Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance Project

Selected Works

- *Clouds* by Anne McGinty
- *Suspended in a Sunbeam* by Jodi Greene

CLOUDS

Anne McGinty (1945 - present)

Composer Information

Anne McGinty was born on June 29, 1945 in Findlay, Ohio. She is an American flutist, composer, and retired public school music teacher. Her higher education began at Ohio State University, which was promptly paused as she left to pursue flute performance with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra. After touring with the group, McGinty finished her education with a Bachelor and Masters degree in music from Duquesne University. Her studies focused on flute performance, music theory, and composition, and were likely the catalyst for her many compositions. In her lifetime, Anne has composed more than 225 pieces for concert band, string orchestra, solo flute, and flute ensembles.

As someone with a public-education background, the majority of her works are intended for use in the elementary or middle school ensemble classroom. Anne's career as an educational-music composer began over 30 years ago, and her passions lie in encouraging students to remain in their instrumental programs. Her goal is to create music that strengthens fundamental music skills, while also exposing students to various levels of musicality.

Anne is a member of multiple musical organizations, including the National Flute Association and the American Society of Composers, and is an advocate for bringing quality music education and literature to under-priveliged communities. She has received dozens of awards for her compositions, and was the first female invited to write a commissioned work for the United States Army Band. In 2023, Anne McGinty is composing chamber works for brass and woodwinds, all published in-house by her publishing company, McGinty Music.

Musical Information & Context

Written in 1994, McGinty describes *Clouds* in the conductor's score as, "an original composition based on the imagery of different cloud forms." Divided into three movements, the piece depicts cirrus, thunder, and cumulus clouds using various compositional devices (accents, slurs, dynamics). The style of each section correlates directly to the cloud form, and the story of an incoming

thunderstorm is told through the music. The total duration of the piece is 2:30, if applying the written metronome markings.

Music Selection

Beyond its musical and pedagogical value, *Clouds* stands apart from other concert band compositions because it was written by a female composer. In a world where the instrumental industry is dominated by male conductors/composers, it is ever more important to raise the voices of minority groups through our teaching. Programming this work provides educators with the opportunity to open a conversation about issues of representation in the music world, draw connections to the work of a living female composer, and invite students to use their personal attitudes to inform their performance.

Musically, *Clouds* can prove rather challenging for a beginning band ensemble. Composed at Level 1.5, it is likely the piece is better suited for middle school students, as it requires advanced textures and articulation techniques. Though the tessitura of each instrument is suitable for beginning ensembles, students must be able to transition between 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures, subdivide through long-held notes, and follow dynamic markings to add shape to the phrases. Additionally, each movement of the piece lends itself to a different sound based on the cloud it depicts. The ensemble will have to not only identify a difference in timbre, but they will also need to form personal opinions and decide how they want each section to sound. The variety in these movements highlight a uniqueness within the piece, as most beginning band literature includes predictable, repeated melodic sections.

The musicality learned through this piece will certainly be transferable to other works. My hope is students will refine their instincts for shaping phrases, and apply this experience when performing other pieces. *Clouds* presents multiple opportunities to concentrate on articulations, such as slurs and accent markings. Students will not only get the chance to rehearse these articulations frequently (one or the other appears in nearly every measure), but they will also have the chance to compare and contrast the effectiveness of each in relation to its movement. There is also a fair amount of softer dynamic markings, which challenge students to play at a lower dynamic while maintaining tone quality. On the contrary, some sections of the piece swell to *fortissimo*, therefore exposing students to opposite ends of the dynamic spectrum and how to transition in and out of them within a piece.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for *Clouds* is as follows, with some abbreviated with “opt” to indicate an optional instrument whose line is doubled.

- Flute, Oboe (opt), Bb Clarinet 1 / 2, Eb Alto Saxophone, Bb Tenor Saxophone (opt), Bb Trumpet 1 / 2, F Horn (opt), Bells, Various Percussion (Triangle, Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Crash Cymbals, Tambourine)

Additionally, the following instruments play the same bass line in various octaves. Ensemble directors are encouraged to have as many instruments as possible, though in a beginning ensemble that may not always be possible.

- Bb Bass Clarinet, Eb Baritone Saxophone, Trombone, Bassoon, Tuba, Baritone B.C. or T.C.

Elements of the Music

Form

Clouds is divided into three movements: "Cirrus," "Thundercloud," and "Cumulus." There is very little transition between the movements, and the piece follows an ABC form.

"Cirrus"

1-8 **First Theme (High Voices Only)**

Trumpets, Low Brass, and Low Woodwinds tacet at the beginning as the upper woodwinds open the piece accompanied with bells and a triangle. Each woodwind instrument plays a different, slurred rhythmic pattern that creates continuous movement throughout the phrase. The alto saxophone sustains a concert Bb, while the rest of the upper woodwinds move in ascending or descending thirds, with accidentals changing nearly every other measure.

9-16 **First Theme (w/ Lower Voices)**

Brass and Low Woodwinds join the pattern with slurred phrases of their own that are similar to the patterns played in the High Woodwinds thus far. Accidentals continue to change often, adding to the levity of the sound. Additionally, the Bass Drum is added to the bells and triangle, who sustain their established rhythm.

17-22 **Closing and Transition**

Upper Woodwinds lead with the same slurred patterns as the Low Brass and Woodwinds tacet until mm. 23. In mm. 21-22, a long tone Bb is held by the Upper Woodwinds as the percussion section plays a series of eighth notes to indicate a storm is on the horizon.

"Thundercloud"

23-31 **First Storm**

The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 as the thunderstorm begins with the Brass section sustaining accented whole notes on concert Bb. Alto saxophone and clarinet join with repeated half notes on beat 3, matching the mezzo forte dynamic and accents. In mm. 24-28, note values get shorter as what started as a whole note progresses into half, quarter, and eventually eighth notes. The concert band (with the exception of Flutes and Oboe), performs a series of major/minor second intervals to increase the intensity through dissonance, and emphasize the contrast of a thunderstorm in comparison to the wispy cirrus clouds. Wind and Brass instruments tacet in m. 31, as the percussion replicates the sounds of a thunderstorm using any of the suggested methods (rim shots, bass drum/triangle rolls, etc.).

