

# Finding the Sun:

An exploration of the band grading system through  
an original work in three levels for concert band

A Thesis Presented for the  
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## **Abstract**

*Finding the Sun* is a demonstration of the difficulties addressed when composing music for concert band within the confines of a band grading system. This thesis project includes a set of three compositions that contain the same musical material that has been adjusted and arranged to fit the skill levels of grade 2, grade 3, and grade 5 band works. Writing three levels of the same work presented its own set of challenges in the form of orchestration, technique, and educational considerations.

The narrative portion of this thesis will set up the work's context by examining various band grading systems and other pieces that have been arranged for less experienced bands. First I will share the background of my compositional research, then I will examine the piece in context of the revised grading chart by Cynthia Hutton, and finally recount my experience and observations with the finished product. Not only does this thesis submit three original works for band, it highlights the compositional challenges of the inconsistencies in the band grading systems.

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*Finding the Sun: Grade 5*

“Finding the Sun\_Grade 5 Score.pdf”

*Finding the Sun: Grade 3*

“Finding the Sun\_Grade 3 Score.pdf”

*Finding the Sun: Grade 2*

“Finding the Sun\_Grade 2 Score.pdf”

American Band College Music Grading Chart

Revised BANDWORLD Grading Chart by Cynthia Hutton

ETSBOA Score Approval Form and Grading Rubric

“Band Grading Charts.pdf”

# **Chapter I:**

## **Introduction**

I have spent every summer of the last three years in Manhattan, Kansas as a member of the municipal band. Being a community band, the ensemble is made up of performers from high school to those long past retirement. Some have even been in the ensemble for close to 60 years. The age range of the ensemble makes for an interesting experience considering the variety of skill levels and endurance of the musicians. In addition, many of the advanced musicians in the in the Kansas State band program stick around to play in the ensemble for the summer. Other community members in the ensemble only pick up their instrument for the summer. Because of this, much of the music we play is usually at an intermediate level.

In early June each year, the municipal band plays a joint concert with the Kansas State music camp. The concert features musicians from ages 10 to 80 at different levels of performance ability. To compensate for the disparity of skills, the choice of literature is usually a multi-level combined band piece. The pieces we have played in the past have three levels of parts: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Elementary and middle school campers play beginner parts, high school campers play intermediate parts, and the municipal band plays advanced parts. As a composer, this configuration fascinated me. Each band was featured, but some parts in the piece were played by all three bands simultaneously. I imagined there had to be quite a bit of thought and planning behind these pieces. I have also had the pleasure of being a counselor for these students the last two summers. I had the opportunity to walk around during rehearsals, look at their parts over their shoulders, and to observe how the composers wrote for each instrument.

These observations stuck with me as I brainstormed ideas for my thesis project. Simply writing a work suitable for middle school or a multi-level work was not going to be substantial enough for a thesis, but writing for three levels could provide the insight I was seeking. Writing three levels of the same work presented its own set of challenges in the form of orchestration, technique, and educational considerations. This was not a set of pieces where I could let the music flow out of me like other compositions. Every decision in this project had to be intentional. Since I wrote the pieces from advanced to easy, each choice I made in the more advanced work needed to be able to be simplified almost to the point of beginner band. This made the composition process much slower.

As the project began to take shape, the element of a band grading system came into play. A grading system, which provides a means of ranking band works based on their technical and musical difficulty, was not the set of guidelines I had thought. In fact, I consulted many grading systems and charts from varying sources and the systems did not always align. My project goal shifted slightly to make room to discuss the inconsistencies between each grade level since I did not want to rank my pieces beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

This thesis project includes a set of three compositions that contain the same musical material that has been adjusted and arranged to fit the skill levels of grade 2, grade 3, and grade 5 band works. For this endeavor, my aim was to challenge myself in the form of writing music for young musicians and to highlight the grey areas in the grading system. The narrative portion of this thesis will set up the work's context by examining various band grading systems and other pieces that have been arranged for less experienced bands. First I will share the background of my composition process, then I will examine the piece in context of the revised grading chart by Cynthia Hutton, and finally recount my experience and observations with the finished product.

Not only does this thesis submit an original composition for band, it highlights the compositional challenges of the inconsistencies in the band grading systems

## Chapter II: Background and Framework

### Examples of Works that were Arranged for Beginner and Intermediate Bands

It was a somewhat unconventional idea to write a band piece knowing that I was going to simplify it into different grade levels. However I am not the first composer to simplify my piece in this manner. Three other situations come to mind, Frank Ticheli's *Earth Song*, Percy Grainger's "Horkstow Grange" from *Lincolnshire Posy*, and arrangements that John Mackey has done from *Wine Dark Sea*.

The first arrangement that came to my mind when considering this project was *Earth Song* by Frank Ticheli. I first heard the choral version of this piece in high school soon after the piece was first published. A few years later during my undergraduate studies, I came across the piece *Sanctuary* (also by Ticheli) on a Spotify concert band playlist and recognized the melody immediately. As it turns out, the melody from *Earth Song* was recycled material from *Sanctuary* and set to a poem written by Tichelli. Not long after the *Earth Song* choral premier, a band director from Texas requested a concert band version of *Earth Song*. Irony aside, Ticheli arranged the work for a concert band. Ticheli refers to *Earth Song* for band as the "grandchild" of *Sanctuary* and the choral version of *Earth Song*. The result is a less technically demanding work that brought the piece back to its concert band origins.<sup>1</sup> Though I am not replicating this process, the evolution of skill level from advanced to accessible inspired my project.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Ticheli, *Earth Song*, Program notes (Pasadena: Manhattan Beach Music, 2012).

