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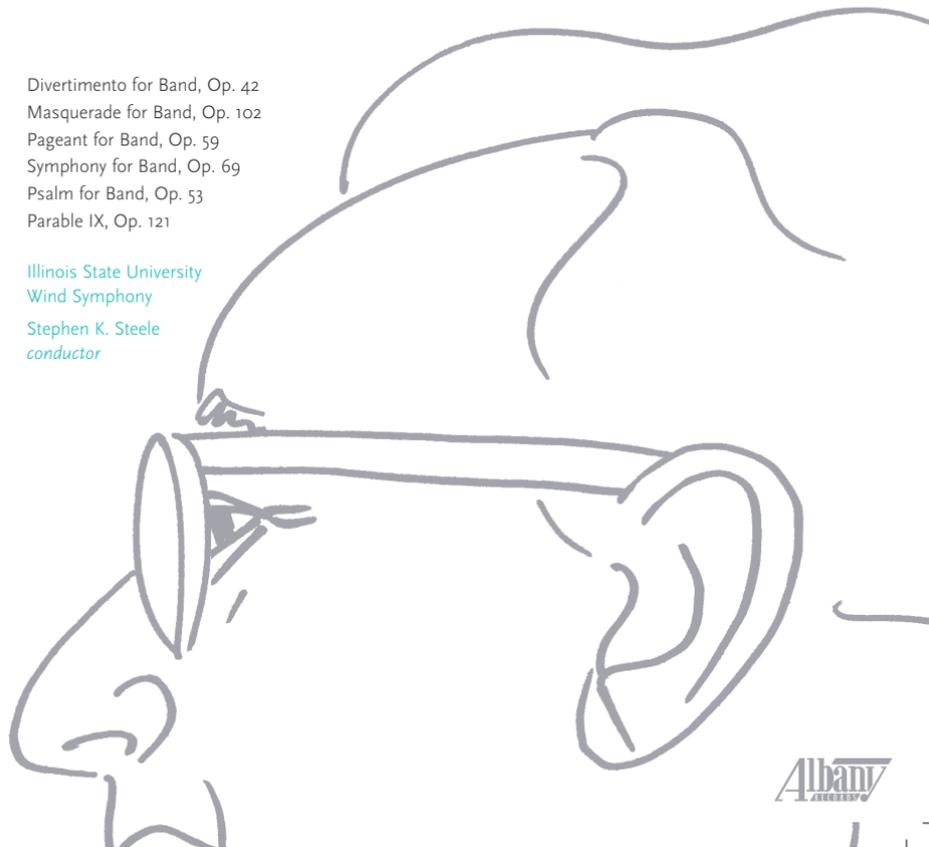
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VINCENT PERSICHETTI **WORKS FOR BAND**

Divertimento for Band, Op. 42
Masquerade for Band, Op. 102
Pageant for Band, Op. 59
Symphony for Band, Op. 69
Psalm for Band, Op. 53
Parable IX, Op. 121

Illinois State University
Wind Symphony
Stephen K. Steele
conductor



Vincent Ludwig Persichetti (1915-1987) spent his entire life in Philadelphia.



From a young age he demonstrated exceptional interest and talent in music, and while his voracious musical appetite led him to explore many musical outlets, piano was the instrument that was to become his primary vehicle of performance. It was a piano scholarship to the Curtis Institute which opened up both professional and personal opportunities, as the opportunity to study with Olga Samaroff was surpassed only by the fortuitous circumstance of having to share the scholarship, at first putting a small dent in his ego, with a young woman from Kansas who would eventually become his wife and muse, Dorothea Flanagan. While keeping an active schedule as a performer on both piano and organ, he constantly honed his compositional craft and had developed a sizable catalog of work by 1947 when William Schuman asked him to join the faculty at The Juilliard School, a position he held through the end of his life. He developed an innovative "Literature and Materials of Music" curriculum that integrated the teaching of theory with composition, history and performance. These materials eventually led to the 1961 publication of his book *Twentieth Century Harmony; Creative Aspects and Practice*, which is still widely used. In addition to his teaching and compositional activities, he traveled extensively throughout the United States to perform, lecture, teach and conduct, and also served as an editor for Elkan-Vogel Publications. In an apt summation of his musical language, the *New York Times* obituary on his death from lung cancer in 1987 read: "Although the composer modestly insisted that there were only two main strains in his work — one graceful and the other gritty — his musical imagination was in fact multifaceted and highly virtuosic."

