



COMPOSER PROFILE

In this special feature, *British Bandsman* talks to German composer **Mathias Wehr**, who was recently a finalist in the RWCMD Cory Composer Competition.

Mathias Wehr (1984) studied clarinet at the Musikhochschule Nürnberg and conducting at the University of Augsburg. At the age of 23 he won the official title 'European Conductor of the Year 2008' at the Fourth European Conductors Championship in Norway. Only a year later he won the Silver Baton at the World Music Conductors Contest in Holland. As composer and chief conductor of various orchestras, Mathias Wehr has already won numerous international awards. For his musical commitment, he has been awarded the culture prizes of the cities of Schwabach, Fürth and Forchheim. His compositions are recorded professionally and are published by Musikverlag Frank in Switzerland.

Can you tell us how you first got interested in writing music?

My love for composing came at the age of 12, when I wanted to write the cadenza for the Stamitz *Clarinet Concerto* myself. Two years later I composed my own pieces for the clarinet quartet at my music school. During my studies at the conservatory, my knowledge was then extended by the subjects of harmony and arrangements.

Who were your early influences as a composer?

In my conducting studies at the University of Augsburg I was able to

take composing lessons with Ed de Boer (Alexander Comitas). This is where my first works for wind band were written, including my first publication with the publisher Musikverlag Frank in Switzerland, *Phoenix*. Of course, I was influenced by my conducting activities and also by the international greats in the composer business, such as Johan de Meij, Philip Division, David Maslanka and Alfred Reed. After ten years studying clarinet and conducting, I felt ready for composing. So I was able to gain a lot of experience, learn and still develop myself freely.

Can you describe your compositional process?

In the beginning there is always some kind of inspiration. This can be completely different each time and can be a randomly heard tune, some beautiful harmonies, or just a theme or picture. Then I sit down to the piano and work out a score in concert pitch. After this I start working on the instrumentation at my computer. In the process, an initially completely incidental accompaniment can become the main motive of the work or vice versa.

And how would you describe your music generally in terms of style?

To describe one's own music is not so easy, so I use the statements of the musicians who have played my works. Many say it's in the direction of 'epic music' or 'orchestral film music'. In any case, I think my music is tonal and concertante.

You were recently a finalist in the RWCMD Cory Composer Competition with your piece *Hyperdrive*. What can you tell us about the work?

The universe is known to be large - extremely large! Thanks to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the absolute speed limit is the speed of light. And that's, if you're honest, pretty lame - over four years to the next star. How should one meet extraterrestrials there? Conquer the galaxy? We need a 'hyperdrive'! It allows a spaceship to handle interstellar and even intergalactic distances in acceptable time periods. In this way, many light years can be covered in days or even hours. Therefore, hyperdrive is a way to travel to other planets or galaxies without being subjected to the constraints of special relativity. Get in, there is a lot to discover!

Finally can you tell us about any new works you might have in the pipeline?

I am currently working on three compositions for composition competitions in Singapore, Italy and Switzerland. Also planned is a large-scale work for brass band soon for the German Brass Band Championships!

Hyperdrive

Duration: 4 minutes

Difficulty Level: Grade 5

A theme which seems to be very much in vogue at the moment with brass band writers is space. Perhaps this is no surprise given that this year marked the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. This work by Mathias Wehr, entitled *Hyperdrive*, describes a form of transport to other planets or galaxies and was awarded third prize in the RWCMD Cory Band Composition Prize earlier this year, where it was given its première by Cory Band under Philip Harper.

From the very first bars of the piece through to the epic finale, the listener is transported to another place, with an emphatic *fortissimo* entry from the lower band, juxtaposed with *pianissimo* decorative figures in the cornets which emerge out of the texture. These are a driving feature throughout much of the work, although some attractive melodic moments provide contrast. The minor tonality which prevails is typical of the movie soundtrack idiom we have become accustomed to. There is clever layering of textures and a wide dynamic contrast, which if observed, will be really quite impactful. However, if attention isn't paid to the dynamics there is a danger the balance may become skewed and much of the detail lost. Cory's attention to detail in their performance of the piece at the recent Composition Prize finale meant the imaginative scoring was fully exploited and was a fine template for any band wishing to play the work.

It will require technical facility across the band to pull this piece off effectively, but those bands that do will have an enthralling item to add to their concert programmes.

The Complete Champions

Duration: 6.40 minutes

Difficulty Level: Grade 4

The Complete Champions was dedicated to Prof. Nicholas Childs and the Black Dyke Band after Prof. Childs was a guest of the Nordbayerische Brass Band, with whom Mathias Wehr is associated, earlier this year. The world première of the work was given by Nordbayerische on 1 June, conducted by Mathias himself, at the German Brass Band Entertainment Contest in Osnabrück. It has since been published by Musikverlag Frank.

Celebratory in mood, it is effectively set in three movements - fast, slow, fast - with a recapitulation in the third movement of the material we hear in the first movement. The instruction for cornets and trombones to start off stage before moving to their seats part way through the first movement will be effective if adhered to, and will be a compelling way of starting a concert.

Like *Hyperdrive*, there is a big emphasis on rhythmic figures, which are treated with a minimalist approach. Four percussion parts are scored, although for bands without a complement of four, with some engineering this could be reduced to three parts, and there are a number of instances where bass drum doubles timpani, for example.

Perhaps less technically demanding than *Hyperdrive*, although there are a number of semi-quaver scalic figures in many of the parts which should be under the fingers, this is a piece that will be manageable by a competent youth band, and will be suitable either as a concert piece or as part of an entertainment programme. ■

Andrew Wainwright

