8-19-2024

Melding of Traditions: African American Cultural and Learned Style Topics in the Music of Roger Dickerson

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in

Conducting

School of Music

University of South Carolina

2024

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to Roger Dickerson for his many contributions to the world through performance, education, and his musical works of art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My musical journey is possible due to the love and support from countless teachers, friends, colleagues, and family. First, thank you Dr. Cormac Cannon for your mentorship and guidance during my doctoral degree. Your wise instruction over the last three years has made me a better musician, educator, and conductor. I would also like to thank the other members of my document committee: Dr. Quintus F. Wrighten, Jr., Dr. J. Daniel Jenkins, and Dr. Birgitta Johnson for your time and bringing your valuable expertise to this project. A special thanks to Dr. Jay Jacobs for granting me many creative opportunities with the Carolina Band and for your support during my doctoral degree.

My musical growth is due to the dedication of numerous music educators. I must thank my trumpet teachers: Robert Nagel, Steven Trinkle, Adel Sanchez, Susan Rider, and Edmund Cord for investing in my development and for inspiring me to strive for excellence. Thank you to Dr. Scott Weiss for your conducting instruction at Indiana University and the University of South Carolina.

This project would not be possible without the support and help from Roger Dickerson. Thank you, Mr. Dickerson, for welcoming me into your home for an interview and graciously providing important documents for this project. I appreciate Southern Music Publishing Company Inc. for granting me gratis permission to use Roger Dickerson's musical scores in this document. I would also like to thank Dr. Ana Dubnjakovic for your assistance and encouragement throughout this project.

I am fortunate to have several family members who have supported and encouraged me over the years. A special thanks to my sister, Feleighta, whose passion for

music inspired me to begin studying music. Most importantly, thank you to my parents, Gertie Green and Kenneth Green, Sr. for your support my entire life. My success is due to your prayers, sacrifice, and unconditional love.

ABSTRACT

Roger Dickerson, born in 1934, is an African American composer, educator, and pianist from New Orleans. His compositions include multiple works for band, orchestra, voice, choir, chamber ensembles, and solo instruments. Dickerson, a two-time Pulitzer Prize nominated composer, published only one work for wind band, *Essay for Band* in 1958. Unfortunately, this work was rarely performed in its first sixty years, and it is not known by many band directors. In recent years, there has been a movement to program music by composers from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. *Essay for Band* has benefited from this movement which also seeks to elevate the past contributions African American composers have made to the wind band repertoire.

Although Dickerson is an award-winning composer, his compositions have not received much scholarly attention. To better contextualize Roger Dickerson's compositional output, this study will explore the musical styles of Roger Dickerson by examining *Essay for Band* and two of his orchestral works using topic theory. Roger Dickerson's life experience and perspective as an African American composer is worthy of examination. This document will present an oral history of Roger Dickerson's experience living in segregated New Orleans, the individuals who contributed to his development as a musician, his philosophy on music, and his work as a music educator to inspire and cultivate emerging composers.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCAP ..... American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers

HBCU ..... Historical Black Colleges and Universities

M ..... Measure

MM ..... Measures

NOCCA ..... New Orleans Center for Creative Arts

NORD ..... New Orleans Recreation Department

OCT ..... Octatonic

PBS ..... Public Broadcasting Service

USAREUR ..... United States Army Europe

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Roger Dickerson (b.1934) is an African American composer, educator, and pianist from New Orleans, Louisiana. He has composed works for band, orchestra, voice, choir, chamber ensembles, and solo instruments. Dickerson is a two-time Pulitzer Prize nominated composer and he earned two Fulbright Scholarships to study composition in Vienna, Austria. His body of work, like New Orleans, is a melding of traditions from Africa and Europe which combine to make something unique.

Many of the early compositions of Roger Dickerson are contrapuntal and emulate the style of German classical composers. After returning to New Orleans from Europe in 1962, he began to meld the African American music traditions within Western European Classical forms. This study examines how his decision to compose music from his African American heritage transformed his compositional style and voice. Topic theory is used to show his transformation from mostly learned style works to compositions that include African American cultural music topics.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Although Roger Dickerson is an award-winning composer, there has not been substantial scholarly research on his many compositions. The purpose of this document is to present more information about the life of Roger Dickerson, *Essay for Band*, and two of his compositions influenced by African American musical traditions.

Dickerson's experiences as a musician and composer are detailed in a brief biography and my two-hour interview with the composer. This oral history gives insight into his experiences growing up in the segregated South, his musical training, his views on music, and the accomplishments of his composition students. This study provides a full theoretical analysis of *Essay for Band*, his only published work for wind band. This detailed analysis provides conductors and musicians knowledge to inform their performance.

When he returned to New Orleans from Europe in 1962, he wanted his compositions to reflect his cultural heritage. *A Musical Service for Louis* and *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone,* composed after he returned to New Orleans, integrates African American musical influences within Western European Classical forms. This study uses Horace Maxile's African American cultural topics to identify elements from African American musical traditions in Dickerson's music.

1.2 DELIMITATIONS

Roger Dickerson composed music for band, orchestra, choir, voice, and chamber ensembles. My research only examines musical topics in *Essay for Band, A Musical Service for Louis*, and *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone*. *Essay for Band* was composed during his early compositional period, before he lived in Europe. Like most of the compositions in this period, *Essay for Band* is contrapuntal and in the learned style. After he returned from Europe, he composed *A Musical Service for Louis* and *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone.* These works are influenced by the music of New Orleans and African American musical traditions.

1.3 NEED FOR THE STUDY

Terence Blanchard, a multiple Grammy Award winner and Academy Award nominated film composer, is a mentee and former student of Roger Dickerson. Blanchard composed several films scores for Spike Lee movies, and he was the first African American composer to have an opera, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2019), staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City in 2021. *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and *Champion* (2013), his second opera staged at the Metropolitan Opera in 2023, both won the Grammy for Best Opera Recording in 2023 and 2024 respectively.

Blanchard, in an interview about the impact Roger Dickerson had on is life said, "The problem with being a classical composer and an African American is that you don't get to have your music played as much as everybody else."[1] *Essay for Band*, composed in 1958**,** was rarely performed in its first sixty years and not known by many band directors. In recent years, there has been a movement to program music by composers from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. *Essay for Band* has benefited from this movement which also seeks to elevate the past contributions African American composers have made to the wind band repertoire.

In the five years preceding this study, *Essay for Band* was performed more frequently by leading collegiate ensembles such as The Ohio State University Symphonic Band, University of Texas Wind Ensemble, Florida State University Wind Ensemble, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music Wind Symphony, University of Illinois Wind Symphony, and the University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble. Now that

[1] Lue Palmer, "The Life and Times of Roger Dickerson, Composer and Teacher," *Verite News*, August 8, 2023. https://veritenews.org/2023/08/08/the-life-and-times-of-roger-dickerson-composer-and-teacher/.

performances of *Essay for Band* are more common, there is a need to provide conductors with a complete formal analysis of the work to inform their performance, as well as knowledge about Roger Dickerson, and introduce them to his later works which are steeped in the musical traditions of New Orleans and African American culture.

Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone and *A Musical Service for Louis* are works that embody Dickerson's African American heritage. However, these works have not received scholarly research or formal theoretical analyses. By exploring these two compositions and *Essay for Band*, conductors are provided a broader understanding of Roger Dickerson's compositional output.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many biographical sources available regarding the life, musical career, and compositions of Roger Dickerson. Lucius Wyatt provides biographical information about Dickerson in the *New Grove Online* and *Black Music Research Newsletter*. These resources provide important life events and dates of his compositions. Alice Tishler's book, *Fifteen Black American Composers: A Bibliography of Their Works,* includes a bibliography of works by Dickerson. Each composition by Dickerson includes the instrumentation, duration, dedication, publisher, premiere date, and ensemble or performers who premiered each work.

James Hinton produced an hour-long documentary in 1977 titled *New Orleans Concerto,* named after his Pulitzer Prize-nominated composition. This documentary explores the life and musical process of Dickerson. Hinton interviews the composer, his parents, wife, and friends. He also gives insight into his performance and compositional approaches as he prepared for the premiere of his concerto. The documentary gives the viewer a valuable look into his world and the environment that created his love for music.

Hallema Sharif, a former student of Roger Dickerson, interviewed him for an online series on November 5, 2020. The interview was entitled *The New Orleans Music Legend Series: A Conversation with Composer/Pianist, Roger Dickerson.* This one-hour interview encompasses his entire life as a musician. He discusses his early life in New Orleans, his teachers, his students, his meetings with Paul Hindemith, and his views on composing.

Roger Dickerson's most recent media interview with Lue Palmer was published on August 8, 2023 by *Verite News*. The article, "The Life and Times of Roger Dickerson, Composer and Teacher," gives a brief biography of his life and major works. Lue Palmer also interviews Terence Blanchard, a former student of Dickerson, a few months after he won his first Best Opera Recording Grammy for *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. In the article, Blanchard expresses the major impact Dickerson had on him and his music throughout his career.

Compositions by Roger Dickerson have received minimal scholarly attention. Myron Moss gives the most substantial scholarly writing about *Essay for Band*. He provides a brief history about the composer and a concise overview of the piece in his dissertation, "Concert Band Music by African-American Composers: 1927–1998."

Leonard G. Ratner proposed the theory of topics in his book, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* in 1980. He identified several categories of musical topics that are common in Western European music.[2] Ratner's theory can be applied to *Essay for Band* and Dickerson's other contrapuntal works.

[2] Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980).

Horace Maxile identified African American cultural topics in his 2001 dissertation, "Say What?: Topics, Signs, and Signification in African-American Music.*"* Maxile applies his musical topics to works by William Grant Still, Charles Mingus, David Baker, and Hale Smith. David Baker and Roger Dickerson attended Indiana University together and formed a band while they were students. Roger Dickerson and Hale Smith were friends.

Maxile also published "Signs, Symphonies, Signifyin(g): African-American Cultural Topics as Analytical Approach to the Music of Black Composers" in the *Black Music Research Journal* in 2008. Maxile proposed five African American cultural topics: call and response, blues, spiritual/supernatural, jazz, and signifyin(g). Maxile's theory will be used to identify topics in *A Musical Service for Louis* and *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone*.

The influence of Paul Hindemith's musical style is evident in *Essay for Band's* harmony, melody, and its treatment of the progenitor tone. This study examines *Essay for Band* using Paul Hindemith's method for analyzing tonal music found in his book, *The Craft of Musical Composition.*

1.5 METHODOLOGY

Essay for Band, one of his earliest published compositions, was greatly influenced by the counterpoint and musical language of Paul Hindemith. This study gives a brief history of the work, a formal theoretical analysis, an analysis using a methodology derived from the writings of Paul Hindemith, and identifies 18th-century classical music topics by Leonard Ratner. *A Musical Service for Louis* and *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone* are works that include cultural elements from the African American music

tradition. This study presents brief historical information about each work and how Horace Maxile's African American cultural topics apply.[3]

1.6 STRUCTURE OF STUDY

Chapter One is an overview of the study. The Introduction includes a statement of purpose, delimitations, need for the study, literature review, methodology, and structure of the study. Chapter Two is a brief biography that details the life and career of Roger Dickerson. Chapter Three includes my two-hour interview with Roger Dickerson at his home in New Orleans. Chapter Four examines *Essay for Band*. This chapter presents the history of the work, a preexisting analysis, formal analysis, and analysis using the analytical techniques of Paul Hindemith. Chapter Five introduces musical topics proposed by Leonard Ratner and Horace Maxile. Chapter Six applies the topics introduced in Chapter Five to *Essay for Band, A Musical Service for Louis*, and *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone.*

Chapter Seven provides a conclusion and recommendations for future studies. Appendix A lists Roger Dickerson's works, awards, and honors. Appendix B provides the complete transcript from my interview with Roger Dickerson. Appendix C provides the author's recitals. This section includes the performance of *Essay for Band* with the University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble and lecture recital titled Roger Dickerson's *Essay for Band*: An Examination using the Analytical Techniques of Paul Hindemith. Appendix D includes an Oral History Release form signed by Roger Dickerson for the

[3] Horace Maxile, "Signs, Symphonies, Signifyin(g): African-American Cultural Topics as Analytical Approach to the Music of Black Composers," *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no. 1 (2008): 123–38.

interview on October 19, 2023 and a letter from Peer Music Classical granting gratis permission to use Dickerson's musical scores in this document.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROGER DICKERSON

Roger Dickerson, born in 1934, is an African American composer, educator, and pianist from New Orleans, Louisiana. He was born to a father who was an auto mechanic and mother who was a homemaker.[4] Dickerson lived on Claiborne Avenue in New Orleans as a young child and remembers watching brass bands parade past his grandmother's house.[5] Many of his family members, although not professional musicians, played instruments for their enjoyment and his grandparents had friends who were professional musicians who visited his house.[6]

He began taking piano lessons with Mrs. Miriam Panelle when he was eight years old while attending Gilbert Academy, a school for African American boys.[7] He also attended McDonogh 35 High School.

His cousin, Wallace Davenport, played trumpet with the Count Basie Jazz Orchestra and toured with Ray Charles in the 1960's. Davenport was the first to introduce Dickerson to harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. As a teenager, he started studying composition and performed in the French Quarter jazz clubs with his band Roger

[4] Jasmaine Talley, "Roger Dickerson: At Home in New Orleans," Amistad Research Center, August 6, 2018, https://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/single-post/2018/08/06/roger-dickerson-at-home-in-new-orleans.

[5] Palmer, "Roger Dickerson, Composer."

[6] Hallema Sharif. "The New Orleans Music Legend Series: A conversation with Composer/Pianist, Roger Dickerson," November 5, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/HallemasWorld/videos/the-new-orleans-music-legend-series-aconversation-with-composerpianist-roger-di/372152967361188/.

[7] Talley, "Roger Dickerson: At Home"

Dickerson and His Groovy Boys. His group also performed gigs around New Orleans after school and on weekends. Ellis Marsalis, father of Branford and Wynton Marsalis, was a member of his group. Dickerson first met Ellis Marsalis at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first African Methodist church established in the Deep South. They later attended middle school together and shared a lifelong friendship based on their love for music.[8]

He attended Dillard University, a Historically Black University in New Orleans, and graduated with his Bachelor of Music degree in 1955. Since he was influenced by the music of Bach, Mozart, and Haydn, he took German language courses while at Dillard University.[9] After graduating from Dillard University, he attended graduate school at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. This was the first time he had formal lessons in composition. He was eager to learn under the guidance of Bernhard Heiden, a well-known German composer who was Chair of the Composition Department at Indiana University, and a former student of Paul Hindemith. Dickerson earned his Master of Music degree in Composition in 1957 from Indiana University.

After graduate school, Dickerson was drafted into the United States Army and served from 1957–1959. He was first stationed at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas for several months. While in Arkansas, he was a musician of and arranger for the army band and played double bass for the Fort Smith Symphony Orchestra. *Essay for Band* was composed during Dickerson's military service. The piece was first performed by the 449th

[8] Sharif, "Music Legend Series."
[9] Palmer, "Roger Dickerson, Composer."

Army Band at Fort Chaffee in 1958 and dedicated to Sergeant First Class Brown, the director of the ensemble.[10]

After his time in Arkansas, he left the segregated South for Europe. He was a member of and composer for the United States Army Europe Band at Army Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany. His new post exposed him to entirely new places around the world including Berlin, Copenhagen, Holland, and Beirut.

In 1959, his tour of duty ended, and he was awarded Fulbright Scholarships in 1959 and 1960 to study composition with Karl Schiske and Alfred Uhl at the *Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst* (The State Academy for Music and Performing Arts) in Vienna, Austria. In Vienna he met Howard Swanson, an African American composer who was also known for setting the poetry of Langston Hughes to music. Dickerson later wrote his own composition to Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in 1961.

While on his Fulbright studies in Vienna and years after *Essay for Band* was composed, Dickerson met Paul Hindemith on two occasions. They first met and bonded over their mutual relationship to Bernhard Heiden at a radio station.[11] Their second meeting occurred a year later at a concert at the *Musikverein*, where the Vienna Philharmonic was honoring and celebrating the 65th birthday of Paul Hindemith. Dickerson visited Hindemith's green room after the celebration and was surprised Hindemith remembered him from their initial meeting at the radio station.[12]

After completing his Fulbright Scholarships, Dickerson was not eager to return home to the United States. Europe offered Dickerson, and other African American artists during this time, a sense of freedom that was uncommon in the segregated South.[13]

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[10] Tischler, *Fifteen Black American Composers,* 82.
[11] Sharif, "Music Legend Series."
[12] Ibid.
[13] Palmer, "Roger Dickerson, Composer."

Nevertheless, he returned to New Orleans in 1962 to teach, compose, and perform jazz piano. When he arrived back in America, Dickerson felt that his future compositions should reflect his cultural heritage.

Dickerson was an adjunct professor of music at Xavier University in New Orleans, a Lecturer and Choir Director at Dillard University, served as Music Coordinator at Southern University at New Orleans, and was appointed Adjunct Professor of Composition at Loyola University of New Orleans. He also taught private lessons to young musicians looking to improve their craft.

He received two Pulitzer nominations, the first for *A Musical Service for Louis (a requiem for Louis Armstrong)* (1972), and the second for *New Orleans Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1975). James Hinton produced an hour-long documentary in 1977 titled, *New Orleans Concerto*, named after Dickerson's Pulitzer-Prize-nominated composition. He was elected to the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) in 1965. In 1972, he composed a series of concert pieces for young string players on a commission from the Rockefeller Foundation.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and flooded most of the city. Roger Dickerson's home flooded, and he found shelter at the Superdome in New Orleans. He then joined many evacuees at the Kelly Airforce Base in San Antonio, Texas. There he made a phone call to his friend, Frank Schlater.[14] Dickerson and Schlater served together in the USAREUR Band in Heidelberg, Germany.[15] Schlater invited Dickerson to his home in Roswell, New Mexico. While he was displaced in New Mexico, he helped found the Roswell Jazz Festival in 2006.[16]

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[14] "About Roswell Jazz Festival," Roswell Jazz Festival New Mexico, accessed January 10, 2024, https://www.roswelljazz.org/about.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Talley, "Roger Dickerson: At Home"

Dickerson has impacted the lives of many students throughout his life. Terrance Blanchard began studying composition with Roger Dickerson at age sixteen and is perhaps his most well-known student. Blanchard performed trumpet on soundtracks for Spike Lee movies, including *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Mo' Better Blues* (1990). He composed several film scores for Spike Lee movies, including *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Clockers* (1995), *Summer of Sam* (1999), *25th Hour* (2002), *Inside Man* (2006), *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), and *Da 5 Bloods* (2020). Blanchard also composed the film scores to *One Night in Miami* (2020) directed by Regina King and *The Woman King* (2022) directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood. He was nominated for Academy Awards for composing the film scores to *BlacKkKlansman* and *Da 5 Bloods*.

Terence Blanchard's operas, *Champio*n (2013) and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2019), both won the Grammy for Best Opera Recording. *Champion* is a two-act opera about the life of African American welterweight boxer Emile Griffith. *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, an opera based on the memoir of Charles Blow, is a coming-of-age story about a young African American man growing up in poverty.

Fire Shut Up in My Bones, Blanchard's second opera, was the first opera staged by an African American composer at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. In a 2023 interview with *Verite News*, Terence Blanchard talked about the impact Roger Dickerson had on his life and music. Blanchard said, "When my opera went to the Met for the first-time last year…I was really blown away and emotionally overcome with the notion of, if I hadn't had (Roger) in my life, where would I be?"[17] In this same interview, Blanchard

[17] Palmer, "Roger Dickerson, Composer."

praises Dickerson's uniqueness and excellence as a composer, and how he integrates New Orleans folklore into his compositions.[18]

At the time of this study, Roger Dickerson is 89 years old and continues to teach composition lessons in person and online using video conferencing platforms.

[18] Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

ROGER DICKERSON INTERVIEW WITH COMMENTARY

Roger Dickerson welcomed me into his home in New Orleans, Louisiana for an interview about his life and music career. The interview was conducted on October 19, 2023 and lasted about two hours. This chapter includes the interview with commentary to provide historical context. We began the interview by discussing his early life growing up in New Orleans.

Green: Let's begin by talking about your early life growing up in New Orleans in the 1930s. What are some of your early memories about music in New Orleans?

Dickerson: My early life is about my family. I have a great loving family. I was born right in the middle of the [Great] Depression, but I didn't know that there was a Depression. I was never without—and I always had lots of love. Later, I found out that a national economic depression occurred in America, during my early life.

Aside from family, I was aware of music in New Orleans. Everyone was aware of music—the music was all around you. At a very young age, I started taking piano lessons. I was, however, already playing the piano—playing before formal lessons—because family members played, and some friends of the family, who were professional musicians, would just show a little kid, if he were interested, a little something on the keys. So—as a result—I was already playing by the age of five or six.

A visiting country cousin came down from East Feliciana Parish said—after hearing me play— "that boy should have lessons. I'll pay for them." My mother was, then, convinced that she should provide formal piano lessons for me. At that time, a lady just around the corner from us—on Roman, just off Palmyra Street—was giving formal piano lessons. The lessons were $0.75 each. Quite a number of children in the neighborhood were taking lessons with her. This teacher, Mrs.

Miriam Panalle, became my first formal teacher of music.

Green: Did you play in high school?

Dickerson: Well, many things were happening for me musically before I got to high school. I was already improvising. Actually, that's how I learned to play piano in the beginning. I was taught tunes, some jazz tunes and jazz rhythmic figures, and church hymns with which I could improvise as well. I was discovering how music worked…. With Mrs. Panalle, I was beginning my study of the formal, notated tradition of music. I was learning little pieces and music written by composers like Mozart, Bach and Beethoven.

When I arrived in middle school, I was still taking piano lessons. I was one of two or three students who could read, or improvise, well enough to accompany the many rehearsals for the various May Festival presentations—rehearsing the different student classes as they learned their steps and movements. A teacher, otherwise, would have to accompany the many rehearsals. It was a great time of year for me.

I got to high school and discovered that they had a marching band and a choir. I was more interested, of course, in the band; but, quickly realized that I couldn't march in the band with a piano. There was a French horn I noticed in the storage area that no one seemed to be playing. So—I took it, and began practicing, playing long tones, and discovering the fingerings. I was already reading musical notation.

That high school, Gilbert Academy, closed after my second year. The school was located uptown on St. Charles Avenue in the prized Garden District of the city, near Jefferson Avenue. Riding each day, from my home in mid-city, through the Garden District with its palatial homes and sumptuous gardens was an experience I shall never forget. The streetcar/bus ride was always exhilarating and beautiful, but at the same time, a clear reminder of the inequities of daily, ever present American Apartheid. There were also neighborhoods in New Orleans that, earlier on, were predominantly White—then, because of the constant White flight to the suburbs, were neighborhoods that steadily became predominantly Black—or filled with other minorities.

