



A LOOK AT FRANK TICHELI'S

Nitro

BY
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Nitro is one of the newest band works from the prolific pen of Frank Ticheli. This short, brilliant work was commissioned by the Northshore Concert Band and conductor Mallory Thompson. The score contains extensive, and highly revealing, performance notes that will be of considerable help to conductors preparing this composition for performance.

According to the notes included in the score, the composer was inspired by his contemplation of the enormous importance to the universe of the element of nitrogen (chemical symbol N₂). Ticheli was fascinated by this element's "life-giving, energizing, healing, cleansing, explosive" characteristics, and in his composition makes reference to the natural world, the human world and perhaps to the nature of creation itself. The work opens with a 'sound cloud' of articulated triplets in the woodwinds (called "chattering" by the composer) that form the background to the primary theme played by horns and trombones. [See Example 1: Primary Theme, bars 3–6 (horns and trombones)]

Nitro, an energy-charged three-minute fanfare for band, was commissioned by the Northshore Concert Band, Mallory Thompson, music director, in celebration of their 50th anniversary season, and received its premiere performance by them on April 9th, 2006.

Nitrogen is the most abundant component of the Earth's atmosphere (78 per cent by volume), and is present in the tissues of every living thing. It is the fifth most abundant element in the universe, created by the fusion deep within stars; it has recently been detected in interstellar space. The sheer prevalence of nitrogen in all of nature, and the infinite range of compounds it is part of — life-giving, energizing, healing, cleansing, explosive — all appealed to me, and served as the inspiration for my music.

The main musical idea for Nitro is a powerful, angular theme, first announced by the trombones and horns, and then imitated in the trumpets. Trumpet fanfare calls and a busy and relentless chattering in the woodwinds enhance the bright, festive mood.

The middle section is based on a woodwind theme that is partly fanfare-like, partly dance-like. This contrasting theme is built from intervals occurring in the natural overtone series (octave and twelfth), giving it an expansive, open-air quality. The main theme reappears, growing in power and density all the while, building to a thunderous conclusion.

Frank Ticheli, preface to Nitro

unexpected constituents allow Blackshaw to introduce graphic notation, draw attention to timbre, balance and listening, and encourage dynamic sensitivity. The score contains an extensive prelude that explains the composer's concept of the piece and offers suggestions for its realization. The composer has developed a pedagogical package called "Know your stuff" that is intended to assist with the teaching of all the elements of this piece, and is available as a free download from the Manhattan Beach Music web site.

Whirlwind is constructed as a series of contrasted events. A pedal "A" drone through much of the piece establishes a tonal anchor, and, when combined with the work's four melodic pitches,

Whirlwind is an unusual and intriguing addition to the young band repertoire. While it provides excellent learning opportunities, this composition reaches well beyond pedagogy. The events flow smoothly one into the next and the blending of continuity and contrast offers a convincing musical experience.

establishes an A minor tonality. The first event, A, and the last event, I, are entitled Soundscape, are freely notated and involve only the "home-made" instruments. The pulsating, eerie sound of the "whirlies", played by four percussionists, is an obvious evocation of the title, and the waterglass chimes and rattles suggest rain. The score is only an approximation of what might result. The composer encourages experimentation so that no two performances would sound the same.

At the B event the melody is introduced as a solo accompanied only by the whirlies [See Example 1, solo melody, prior page]



