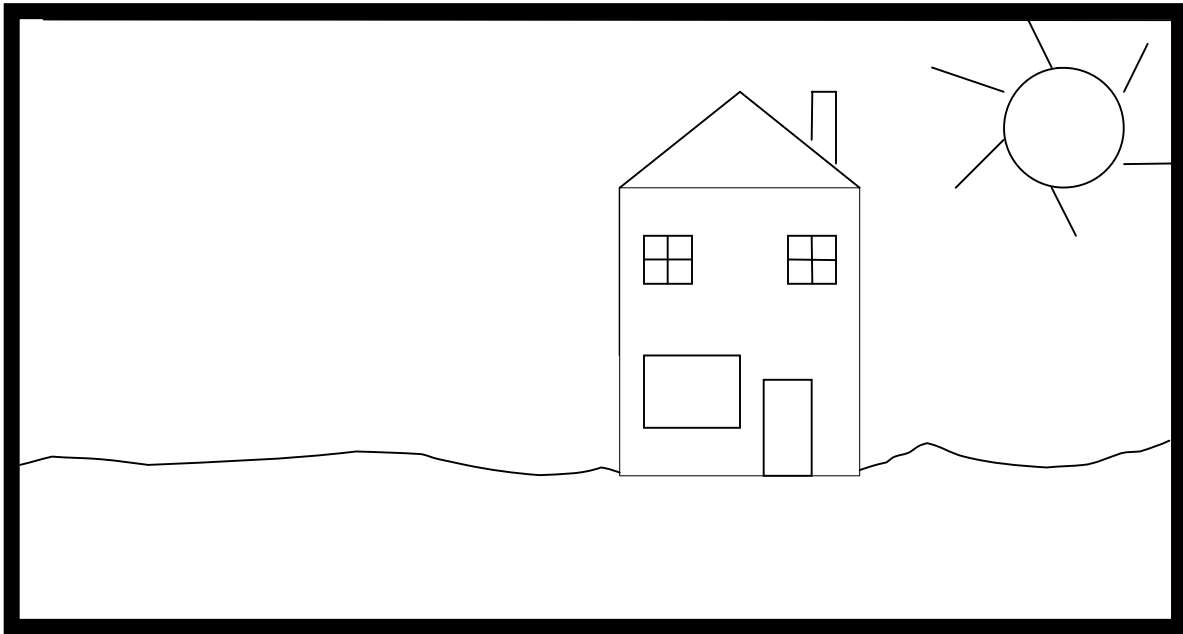
The Mulberry March has proven to be a very fine beginning march for young players. It is an excellent teaching piece for reinforcing beginning pitches, simple 1/8th note rhythms, ties, dynamic contrasts and musical balance. The piece is written around a rhythmic motif that is presented with contrasting melodic treatments and orchestrations. The percussion parts are supportive and colorful.

The non-pitched parts play an integral role in the structure of the piece and are more than simple "boom-chick" accompaniments. Please note that the snare drum part uses buzzed 1/8th notes instead of traditional 16th note rolls. This reinforces in beginning percussionists the foundations of playing good snare drum rolls which are using a buzz or bounce played in a steady rhythm. The tambourine/suspended cymbal parts have been included on the bell part as either an introduction to multiple percussion playing or as an opportunity for weaker players to use colorful but unusual parts while keeping their place in the music by following the bell part. Conductors should feel free to add additional mallet instruments if they are available.