African Americans made gains during the Reconstruction Era that followed the United States Civil War. To reverse this progress, Louisiana implemented racial segregation laws. The Supreme Court established the doctrine of "separate but equal" in their 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, after an African American man in New Orleans

attempted to sit in a whites-only railway car.[19] This paved the way for states to establish "separate but equal" laws. This is how the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) described what African Americans endured during this time:

> The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as "Jim Crow" represented a formal, codified system of racial apartheid that dominated the American South for three quarters of a century beginning in the 1890s. The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants. "Whites Only" and "Colored" signs were constant reminders of the enforced racial order.[20]

New Orleans restaurants, hotels, night clubs, cemeteries, playgrounds, schools, streetcars, and nearly all public spaces were segregated. The Catholic Church even established a segregated parish in downtown New Orleans, the Congregation of Corpus Christi.[21] Diane Nash, an American civil rights activist, gave the following remarks in an interview for *Freedom Riders*:

> Travel in the segregated South for black people was humiliating. The very fact that there were separate facilities was to say to black people and white people that blacks were so subhuman and so inferior that we could not even use the public facilities that white people used.[22]

The system of Jim Crow was enforced by government officials and reinforced by acts of terror from vigilantes.[23] This system was maintained through lynching and the threat of lynching. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, thousands of African

[19] "Jim Crow Laws," Public Broadcasting Service - American Experience, accessed January 12, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedom-riders-jim-crow-laws/.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Nikki Brown, "Jim Crow & Segregation," 64 Parishes, April 5, 2023, https://64parishes.org/entry/jim-crowsegregation.

[22] "Jim Crow Laws," Public Broadcasting Service.

[23] Ibid.

Americans were lynched in the New Orleans area.[24] Racial segregation was outlawed with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Roger Dickerson, born in 1934, grew up in a New Orleans where the white electorate passed racial segregation laws and African Americans were systematically denied the right to vote. Dickerson was candid in talking about his experiences under this regime.

> **Dickerson:** I lived on a major New Orleans thoroughfare, Claiborne Avenue, where everything happened during carnival time—at least for Black Americans. An oppressive, hard brand of American apartheid was featured throughout the South in those days. We Blacks—as in most social matters, and occasions—had our own carnival, and Whites had their own carnival. Everything of that nature in New Orleans' culture reflected racial segregation. Much of our carnival, carnival for Blacks, moved up and down this broad thoroughfare, divided with spacious greens, from uptown Jackson Avenue all the way to downtown Saint Bernard Circle in the 7th Ward. As a young kid, I could sit on the front steps of our house and see everything. Our house on Claiborne Avenue was one block above Canal Street, the main thoroughfare to downtown New Orleans business district, hotels, theaters, and department stores—and ending at the Mississippi River. From my front steps, I could see the Zulu parade. When Louis Armstrong returned to New Orleans to parade with the Zulus, I saw him on their carnival float. And then, there were the Skull Men, who—as a child—I dreaded seeing with their bones and skeleton outfits. I would quickly run—as they approached, dancing on the spacious, green, neutral grounds—to the backyard of our house and hide as best I could. Throughout the year, and at other festive times requiring parades, I always had a front row seat from my front steps. City parades with enormous marching bands from white high schools and universities used the Claiborne Ave neutral grounds as a staging area for parades marching onto Canal Street to downtown New Orleans. I got to see, and hear, these bands with their many, many instruments, all kinds of instruments, as a young kid.
>
> **Green:** Were there two separate Mardi Gras?
>
> **Dickerson:** Yes—Mardi Gras reflected American Apartheid as well.
>
> **Green:** Was it segregated?

[24] Brown, "Jim Crow & Segregation."

Dickerson: Yes, hard segregation everywhere, at the bus station, and at the movie house. When I say American apartheid, that's what I mean—racial segregation.

Green: How was it living in Europe compared to the segregated South in America?

Dickerson: Well, in America, you are talking about apartheid. Living in Europe was being free. There was no comparison. You could go anywhere. You don't have second thoughts about going in a place, restaurant, or hotel. If you grew up here, you don't think about it. You just didn't do it. When we were in high school, there was a screen on the bus. You had to sit behind the screen.

Green: In Vienna, you talked about going to the Vienna Philharmonic. Were you able to go to the New Orleans Philharmonic as a child?

Dickerson: Oh, yeah. We could go. When I was in middle school we went to the symphony. That was the first time I heard a full symphony orchestra.

Green: Was there segregated seating?

Dickerson: They sent the black schools on a certain day. It was hard apartheid in those days. It was in the system. Even though today, it is supposed to be over, guess what? Much of its residue is still here, and not just here, but many places. People just automatically do certain things. It's like that on the job. Who gets promoted, this or that…it's still here.

Green: African Americans thrived musically during this time. Was there a system of support for musicians?

Dickerson: There was always a natural, cultural support of the music here. It belonged to the people—was the people's music. It, indeed, was a natural expression of everyday life. One can easily see evidence of its support in its practice and application in everyday life—both sacred and secular physical forms of support. But, more importantly, I believe that the area of New Orleans, at the bottom of the Mississippi River, functions, indeed, as a spiritual center—a corridor in which the cultural traditions of Africa and of Europe have fused together in this city, and in a way, that they haven't combined in any other city on this planet. That confluence of cultural traditions, of spiritual energies, are at, I believe, the very core of our uniqueness. That, to me, is what makes New Orleans truly special—truly unique. The traditions have melded here—and flowed out, on to other distant places and communities. The European traditions in the form of

march music and those rhythmic traditions of Africa combined to produce what became known as "ragging", or later known as Ragtime. And which, when finally connected to the blues tradition, fused into a form of music that has circled the world, capturing hearts everywhere—a music we call jazz. The acculturation of these traditions, sourced from Europe and Africa, in America produced this new music—a 20th-century music—and it affected our cuisine, dress, and architecture as well. Our New Orleans is a great center reflecting that acculturation, or the melding of those cultural traditions in this spiritual corridor.

Green: During that time, did you view jazz as being different from classical music?

Dickerson: No, I've only thought of music as being "good music", or music that was "not very good." I'm pretty much that way yet—even today. My thinking is a little bit more refined, now, because of what I'm trying to do in my own work. I was telling a student—we were on this subject—as he's progressing in writing a piece in sonata allegro form—that this is a codified form of the Viennese classical period. "You must," I said, "write in a way that follows the structure of this form." You may listen to other composers' use of this form—and use them as a model, but you need to have your own "melodic," "harmonic stuff"—and temperament, or attitude. We discussed what that 'stuff' could possibly be—and how one can project himself into it all toward creating something that might be considered good music. And that, in a final analysis, the Viennese classical form—sonata allegro—does not really make the music, "good music" or "not very good music." It's the melodic, harmonic "stuff" and temperament that filled-out the form that determines its quality, it's worth. I think every artist—at some point in his/her life—comes to terms with that question: what am I expressing? What am I doing, and what is that about?

My art is about a love of music, a love of music that combines art with human relationships, and a sense of godly duty weaving it way through it all. These qualities resonate throughout my creative work. Now—I know there are some people who are more intellectual about what they are doing—and whose tendencies lean more toward being mechanical, than being devotional in the creative process—and somehow, the bit about human relationships get totally left out—of consideration.

And now, we've got Finale and Sebelius music software—and settings that can be implemented on a computer and which eliminates, through generated sounds, the need for humans, for human relationships. One—now, doesn't need people to—even—play the music. I don't mind having recorded music of some idea, here or there in my scores—but I do prefer having live musicians performing my music.

If one is going forward, continuing on to become a serious artist/composer, my advice is that you should become aware of the pitfalls of the commercial world of music. That otherwise—you may forget, if you are seduced, many of the real,

sacred, reasons you may have held, in your heart, for writing music. There are some real talents, I know, who are interested only in making 'the big bucks—and will do anything because they are "going to get paid" for it. If that's their/your desire—then so be it.

Wallace Davenport was the first person to introduce Roger Dickerson to counterpoint, harmony, and orchestration. Davenport is incorrectly listed in many publications as Roger Dickerson's uncle. Roger Dickerson informed me that he was a cousin by marriage and talked about the major impact Davenport had on him as a musician.

Green: Let's talk about your uncle, Wallace Davenport.

Dickerson: Well, a little thing. He's not an uncle.

Green: He's not an uncle?

Dickerson: He's a cousin by marriage. He married my cousin, Jean Hitchens. She was a great singer, and he was always around.

Green: Where did Wallace Davenport receive his musical training?

Dickerson: Well, I don't know too much about that. I know he had formal training. He had quite a wide arrange on trumpet. I mean, he became a first trumpet player. He could hit notes way above the staff, right on the head. He was the first trumpet player in Hamp's [Lionel Hampton] band. He was with Count Basie and some others.

I got to know him pretty well when he was dating my cousin. Then, they got married and he went into the Navy. I remember seeing him with pride in his Navy uniform.

In my teen years, I had ideas of wanting to have a band because I knew stuff I could write down. But how do you write it down and how do you transpose it for instruments? That's where Wallace came in. He talked about transposition and stuff like that and helped me with matters as that. I started discovering how to write other things and copy music that was on the record players, hit music like

Louis Jordan and Roy Brown, and other styles that were popular in the 40's. I was discovering the language of writing—that's how I started writing.

Green: Did Wallace Davenport go to university?

Dickerson: No, not that I know of. After Wallace came out of the military, he went to the Grunewald School of Music. That was a school here that many of the New Orleans musicians went to. I mean the top guys. It was like something that the American Government set up for veterans after they came out of the war. There were teachers there who were the best music teachers in town. They were at university, but it was a federally funded program. Ellis Marsalis and I went over there a lot to jam with them because the best musicians were over there. It was downtown in the central business district.

Ellis Marsalis, patriarch of the Marsalis family, was a member of the band, Roger Dickerson and His Groovy Boys. Roger Dickerson reflected on their life-long friendship and Ellis Marsalis' children, Branford and Wynton.

Green: Your band was called Roger Dickerson and His Groovy Boys. Do you remember all the members of your group?

Dickerson: Well, some. It changed over time. In the beginning, it was mostly neighborhood boys. Ellis [Marsalis] is someone I met at church. His parents went to the same church that my parents did, and we met in Sunday school. When Ellis graduated from middle school, we met in the school on St. Charles Avenue. It was a *crème de la crème* private school for Blacks. Gilbert Academy School was a church associated school. I think the Methodist Church owned the school.

Anyway, that's where I truly got to know Ellis. He was in the band. He was a clarinet player. We were at church together and we both loved music. Then, we started meeting at each other's homes and became fast friends. I often tell people; we were closer than brothers because brothers fight. I later, when Ellis married, was his best man; his first child, Branford, is my godson.

Ellis became a part of my neighborhood band because we were friends at school and church. His grandparents lived in my neighborhood. In the summers, he would come and stay with his grandparents. So, he got to be just one of the guys in the neighborhood. He was accepted by all the kids in the neighborhood. Then, Ellis later got a tenor saxophone–one summer, and his playing took off. He was playing, learning all the tenor saxophone solos on the hit recordings. Branford, his son, is just a chip off the block. Ellis was a clarinet player and took up the other saxes. Ellis didn't start playing piano till later. When I look at Branford, I see him

progressing as Ellis– first, clarinet player, then later the saxes.

Roy Brown was one of my mother's tenants. My dad bought some property, after we moved from Claiborne Avenue to what we call Backatown, near where Louis Armstrong was born. It was on the 2300 block of Gravier Street. A big lot with a house and apartments on the side. Roy Brown was friends with my mother and my father when they were growing up. He eventually became a tenant with us. When Roy recorded *Good Rockin' Tonight*, he was living at my house. At that time, upstairs, in a room in this camelback house above the kitchen. He later took one of the apartments on the side of the house. When he got his band, Roy Brown was buying instruments, or getting instruments for players who didn't have an instrument, and those instruments often ended up in my mother's wash shed, in the back of our house. So–I would go out there. I would get them out, you see, and start playing them– because I was interested. I learned saxophone like that. I learned to play the bass.

One Sunday, I went to church and told Ellis, "Man, I'm playing up some bass." He came over to my house after church and got on the bass. We both learned that way how to play bass. It was a while before we got a bass player for the group. Earlier, we would switch up on gigs. I would play bass on some pieces, and he would play piano, and then we would switch up. It was a while before we got a bass player for the band. This was an experience about discovering a personal relationship about instruments. I was only just reading about these instruments later in an orchestration book in school.

Green: Can you tell me a little bit about Wynton Marsalis?

Dickerson: They were all bright. Al Hirt gave him a trumpet because Ellis [Marsalis] was playing with Al Hirt's Band, at the time.

They were playing football. I have pictures of them, Wynton and Branford played football with the NORD league, New Orleans Recreation Department. It wasn't until later when they both kind of got the idea of music. I don't know the exact age, but when they got it, they went with it.

Roger Dickerson attended Dillard University, a private HBCU, in New Orleans and graduated with his Bachelor of Music degree in 1955. He then attended Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and earned his Master of Music degree in Composition in 1957. He talked about his experiences while a student at these universities.

Green: Why did you choose to attend Dillard University?

Dickerson: I won a scholarship there. When I got to 35 [McDonogh 35 Senior High School], they didn't have any French horns. They had a mellophone and a baritone horn. And I chose the baritone horn. That instrument just opened doors for me. I learned a lot and I loved it. It was great. This wonderful soft tone it had. I became a pretty good baritone horn player. I got a scholarship as a result on the baritone horn. My second or third year, we had other baritone horn players, but we didn't have a tuba. I was on scholarship. So, guess who played tuba?

One of my teachers who had come down to be the timpanist for the New Orleans Symphony and then came over to Dillard to be the head of the program. He said, "you should learn the trombone." I said sure. I learned the trombone. I don't consider myself a trombone player but getting to know something about these instruments in a personal way. I think that has informed my writing. When I write for them, I'm writing for something I know about, and something of what they do, and where they sound. *Essay for Band* uses brass in a resilient kind of way.

Green: Were you in the concert band and the marching band at Dillard University?

Dickerson: Yes, and I also became the assistant conductor. In a small school, you get to be and do all these kinds of things. When I got to Indiana University, there were more people in the music department at Indiana than were in the whole school at Dillard. So, at Dillard I was the assistant band director. I got to rehearse and got to learn all kinds of stuff. That also informs your writing, too.

Green: Could you talk about taking German classes at Dillard?

Dickerson: My last year, I had some free open time. So, I chose German as an elective. My rationale was I'm in music, and I need to know something about the culture of European music. I had no idea, at that time that I would be going to Vienna, Austria. No idea at all. I went on to graduate school and finished at Indiana University. Soon as I completed my work, I was drafted. A lot of my friends were going into the military service. If you weren't in school, you were getting drafted in those days. Soon as I got my masters, I got drafted.

I had been in the Army Reserve Band here while at Dillard. My teacher, Dr. Bryant was in charge. He was the warrant officer in charge of this Black ensemble that was at Camp Leroy Johnson. All of the best musicians in New Orleans, who were veterans, were receiving checks to attend educational and musical training. Many enlisted in this band, and they were receiving checks for that, as well. I

knew that the band had all the best musicians in it, so I joined that band really for that reason. It was a great band. I started writing for them. These guys could really play—big band arrangements and concert music.

Green: They had a big band and concert band?

Dickerson: It was an Army marching band. Within that band, there was a concert band and a big band. Which typically happens with army bands. You have marching band that play for the troops, but then you also can play concerts and have the ability to play jazz. I got in that band and became a specialist third class, which is like a corporal in that band, in the ranks.

So, when I was drafted after leaving Indiana, I went into the military with rank. I didn't go in as a buck private. When I got the draft letter, I went down here to someone with the reserve, and he said, "we're going to help you. We're going to just transfer you from reserve duty to active duty, and you can keep your rank." So, I went in making corporal pay or specialist third class pay. Also, if you got some stripes, you didn't get put on detail. You got put in charge of the detail. When I was in basic training, I was in charge of the first barracks because I had that Specialist Third Class rank on my arm.

Green: How was Bloomington, Indiana in the 1950s?

Dickerson: The school is the town. My time was spent totally in a music building—and over there when ensembles were rehearsing. I lived in Rogers Center. Walking back and forth between—I was busy all the time.

Green: Did you play in the bands or orchestras at Indiana University?

Dickerson: I was in the graduate band. It was a good symphonic wind ensemble with a lot of good players. I became aware of the repertoire for band. We had the latest stuff for concert band. When I got to the band in Heidelberg, I immediately went to the band director and informed him what they should order because I had just played those compositions at Indiana [University].

Green: How did Bernard Heiden influence your music?

Dickerson: He was my teacher. He taught me counterpoint, composition, score reading, and other classes like that. Counterpoint particularly opened my eyes because that's where you are reduced to dealing with the small parts of the

language of music. Nobody told me this back then, but if you can get some control and influence over the small things, then you will–as a result–develop control and influence over the big stuff.

Green: While attending Indiana University, were there other African American students in the School of Music?

Dickerson: David Baker was there. We had a group together. We had so many gigs. We were playing in Indianapolis, and over to Columbus [Ohio]. He discovered I could play piano, and he says, "hey man, we got a piano player." So, I was in the band from the very beginning. Initially, I was bussing dishes at Rogers Center Dining Hall, but soon left bussing dishes when I began getting the many gigs from David Baker.

David [Baker] came to New Orleans with his wife before he passed [away]. We went out to dinner. David and I had many great times together.

Green: Please talk about your composition and master's thesis, *Concert Overture*?

Dickerson: It is of the same language as *Essay for Band*. Most of my works like that are primarily contrapuntal. I was just telling a student today to include more counterpoint in what you are writing. It brings dimensions in your work that you wouldn't otherwise have there. It brings angles and a quality of profundity that works without counterpoint often lack.

Essay for Band was composed during Dickerson's military service. The piece was first performed by the 449th Army Band at Fort Chaffee in 1958 and dedicated to Sergeant First Class Brown, the director of the ensemble.

Green: Let's talk about *Essay for Band*. Why did you write a musical essay?

Dickerson: Essay just seems to be an appropriate title. If you don't have a programmatic title, you call it an essay. It is an essay of your expression and of your emotions. Whatever you want that to be about, in terms of the thematic or rhythmic material you are working with. So, that's what it is.

Green: While you were at Fort Chaffee, did the band play the work?

Dickerson: Oh, they played it. Sergeant Brown loved Wagner as well. We were playing *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* and all music of that style. There were two bands, the band training unit, and the regular band which Sergeant Brown was the conductor. The band training unit had soldier trainees who just came out of basic training. When I finished the band training unit, my orders sent me to Heidelberg, Germany.

Roger Dickerson was awarded Fulbright Scholarships in 1959 and 1960 to study composition with Karl Schiske and Alfred Uhl at the *Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst* in Vienna, Austria.

Green: How was your time with the United States Army Europe Band at Army Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany?

Dickerson: We were the USAREUR Headquarters Band. So, anybody coming over from Congress, they would land first in Heidelberg. We played for the Secretary of the Army, for senators, and we played them in and played them off. We had special kinds of duties, like going to play for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers in France and doing some cultural outreach with the local bands. Of course, Germany was still divided then, the Russians were on one side, East Germany. Russian generals would meet with American generals usually down in the ski country, and they would bring us down to play concerts. We would play one or two concerts, and then got to go skiing the rest of the week. It was a great experience with the band. If you took holidays, then you could go to France. I was making money. I had a bank account because I was playing gigs. I was teaching. I bought a Volkswagen and was driving, visiting other cities and countries.

Green: While in Vienna, how did Karl Schiske and Alfred Uhl influence you as a composer?

Dickerson: They were both professionals. Schiske had more influence–I would say–than Uhl. Alfred Uhl was an opera composer. When I arrived in Vienna, I had requested studies with Dr. Professor Karl Schiske, but he was away on some official Austrian state duty, accounting for my assignment to Alfred Uhl. When I applied for renewal of my Fulbright, that was one of my strong points. I believe that's why they renewed my scholarship because I didn't get to study with the person that I had come to study composition with. At least that's my thinking about it. So, they renewed the scholarship and I got to have two Fulbrights. I stayed two years.

The experience in Vienna was not about just going to a school to study with a specific teacher, but to study in a city that is a great cultural center. When you go

to a university in a city like Vienna, Paris, or even New York, that city is part of the cultural universe. All is a part of your training. It isn't just the school. Vienna had opera houses, major orchestras, chamber music, and everything cultural. Being a Fulbrighter, you have monies for tickets, books, and money to live on. I could buy series tickets for the orchestra, *Lieder Abends*, operas, et cetera.

Green: While you were in Germany you met Howard Swanson. How was your interaction with him?

Dickerson: Oh, it was just great. That was one of the most important meetings of my life. I could say he's the greatest person I've ever met. I have never met anybody like that before. That's his bust on the top of my bookshelf. It's a great head sculpture of him.

Green: What made him special?

Dickerson: His person. He was a great spirit. Wisdom. Knowledge. I stopped going to the academy when I met him. We would have these dinners. The things he knew and would talk about–I never heard anybody talk about in none of my classes–anywhere. We became friends.

When I finally went back to Schiske, he said, "*Herr Dickerson, Wo sind sie denn*?" Where were you? So, I told him–something...

Green: You like the way Swanson spoke about music?

Dickerson: He was a fountain of knowledge. Howard lived in Harlem during the Black Renaissance. He knew those writers. And he was right there. When Langston and all the Harlem writers were there, Howard was right there. He would tell me about it because he knew them personally. It had a great effect on my life and helped me to get my vision straight about what I should be doing in my music.

Green: Besides Howard Swanson, did you meet other African Americans in Europe?

Dickerson: Yes, I had a lot of friends when I was in the military. I met Raoul Abdul, who was from Cleveland and had been in New York, and who had been Langston Hughes' Secretary. He was a singer, tenor, and was the first black person I saw at the academy in Vienna. We went to lunch, and we were practicing our German. These two Black guys speaking German in a Viennese restaurant. He

told me about his cousin, Hale Smith. It was Raoul, actually, who one day called me up and said, “Howard [Swanson] is over here at my house.” Raoul knew everybody. He was a music critic for a black newspaper in Cleveland and one of those small papers in Manhattan. He called me and said, “Roger, Howard is over here. We want you to come over and meet him.”

Edna Williams was there, a friend of ours from Chicago. She was a singer in Vienna on a Whitney Scholarship, and she was preparing to go to Italy for some competitions. Howard Swanson was coaching her for this.

Raoul said to me, “he's over here with Edna.” So, I went over to his apartment and waited. That’s when Howard and I first met. We went for a coffee that evening. Anybody who was around Howard Swanson learned—automatically.

Green: Many of your works were performed by the New Orleans Philharmonic. Did you have a great relationship with the conductor or organization?

Dickerson: I did when I returned home from Vienna. Werner Torkanowsky, a Jewish conductor, who had just come into town. Ernest Chachere, a longtime friend, who was band director at Booker T. Washington High School, where the symphony used to rehearse, said, “I want you to come over and introduce you to Maestro Torkanowsky.” I said, “sure.” I had read about him coming to town.

I remembered something Howard [Swanson] told me, “Don't ever meet a conductor without a score in your hand.” I took my *Concert Overture for Orchestra* score with me. After arriving, Torkanowsky said, “you were in Vienna.” I said, “I just got back.” We exchanged a few German expressions because he’s German. He grew up in Germany, went to a kibbutz in Israel, and came to New York for conducting school. We talked during the orchestra break, he said, “What’s that you have in your hand?” And that lead to my first performance with the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra.

Green: Your *Concert Overture for Orchestra*?

