

# JAMES SYLER

Music for Band & Wind Ensemble



## E-CATALOG

*with hyperlinks to recordings and video performances*

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[www.jamessyler.com](http://www.jamessyler.com)

## Welcome!

I've created this e-catalog to help you peruse my current works for band and wind ensemble. There are 26 original works here organized by grade level and all include hyperlinks to recordings or video performances. In our new era of A.I., I'm happy to report that 100% of these works were created with "H.I." — human intelligence.

Throughout these works, I've noticed my reliance on structure, rhythmic energy, lyricism, and harmonic color that all strive to communicate the expression "the good, the true, and the beautiful". I recognize that "beautiful" does not have to mean pretty and "true" can embrace ambiguities. This has been my creative aesthetic throughout these works and represents a broad expressionism in the pursuit of wonder and mystery. My hope is to continue to write music that has something to say, is thought-provoking, and reflects the human experience in all its diversity. I hope you find music here that speaks to you.

Visit my website for details on pricing and how to purchase. If you have any questions or would like to see a PDF perusal score please contact me directly. For recordings and video performances see my YouTube channel at <https://youtube.com/@jamessylercomposer5770>.

Thanks for listening,  
James Syler  
November 2024

website: [www.jamessyler.com](http://www.jamessyler.com)  
email: [jsyler61@gmail.com](mailto:jsyler61@gmail.com)  
phone: [210-698-9738](tel:210-698-9738)

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***“His works display both excellent craftsmanship and creative inspiration. I find that his music is sophisticated, fresh, and vital.” ~ Frank Battisti, Conductor, Retired, New England Conservatory***

***“He writes with heart and has the musical and technical ability to realize his conceptions. He is one of the few young composers whose music has moved me.” ~ Michael Colgrass, Composer***

***“You really write exactly what you want to write and that is excellent. The pieces are full of energy and musicality” ~ Samuel Adler, Composer, Retired, The Juilliard School***

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## GRADE 3

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### 1. CANTIQUÉ

This work was written to accentuate long lyrical lines and attention to a legato style, yet remain playable by ensembles with limited range and technique. The work uses a modified arch form consisting of ABC-A-CBA. The introductory A section is repeated at the zenith before recapitulating in reverse the B and C sections. The A section appears again at the end as a coda and brings the work to a quiet ending. Published by FJH/Alfred Music. Duration: 6'

Listen & see the score at: <https://www.alfred.com/cantique/p/98-B1528/>

### 2. COUNTRY BANDSTAND

Three movements based on American folk songs that suggest the sounds of the traditional town bandstand. The first movement is a march based on the Southern folk song Batchelor's Hall. The second movement is slow chorale setting of the folk hymn Vernon and the third movement transforms the folk tune Happy Land into a rousing barn dance. Published by FJH/Alfred Music. Duration: 7'

Listen & see the score at: <https://www.alfred.com/country-bandstand/p/98-B1446/>

*"... delightful collection of imaginatively scored melodies lies at the easier end of this grade level."*

*~ New Music Reviews, The Instrumentalist magazine, January 2011*

### 3. FANTASIA ON BROTHER JAMES' AIR

*Brother James' Air* is a hymn tune on Psalm 23 by Scottish-born James Bain (1860-1925). The tune was first published in 1915. This fantasia is in four sections starting with the original tune presented in a chorale style by the woodwinds followed by the brass. In the second section the tune is transformed into a march in 4/4 harmonized with polychords. The third section is a waltz setting in 3/4, and since it is a tune from Scotland, the conclusion is a rousing 6/8 setting in the style of a Scottish Pipe & Drum band. Duration: 5'

Listen to live recording at: <https://on.soundcloud.com/e7XxtXn9e5ZGJ2T36>

### 4. FANTASIA ON SILENT NIGHT

A re-interpretation of the classic Christmas carol *Silent Night*. All the elements of the original music have been altered through elongation of the melody, changing the key to minor, the meter to 6/8, and re-harmonizing the chord structure. The result is a dreamy sound that extends the wonder and mystery of the original. Commissioned by a consortium of 11 community bands. Something different and refreshing for holiday programs. Duration: 5'30"

*"Friends, this is a very successful piece of quality repertoire. Check it out!"*

*~ Timothy Mahr, retired, St. Olaf College*

*"I think your Fantasia is the type of composition that grows on you. Each time we rehearsed it I liked it even more."*