Frank Ticheli made several effective compositional decisions when he arranged *Earth Song* for band including part-doublings and instrumentation. *Earth Song* for band follows the form from the choral version but contains colors and musical ideas from *Sanctuary*. Figure 1a shows the first instance of the main melody starting in m. 26 of the horn part. In *Sanctuary*, the solo horn is cross-cued in the alto saxophone and then later in the trumpet.<sup>2</sup> Ticheli calls *Sanctuary* a grade 5 work and *Earth Song* a grade 2. Because *Earth Song* is a grade 2, the horn solo from *Sanctuary* is replaced with alto saxophone and trumpet 1 (Figure 2a. mm. 9).<sup>3</sup> Solos in grade 2 music are uncommon and horn solos at that level are risky due to difficulty controlling the instrument. The range of the horn solo would be a major issue as well.

Another change between the works is in instrumentation. They are mostly similar but in *Earth Song* the piccolo, e-flat contra-bass clarinet, horns 2-4, trombone 3, string bass, and piano are omitted. These are similar instruments that I simplified in my arrangements. The purpose of this is to make the easier versions as accessible as possible to the most bands. Instruments like e-flat contra-bass clarinet are uncommon in most high schools.

In observing the two arrangements, there are many similarities and some parts are even identical. The clarinet 1 part in *Earth Song* is almost a copy and paste of the clarinet 2 part in *Sanctuary*. Similarly, the bassoon and bass clarinet parts are identical from m. 26 in *Sanctuary* and m. 9 in *Earth Song*. The melody and counterlines written for these instruments fit the range and skill level for both pieces. This is a benefit that I took advantage of due to the simple nature of the melodies I chose for my compositions.

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Ticheli, *Sanctuary* (Pasadena: Manhattan Beach Music, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Frank Ticheli, *Earth Song* (Pasadena California: Manhattan Beach Music, 2012).

rit. ----- 25 26 ♩ = c. 69 27 28 29

The score is arranged in systems. The first system includes Percussion (Perc.), Flute 1 (Fl. 1), Flute 2 (Fl. 2), Oboe 1 (Ob. 1), Oboe 2 (Ob. 2), Clarinet in Bb 1 (Cl. 1), Clarinet in Bb 2 (Cl. 2), Clarinet in Bb 3 (Cl. 3), Bass Clarinet (Bb Bass Cl.), Clarinet in Eb (Eb Cl. Cl.), Horn 1 (Hrn. 1), Horn 2 (Hrn. 2), Alto Saxophone (Alto Sax.), Tenor Saxophone (Ten. Sax.), and Baritone Saxophone (Bari. Sax.).

The second system includes Trumpet 1 (Tp. 1), Trumpet 2 (Tp. 2), Trumpet 3 (Tp. 3), Horn 1 (Hrn. 1), Horn 2 (Hrn. 2), Horn 3 (Hrn. 3), Horn 4 (Hrn. 4), Trombone 1 (Tbn. 1), Trombone 2 (Tbn. 2), Trombone 3 (Tbn. 3), Euphonium (Euph.), Tuba (Tuba), String Bass (Str. Bass), Timpani (Timp.), Percussion (Perc.), and Piano (Piano).

Key performance instructions include: *rit.* (ritardando) at the start; *26* in a box above the first measure of the second system; *♩ = c. 69* indicating the tempo; *Fall!* above the Clarinet 1 staff; *Solo Hrn. 1. sobby and expressively* above the Horn 1 staff; *Solo Trumpet: Play only if Hrn. 1 plays solo* above the Trumpet 1 staff; *1. Solo sobby and expressively* above the Horn 1 staff; *2. sm.* above the Horn 2 staff; *3. sm.* above the Horn 3 staff; *Dim. 1* and *Dim. 2* above the Euphonium and Tuba staves; *Play Solo* above the Tuba staff; and *grz.* (grazioso) above the String Bass staff.

Figure 1a: *Sanctuary*, mm. 24-29. Used by kind permission of Frank Ticheli.

This figure shows a page of a musical score for the piece 'Sanctuary', covering measures 30 through 36. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with multiple staves for each instrument. The instruments included are:

- Flutes (Fl.)
- Oboes (Ob.)
- Clarinets in Bb (Cl. 2)
- Bass Clarinet (Bass Cl.)
- Clarinet in Eb (Cl. 1)
- Horns (Horn 1 and 2)
- Alto Saxophones (Alto Sax. 1 and 2)
- Tenor Saxophone (Ten. Sax.)
- Bari Saxophone (Bari. Sax.)
- Trumpets (Tpt. 1, 2, 3)
- French Horns (F.Hn. 1 and 2)
- Timpani (Tbn.)
- Snare Drum (Snare)
- Tom-toms (Tom.)
- Maracas (Mar.)
- Triangle (Tri.)
- Cymbals (Cym.)
- Piano (Piano)

The score features various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings. Key performance instructions include 'espr.' (expressive), 'Play' (with a fermata), 'cresc.' (crescendo), 'Play (one player only)', and 'lead solo'. Measure numbers 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 are clearly marked at the top of the page. The number '34' is enclosed in a box above the staff for that measure.

Figure 1b: Sanctuary, mm. 30-36.



15 16 17

Fl. 1 2

Ob.

B♭ Cl. 1

B♭ Cl. 2

B♭ Cl. 3

B♭ Bass Cl.

Bsn.

E♭ Alto Sax. 1

E♭ Alto Sax. 2

B♭ Ten. Sax.

E♭ Bari. Sax.

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2 3

F Hrn.

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Euph.

Tuba

Vibes. Motor off (soft mallets)

Glock.

Tri.

3

Figure 2b: *Earth Song* for band, mm. 15-20.

