

# Invictus CD – Program Notes

(All selections Composed & Conducted by Mark E. Wolfram)

## 1) The Swashbuckler (A Concert March) for Band (5:29) [GRADE 5]

Whether on the high seas, at a distant archaeological dig site, in the forests of medieval England or even on a pirate star cruiser, the swashbuckler character - a loveable rogue - has long been a part of literature. The early Hollywood films of the 20th century established a visual archetype for this iconic character, complete with his own brand of music - flamboyant, exciting, swaggering, and yet always with a hint a whimsy. To this day these silver screen characters are often revisited and remain extremely popular.

This work embodies all these qualities - giving every section of the band an opportunity to metaphorically swing from a yardarm, duel with a sword, find a lost treasure and (of course) save a fair damsel. From its robust theme in the brass section to its sweeping woodwind passages, "The Swashbuckler" offers a refreshing alternative to the traditional march fare. Fanfare-inspired passages are contrasted with faux-fugal sections, complex and angular harmonic interludes, all punctuated with exciting percussion and unexpected timbral and tonal episodes.

## 2) Invictus (for Concert Band) (9:15) [GRADE 6]

This piece is a rhapsodic tone poem inspired by William Ernest Henley's 1875 poem. Henley, an atheist, tuberculosis and amputee survivor wrote the poem as his response to the horrific events befalling him. It was originally published with no title. The title "Invictus" was added to the poem in 1900 by editor Arthur Quiller-Couch when it was included in The Oxford Book of English Verse.

The music follows the emotional arc of the poem - initially dark and brooding - and ultimately moving to a place of confidence and triumph. Its performance requires a mature ensemble - patient, measured, with a strong sense of inner-rhythm. The slow tempo proceeds unabated from beginning to end - like an undeniable force. While starting with a sense of foreboding, the piece weathers on through the onslaught of life's circumstances and emerges "unconquered"! ("Invictus" is the Latin word for "unconquered")

Here is the poem in its entirety:

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**Invictus** (1875) by William Ernest Henley

V.1) Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

V.2) In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

V.3) Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

V.4) It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

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"Invictus" highlights angular melodies, several step-out solos, colorful sonorities and large emotional tutti sections - all while combining several composition styles in an exciting blend which is both intellectually satisfying and aesthetically pleasing.

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**3) With Malice Toward None (A Hymn for Band) (5:48) [GRADE 4]**

This work was inspired by the last paragraph of President Abraham Lincoln's 2nd Inaugural Address on March 4th, 1865 in which he said:

*"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."*

These powerful words are as apropos today as they were in 1865. This passage has great resonance in that it encapsulates the basic moral responsibility which so many of us have been taught – including forgiveness, generosity of spirit, and trust in a higher power. Sadly, President Lincoln would be felled by an assassin's bullet little more than a month after delivering these moving and powerful words.

Mr. Wolfram used the cadence and spirit of Mr. Lincoln's text to compose a hymn-like melody. From that hymn he wrote an extended composition which mirrored the turbulent days in which this Inaugural Address was given - sometimes dark and brooding, sometimes warm and hopeful - and always with an undercurrent of change and uncertainty. It draws from a more tonal than dissonant palette, and yet it has plenty of satisfying departures from the expected. The work was written for and dedicated to Marcellus Brown and the Boise State University Symphonic Winds, who premiered it on April 22, 2012.

**4) The Tucson March (for Concert Band) (4:08) [GRADE 4]**

The Arizona Symphonic Winds premiered this new work at their March 26th, 2017 concert in Tucson, Arizona. At the suggestion of Maestro László Veres, Mr. Wolfram composed the march and dedicated it to Maestro Veres, the Arizona Symphonic Winds of Tucson and the City of Tucson. An orchestral version of the piece has been performed several times by the Tucson Pops Orchestra – with the premiere conducted by Tucson Mayor Jonathan Rothschild.

While the work is written in march form, it's also fun, light in nature and sounds a bit "southwestern" - but mostly it's a happy toe-tapping, whistle along good time!

**5) Monkey Mind (for Concert Band) (6:05) [GRADE 5]**

This work is an original composition based on the Chinese and Sino-Japanese Buddhist term meaning "unsettled; restless; capricious; whimsical; uncontrollable." Sometimes monkey mind arises at bedtime when unruly thoughts race and build. Counting sheep just won't settle a monkey mind! Many people use meditation and deep breathing techniques in an effort to calm and relax themselves. Some try a glass of warm milk, while others just give up and let the monkey mind win, hoping to rest at a later time.

Mr. Wolfram's musical depiction of the monkey mind begins with an agitated motif in the clarinets - passed along to the saxophones - and ultimately taking over the piece. As the band trades various wild and fidgety musical elements, the full ensemble builds to a high point where a Tam-tam is sounded. This begins a section of introspection and an attempt to calm the anxious music. But in true monkey mind tradition the texture gradually resumes more activity as the tension and dynamics rise

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## Invictus CD – Program Notes (continued)

again. The flutes reprise the original clarinet motif which quickly devolves into a repeat of the tense and building section. As it climaxes there are a few attempts to quiet the mind - and the solo flute and piccolo endeavor to put the piece "to bed" followed by a low woodwind "sigh." But in the end the monkey mind prevails with a full ensemble shout of the original motif.

### 6→9) Four Fripperies for Band (7:30) [GRADE 5]

Defined as a showy or unnecessary ornament in architecture, dress or language, a frippery is also thought to be a tawdry or frivolous thing - and in this case, just plain FUN! These 4 short contrasting musical fripperies are aptly described by their titles:

Mvt. 1 "Afternoon Jaunt" - A cosmopolitan trip around town - taking in the sights, smells and general atmosphere of a vibrant city.