32-37 **Second Storm**

The storm series repeats again, this time transposed one whole step higher. Rhythmic divisions and accent markings are all the same, in addition to a large crescendo through m. 36 before the climax of the storm in m. 37 at the fortissimo dynamic.

38-45 **Storm Leaves**

Directly following the height of the storm in m. 37, in mm. 38-39 the band plays notes of longer durations as they decrescendo. By m. 40, the Clarinets, Alto Saxophones, and Brass sections have landed on an F major chord which they sustain beneath a legato Flute melody. The time signature changes back into 3/4 as the group transitions away from the meter established in the Thundercloud section. In m. 44, the lower voices land on a concert Bb, and the Flutes join them as their melody concludes. Mm. 44-45 feature the clarinet section as they play a two-bar, arc-shaped phrase that transitions the group into the Cumulus cloud section in m. 46.

"Cumulus"

46-53 **First Theme**

An arc-shaped melodic line begins in m. 46, led by the Alto Saxophones and Low Brass section. The motive used in the Cumulus section is established as an ascending Bb major scale to the third scale degree (mi) and its descent to the

leading tone (ti) before landing on the tonic (do). This ascending and descending shape is played in every other measure, alternating between the Flute section and the Alto Saxophones/Low Brass section that began the pattern. Each section performs the phrase above long tone Bb's or members of the Bb major triad from the alternating sections of the ensemble.

54-61 **First Theme Repeats**

The melody that was first led by the Alto Saxophone and Low Brass sections transfers to the Flute and Trumpet sections and the alternating pattern repeats, now with new voices leading the call and response. Clarinets, who before were providing accompaniment, are the only section to move in alternation with the melody. The Low Brass, Saxophone, and Percussion sections provide long tone Bb's with occasional moving notes to create a fuller ensemble sound.

62 - 68 (end) **Coda**

The slurred patterns that began the piece in the Cirrus section reappear to complete the cloud cycle. As before, the clarinet section begins on beat two of each measure, as they provide a countermelody in opposition to the flute, oboe, and trumpets who begin on the downbeat. This texture remains the same until m. 66 where every instrument holds a long tone below a bell solo that finishes the piece.

Rhythm

Considering this piece is composed at Grade 1.5 for beginning bands, it is logical that the piece focuses on eighth, quarter, half, and whole notes. McGinty plants smaller value notes within long held harmonies that challenge the moving lines to subdivide carefully for their entrances. Placing these subdivisions in parts that are not carrying the melody at a particular time also provides the entire ensemble with an opportunity to expand their musicianship and listen for these moving accompaniments. Most notably, these overlapping eighth note patterns are stacked in the "Cumulus" movement to imitate the shape of the cloud. In this movement, the rhythm is essential to the depiction of a non-musical event. Similarly, the "Thundercloud" movement uses incrementally smaller note values to increase the intensity of the coming thundercrash. The motif begins with a whole note, transitioning into two half notes, then four quarter notes, and finally eight dissonant eighth notes resulting in a climax before the storm breaks.

Melody

Something I particularly admire about this piece is that every section has the opportunity to lead the ensemble with the melody. Notably, in the final movement every section plays the ascending and descending melody at some point in a call and response action. This motif, "do re mi re do ti do", appears in nearly every voice line, and epitomizes the "Cumulus" movement that ends the piece. In this movement, the melody is clear, and performed mostly by Upper Woodwind and Trumpet players. Movements One and Two, "Cirrus" and "Thunderclouds," is the exception to this, as the intensity is conveyed through the subdivision of rhythm and complex harmonies. Instead of a repeated motif, these movements utilize other compositional elements, specifically dissonance and texture, to convey the story.

Harmony

In Cirrus, the harmonies change frequently, leaving the sound in a lofty space between tonalities. Sharps and naturals are appended to the pitches, raising the fourth and fifth scale degrees. These harmonic alterations are seen mostly in the Flute and Clarinet melodies throughout the movement. The Thundercloud movement harmonies are defined by intervals of a major or minor second. Harmonies are established and held through the measure, growing in intensity. The harmonies of the Cumulus movement are relatively simple, as the melody line floats over long held chords in the key of Bb major.

Timbre

Most of the melodic sections begin with one or two sections and other parts stagger in after barlines, or maintain the accompaniment throughout. A few times, McGinty stages an addition of the Brass sections after a Woodwind melody, creating a sort of "bass-drop." When the lower voice sections are added, the ensemble sound feels much deeper and full, which completely changes the timbre of the melody.

Texture

There is great contrast between the textures of each section, which is likely one of the main reasons the movements differ from each other. The Cirrus movement has the most similar texture to polyphony, as each voice moves according to its own rhythms, regardless of the other instruments. Cumulus, the third and final movement follows a monophonic, call and response-like texture with one or two voices carrying the melody, and the others sustaining pitches in accompaniment. The Thundercloud movement is a stark contrast to both of these, as the ensemble performs in homophony for the entirety of the movement (except for the end as the storm transitions into cumulus clouds).

This texture focuses the audience's ear on the dissonant harmonies and accented rhythms that depict the thunderstorm.

Expression

Every melody is paired with dynamics and articulations to bring out the desired style for each movement. Slurs are used to add longevity and connect phrases, while accents are used to contrast the smoothness and add aggression to the Thundercloud harmonies. Dynamic markings tend to match the style of each movement as well. The Cirrus movement depicts long, wispy clouds that stretch across the sky, which is depicted in the long slurs in every line. There is never a moment of harsh articulation, and one part of the ensemble is carrying a slur to the next note at all times. The Second movement is by far the loudest, climaxing at *fortissimo* at the peak of each storm. The Third movement averages quieter at a *mezzo piano* dynamic, providing the ensemble with opportunities to shape each melody phrase with *mezzo di voce* to mimic the arced melody shape.

Heart Statement

The heart of *Clouds* is the contrast in between each movement, and the similarities that bring the entire composition together. Every movement is structured to expose young musicians to varying musical devices, each included to characterize a non-musical occurrence. *Clouds* provides a unique opportunity to explore composer's intent simultaneously with compositional devices as well as compare and contrast the effectiveness of each device. In addition to growing understanding of the compositional process, the literature includes articulation and dynamic markings appropriate for rehearsal in a beginning band. Because of its ability to depict non-musical occurrences, facilitate learning of the compositional process, while simultaneously providing an opportunity to rehearse technical articulation/dynamic skills, *Clouds* supersedes other compositional words for beginning bands.