Eclectic: this one word could describe the music and personality of Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987), within whose 166 published works one can find contributions to an enormously varied range of media, including orchestral, piano, choral, voice, chamber ensembles and solo pieces. Of these works 12-14 (depending on how "band" is defined) are for the wind band; they represent the full range of Persichetti's compositional career from the Opus 1 *Serenade No. 1 for Ten Wind Instruments* written by the 14-year-old composer to the Opus 160 *Chorale Prelude: O God Unseen*, written just a few years before his death.

Persichetti was a musical omnivore. The fact that a composer of his stature and prominence wrote so many works for wind band was not a result of a unique devotion, as he still wrote more works for piano, orchestra and choral media, but simply because he was inherently attracted to the medium. However, he was still mindful of the fact that many wind band conductors and performers actively sought new music and relationships with the people who wrote it. Throughout his speeches, writings and lectures he extolled the importance of celebrating each media on its own merit, often using examples like, "When I write for the string quartet I do not miss the clarinet," when asked about writing for the string-less large instrumental ensemble represented by the works on this recording. In another response to such an inquiry he responded:

"Stylistic differences probably do not exist between band and orchestra any more than string quartets and sonatas. In any case I have never made a point of unity for any one particular medium. I get musical ideas and use the medium in which these ideas occur."

The works on this recording represent a wide variety of lengths, forms and difficulty levels and yet certain compositional consistencies can be found throughout. Persichetti himself as well as subsequent scholars have declined to place his output into distinct periods, partially because after he emerged from a self-described "dark period" of approximately ten years following the Opus 1 *Serenade No. 1* for ten winds and the Opus 2 *Serenade No. 2* for piano his compositional voice was to a large extent fully formed. While many of his later works tended to be more difficult, the essential rhythmic, harmonic and rhythmic language is consistent throughout his oeuvre. The differences between easier works like the *Divertimento*, *Pageant*, and the quite difficult *Parable IX* are in technical demands and harmonic density rather than the basic musical language. Throughout his works, Persichetti's melodic language frequently consists of short motives that gradually develop and expand over time, usually containing rapid accelerations. This rhythmic vitality combines with a consistent *grazioso* to create, in the composer's own description of his music, the "graceful and gritty."

Divertimento for Band, Op. 42

Persichetti's first work for full band is among the most frequently performed of his entire output. This is probably due to the fact that it contains an extraordinary range of styles, emotions and performance opportunities, making it an exceptionally good way to access the composer's musical language.

Persichetti described the genesis of this piece as follows:

"I'd been composing in a log cabin schoolhouse in El Dorado, Kansas, (the hometown of his wife – ed.) during the summer of 1949: working with some lovely woodwind figures, accentuated by choirs of aggressive brasses and percussion beating. I soon realized the strings weren't going to enter, and my *Divertimento* began to take shape."

Besides the quaint image this evokes, it emphasizes his self-professed independence of intent; he claimed he wrote pieces that then aligned with commissions, not that commissions drove him to write works for prescribed media.

The six movements of the piece can be thought of as two trios: the sequence of Prologue-Song-Dance followed by the Burlesque-Soliloquy-March creates two smaller arches supporting the overall structure of the piece. Within this framework Persichetti displays a sense of musical rhetoric that takes the listener and performer on a fascinating journey. *Divertimento* is also notable in its orchestrational combinations and colors. While beautiful solos are given to the usual suspects of flute, clarinet and trumpet, there are also exposed and lyrical opportunities for the tuba, woodblock and virtually every section of the band.