Dickerson: Exactly. I showed it to him, and he looked at it. He said, “would you mind if I hold on to this?” I said, “sure.” Next thing I heard from someone was that Werner Torkanowsky is planning to play Roger Dickerson's piece. That was the beginning of our relationship. Irving Kolodin, who was the critic for the *Saturday Review Magazine,* gave the performance of my composition a great review, talked about me, and my piece. Because of the success that piece had with orchestra, they commissioned me, when Louis Armstrong died, to write a kind of a requiem for him. I created *A Musical Service for Louis* because he didn't have a funeral service here in New Orleans–and this was his home. It’s subtitled a requiem, but the composition is truly a musical service. Just like we have services in the Black Church. The New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra took

that piece on tour, and the composition was nominated for a Pulitzer. That was my first big piece to be formerly published.

Green: Did you decide not to compose for band when you returned from Europe?

Dickerson: Oh no. I've never decided not to do anything. That's negative. Things are just how they unfold.

Hurricane Katrina was a category five hurricane that caused over 1,800 deaths in the United States.[25] New Orleans had the largest loss of life due to the flooding caused by engineering flaws in the levee around the city.[26] Most of New Orleans flooded for weeks including Roger Dickerson's home.

Green: During Hurricane Katrina, did you lose scores?

Dickerson: Yes, I lost scores. This composition, my *New Orleans Concerto*, the actual notes, and the lines on the page, dissolved. I spent weeks drawing staff lines through the notes to get the score back. Just drawing lines through with a thin, sharp pencil on every page. The water didn't dissolve the notes–but there was something toxic in the water that dissolved the staff lines.

Green: Was your house destroyed?

Dickerson: Yes. I was in five or six feet of water. I restored it. It's in Gentilly. My son has a studio there now.

Green: After Hurricane Katrina, you lived in New Mexico?

Dickerson: After, I went through the Superdome in New Orleans and went to Kelly Airforce Base in San Antonio, Texas. There were phone banks there for people who had gotten out of their homes in New Orleans and gone through the Superdome, which was quite an experience. They were going to transport us to Houston but had to evacuate the Houston Astrodome owing to another storm coming out of the gulf. So, we went directly to Kelly Air Force Base in San

[25] Campbell Robertson, "Decade After Katrina, Pointing Finger More Firmly at Army Corps," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2015.

[26] Ibid.

Antonio, Texas. They had us waiting at first in a cafeteria. People were just coming in from all over, like immigrants.

There were these rooms with red phones all around. You could call out anywhere in America, but no one could call you. I had my wallet, and a friend who was in that Heidelberg band had just come to New Orleans to visit. He lives in Miami, and I had his card, and I called him…and I got him. I told him about some people I wanted to contact and where they lived. He started calling around and getting numbers. That's how I got in touch with persons that I wanted to contact because I didn't have my contact book with me. Pretty soon, Gabe Villani, had me in touch with people from San Francisco, Los Angeles, to Long Island, New York, where Hale Smith lived. Hale Smith's wife, Juanita, said "Roger, where are you? Come here?" Others were saying, come there. Then, I got in touch with Frank Slaughter, who was a piccolo player in that Heidelberg band. He lived in Roswell. He said, "Roger, come here." I said, "Should I take a bus from El Paso or something?" Frank said, "Don't take a bus anywhere. You fly to Lubbock, Texas, and we'll pick you up." In those days, one couldn't fly right into Roswell. So, I flew to Lubbock, and Frank drove with his wife, Carol, to Lubbock. (I just was on the phone with her the other day. Frank is now dead.)

They picked me up and brought me to Roswell. I had gotten trenched foot from walking in the water, and the military doctors treated me when I was in San Antonio. I was wearing some kind of sandals or something. When I arrived, I had to get some clothes because all I had was what I had on my back–and my briefcase with some things I was able to save from my house and carried with me.

I was in Roswell for months. Of course, after the water went down here [New Orleans], I came back and started working on my house. Then they said, "come back to Roswell." I started playing there early on when I first arrived. As a matter of fact, the Minister at the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Hugh Borroughs, asked me to talk. That was medicinal for me. After coming out of all that havoc and having an opportunity just to talk about it. That day they offered me a job at the church. I didn't accept it because I had just retired from university teaching. I really wasn't looking for a job, but they still wanted to do something. I started playing at the church, playing at other places in Roswell, and at a winery. There was another pianist, Michael Francis, in the area who is now the music director for the Roswell Jazz Festival. He and I would play duos. Out of all of that performing, and with Frank's coordinating it all, we somehow started a festival. That's exactly how we got started.

Roger Dickerson has taught many students during his career. He continues to teach composition lessons online using video conferencing platforms. He currently teaches lessons online to students in the United States and around the world. Terence

Blanchard, his most famous student, started studying composition with Roger Dickerson at age 16. Blanchard is a trumpeter, multiple Grammy Award winner, and film composer.

Green: Let's talk about your students. How did you meet Terence Blanchard?

Dickerson: Terence came to me through his aunt. She was a piano student in the class with Ellis, me, and a number of other people at Dillard University. We graduated at the same time. When I came back from Europe, she called me up and said, "I have a nephew who wants to learn about jazz. Would you take him as a student?" I said, "sure."

While he was with me, NOCCA, New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, opened up and Ellis was among the first faculty there. Terence wanted to go to NOCCA as well because that's the first time we had a center like that with arts teaching on that level. But, at the beginning, NOCCA was just for students in the public high schools. The parochial schools, like Terence was attending, a Catholic School, he couldn't attend NOCCA. So, Terence transferred from Saint Aug, which is one of the *crème de la crème* schools, to Kennedy High School, so he could go to NOCCA. He got in to classes with Ellis at NOCCA and was taking privately with me. Ellis and I, would be on the phone talking about Terence and we'd say, "we're going to make a pianist out of him because he could play." We had decided that we had enough trumpet players, and that we needed more pianists. So, we were going to make a pianist out of Terence—but he showed us something. He's now a great trumpet player!

Green: You had another wonderful student, Jay Weigel.

Dickerson: Yes. Jay has now moved to Nashville. He came to me while he was at Tulane. I had an arrangement with Tulane, or they had an arrangement with me. Werner [Torkanowsky] was playing my music. I was in the papers and the critics were talking about my music. So, students at Tulane wanted to study with Roger Dickerson. Tulane let them come to me privately. They paid for their lessons, but they got course credit at Tulane. Jay Weigel was part of that, and he came to me. After he graduated from Tulane, he went out to California to a school in Los Angeles, and he got a master's in composition. Then, he came back, and he came back to me. This time we weren't so much doing composition as he wanted to learn about jazz piano. While he grew up in New Orleans, he came up like other guys, he's Caucasian, with rock bands. That was an experience that he didn't have, that he wanted. He was with me for quite a while. Then, he moved on off, He started doing films and still writing. Now, he's moved all the way on up to Nashville.

Green: Do you have any other notable students you have taught over the years?

Dickerson: They are all notable in their own way. People I'm just working with, like, Mr. Parson. He's done stuff with Terence. He's a cellist. He's played Birdland with jazz groups and the Kennedy Center. He's working with people in New York with plays. He is working with me and writing pieces. He's just had an orchestra piece performed by the Louisiana Philharmonic.

Another student, Mr. Omar. He's got his own group. He's Latino and working on his PhD in Composition at LSU right now. He's in the second year. We have lessons on Saturdays now and he's writing all kinds of great pieces. It's the best of worlds to be working with young people who have ideas and talent.

I've got another student who's a bassist. He's traveling all over everywhere with people in Europe and South America. He's writing a piece for two bassists, and he's taking counterpoint. He was a student of Ellis Marsalis, too. He was with Ellis at UNO [University of New Orleans].

I have another student who is a drummer. He wants to do it all, but you have to hold him down. He just needs to do "these little things" first.

They're all out there and we stay in touch. After a while, they're no longer students. They become friends. Then, you have this friendship on a very high level where there is trust and respect. It's just great.

CHAPTER 4

ESSAY FOR BAND

Roger Dickerson composed *Essay for Band* during his military service while at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas. This ten-minute composition was premiered by the 449th Army Band at Fort Chaffee in 1958 and dedicated to Sergeant First Class Brown, the director of the ensemble.[27] *Essay for Band* has an Hindemithian sound that can be attributed to Bernard Heiden, who was Dickerson's composition professor at Indiana University and a former student of Paul Hindemith. Heiden and Dickerson both incorporated gestures from the Hindemithian sound world in their compositions. The work uses quartal melodic gestures, diatonic chords which avoid triadic formation, and neo-classical counterpoint.[28]

The instrumentation for *Essay for Band* includes two flutes, oboe, bassoon, Eb clarinet, four Bb clarinets, bass clarinet, two alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, four cornets, four French horns, three trombones, bass trombone, baritone, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, and side drum. As shown in Figure 4.1, the formal structure of *Essay for Band* is ternary (ABA') with an introduction and coda.

[27] Tischler, *Fifteen Black American Composers*, 82.

[28] Myron Moss, "Concert Band Music by African-American Composers: 1927–1998," PhD diss., (University of Michigan, 2000), 101. https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304610047/abstract/ED2E7EF4A1324F93 PQ/1.

Introduction	A	B	A	Coda
Adagio	Allegro Moderato	Andante	Allegro Moderato	Moderato
(1-16)	(16-65)	(66-115)	(116-188)	(189-225)

Figure 4.1 Formal Structure of *Essay for Band*.

Although Hindemith's musical vocabulary is clearly present in *Essay for Band*, Hindemith never titled a piece of music an essay. A musical essay was invented by Samuel Barber and first used for his *Three Essays for Piano.* He later went on to compose three essays for orchestra. As with a written essay, a musical essay develops one or a few melodic theses over a single movement.[29] All musical essays are absolute, meaning they are non-representational and non-programmatic. Therefore, a musical essay is the manipulation and development of a complex, well-reasoned, thoughtful work drawn from a single or a few musical objects.[30]

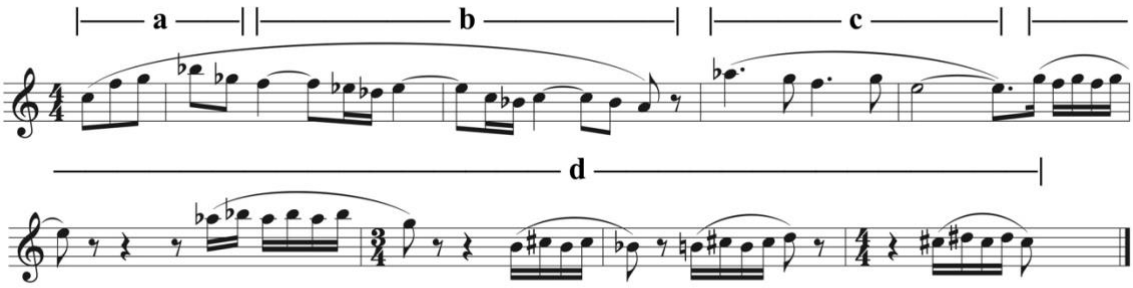
The main subject for *Essay for Band* is stated, transformed, and developed over the entire work. The main subject or the principal theme for *Essay for Band* first appears fully in m. 19. The theme is introduced by the flute, oboe, and clarinets in unison. The subject is a continuous melody that can be divided in to four distinct motives. Myron Moss identified four motives in his dissertation, "Concert Band Music by African-American Composers: 1927–1998." The four motives (a,b,c,d) are shown in Example 4.1.[31]

[29] Daniel French, "Essay for Orchestra" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), ii.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Moss, "African-American Composers" 102.

Example 4.1 Principal theme. *Essay for Band*, mm. 19–27.



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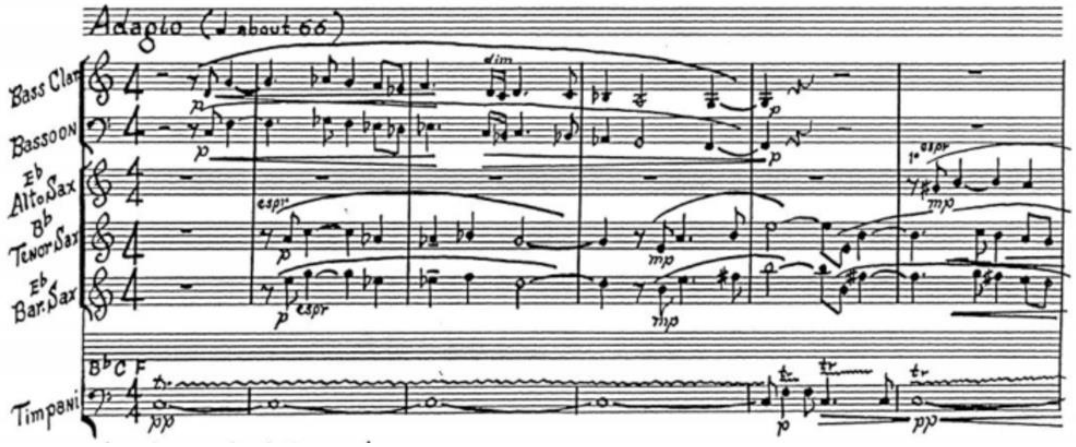
The first motive, "a," begins with a fourth, C up to F, then a minor third from G up to Bb. The G is replaced by a Gb as the melody descends. The contour of the melody has a strong pull to the progenitor tone, F. The opening fourth and mode mixture are common in the music of Hindemith.[32]

Motive "b" has a dotted-quarter and two sixteenth note descending sequence and motive "c" contains a dotted-quarter and eighth note descending sequence. Motive "d" transforms the final pitches from motive "c" into sixteenth-note figures. The melodic material of motive "d" forms the $OCT_{1,2}$ collection.[33]

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

Example 4.2 *Essay for Band*, mm. 1–6.



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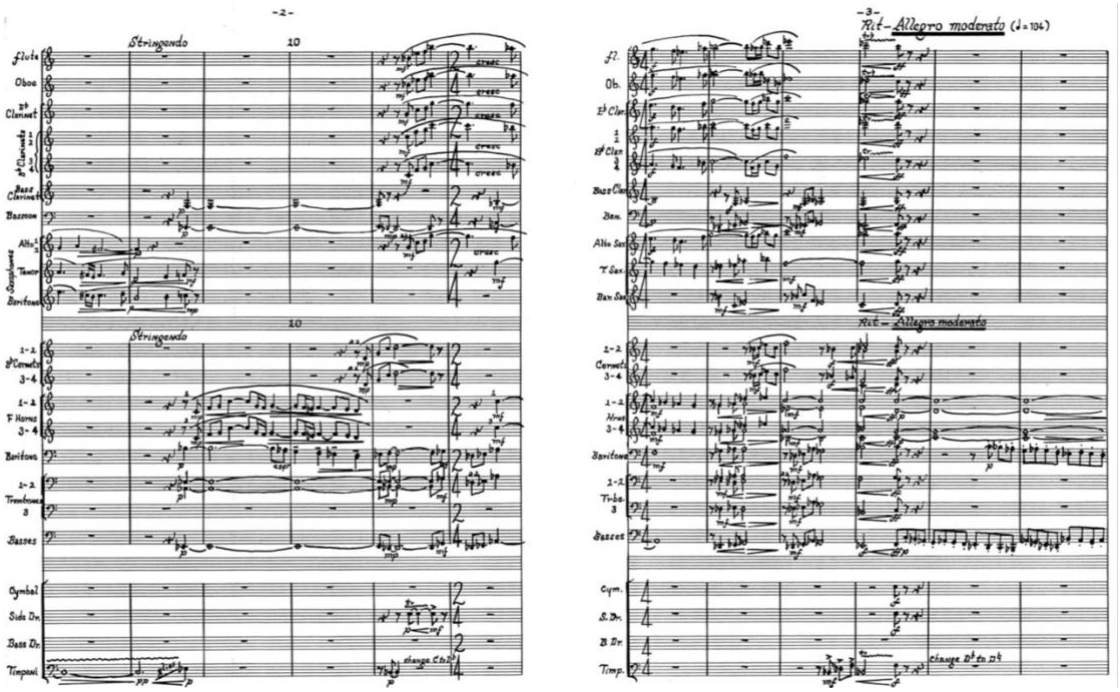
As shown in Example 4.2, the piece begins with a slow and soft introduction. The introduction foreshadows the principal theme with fragments of the theme appearing in various lengths. The first two notes of the piece are the same notes of the principal theme, C and F. They are played by the bassoon and bass clarinet in the first measure over a timpani roll marked pianissimo on the dominant. The opening lines are contrapuntal and marked espressivo. There is also mode mixture found which foreshadows the principal theme with G and Gb. Both tones serving as upper neighbor tones to F.

Example 4.3 *Essay for Band*, mm. 7-18.



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At m. 8, Dickerson gradually increases the tempo. Ascending fourths, recalling Hindemith, appear in mm. 8–9 in the French horns, mm. 10–11 in the cornets, and finally in measure 11 by the flute, oboe, and clarinets. The introduction ends with a ritardando and crescendo to fortissimo on the third beat of m. 16.

The A section, Allegro Moderato, mm. 16–65, is fugal, fast, and forceful. However, it begins with soft eight-note staccato figures in C minor played by the tuba and baritone. The A Section has four statements of the principal theme. The first statement of the principal theme occurs in measure 19 played by the flute, oboe, and clarinet in F major. The accompaniment in the bassoon and bass clarinet begins in C minor, creating a sense of bitonality.

The cornets present the second statement of the principal theme in mm. 28–37. The melody is transposed up a fourth to Bb. Dickerson also extends the melody one

measure by adding a dotted-quarter and eighth-note sequence in m. 33. He also adds an obbligato in the upper woodwinds (flutes, oboe, and clarinets) based on the sixteenth notes from motive "d."

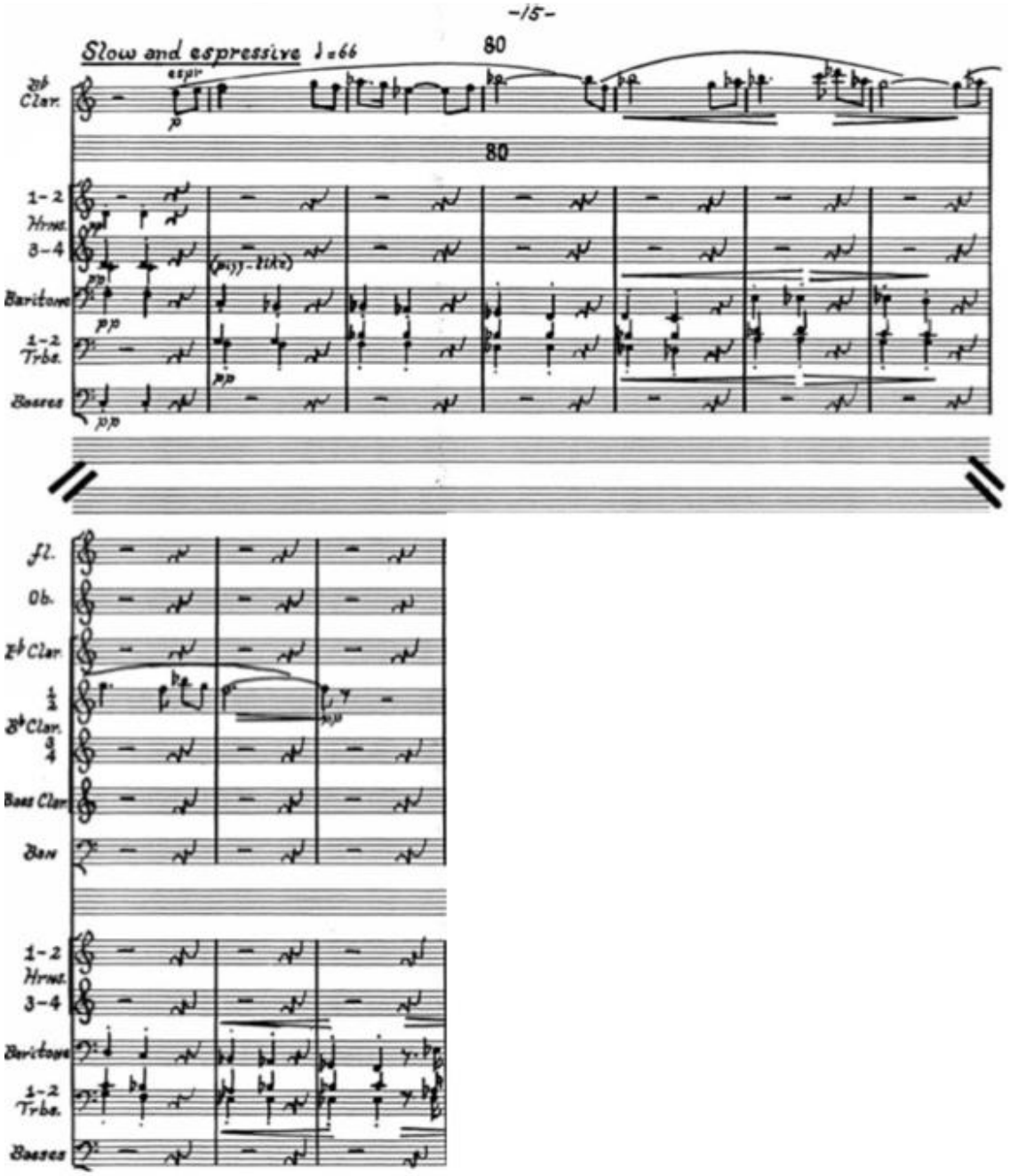
The third statement of the principal theme begins in m. 39. The theme is a whole step higher, in C, and played by the flute, oboe, clarinet, alto saxophone, and cornets.

The fourth statement occurs in mm. 50–58, and includes imitative counterpoint of motives "a" and "b." The trombones and baritone make the first statement in F. Then, the French horns enter in the next measure in Bb. Finally, the cornets enter in the following measure in Eb.

The B Section, mm. 66–115, is lyrical and slower than the fast and forceful A Section. This section features expressive solos with simple accompaniment. Dickerson transforms the principal theme motives into lyrical melodic lines.[34] The longest and most exposed solo of the piece begins in m. 77 played by the solo clarinet. This clarinet solo is a transformation of motive "a" and is accompanied by staccato quarter notes in the baritone and trombones.

[34] Ibid., 105.

Example 4.4 Clarinet solo, *Essay for Band*, mm. 77–86.