Introducing this Piece

Students will come in for rehearsal, but leave their instruments in the cases. There are pictures of the sun, moon, a tornado, thunderstorms, snow, and different types of clouds on the board as they sit down. The class begins with an open question: "What do these pictures all have in common?" When students draw the comparison of all the photos being weather-related, the conversation continues: "What makes these elements different from each other?" A guided discussion ensues, highlighting the idea that though there are things that make us different, we all share similarities that bring us together. Students will then be invited to get into small groups of 5-6, with only one instrument from each section. Photos of cirrus clouds will be projected onto the board, and students are given two minutes to create their own, 30 second composition with their peers that demonstrates

what they believe the photo sounds like. There is no notation involved, rather students are given an empty graph divided into 6 equal parts with labeled axes "time" and "pitch," in addition to a kitchen timer set to 30 seconds. Students are expected to use their instruments in any way (safely) to depict the cirrus cloud and must devise a way to notate these sounds using the provided graph. They are allowed to use any note they have learned from their method books (fingering charts with usable notes will be made available) and at least one pitch must change in each of the six sections. There will also be a space above each section for students to write in one dynamic or articulation marking for each of the six sections. These markings can be chosen from a provided "word bank" that will be given to students in the activity. Ample time should be given for students to make and practice their composition. After each round, the groups will be asked to share their brief compositions for the class. This composition and presentation process will repeat twice more, for thunder and cumulus clouds, and then students will come back together for one final discussion. We will share what was different about our compositions, but also what connected them together. In the next class period, students begin working on the first movement of *Clouds*, and when ready to play the next movement, we will briefly review this activity in order to demonstrate differences in how each movement is performed.

Skill Outcome #1: Students will be able to distinguish between slurs and accents by connecting the articulations to the imagery presented in *Clouds*.

Strategy: To begin this activity, students will be rote taught the flute melody found in mm. 1-8 from the "Cirrus" movement. On a neutral syllable "oo," students will sing the melody first without paying attention to the slurred articulations as they get a feel for the melody's shape. Again, this melody will be taught entirely through rote, with no notation, in a call and response fashion. Once the first eight measures can be performed with the correct pitches, the educator will then add a flowing arm movement for students to mirror as they sing. This arm movement will move from left to right, only moving back to the left side when a new slur begins; pay special attention to ensure the movement repeats only when a new slur begins. For more diversity, students can perform a flowing movement with their heads, both arms, or legs, or even with a colorful streamer/string to represent the connection between each note under the slur. A conversation should then begin, discussing how the connectedness of the slur depicts the cirrus cloud. The same singing activity above should be reprise with the top notes of the "Thunderstorm" section. This time, use the neutral syllable "da" to add extra emphasis to the attack of the note. A movement to connect with the accented melodies could be a karate chop, stomp, or any other sharp movement. This time, ask students why they think this melody feels more intense than the last. Emphasize the contrast between each movement and how each musical device accurately depicts a non-musical event. In a later rehearsal, students will be presented with the names of the slurs and accents (likely in a method book) and should then be given the opportunity to

identify slurs throughout *Clouds*. At any point, it may be helpful to review the movement activity to remind students of the connection between each note and when to rearticulate a new phrase.

Assessment #1: Once students have been presented with what a slur looks like in another context, they should be offered the chance to apply this knowledge to *Clouds*. To assess their ability to name slurs and accents in other contexts, students should be asked to scan a lead sheet with the Clarinet 1 and 2 melody from the "Cirrus" section for any articulation markings. If they find a marking (they should only find slurs), they should label it with a pencil. The same prompt can be used for the Saxophone melody line in the "Thunderstorm" section (they should only find accents here). Students should have their names on these lead sheets, so after they are handed in and the educator reviews for accuracy, the sheets can be passed back for further use.

Assessment #2: Because this outcome has two parts, two assessments are necessary. In a "Popcorn Play" activity, students will play in teams the flute melody from mm. 1-20 (transposed to the correct key for each instrument). Each team will be a different section of the ensemble, combining small sections as necessary so students play in small groups of 8-10. Every four measures, the director will "Popcorn" a certain team who will then pick up the melody and play the next four measures. The melody will be repeated if there are more than 5 groups. The "Popcorn" aspect requires students to count along through the measures as others are playing to ensure they are ready to join. Students will be graded on the connection between notes under a slur and the rearticulation when a new slurred phrase begins. The same format will be used for mm. 23-28 in the "Thunderstorm" section.

Skill Outcome #2: Students will be able to navigate the changing meter between 3/4 and 4/4 and describe how the changing downbeats are used in the melody of each movement.

Strategy: This activity can be performed indoors or outdoors. The educator will prepare a short playlist of songs in moderate tempos in 3/4 and 4/4 meters. Students will play a version of "Red Light, Green Light", where they can only walk to the "big beats". The educator will demonstrate the big beat of a song in 3/4 (possibly a minuet) by only taking a step when beat one occurs. They should speak each beat aloud with their foot in the air, taking a step on the downbeat of a new measure. One student will be stationed across the room with their back turned to the group, and may only turn around to view the group when the music stops. To ensure each track is played long enough to internalize the meter, the educator should remain in charge of the sound. The group may only move while the music is playing, and only if they step on the downbeats. When the student up front turns around, students must freeze in whatever position they are in; if they are caught moving they will have to return to the beginning. This activity should be completed multiple times with alternating 3/4 and 4/4 listening samples. For songs in 4/4, students are only allowed to take a step on beats 1 and 3. To enrich the activity, clap measures that alternate with each time signature; invite students to continue speaking the subdivisions aloud and stepping only on downbeats.

Assessment: Following the above activity, initiate a conversation with students about how stepping on the different beats felt to them. Divide them by section and mediate small group conversations that explore what they liked and didn't like about each downbeat pattern. Students will then take out their scores for *Clouds* and circle places when the meter changes. The group as a whole will listen to a recording of the piece before returning to their groups to discuss how the change in downbeat across movements adds variety to the piece. Students will be graded on participation and insight in group discussions.

Knowledge Outcome #1: Students will be able to create at least one measure of aleatoric music to represent a non-musical, weather-related event of their choice.