*~ George Zoske, Sun City Concert Band, Arizona*



## 5. HOCUS POCUS

Mischief and fun abound in this magical work that evokes images of young wizards. A mystical opening features flute and percussion before moving into a tarantella, a fast dance in 6/8 that almost has a delirious character to it. Themes collide, intensity rises, and pulse quickens as the music moves forward at a feverish rate. Published by FJH/Alfred Music. Duration: 4'

Listen & see the score at: <https://www.alfred.com/hocus-pocus/p/98-B1553/>

## 6. SILENT SHADOWS TO THE LAST for Soprano & Band

There are very few works for soprano and grade 3 band. The music is technically accessible, yet still artistically mature with a strong lyrical flow. What a joy it was to set these timeless Walt Whitman poems to music – *Look Down Fair Moon*, *A Clear Midnight*, and *A Prairie Sunset*. Duration: 9'

*"... a work for wind band and voice where the text is not hidden by the instrumental colors. The work has moments of incredible beauty and lush textures juxtaposed with transparency and clarity. A wonderful addition to the repertoire for band and voice."*

*~ Brett Richardson, University of the Incarnate Word*

*"With his poignant text painting of the amazing poetry of Walt Whitman, James Syler has created a beautiful contribution to the canon of wind band repertoire for ensemble and voice. This composition is worthy of your time and deep exploration!"*

*~ Brent Allston, Florida International University*

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,  
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,  
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best.  
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

## 7. WU XING Concertino for Two Percussion and Band

~ Winner of the 2016 CBDNA Young Band Composition Contest

The Wu Xing (pronounced wu-hsing) are the traditional Chinese five phases – Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. “Wu” refers to the number 5. These five phases also have traditional pitch associations in Western solfege that produce a pentatonic scale and these corresponding harmonies:

	Metal	Water	Wood	Fire	Earth
	re	la	mi	sol	do
	ii	vi	iii	V	I
in Bb:	Cm	Gm	Dm	F	Bb

The resulting chord progression of Cm-Gm-Dm-F-Bb briefly appear at the beginning of the “Wood” section and is repeated in the last “Earth” section as the culmination of the Wu Xing concept. The number 5 is referred to throughout – 5-measure phrases, 5-note harmonies, a 5-note melody, 5-note rhythms, etc. The work features two solo percussionists playing a variety of sounds organized by instruments made of, or work representing, metal, water, wood, fire, and earth. The final “Earth” section uses two bass drums playing a 5-note rhythm, in five phrases, of five rhythms each, that grows in power to the end. Very playable by high schools and above. Published by Alfred Music. Duration: 10’

Available at: <https://www.alfred.com/wu-xing/p/00-PK-0008319/>

*“WU XING is a versatile, colorful work that fills a much-needed spot in the wind band repertoire. Musically enriching and technically accessible... Through its thoughtfully constructed sections and inherent energy, Syler has created yet another composition of real value.”*

~ John Zarco, University of Texas at San Antonio



## GRADE 4

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### 1. GALOP (1909) by Arthur Bird ed. for Concert Band

This delightful galop is the only known military band work by 19th century American composer Arthur Bird and reflects a clear and buoyant texture with a humorous lightness. It reflects his interest in dance forms and his lifelong emulation of French music. This edition is not an arrangement, but comes directly from Bird’s handwritten manuscript as found in the Fleischer Collection at the Philadelphia Library. The score and parts were edited to be playable by today’s standard concert band. No changes were made in the original music. A re-discovered gem! Published by FJH/Alfred Music. Duration: 3’

Listen & see the score at: <https://www.alfred.com/galop/p/98-B1537/>

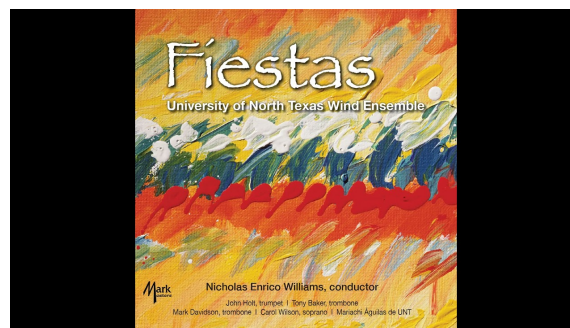
## 2. THE HARMONIOUS BLACKSMITH by Handel arr. for Woodwind Ensemble