Divertimento was written at about the same time as another work, *King Lear*, which was being written for the Martha Graham dance company and the resulting comparisons are intriguing. Even when the music of the "Song" or "Soliloquy" becomes pensive or the textures of the "Burlesque" and "March" become weightier there is never a point when the music stops dancing. Line, direction and flow can always be felt and the serious intent of the music is not to be confused with music that takes itself too seriously.

Masquerade for Band, Op. 102

When commissioned by the Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music to write a piece for band, chorus, orchestra or string quartet, Persichetti chose to write for band. His only piece for band using the variation form, *Masquerade* uses several themes in a way that creates a continuous form rather than a series of discrete episodes. The listener unaware of the intent of the piece may not even be aware that this is a variation form because of its continuity when compared to other traditional theme and variation examples.

Masquerade epitomizes the craftsmanship of Persichetti's compositional process. Sketches include extensive examples of the composer's working method, demonstrating the re-working and editing of his materials until satisfied with the result. One of the most interesting aspects of this piece is its well-known derivation from some of the themes he used to write his 1960 text *Twentieth-Century Harmony*. The cover of the score is a reproduction of some of Persichetti's sketches, containing the example numbers from the book that he utilized in the piece, and it has been noted that this may be the first piece of music to be based on examples for a harmony text rather than the other way around. While this is interesting and may stimulate detective work (prompting the reason for its title), it is noteworthy that even musical examples designed exclusively for pedagogical purposes stirred his creativity and resulted in a substantial piece of music for the band. Regardless, *Masquerade* is the work of a mature composer working at the height of his powers.

Pageant for Band, Op. 59

Along with *Divertimento*, *Pageant* is among Persichetti's most frequently performed compositions because of its accessible length, difficulty and technical demands. The introduction is Haydn-esque in both its concision and introduction of thematic materials that are heard throughout the rest of the piece. The opening horn motive is at once one of the most familiar and terrifyingly exposed introductions in the wind band repertoire, containing the motivic cell that is frequently found throughout the rest of the piece. *Pageant* typifies Persichetti's predilection for the use of short, burst-like statements that propel the musical energy forward in the faster second section. Also notable is the composer's expanding

use of the percussion section as a generator and sustainer of thematic material, a role significantly beyond other wind band repertoire of its day.

Symphony for Band (Symphony No. 6), Op. 69

The *Symphony for Band*, like the *Divertimento* that preceded it by six years, did not initially start out as a piece for band. Also like *Masquerade*, it was written for a commission, this one from Washington University in St. Louis, but not for a specific type of ensemble. Originally intended to be a work of approximately eight minutes, the material took on a life of its own and the composer realized that eight minutes was not going to contain all of his ideas. He subsequently requested and received an extension of both the time and commission allotments.

The resulting four-movement work has become one of the cornerstones of the wind band repertoire, containing the musical dimensions to put it in this echelon and having a place among the first symphonies for band written by an established and significant American composer. The introduction of the first movement continues the pattern begun in the three earlier works (*Divertimento*, *Psalm* and *Pageant*) of placing integral and musically sophisticated material in the percussion section. The call for instruments such as sizzle cymbal was proof enough that this was a composer determined to expand the timbral palette of the wind band; he would not be constrained by the traditional time-beating and sound effects roles of percussionists. While unexceptional by today's standards, the percussion demands of Persichetti's music needs to be viewed as an important step in the development of band repertoire in its own right and as part of the growing utilization of percussion.

The second movement, famously based on the composer's own hymn "Round Me Falls the Night," is a work of such beauty and power that it has become available as a separately published work and performable as a stand-alone piece. This and the "Pastorale Nocturne" from Ingolf Dahl's *Sinfonietta* of just a few years later demonstrate the ability of the band to be profoundly expressive in original material, not just in transcriptions of orchestral or organ repertoire.