The evolution of *Earth Song* is very similar to that of works by Percy Grainger. I played *Colonial Song* and *Australian Up-Country Tune* once in the same concert block and I was able to compare them closely. Both works use the same melodic material though the latter is easier to play. This melody was also recycled in the *Gum Sucker's March* from *In a Nutshell*.<sup>4</sup> Grainger wrote each of these pieces, but many of his other works have been arranged and simplified by other composers and arrangers. Because of its popularity, there are many excerpts from *Lincolnshire Posy* that have been arranged. Michael Sweeney is one composer who simplified “Horkstow Grange,” the second movement from *Lincolnshire Posey*. “Horkstow Grange” presents a few awkward elements like the key signature (Figure 3a).<sup>5</sup> The original movement is in D-flat major and Michael Sweeney transposed it to the more comfortable key of B-flat (Figure 4a).<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the change of key, Sweeney adjusted some of the instrumentation and rhythmic notations. The instrumentation is very similar between the two but the piccolo, English horn, double bassoon, e-flat clarinet, soprano saxophone, trumpet 3, horns 2-4, trombone 2, and bass trombone have been removed from the score for the same reasons instruments were removed from *Sanctuary*. Sweeney makes a smart notation decision for his arrangement by breaking up the triplet into a 2/4 bar (m. 8 in both versions) so he could show where the eighth note would land. For a younger band that is reading triplets for the first time this visual is helpful.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas P. Lewis, “Program Notes,” In *A Source Guide to the Music of Percy Grainger* (Westport: Pro Am Music Resources, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Percy Grainger, *Lincolnshire Posey* “Horkstow Grange” (Cleveland: Ludwig Music Publishing Co, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Sweeney, “Horkstow Grange,” Composed by Percy Grainger (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard LLC, 2008).

Slowly flowing, singingly  $\text{♩} = 76$

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with 24 staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Piccolo Flute 1,2; Oboe; English Horn; Bassoon; Double Bassoon; Clarinet in E; Clarinet in Bb 1; Clarinet in Bb 2; Clarinet in Bb 3; Alto Clarinet; Bass Clarinet; Soprano Sax; Alto Sax 1; Alto Sax 2; Tenor Sax; Baritone Sax; Bass Sax; Trumpet in Bb 1; Trumpet in Bb 2,3; Horn in F 1,2; Horn in F 3,4; Trombone 1,2; Bass Trombone; Baritone (T.C.); Euphonium; Tuba; and Double Bass. The score begins with a tempo marking of 'Slowly flowing, singingly' and a quarter note equal to 76 beats per minute. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The first six measures are shown, with dynamics such as *mf* and *f* indicated throughout.

Figure 3a: “Horkstow Grange,” mm. 1-6. Used with kind permission of Ludwig Music Publishing

Figure 3b: “Horkstow Grange,” mm. 7-12.

From "Lincolshire Posy"  
**HORKSTOW GRANGE**

Percy Aldridge Grainger  
*Adapted by Michael Sweeney*

Slowly flowingly ♩ = 72 5

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with 20 staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet in B $\flat$  1, Clarinet in B $\flat$  2, Alto Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Alto Sax 1, 2, Tenor Sax, Baritone Sax, Trumpet in B $\flat$  1, 2, Horn in F, Trombone, Baritone (B.C.), Tuba, Double Bass, Percussion 1, Percussion 2, Mallets, and Timpani. The score begins with a tempo marking 'Slowly flowingly' and a metronome marking of 72 quarter notes per minute. A rehearsal mark '5' is placed above the first measure. Dynamics such as *mp*, *mf*, and *mf mp* are indicated throughout the score. The score spans six measures, with measure numbers 1 through 6 printed below the staves.

Figure 4a: "Horkstow Grange," Arranged by Michael Sweeney, mm. 1-6. Used with kind permission by publisher Hal Leonard.

HORKSTOW GRANGE

10

This musical score page contains 18 staves for various instruments. The instruments listed on the left are: Fl., Ob., Bsn., B♭ Cl. 1, B♭ Cl. 2, A. Cl., B. Cl., A. Sax. 1, 2, T. Sax., B. Sax., B♭ Tpt. 1, 2, Hrn., Tbn., Bar., Tuba, D.B., Perc. 1, Perc. 2, Mal., and Timp. The score is written in 3/4 time and features a variety of dynamics including *mf*, *mp*, and *mpo*. The music includes melodic lines, harmonic support, and rhythmic patterns. The bottom of the page is marked with measure numbers 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

Figure 4b: “Horkstow Grange,” Arr. Michael Sweeney, mm. 7-13.

A very recent example of this sort of reduction occurs in the works *Wine Dark Sea* (2014), *Lightning Field* (2015), and *Until the Scars* (2019) all by John Mackey. Mackey has been open about the challenges of writing for younger bands. In a post on his blog from 2010, Mackey explains his goal when writing for young bands:

“The biggest challenge in writing music for young bands is writing music that is easy, but it doesn’t sound simplistic or dorky. It still needs to sound like I wrote it, but it needs to sound like the piece just happened to be technically easy – as if it all happened by accident.”<sup>7</sup>

In 2017 Mackey gave an interview with the Director of Bands at Michigan State University, Kevin Sedatole, where he discussed his approach to writing grade 3 music. In this interview he mentions that he finds it easier to write middle school music by writing a harder version first. After he’s written the harder version, he finds the “essence” of that piece or what gives that piece character and simplifies the rest of the surrounding piece.<sup>8</sup> *Lightning Field* and *Until the Scars* were composed in this manner. *Lightning Field* is more or less a reduction of the last movement “The Attentions of Souls” from *Wine-Dark Sea*, which Mackey confirms in his tweet, “Yep! It’s like the first cousin to the last movement of *Wine-Dark Sea* - but for younger bands.”<sup>9</sup> *Until the Scars* is a newer work that is an adaption of the first movement of *Wine-Dark Sea* titled “Hubris.” Knowing that Mackey has been simplifying his music for younger bands further encouraged my idea for this project. He is a trend-setter and seems to anticipate needs in what he calls “the biz”<sup>10</sup> very well.

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<sup>7</sup> John Mackey, “Grade 3 = Difficult,” *Osti Music*. November 14, 2010, <http://ostimusic.com/blog/grade-3-difficult/>

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Sedatole, “John Mackey The Compositional Process grade 3 and lower,” YouTube video, 13:59, Posted [December 2017]. <https://tinyurl.com/yy7vsfuy>.

