SUITE FOR BIG BAND

BY

Eric Oatts

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Chairperson: Dan Gailey

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The Thesis Committee for Eric Oatts certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

Suite for Big Band

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Chairperson: Dan Gailey

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Abstract

Suite for Big Band is a series of original compositions for a traditional 17-piece large jazz ensemble. The three-movement collection lasts approximately 18-19 minutes in its entirety. The goal of the suite is to present both the audience and performers with an enjoyable and challenging, yet still accessible, composition that utilizes a combination of both modern and traditional jazz-writing techniques. It features many different members of the ensemble, as improvised solo sections are provided for several different individual instrument parts.

Each movement contains its own central melodic theme, with other various smaller themes occasionally appearing throughout. There are, however, instances of thematic melodic and harmonic material overlapping between pieces. For instance, the first motivic material presented in the first piece, *Second Wind*, is the same motivic material that is used to end the final piece, *Revival*. Each movement is also tonally centered to a different minor scale, with a substantial amount of the underlying harmonies being comprised of a series of stacked perfect fourths and fifths used in combination with both minor and major seconds. The main melody of each movement is also first presented early in a clear fashion by a small group of horns with rhythm section before eventually being joined by the rest of the ensemble. While traditional instrumentation for big band usually utilizes each horn section as a singular cohesive unit, members of each section instead play independently from one another for a majority of each movement of the suite.
I. Second Wind

The first movement is in a unique open-ended form, that is tonally centered around the B aeolian mode. It is intended to start softly while gradually and continuously gaining momentum until eventually dropping dramatically for an extended guitar solo beginning in m. 76. While the form is open, sections of the piece are divided almost entirely into eight-measure phrases, with the only exception occurring during the end of the guitar solo, in which five-measure phrases are instead utilized.

An abrupt recapitulation of mm. 52-75 follows a quiet piano interlude after the long guitar solo. However, a new melodic device (perfect fourths ascending by major thirds) provides a somewhat unexpected and entertaining ending for the movement.

II. Gold and Lavender

The second movement, which features solos for both alto and tenor saxophone, is intended to be both rhythmically fluid and aesthetically relaxing in nature. To accomplish this, trumpets are replaced by flugelhorns, triple meter is utilized to create a dance-like effect, and many of the dynamics in each section are marked as piano throughout the piece. The tonal center of the work is based on C natural minor, while it transitions briefly to A-flat melodic minor at the end of the form. The first statement of the melody is a permutation of a first-inversion G-minor triad. This statement is mimicked in several instances by the flugelhorns as background figures for the tenor saxophone solo.
The piano performs a consistent rhythm throughout the piece, and utilizes minor and major seconds as a basis for a majority of its harmonies. The piece again utilizes a unique form, although not in the same open-ended fashion as Second Wind. 28-measures in length, this form is repeated continuously entirely throughout the piece, with few exceptions. The first 12 measures of the form provide an introduction, and again serve as an interlude between the alto saxophone and tenor saxophone solos. It is intended that the tenor saxophone end its solo by transitioning either by scalar or intervallic means back to the original melody in a seamless and natural fashion.

Another instance of the form breaking away from its set-forth 28-measure structure occurs in m. 301, when the harmony shifts away from the expected return to C minor and instead moves to A-flat lydian. This is intended to be the major arrival point of the piece, and the ensemble is to almost immediately begin to decrescendo while playing independent descending lines. This decaying effect is done in order to set up the final dramatic ostinato figures in the rhythm section before fading to silence.

**III. Revival**

The melody of the final movement, Revival, is based almost entirely on the C harmonic minor scale. Its underlying form, 32 measures in length, includes a 24-bar minor blues followed by 8 measures of extended utilization of various minor chords. These minor chords shift from B-flat dorian to C phrygian, and then from E-flat dorian to F phrygian before briefly returning to C minor and ending on a rather unexpected D-flat lydian. The 24-bar blues form is accomplished
by essentially doubling the length of what would be each bar of a standard traditional 12-bar blues. As harmonic minor provides the tonal foundation, the resulting aesthetic of the work possesses a certain dark and ominous quality to it. Other textural devices are used to further this somewhat “dark” aesthetic, such as extended usage of trills in the saxophones and trumpets, and a recurring ostinato in the piano, bass, trombones, and baritone saxophone.

Each horn section plays more independently with one another than in the previous two movements. For example, the trumpets and trombones primarily play the melody throughout the piece, while the saxophones provide various eighth-note fills. This is done in some degree to create a “call and response” effect. Many of the lines played by the saxophones are based on augmented triads, which can again be derived from the parent harmonic minor scale.
SUITE FOR BIG BAND

I. SECOND WIND
II. GOLD & LAVENDER
III. REVIVAL
start winding down solo 2x

start winding down 2x

start winding down solo 2x
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II. GOLD & LAVENDER

ERIC OATTS

[Music notation page with different parts and sections indicated, including treble clef notes, bass clef notes, and tempo markings.]

C-9

F-11

B-13(b9)

Eric Oatts
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Bari. Sax.
Alto Sax.
Ten. Sax.
Tbn.
Pno.
U. Bass
B. Tbn.
Dr.

ccoy-esque sus voicings for all minor chords