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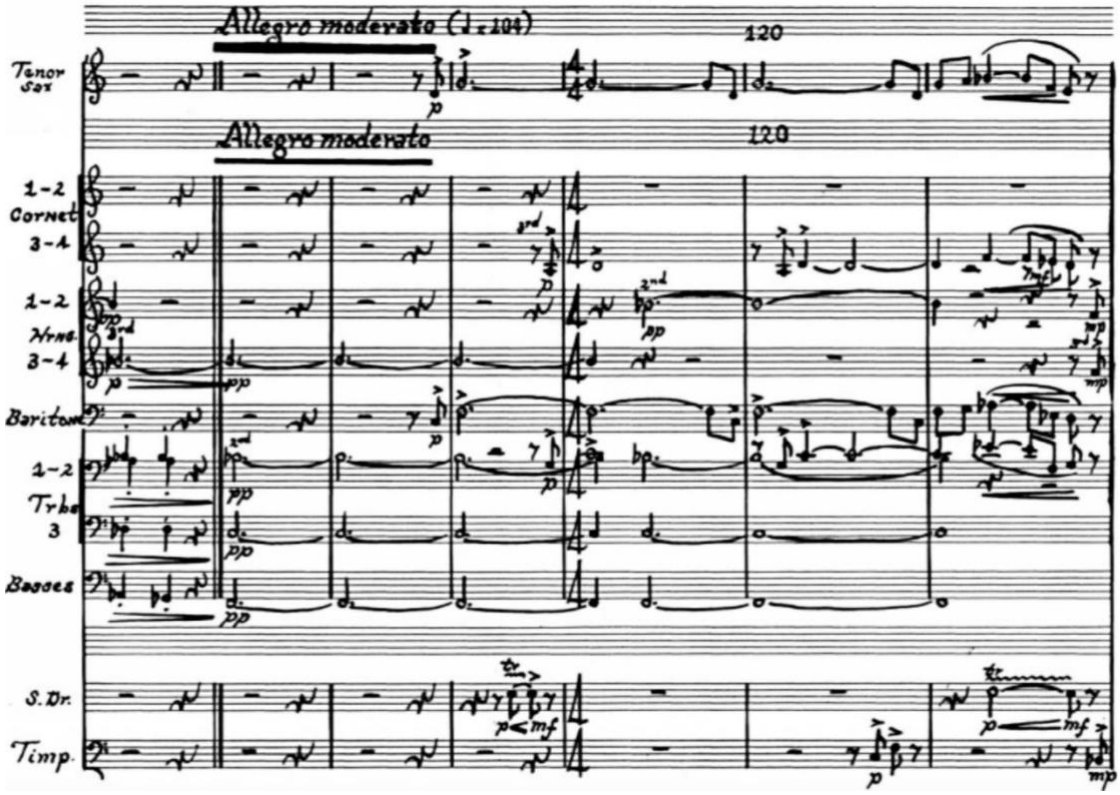
Later in the B Section, Dickerson turns accompaniment material into melodic lines. The eighth and sixteenth note accompaniment at mm. 95–96 is played by the cornets and become a melodic sequence at m. 97 with dotted-eighth and slurred thirty-second notes. This sequence provides the material for the countermelody at m. 103

played by the solo flute. The melody played by the clarinet in m. 77, is played by the solo cornet a major second lower in m. 103.

The second Allegro Moderato section begins as a transition away from Section B. The transition is constructed with open chords in the bass, ascending fourths, and imitative counterpoint, as shown in Example 4.5.

Example 4.5 *Essay for Band*, mm. 115–121.



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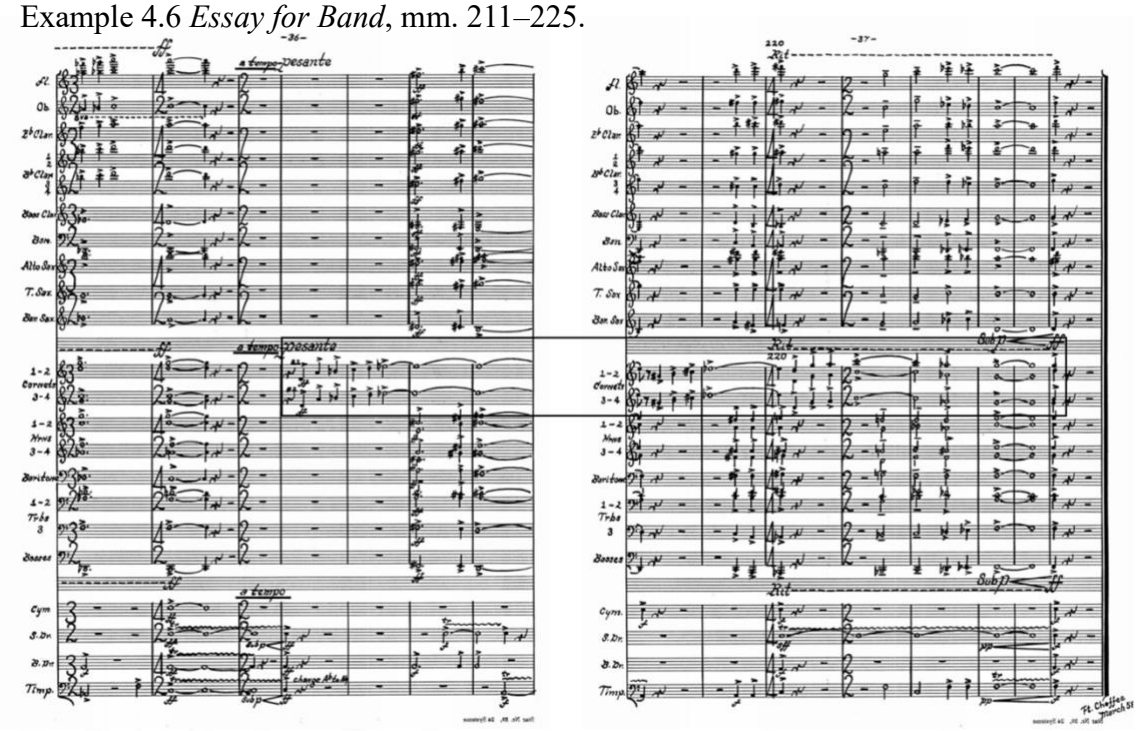
The return of the principal theme is played by the cornets and accompanied by walking quarter notes in the low reeds and brass. The French horns play the second statement of the theme. This time the melody is accompanied by a woodwind obbligato. Like the first A section, there are four entrances in stretto.

Towards the end of this section, the upper woodwinds and cornets play a driving eighth and sixteenth-note ostinato. This repeated rhythm becomes the accompaniment to a three-voice canon. This canonic material is based on motive "a" and "b." At the end of the canon, there is a two-measure accelerando that achieves a rhythmic modulation to the Coda.

The Coda begins with the diminution of motive "a" which rapidly repeats in the French horns and lower cornets. This ostinato is repeated for the first twenty measures of the Coda. Over this ostinato, the low brass and low reeds state an augmentation of motive "a" and "b" at m. 191. This augmentation of the melody occurs over eight measures in contrast with the two-measure original. The upper woodwinds (flute, oboe, and clarinets) state the augmented melody from the low brass and reeds in m. 199.

As shown in Example 4.6, the piece concludes with a final declaration by the cornets of the first four notes of the Principal Theme. The progenitor tone, F, is the most important pitch throughout *Essay for Band*. However, Dickerson only has one F Major triad in the entire composition, and it appears on the final chord. The arrival of the F Major triad at the very end supports Hindemith's belief in tonality and the importance of the major triad.

Example 4.6 *Essay for Band*, mm. 211–225.



HINDEMITH'S METHOD FOR ANALYZING MUSIC

Paul Hindemith authored *The Craft of Musical Composition* in 1937. He wrote this book primarily to educate his composition students. Although he taught at Berlin *Musikhochschule*, he did not have a formal degree in music and was hired based on his reputation as a composer and performer. Hindemith also wanted to offer his students theoretical writings to help them compose music. In the *Craft of Musical Composition*, Hindemith writes:

> Anyone who has not sidestepped this unending struggle with the why of things and, at the risk of laying himself bare before his pupils, has taken each new question as a stimulus to deeper and more searching study...will understand why I feel called upon to devote to the writing of a theoretical work the time and trouble I would rather spend in composing living music.[35]

[35] Paul Hindemith, *The Craft of Musical Composition: Theoretical Part - Book 1*, 4th ed. (Schott, 1984), 8.

Hindemith also wrote *The Craft of Musical Composition* because he thought composers were overlooking tonality in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

> It is not surprising that things have developed as they have. The discovery, in the last century, of the extreme limits of power and subtlety in the effect of musical tone extended the boundaries of tonal domain at the disposal of the composer into hitherto undreamed-of distances. New combinations of tones came to be recognized and new ways of bending a melodic line were discovered.[36]

He also stated:

> We are constantly brought face to face with this confusion by a manner of writing which puts tones together according to no system except that dictated by pure whim, or that into which facile and misleading fingers draw the writer as they glide over the keys.[37]

Hindemith was a neoclassicist and valued clarity and order. He believed that tonality held music together and allowed the listener to understand music. Hindemith sought to make the Western tonal system relevant to the theoretical needs of the twentieth century. His book attempted to develop a way to explain the complexities of twentieth century harmony and other styles of music outside the common practice period.

The *Craft of Musical Composition* is divided into six chapters. In Chapter I, Hindemith criticizes methods of teaching composition in the 1930's and introduces new principles. He then derives a scale of twelve notes to the octave from the overtone series in Chapter II. He offers his classification of chords in Chapter III, harmony in Chapter IV, theory of melody in Chapter V, and concludes the book with analyses of several works.

[36] Ibid., 3.
[37] Ibid., 2.

Hindemith's system for how the notes of the total chromatic relate was based on the harmonic series. In his book, he contends that the harmonic series is a natural phenomenon and the hierarchy of pitches that are represented in the series must be significant. The major triad is formed from the fourth, fifth, and sixth partials of the harmonic series. This natural occurrence was used to support his belief in tonality and the major triad.

Hindemith also uses the harmonic series to construct his version of the chromatic scale. He divides the vibration number of each of the first six overtones by the order number of the preceding tone. Using this formula, he derives the notes C, G, F, A, E, Eb, and Ab.[38] Then, he uses the same formula at the second partial, G, to get the remaining tones. He calls the complete scale Series 1 (C, G, F, A, E, Eb, Ab, D, Bb, Db, B, Gb). Series 1 forms the basis of Hindemith's philosophy of music construction. It includes both a hierarchy of pitches and equal use of all twelve tones of the chromatic scale.

He calls the central pitch the progenitor tone. The progenitor tone is the most important pitch of Series 1. All other pitches are arranged based on their relation to the progenitor tone. In Series 1 (C, G, F, A, E, Eb, Ab, D, Bb, Db, B, Gb), the relatedness and importance of a pitch is determined by its order in the series.

Series 2 gives a hierarchy for intervals. The ordering of Series 2 is determined by the subtones that are produced when pitches are sounded together. The more combination tones that sound, the more complex the interval. In Series 2, intervals are arranged in this order, from strongest to weakest: perfect fifth, perfect fourth, major third, minor sixth, minor third, major sixth, major second, minor seventh, minor second, and major seventh. Each chord has a best interval. When the best interval of a chord is determined, its chord

[38]Ibid., 39.

classification and the chord root can be identified. The root of a chord is the root of its best interval. The roots of fifths, thirds, and sevenths are their lower note and roots of fourths, sixths, and seconds are their upper note. The tritone has no root and is undefined.[39]

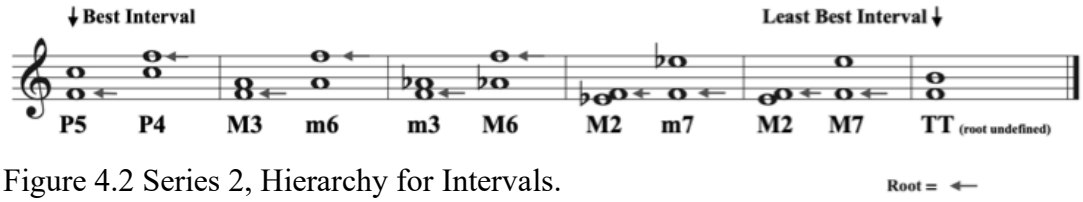


Figure 4.2 Series 2, Hierarchy for Intervals.

Hindemith uses Series 2 to also classify chords as shown in Table 4.1. For his method, a chord is a group of at least three different tones sounding simultaneously. He classifies chords into two main groups in his Table of Chord-Groups. Group A chords do not have a tritone and Group B chords contains one or more tritones. Within each group are three subdivisions that make up six main categories. Group I contains chords without seconds or sevenths. Group II contains chords without minor seconds or major sevenths. Group III has chords with seconds or sevenths and Group IV contains minor seconds or major sevenths. Group V contains augmented triads and superposed fourths and Group VI contains diminished triads. Groups V and VI are both indeterminate because they are made up of intervals of equal size. Group A encompasses groups I, III, and V; Group B includes groups II, IV, and VI. The position of the root of the chord places the chord in a subgroup; if the root is the lowest note, the chord is more stable than if the root is above the lowest note.[40]

[39]Ibid., 94–101.
[40]Ibid., 94–101.

Hindemith states:

> This system of appraising chords and intervals results in a classification of all chords. There is no combination of intervals which does not fit into some division of our system. Chords, which a theorist would analyze only in his nightmares, and which any self- respecting counterpoint book would not tolerate, can now be easily explained.[41]

Table 4.1 Table of Chord-Groups, *The Craft of Musical Composition*.

Table of Chord-Groups

A Chords without Tritone	**B** Chords containing Tritone
I. Without seconds or sevenths **1.** Without seconds or sevenths **2.** Root lies above the bass tone	**II** Without minor seconds or major sevenths The tritone subordinate **a.** With minor seventh only (no major second) Root and bass tone are identical **b.** Containing major seconds or minor sevenths or both **1.** Root and bass tone are identical **2.** Root lies above the bass tone **3.** Containing more than one tritone
III Containing seconds or sevenths or both 1. Root and bass tone are identical 2. Root lies above the bass tone	**IV** Containing minor seconds or major sevenths or both One or more tritones subordinate **1.** Root and bass tone are identical **2.** Root lies above the bass tone
V Indeterminate Augmented triad & Stack of 4th	**VI** Indeterminate, Tritone predominating

[41] Todd Tucker, "Hindemith's Harmonic Procedure from 1935–1940," PhD. dissertation, (Indiana University, 1988), 43.

Hindemith's Table of Chord-Groups from strong to weak shows his hierarchical method for analyzing chords[42]. He uses the term harmonic fluctuation to describe the succession of tension and relaxation in a progression. The ideal fluctuation should show an increase in tension followed by the decrease in tension over a succession of chords. Harmonic fluctuation, as he defines it, should increase tension from the most consonant chords of Group I to the most dissonant of Group IV.[43]

Long notes and sequential patterns demonstrate his law of melodic construction. In Chapter V of *The Craft of Musical Composition*, Hindemith describes a theory for melody. At the time he published the book, Hindemith was astounded that instruction in composition had never developed a theory for melody. Hindemith's theory allows for any combination of tones to be analyzed as a chord. However, his theory of melody includes non-chord tones. The highest note, lowest note, longest note, and other prominent notes of a well-formed melody should form a step-progression. His primary law of melodic construction is achieved when these important points form a smooth and convincing melodic progression in seconds.[44]

Roger Dickerson's *Essay for Band* can be examined by using principles and analytical techniques found in Hindemith's *The Craft of Musical Composition*. Approaches and tools, like Series 1, Series 2, the classification of chords, harmonic fluctuation, and melodic and harmonic degree-progressions can be used to analyze *Essay for Band*.

[42] Hindemith, *Craft of Musical Composition,* 137.
[43] Hindemith, *Musical Composition*, 116.
[44] Ibid., 175.

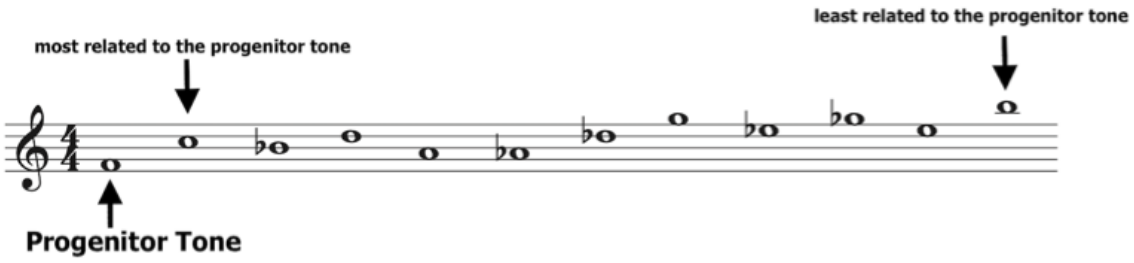


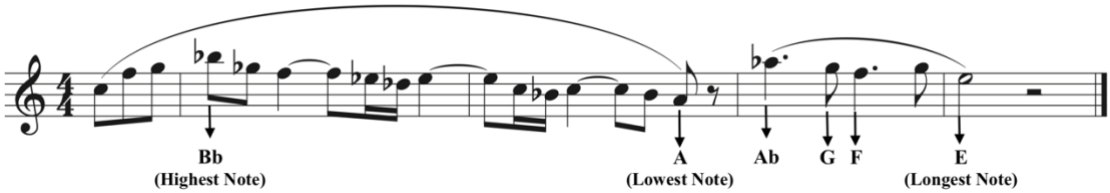
Figure 4.3 Hindemith's Series 1 for *Essay for Band.*

The progenitor tone, tonic, of *Essay for Band* is F. In Figure 4.3, the notes for Series 1 (F, C, Bb, D, A, Ab, Db, G, Eb, Gb, E, B) appear in order of relatedness. Roger Dickerson uses the progenitor tone and most related tones throughout the piece to form melodies and key areas. The work begins with a C eighth note ascending to F. The C serves as a pickup note to the progenitor tone, F. This ascending fourth in the bassoon and bass clarinet is immediately followed by a Gb upper neighbor tone that returns to F. Within the first measure, F is established as the progenitor tone. At the end of the Introduction, the ensemble crescendos and cadences on the F and C pitches. At this point in the piece, F, the progenitor tone, and C, its most closely related tone, are important tones for this work.

The principal theme is first stated in m. 19 of the Allegro Moderato. It begins with C and F, like the first two notes of the piece. The C and F ascending fourth begins a six-note eighth note figure that ends on an F quarter note, which is motive "a." The focal point of motive "a" is Bb, the second most related pitch to the progenitor tone. The second statement of the theme at m. 28 is in Bb. The third statement of the theme at m. 39 is in C. The fourth statement of the theme at m. 50 is in F. All the statements of the theme in Section A, include the progenitor tone, F, and the most closely related tones to

the progenitor tone, C and Bb.

Example 4.7 Motive a, b, c, from the Principal Theme, *Essay for Band*.



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According to Hindemith's theory of melody, the highest note, lowest note, longest note, and other prominent notes of a well-constructed melody should form a step-progression as shown in Example 4.7, the melody is mainly stepwise and contains sequential material. When we do a step-progression analysis of motives a, b, and c, the most prominent notes descend in seconds from Bb to E.

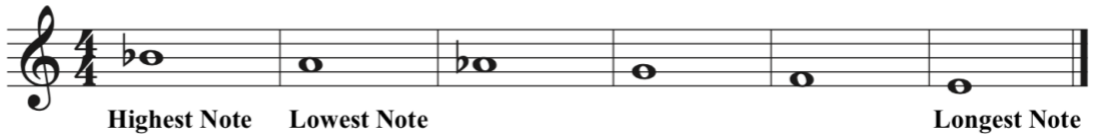


Figure 4.4 Step-progression (motives a, b, and c), *Essay for Band*.

In Figure 4.4, the registers of the prominent notes from Example 4.7 are normalized to illustrate descending seconds from Bb to E. The step-progression for the principal theme, includes the highest note, Bb, lowest note, A, and longest note, E. *Essay for Band'*s principal theme achieves Hindemith's primary law of melodic construction because the important points form a smooth and convincing melodic progression in seconds.

The Andante, Section B, begins at m. 66 with the flute playing a modified motive "a" melodic line. The contour of the flute solo emphasizes and ends on F. The slow and expressive clarinet solo at m. 76 is also a transformation of motive "a" and centered around F. The transition from Section B begins in m. 116 with sustained notes on F, C, and Bb. The C and F ascending pickup figure is stated by the tenor saxophone and baritone, then echoed by multiple instruments throughout the next six measures.

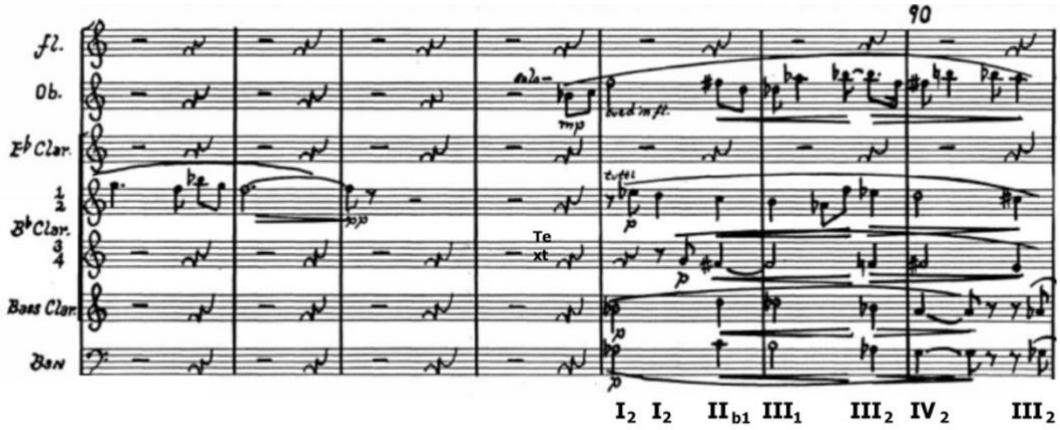
The principal theme returns in Section A', in m. 131, by the cornets in F. The second statement in the woodwinds at m. 140 is in Bb. The third statement appears in m. 150 in F, played by the French horns. The fourth statement, in C, appears in the woodwinds and trumpets in m. 161. The three-voice canon at the end of Section A' begins with tuba and baritone in F at m. 172. Sections A and A' both emphasize F, C, and Bb.

The Coda begins at m. 189 with a driving ostinato in the French horns and lower cornets. This ostinato is a diminution of motives "a" and "b" and begins with C and F. Over this ostinato, the low brass and bassoon state an augmented form of motive "a" and "b" at m. 191. The first eighth notes, C and F, from the principal theme appear as a half note C and whole note F. This augmentation is repeated by the upper woodwinds at measure 199. In m. 220, five measures from the end, the cornets state C and F from motive "a" for the final time. The last chord in m. 223 ends on an F major triad, the only appearance of the tonic triad, with F sounding as the highest and lowest note.

Hindemith's Table of Chord-Groups allows for the categorization of any chord. The method places chords in groups based on their level of consonance and dissonance. This allows for the analyzation of harmonic fluctuation, the tension and relaxation during the succession of chords.

Measures 87–90 illustrate a logical succession of chords supported by Hindemith. The progression begins with consonant chords from Group I. Then, the tension increases until it reaches its peak at a Group IV chord, the most dissonant chord group. Then, the progression ends on a consonant Group III chord. This succession of chords, shown in Example 4.8, demonstrates the tension and relaxation principal of Hindemith's harmonic fluctuation.

Example 4.8 Harmonic fluctuation, mm. 84–90, *Essay for Band*.



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CHAPTER 5

MUSICAL TOPICS

5.1 LEONARD RATNER'S CONCEPT OF MUSICAL TOPICS

Leonard Ratner introduced the concept of topics to account for cross-references between eighteenth-century styles and genres. Viennese Classical composers crossed the boundaries between stylistic conventions as means to communicate with the audience. It was common for Viennese instrumental music to incorporate topical use of styles and genres out of their proper context and combine them with other styles and genres.[45] Ratner's eighteenth-century topics laid the foundation for the study of musical topics of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.[46]

Leonard Ratner was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and was a Professor of Musicology at Stanford University. He was the first to earn a Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of California at Berkeley. Ratner studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg, Ernest Bloch, Arthur Bliss, and Frederick Jacobi.[47] He received a Guggenheim Fellowship and was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and

[45] Danuta Mirka, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory* (Oxford Handbooks: Online edition, 2013).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Kofi Agawu, "Leonard G. Ratner, 1916-2011," *Ad Parnassum: A Journal of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Instrumental Music* (2012)*:* 190–194.