<sup>9</sup> John Mackey, Twitter Post, 13 May, 2015, 6:02 AM, <https://twitter.com/ostimusic/status/598473353226158080?lang=en>

<sup>10</sup> Mackey. “Grade 3 = difficult.”

## Band Grading Systems

The band grading system exists to assist band directors and conductors by classifying literature based on technical and musical difficulty. Based on the assigned grade number, directors can choose pieces that are at an appropriate skill level for their ensembles. The numbers range from as low as 0.5 to as high as 6, 0.5 being exceedingly elementary and 6 being experimental and especially difficult. In general, the lower end of the system (0.5-2) is played by elementary and middle school bands. The middle range (3-4) can be played by high school bands and the high range (4-6) by collegiate bands. Advanced high school bands will program grade 5-6 music if their students have the requisite skill while smaller programs may prefer to stay around grade 2-3 if they don't have the numbers or skill to play grade 4 music. That is one of the benefits to this system: pieces are rated by difficulty rather than by age.

It is somewhat challenging to define what makes up each grade in the grading system because there are multiple grading systems in use. Some only go from 1-5, others 1-6, and others use a .5 to split the difference in grade level. There is not an agreed upon grading system and often one piece will be graded differently by different publishers. This makes choosing literature even more challenging. Manhattan Beach Music uses the grading system 1-6 with descriptions listed in Table 1.<sup>11</sup> Hal Leonard on the other hand uses 1-P instead of 6 as seen in Table 2.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Manhattan Beach Music, "Concert Band Music by Grade Level," [Manhattanbeachmusic.com](https://www.manhattanbeachmusic.com/grade.html).  
<https://www.manhattanbeachmusic.com/grade.html>

<sup>12</sup> Hal Leonard, "Instrumental Series Guide," [Halleonard.com](https://www.halleonard.com),  
<https://www.halleonard.com/bandSeriesGuide.jsp>

Table 1. The Manhattan Beach Music Grading System.

Grade 1	All middle schools and first-year bands
Grade 2	All middle schools and small high school bands
Grade 3	Better middle schools, all high schools, all universities
Grade 4	Better high schools, small colleges, all universities
Grade 5	Advanced high schools, better small colleges, all universities
Grade 6	The best high schools, all universities

Table 2. The Hal Leonard Grading Scale.

1	Very Easy – 1 year of playing experience
2	Easy – 2 years of playing experience
3	Medium – 3-4 years of playing experience
4	Medium Advanced
5	Advanced
P	Professional

A music distributor JW Pepper uses its own scale that differs entirely from the number grading system. Instead, of numbers, JW Pepper uses letters that indicate easy versus advanced.

Table 3 shows the different labels a piece can receive based on its difficulty.<sup>13</sup>

Table 3. JW Pepper Grading Chart for Instrumental Music.

B	Beginning (first concert)
VE	Very Easy
E	Easy
ME	Medium-Easy
M	Medium
MA	Medium-Advanced
A	Advanced (professional level)

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<sup>13</sup> JW Pepper, “Music Grading Information,” Jwpepper.com, [https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/grade\\_classabrvs.jsp](https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/grade_classabrvs.jsp)

There have been a few notable attempts to create uniformity. *Bandworld* released a grading chart in 2000 called the “American Band College Music Grading Chart”. The chart breaks down different components of musical scores and shows the progression of difficulty through the grading system within each.<sup>14</sup> The first half of the chart shows components such as meter, key signature, tempo, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, scoring, length, and other considerations. The second half shows the instrument ranges through the grading levels where the higher the grade level, the more expansive the range. This chart is likely what many people who search for grading charts will find.

In 2001 Dr. Cynthia Hutton, a professor of music education at Southern Oregon University, published a revised grading chart that elaborates on and changes information given in a few categories of the existing chart. The “Key Signature” category is one in particular. She changed the recommended number of sharps and flats for each grade level but the most significant edition is in the description. In addition to the number of sharps and flats she includes the use of modes, chromatic alterations, polytonalities, and dissonance. The “Rhythm” category elaborated on acceptable note groupings through images rather than description. Other altered categories that are altered are dynamics, scoring, length, and percussion usage. Her edits can be seen clearly in the range section where range can be specified by half grades such as 2.5 and 3.5. She also adds a category for the suggested percussion instruments in each grade. Another noticeable change is the addition of a “Musical Substance” category and the change of “Things to Avoid” to “Considerations”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Band world, “American Band College Grading Chart” [bandworld.org, http://www.bandworld.org/pdfs/gradingchart.pdf](http://www.bandworld.org/pdfs/gradingchart.pdf). See Appendix D.

<sup>15</sup> Cynthia Hutton, “Revised Bandworld Grading Chart,” <https://linoguerreiro.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/band-world-grading-chart11.pdf>

I have chosen to use Hutton's revised chart for reference when referring to my own pieces because I believe it is more recent and thorough than the American Band College chart. Her chart supports what I have observed during my experience as a student playing band music through school as well as the expectations of band directors who commission music from me.

Appendix F shows the grading rubric for the East Tennessee School Band & Orchestra Association (ETSBOA) approval form and grading rubric. This form is used to request new pieces to be added to the ETSBOA repertoire list. The conductor fills out the form by putting an X in the box that best fits the composition.<sup>16</sup> This chart is identical to Hutton's chart.<sup>17</sup> The pitfall is that multiple band directors with mixed backgrounds are filling out this chart. A grade suggested by one band director may be different than another. States and regions classify music based on their own grading systems for contests and festivals. Tables 4 and 5 show two examples of pieces and where they fit on the grading scale for different states: *October* by Eric Whitacre and *Dusk* by Steven Bryant. Tables 4 and 5 from JW Pepper show the disparity between states. The inconsistencies in the grading system lead to these mixed evaluations.

