

Teaching Music through Performance in Band

VOLUME 10

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Teacher Resource Guide

The Bonsai Tree

Julie Giroux

(b. 1961)

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Duration	2:50

Unit 1: Composer

Julie Giroux was born 1961 in Fairhaven, MA, and spent her formative years in Phoenix, AZ, and Monroe, LA. She began playing the piano when she was three years old and published her first composition at the age of nine. She received a bachelor's degree in music performance from Louisiana State University, where she was an accomplished performer on horn and piano. In 1983, while still an undergraduate student at Louisiana State University, she published her first work for concert band titled *Mystery on Mena Mountain*. She also completed additional academic studies at Boston University. Her composition teachers include John Williams, Bill Conti, and Jerry Goldsmith.

In 1985, Giroux began composing, orchestrating, and conducting music for television and film, with over 100 credits to her name. Some of those credits include the mini-series *North and South*, *Dynasty*, and *The Colbys*, as well as the films *Karate Kid II*, *White Men Can't Jump*, and *Broadcast News*. In 1988, she received her first Emmy nomination for *North and South II*. For the next three years, she was nominated for her arranging and original compositions for the Academy Awards Show. In 1992, she shared the Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Music Direction for the 64th Annual Academy Awards. In addition to her works for concert band, Giroux has composed for symphony orchestra (including chorus), chamber ensembles, wind ensembles, soloists, as well as brass and woodwind quintets. She has also arranged music for such popular artists as Celene Dion, Paula Abdul, Dudley Moore, Liza Minnelli, Madonna, Reba McEntyre, Little Richard, Billy Crystal, and Michael Jackson.

Unit 2: Composition

The Bonsai Tree is a one-movement work in a loose rondo form. It was composed for the Scott County High School Symphonic Winds from Georgetown, KY, under the direction of Tom Brawner for their performance at the 2010 Midwest Band Clinic in Chicago. The subtitle, "Sandai-Shogun no Matsu," is in reference to a specific bonsai tree in Japan. The instrumentation for *The Bonsai Tree* is limited, with woodwinds and brass in pairs (excluding B-flat bass clarinet, tenor and baritone saxophone, euphonium, and tuba for which there is a single part). Percussion scoring is extensive for this grade level and includes the use of four timpani, orchestra bells, chimes, marimba, vibraphone, finger cymbals, gong, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, and bass drum. The approximate performance time for *The Bonsai Tree* is 2:50.

Unit 3: Historical Perspective

The inspiration for this composition was a specific bonsai tree located in Tokyo, Japan. In the program notes, Giroux writes:

"*Sandai-Shogun no Matsu*, a five-needle pine bonsai (*Pinus pentaphylla* var. *negishi*) is considered one of Japan's national treasures. The tree is at least 500 years old and is considered to be one of the oldest-known living bonsai trees. It is documented as having been cared for by Tokugawa Iemitsu (August 12, 1604 – June 8, 1651), who was the third shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty. *Sandai-Shogun no Matsu* is housed in the Tokyo Imperial Palace.

Although the center of this famous tree's trunk is now totally hollow, it has been carefully nurtured for generations, and gazing at its gnarled form today, a sense of awe is felt at the forceful destiny that has allowed such a small piece of life to survive for so many centuries."

Unit 4: Technical Considerations

The technical demands of *The Bonsai Tree* are modest and should be attainable by aspiring musicians in their second or third year of development. The musical challenges and appeal of *The Bonsai Tree* also make this an appropriate selection for high school musicians. *The Bonsai Tree* utilizes only one key signature (concert B-flat Major) with accidental alterations allowing the use of chords from the keys of concert E-flat Major and F Major. The melodic lines are constructed using the D and G minor pentatonic scales (first, third, fourth, fifth, and seventh scale degrees of a natural minor scale) as well as the C mixolydian scale. While the accompaniment chord structure is tertian in nature (primarily triads and seventh chords), non-traditional chord progressions are