Strategy: Students will participate in a listening activity as a whole ensemble. The group will listen to two iterations of "Music of Changes" (John Cage, 1951) by two separate performers. Because these works are aleatoric in nature, there should be differences in performance. Ask students to think about if they think the pieces were the exact same, or different by giving a thumbs up or thumbs down. Students will likely answer that the pieces are different, at which time the director should reveal that the two recordings are indeed the same piece. Provide some time for students to consider how the same piece of music can sound so different when performed two separate times. Present that this is "aleatoric" or "chance" music, meaning that the performer has control over how some aspect of the music is performed. Connect their understanding of aleatoric music to the "Thunderstorm" movement of *Clouds*, prompting them to identify where in the music the ensemble gets to compose on the spot.

Assessment: Students will be provided with a list of weather events (tornados, snow falling, hail, wind, sun shining, hurricane, sunrise, rain) and will be asked to choose one event to create an aleatoric composition for. They will be given a worksheet that walks them through the composition process, in addition to providing them with certain limits. Students will first take time to research their weather event. The prompt may read, "Write 3-5 sentences describing what you learned about your weather event. How does it sound? What does it look like?" After researching, students will apply their new knowledge and connect their event to a musical instrument. This prompt might ask, "What instrument(s) do you think best describe the sound of your event? What about the instrument's sound do you like?" Students will be able to choose an instrument found in the classroom, or they may describe an instrument of their choice and its sound in this same section. The next prompt should read, "Define what 'aleatoric' music is." Students will then decide what part of the composition will be aleatoric, and can choose from the following options: rhythm or melody. Plain, and staff paper will be provided for students to notate their aleatoric composition how they wish, and attach it to the packet. The required length for this composition is one measure, though students should be encouraged to compose longer, if they choose. Finally, students will complete the worksheet by writing a brief note to

performers on how to correctly repeat their composition. Students will be graded on creativity, an accurate definition of 'aleatoric', and a clear, readable composition.

Knowledge Outcome #2: Students will be able to discuss consonance and dissonance and how they create contrast within a musical work.

Activity: Consonance and dissonance can be presented through a listening exercise. First, the director will play the interval of a major third at the piano, followed by the interval of a minor second. Students will then think about the quality of each sound and discuss which sounds better to them. At this point, the terms of consonance and dissonance can be presented. Then, students will listen to György Ligeti's Requiem Mass (Kyrie) and talk about how the extreme layers of sound create unease in the listener. The educator should remind students that dissonance often makes the listeners uneasy and describe how the sound can be unpleasant to the ear. The ensemble will also listen to Erik Satie's Gymnopédie 3, while discussing the use of consonance to create a more relaxing sound. Throughout future rehearsals, it would be beneficial to practice this skill by inviting students to hold a chord on a particular beat (in any of their concert rep.) and determine if the sound is consonant or dissonant. This can be easily facilitated by asking the group to give a thumbs up for consonance, or a thumbs down for dissonance. The group response saves rehearsal time and provides a means of formative assessment when determining the groups' understanding of consonance and dissonance.

Assessment: For this assessment, students will draw cartoons above two whole notes that correspond to whether they sound consonant or dissonant. An example will be projected onto the board of two whole notes (C5 and D5) with arms and legs swordfighting. This conflict represents the dissonance between the two notes. An alternative example for consonance may look like two whole note-shaped fish swimming peacefully in the sea. A treble clef staff will be enlarged on the worksheet so there is enough room to draw; additionally the notes will not be stacked on top of each other. Students will decide whether the interval presented is consonant or dissonant and draw a cartoon on each set of two notes. There will be a place to circle if the student believes the notes are consonant or dissonant, and a short writing question (How does Anne McGinty use consonance and/or dissonance to make *Clouds* a more interesting piece?) will be asked at the end of the worksheet. Students will also have the opportunity to listen to the two notes played at the same time to help them determine their quality. Students will be graded on their ability to distinguish between consonance and dissonance, creativity, and how their cartoon's theme correlates to the quality of the whole notes.

Affective Outcome #1: Students will be able to create a dance move that matches how they perceive the style of music in each movement. For a further challenge, students will be able to describe how their dance moves translate into how they would conduct the piece.

Activity: For this activity, three pictures of clouds will be projected onto the board: one Cirrus, one Thundercloud, and one Cumulus. The director will conduct a three beat pattern; one smaller and restricted to represent the Cirrus clouds, and will then prompt students to determine which photo they think their conducting best represents. The activity will be repeated with another three-beat pattern that is large with lots of travel to represent the Cumulus cloud, and then once more with fortissimo marcato clicks to represent the Thunderclouds. Following each demonstration, the director should invite the students to mirror their conducting to internalize the contrast between each movement. The director will then lead students through a discussion of what parts of the conducting clued them onto which cloud type was being shown, and how that could translate to them if they were conducting the piece.

Assessment: After students have practiced all three movements of *Clouds* for some time, students will have time to listen to a professional recording of the piece as they devise a dance move for each movement. Students will be prompted to create one move in which their feet stay in one place, and one move where their feet move in some way. The third movement can be either locomotive or non locomotive. Students will work individually for this activity and will perform their dance moves in small groups of 6-7 while the recording plays. Following this assessment, a discussion should take place where students can highlight similarities and differences across everyone's movements.

Affective Outcome #2: Students will be able to choose which movement from *Clouds* best represents its cloud type and explain why they feel this way.

Strategy: Before class, a Kahoot (or other polling website) will be created with approximately 10 "This or That" questions. Students will have the chance to connect on a computer or phone to the survey and answer each of the questions. Most of the questions will be musical, though some could be about food, pop culture, or other interesting topics. Whichever website is chosen to compile the survey should project the overall percentage of who chose what. The goal of this activity is to facilitate opportunities for every student to practice making decisions based on their personal preferences.

Assessment: For this assessment, students will write a letter to Anne McGinty discussing their favorite movement and why they think it best describes its cloud type. 3-5 musical terms must be included in the letter. Students will be graded on the accurate use of musical terminology, in addition to proper sentence structure.

Affective Outcome #3: Students will be able to infer why a composer might have added an accent to a particular note or phrase in the "Thunderstorm" section.

