

The Red Balloon
Anne McGinty 1993
Edmundson & McGinty Publications
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Broad Description

The Red Balloon is a lyrical piece for concert band utilizing visual imagery as a programmatic influence.

Background information

From the composer's notes, "*THE RED BALLOON*" is an original composition based on a painting the composer saw just once. The painting showed a small child and a grandfather, facing away. The two people and the background were done in white on white. The only color in the painting was the red balloon, held by the child.

Simple Overview

1-8	(C Lydian) flute theme two measure ascending motifs outlining C Major
9-16	transition of two measure ascending motifs with melodic fragments
17-24	(G Lydian) oboe, horn tenor sax, clarinet, mallets theme static G Major in all other voices
25-32	(Db Lydian) trumpet theme two measure ascending motifs outlining Db Major
33-36	transition of two measure ascending motifs
37-42	(Ab Lydian) low brass theme static Eb7 chords in all other voices
43-46	(G Lydian) flute rhythmic alteration of theme
47-54	(Bb Lydian) alto saxophone and flute theme two measure ascending motifs outlining Bb Major
55-62	transition of two measure ascending motifs with melodic fragments
63-70	(F Lydian) flute, oboe, clarinet, alto sax, horn, tenor sax theme non-static chord progression in all other voices
71-74	(Eb Lydian) solo trumpet theme abbreviated
75-80	transition of two measure ascending motifs
81-84	(C Lydian) original statement of flute theme abbreviated
85-88	interruption of two measure ascending motifs in F and Bb
89-92	(C Lydian) final statement in bells with C Major tonic cadence

Elements of Music

Form

- The Red Balloon consists of ten recurring statements of a single theme.

Rhythm

- The rhythm combinations in the Red Balloon are limited to quarter, half, dotted half, and the isolated use of the dotted quarter eighth note combination.
- Most importantly, the use of simple triple meter, the unpredictable beat placement of the varying accompaniment figures and the use of ties over bar lines help avoid any obvious strong and weak beat patterns. This is particularly clear in measure 20.
- These three rhythmic elements help generate a rounded, rolling, and supremely relaxed sense of time and tempo.

Melody

- The composition is monothematic.
- McGinty has written an exquisitely shaped melody lasting various combinations of two, four or eight bar phrase lengths. Starting on the fifth scale degree of the Lydian mode and floating in a gentle linear manner around the fifth degree, McGinty created a melody that aurally floats.
- Each consecutive statement of the theme stays within the same linear patterns enough to say it is a repeat of the previous material. The two measure motifs employ subtle changes in melodic shape that give the work it's unpredictable nature of balloon flight.

Harmony

- The melodic material remains in the Lydian mode throughout with nine distinct tonal centers of C, G, Db, Ab, G, Bb, F, Eb, and C. The harmonic accompaniment is simple chordal harmony in the relative major key.

Timbre

- Each statement of the theme is expertly voiced in a perfect key for the instruments playing the melody and accompaniment. Write the melody out for all instruments in all keys, and you will notice immediately McGinty's expert choice of voicings for each instrument group's presentation of the theme.
- The use of percussion is purely for purposes of timbral color.

Texture

- Each statement of the theme is set with appropriate accompaniment to support or sustain interest in the theme. In some instances, the accompaniment is purely static, while at other times, the accompaniment supports an equally important floating motif of stacked fourth and fifth harmonies. In general, this texture would be described and fairly transparent within a homophonic structure.

Expression

- The dynamic, articulation, and tempo demands of this work create a calm and gentle musical work. The tempo indication is "floatingly" and all parts use a slurred or legato articulation. The expressive element that factors decidedly into the interpretation of the work is the sense of dynamic crescendo to the full ensemble statement of the theme at measure 71.

The Heart of the Red Balloon

The heart of the Red Balloon is the elegant floating nature of the melody defined by the raised fourth in the Lydian mode. The monothematic setting gives the listener and performer equal opportunity to enjoy the composer’s singular goal of aurally representing the unpredictable nature of the flight of a single red balloon.