Mvt. 2 "Ripples on a Shimmering Pond" - The waxing and waning of concentric circles and wind-blown ripples on a still pond - growing to a peak and then subsiding as bell-like musical touches embellish the dissipating descending lines - and ending with a peaceful calm.

Mvt. 3 "Comings & Goings" - Cartoon-like fervor with woodwinds and muted brass alternating contrasting angular phases - surging and pulsing in several diverse directions until capped off with a tutti ensemble shout.

Mvt. 4 "March Azure" - Unexpected melodic and harmonic shifts between 6/8 and 2/4 march styles with recurring "bluesy" riffs that give a hint of jazz - culminating in a satisfying, full-voiced finish.

Occasionally ostentatious and showy, this group of "fripperies" is delightfully fun for both audiences and performers.

### 10) Paeon (for Concert Band) (6:43) [GRADE 5]

An original composition for concert band, this paeon refers not to the Greek healer of the gods, Paeon, but rather to the musical form paeon: a hymn of thanksgiving. Early paeans were sung in preparation for and after battles. Greek warriors sang paeans to muster their courage and resolve as they prepared for battle - and afterward to celebrate their victories.

Musically, the paeon was originally a choral ode which had an antiphonal character - a call and response in which a leader sang in a monodic style, and the chorus responded with a simple phrase. Later in its development, the paeon was an entirely choral form. Paeon is now usually used to mean an expression of praise or exultation.

In this Paeon, a brief introduction leads to a melodic solo trumpet motif which is answered by woodwind responses. As the tempo increases a series of solo woodwind passages embellish the melodic fragments until a chorale of the original low instruments motif (from the introduction) is answered by a chorus of woodwinds - all with a rhythmic underpinning of muted trumpets, marimba and shaker. The original trumpet theme returns in the woodwinds and evolves into a brass chorale - and then a clarinet chorale with low woodwind accompaniment. After a section of development, a softly played brass chorus returns as woodwinds punctuate behind and lead to further phrases of the brass chorus - growing in intensity until a penultimate series of chords answered by timpani. As the woodwinds come to the fore with their punctuations, the first motif of the original trumpet solo is woven into a chorale growing in intensity - until the final triumphant chord! The piece features rhapsodic ensemble playing and step-out solos in the flute, oboe, bassoon, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone and trumpet.

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**11) Homily (for Concert Band) (6:16) [GRADE 5]**

An original composition for concert band, this work is dedicated to Mr. Wolfram's father, a former preacher and teacher, on the 100th anniversary of his birth.

A homily often means a sermon concerning a practical matter, a moralizing lecture or admonition, or an inspirational saying or platitude. In this "Homily" you can hear the calm presentation of the premise, the detailed explanation of how it applies to the listeners, a fair amount of finger wagging - some bluster and a loud, pounding fist for emphasis - and then it slowly returns to the original premise, develops a little more and ends with a reassuring "amen."

The work features independent rhythmic motion, colorful sonorities, time signature changes, tertian, quartal and serial composition in an intellectually satisfying and aesthetically pleasing blend.

**12→14) Labyrinth (for Concert Band) (8:45) [GRADE 5]**

This work is inspired by both the fact and lore associated with mazes and puzzles of all kinds. Labyrinths have existed since prehistoric times. Some labyrinths are "unicursal", meaning that they have a single path leading to a center, often embodying a journey - both a physical journey of walking the path - and a lifelong spiritual journey; a hard path to God, with the entrance being birth and the center being God. Complex labyrinths are known as "multicursal" - with choices of path and direction - they are branching puzzles, using misdirection and several dead ends on the way to the center. A meander (or meandrous) is a decorative border constructed from a continuous line, shaped into a repeated motif. The word "meander" used as a verb recalls a twisting and turning path. It has been said that a meander is the figure of a labyrinth in linear form. Prehistoric labyrinths are believed to have served as traps for malevolent spirits - or as defined paths for early man's ritual dances.

Movement 1 "The Journey Begins" opens with strong contrary motion ensemble figures based on fourth-fifth structure chords and whole-tone scales. The jaunty rhythmic underpinnings keep the piece moving forward. The opening figures are restated, followed by harmonically tight staccato phrases with rapid dynamic shifts, and then some of the fourth-fifth structure material is reprised. A final restatement of the opening ensemble figure completes the movement.

The slower Movement 2 "Meandering Paths," starts with woodwinds playing eighth-note figures - establishing a harmonic and rhythmic foundation for the movement. The Tuba introduces the melody, followed by a flute/English horn/E-flat clarinet melodic line against trumpet and French horn dynamic timbre shifts. As the melodic figure and accompaniment shift from instrument to instrument around the ensemble, the movement builds to a dramatic climax, quickly subsiding and returning to the opening motifs with a slightly fuller scoring. The movement ends with a restatement of the melody and accompaniment in a warm, reassuring tone.

Movement 3 "Ritual Dance," is a bright, full-voiced tour-de-force using the accompaniment figure from Movement 2 as the germ for new melodic material. Interwoven throughout the movement are several themes from previous movements in slightly altered forms. Contrasting quartal and bitonal sections set up the coda: a return to the opening melodic figures - a brief moment of introspective material - and then a satisfying, full-voiced flourish of a finish.

This work highlights angular melodies, several step-out solos, colorful sonorities and time signature changes, all while combining several composition styles.