Sciences. He was best known for pioneering the concept of Topic Theory and specialized in the style of the classical period.

Leonard Ratner first introduced topic theory in his book, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style,* in 1980. In this book, he defined topics as subjects for musical discourse. These figures from eighteenth-century genres and styles were borrowed by composers and used in their works. Ratner thought that topics were valuable because they would allow modern listeners to perceive the affective connotations of the source styles.[48]

Viennese Classicism in the eighteenth-century included characteristic musical figures from poetry, the military, the hunt, entertainment, dance, and other sources. These figures give classical composers a way to convey feelings, affections, or images.[49]

Dances reflected the formality and protocol of eighteenth-century life and class hierarchy. For instance, the minuet, Sarabande, and gavotte were high style dances and were viewed as elegant and courtly. The lively bourrée and gigue represented middle style dances. The contredanses and *Ländler* were viewed as dance of the low style.[50] Popular dance forms are a way for audiences to associate feelings, lifestyle, and class. Dances were small forms that served as models for compositions and classical composers wrote thousands. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven composed hundreds of compositions using dance forms for social, speculative, and theatrical purposes.

Marches had both dance and ceremonial meaning during the eighteenth century. Marches were originally performed by military bands on the battlefield, military

[48] Ibid.
[49] Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9–10.
[50] Ibid, 9.

exercises, and for parades. The march reminded the listener of authority and served to open ballet performances, ceremonies, and stage presentations.[51]

Military and hunt music was common during the eighteenth century. The nobility had their own court guards, parading to the fanfare of trumpets accompanied by the tattoo of drums; German towns had town bands that performed for trade fairs, festivals, birthdays, and weddings. The hunt was a favorite diversion of the nobility and horn signals commonly echoed throughout the countryside.[52] Composers also imitated horn signals to recall the nostalgic affection.[53]

The learned and strict styles were associated with music of the church. The strict style, also called the bound style or fugal style, sets firm rules for harmonic and melodic progression. The learned style generally signifies imitation, fugal or canonic, and contrapuntal compositions.[54]

Ratner introduced serval other topics including Singing Style, Brilliant Style, French Overture, Musette/Pastorale, Turkish Music, Storm and Stress (*Sturm und Drang*), Sensibility (*Empfindsamkeit*), and Fantasia. These eighteenth-century styles formed the foundation of topic theory and gave future musicologist a model to identify other topics.

5.2 HORACE MAXILE'S AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL TOPICS

Horace Maxile uses Leonard Ratner's topic theory to develop African American music topics. In his 2002 Dissertation, "Say What?: Topics, Signs, and Signification in

[51] Ibid, 16.
[52] Ibid, 18.
[53] Ibid, 19.
[54] Ibid, 23.

African-American Music," Maxile identifies African American cultural topics and investigates how they function in specific musical contexts.[55] He introduces the following African American cultural topics:

1. Call and Response
2. Signifyin(g)
3. Spiritual/supernatural
4. Blues
5. Jazz

These topics do not represent the full range of expression in African American music. Maxile intended for these topics to provide the platform from which to begin investigating African American musical topics.[56] Maxile's dissertation analyzed works by William Grant Still, Charles Mingus, David Baker, and Hale Smith. David Baker and Roger Dickerson attended Indiana University together and formed a band while they were students. Roger Dickerson and Hale Smith were friends.

CALL AND RESPONSE

Call and response, an African trope, was brought to the United States by enslaved Africans. The African diaspora retained call and response characteristics in African American music, rhetoric, and worship services. This common African performance practice is structured in the antiphonal style. It involves a leader who makes a musical statement and is responded to by another performer or group of performers.[57] This trope

[55] Horace Maxile, "Say What?: Topics, Signs, and Signification in African American Music," PhD diss., (Louisiana State University, 2001), 15.
[56] Ibid., 10.
[57] Ibid., 11.

appears in both vocal and instrumental music. In jazz, an improviser may respond to calls suggested by ensemble riffs and repetitions.[58]

SIGNIFYIN(G)

Henry Louis Gates, a Harvard University professor, developed the concept of Signifyin(g). This theory of African American literary criticism interprets African American literature and vernacular culture. Samuel Floyd first used the Signifiyin(g) concept to examine figures of African American musical traditions.[59] Floyd describes signifyin(g) as:

> troping: the transformation of preexisting musical material by trifling with it, teasing it, or censuring it. Musical Signifyin(g) is the rhetorical use of preexisting material as a means of demonstrating respect for or poking fun at a musical style, process or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanisms.[60]

Signifyin(g) is simply the creative play with or on musical styles and genres. These musical elements must be evident before any type of play can occur.[61] Maxile said:

> One must be adept with both the signifier and the signified in order to discuss the referential richness of this process and to recognize varying levels of topical signification in structural and expressive domains. In other words and with regard to certain works by black composers, one must be as comfortable with the blues as one is with Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms in order to shed light on this practice.[62]

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[58] Ibid., 12.
[59] Ibid., 13.
[60] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United* Scares (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.
[61] Maxile, "Say What?: Topics," 14.
[62] Horace Maxile, "Signs, Symphonies, Signifyin(g): African-American Cultural Topics as Analytical Approach to the Music of Black Composers," *Black Music Research Journal* (2008): 128.

The concept of re-creation is prevalent in African American culture and music. The practice of improvisation by jazz musicians is an example of Floyd's concept of musical signifyin(g).

> The technique, the knowledge of structure and theory, and the external ideas that facilitate and support improvisation, then, must be called on to convey, in coherent and effective presentation, what emerges from cultural memory. It is this dialogical effectiveness that jazz musicians strive for as they create and re-create, state and revise, in the spontaneous manner known as improvisation; it is this Signifyin(g) revision that is at the heart of the jazz player's art.[63]

SPIRITUAL/SUPERNATURAL

Spirituals are African American folksongs that originated in the early nineteenth century. These songs infuse African musical traditions and culture into European Protestant church music. When enslaved Africans were introduced to Christianity and protestant music in the United States during the early nineteenth century, they challenged and altered the church service and its music. They would alter the text, melody, and rhythm of Protestant psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to create new compositions. They would commonly transform the verse structure of the original song into a call and response or repetitive chorus structure.[64] They would also incorporate shouts, moans, groans, and cries into the melody of the improvised solo.[65] Transcriptions of early spirituals place the melodies in major and the pentatonic scale with some flatted tones. Western notation only offers an approximation of complex rhythmic patterns and layers. This made it difficult for transcribers to capture the rhythms of spirituals.[66]

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[63] Floyd, Power of Black Music, 140-41.

[64] Portia Maultsby, "Africanisms in African-American Music," in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph. E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 198.

[65] Ibid., 198.

[66] Maxile, "Say What?: Topics," 17.

> In performance, the steady beats of a song's meter were sustained by hand clapping and foot tapping. . .Against the fixed rhythm of the pulse, the melodies moved freely, producing cross- rhythms that constantly clashed with the pulse patterns. It has become conventional to notate the cross-rhythms of slave melodies as syncopation, but in reality, the phenomenon is more complex than that.[67]

The traditions and performance practices of Gospel music are also covered under the spiritual/supernatural topic.

BLUES

Spirituals and the blues both developed from the misery and hardships of an oppressed people.[68] The blues reflects the secular aspects of the African American experience and has certain musical conventions which distinguish it from the sacred spiritual. The blues scale, blue notes, and the twelve-bar blues form are all hallmarks of the blues. Blues melodies typically use diatonic collections where the third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees are lowered. In instrumental textures, these altered tones or blue notes might imitate the cries and moans of expressive blues singing.[69]

JAZZ

Jazz is a broad and diverse genre which was developed in the early 20th century by African Americans. The genre features fluid creative process involving improvisation, syncopation, swing rhythms, melodic and harmonic elements from blues, and cyclical formal structures.[70] Improvisation, the spontaneous creation of music as it is being

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[67] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 3rd edition (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 195.

[68] Maxile, "Say What?: Topics," 18.

[69] Ibid., 19.

[70] Mark Tucker, "Jazz," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition, ed. Stanley Sadie, Vol. 12 (New York: Macmillan Publishers Inc., 2001), 903–904.

performed, is the principal component to jazz performance.[71] Although jazz has elements of blues (blue notes), call and response (riffs, responses, and revisions), and signifyin(g), the jazz topic focuses mainly on the harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic conventions associated with the genre.[72] This includes chord construction, progressions, jazz scales, and swing rhythms.

Jazz chords include extended tertian harmonies which involve the addition of thirds to the chord beyond the seventh (ninths, elevenths, thirteenths).[73] Practitioners of jazz use a variety of scales and modes during improvisation.[74]

[71] Barry Kernfeld, "Improvisation," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 554.
[72] Maxile, "Say What?: Topics," 22.
[73] Ibid., 22.
[74] Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

MUSICAL TOPICS IN THE COMPOSITIONS OF ROGER DICKERSON

6.1 ESSAY FOR BAND

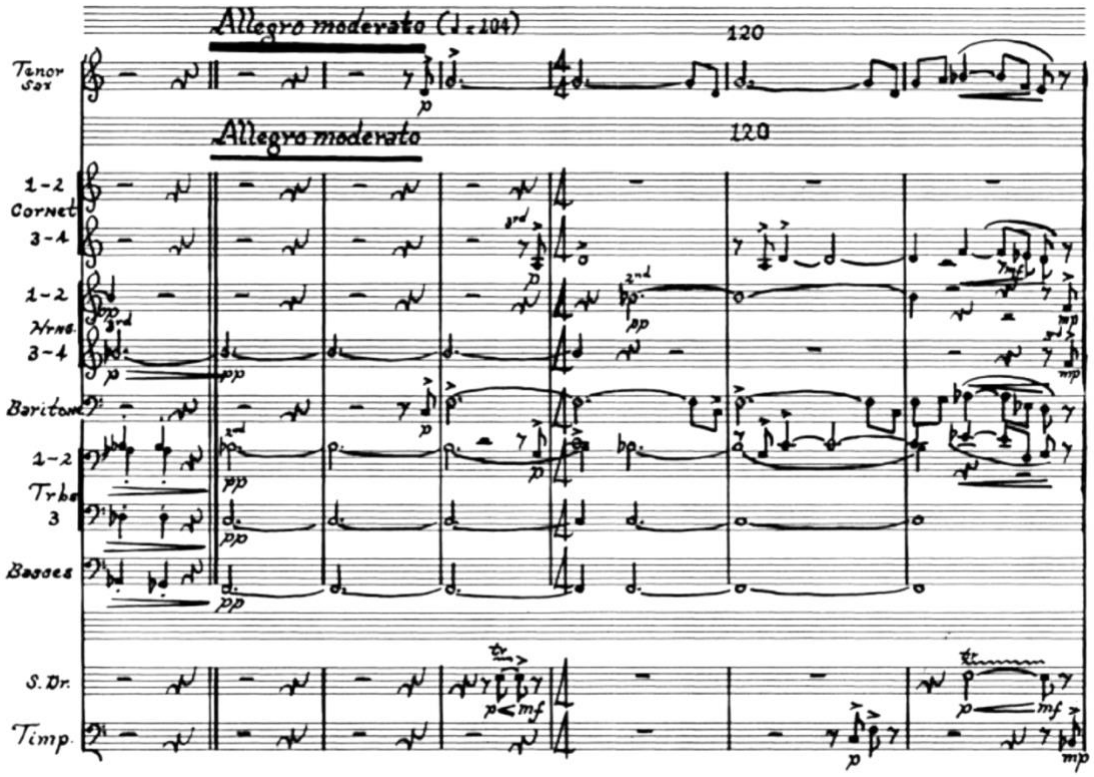
Leonard Ratner applied his concept of topics to eighteenth-century Viennese musical styles and genres. These stylistic conventions were used to communicate feelings, affections, and images to the audience. *Essay for Band* follows the compositional techniques of twentieth-century German composer Paul Hindemith. Hindemith was a neoclassicist, valued clarity and order in music, and championed tonality in the twentieth century. Roger Dickerson's *Essay for Band* can be analyzed using Ratner's topics because it is contrapuntal and has Germanic characteristics. Although a musical essay is not programmatic, topics by Ratner can be applied to Dickerson's composition. The learned style topic and military and hunt music topic can be used to examine *Essay for Band*.

The learned style topic is characterized by imitative counterpoint. Dickerson's *Essay for Band* is largely contrapuntal and uses the material from the principal theme throughout the work. Dickerson skillfully develops the principal theme by using contrapuntal devices like stretto, diminution, and augmentation.

Essay for Band was composed during Roger Dickerson's military service in Arkansas. It was composed for and premiered by the 449th Army Band at Fort Chaffee.

The fanfare figures throughout *Essay for Band* correspond with Ratner's military and hunt music topic. When the Allegro Moderato section returns at measure 116, Dickerson writes a two-note fanfare figure that is first played by the baritone and tenor saxophone, then played by the third trumpet and first trombone. In Example 6.1, this transition section begins piano and builds in volume until the return of the principal theme. This effect resembles an approaching military band in the distance.

Example 6.1 *Essay for Band*, mm. 115–121.



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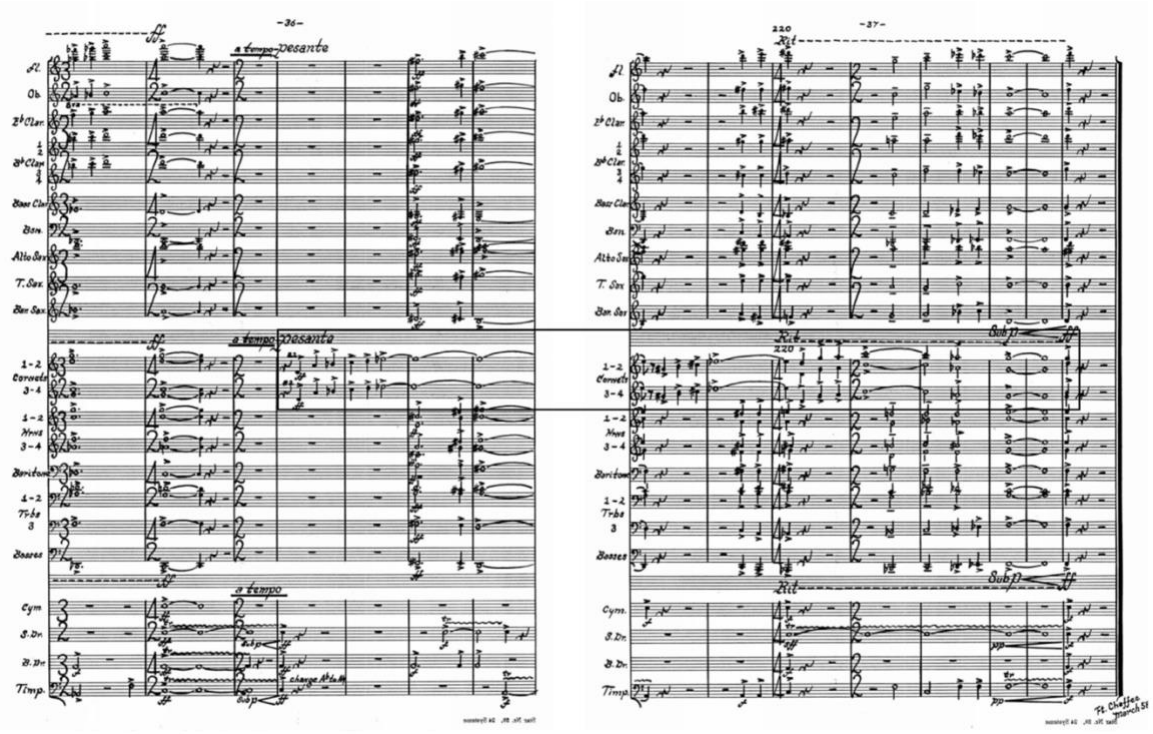
At the end of the piece, the cornets give a final proclamation of the first four notes of the Principal Theme. Dickerson uses this fanfare as the climax of his work and to signal the final development of the principal theme.

Example 6.2 *Essay for Band*, mm. 211–225.



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6.2 A MUSICAL SERVICE FOR LOUIS

Following the death of Louis Armstrong on July 6, 1971, the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra marked his death by commissioning a new work. Werner Torkanowsky, the music director of the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra, commissioned Dickerson in September of 1971 to compose a sort of requiem for Louis Armstrong. Dickerson titled the piece, *A Musical Service for Louis* (*A Requiem for Louis Armstrong)*. The New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Werner

Torkanowsky premiered the work on March 7, 1972. This composition earned Roger Dickerson his first Pulitzer nomination.

A Musical Service for Louis is based on services in the African American Church. Dickerson describes this work as a way for him to play a "role in facilitating something in a formal nature to mark Armstrong's passing; something within the tradition of the Black Church, even though performance is not in a church."[75]

The piece has a three-note motif that appears through the work. An offstage trumpet plays the motif at the end of the piece. The offstage trumpet represents Louis Armstrong playing somewhere in the cosmos answering back.[76] The final statement of the three-note motif symbolizes the "Free at Last" concept associated with the African American Christian church and its struggle for freedom from slavery and Louis Armstrong's freedom from this world to another plane of existence.[77] These three words, free at last, are from a spiritual and appear at the end of the Martin Luther King's rousing speech, "I have a Dream."

> And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last![78]

This fifteen-minute orchestral work is for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets in Bb, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four French horns in F, three

[75] Ken Scarbrough, "With Humility and Piety, Composer Roger Dickerson Serves His City, Students and the Human Spirit," *Scholastic* 122, no. April 8, 1981, 24.

[76] Ibid., 24.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, Transcript, The Avalon Project, Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library.

trumpets in Bb, offstage trumpet in Bb, three trombones, tuba, timpani, side drum, bass drum, tambourine, jazz set, harp, piano, strings, and optional mixed chorus.

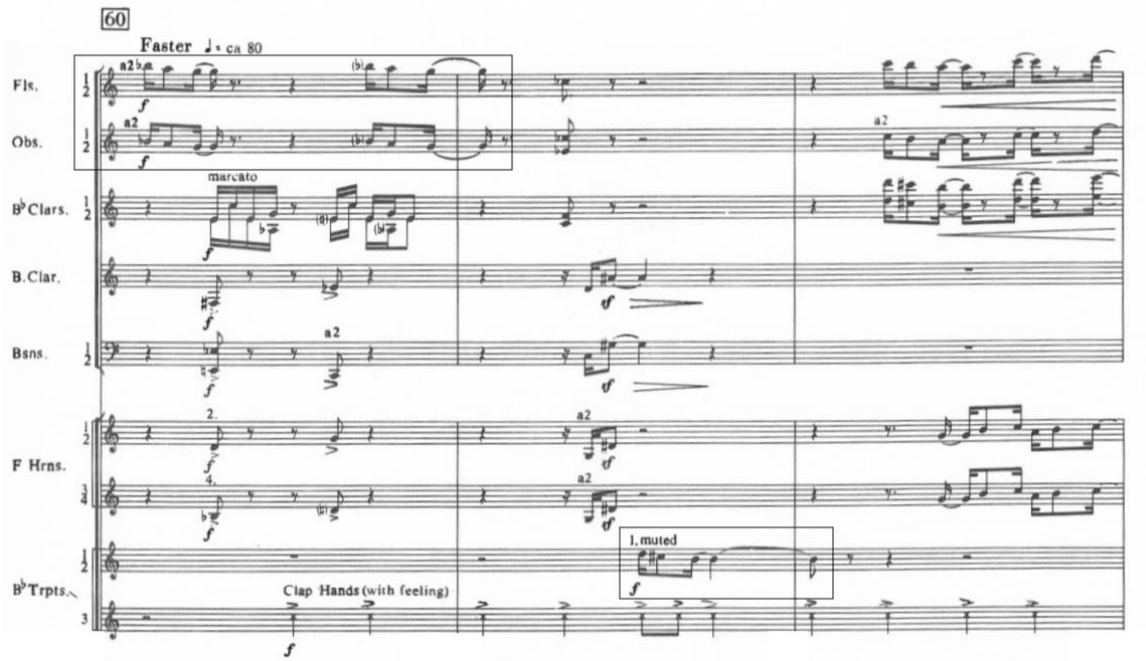
The African American worship service is a blend of European Protestant and African traditions. Enslaved Africans were introduced to Christianity in the early nineteenth century and altered and challenged the orthodox service.[79] They preserved the Sub-Saharan African interaction between speaker and audience known as call and response. In the African American church, there is constant verbal and non-verbal communication between speaker and congregation. For instance, it is common for congregants to acknowledge the sermon by saying "Amen" or nodding their head. Call and response patterns are persuasive and encourage solidarity among the congregation.

Music in African American services encourage the same participation from the congregation. Typically, a song leader will sing a phrase or verse and the congregants will respond. They may respond with the same material, answer a question, or slightly alter the original statement.

As shown in Example 6.3, The three-note Free at Last motif appear first in measure 60 by the flutes and oboes. They play the motif twice and the first trumpet responds in measure 61.

[79] Maxile, "Say What?: Topics," 15.

Example 6.3 Free at Last motif, *A Musical Service for Louis*, mm. 60-62.



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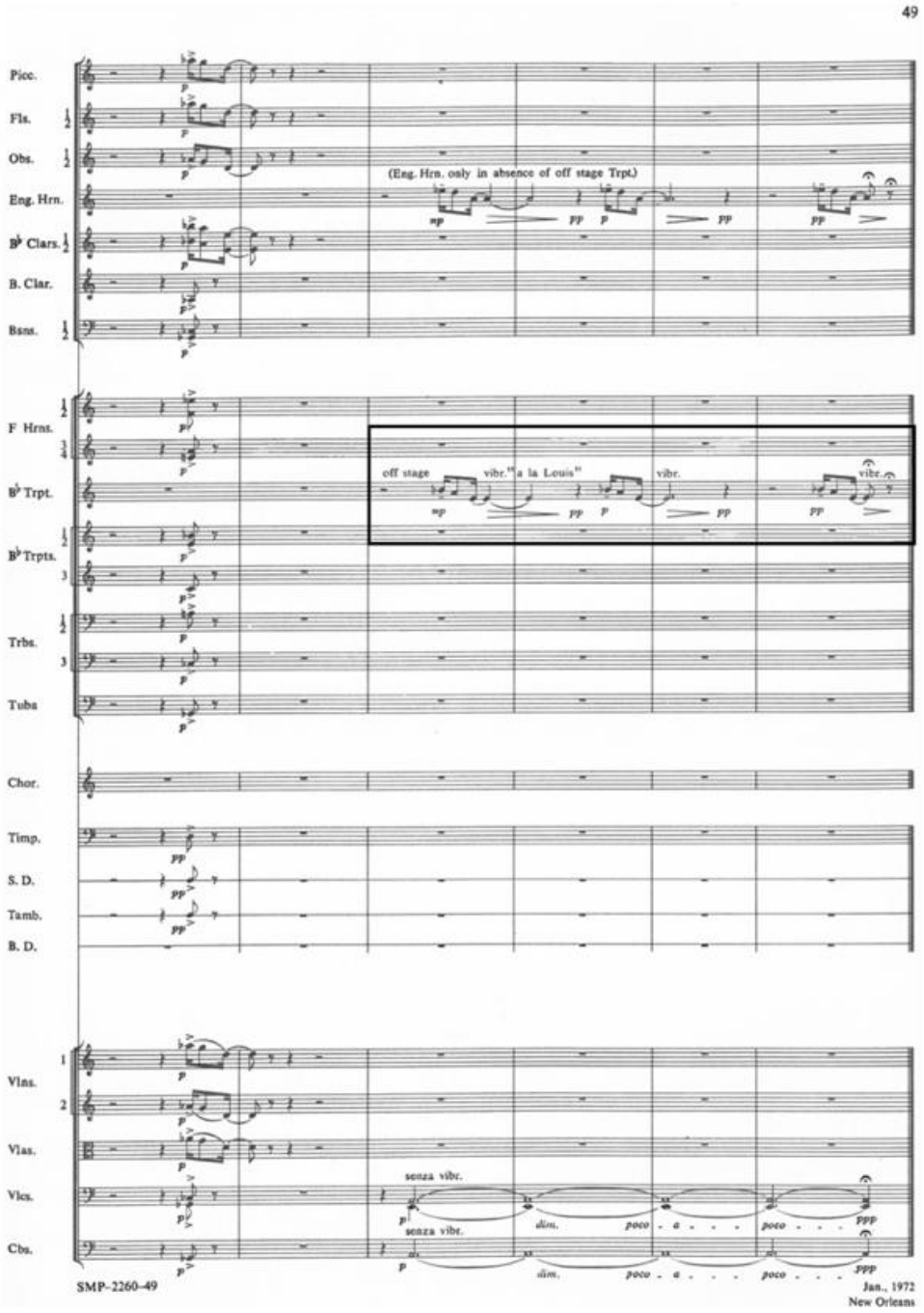
In mm. 189-192, the flutes, oboes, clarinets, violins, violas make three statements of the Free at Last motif. The first note of each statement is accented. The first two statements are forte, and the third statement is piano. As shown in Example 6.4, the off-stage trumpet responds to the strings and woodwinds with three statements of the motif in the last four measures. Dickerson instructs the off-stage trumpeter to play with vibrato in the style of Louis Armstrong. He also indicates that the sustained F major chord in the cellos and basses should be played without vibrato.