used throughout the composition, and traditional cadences are either delayed or avoided. The predominant time signature is 4/4 with the use of some 2/4 and 3/4 time signatures, primarily at phrase ends. The tempo marking is quarter note = 74 beats per minute with two *molto ritards* marked in the music, as well as the opportunity to use interpretive *rubato* throughout. Rhythmically, the performers should be prepared to execute eighth-note rhythms in two-, three-, and four-note groupings, a dotted-quarter/eighth-note pattern, a dotted-quarter/two sixteenth-note pattern, an eighth-note/two sixteenth-note pattern, a quarter note tied to an eighth note followed by three eighth notes pattern, and a quarter note tied to an eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes pattern. The tempo and sustained playing required for an authentic performance will challenge students to play correct phrase lengths. The moderate tempo and use of *rubato* also presents a challenge for students to move rhythms precisely together. Range demands are very modest. Brass players will find their ranges limited to a Major ninth, with trumpets playing up to their d^1 , horns to their c^1 , trombones and euphoniums to their d , and tubas to their G^1 . Woodwind ranges are a little more extended and can be as wide as two octaves, with the flute range extending from f to f^2 , oboe from $e\text{-flat}$ to f^1 , clarinets from their written E to b^1 , bassoons from $B\text{-flat}^2$ to c , alto saxophone from their written d to e^1 , tenor saxophone from their written e to e^1 , and baritone saxophone from their written e to $f\text{-sharp}^1$. All clarinets cross the break.

Unit 5: Stylistic Considerations

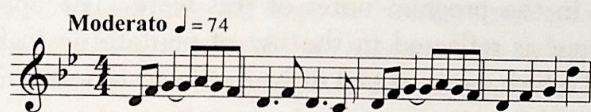
The Bonsai Tree is a contemporary composition that should employ a romantic interpretation with a legato stylistic approach to the lyrical melodies and lush harmonies. Adequate air support through the melodic phrases and longer note values are required to achieve the desired musical effect. The front sides of the notes must be softly initiated by using a soft “da” articulation throughout the composition. Releases must not be abrupt but should have a slight taper to the conclusion of the note or phrase. Slurs should be strictly followed, and the last note of any slurred pattern must not be clipped. Accented notes should be executed using more air rather than a heavy tongue, which should result in more weight on the accented notes for the full value of the note rather than a percussive attack on the front side of the note. There are specific instances where directions are given to change tempo, but a tasteful use of *rubato* at phrase ends or the introduction of the “C” theme would be appropriate as well. There are many opportunities for dynamic contrast, both marked and unmarked. It is important that the performers pay strict attention to the softer dynamic markings to allow for the appropriate musical effect on the marked crescendos and decrescendos. While there are no dynamic markings to indicate any contrast in the melodic line, it would be appropriate to use crescendos and decrescendos to shape the melodic phrase.



Unit 6: Musical Elements

MELODY:

The melodic lines for *The Bonsai Tree* are composed from the D and G minor pentatonic scales as well as from the C mixolydian scale producing three distinct themes.



FIGURES 1. THEME A, D MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE.



FIGURE 2. THEME B, G MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE.

Fl. *mf*

B♭ Tpt. *mf*

Tbn. *mf*

Fl. *mp*

B♭ Tpt. *mp*

Tbn. *mp*

FIGURE 3. THEME C, C MIXOLYDIAN SCALE.

Performers can prepare to play each pentatonic scale by learning the corresponding natural minor scale first and then practicing that scale by omitting the second and sixth scale degrees. Only one key signature is used throughout the composition, but the use of accidentals (primarily concert E-natural) allows for greater freedom to harmonize the pentatonic melodies. The number five seems to be an important compositional device, perhaps derived from the five-needle pine or the over 500-year existence of the bonsai tree referenced in the program notes of this work. The application of this unifying technique is reflected in the use of pentatonic scales (five notes), melodic skips of a fifth, and stacked fifths in the accompaniment parts.

HARMONY:

The harmony in *The Bonsai Tree* is traditional, using primarily Major and minor triads with a few seventh chords. The overall texture of the composition is homophonic, relying on a single melodic line with accompanying chords. The use of pentatonic scales allows for a great deal of freedom when harmonizing the melodic line. There are very few instances where the harmonization uses typical Western music chord progressions. The progression ambiguity is accomplished at times by omitting the third of the chord leaving open fifths or by chord movement of an interval of a third so each chord in the series shares two common tones. This approach to harmonization allows students to play traditional chords even though the chord progressions are not always traditional.

RHYTHM:

The beginning of the composition begins in 4/4 time with the quarter note getting the beat. Additional time signatures of 2/4 and 3/4 are utilized sparingly at the end of selected phrases. The most difficult rhythmic challenge students will have to navigate involves moving eighth-note groupings that begin on the offbeat. There are also many instances where tied or dotted rhythms are used, which may cause confusion about where the release of these sustained notes should occur.