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<sup>16</sup> East Tennessee School Band and Orchestra Association, "ETSBOA Score Approval Form and Grading Rubric," Etsboa.org. <http://etsboa.org/wp-content/uploads/ETSBOAScoreApprovalFormGradingRubric.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix E and Attached Material

Table 4. Grades for Eric Whitacre’s *October* according to different states.

WI	Event 3000 Concert Band Class A
IN	ISSMA Senior Band Group I
FL	FBA Band Grade 5
MD	Concert Band Grade 5
IA	IA HS Music Assoc Band Grade 4
NC	Concert Band Grade 5
GA	GA Band Grade 6
SC	SC Band Grade 4
TX	Band Grade 4-Complete
TN	Concert Band Grade 4
LA	LA Band Grade 4
MI	Senior High Band Class A
MS	MS Band Class 6A
MN	Category 2
OR	Required Band List 5a
MN	MN HS League Band Category 2

Table 5. Grades for Steven Bryant’s *Dusk* according to different states.

FL	FBA Band Grade 3
IA	IA HS Music Assoc Band Grade 4
NC	Concert Band Grade 4
GA	GA Band Grade 6
TX	Band Grade 4-Complete
TN	Concert Band Grade 4
LA	LA Band Grade 4
IN	ISSMA Senior Band Group II
KS	KS HSAA Band Level 4
MI	Senior High Band Class B

As a composer, inconsistency in grading can cause confusion when receiving a commission. If a band were to commission a grade 3 work, the composer may have to make some guesses as to what that means. There is a general unspoken difficulty range for those who have a background in concert band, but for those who are unfamiliar, this can be a daunting task. Composers may ask for a list of repertoire that an ensemble performs to get a better idea of the skill level they are writing for. Recordings of recent performances could be equally as helpful. Other composers may ask for specifics about the ensemble to assist their writing. Relevant questions include:

- Will they have any unusually large or small instrument sections?
- Are there any instrument sections that are particularly strong or weak?
- Are there any instruments that should not be given a solo?
- Is there an individual or section you want to feature?
- What do you feel your strengths and weaknesses are as an ensemble?

## Chapter III: *Finding the Sun*

### *Finding the Sun: Background, Themes, and Form*

#### **Background**

For a composer, one of the more challenging parts of writing a piece of music is giving it a title. Some composers have a title or story in mind before they compose, others develop one during their process, and some title their work after the fact. Unlike pop music, composers of instrumental music can't rely on the lyrics for a title; instrumental music is more abstract than that. As a result, the title is essential because it gives the listeners and performers an idea of the meaning or story behind the piece.

These pieces were not originally titled *Finding the Sun*, they were titled *Up into the Night*. The original title, for me, evokes an image of flying away and leaving your troubles behind. But as the piece began to take shape, the night imagery felt too dark. Not only was the title too dark, but also it lacked purpose. When I composed these pieces they felt like they had direction and I was able to apply personal meaning to that direction. Now, this piece is about overcoming doubt, which is something everyone struggles with but I specifically felt in relation to this project. I doubted my knowledge and whether I would be successful in my project, but the personal connection with the title gave me a direction when I was considering form, expression, and tempo.

The phrase *Finding the Sun*, is a take on a lyric of a song from my favorite movie trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*. The closing credits song for the first movie, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, is titled *May it Be*. It is sung by Enya with words by Roma Ryan and orchestration by Howard





The image shows a musical score for the upper woodwinds. It includes staves for Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet 1 (B♭ Cl. 1), Clarinet 2 (B♭ Cl. 2), and Clarinet 3 (B♭ Cl. 3). The key signature is one flat (B♭). The score shows measures 27 and 28. In measure 27, there are sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and a '6' indicating a sextuplet. In measure 28, there are accents and a 'f' dynamic marking. The Piccolo part has a rest in measure 28.

Figure 7. Motive example in the upper woodwinds. mm. 27 and 28.

The image shows a musical score for the upper brass. It includes staves for Trumpet 1 (B♭ Tpt. 1), Trumpet 2 (B♭ Tpt. 2), Trumpet 3 (B♭ Tpt. 3), Horn 1 (Hn. 1), and Horn 2 (Hn. 2). The key signature is one flat (B♭). The score shows measures 27 and 28. The parts feature eighth-note patterns with slurs and accents. There are '3' markings indicating triplets in measures 27 and 28. The Horn 2 part has a '3' marking in measure 28.

Figure 8. Motive example in the upper brass. mm. 27 and 28.

## Form

Form is an element that I wanted to keep consistent through each arrangement. Between themes and form, the pieces would have an obvious relationship. The form in all three arrangements is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Formal pattern and measure numbers in *Finding the Sun*.

	Slow and mysterious	Fanfare	Fast and lyrical	Slow and thoughtful	Fanfare return	Modulation /ending
Grade 5	m. 1-24	m. 25-41	m. 42-68	m. 69-121	m. 141-153	m. 154- end
Grade 3	m. 1- 21	m. 22-32	m. 33-60	m. 61-97	m. 98-110	m. 111- end
Grade 2	m. 1-10	m. 11-22	m. 23-49	m. 50-69	m. 70-81	m. 82-end

With the exception of the transition section from m. 122-140 in the grade 5 work, each follows the same form. This form is loosely based on *With Heart and Voice* by David Gillingham.<sup>20</sup> His piece also begins slow and mysteriously with low woodwinds and sparkling lines in the piano. This builds into a brass heavy section which expands into a major chord. Here, I differed and wrote a fanfare because it followed the story I wanted to tell. His next section is especially similar to the one I call “Fast and Lyrical.” Both sections contain sparkling ostinatos in the piano that sit under a conversation between the flute and euphonium while brass offers harmonic support underneath. I deviate from this form for the rest of the piece. Whereas Gillingham’s piece descends into chaos, mine rises to fulfillment.