Example 6.4 Free at Last Motif, *A Musical Service for Louis*, mm. 191–196.



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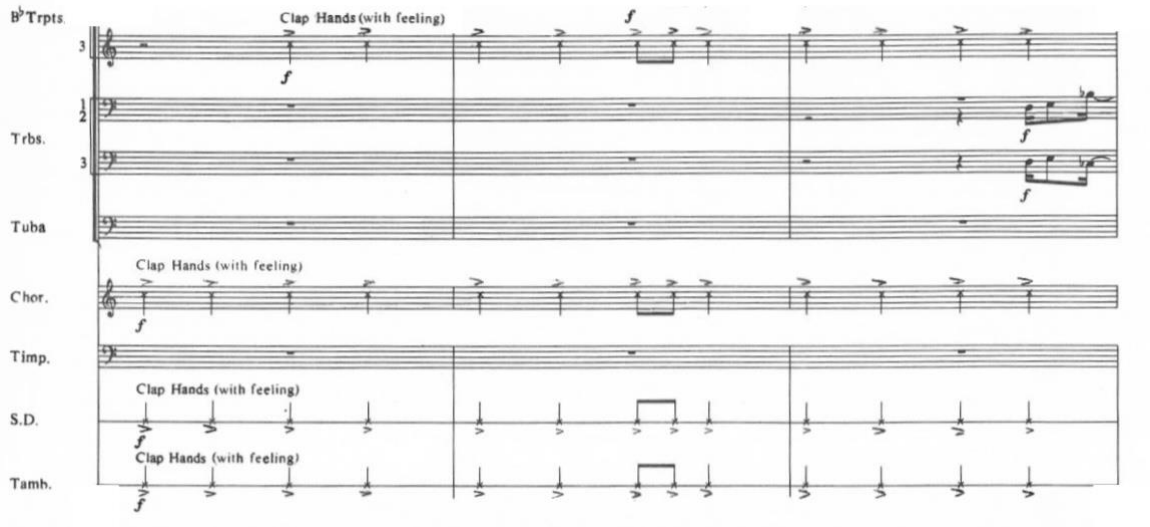
Roger Dickerson is transparent about his spirituality and said the following concerning his philosophical approach to composing music:

> I believe that my work is an expression of inner devotion and freedom; an expression that combines love of art with human relationships and the sense of Godly duty. I see my creativity as a release of my spiritual self and all that self reflects from the conscious and unconscious worlds we live in and move through.[80]

A Musical Service for Louis (A Requiem for Louis Armstrong) does not follow the structure of a Catholic mass for the dead. Roger Dickerson wanted the piece to follow the traditional musical service from the African American Protestant church. The piece features elements common in New Orleans African American churches, like the dirge, the drum set, tambourine, hand clapping, and a choir. The choir sings "Ah" with the orchestra throughout the work. As shown in Example 6.5, Dickerson indicates that the choir, percussion, and trumpet should clap their hands with feeling.

Example 6.5 Clap Hands (with feeling), *A Musical Service for Louis*, mm. 75–77.



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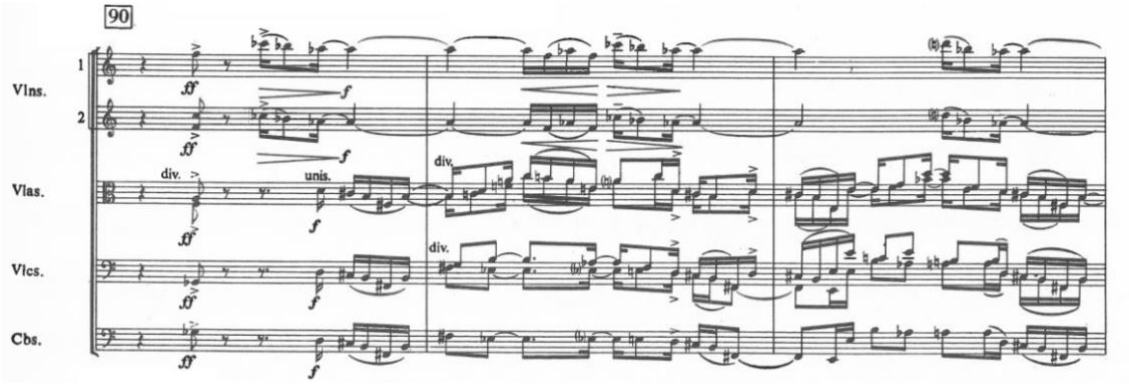
A Musical Service for Louis is a tribute to one of the legends of jazz. Although there is not improvisation or swung rhythms, this work incorporates some elements from

[80] Lucius Wyatt. "Roger Dickerson, Composer," *Black Music Research Newsletter*, 1984, 4.

jazz. The most ubiquitous element is syncopation. The Free at Last motif is syncopated along with other rhythms throughout the work. Measures 90–92 in Example 6.6 illustrate how Dickerson skillfully writes syncopated counterpoint in the strings.

Example 6.6 Syncopation, *A Musical Service for Louis*, mm. 90–92.



6.3 ORPHEUS AN' HIS SLIDE TROMBONE

Roger Dickerson composed *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone,* a work for narrator and orchestra, in 1975. Werner Torkanowsky conducted its premiere with the New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra and actor Roscoe Lee Browne was the narrator. The text is based on Joanne Greenberg's short story, *Orpheus an' Eurydice* from a collection titled *Rites of Passages*. In *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone*, Dickerson creates his own myth of Orpheus with places and names from New Orleans. In his story, Orpheus is transplanted to New Orleans and finds and loses his Eurydice.[81] The text is written in African American Vernacular English which is commonly spoken by African Americans in New Orleans and throughout the Southern United States.

[81] Scarbrough. "Composer Roger Dickerson," 24.

The piece is written for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four French horns, three trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, tambourine, large gong, cymbals, bass drum, harp, piano, strings, and narrator.

In music, call and response functions similarly to a musical conversation. This compositional technique often has a succession of two distinct phrases. Usually a performer offers a phrase, then a second performer or group of performers answer with direct commentary or a response. These phrases can be performed by singers, instrumentalists, or both.

Call and response has its roots in Sub-Saharan Africa and this conversational technique goes beyond music. The people of Sub-Saharan Africa use this pervasive pattern of speech participation in public gatherings for storytelling, civic affairs, and religious rituals.

> In the case of the Igbo (Nigeria), the storyteller calls out the story in lines; the audience or chorus responds at regular intervals to the storyteller's calls with a sala (the chorus' response). In some cases, the Igbo sala is "amanye," roughly equivalent to American English expressions of agreement such as "amen" or "right on!"[82]

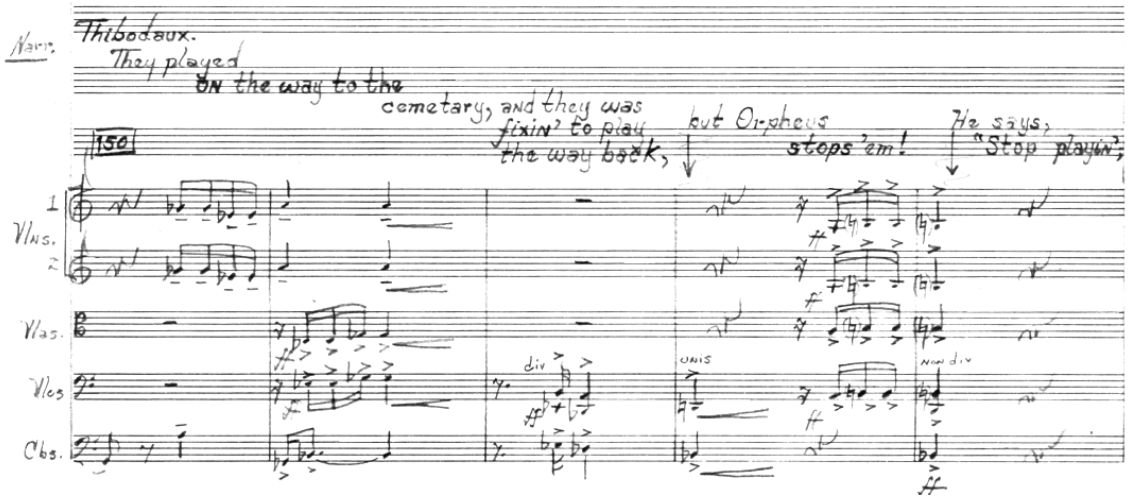
This oral and musical tradition was brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans. The influence of call and response can be found in American workshop services, sporting events, political rallies, and other public venues. In American music, call and response is common in blues, gospel, country, rock and roll, funk, pop, soul, and hip hop.

Roger Dickerson prominently uses a narrator to tell the story of *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone*. The narrator calls out the story in the African tradition. However, the

[82] Kimberly Sambol-Tosco, "Slavery and the Making of America," (PBS.org. Education Broadcasting Inc., 2004)

narrator does not receive a vocal response from a group of people, but rather the instruments of the orchestra respond. In m. 153, the narrator exclaims, "Orpheus stops'em!" Then, the strings respond by playing fortissimo accented notes. This call and response sequence is shown in Example 6.7.

Example 6.7 Call and Response, *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone*, mm. 150–155.



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Samuel Floyd's concept of musical signifyin(g) includes the notion of re-creation. Over the years, African American musicians have altered, revised, and recreated music from pre-existing forms and songs. The spiritual was a re-creation of European Protestant hymns using African musical traditions. They altered the rhythm, melody, text, and changed the verse structure on the original song into a call and response or repetitive chorus structure.[83] It is also common for jazz musicians to spontaneously create and recreate music when they improvise.

Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone embodies the spirit of re-creation found throughout African American culture. Roger Dickerson recreates the mythical story of

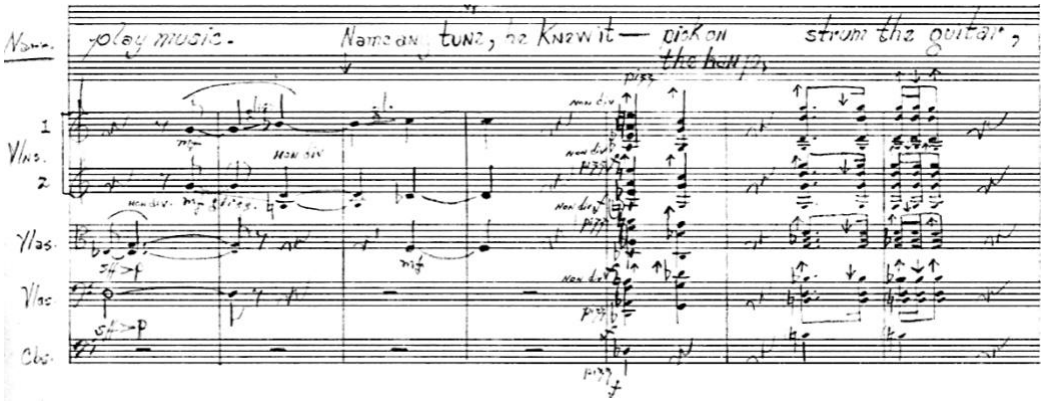
[83] Maultsby, "Africanisms in African-American Music," 198.

Orpheus an' Eurydice by changing the location of the story to his home, New Orleans. When Orpheus and Eurydice marry, they take a wedding trip to Algiers, a historic neighborhood on the West Bank of the Mississippi River in New Orleans. The couple lived in Downtown New Orleans, near the French Quarter, where Orpheus played for weddings, funerals, dances, Christmas parties, churches, and saloons.

Orpheus is a talented musician and master of various musical instruments. In Dickerson's piece, Orpheus does not play instruments from Greek mythology, but from modern New Orleans. The trombone, banjo, guitar, and tambourine are featured in Dickerson's recreated story. The banjo was developed by enslaved Africans in North America who wanted to recreate an instrument similar to the plucked spike lutes found in West Africa.[84] The neck is made from a plain round stick and the body covered like a drum with animal hide from hollow gourd, calabash, or carved wood.[85] The banjo was exclusively played by enslaved Africans during the colonial period and the early United States.[86] Dickerson does not include the banjo or guitar in the piece's instrumentation, but rather uses the strings to play a plucked string effect. In m. 32, Dickerson has the violins, violas, and cellos strum their instruments like a banjo or guitar. As shown in Example 6.8, Dickerson uses up and down arrows to indicate the direction the instruments should strum.

[84] Matthew Sabatella, "Banjo: A Brief History," (Ballad of America, 2023)
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

Example 6.8 Banjo imitation, *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone,* mm. 28–34



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Although *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone* is a secular mythological story, Dickerson introduces Christian themes and supernatural events in his retelling. The story has a Christian funeral with a big band playing as the procession goes to the cemetery. In the original story, Orpheus goes to the underworld to ask Hades for Eurydice. Instead of Hades, Dickerson has God appear to Orpheus at Eurydice's grave. Orpheus mourned his wife's death by playing his trombone in a sorrowful manner. His playing caused the birds to fall out of the sky, sea tide to stop, and leaves to die on the trees. God convinces Orpheus to stop playing his trombone by offering him a way to get his wife back.

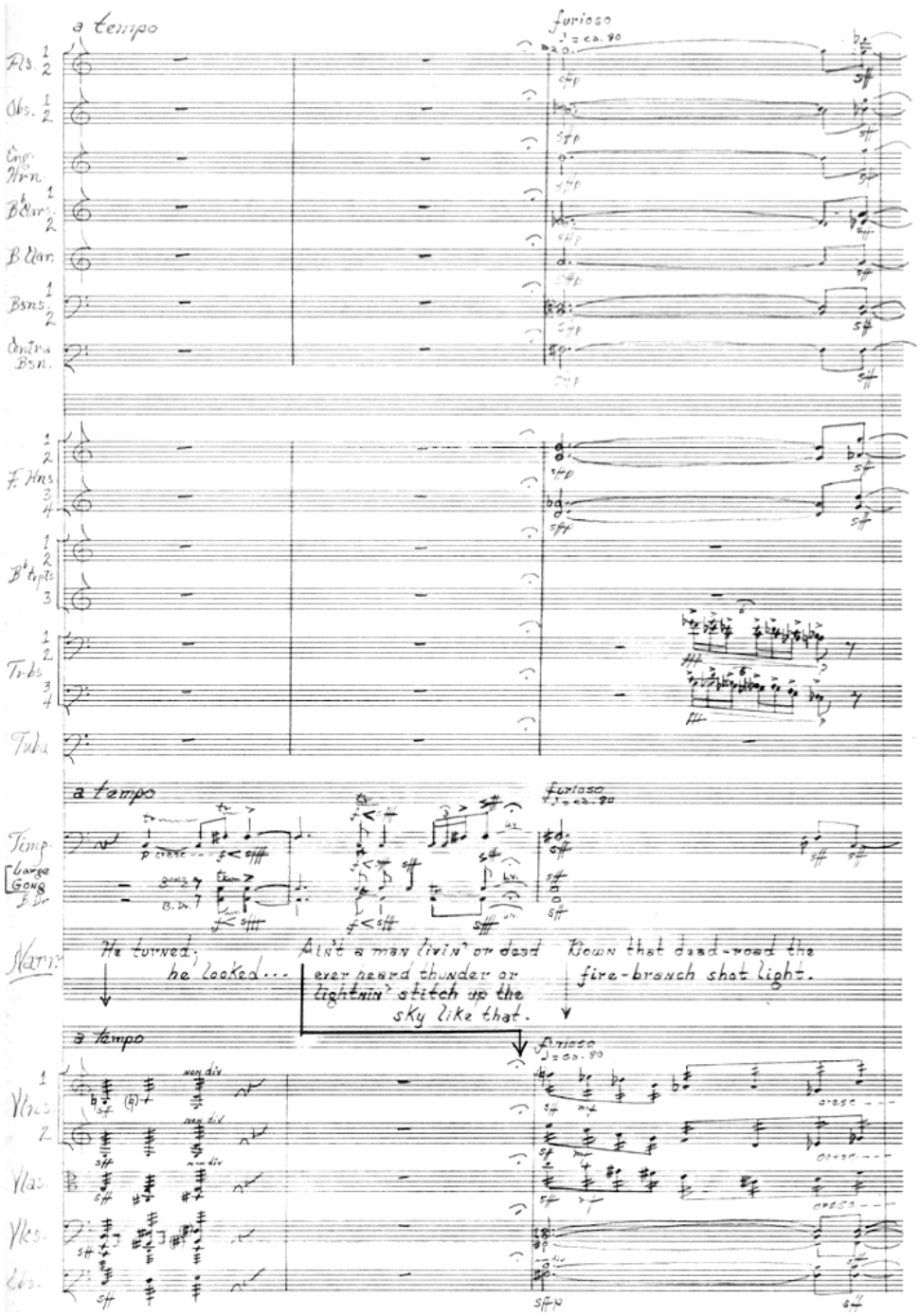
> God says to them, "You can both go home, but don't lay eyes on each other till you're standin' on ground. You do like I say or the deal's off, an' she got to go back. Hear?[87]

When Orpheus eventually turned and looked at Eurydice, a supernatural event happened with thunder and lightning. In mm. 242–243, Dickerson writes trills in the timpani, gong, and bass drum to simulate thunder. In m. 244, violins and violas play tremolos and the

[87] Roger Dickerson, "Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone," (Peer music Classical, 1975)

trombone quartet play a descending sextuplet feature to describe the fire-branch shooting light.[88]

Example 6.9 Supernatural event, *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone, mm. 242–244.*



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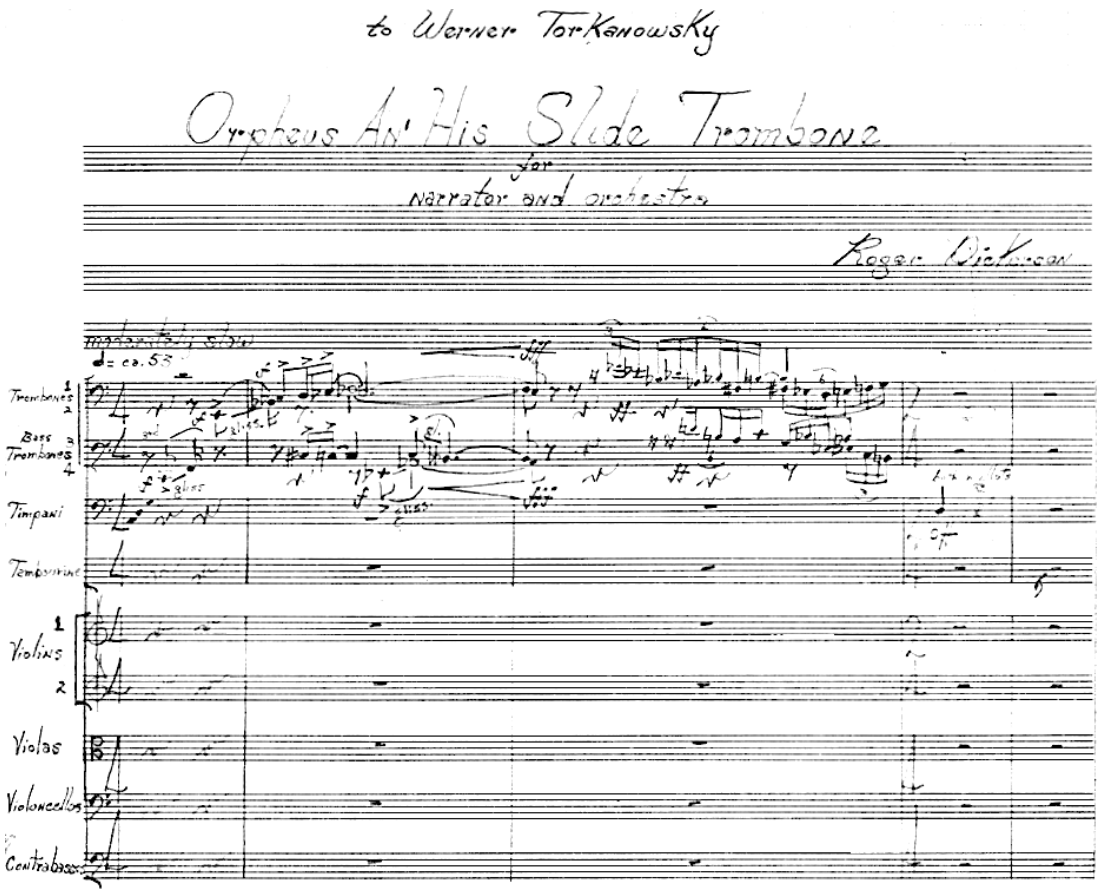
[88] Ibid.

Roger Dickerson creates a blues effect by using glissandos in various instruments throughout the piece. These glissandos imitate the cries and moans of expressive blues singing. In Example 6.10, the opening measures feature the trombone quartet playing glissandos.

Example 6.10 Trombone glissandos, *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone,* mm. 1–5.



