

***Battalia* by Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber**

CMP Teaching Plan

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Heinrich Biber (1644-1704) was born in Prague and later spent 24 years in Salzburg serving as Kapellmeister for the Court of the archbishop of Salzburg. Biber was described by noted violinmaker Jacob Stainer as “the outstanding virtuoso Herr Biber”. Well known as a great violinist, he became best known as a composer of violin works, many of which employ scordatura (unconventional tunings of the violin strings). His “Rosary Sonatas” consisting of 16 sonatas, had each movement with a different tuning of the open strings. Biber’s music used much canonic devices and diverse harmonic ideas that pre-date the later Baroque works of Pachelbel and J.S. Bach. Some of these compositional ideas included polytonality and *col legno*.

Battalia, edited by Wisconsin native Joel Blahnik, was written in 1673 during the Baroque era. Some historians have attributed this work as Biber’s feelings toward the Thirty Year War. This was a religious war fought from 1618-1648 involving most of Europe. It began as a conflict between Protestants and Catholics and spread throughout many European countries. The war often used mercenary armies and created much famine and disease that devastated many countries. Biber might have expressed serious emotions about the war as it was recorded that almost half the male population of German states and over a third of the Czechs were killed. Biber grew up in the Czech area and spent his adulthood in the German state of Austria. *Battalia* seems to be a statement about all aspects of war, including statements about the social and historical impact of war and the toll on humanity.

Analysis

Battalia is often translated as “a body of troops” or simply as “battle.” This piece is dedicated to Bacchus, god of wine, vegetation and theatre. This immediately suggests notions of absurdity to both player and listener. Biber uses many non-traditional musical techniques including striking the bow on the instrument, woven paper through strings, and Ives-like polytonality. The piece is divided into eight short movements with the following titles:

1. Sonata
2. The Profligate Society of Common Humor
3. Allegro
4. The March
5. Presto
6. Aria
7. The Battle
8. The Lament of the Wounded

1. Sonata (Gathering of the Troops*)
 - AB form
 - A section uses rhythmic motive of _____ which I interpret as “marching of troops to a central gathering place”
 - Biber uses other motives for different groups of troops i.e.
 - B section uses dynamics to create a call and response pattern
 - A new timbre is introduced by using the wood of the bow against the side of the instrument
2. The Profligate Society of Common Humor (The troops have gathered in one location, each in their own campsite)
 - The form consists of 8 different songs each starting at a different time
 - The harmony is polytonality as the 8 melodies are in 7 different keys
D, c, d, F, A, G, e
 - The rhythmic intensity is created by using polyrhythm. One section is in 12/8 time and the others in 4/4 time
 - I interpret this movement as each mercenary group having its own nationalistic song and every group is singing at the same time in the same campsite
3. Allegro (An interlude as troops pass time before the fighting)
 - Form is AA BB
 - Dynamic scheme is f-p-f-p
 - D major
 - Movement is 7 measures long, which might be interpreted as the feeling of uneasiness that the troops have inside them waiting for battle, while on the outside they show a sense of frivolity and bravado
4. The March (A military leader stepping forward to organize and lead the troops)
 - This has a violin solo with only a single bass accompaniment
 - The key is D but the part is written with a G# intentional making the piece in A
 - The bass player imitates a drum by weaving a piece of paper under the A string and over the E and D strings
5. Presto (Happiness and bravura before battle)
 - D major and some A major
 - Form is A, B, Development using canonic ideas, B, B
 - Dynamic scheme is f-p-f-p-f
 - Uses the following rhythmic motive:
6. Aria (Prayer before battle)
 - DM to AM to DM
 - Form is A A B B
 - Very reflective in style and tempo
 - All parts have moving and weaving lines as if each individual soldier has his own thoughts.
7. The Battle (No explanation needed)
 - Form is A m. 1-6 and part B m. 7-12 and then repeated.
 - Rhythmic motive is:

* Parenthetical references next to each movement are interpreted by GW

- Violin parts 1 and 2 have moving melodies with similar patterns mostly in thirds.
Violin 3, violas and cellos have repeated patterns
Basses imitate cannon shots with the right hand snapping the string against the fingerboard (now called Bartok pizzicato)
8. The Lament of the Wounded (A part of war that is often forgotten)
Uses the rhythmic motive as if dragging a wounded leg.
B minor and ends in D major possible symbolizing hope after the war is over
Much harmonic dissonance in m. 11 and 12 using chromatics and suspensions
Dynamic range is p to pp

The Heart

The heart of *Battalia* is the way the composer expresses the different aspects of war by using traditional and non-traditional musical effects, creating a multitude of emotional timbres.

Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate the bowing style of the Baroque period and be able to create exceptions to the basic rules (skill).
2. Students will be able to describe and identify the musical concepts of polytonality and poly-meter (knowledge).
3. Students will be able to express and describe how music can capture the many emotions of war (affective).

Strategies for Outcome 1

1. Play a recording of music from the Baroque period and have students identify and write in their portfolios the bowing styles they hear.
2. Go around the room and have each student create a unique sound using their instrument.
3. Have students locate the unique sounds in *Battalia* and then try them out.

Strategies for Outcome 2

1. Have the students play “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” with each string section starting on a different pitch. Then have each section create and play a variation of Twinkle with at least one group using triplets.
2. After the students have learned the notes and rhythms to the second movement of *Battalia*, have each part (there are eight) spread out throughout the entire rehearsal space (each part should be as far as possible from the other parts). Then play the second movement from this position. Ask the students, “why did the composer write 8 parts in 7 keys?”
3. Using an established set of bowing exercises in warm-ups, have each section play the exercises in different keys. Then separate the sections from each other by one or two beats.

4. Have each section come up with their own theme song. After each group has played their song for the orchestra, have them all play them together.

Strategies for Outcome 3

1. Lead a discussion on the following question: Is Biber in favor of war or against and why? Why do you think Biber dedicated this piece to Bacchus?
2. After playing the movement “Aria” from *Battalia*, have the students write a letter home as if they would be in battle the very next day.
3. After the students know *Battalia* well, have them work in small groups to try to figure out what Biber might have been saying about war in each movement. Then lead a class discussion sharing ideas.

Assessment for Outcome 1

1. Hand out another piece from the Baroque period and see if the student can sight-read the piece using traditional Baroque bowings.
2. Have the students compare and contrast a different Baroque piece from the Biber.

Assessment for Outcome 2

1. Give the students a simple melody written on paper or on the board, and have them re-write it in two different keys of their choice. Then play the melody together in the keys they have written.
2. Divide the students into groups of 8 and have them compose a rhythmic piece by layering the music like African drumming. Have one student in each group keep a steady beat and each student create a rhythmic motive that fits within that beat. Keep adding one student at a time in each group. Then perform them for the class.

Assessment for Outcome 3

1. On a written exam, have the students describe how Biber musically captured the emotions of war in *Battalia*.
2. Have the students write in their portfolios their thoughts on the following question: If Biber were alive today, how might his music about war sound different or the same? Then discuss their thoughts as a class.

Music Selection

1. Since our country is at war presently, this piece might help the students explore the different emotions they might have about war.
2. *Battalia* is a good piece to explore the way composers followed the basic music rules of their time, and how they brought in new and sometimes controversial ideas.
3. The piece has excellent examples of polytonality and polyrhythm.

4. The piece is well constructed and thought-out and is easily within the technical and emotional levels of my students.

Notes to self