Handel published eight harpsichord suites in 1720 that showcase his mastery as a young keyboard virtuoso. The “Air and Variations” is the final movement from the *Suite No. 5 in E major* and became known as “The Harmonious Blacksmith”. It’s dazzling music and considering the many colors available from woodwinds, this version becomes kaleidoscopic and full of color. Completed in 2020 in celebration of its 300th anniversary. Includes double bass, optional contrabassoon, Bb or Eb contrabass clarinet, and bass saxophone. Grade 4.5 to a modest 5. Duration: 5’



## 3. O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM for Soprano and Wind Ensemble

Originally a choral work, the *O Magnum Mysterium* is an ancient Christmas day text that describes the mystery of God becoming man – “even the animals behold him.” In this version for wind ensemble and soprano, I’m attempting to transcend time and space by juxtaposing the nativity scene with the crucifixion scene. In creating this work it’s been my desire to catch a glimpse of the weight of this mystery. Duration 12’



## 4. SUITE ARGENTINE

Argentina is a rich and diverse musical culture that spans vernacular traditions to art music. Most famous for the tango, I chose the following four folk musics for this symphonic suite.

I. Chacarera is a type of folk dance that originates in northwest Argentina. This setting is partially based on a recording of an old chacarera for guitar.

II. Milonga is a precursor to the more popular tango. In this setting, I wrote a slow tempo milonga that implies the music that would eventually become the tango.

III. Bombo is a traditional Argentine wooden drum with an animal skin head that is basic to much Argentine folk music. It features a drumming technique that alternates between striking the head and the rim or shell. This movement is an extended solo featuring four drummers.

IV. Malambo may be Argentina's most exciting dance. In this setting, I combined the opening chacarera melody with the traditional malambo progression. *Suite Argentine* was commissioned by a consortium of twenty high schools and colleges. Duration: 7'

*"SUITE ARGENTINE is a fun piece with good contrasts — also well within the reach of high school ensembles. It's fresh and to the point, with music that so wonderfully captures the spirit of their respective dance forms."*

~ John Zarco, University of Texas at San Antonio



## 5. SUITE LOUISIANE

Louisiana is uniquely rich in vernacular music. This work is a symphonic suite that entertains as well as educates. The five songs I selected each have unique histories and rich musical characteristics that I was able to amplify and expand upon. Below are brief notes on each. The music was commissioned by a consortium of colleges and universities from the Louisiana Chapter of the College Band Directors National Association for the 2019 Louisiana Intercollegiate Band. Published by Alfred Music. Duration: 12'

I. Isabeau S'y Promene

II. Michieu Banjo

III. Aux Natchitoches

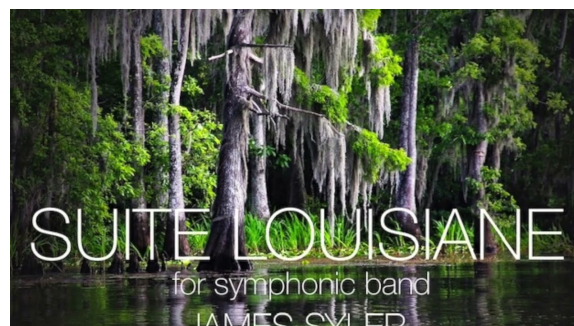
IV. Now Shall My Inward Joys Arise

V. Eunice Two-Step

Available at: <https://www.alfred.com/suite-louisiane/p/00-PK-0008316/>

*"... a delightful collection of tunes showcasing the unique variety of the cultural heritage of the state. In turn, it is bold, beautiful, fun, and simply a joy to perform!"*

~ Caroline Beatty, Texas State University



## GRADE 5

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### 1. CONGO SQUARE for African Drums and Wind Ensemble

Features four hand drummers playing Bata, Djembe, and Boula drums (substitutes recommended if unavailable). The opening music quotes an authentic Konkoba war dance in and grows in intensity. The slower middle section quotes Salangadou, an old Creole song. Near the end of the work an early jazz style song emerges in a stomp style to suggest the new music that will eventually grow out of Congo Square. These three musics – African drums, a Creole song, and early jazz – overlap to produce the emotional zenith of the work as you hear the past, present, and future simultaneously. Commissioned by a consortium of 12 universities. Duration: 12'

*"... a wonderful juxtaposition of percussion soloists and wind ensemble. The sonorities in the wind ensemble and rhythmic complexities of the solo parts were beautifully weaved together."*

~ David Martins, Boston University

*"A kaleidoscope of powerfully evocative musical elements. Syler has a unique talent for distilling the spirit of a place and time into sound to create a three-dimensional sonic portrait. The result is imaginative, compelling, and deeply moving."*