Strategy: Invite students to play through a concert G minor scale first with legato articulation connecting the notes together. Repeat the minor scale again, this time with students playing each note with a light staccato. After playing, initiate a conversation with students about what they liked and

didn't like about playing legato and staccato through the dense harmonies. Invite students to play once more, this time with accents on every note. Once finished, ask students to articulate what it feels like to play with strong accents, and how they think playing this way makes the audience feel. If students are struggling to draw connections, divide the ensemble in two and have each group play the accented scale for the others. After listening, students might have a stronger understanding of how the sound impacts them as a listener.

Assessment: In an Exit Ticket, students will complete a short writing prompt, "Why do you think Anne McGinty chose to add accents to the 'Thunderstorm' movement?" Students will be assessed on originality and thoughtfulness in their responses. Oral discussions will be made available as an alternative assessment option for students who are unable to write comfortably on their own.

SUSPENDED IN A SUNBEAM
Joni Greene (1981 - present)

Composer Information

Joni Greene (b. 1981) is a full-time composer of educational vocal and wind repertoire. She holds a BM and an MM from Indiana University and has premiered works all over the world. Joni specializes in concert band repertoire, and composes frequently for district festivals, composer competitions, and universities across the country. Her compositions have received numerous awards, including the 2nd and 3rd International Frank Ticheli Competition. Greene is commissioned frequently by universities, high schools, and consortiums, opportunities that allow her to continue her composition career. Joni is currently collaborating with librettist Robert Hatten in creating a modern opera.

Musical Information & Context

Suspended in a Sunbeam is appended with a subtitle: "*a Cross Curriculum Journey of the James Webb Telescope for Concert Band*." The piece was commissioned by the Nebraska State Bandmasters Association and was published by Color Works Press recently in 2022. The music tells the story of the launch and exploration of the James Webb Space Telescope. Compositional elements are strategically crafted to evoke emotion and emulate the launch and the exploration of distant planets.

Greene's composition can be divided in a variety of ways, though the most sensible way is to view the piece through five movements. The first movement "Leaving the Pale Blue Dot" is characterized by fast, ascending sixteenth notes as the rocket prepares for liftoff. "Deployment Sequence Begins" follows next and describes the deployment of the JWST from its vessel. This movement contains a series of textures to emulate each step of the calibration of the telescope. Tuba, Timpani, F Horn, and Flute solo voices transition to the next movement, where the JWST has begun to "look into the cosmic dark." This is the final movement that is linked directly to the historical events of the JWST launch.

The following movements have no scientific backing, though are included to round out the musical experience. Movement three is titled "Ice Planet," which consists of smooth, drawn out melodies with chromatic alterations that add sharpness to the sound. This movement also includes aleatoric sections, contributing to the shimmery sound of the Ice Planet. The next movement brings the audience to "Earth Planet." This section is categorized with a mixed meter, changing every other bar or so. The constant changing of strong beats creates a rocky uncertainty that symbolizes the Earth Planet. The fifth, and final movement is entitled "Lava Planet." Notes durations return to eighth and sixteenth notes that spiral through chromatics and *subito* dynamics. The rhythmic sequences and staggered entrance of instruments calls back to the texture of the beginning of the piece, and rounds

out the journey of the James Webb Space Telescope. The total duration of the piece, without pause between movements, is approximately 8:30. It is composed at Grade 4, making it most suitable for higher level ensembles.

Music Selection

Suspended in a Sunbeam provides the opportunity to highlight a composition by a female composer in a male-dominant industry. Students in high school should be educated on the current status of our world, and programming this piece gives an opening for conversations to begin. It is important as humans to learn how to lift minority voices up in an inclusive, and selfless way.

Beyond its value in ethics, this piece presents an opportunity to mesh scientific advancement with creativity. There is often a rift between academia and the arts: a stigma this piece works to fight. Students are able to discuss their personal opinions on the conflict and analyze the piece for ways the composer works to mend the rift. Discussion of the science behind the compositional choices encourages students to draw connections between science and artistic expression, while using those connections to inform their performance.

Instrumentation

Suspended in a Sunbeam requires a hearty amount of players, with some sections divided into two or three subsections. The instrumentation is as follows.

- Piccolo, Flute 1 / 2, Oboe, Bb Clarinet 1 / 2 / 3, Bb Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, Eb Alto Saxophone 1 / 2, Bb Tenor Saxophone, Eb Baritone Saxophone, Bb Trumpet 1 / 2, F Horn 1 / 2, Trombone 1 / 2, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba, Piano

The percussion section is divided into six sections to eliminate frantic instrument changes. *Suspended in a Sunbeam* requires household items, such as paper bags and metal pipes to create sounds that advance the storytelling of the piece. Additionally, this piece requires extended techniques (i.e., using a bow on a vibraphone) to perform the written composition. The score comes with synthesized lists of percussion events and notes where instruments can be shared across parts.

- Timpani, Percussion 1 (Paper Bag, Claves, Crotales C5-C6 with bow), Percussion 2 (Glockenspiel), Percussion 3 (Paper Bag, Vibraphone with Bow), Percussion 4 (Paper Bag, Tam-Tam, Marimba, Cabasa, Xylophone), Percussion 5 (Bass Drum, Metal Pipes, High Suspended Cymbal, Splash Cymbal, Large Suspended Cymbal), Percussion 6 (Bass Drum, Large Suspended Cymbal, Cabasa, Crotales C4-C5 with bow, Chimes, Toms and Bongos, Bass Drumhead)

Elements of the Music

Form

1-28 (I.) **Leaving the Pale Blue Dot**

1-18 The piece begins with a bass drum roll to signify the beginning of the launch sequence. The bass drum enters at a *pianissimo* dynamic, giving ample room to grow in intensity as the engines fire up. Beginning in m. 2, the rest of the ensemble begins to stagger in, resulting in a pseudo-crescendo as more voices are added to the texture. The anticipation is characterized by the brisk tempo and the sixteenth notes performed by the majority of the ensemble. By mm. 10-11, the group as a whole has reached a fortissimo dynamic which then suddenly drops quieter as everyone but Low Brass and Alto Saxophones tacet throughout m. 12. The sudden break in the frenzy leads directly into the ten-second countdown sequence, signified by the claves beginning in m. 13. In the measures that follow, the group performs ascending patterns of sixteenth notes at a forte dynamic or louder through alternating time signatures of 4/4 and 3/4. The texture becomes almost entirely homophonic in m. 18 as the group takes one final sixteenth-note driven ascent, and the rocket launches.