The third movement "Allegretto" has a lilting dance feel that alternates with a more stilted 2/4 section, creating a juxtaposition that ends as abruptly as it begins before the fourth movement brings forth a parade of themes and motives that, while pausing briefly to recall the opening theme of the first movement, culminates in the ultimate chord for a composer willing to freely borrow materials from wherever he could: one containing each note of the chromatic scale.

Psalm for Band, Op. 53

From its inception *Psalm for Band* has been among the more idiosyncratic wind band works in Persichetti's catalog. Like any new work, the piece had both critics and fans after its premiere — Richard Franko Goldman among the former and Frederick Fennell the latter. Revealing both the author and recipient's interest in instrumentation and orchestration issues of the band, the following excerpt from a letter from Fennell to Persichetti about the *Psalm* discusses the composer's importance to the relatively new world of band music:

"...This is mostly because we have not had enough years of experience with the contra clarinet as of yet, and those who play bass clarinet too frequently play the instrument with an incredible lack of breath support which affects, of course, both the quality and the pitch. But unless you, as composer, continue to expose the problem, this solution will be delayed just that much longer. Your scoring for the first twelve bars of PSALM (*sic*) most likely did more to bring both the instrumentation and support matter to a head for many players and conductors than any similar group of bars in our time."

Another orchestrational issue of the *Psalm* is the relatively choral approach to scoring, even when compared to the *Divertimento* and *Pageant*, the band works that bookend it in Persichetti's publications. While there are examples of section soli, there are no individual solos to speak of as there are in his other wind band works. The vast majority of the scoring utilizes groups of like instruments, creating definite contrasting juxtapositions in the piece.

Parable IX, Op. 121

In a 1974 commencement address Persichetti said the following:

"I sometimes write pieces called Parables. People who write program notes always want to know the story. They are like the annotators who ask you what your Symphony "means" and ask you to "analyze" it.

'Music is an extraordinarily parabolic art because its essence lies just far enough beneath the human consciousness that produces verbal speech to be immune from misunderstanding. When music is good nobody knows what it means, but everyone knows that it means something.

'A parable is a misstated story that avoids a truth in order to tell it. Parables are always "again" even when they're new, but they are never "was" or old.

'The past must be constantly broken, torn limb from limb and forgotten, except in true parable. Continuancy gives lifeblood to any new art. We are afraid of the future because we hate the past, even when we take refuge in it. But we preserve rather than conserve and construct with an eye to the monumental. Monuments we don't need. Remembrance of the continuing contemporaneity of life, we do need."

Persichetti's twenty-five parables are interesting and worthy of examination as a genre. Nineteen are for solo instruments, four are for chamber ensembles and none are for the same instrument or combination of instruments. In addition to the band parable, the only other large ensemble parable is his one-act opera *The Sibyl: A Parable of Chicken Little*. While many of his works were assigned conventional titles such as symphony, sonata, serenade and chorale prelude, he also wrote a number of pieces with literary references such as poem and parable. Persichetti was an avid reader, particularly of poetry, and his extensive catalog for voice and choir attests to the fact that he had enormous affinity for the works of poets such as Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens and Walt Whitman. This, then, can be an important interpretive key to understanding the parables; the working out of the piece is like the storytellers' ability to spin out an elongated tale from simple core material.