~ Carolyn Barber, University of Nebraska



### 2. FIELDS for Spatial Wind Ensemble

A dark abstract adagio that exploits the sonorities of the woodwind and brass choirs by separating them on stage. Further spatial sound is achieved through an off-stage right flugelhorn and off-stage left percussion. A dramatic quiet ending fuses together blocks of woodwind and brass chords. Uses asynchronous events and layers of sound to create an Ivesian numinous sound world. Completed in 1994 and commissioned by the Air Force Band of Flight, Dayton, Ohio. Duration: 11'

Listen at: <https://soundcloud.com/james-syler/fields>

*"FIELDS remains one of the most prominent works for wind band on my Core Repertoire list. James Syler is a master at exploiting sonic resources to create musical images of depth and poignancy as well as joy and sanctity." ~ Richard L. Johnson, Coastal Carolina University*

### 3. GEARBOX

An energetic, brassy and lyrical overture-like work that evokes repetitive mechanical sounds and the singing lines that emerge out of them. Develops a simple motive through canon, repetition, counterpoint and

lyricism. Commissioned and premiered by the San Antonio Symphony, TX in 2009. This version for wind ensemble was made in 2010. There is also a version for British-style brass band. In memory of my father Robert Syler (1933-2007) a lover of cars, driving, and all things mechanical. Duration: 8'

*"His orchestral work entitled GEARBOX is a brilliant showpiece that surges with energy from beginning to end."* ~ San Antonio Express News



#### **4. THE HOUND OF HEAVEN**

*~ Winner of the 1993 NBA/William Revelli Composition Award*

*~ Winner of the 1993 Arnald Gabriel Award, United States Air Force Band*

A programmatic symphony in six movements based on the poem of the same name by poet Francis Thompson. Features a solo antiphonal trumpet and an eclectic mix of styles to emphasize the poem's drama. Minimalism, 12-tone writing, post-romanticism, tonality and atonality exist side by side and are held together by the work's melodic through-line. Duration:18'

*"THE HOUND OF HEAVEN" is a masterfully crafted work by the gifted young composer, James Syler. It is a challenging composition destined to enrich the contemporary repertoire with its imaginative and innovative effects."* ~ Arnald D. Gabriel, Conductor Emeritus, United States Air Force Band

*"I listened to your work THE HOUND OF HEAVEN and I like it! I think it's imaginative and evocative and hope it receives many performances."* ~ Morton Gould, Composer



[www.jamessyler.com](http://www.jamessyler.com)

## 5. LOVE AMONG THE RUINS for Viola and Wind Ensemble

The subject of the work is love as a timeless force, a continuation beyond the grave. The title is from the poem *Love Among the Ruins* by Robert Browning. It features the viola for its color and expressivity. It's always evolving as a metaphor for love as a transforming force. It borrows from a previous work titled *Fields* that I've always felt had more to say. Commissioned by a consortium of 14 colleges led by Dr. Matthew Schlomer, Interlochen Arts Academy. Duration: 18'

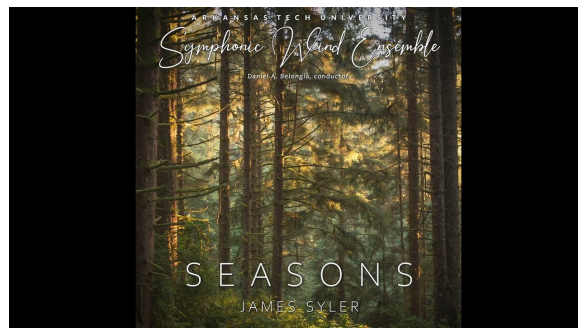
*"LOVE AMONG THE RUINS seems to achieve the impossible with a perfect orchestration for viola soloist and wind ensemble... takes the audience to an intimate sense of introspection that is incredibly rare in our repertoire."* ~ Matthew Schlomer, University of Wyoming



## 6. SEASONS for Soprano and Wind Ensemble

The seasons of the year can be thought of as stages or "seasons" of life. Each text is from a different time and place, yet all reflect the theme of remembering. We begin in the Fall with a rousing and colorful excerpt from Robert Louis Stevenson's poem *Autumn Fires*. Winter is a setting on the classic Frost poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Spring is based on a poem by the composer, *Water Bells*, written in the traditional Japanese haiku three-line form. Summer is based on the traditional Gaelic poem *Olde Irish Blessing* as we say goodbye and look forward to a time of rest. In the end, our work and memories from the "seasons" of life will not be forgotten. Commissioned by Dr. Daniel Belongia, Director of Bands at Arkansas Tech University and a consortium of high schools and colleges. Duration: 12'