### ***Finding the Sun and the Grading Chart***

#### **Meter**

My use of meter changed very little among the arrangements; this was intentional. The melodies needed to stay consistent among the arrangements, and are therefore simple enough for young musicians to perform and be musically interesting enough to stimulate advanced musicians. By choosing a melody in 4/4, adjusting the meter was something I didn’t need to do

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<sup>20</sup> David Gillingham, *With Heart and Voice*, Greensboro, NC: C. Allen Publications, 2001.

often. I accounted for metrical changes in two ways. The first way was by omitting passages with more challenging content and the second was by rewriting certain passages to fit in simpler meters.

Two instances of omitted passages serve as examples of the modifications I made from grade 5 to grades 3 and 2. The opening section in the grade 5 piece begins in 4/4 but then changes to 3/4 in m. 12-13. A meter 3/4 is not challenging and is certainly playable at a grade 2 level (see grading chart), but the soloistic nature and length of the section made parts of the opening expendable when I needed to shorten the duration of the piece to accommodate easier skill levels. Another passage that was omitted for similar reasons was m. 123-140 in the grade 5 piece. In the grade 5 version, measures 139 and 140 briefly switch to 9/8 to assist in broadening the ending of this section. Once again, this section is more independent and is certainly not playable by inexperienced players. A meter 9/8 by itself is not beyond the ability of a grade 3 work (see chart), but the location and content in the grade 5 piece made this section a good candidate to be cut for reasons regarding length.

The second way that I accounted for metrical changes was to simplify the meter. Measures 67 and 68 in the grade 5 piece are rewritten in the grades 3 (m. 62) and 2 (m. 46) pieces. The 6/4 measure is meant to assist in the ritardando that happens in m. 68. A meter 6/4 is a key signature that is acceptable for grade 2 (see chart) but I changed it to 4/4 to keep things as simple possible and to remove any unusual signs in the music. For the grade 3 piece I was able to split the difference: I kept the note values and rhythms from the grade 5 piece but instead of two 6/4 bars, I used three 4/4 bars. They both add up to a total of twelve beats so it helps achieve the same effect while removing the shock of the slightly unusual time signature.

Overall in the Grade 5 version, meter was employed as a way to extend phrases. Measure 82 in the grade 5 piece, a bar in 5/4, is used to break up the four bar phrases that were used up until that point. By adding an extra beat to the measure, the subdominant chord can increase the anticipation of its resolution thus adding suspense and interest to a predictable melody. Measures 111 and 115 are 2/4 bars that are also used to extend note length. Originally, the notes in measures 111 and 115 had a fermata above them. By specifying the length that I intended these notes to be instead of using a fermata, I'm able to control how long the notes are held. The length of the fermata would not otherwise be in my control.

### **Key Signatures**

Range was a primary factor in determining the key of B-flat major. This key works well with all transposing instruments. Horn will be in F, alto and bari sax in G, and trumpet and clarinet in C. Knowing that I was going to modulate up one whole step, the new key needed to meet the same qualifications: a simple range with limited accidentals. By moving from concert B-flat to concert C, Horn would be in G, alto and bari sax in A, and trumpet and clarinet in D. I used these keys for the grades 3 and 5 pieces.

These keys would have worked for the grade 2 piece as well, but range issues began to crop up as I started to arrange the music at this level. Brass ranges were just a hair outside of the suggested ranges in the grading chart and I found that I was crossing the break on the clarinet frequently. To fix this, I just moved the entire piece down a whole step so that the piece would modulate from A-flat to B-flat. Horn would be modulating from E-flat to F, alto and bari sax from F to G, and trumpet and clarinet from B-flat to C. Although A-flat contains 4-flats, I believe

more flats in the key signature would be easier to work with than frequently crossing breaks and high notes. A-flat is still within the recommended key signatures for grade 2.<sup>21</sup>

## **Tempo**

There is only one instance where the tempo is adjusted for a grade level, which is at the opening section of the pieces. In the grade 3 and 5 pieces, the opening tempo is at quarter note = 52 bpm, which is just a little too slow for young players. This slow tempo can be difficult because young musicians may not have yet acquired the control to move their fingers precisely in time at that speed. To create a similar feel I ended up almost doubling the tempo to quarter note = 80 bpm. Because the tempo was almost doubled, some of the faster motives in the opening section of the grades 3 and 5 were able to be notated double in value. For example, the 16<sup>th</sup> note gesture in bar 17 in the piano of the grade 5 piece was modified to 8<sup>th</sup> notes in measures 2 and 4 in the glockenspiel and marimba of the grade 2 piece. This was a bonus because the gesture is a little more approachable as eighth notes to a young musician than 16<sup>th</sup> notes. Due to the near doubled tempo in the grade 2 piece, the gestures sound remarkably similar.

Example

## **Rhythm**

I built adaptable rhythms into the grade 5 piece so that they would also work in the grade 2 piece. The primary themes discussed in chapter one were written to be played by young musicians but had room for musical expression. Since they were one of the main connections among the arrangements, I wanted them to be consistent.

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<sup>21</sup> Appendix E and Attached Material

Syncopated rhythms were the only type that needed simplifying. They were only simplified in the grade 2 arrangement in measures that didn't have the same syncopated rhythms repeated every bar or two. Figures 9 and 10 show two situations in the trumpet part where the rhythm from the grade 3 piece was simplified for the grade 2 piece.

Grade 3 trumpets



Grade 2 Trumpets



Figure 9. Comparing trumpet rhythms in grade 3 and 2—Fanfare.

Grade 3 trumpet



Grade 2 trumpet



Figure 10. Comparing trumpet rhythms in grades 3 and 2—Ending.

## **Dynamics and Articulation**

The dynamics in the works are adjusted based on the level of independence musicians at which different grades could play. At the grade 2 level, dynamics are terraced; instruments are marked at slightly louder dynamics if they have the melody than those that have the accompanying lines. The dynamics marked will often stay at that those levels for entire phrases without crescendos or decrescendos. Crescendos and decrescendos are used fairly sparingly at this grade level. Crescendos are used as lead-ins to new sections whereas decrescendos signal phrase endings.