19-28 The texture changes drastically in m. 19 as the rocket has officially achieved liftoff. Beginning at a fortissimo dynamic, the ensemble performs overlapping phrases of dotted quarter and half notes as the group slowly returns to a *mezzo piano* dynamic. The floating harmonies represent the flight of the rocket, now controlled entirely on its own. Additionally, the harmonies create a motif that is established through mm. 19-24, which appears again in a later movement. The excitement returns in m. 25 as the Upper Woodwinds articulate each downbeat with two, successive sixteenth notes. This texture is used to transition the ensemble into a time signature change to 12/8 that begins in m. 29.

29-80 (II.) **Deployment Sequence Begins**

29-36 Now that the rocket has reached optimal velocity, it is time to deploy the James Webb Space Telescope. To replicate this process and the machinery involved, the percussion session plays pitches on metal or

copper pipes. The lower voices of the ensemble sustain a variation of the sixteenth-note pattern established in the measures prior. Above the emphasized downbeats, the Flutes and Clarinets play in harmony, alternating between slurred and articulated chromatic patterns to drive the intensity of the piece forward.

37-51 There is a drastic change in texture once again, beginning in m. 37 as the Upper Woodwinds voices rest to highlight Low Woodwinds and Low Brass playing duplets in a triple meter. As this section progresses, the upper voices sneak back into the texture on long tones above the staccato duplets. While both of these things are happening, the Trumpet section maintains the double eighth-note pattern that establishes the downbeat of the meter. This texture goes away quickly, as dotted quarter notes are the only durations found in mm. 48-51 to signify the transfer to a new section.

52-61 An oboe solo begins this section, accompanied by the eighth note ostinato in the French Horns, and the tripled floating melody in the Flutes. The rest of the Woodwind section joins the Flutes with this melody from mm. 58-62, to complete the return of the motive before moving to new material.

62-77 To amplify the metallic sounds of the JWST deployment, this section begins with a series of bell tones performed by the Saxophone and Brass sections as the rest of the ensemble rests. The tripled melody returns in m. 68 and is passed through the Upper Woodwinds through m. 71. Multiple solo lines (Tuba solo, then Flute 1 and F Horn 1) transition the ensemble from mm. 77-80 into the next movement.

81-147 (III.) **Ice Planet**

81-135 Starting in m. 81, the time signature changes to 3/4 and remains there until m. 107. The Piano and Glockenspiel begin a legato ostinato that repeats, while the Low Brass and Saxophone sections sustain *piano* long tones of various pitches. Other voices filter in with chromatic patterns of their own, while remaining at a *mezzo piano* dynamic. The character of this movement is frigid, desolate, and eerie. In m. 11, the

piano begins an aleatoric pattern, adding to the shimmering energy of the Ice Planet.

136-147 A series of duet and trio voices transition to the next planet as they diminuendo down to *pianissimo*. There is no fermata or pause before entering the next movement.

148-197 (IV.) **Earth Planet**

148-169 This movement is characterized by mixed meter and sudden rhythmic changes. Eighth note patterns of various articulations pass through voices in the Upper Woodwinds as the Percussion and Brass sections accompany with long tones or staccato sixteenth notes that establish the downbeat.

170-197 The texture of this section is fairly sparse, as instruments stagger entrances of legato phrases that diminuendo from the height of the previous musical material. The movement ends in a fermata before continuing onto the next section. This is the first time in the piece when the ensemble is entirely silent.

198-255 (end) (V.) **Lava Planet**

198-245 The tempo returns to ♩ = 120 as the intensity ramps up to venture into the Lava Planet. Eight and sixteenth notes characterize the phrases, emulating the bubbling and bursts of lava pockets. Quick crescendos through one measure phrases mimics flying past small explosions from the surface. Accent markings are often used to add contrast to ascending eighth notes against the sixteenth note textures. Crescendos that expand quickly to dynamic extremes are found in the Trumpet part, beginning at *forte piano* and growing back to *fortissimo* in the span of four beats. In contrast to the deep brass sounds, mm. 221-238 every section performs pairs of sixteenth notes "Lightly" as the ensemble prepares to transition to the end of the piece. Measures 239-245 repeat this texture, but with less of the ensemble playing at once. This drastic pull back of sound resets the dynamic for the ensemble to grow more intensely in the final measures of the piece.

246-255 The final push to the end begins with a return of the fast ascending sixteenth notes used in the beginning of the piece. The meter changes erratically as the ensemble rapidly finishes the piece with one final sixteenth note ascent and button.

Rhythm

In *Suspended in a Sunbeam*, rhythm is primarily used to convey intensity in the performance. For example, the rapidly ascending sixteenth notes that sound as the rocket prepares for liftoff emulate the anticipation of venturing into outer space. By associating fast rhythms with anticipation, Greene can use longer notes (half, dotted quarter) to create a contrasting sense of security, or even an eerie sense of unease. In the "Deployment Sequence" section that begins at m. 29, the time signature changes to 12/8 with a repeated rhythmic ostinato of two eighth notes and an eighth rest repeated four times within a measure. The change in meter, in addition to this ostinato paired with arpeggiating chords in the Upper Woodwinds characterize the anticipation of liftoff. At Grade 4, this piece includes a variety of rhythmic figures, tempi, and time signatures that transition often. Dynamic elements are added to smooth these transitions and bind the piece together.

Melody

Motivic patterns that reappear are not often led by one or two sections. For example, the motif established as the rocket flies for the first time entirely on its own, is a set of harmonies performed by the ensemble as a whole. Beyond motives, Joni is very intentional in assigning the melody to the section whose sound characterizes the story the best. Louder moments are set in the Low Brass section, while lighter, sharper moments are set in the Upper Woodwinds. In stark contrast, the desolate "Ice Planet" utilizes a D minor arpeggio with an added fourth scale degree in the Glockenspiel and Piano section. The fourth scale degree creates turbulence, interrupting the flow of the arpeggio and adding to the frigidity of the icy aesthetic. This ostinato repeats through the entire movement and is the only texture that provides a sense of movement below sustained long tone in dissonant intervals.

