

*Nature's Way* for middle-level band (or wind ensemble) was commissioned by BandQuest, a commissioning project initiated by the American Composers Forum. The basic idea was for major composers of national reputation to write works of high quality, that would take into consideration the (still comparatively limited) intermediate levels of musical development—both technical and conceptual—of such typical high school ensembles.

I eagerly accepted the commission and the creative/compositional challenges implied thereby, that is, to reign in my creative imagination to some extent and limit the technical/conceptual demands to a more moderate level than is to be found in the dozen or so other works for band (or wind ensemble) that I had previously composed. Nonetheless, since the process of rehearsing, studying and performing a work created specifically for the non-professional school student market is— and must be (in my view)—primarily educational, i.e. a teaching/learning experience, it was very clear to me that my work would (and should) challenge the players at least to their top levels, and then even a little beyond that.

Thus *Nature's Way* in no way represents a compromise of my personal style (basically atonal, or highly chromatic), nor my long held concepts of form, continuity, texture, and instrumentation, inherent in all my music.

I have known for a long time that young, inquisitive minds are eager to learn from new experiences, from previously never encountered challenges, that is to say, to be pushed—gently—to rise above their present levels of achievement. That's what education is all about. To encounter rhythmic ideas, musical gestures and shapes, simultaneous differentiated dynamic levels, harmonic/melodic ideas—that, by the way, in my case have been around for over a hundred years, but are not usually represented in the generally available published band literature—is no different than encountering in a math class, for the first time, a 'new' equation or an unfamiliar mathematical principle. Again, that's what learning and the acquisition of knowledge (and experience) is all about; it applies to learning in music as much as in any other human intellectual endeavor.

I was particularly interested in exploring with the young players (and their band directors) certain "modern" musical ideas and concepts, first initiated in the early twentieth century. One of these is the idea of sudden abrupt changes (or interruptions) in continuity and form, the opposite of the historically long-standing approach to form, in which one moves in a transitional, gradual way from one section of music to another, through a ritard or accelerando, a crescendo or diminuendo, or through a graduated change in instrumentation and texture, and the like. (This earlier approach to form and continuity is, of course, also used in *Nature's Way*.)

Many times the music moves from one mood, character and sound to another, but very suddenly and unpredictably, usually then returning to the previous mood and texture just as abruptly. These continuity interruptions are like brief verbal or written inserts. The intent here is not to be 'disturbing' or 'illogically disruptive,' but rather—and this is the

point and the challenge — as smooth and functional as possible, just perhaps 'surprising.' It is like a carpenter's inlay, smooth and functional.

Typical of such sudden continuity "breaks" are, for example, mm. 4, 9, 13; m. 28-29 and 31-32; m. 52-54, and 58-62. (The conventional "transitional" approach to form can be found at m. 35 to 41 and m. 72 to 80; and overlapping form segments can be seen at mm. 69 to 76.)

Another rather unconventional form principal explored in *Nature's Way* is the palindromic form, in this case m. 80 to approximately m. 95 being more or less the exact retrograde (although somewhat abbreviated) of the beginning of the piece (m. 1 to 25). In other words, it is the same music but played backwards, in reverse order.

In general I have taken a more individualized 'chamber music' approach in *Nature's Way*, emphasizing the idea that almost every player is independently responsible for his or her part, rather than the (educationally *not* necessarily very effective) 'massed sound' concept (often called the herd mentality)—the idea being that there is "safety in numbers," and therefore the desirability of lots of doubling and redundancy of parts, a concept that governs so much music of the high school and college band literature.

I also defied convention to some extent in *Nature's Way*, by giving important (though brief) solo parts to the English horn, oboe, and E-flat clarinet—considered "no-no's" in the band world.

*Nature's Way* was composed in the spring of 2006, and first performed in April of that year, conducted by the composer and played by the Lexington, MA high school band, Jeffrey Leonard director.