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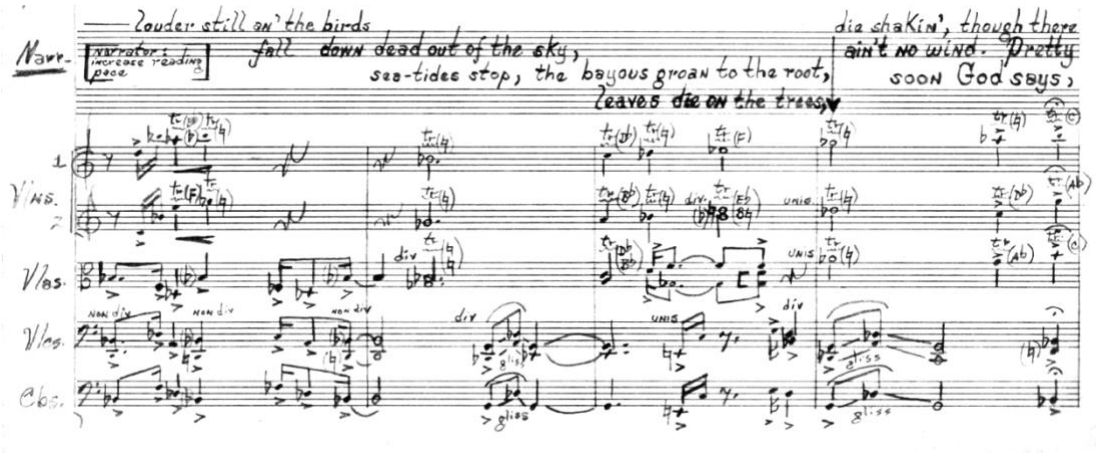
Syncopated rhythms are found throughout *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone.* In measure 181, syncopated rhythms appear in the viola, cello and bass parts.

Example 6.11 Syncopation, *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone,* mm. 181–184.



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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Roger Dickerson was born in a segregated New Orleans that disenfranchised African Americans and placed social and physical barriers between its citizens. Although Dickerson grew up in a system that enforced separation, his musical life embraces music from all over the world. Weather playing jazz in the French Quarter as a teenager or studying composition in Europe on his Fulbright Scholarships, Dickerson did not separate music based on tradition.

Despite its history of segregation laws, Dickerson views New Orleans as a melting pot and a cultural center that melds traditions. In the interview for this study, Dickerson said:

> I believe that the area of New Orleans, at the bottom of the Mississippi River, functions, indeed, as a spiritual center—a corridor in which the cultural traditions of Africa and of Europe have fused together in this city, and in a way, that they haven't combined in any other city on this planet. That confluence of cultural traditions, of spiritual energies, are at, I believe, the very core of our uniqueness. That, to me, is what makes New Orleans truly special—truly unique. The traditions have melded here—and flowed out, on to other distant places and communities. The European traditions in the form of march music and those rhythmic traditions of Africa combined to produce what became known as "ragging", or later known as Ragtime. And which, when finally connected to the blues tradition, fused into a form of music that has circled the world, capturing hearts everywhere—a music we call jazz. The acculturation of these traditions, sourced from Europe and Africa, in America produced this new music—a 20th Century music—and it affected our cuisine, dress, and architecture as well. Our New Orleans is a great center reflecting that acculturation, or the melding of those

cultural traditions in this spiritual corridor.[89]

When Dickerson returned home from Europe in the 1960's, New Orleans became a source of inspiration for the composer. He wanted his future compositions to reflect his cultural heritage.

This study examined the musical life of Roger Dickerson, *Essay for Band*, and two orchestral works, *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone* and *A Musical Service for Louis*, influenced by his African American culture. My interview with Dickerson provides a look into his experience living in the segregated South, his musical training, his philosophy on music, and his life as a music educator.

Due to the increased programming of *Essay for Band* by leading university ensembles, many band directors and musicians are discovering the work and Roger Dickerson for the first time. This document offers preexisting analyses of the work and new research based on Hindemith's method for analyzing twentieth-century tonal music. The purpose of this research is to inform the performance practices of conductors and musicians.

Essay for Band was composed by Roger Dickerson early in his career. The composition is nonprogrammatic, contrapuntal, and similar in style to the music of Bernhard Heiden and Paul Hindemith. Although *Essay for Band* is a well-composed work and demonstrates Dickerson's skills as a composer, it does not represent all the music in his compositional catalogue.

[89] Roger Dickerson. "Roger Dickerson Interview," New Orleans, Louisiana, Transcript (October 19, 2023).

Examining his music using musical topics in Chapter 6 provides a more complete look at his compositional style and output. *Essay for Band* is examined using Leonard Ratner's musical topics from eighteenth-century Viennese Classical music. The learned style topic and military and hunt music topic can be identified in *Essay for Band*. Horace Maxile's African American cultural topics were used to identify traditions from African American music in *Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone* and *A Musical Service for Louis.*

When Roger Dickerson returned from Europe, he did not reject the techniques he learned in college and in Vienna. Rather, he composed music in his African American heritage within Western European Classical forms. He melded these traditions to create his own unique compositional style and voice.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Roger Dickerson has other works worthy of further research. His *String Quartet* and *Concert Overture* are heavily contrapuntal, much like *Essay for Band*. His *New Orleans Concerto* earned him a Pulitzer nomination and contains many of Horace Maxile's African American cultural topics. His vocal and choral works could also provide areas for research. Including his 1961 composition, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, for soprano & piano, which uses the text from the Langston Hughes poem.

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APPENDIX A

ROGER DICKERSON'S MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS AND AWARDS

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Concert Overture (1957)

Essay for Band (1958)

Fugue 'n' Blues, jazz orchestra (1959)

A Musical Service for Louis (1972)

Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone (1975)

New Orleans Concerto, for piano & orchestra (1976)

VOCAL WORKS

Fair Dillard (J.N. Barnum), SATB (1955)

Music I Heard (C. Aiken), for soprano & piano (1956)

The Negro Speaks of Rivers (L. Hughes), for soprano & piano (1961)

Psalms 49 (1979)

Ps xlix, SATB, timpani (1979)

African-American Celebration (Dickerson), SATB (1984)

Beyond Silence (Dickerson), for soprano, baritone, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani & organ (1986)

MUSICAL

Preacher Man! Preacher Man! (1985)

CHAMBER AND SOLO INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Prekussion, percussion ensemble (1954)

Music for Brass, 2 trumpets, trombone (1955)

Woodwind Trio (1955)

Das neugeborne Kindelein, chorale prelude, organ (1956)

Sonatina, piano (1956)

String Quartet (1956)

Music for String Trio (1957)

Scene, horn, string quartet (1959)

Movt, trumpet, piano (1960)

Sonata, clarinet, piano (1960)

Wind Quintet (1961)

Concert Pieces for Beginning String Players (1972)

Expressions, violin, piano (1983)

Incantation, violin, piano (1983)

Fanfare, 2 trumpets, timpani (1991)

COMMISSIONS

A Flower Blooms in the Desert
Pecos Valley Jazz & Arts Festival
Roswell, New Mexico, 2007

For the Love of Jesus, an art song (soprano/piano),
Sisters of The Holy Family
New Orleans, 2001

Beyond Silence, organ, soprano, /baritone soloists, brass, timpani
Dillard University
New Orleans, 1986

Incantation for violin and piano,
Richard Burch
1983

A Musical Service for Louis (a requiem for Louis Armstrong)
New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra
New Orleans, 1972

Concert Pieces for Beginning String Players
Rockefeller Foundation, 1972

New Orleans Concerto, for piano and orchestra
New Orleans Bicentennial Commission,
New Orleans, 1975

New Orleans Concerto, for piano and orchestra
The Links, Inc., New Orleans Chapter,
New Orleans, 1975

African-American Celebration,
Afro-American Pavilion
1984 Louisiana World Exposition
New Orleans, 1984

Psalm 49
Loyola University Chorale
Dr. Larry Wyatt, Director
New Orleans, 1979

PUBLISHERS

Peermusic Classical, 152 West 57th, 10th Floor, New York, New York 10019

Sonatina for Piano
Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc.
New York, 1980

Ten Concert Pieces for Beginning String Players
Southern Music Publishing Company, 1977

A Musical Service for Louis (A Requiem for Louis Armstrong)
Southern Music Publishing Co, Inc., 1972

E.C. Schirmer Music Publishing, Galaxy Music Corporation, 138 Ipswich Street, Boston, MA 02215-3534

Chorale Prelude on Das Neugeborne Kindelein, The ECS/AGO, African-American Organ Series Catalog No. 5120, 1996

RENTALS BY PEERMUSIC CLASSICAL

For the Love of Jesus for high voice and orchestra, 2007

New Orleans Concerto for piano and orchestra, 1975

Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone for narrator and orchestra, 1975

Concert Overture for orchestra, 1957

Quintet for Wind Instruments, 1961

String Quartet, 1956

Essay for Band, symphonic wind ensemble, 1958

Movement for B flat Trumpet and Piano, 1960

Sonata for B flat Clarinet and Piano, 1960

AWARDS

American Academy of Arts and Letters, 2006

Baton Rouge Area Foundation, 2006

National Endowment for the Arts, 1979

Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship to The Republic of China, 1991

John Hay Whitney Fellowship, 1964

American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), 1978, 1979, 1980-82

Marcus –Christian Award, University of New Orleans Music Department, 1979

American Music Center, 1972, 1975

Fulbright Fellowship to Vienna, Austria, 1959-60, 1960-61

Louisiana Out-of-State Scholarship for graduate study at Indiana University, 1956-57

Dave Frank Award, Werleins Music, 1955

Dillard University Academic Scholarship, 1951-55

HONORS

DIRECT FROM NEW ORLEANS!
An annual concert presented by the Historic New Orleans Collection and The Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. This 13th award winning series—reaching an incredible broad audience through live radio broadcast and online video streaming of the concert—featured Composer Roger Dickerson's Orpheus an' His Slide Trombone for narrator, trombone quartet and orchestra in the St. Louis Cathedral concert. Special acknowledgement was accorded Composer Dickerson—requested, He was, to stand and bow—during the opening remarks to the LPO concert conducted by Carlos Miguel Prieto, March 20, 2019.

The Musical Journey of New Orleans Composer Roger Dickerson
Presented by the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, 2017. A two-hour program featuring an interview with the composer by renowned radio announcer Fred Kasten. Selected segments from the composer's documentary film and a video DVD—documenting a 2014 concert honoring Dickerson and his music at the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music—were both shared, and discussed, with the audience. Spinto~Soprano Dr. Valerie Anne Jones-Francis accompanied by Pianist Dr. Wilfred Delphin performed

several Dickerson art songs which reflected, as well, stages of the composer's creative journey.

A TRIBUTE TO ROGER DICKERSON, Part 2 – HONORING OUR ELDERS:
A 5 Part Series A Concert of Compositions by Roger Dickerson presented by EMCM (The Ellis Marsalis Center for Music) A String Quartet, Quintet for Wind Instruments, selections from Preacher Man! Preacher Man! A Musical Comedy in 3 Acts (11 Scenes) and Dickerson's African-American Celebration (for a cappella choir) composed for the1984 Louisiana World Exposition in New Orleans.

National Lifetime Achievement Honoree, National Association of Negro Musicians, 2017

Lifetime Achievement Award in Education, Off-Beat Magazine, 2014

Concerto for Roger Dickerson, composed/dedicated to the composer by Terence Blanchard, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra premier, 2011

Roswell Jazz Festival Honoree, Festival Proclamation, 2010

Lifetime Achievement Award, Tribute To The Classical Arts, New Orleans, 2008
Humanitarian Award, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration, Roswell, NM, 2008

Mayor of New Orleans Arts Award, 199-

New Orleans Jazz Legend Award, presented by the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, 1998

Honorary Doctorate Degree, Peoples Republic of China, Minority Nationalities Institute, Dali, Yunnan Province, China, 1991

Distinguish Achievement in the Arts Award, The Links, Inc., 21st National Assembly, Chicago, Ill., 1978

Pulitzer Nomination, New Orleans Concerto for piano and orchestra, 1977

Pulitzer Nomination, A Musical Service for Louis (A Requiem for Louis Armstrong), 1972

Kennedy Center Composers' Forum, National Black Music Colloquium, one of 17 Composers honored, Washington, D.C., 1980

City Council of New Orleans, Special Proclamation presented for creative work, 1978

Institute for Services to Education, Inc., Summer Conference Directors Award
New Orleans, 1978

Councilman Jimmy Snell, Key to the City of Austin, Texas, 1978

Bicentennial Certificate Award, presented by the New Orleans Bicentennial Commission 1977

"Outstanding Musicianship Trophy" awarded by Mason's Las Vegas Strip, New Orleans, 1977

The Louis Armstrong Memorial Award presented by the Louis Armstrong Cultural Foundation, New Orleans, July 4, 1977

Jarvis Christian College, Plaque awarded by Eight College Curriculum Program Staff, Hawkins, Texas, 1976

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Advisory Council to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and Foundation

Honorary Chairman, Pecos Valley Jazz and Arts Festival Committee, Roswell, NM

National Endowment for the Arts Panelist, Washing D.C.

Arts Council of New Orleans Advisory Board

Mayor of New Orleans Arts Task Force

Louisiana State Arts Council Panelist

APPENDIX B

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT OF ROGER DICKERSON INTERVIEW

Location: New Orleans, Louisiana
Duration:1 hour and 55 minutes
Date: 10/19/2023

Green: Let's begin by talking about your early life growing up in New Orleans in the 1930s. What are some of your early memories about music in New Orleans?

Dickerson: My early life is about my family. I have a great loving family. I was born right in the middle of the [Great] Depression, but I didn't know that there was a depression. I was never without—and I always had lots of love. Later, I found out that a national economic depression occurred in America, during my early life.

Aside from family, I was aware of music in New Orleans. Everyone was aware of music—the music was all around you. At a very young age, I started taking piano lessons. I was, however, already playing the piano—playing before formal lessons—because family members played, and some friends of the family, who were professional musicians, would just show a little kid, if he were interested, a little something on the keys. So—as a result—I was already playing by the age of five or six.

A visiting country cousin came down from East Feliciana Parish said—after hearing me play— "that boy should have lessons. I'll pay for them." My mother was, then, convinced that she should provide formal piano lessons for me. At that time, a lady just around the corner from us—on Roman, just off Palmyra Street—was giving formal piano lessons. The lessons were $0.75 each. Quite a number of children in the neighborhood were taking lessons with her. This teacher, Mrs. Miriam Panalle, became my first formal teacher of music.

Green: Did you play in high school?

Dickerson: Well, many things were happening for me musically before I got to high school. I was already improvising. Actually, that's how I learned to play piano in the beginning. I was taught tunes, some jazz tunes and jazz rhythmic figures, and church hymns with which I could improvise as well. I was discovering how music worked….

With Mrs. Panalle, I was beginning my study of the formal, notated tradition of music. I was learning little pieces and music written by composers like Mozart, Bach and Beethoven.

I lived on a major New Orleans thoroughfare, Claiborne Avenue, where everything happened during carnival time—at least for Black Americans. An oppressive, hard brand of American apartheid was featured throughout the South in those days. We Blacks—as in most social matters, and occasions—had our own carnival, and Whites had their own carnival. Everything of that nature in New Orleans' culture reflected racial segregation. Much of our carnival, carnival for Blacks, moved up and down this broad thoroughfare, divided with spacious greens, from uptown Jackson Avenue all the way to downtown Saint Bernard Circle in the 7th Ward. As a young kid, I could sit on the front steps of our house and see everything. Our house on Claiborne Avenue was one block above Canal Street, the main thoroughfare to downtown New Orleans business district, hotels, theaters, and department stores—and ending at the Mississippi River. From my front steps, I could see the Zulu parade. When Louis Armstrong returned to New Orleans to parade with the Zulus, I saw him on their carnival float. And then, there were the Skull Men, who—as a child—I dreaded seeing with their bones and skeleton outfits. I would quickly run—as they approached, dancing on the spacious, green, neutral grounds—to the backyard of our house and hide as best I could. Throughout the year, and at other festive times requiring parades, I always had a front row seat from my front steps. City parades with enormous marching bands from white high schools and universities used the Claiborne Ave neutral grounds as a staging area for parades marching onto Canal Street to downtown New Orleans. I got to see, and hear, these bands with their many, many instruments, all kinds of instruments, as a young kid.

When I arrived in middle school, I was still taking piano lessons. I was one of two or three students who could read, or improvise, well enough to accompany the many rehearsals for the various May Festival presentations—rehearsing the different student classes as they learned their steps and movements. A teacher, otherwise, would have to accompany the many rehearsals. It was a great time of year for me.

I got to high school and discovered that they had a marching band and a choir. I was more interested, of course, in the band; but, quickly realized that I couldn't march in the band with a piano. There was a French horn I noticed in the storage area that no one seemed to be playing. So—I took it, and began practicing, playing long tones, and discovering the fingerings. I was already reading musical notation.

That high school, Gilbert Academy, closed after my second year. The school was located uptown on St. Charles Avenue in the prized Garden District of the city, near Jefferson Avenue. Riding each day, from my home in mid-city, through the Garden District with its palatial homes and sumptuous gardens was an experience I shall never forget. The streetcar/bus ride was always exhilarating and beautiful, but at the same time, a clear reminder of the inequities of daily, ever present American Apartheid. There were also neighborhoods in New Orleans that, earlier on, were predominantly White—then, because of the constant White flight to the suburbs, were neighborhoods that steadily became predominantly Black—or filled with other minorities.

Green: Were there two separate Mardi Gras?

Dickerson: Yes—Mardi Gras reflected American Apartheid as well.

Green: Was it segregated?

Dickerson: Yes, hard segregation everywhere, at the bus station, and at the movie house. When I say American apartheid, that's what I mean—racial segregation.

Green: African Americans thrived musically during this time. Was there a system of support for musicians?

Dickerson: There was always a natural, cultural support of the music here. It belonged to the people—was the people's music. It, indeed, was a natural expression of everyday life. One can easily see evidence of its support in its practice and application in everyday life—both sacred and secular physical forms of support. But, more importantly, I believe that the area of New Orleans, at the bottom of the Mississippi River, functions, indeed, as a spiritual center—a corridor in which the cultural traditions of Africa and of Europe have fused together in this city, and in a way, that they haven't combined in any other city on this planet. That confluence of cultural traditions, of spiritual energies, are at, I believe, the very core of our uniqueness. That, to me, is what makes New Orleans truly special—truly unique. The traditions have melded here—and flowed out, on to other distant places and communities. The European traditions in the form of march music and those rhythmic traditions of Africa combined to produce what became known as "ragging", or later known as Ragtime. And which, when finally connected to the blues tradition, fused into a form of music that has circled the world, capturing hearts everywhere—a music we call jazz. The acculturation of these traditions, sourced from Europe and Africa, in America produced this new music—a 20th-century music—and it affected our cuisine, dress, and architecture as well. Our New Orleans is a great center reflecting that acculturation, or the melding of those cultural traditions in this spiritual corridor.

Green: During that time, did you view jazz as being different from classical music?

Dickerson: No, I've only thought of music as being "good music", or music that was "not very good." I'm pretty much that way yet—even today. My thinking is a little bit more refined, now, because of what I'm trying to do in my own work. I was telling a student—we were on this subject—as he's progressing in writing a piece in sonata allegro form—that this is a codified form of the Viennese classical period. "You must," I said, "write in a way that follows the structure of this form." You may listen to other composers' use of this form—and use them as a model, but you need to have your own

"melodic," "harmonic stuff'—and temperament, or attitude. We discussed what that 'stuff' could possibly be—and how one can project himself into it all toward creating something that might be considered good music. And that, in a final analysis, the Viennese classical form—sonata allegro—does not really make the music, "good music" or "not very good music." It's the melodic, harmonic "stuff" and temperament that filled-out the form that determines its quality, it's worth. I think every artist—at some point in his/her life—comes to terms with that question: what am I expressing? What am I doing, and what is that about?

My art is about a love of music, a love of music that combines art with human relationships, and a sense of godly duty weaving it way through it all. These qualities resonate throughout my creative work. Now—I know there are some people who are more intellectual about what they are doing—and whose tendencies lean more toward being mechanical, than being devotional in the creative process—and somehow, the bit about human relationships get totally left out—of consideration.

And now, we've got Finale and Sebelius music software—and settings that can be implemented on a computer and which eliminates, through generated sounds, the need for humans, for human relationships. One—now, doesn't need people to—even—play the music. I don't mind having recorded music of some idea, here or there in my scores—but I do prefer having live musicians performing my music.

If one is going forward, continuing on to become a serious artist/composer, my advice is that you should become aware of the pitfalls of the commercial world of music. That otherwise—you may forget, if you are seduced, many of the real, sacred, reasons you may have held, in your heart, for writing music. There are some real talents, I know, who are interested only in making 'the big bucks—and will do anything because they are "going to get paid" for it. If that's their/your desire—then so be it.

Green: Let's talk about your uncle, Wallace Davenport.

Dickerson: Well, a little thing. He's not an uncle.

Green: He's not an uncle?

Dickerson: He's a cousin by marriage. He married my cousin, Jean Hitchens. She was a great singer, and he was always around.

Green: Where did Wallace Davenport receive his musical training?

Dickerson: Well, I don't know too much about that. I know he had formal training. He had quite a wide arrange on trumpet. I mean, he became a first trumpet player. He could

hit notes way above the staff, right on the head. He was the first trumpet player in Hamp's [Lionel Hampton] band. He was with Count Basie and some others.

I got to know him pretty well when he was dating my cousin. Then, they got married and he went into the Navy. I remember seeing him with pride in his Navy uniform.

In my teen years, I had ideas of wanting to have a band because I knew stuff I could write down. But how do you write it down and how do you transpose it for instruments? That's where Wallace came in. He talked about transposition and stuff like that and helped me with matters as that. I started discovering how to write other things and copy music that was on the record players, hit music like Louis Jordan and Roy Brown, and other styles that were popular in the 40's. I was discovering the language of writing—that's how I started writing.

Green: Did Wallace Davenport go to university?

Dickerson: No, not that I know of. After Wallace came out of the military, he went to the Grunewald School of Music. That was a school here that many of the New Orleans musicians went to. I mean the top guys. It was like something that the American Government set up for veterans after they came out of the war. There were teachers there who were the best music teachers in town. They were at university, but it was a federally funded program. Ellis Marsalis and I went over there a lot to jam with them because the best musicians were over there. It was downtown in the central business district.

Green: Your band was called Roger Dickerson and His Groovy Boys. Do you remember all the members of your group?

Dickerson: Well, some. It changed over time. In the beginning, it was mostly neighborhood boys. Ellis [Marsalis] is someone I met at church. His parents went to the same church that my parents did, and we met in Sunday school. When Ellis graduated from middle school, we met in the school on St. Charles Avenue. It was a *crème de la crème* private school for Blacks. Gilbert Academy School was a church associated school. I think the Methodist Church owned the school.

Anyway, that's where I truly got to know Ellis. He was in the band. He was a clarinet player. We were at church together and we both loved music. Then, we started meeting at each other's homes and became fast friends. I often tell people; we were closer than brothers because brothers fight. I later, when Ellis married, was his best man; his first child, Branford, is my godson.

Ellis became a part of my neighborhood band because we were friends at school and church. His grandparents lived in my neighborhood. In the summers, he would come and stay with his grandparents. So, he got to be just one of the guys in the neighborhood. He was accepted by all the kids in the neighborhood. Then, Ellis later got a tenor saxophone–one summer, and his playing took off. He was playing, learning all the tenor saxophone

solos on the hit recordings. Branford, his son, is just a chip off the block. Ellis was a clarinet player and took up the other saxes. Ellis didn't start playing piano till later. When I look at Branford, I see him progressing as Ellis– first, clarinet player, then later the saxes.