In this case, the *Parable for Band* utilizes a method that, while not strictly serial, incorporates pitch material from a few limited sources. This was another aspect of Persichetti's parables, no matter the medium: a (usually difficult and sophisticated) piece was constructed using a very limited amount of basic material, and it was almost as if the composer challenged himself to write as complex a piece based on as simple material as possible. Though a one-movement work, Persichetti divided the piece into five sections:

- I Declamation – EH cadenza – lyric chrom[aticism] – low horns
 - II Scherzo - clarinet 2nds and chirps – canon to 12 soli – repeated as flute hold
 - III Lyric chorale – canon and chirps- chimes to trumpets
 - IV Drive (repeat F-sharps) – 3-part canon (clarinet octaves) to brass snags
 - V Oboe and saxophone cadenza – unison clarinet to lyric chromatic tutti – chorale declamation – lyric tutti – repeated high E-flats
- Coda CP [contrapuntal?] tutti to close

While this is unquestionably Persichetti's most difficult and challenging work for band, he wrote on the inside cover sheet of the short score (which was not published) that "If the band contains solo instrumentalists who do not play meaningfully, the conductor may transpose and substitute parts, if he does so, on his own time and graciously." It is interesting that he recognized the challenges of performing the piece while acknowledging the realities of some situations where well-intentioned and earnest musicians might want to tackle the piece yet lack the full resources to do so. While an effective and powerful close to this recording, the piece leaves the listener with the overwhelming impression of a composer providing the wind band with a work of extraordinary technical effect and musical power.

—Andrew Mast

(Information for these program notes was derived from the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Music Division, and Donald Morris' excellent 1991 dissertation *The Life of Vincent Persichetti, With Emphasis On His Works For Band*.)

Wind Symphony

The Illinois State University Wind Symphony is the premier performing ensemble on campus, performing representative works in all styles from classical to avante garde. It has been a featured performing ensemble at the American Bandmasters Association Convention, the Illinois Music Educators Association Conference and the College Band Directors National Association National Convention in 1992 and 2001. Recently, the Illinois State University Wind Symphony presented a performance/clinic with Karel Husa at the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic demonstrating and performing his wind compositions. The Wind Symphony tours annually and has released eight compact discs through Albany Records.

Stephen K. Steele has been the Director of Bands at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois since the fall of 1987. He is responsible for the administration of all band activities. In addition to his conducting and administrative responsibilities, Dr. Steele also teaches undergraduate and graduate conducting, wind literature, and music education courses.

Under his direction, the Illinois State University Wind Symphony has performed for state and national conventions, including the 1990 Illinois Music Educators Association Convention, American Bandmasters Association Convention, the 1993 and 2001 College Band Directors National Association Conference, and the 2005 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic. Recordings of Dr. Steele conducting the Illinois State University Wind Symphony can be found on the Albany record label. Under Dr. Steele's direction, the Illinois State University Bands have traveled and performed in England and Ireland. The marching band has performed for many prestigious events including the 1998 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Before moving to Illinois in the fall of 1987, Professor Steele was the Marching Band Director and Assistant Director of Bands at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Prior to his responsibilities at the University of Arizona he spent thirteen years as a high school band director in California, Oregon, and Arizona.

Dr. Steele serves as a clinician, adjudicator, and guest conductor in Canada and through out the United States and is a member of the American Bandmasters Association, National Band Association, College Band Directors National Association, American School Band Directors Association, Illinois Music Educators Association, Music Educators National Association, Phi Mu Alpha, Pi Kappa Lambda, and holds honorary memberships in Kappa Kappa Psi and Tau Beta Sigma.

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VINCENT PERSICHELLI Illinois State University Wind Symphony Stephen K. Steele, *conductor***Divertimento for Band, Op. 42**

- 1 Prologue [1:26]
- 2 Song [2:19]
- 3 Dance [1:03]
- 4 Burlesque [1:50]
- 5 Soliloquy [2:56]
- 6 March [2:01]
- 7 **Masquerade for Band, Op. 102** [11:02]

- 8 **Pageant for Band, Op. 59** [7:48]

Symphony for Band (Symphony No. 6), Op. 69

- 9 Adagio, Allegro [5:25]
- 10 Allegretto [3:39]
- 11 Allegretto [2:36]
- 12 Vivace [4:03]
- 13 **Psalm for Band, Op. 53** [7:45]
- 14 **Parable IX, Op. 121** [16:06]

Total Time = 70:09



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