Dynamics at the grade 3 level show more phrasing and increasingly independent dynamic changes than at the grade 2 level. Crescendos and decrescendos are still shorter than four bars long, similar to the easier piece.

At the grade 5 level, dynamics take on a slightly different role; instead of merely being the markers of loud and soft, they assist in portraying emotion. Dynamics are employed in primarily two areas: soft, sensitive sections and transitions. In the soft and legato sections the dynamics show swells and mimic the push and pull of the phrasing. This requires a more advanced musician and emotional maturity to communicate the emotion behind the phrasing. In this piece, most of the transitioning occurs between fast and slow sections where the fast section is loud and the slow is soft. To assist in the contrast the crescendos support accelerandos and diminuendos support ritardandos.

Articulation stays consistent among the pieces since all the types of articulations used throughout are appropriate for young musicians. When the syncopation is simplified from the advanced work, the accents are not used quite as much.

## Scoring

Scoring details required significantly more adjustments than in the other musical elements. Typically, the lower the grade level, the less individual parts there are. In the grade 5 piece there are 35 parts once the shared staves are divided. Included in this number are instruments such as contrabassoon, double bass, and piccolo that are specialty instruments or instruments that are considered more accessible to higher performance level groups. The presence of these instruments is an indication of a higher-grade level, especially when the piccolo is a prominent voice.

In the grade 3 piece, piccolo, contrabassoon, bass trombone, and double bass have been taken from instrumentation. The piccolo line merges with the rest of the flute parts and the solo lines have been reassigned. The absence of contrabassoon is a practical consideration as it would be unreasonable to expect the less-experienced performance ensembles to own or have access to the instrument. Bass trombone basically becomes trombone 3; therefore, trombone 3 could be played by a bass trombone or tenor trombone. The bass trombone part in the grade 5 piece was written with the specific instrument in mind. The part is still technically within range of the tenor trombone, but the resonance of the slightly larger instrument fits better. Double bass in the grade 5 piece isn't an important color and mostly doubles the tuba. Even with a grade 5 band piece, there is no certainty that a double bass will be available, thus the part is written where it could be omitted.

Other considerations were made for the grade 3 band piece such as cross cueing and divisions within sections. The most important solo line is in the introduction. In the grade 5 piece, the solo was played by clarinet and the line briefly goes into a part of the range that's beyond a grade 3 work. Instead of taking the solo down the octave, I reassigned it to the flute.

Ideally the oboe would take the solo, but assigning the solo part to the flute makes the piece just slightly more accessible to bands that may not have a strong oboe player. The solo is cross-cued in the oboe part should a director choose to have the oboe play.

The brass parts in the grade 5 band piece are generally homophonic where the rhythm is the same throughout but each part plays a different note of the chord. At this level, all 3 trumpets have their own part, but when the parts were rearranged for the grade 3 band work, some of the independent lines were simplified. This was done even more so at the grade 2 level. There is still quite a bit of *divisi* present in the grade 3 piece but *divisi* in the grade 2 piece is used sparingly.

Many aspects of the more advanced pieces are changed dramatically for the grade 2 piece: instruments are reduced further and soloistic parts are rewritten for whole sections. All sections but clarinet and trumpet have been reduced to one line, which is a common instrumentation design set up in grade 2 band music. Presumably this is because those sections are larger in young ensembles due to instrument popularity. There are 17 parts in the grade 2 band piece which cuts the instrumentation from the grade 5 piece by over 50%. There is still some *divisi*, but instruments in one section generally play one line. This has helped cover the solo lines from the more advanced works. At this level, solos are played by entire sections and sometimes two sections (e.g. the horn sax in m.35).

Table 7. Instrumentation in grades 2, 3 and 5 of *Finding the Sun*.

Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 5
Flute	Flute 1	Piccolo
Clarinet 1	Flute 2	Flute 1,2
Clarinet 2	Oboe	Oboe
Alto Sax	Clarinet 1	Clarinet 1
Tenor Sax	Clarinet 2	Clarinet 2
Bari Sax	Clarinet 3	Clarinet 3
Trumpet 1	Bass Clarinet	Bass Clarinet
Trumpet 2	Bassoon	Bassoon (div)
Horn (div.)	Alto Sax 1,2	Contra Bassoon
Trombone (div)	Tenor Sax	Alto Sax 1,2
Euphonium	Bari Sax	Tenor Sax
Tuba	Trumpet 1	Bari Sax
Timpani	Trumpet 2,3	Trumpet 1
Marimba, Bells, Cymbals, bass drum	Horn 1,2	Trumpet 2
	Trombone 1	Trumpet 3
	Trombone 2,3	Horn 1,2
	Euphonium	Horn 3,4
	Tuba	Trombone 1
	Timpani	Trombone 2,3
	Marimba, Glockenspiel,	Bass Trombone
	Vibraphone, Suspended Cymbal,	Euphonium
	Bass Drum	Tuba
		Double Bass
		Timpani
		Marimba, Glockenspiel,
		Vibraphone, Cymbals, Chimes,
		Tom Toms, Bass drum

### Musical Substance and Considerations

Each grade level contains sets of considerations based on the likely skill level of musicians who will play the piece. Hutton’s chart mentions considerations such as endurance, tempo changes, exposed parts, and instrument quirks to be aware of at the grade 2 level. This includes the break on the clarinet, awkward fingerings and slide movements, and large leaps for brass players. To combat this, I changed the key signature to the Key of A-flat major to accommodate the break on the clarinet and wrote for large groups of the ensemble to avoid

exposed parts. The melodic lines were written with this level in mind using mostly stepwise motion and limited range.