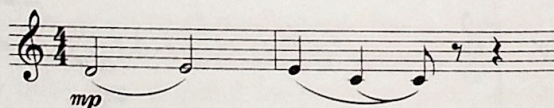


FIGURE 4. PRECISE RELEASE EXAMPLE.



In those instances, you should identify the precise beat or offbeat where the release should occur. If the students continue to release at different times, indicating where to breathe after the sustained tone should resolve the issue. Another challenge young musicians will face is moving consecutive slurred sixteenth notes precisely together. If moving slurred notes at the same time becomes an issue, then remove the slur and have students articulate each note until the rhythms move precisely at the same time. Once the rhythms are executed precisely, then add the slur back in. Finally, there are occasions when rhythmic patterns begin together and then separate into independent rhythms to create an echo effect. If this becomes confusing for younger musicians, then work each part separately until the students become confident with their own part, and then put the parts back together.

Fl. *mp* *mf*

B♭ Cl. *mp* *mf*

FIGURE 5. INDEPENDENT COUNTING EXAMPLE.

TIMBRE:

The scoring of *The Bonsai Tree* uses combinations of percussion ensemble, woodwind choir, and tutti band to present each theme in a different setting. Since instrument ranges are limited, the melodic lines are often scored in the mid to low registers, making it difficult in those instances for the melodic line to be heard above the accompanying voices. Students must be conscientious not to cover up these melodic lines. To develop sensitivity to the melodic line, direct the students' attention to the rhythmically active parts and then have them play soft enough to allow those parts to be heard. A more direct approach might be to have the instruments play the melody by themselves so members who play the accompaniment parts can identify those playing the melody.

Unit 7: Form and Structure

SECTION	MEASURE	EVENT AND SCORING
A theme	1–4	Melody in D minor pentatonic; orchestra bells.
B theme	5–9	Melody in G minor pentatonic; flute.
A theme	10–15	Melody in D minor pentatonic; clarinet and trumpet.
B theme	16–21	Melody in G minor pentatonic; flute, oboe, and alto saxophone.
C theme	22–29	Melody in C mixolydian trombone and euphonium to flute, oboe, and clarinet.
Development	30–36	B theme fragments in fifths; tutti ensemble.
A theme	37–41	Melody in D minor pentatonic; orchestra bells.
B theme	42–47	Melody in G minor pentatonic; flute, oboe and alto saxophone.
A theme	48–52	Melody in D minor pentatonic with a resolution on last chord to B-flat Major; orchestra bells.

Unit 8: Suggested Listening

John Barnes Chance:

Variations on a Korean Folk Song. Teaching Music through Performance in Band, Vol. 1 – CD Resource Recordings, Grade 4, North Texas Wind Symphony, Eugene Migliaro Corporon, conductor. GIA, CD-490, 2001.

Julie Giroux:

Music of Julie Giroux, University of Texas-El Paso Wind Symphony, Ron Hufstader, conductor. Mark Records, 8724-MCD, 2009.

Samuel R. Hazo:

Fantasy on a Japanese Folk Song. Teaching Music through Performance in Band, Vol. 6 – CD Resource Recordings, Grades 2–3, North Texas Wind Symphony, Eugene Migliaro Corporon, conductor. GIA, CD-683.

Robert Jager:

Three Chinese Miniatures. Teaching Music through Performance in Band, Vol. 4 – CD Resource Recordings, Grades 2–3, North Texas Wind Symphony, Eugene Migliaro Corporon, conductor. GIA, CD-552.

Chang Su KOH:

Arirang and Akatonbo. Redline Tango, Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra, Ichiro Saito, conductor. EMI Music Japan, TOCF-56077, 2007.

Korean Dances. Converging Cultures, Lone Star Wind Orchestra, Eugene Migliaro Corporon, conductor. Naxos, 8.572837, 2010-2011.

Anne McGinty:

Japanese Folk Trilogy. Teaching Music through Performance in Beginning Band, Vol. 1 – CD, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Wind Ensemble, Thomas Dvorak, conductor. GIA, CD-485.

Mike Story:

Sakura. Distinguished Music for the Developing Wind Band, Rutgers University Wind Ensemble, William Berz, conductor. Mark Records, 3627-MCD, 2009.

Unit 9: Additional References and Resources

Dallin, Leon. *Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition: A Guide to the Materials of Modern Music*. Third edition. Dubuque, IA: WM. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1974.

Websites:

<https://www.giamusic.com/bios/julie-giroux>

http://www.musicapropria.com/julie_giroux.html

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