Music Selection

This work provides young musicians the opportunity and the responsibility to interpret a visual image through their musical art form. Whether they actually see the original visual art that inspired the composer, they will be expected to recreate musically the composer’s memory of the work and her intended translation.

For young players learning to master tonality through the use of a key signature, the Red Balloon provides an excellent alternative study opportunity. The Lydian mode is represented in 7 different keys and always done so through the use of accidentals instead of key signatures.

The piece also requires a very controlled style of articulation to convey the gentle nature of the selection. We often accept “less than gentle” playing from our young musicians and this piece is a great example of idiomatic writing for beautiful legato phrasing. If introduced to the students correctly so they internalize the style and nature of the work, The Red Balloon can be played in no other manner than controlled gentleness. It is an excellent vehicle to demand this from young musicians and definitely promotes a transferable skill.

Introducing the piece (a strategy)

1. Play a scale pattern using geometric shapes that control air and volume
2. Latex Question to foster the discussion of inclusion in class activities
3. Like a scientist, make 10 observations of a balloon and how those observations would inform how a balloon should sound?

Knowledge Outcome

Students will examine and execute the altered half and whole step relationships of a modal based melody as it relates to their previous experiences in major tonality.

Strategy “What’s so wrong?”

Identification game where students compare the aural difference between Major scale and Modal patterns.

Assessment

Assign points according to student level of mastery.

1	Was there a change from our major scale?
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2	Which note was changed?
3	What was the change?
4	Is it really wrong? If it's not wrong, do you know what it is called?

Strategy “modal preference”

Which would you choose if you were in charge?

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D
E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E
F	G	A	B	C	D	E	F
G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
B	C	D	E	F	G	A	B

Strategy “Why did Anne McGinty pick Lydian?”

Which way do you like Lydian better? Sol or Do start? Invert the melody to start on DO. Discuss the raised fourth character of ascension and floating.

Assessment

Using the theme sheet for the Red Balloon, play the theme sheet and identify the raised fourth of the Lydian mode.

Affective Outcome

Students will weigh the value of fair play and the basic human need to feel included.

Strategy “monothematic responsibility”

Play the theme sheet and then play the Red Balloon.

Assessment

Why wouldn't we just perform the theme sheet?

Strategy “compositional decision making”

Stand/sit according to your role in the piece. Analyze Anne McGinty's choices.

Assessment

What is your role in the game? Why is or isn't one better? WHY, WHY, WHY?

Strategy “the rules of the game”

Sharing Game

Level 1: Passing the melodic material from the theme sheet around the room to different players.

Level 2: Place eight people in a line with a balloon partner. Pass the melody according to who has the balloon. Keep the balloon floating with hands or air.

Level 3: One person tries to emulate the movement of the balloon when one person is moving it with air.

Level 4: The entire band play one time through the melody and someone moves the balloon as the conductor.

Assessment

What would you rather do, play or watch?

Reflect on their own game playing in their lives.

Strategy

Conversational Fairness

Skill Outcome

Students will explore, manipulate, and master phrase shape and design using appropriate breath control and sound production.

Strategy “STATIC BALLOON”

Initial skill exploration of shaping a line with imagery of steps, sand, and finally a balloon. Notes always have to be going somewhere.

Assessment

Q. What makes the balloon shape unique?

A. No straight lines!

Strategy “FLOATING BALLOON”

Creating a melodic shape and the responsibility to keep the balloon floating either up or down. The arc of the balloon’s flight pattern has no static shape, always changing.

Assessment

Use the strategies from “rules of the game” for assessment purposes.

Strategy “BUNCH OF BALLOONS”

Finding balloon imagery in the accompaniment patterns.

Assessment

Draw or Design the shape of the two measure accompaniment figures

Concluding activity

As the students to reflect on whether or not they support the notion that in each recurring statement of the theme the balloon remains red.