



“A Cambrian Suite” – Michael Ball (Published by Studio Music)

Guidance Notes – Professor Roger Webster

My simple comments here are offered with the sole intention of giving a basic insight into the adjudication process.

Having been involved in the premier performance and subsequent recording of this beautiful little piece, I feel able to comment with some authority on the musical, technical and logistical challenges it offers.

This synopsis must not be understood as a ‘blue print’ for success but as a guide to how adjudicators analyse the inner elements of the score in order to define the accuracy of a performance. Therefore, this is offered as an example only and conductors should delve further into the score in order to reveal other detail not covered in this critique. Moreover, it is expected that conductors will be as musically creative as is possible within the bounds of the score and enable the adjudicator to “hear what we see”!

The first movement (Gwyr Harlech) should immediately show a steadfast intent and pride within a controlled tempo and dynamic framework as we build upon the initial Men of Harlech theme (after all, this music is a traditional Welsh military march... albeit in a slightly slower form here).

Balance is vital, paying attention to all dynamics and accents.

The composer has given every bit of advice required to effectively communicate his thematic ideas; so use them.

Ensure that the ‘a tempo’ markings following each poco rit, actually returns to the correct and consistent tempo (and don’t anticipate the rits).

Due to the original military nature of the first movement theme, it is essential to keep the music alive i.e. not dull or lifeless.

The second movement is a traditional Welsh lullaby (Suo Gân)

Do I need to say anymore?

To be performed gently and sweetly. Care should be taken to show dynamic contrasts, but never over blow. The louder sections must be controlled and continue on with the lullaby theme.

Pay particular attention to the rhythms. Aim for accuracy especially with triplet rhythms; accurate but not exaggerated i.e. not semiquavers.

This movement must sing sweetly throughout. The closing reference to Y Deryn Pur from soprano and Flugel should flow seamlessly to the balanced and beautifully placed final chord ! No welsh harp impressions please.

The third and final movement is Codiad yr Hedydd (the rising of the Lark).

This is a rousing tune, full of crisp musical lines punctuated with accents and ever changing dynamics. This movement should ooze nationalistic pride (welsh or other) as the conductor guides the players in an orderly fashion, chests puffed out and heads held high.

Balanced, super crisp and accurate note lengths and tight ensemble, with sounds full of life (not dead, lifeless sounds) will help this to jump off the score into the audience and adjudicator's hearts and minds.

As the movement comes to a close, the composer re visits the early themes. The lullaby's triplet rhythm is aided this time by triplets on the timp...so it can't go wrong, yes?

The snappy semiquavers first heard in bar 7 of the piece return two bars before 26 (11 before the end) prior to the final climax. Don't stop concentrating yet; the last few bars, if not cleanly (neatly) placed could take the shine off any performance.

Like any music, it may at first glance look simple, but therein lies the difficulty. As previously mentioned, the composer gives you all the information required to perform the music as intended. Don't try to find 'the hidden meaning' ...it really is not there.

Enjoy working on and performing this beautiful gem of a piece.

Further information regarding the Association of Brass Band Adjudicators performance assessment criteria (PAC) can be found on the AoBBA website

(<http://www.aobba.com/performance-assessment-criteria-pac-a-guide-for-conductors-and-bands/>)

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