Harmony

Much of the harmony is complex, chromatic harmonies that add an edginess to the overall feeling of the piece. The main function of the harmonies in *Suspended in a Sunbeam* is to contribute to the suspense created as the story unfolds. Greene utilizes staggered entrances often, thus exposing melodies hidden in lower parts and how they work together with the accompanying harmonies.

Timbre

Additionally, multiple extended techniques are used to emulate metallic, shimmering, and eerie sounds of the JWST's journey. Metal pipes and paper bags are utilized in the percussion section to translate non-musical events through an instrumental setting. The effect of the piece is amplified through experimentation with varying timbres found throughout the ensemble.

Texture

Even within one movement, the texture of the piece can vary rapidly. Multiple sections feature solos or small groups representing parts of the ensemble. This does wonders in emphasizing the uncertainty of exploring the outer wilds of our universe; the texture can change rapidly from full and epic, to thin and precarious. Greene staggers entrances of instrument lines frequently to manipulate the texture to sound dense or vast. The contrast in texture embodies the highs and lows of traveling into space.

Expression

Dynamics play an important role in creating contrast between the sections. Greene adds detailed dynamics throughout the entire piece that match the intensity of the section at hand. Her writing is proficient in using soft dynamics to instill a sense of unease and in contrast using loud dynamics to increase anticipation. Crescendos and diminuendos often only span single measures and require students to change dynamics drastically.

Heart Statement

The heart of the piece is the various compositional devices that work to connect scientific advancements to artistic expression. *Suspended in a Sunbeam* provides the opportunity for students to draw connections between musical material and scientific advancements; a concept virtually no other repertoire for concert band has achieved. The literature is a prime vehicle for studying score analysis and compositional devices. These compositional devices are often extended techniques used to depict non-musical sounds (metal clanking, rocket launch, etc.), without which would leave the piece sounding as any other symphony in the Western canon. *Suspended in a Sunbeam* is a prime example of quality literature due to the expressive qualities that connect the ensemble sound to a greater story.

Introducing this Piece

When students enter the ensemble room, their chairs will be placed in small groups throughout the room. In a larger ensemble where this may not be possible, students can be invited to work with their stand partners or others in their instrument section. Once students are directed to their group for the day, an activity packet will be passed out and with very little instruction, students will

begin their journey through the universe. The packet will be written as a "choose your own adventure" of sorts, giving students the opportunity to work with their peers to make decisions that their metaphorical lives depend on. The activity will be structured so that students are put in conflicting moral situations that require them to use their instincts, and decide as a group how to move forward. Upon completion of the activity, students will come together for a group discussion about how they felt, what went well or didn't go well, and one thing they admire about space travel. Students will then be asked to take out *Suspended in a Sunbeam* and play through mm. 80-106, and later mm. 1-11 while applying their experience with the activity to how they shape the phrases. To assist students in applying their experience with the activity to their playing, a few questions can be presented to prime the energy you want students to play with. Details mentioned in the conversation regarding the simulation activity can be used to orient students into the setting; hopefully, the intensity presented in the simulation will translate into performance. To solidify the experience even further, it may be best to let students know mm. 80-106 is about taking the first steps on an unknown ice planet, while mm. 1-11 are the frantic moments before liftoff. The overall goal is to get students to use their personal emotions and experiences to guide their performance.

Skill Outcome #1: Students will be able to perform duple against triple rhythms accurately.

Strategy: This activity will be facilitated by the use of a lead sheet. A portion of the lead sheet will include an excerpt from the Trombone 1 line from mm. 37-42, transposed to the respective instrument keys for the ensemble. Attached below this line will be a transposed excerpt from the Flute 1 line from the same five measures. Students will be able to use this lead sheet to see both duplet and triplet parts and learn how to perform each rhythm accurately in tandem with its opposite. The use of a lead sheet allows every student to practice this skill simultaneously. The exact notes from the score may be written on the lead sheet, or the director may choose to set the rhythms to a melody of their own or to a concert scale pattern. Either way, students should be able to experience the juxtaposition of these two rhythmic patterns in a variety of contexts.

Assessment: For this assessment, students will record and evaluate a recording of themselves performing a given set of measures that differs from what students performed on their lead sheet. A separate lead sheet will be provided with two examples: one with triplet rhythms and one with duplet rhythms. Whether students are asked to play the triplet line or the duplet line will be determined by a random selection on the day of recording. The percussion section will be asked to participate in this assessment as well, though on a mallet instrument of their choice. Percussion players will have the opportunity to record during class time; a predetermined order of students will go to a practice room to record their phrase with a pre-recorded accompaniment with the opposite rhythmic pattern that they are assigned to. One student will be "on deck" at all times to alleviate transition time. Rehearsal should continue on as normal throughout this assessment day. For students recording at home, they

should play the phrase and before listening to the video, score themselves on a shortened rubric. After this initial reflection on how the recording went, students will then evaluate their performance on the video and complete a more detailed rubric to assign themselves a grade. The video and both rubrics will be sent to the director for a comprehensive grade. Students will be graded on honesty in self-reflection, in addition to their ability to play the duple or triple rhythms with rhythmic accuracy against the opposite accompaniment.

Skill Outcome #2: Students will be able to strengthen emphasis on uneven downbeats in *Suspended in a Sunbeam* by developing an internalization of mixed meter using the Counting System rhythmic syllables when rehearsing a 10-bar melodic phrase.

Strategy: Students will be divided into small groups of 6-7 people; these groups can be derived randomly or by sections. Each group will be presented with an 8-10 bar rhythm-only phrase that rapidly changes meter between 4/4, 3/4, and 5/4. Each group member will discuss how they would personally approach counting the rhythm. At this point, students will have the opportunity to vote upon a counting method the majority prefers and practice chanting their rhythmic excerpt with the chosen method. If a group finishes quicker than another group, they should be challenged to try another counting system and discuss the pros and cons of each. To enrich this activity, invite students to come up with a rhythmic counting system of their own. It will be helpful to point out what qualities make up a successful counting system (neutral syllables that are easy to say quickly, numbers to track place, etc). Guidelines such as "must include beat numbers and a neutral syllable" may be provided to add structure to the activity.