Roy Brown was one of my mother's tenants. My dad bought some property, after we moved from Claiborne Avenue to what we call Backatown, near where Louis Armstrong was born. It was on the 2300 block of Gravier Street. A big lot with a house and apartments on the side. Roy Brown was friends with my mother and my father when they were growing up. He eventually became a tenant with us. When Roy recorded *Good Rockin' Tonight*, he was living at my house. At that time, upstairs, in a room in this camelback house above the kitchen. He later took one of the apartments on the side of the house. When he got his band, Roy Brown was buying instruments, or getting instruments for players who didn't have an instrument, and those instruments often ended up in my mother's wash shed, in the back of our house. So–I would go out there. I would get them out, you see, and start playing them– because I was interested. I learned saxophone like that. I learned to play the bass.

One Sunday, I went to church and told Ellis, "Man, I'm playing up some bass." He came over to my house after church and got on the bass. We both learned that way how to play bass. It was a while before we got a bass player for the group. Earlier, we would switch up on gigs. I would play bass on some pieces, and he would play piano, and then we would switch up. It was a while before we got a bass player for the band. This was an experience about discovering a personal relationship about instruments. I was only just reading about these instruments later in an orchestration book in school.

Green: Can you tell me a little bit about Wynton Marsalis?

Dickerson: They were all bright. Al Hirt gave him a trumpet because Ellis [Marsalis] was playing with Al Hirt's Band, at the time.

They were playing football. I have pictures of them, Wynton and Branford played football with the NORD league, New Orleans Recreation Department. It wasn't until later when they both kind of got the idea of music. I don't know the exact age, but when they got it, they went with it.

Green: Why did you choose to attend Dillard University?

Dickerson: I won a scholarship there. When I got to 35 [McDonogh 35 Senior High School], they didn't have any French horns. They had a mellophone and a baritone horn. And I chose the baritone horn. That instrument just opened doors for me. I learned a lot and I loved it. It was great. This wonderful soft tone it had. I became a pretty good baritone horn player. I got a scholarship as a result on the baritone horn. My second or third year, we had other baritone horn players, but we didn't have a tuba. I was on scholarship. So, guess who played tuba?

One of my teachers who had come down to be the timpanist for the New Orleans Symphony and then came over to Dillard to be the head of the program. He said, “you should learn the trombone.” I said sure. I learned the trombone. I don’t consider myself a trombone player but getting to know something about these instruments in a personal way. I think that has informed my writing. When I write for them, I'm writing for something I know about, and something of what they do, and where they sound. *Essay for Band* uses brass in a resilient kind of way.

Green: Were you in the concert band and the marching band at Dillard University?

Dickerson: Yes, and I also became the assistant conductor. In a small school, you get to be and do all these kinds of things. When I got to Indiana University, there were more people in the music department at Indiana than were in the whole school at Dillard. So, at Dillard I was the assistant band director. I got to rehearse and got to learn all kinds of stuff. That also informs your writing, too.

Green: Could you talk about taking German classes at Dillard?

Dickerson: My last year, I had some free open time. So, I chose German as an elective. My rationale was I’m in music, and I need to know something about the culture of European music. I had no idea, at that time that I would be going to Vienna, Austria. No idea at all. I went on to graduate school and finished at Indiana University. Soon as I completed my work, I was drafted. A lot of my friends were going into the military service. If you weren't in school, you were getting drafted in those days. Soon as I got my masters, I got drafted.

I had been in the Army Reserve Band here while at Dillard. My teacher, Dr. Bryant was in charge. He was the warrant officer in charge of this Black ensemble that was at Camp Leroy Johnson. All of the best musicians in New Orleans, who were veterans, were receiving checks to attend educational and musical training. Many enlisted in this band, and they were receiving checks for that, as well. I knew that the band had all the best musicians in it, so I joined that band really for that reason. It was a great band. I started writing for them. These guys could really play—big band arrangements and concert music.

Green: They had a big band and concert band?

Dickerson: It was an Army marching band. Within that band, there was a concert band and a big band. Which typically happens with army bands. You have marching band that play for the troops, but then you also can play concerts and have the ability to play jazz. I got in that band and became a specialist third class, which is like a corporal in that band,

in the ranks.

So, when I was drafted after leaving Indiana, I went into the military with rank. I didn't go in as a buck private. When I got the draft letter, I went down here to someone with the reserve, and he said, “we're going to help you. We're going to just transfer you from reserve duty to active duty, and you can keep your rank.” So, I went in making corporal pay or specialist third class pay. Also, if you got some stripes, you didn’t get put on detail. You got put in charge of the detail. When I was in basic training, I was in charge of the first barracks because I had that Specialist Third Class rank on my arm.

Green: How was Bloomington, Indiana in the 1950s?

Dickerson: The school is the town. My time was spent totally in a music building—and over there when ensembles were rehearsing. I lived in Rogers Center. Walking back and forth between—I was busy all the time.

Green: Did you play in the bands or orchestras at Indiana University?

Dickerson: I was in the graduate band. It was a good symphonic wind ensemble with a lot of good players. I became aware of the repertoire for band. We had the latest stuff for concert band. When I got to the band in Heidelberg, I immediately went to the band director and informed him what they should order because I had just played those compositions at Indiana [University].

Green: How did Bernard Heiden influence your music?

Dickerson: He was my teacher. He taught me counterpoint, composition, score reading, and other classes like that. Counterpoint particularly opened my eyes because that’s where you are reduced to dealing with the small parts of the language of music. Nobody told me this back then, but if you can get some control and influence over the small things, then you will–as a result–develop control and influence over the big stuff.

Green: While attending Indiana University, were there other African American students in the School of Music?

Dickerson: David Baker was there. We had a group together. We had so many gigs. We were playing in Indianapolis, and over to Columbus [Ohio]. He discovered I could play piano, and he says, “hey man, we got a piano player.” So, I was in the band from the very beginning. Initially, I was bussing dishes at Rogers Center Dining Hall, but soon left bussing dishes when I began getting the many gigs from David Baker.

David [Baker] came to New Orleans with his wife before he passed [away]. We went out to dinner. David and I had many great times together.

Green: Please talk about your composition and master's thesis, *Concert Overture*?

Dickerson: It is of the same language as *Essay for Band*. Most of my works like that are primarily contrapuntal. I was just telling a student today to include more counterpoint in what you are writing. It brings dimensions in your work that you wouldn't otherwise have there. It brings angles and a quality of profundity that works without counterpoint often lack.

Green: Let's talk about *Essay for Band*. Why did you write a musical essay?

Dickerson: Essay just seems to be an appropriate title. If you don't have a programmatic title, you call it an essay. It is an essay of your expression and of your emotions. Whatever you want that to be about, in terms of the thematic or rhythmic material you are working with. So, that's what it is.

Green: While you were at Fort Chaffee, did the band play the work?

Dickerson: Oh, they played it. Sergeant Brown loved Wagner as well. We were playing *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* and all music of that style. There were two bands, the band training unit, and the regular band which Sergeant Brown was the conductor. The band training unit had soldier trainees who just came out of basic training. When I finished the band training unit, my orders sent me to Heidelberg, Germany.

Green: How was your time with the United States Army Europe Band at Army Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany?

Dickerson: We were the USAREUR Headquarters Band. So, anybody coming over from Congress, they would land first in Heidelberg. We played for the Secretary of the Army, for senators, and we played them in and played them off. We had special kinds of duties, like going to play for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers in France and doing some cultural outreach with the local bands. Of course, Germany was still divided then, the Russians were on one side, East Germany. Russian generals would meet with American generals usually down in the ski country, and they would bring us down to play concerts. We would play one or two concerts, and then got to go skiing the rest of the week. It was a great experience with the band. If you took holidays, then you could go to France. I was making money. I had a bank account because I was playing gigs. I was teaching. I bought a Volkswagen and was driving, visiting other cities and countries.

Green: While in Vienna, how did Karl Schiske and Alfred Uhl influence you as a composer?

Dickerson: They were both professionals. Schiske had more influence–I would say–than Uhl. Alfred Uhl was an opera composer. When I arrived in Vienna, I had requested studies with Dr. Professor Karl Schiske, but he was away on some official Austrian state duty, accounting for my assignment to Alfred Uhl. When I applied for renewal of my Fulbright, that was one of my strong points. I believe that's why they renewed my scholarship because I didn't get to study with the person that I had come to study composition with. At least that's my thinking about it. So, they renewed the scholarship and I got to have two Fulbrights. I stayed two years.

The experience in Vienna was not about just going to a school to study with a specific teacher, but to study in a city that is a great cultural center. When you go to a university in a city like Vienna, Paris, or even New York, that city is part of the cultural universe. All is a part of your training. It isn't just the school. Vienna had opera houses, major orchestras, chamber music, and everything cultural. Being a Fulbrighter, you have monies for tickets, books, and money to live on. I could buy series tickets for the orchestra, *Lieder Abends*, operas, et cetera.

Green: While you were in Germany you met Howard Swanson. How was your interaction with him?

Dickerson: Oh, it was just great. That was one of the most important meetings of my life. I could say he's the greatest person I've ever met. I have never met anybody like that before. That's his bust on the top of my bookshelf. It's a great head sculpture of him.

Green: What made him special?

Dickerson: His person. He was a great spirit. Wisdom. Knowledge. I stopped going to the academy when I met him. We would have these dinners. The things he knew and would talk about–I never heard anybody talk about in none of my classes–anywhere. We became friends.

When I finally went back to Schiske, he said, "*Herr Dickerson, Wo sind sie denn*?" Where were you? So, I told him–something...

Green: You like the way Swanson spoke about music?

Dickerson: He was a fountain of knowledge. Howard lived in Harlem during the Black Renaissance. He knew those writers. And he was right there. When Langston and all the Harlem writers were there, Howard was right there. He would tell me about it because he knew them personally. It had a great effect on my life and helped me to get my vision

straight about what I should be doing in my music.

Green: How was it living in Europe compared to the segregated South in America?

Dickerson: Well, in America, you are talking about apartheid. Living in Europe was being free. There was no comparison. You could go anywhere. You don't have second thoughts about going in a place, restaurant, or hotel. If you grew up here, you don't think about it. You just didn't do it. When we were in high school, there was a screen on the bus. You had to sit behind the screen.

Green: In Vienna, you talked about going to the Vienna Philharmonic. Were you able to go to the New Orleans Philharmonic as a child?

Dickerson: Oh, yeah. We could go. When I was in middle school we went to the symphony. That was the first time I heard a full symphony orchestra.

Green: Was there segregated seating?

Dickerson: They sent the black schools on a certain day. It was hard apartheid in those days. It was in the system. Even though today, it is supposed to be over, guess what? Much of its residue is still here, and not just here, but many places. People just automatically do certain things. It's like that on the job. Who gets promoted, this or that…it's still here.

Green: Besides Howard Swanson, did you meet other African Americans in Europe?

Dickerson: Yes, I had a lot of friends when I was in the military. I met Raoul Abdul, who was from Cleveland and had been in New York, and who had been Langston Hughes' Secretary. He was a singer, tenor, and was the first black person I saw at the academy in Vienna. We went to lunch, and we were practicing our German. These two Black guys speaking German in a Viennese restaurant. He told me about his cousin, Hale Smith. It was Raoul, actually, who one day called me up and said, "Howard [Swanson] is over here at my house." Raoul knew everybody. He was a music critic for a black newspaper in Cleveland and one of those small papers in Manhattan. He called me and said, "Roger, Howard is over here. We want you to come over and meet him."

Edna Williams was there, a friend of ours from Chicago. She was a singer in Vienna on a Whitney Scholarship, and she was preparing to go to Italy for some competitions. Howard Swanson was coaching her for this.

Raoul said to me, "he's over here with Edna." So, I went over to his apartment and

waited. That's when Howard and I first met. We went for a coffee that evening. Anybody who was around Howard Swanson learned—automatically.

Green: Many of your works were performed by the New Orleans Philharmonic. Did you have a great relationship with the conductor or organization?

Dickerson: I did when I returned home from Vienna. Werner Torkanowsky, a Jewish conductor, who had just come into town. Ernest Chachere, a longtime friend, who was band director at Booker T. Washington High School, where the symphony used to rehearse, said, "I want you to come over and introduce you to Maestro Torkanowsky." I said, "sure." I had read about him coming to town.

I remembered something Howard [Swanson] told me, "Don't ever meet a conductor without a score in your hand." I took my *Concert Overture for Orchestra* score with me. After arriving, Torkanowsky said, "you were in Vienna." I said, "I just got back." We exchanged a few German expressions because he's German. He grew up in Germany, went to a kibbutz in Israel, and came to New York for conducting school. We talked during the orchestra break, he said, "What's that you have in your hand?" And that lead to my first performance with the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra.

Green: Your *Concert Overture for Orchestra*?

Dickerson: Exactly. I showed it to him, and he looked at it. He said, "would you mind if I hold on to this?" I said, "sure." Next thing I heard from someone was that Werner Torkanowsky is planning to play Roger Dickerson's piece. That was the beginning of our relationship. Irving Kolodin, who was the critic for the *Saturday Review Magazine,* gave the performance of my composition a great review, talked about me, and my piece. Because of the success that piece had with orchestra, they commissioned me, when Louis Armstrong died, to write a kind of a requiem for him. I created *A Musical Service for Louis* because he didn't have a funeral service here in New Orleans–and this was his home. It's subtitled a requiem, but the composition is truly a musical service. Just like we have services in the Black Church. The New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra took that piece on tour, and the composition was nominated for a Pulitzer. That was my first big piece to be formerly published.

Green: Did you decide not to compose for band when you returned from Europe?

Dickerson: Oh no. I've never decided not to do anything. That's negative. Things are just how they unfold.

Green: During Hurricane Katrina, did you lose scores?

Dickerson: Yes, I lost scores. This composition, my *New Orleans Concerto*, the actual notes, and the lines on the page, dissolved. I spent weeks drawing staff lines through the notes to get the score back. Just drawing lines through with a thin, sharp pencil on every page. The water didn't dissolve the notes–but there was something toxic in the water that dissolved the staff lines.

Green: Was your house destroyed?

Dickerson: Yes. I was in five or six feet of water. I restored it. It's in Gentilly. My son has a studio there now.

Green: After Hurricane Katrina, you lived in New Mexico?

Dickerson: After, I went through the Superdome in New Orleans and went to Kelly Airforce Base in San Antonio, Texas. There were phone banks there for people who had gotten out of their homes in New Orleans and gone through the Superdome, which was quite an experience. They were going to transport us to Houston but had to evacuate the Houston Astrodome owing to another storm coming out of the gulf. So, we went directly to Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. They had us waiting at first in a cafeteria. People were just coming in from all over, like immigrants.
There were these rooms with red phones all around. You could call out anywhere in America, but no one could call you. I had my wallet, and a friend who was in that Heidelberg band had just come to New Orleans to visit. He lives in Miami, and I had his card, and I called him…and I got him. I told him about some people I wanted to contact and where they lived. He started calling around and getting numbers. That's how I got in touch with persons that I wanted to contact because I didn't have my contact book with me. Pretty soon, Gabe Villani, had me in touch with people from San Francisco, Los Angeles, to Long Island, New York, where Hale Smith lived. Hale Smith's wife, Juanita, said "Roger, where are you? Come here?" Others were saying, come there. Then, I got in touch with Frank Slaughter, who was a piccolo player in that Heidelberg band. He lived in Roswell. He said, "Roger, come here." I said, "Should I take a bus from El Paso or something?" Frank said, "Don't take a bus anywhere. You fly to Lubbock, Texas, and we'll pick you up." In those days, one couldn't fly right into Roswell. So, I flew to Lubbock, and Frank drove with his wife, Carol, to Lubbock. (I just was on the phone with her the other day. Frank is now dead.)

They picked me up and brought me to Roswell. I had gotten trenched foot from walking in the water, and the military doctors treated me when I was in San Antonio. I was wearing some kind of sandals or something. When I arrived, I had to get some clothes because all I had was what I had on my back–and my briefcase with some things I was able to save from my house and carried with me.

I was in Roswell for months. Of course, after the water went down here [New Orleans], I came back and started working on my house. Then they said, "come back to Roswell." I

started playing there early on when I first arrived. As a matter of fact, the Minister at the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Hugh Borroughs, asked me to talk. That was medicinal for me. After coming out of all that havoc and having an opportunity just to talk about it. That day they offered me a job at the church. I didn't accept it because I had just retired from university teaching. I really wasn't looking for a job, but they still wanted to do something. I started playing at the church, playing at other places in Roswell, and at a winery. There was another pianist, Michael Francis, in the area who is now the music director for the Roswell Jazz Festival. He and I would play duos. Out of all of that performing, and with Frank's coordinating it all, we somehow started a festival. That's exactly how we got started.

Green: Let's talk about your students. How did you meet Terence Blanchard?

Dickerson: Terence came to me through his aunt. She was a piano student in the class with Ellis, me, and a number of other people at Dillard University. We graduated at the same time. When I came back from Europe, she called me up and said, "I have a nephew who wants to learn about jazz. Would you take him as a student?" I said, "sure."

While he was with me, NOCCA, New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, opened up and Ellis was among the first faculty there. Terence wanted to go to NOCCA as well because that's the first time we had a center like that with arts teaching on that level. But, at the beginning, NOCCA was just for students in the public high schools. The parochial schools, like Terence was attending, a Catholic School, he couldn't attend NOCCA. So, Terence transferred from Saint Aug, which is one of the *crème de la crème* schools, to Kennedy High School, so he could go to NOCCA. He got in to classes with Ellis at NOCCA and was taking privately with me. Ellis and I, would be on the phone talking about Terence and we'd say, "we're going to make a pianist out of him because he could play." We had decided that we had enough trumpet players, and that we needed more pianists. So, we were going to make a pianist out of Terence—but he showed us something. He's now a great trumpet player!

Green: You had another wonderful student, Jay Weigel.

Dickerson: Yes. Jay has now moved to Nashville. He came to me while he was at Tulane. I had an arrangement with Tulane, or they had an arrangement with me. Werner [Torkanowsky] was playing my music. I was in the papers and the critics were talking about my music. So, students at Tulane wanted to study with Roger Dickerson. Tulane let them come to me privately. They paid for their lessons, but they got course credit at Tulane. Jay Weigel was part of that, and he came to me. After he graduated from Tulane, he went out to California to a school in Los Angeles, and he got a master's in composition. Then, he came back, and he came back to me. This time we weren't so much doing composition as he wanted to learn about jazz piano. While he grew up in New Orleans, he came up like other guys, he's Caucasian, with rock bands. That was an experience that he didn't have, that he wanted. He was with me for quite a while. Then, he moved on off, He started doing films and still writing. Now, he's moved all the way on

up to Nashville.

Green: Do you have any other notable students you have taught over the years?

Dickerson: They are all notable in their own way. People I'm just working with, like, Mr. Parson. He's done stuff with Terence. He's a cellist. He's played Birdland with jazz groups and the Kennedy Center. He's working with people in New York with plays. He is working with me and writing pieces. He's just had an orchestra piece performed by the Louisiana Philharmonic.

Another student, Mr. Omar. He's got his own group. He's Latino and working on his PhD in Composition at LSU right now. He's in the second year. We have lessons on Saturdays now and he's writing all kinds of great pieces. It's the best of worlds to be working with young people who have ideas and talent.

I've got another student who's a bassist. He's traveling all over everywhere with people in Europe and South America. He's writing a piece for two bassists, and he's taking counterpoint. He was a student of Ellis Marsalis, too. He was with Ellis at UNO [University of New Orleans].

I have another student who is a drummer. He wants to do it all, but you have to hold him down. He just needs to do "these little things" first.

They're all out there and we stay in touch. After a while, they're no longer students. They become friends. Then, you have this friendship on a very high level where there is trust and respect. It's just great.

APPENDIX C

RECITALS

KENNETH GREEN II
Doctoral Rehearsal Recital
with the
University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble

Thursday, October 6, 2022
3:00 pm

Koger Center for the Arts Large Rehearsal Room
Columbia, SC

Program

ARTHUR BIRD
*Suite in D Major for Wind Instruments, Op. 29 (*1889)
IV. Allegro con fuoco

JOHN ROGERS
Intarsia (2022)

JENNIFER JOLLEY
Questions to Heaven (2021)

JULIE GIROUX
Symphony No. V: Elements (2018)
I. Sun in C
II. Rain in Db
III. Wind in Eb

Kenneth Green is a student of Dr. Cormac Cannon.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Wind Conducting.

University of South Carolina

School of Music

DOCTORAL COMPILATION RECITAL

submitted by

Kenneth Green II

Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Conducting

Title: Doctoral Compilation Recital

Justification: Compilation recital given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Music Arts degree in Conducting

Contents:

Meditation (Dwayne Milburn) 5’
University of South Carolina University Band
7:30 p.m., Monday, November 15, 2021
Koger Center for the Arts

Canzon Duodecimi Toni (Giovanni Gabrieli) 3’
University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble
3:30 p.m., Friday, December 3, 2021
USC School of Music Recital Hall

Consort for Ten Winds, I. Jeux (Robert Spittal) 4’
University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble
3:30 p.m., Friday, December 3, 2021
USC School of Music Recital Hall

Children’s March (Percy Grainger) 7’
University of South Carolina Symphonic Winds
5:00 p.m., Friday, February 11, 2022
Koger Center for the Arts

Divertimento for Band (Vincent Persichetti) 11’
University of South Carolina Symphonic Winds
7:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 12, 2022
Koger Center for the Arts

Essay for Band (Roger Dickerson) 11’
University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble
4:00 p.m., Sunday, September 18, 2022
Koger Center for the Arts

Questions to Heaven (Jennifer Jolley) 10’
University of South Carolina Wind Ensemble
4:00 p.m., Sunday, October 23, 2022
Koger Center for the Arts

Total 51’

Mr. Green is a student of Cormac Cannon.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting.

KENNETH C. GREEN II, conductor

in

DOCTORAL LECTURE RECITAL

Thursday, September 28, 2023
University of South Carolina
School of Music
Recital Hall

Roger Dickerson's *Essay for Band:* An Examination using the Analytical Techniques of Paul Hindemith	40′
Performance of *Essay for Band*	10′
Total:	50′

Mr. Green is a student of Cormac Cannon.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting.

APPENDIX D

RELEASE FORMS

D.1 ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

Oral History Release Form

I, Roger Dickerson (name of interviewee), hereby give to the University of South Carolina (repository) an interview recorded with me by Kenneth Green on October 19, 2023 in New Orleans, Louisiana. With this gift, I hereby transfer to the University of South Carolina legal title and all literary rights to the interview, including copyright.

I understand the University of South Carolina (repository) may make interview available for research and use as it may determine, but it may not be broadcast, cablecast, or electronically published for commercial purposes without my written consent. Beyond this, my consent for use has:

_____ no restrictions
* _____ restrictions as specified here:

Mr. Kenneth Green is granted complete use of my personal materials and scores ONLY WITHIN the requirements, pursuit of his doctorate curriculum, writing the dissertation and the printing thereof. All copyrights of said materials shall remain with me in perpetuity.

Interviewee: Roger Dickerson
(signature)

Date: March 12, 2024

Transcript reviewed and accepted by Interviewee

Interviewee Roger Dickerson
(signature)
March 12, 2024
(date)

Interviewer: Kenneth C. Green
(signature)
March 12, 2024
(date)

D.2 COPYRIGHT RELEASE LETTER

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March 21, 2024

Kenneth Green

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1. Essay for Band

2. A Musical Service for Louis (A Requiem to Louis Armstrong)

3. Orpheus an' his Slide Trombone

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