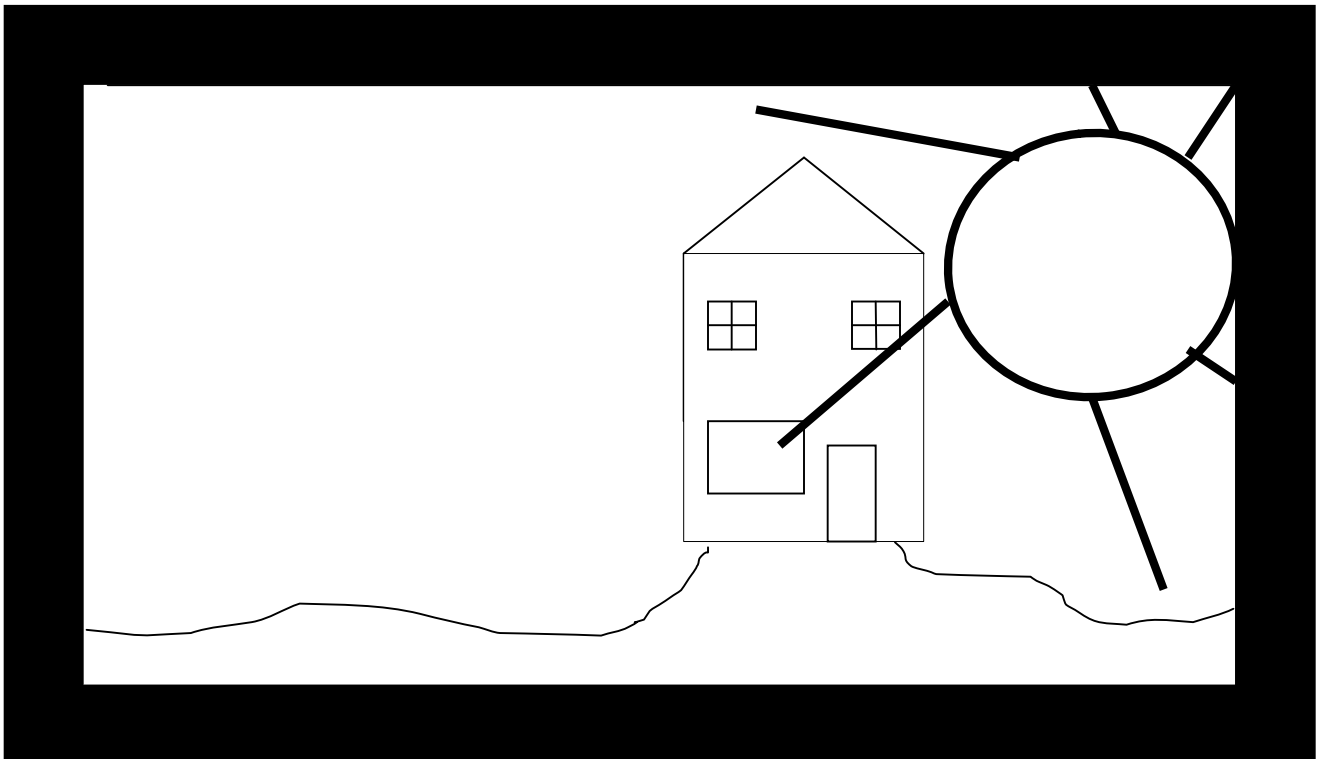
Ideas on Presenting the Concept of Balance

Every player can be aware of their role in the balance of the Mulberry March as melody, bass line, harmony or support color. When presenting this piece, I often use a drawing of my Mulberry home to demonstrate the concept of balance in music performance. At measure 9 I want the music to sound like this picture, with each part of the drawing representing the instruments in the band.

The ground is the bass line. The melody instruments are the house: trumpets are the walls, flutes/oboes are the windows and doors and the bells are the chimney. The harmony parts, clarinets, saxophones and horns are the sun. The non-tuned percussion make up the picture frame, as they hold all of the other parts together.



If one element is too weak or too strong I draw another picture showing how strange the picture looks if the elements are not in proper balance. In the following picture the percussion is too loud, the bass line too weak, the harmony parts outweigh the melody and the bells forgot to play:



I compare the section at 17 to a slice of pumpkin pie with candy sprinkles on top. The bass line represents the crust, the filling is made up of saxophones and horns on the melody, the tambourine/cymbal parts are the plate holding the slice and the remaining instruments are the candy sprinkles.

The students have a lot of fun with this activity and it helps them learn a rather abstract concept by comparing it to something they can all understand. I encourage teachers to be creative and come up with analogies that might make more sense to their students.

Thank you for working on this piece. I hope it improves the quality of your band and is fun for your players and audience.



Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr. lives in Lafayette, Indiana with his wife Kim and four children. He is a band director in the Lafayette (IN) School Corporation where he currently directs the concert and jazz bands at Tecumseh Middle School and is an assistant director at Jefferson High School. During his 20+ years as a public school teacher he has taught instrumental music at every level from elementary band and orchestra through teaching applied percussion at Purdue University. Jeff holds degrees from Butler University and Northwestern University where he studied band arranging with John P. Paynter, Don Owens and Don Casey. In addition to a busy teaching schedule he is active as a freelance percussionist with many regional jazz and concert groups. He is an experienced adjudicator/clinician/arranger for concert, jazz, marching and percussion ensembles and is a member of the Central States Judges Association. He can be seen (briefly!) as the band director in the Paramount Pictures movie “Blue Chips” with Shaquille O’Neal and Nick Nolte.