In the grade 3 level I was able to move beyond these challenges and write parts that crossed the break more frequently. Solos are introduced at this level with cross cues to allow for more flexibility for performers. Though these challenges are met, other challenges are still present such as part doublings and divisions. I introduced more part divisions particularly in the brass sections to fill out the sound. To help with the growth process, I've kept much of the parts in unison. Showing the *divisi* within one part allows players to see how the note they play relates to their neighbors if they play a different note.

For grade 5, the only special considerations I made were providing sections where musicians could express emotion through the music. Musical independence and expression are deceptively difficult when the notes and rhythms are simple. Since the melodies I use are easy in range and rhythm, there needs to be emotional backing to support the melodies. Without emotion, the slower sections will sound simplistic. A musician who knows what to do with this section would elevate the melodies beyond what younger players typically give even though they share the same melodies

## **Length**

The most noticeable way I could separate each piece by grade level was through length. According to the revised band grading chart, one could write a piece that was 2 minutes long and have it be an acceptable length at any grade level except 1. Once the length of the pieces start increasing, the grade level follows. My grade 5 piece is approximately 8 minutes and 30 seconds situated perfectly within the recommended length range for a grade 4 or 5 piece. To make the

piece fit within the length range for grade 3, I needed to cut parts of the piece to make it work. I chose to cut m. 122-140 from the grade 5 piece since that material was mainly transitional.





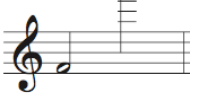
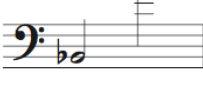





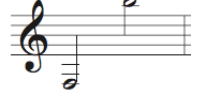
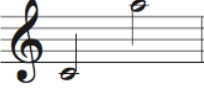

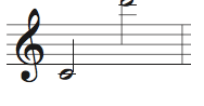


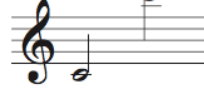
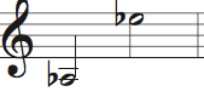

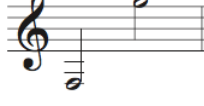
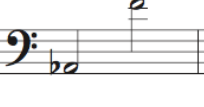
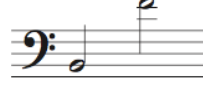

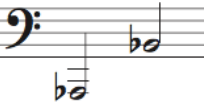
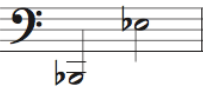

When choosing what to cut, I had to think about what was most important to the piece, which was form and melody. Each piece follows the same form and has the same melodies while being at different lengths. Unfortunately, I had to sacrifice some of the interesting, small sections and transitions to accommodate the length. For the grade 2 work, I stripped the piece back to its most basic form and then I filled back in some of the gaps to make the piece flow.

### **Range**

Of all of the discussed elements, range was the most important to consider. Elements such as meter, rhythm, and key signature could be pushed a little more because they can be improved fairly easily in practice. Range, however, should adhere to the suggested ones in Cynthia Hutton's chart (reference). When an under-developed brass player attempts to play notes out of their range, two things happen: a poor tone is produced and bad habits are developed. Bad habits include strain and pressure that can harm them in the long run.

Table 8 shows the comparison in range development among each arrangement.

Table 8. Instrument ranges used in each arrangement of *Finding the Sun*. Written pitches

	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 5
Flute			
Oboe	N/A		
Bassoon	N/A		
Clarinet			
Bass Clarinet	N/A		
Saxophones			
Trumpet			
Horn			
Trombone/baritone			
Tuba			

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

*Finding the Sun* was unlike any piece that I've composed. This composition had to be written with intent and every note needed a purpose or explanation. It was exhausting in a way that none of my other compositions were. In the past, the music came through inspiration, but for this project the music came through intuition. This was my first experience writing for young bands and I can agree with John Mackey that "Grade 3 = Difficult".<sup>22</sup> As the grade levels get smaller, the more restrictive I felt creatively. I understand a little better now why there aren't as many new pieces for the early years in band.

I anticipated these restrictions from the grading charts, but I didn't expect the lack of organization and material on the band grading system. The little existing research I found about classifying music in grade levels was either outdated or irrelevant. There is a gaping hole of literature that I explored and hopefully made some small contribution toward. For an element of music education that is so essential to the development of band students, it is shocking that there is so little information written about this topic. Yet, I feel as though I've only scraped the surface of what information could be gathered. *Finding the Sun* is only the first experiment in a wide area to explore.

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<sup>22</sup> Mackey, "Grade 3 = Difficult."

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# Appendix

Appendix A

*Finding the Sun*

Grade 5

Uploaded as Supplemental Material

Appendix B

*Finding the Sun*

Grade 3

Uploaded as Supplemental Material

Appendix C

*Finding the Sun*

Grade 2

Uploaded as Supplemental Material

Appendix D

American Band College Music Grading Chart

Uploaded as Supplemental Material

Appendix E

Revised BANDWORLD Grading Chart  
By Dr. Cynthia Hutton

Uploaded as Supplemental Material

## Appendix F

# ETSBOA Score Approval Form and Grading Rubric

Uploaded as Supplemental Material

## VITA

Grace Baugher is a native of Overland Park, Kansas where she grew up participating and performing in many music ensembles and groups. From these experiences she gained a passion for music and went on to study music composition at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas after high school graduation. While at K-State she continued performing in ensembles such as the marching band, wind ensemble, and orchestras. She completed a dual focus Bachelor of Music in Music Composition and French Horn Performance in May, 2017. In addition to her music studies, Grace is passionate about leadership. She also received a minor in Leadership Studies from Kansas State. Currently, she is finishing her Masters of Music degree in Music Composition at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. During her time in Tennessee she had a teaching assistantship as an ear-training instructor and worked toward a Graduate Certificate in Music Theory Pedagogy. Grace is returning to Kansas State University in the fall of 2019 to continue her graduate studies and work toward a Graduate Certificate in Teaching in Learning in Music Education.