Assessment: This assessment will take place in rehearsal with the entire ensemble. For the assessment, the director will set up a video camera facing the ensemble to record the assessment for later review. The ensemble will open *Suspended in a Sunbeam* to m. 203 and be given the option to chant using the Counting System. The first time through, half of the students will chant their written rhythms from mm. 203-213 while the rest of the ensemble lightly keeps the pulse. The second time through, students who previously tapped the beat will perform. Students who wish to use a system of their own will be instructed to record a video of their section or perform their syllables for the director in the last 5 minutes of class. The video will be reviewed and students will be graded on rhythmic accuracy, syllable consistency, and correct emphasis of downbeats in a new meter.

Skill Outcome #3: Students will be able to critique extended techniques found in the percussion section for their effectiveness in making the music depict a realistic event.

Strategy: Students will play through the "Deployment Sequence" movement, mm. 29-80, without knowledge of what is occurring in the story at this point. Attention should be directed to the metal pipes and paper bags being used in the percussion section throughout the movement. Students

will be prompted to write a story or draw a picture of the non-musical event the music is trying to depict. After these interpretations are submitted, the director should read aloud to the group Joni Greene's description of the movement's events. Invite the students to consider how their interpretations were similar or different to what the composer was trying to emulate. Finish this reflection by calling out the extended techniques found in the percussion section and prompt students to consider how the techniques enhance the experience.

Assessment: For this assessment, students will write a review of *Suspended in a Sunbeam* and how it uses extended techniques to depict non-musical events. They will act as a music critic for a newspaper or magazine of their choice. Students will be provided with a checklist of elements to include in their article, with an opportunity to add photos and a consistent format for bonus points. The checklist of essential parts is as follows: (1) overall reaction to hearing the piece, (2) definition and explanation of a particular extended technique, (3) where the technique was found, and (4) why the technique was effective. Students will be graded on their creativity, definition of extended technique, and tone of writing.

Knowledge Outcome #1: Students will be able to describe a compositional device (chosen from: mixed meter, subito dynamics, ostinati, aleatoric sections, homophony, melismas, and extended techniques) used in *Suspended in a Sunbeam* and detail its effectiveness in depicting non-musical events.

Strategy: As a new device is encountered in *Suspended in a Sunbeam*, time can be taken in rehearsal to name the device and connect it to the non-musical event occurring. When connecting the sound to a non-musical event, students should be given the opportunity to determine the effectiveness of the device after knowing the composer's intent/point in the JWST story being depicted. Students may be given the option to create another non-musical event that they feel best suits the compositional device. Encourage students to write short descriptions of the events happening into their scores to better inform their performance of the piece.

Assessment: This assessment is structured as a group presentation of an assigned compositional device. Students will be offered the opportunity to choose their own groups or be placed in a group of 4-5 band members. Each group will choose a compositional element found in *Suspended in a Sunbeam* to create a short presentation on. A list of elements such as atypical percussion parts, accent articulation, dissonance, tempo, and mixed meter will be provided and students will be able to bid on the topic they are most interested in. Some class time will be scheduled for the groups to designate jobs and design/rehearse their presentation. The presentation can be any form the group chooses, though options such as powerpoint, Prezi, poster, or listening activity will be presented in the project description. Students will be graded on the following criteria in this rubric.

Knowledge Outcome #2: Students will be able to compare and contrast pianissimo and fortissimo dynamics and describe how these extremes heighten intensity in *Suspended in a Sunbeam*.

Strategy: These dynamic extremes can be explored through student experience in conducting. This activity is first structured so that all students can feel the difference in conducting both the fortissimo and pianissimo dynamics. In their seats, students will be asked to mirror the director as they are led through a standard four-beat pattern at multiple dynamics. Periodically, ask random students to name the dynamic they feel they are conducting at. Provide the opportunity for other students to offer alternate opinions and ways to clarify the dynamic in the pattern.

Assessment: Students will sing and conduct through a section of *Suspended in a Sunbeam* that transitions between the fortissimo and pianissimo dynamic. Small groups of students could take turns conducting in front of the room as the ensemble played through the section. Once every student has conducted the ensemble, a short conversation discussing the intensity of each dynamic and how it heightens the story-telling experience should end the activity. Students will be graded on size of conducting gesture and their participation in the discussion following the activity.

Affective Outcome #1: Students will be able to discuss the contrasting aesthetics of the Ice, Earth, and Lava movements using three or more adjectives of their choice for each movement.

Strategy: Students will create a mood board for their choice of the Ice, Earth, or Lava movements of *Suspended in a Sunbeam*. This activity can be used as a way to keep the ensemble engaged during one on one assessments, for substitute teaching, or assigned for completion outside of class. Students will be given access to a school-sponsored account on Canva and given time to compile photos from reliable sources (Unsplash, Pinterest) that match their understanding of the movement's overall aesthetic. In a short reflection, students will be asked to write a few sentences about what parts of the music led them to choose the images they did for their mood boards. Students will respond to the prompt, "Think of a part of the music (a melody, rhythm, extended technique, etc.) that inspired your mood board. Explain your musical device to someone who doesn't know anything about music, and discuss how your mood board connects to it in 5-7 sentences."

Assessment: After playing each movement one day in class, students will be asked to listen to the movement at home that evening for homework. After listening, they should take a piece of paper and write three adjectives for each movement that they feel best describe the aesthetic presented by Joni Greene. This short assignment will be due the next time class meets; students will then be asked to justify their adjectives to their stand partners and hand them in for grading. At this point, it may be helpful to ask students to add qualifying statements to their adjectives if they wish to clarify further. In this informal assessment, students will be graded on individuality and creativity.

Affective Outcome #2: Students will be able to connect personal experience to the events encountered by the James Webb Space Telescope team.

Strategy: Following the introduction simulation exercise, students will watch a short video presentation about the journey of the JWST team. The presentation should be relatively short, but provide a clear timeline of the events and happenings of the expedition. This information will eventually be used to inform performance.

Assessment: For homework outside of class, students will be asked to write a journal entry as if they were part of the James Webb Space Telescope team. Students can choose if they would like to play a member of the crew, or if they would prefer to write as themselves. Additionally, students may choose which point in the timeline they would like to write from. To help with this decision, a timeline will be provided with the dates and events of the JWST expedition. Students will be assessed on their originality and effort given into placing themselves in the teams' shoes.