*"SEASONS is a wonderful addition to the wind band repertoire! Its four movements blend poetry and music to represent the seasons of life. At times bright and enthusiastic while at others intimate and understated..."*  
~ Daniel Belongia, Arkansas Tech University



## 7. SINFONIETTA

This one movement abstract work is in three sections and begins with a timpani motive containing the intervallic and rhythmic ideas to be developed. A lyrical 12-tone theme follows and is developed by way of a fugue where each entrance is at the m7th creating a perpetual spiral fugue. It grows in volume, complexity, and weight to its culmination in the brass. The B section is slower and features oboe and bassoon solos developed from the original 12-tone theme. Static woodwinds and keyboard percussion provide background to simple melodic lines. The C section is Allegro and begins with a traditional fugal treatment in 7/4 of the opening theme. The music develops and restates the opening as it grows in intensity and power to the end. Commissioned by a consortium of 20 university wind ensembles. Duration: 13'

*"The themes presented reveal outstanding construction and provide beautiful opportunities for expression. The middle section stretched the ensemble with its demand for sensitivity. This SINFONIETTA holds a unique place in the oeuvre of wind band literature."*

*~ Isaiah Odajima, Baylor University*

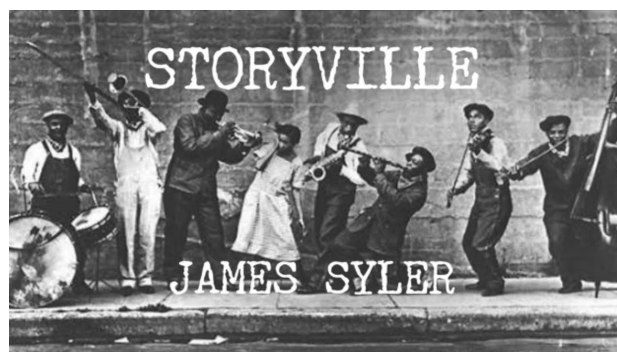


## 8. STORYVILLE

A one movement "Third Stream" type symphonic poem. Early jazz styles and contemporary devices are used in a modern setting to intensify the realities of Storyville – the infamous New Orleans prostitution district. No improvisation required. The work is dramatic with a sense of sadness and spaciousness. Commissioned by a consortium of 9 universities. Duration: 17'

*"Through a brilliant use of the wind ensemble colors, Syler has captured the expression of Storyville and its people. He is a truly gifted and creative composer whose contributions to wind band literature are to be cherished. STORYVILLE is a particularly moving and emotional experience."*

*~ Bobby Francis, Texas Christian University*



## 9. TATTOO

Built on the techniques of minimalism, this work separates the timbre and color of the woodwind and brass choirs. The woodwinds begin by playing repeated fragments that create a shifting contrapuntal texture along a steady pulse. The brass are divided into stage-right and stage-left choirs and play out-of-time with the woodwinds. As the music develops and the energy builds they come together to drive the music to its climax. Optional 2 conductors. Commissioned by a consortium of 20 university wind ensembles.

Duration: 8'

Listen at: <https://soundcloud.com/james-syler/tattoo>

## 10. THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTHONY for Chorus and Wind Ensemble

Anthony of Egypt (251-356) was a 3rd century hermit and saint in the early church. His life and account of being tempted and tormented in the Egyptian desert were popularized through the first hand account of Athanasius in his book *The Life of Antony*. Anthony's dramatic and supernatural reports of temptation and torment have been a source of inspiration for visual artists and writers from the 10th century to the present. The six musical sections of this work are titled by phrases I found memorable from my reading of *The Life of Antony*. By avoiding a direct depiction of his experiences, I've approached the Temptation of St. Anthony as an analogy for the process of temptation – approach, doubt, temptation, torment, relief, and joy. The music is filled with drama, sensuality, horror, and strangely enough, joy. Duration: 18'

*“The vocabulary ranges from thorny tone clusters to soaring vocal lines to beautiful traditional harmonies. The effect of the combined choral and instrumental forces is sonically powerful and intensely emotional.”*  
~ John Silantien, Retired Director of Choral Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio



## 11. SYMPHONY No. 1 “BLUE” for Soprano, Chorus and Wind Ensemble

A five movement choral symphony for solo soprano, SATB chorus and wind ensemble based on a text by the composer. The narrative text, “Blue”, is rooted in the notion of the loss of hope and the process of reconnecting with it. The music is carefully orchestrated to avoid inherent balance problems between winds and voices. Oratorio-like and dramatic in nature. Completed in 1999 and commissioned by a consortium of 42 university wind ensembles. A minimum of 75 singers is recommended for acoustic balance with the winds. Duration: 35'

Listen at:

I. Impending Blue [https://youtu.be/8kXdSLnH3\\_Y](https://youtu.be/8kXdSLnH3_Y)

II. Dark Blue <https://youtu.be/7z7GhucnQIE>

III. Fading Blue <https://youtu.be/SSP8J76CgNI>

IV. Still Point Blue <https://youtu.be/sgFJ7FKrp-4>

V. True Blue [https://youtu.be/n5FXKA\\_K3rg](https://youtu.be/n5FXKA_K3rg)

*“... James Syler’s SYMPHONY No. 1 is a major addition to the wind ensemble repertoire. What immediately strikes the listener about this composition with a title ‘Blue’ is the depth of the text and music and the absence of all of the possible stereotypes that could be associated with such a title.”*

*~ Leon Bly, World Association of Symphonic Bands and Ensembles*

## **12. SYMPHONY No. 2**

*~ Finalist 2020 National Band Association/Revelli Composition Contest*

*~ 3rd Place Winner 2023 American Prize in Composition*

The foundation is a 3-note motive of C-Ab-B. This motive is the basis for the primary 12-tone theme heard at the beginning. Because there is no narrative, the structure of the work is held together by using three traditional forms. Movement I is a modified sonata form with a mood of foreboding — nervous, alarming, and militaristic. Movement II is an ABA form built on an excerpt of the original theme from movement I. The zenith of the movement is a quiet chorale — like it’s traveling and looking back with nostalgia. Movement III is a passacaglia and eight variations followed by a double fugue featuring two simultaneous subjects. The themes of the previous two movements reappear as the music develops into a dissonant texture that transitions to the opening bass ostinato. As the brass build tension, the music pushes towards its new tonic of G major. Highly contrapuntal, lean, and muscular music. Commissioned by a consortium of 15 universities organized by Dr. Timothy Shade, Director of Bands, Wichita State University, Kansas. Duration: 20’

*“This work is one of his best. Very well constructed, lean and clever... For me, it strikes a great balance between the exciting and the gentle, the powerful and the sublime. SYMPHONY No. 2 brings lasting value to our repertoire.”*

*~ Stephen Squires, Chicago College of Performing Arts*

*“... a superbly crafted piece that continues to yield meaningful music throughout the entire process of preparation. It is in turns aggressively muscular and exceedingly tender, forcefully imposing and intensely intimate. In short, SYMPHONY No. 2 is a masterful work that deserves the attention of every thoughtful conductor.”*

*~ David Campo, Stephen F. Austin State University*

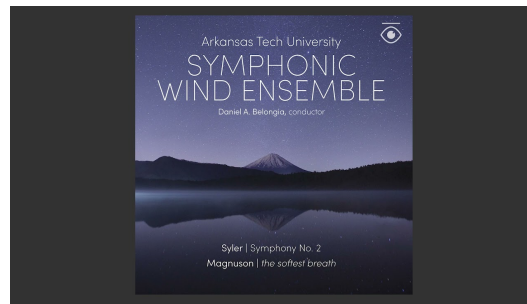
*“SYMPHONY No. 2 is both powerful and intimate. Its thoughtful structure, transparent layers, and engaging melodic content allows for the players and listeners to immediately connect with the music.”*

*~ Phillip Clements, Texas A&M University-Commerce*

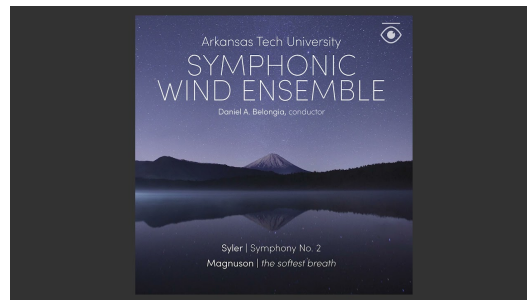
### **Movement 1: ANDANTE**



## Movement 2: ADAGIO



## Movement 3: PASSACAGLIA and FUGU



### 13. BIRDS OF PARADISE Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble **NEW!**

Jazz has proven to be a great metaphor for freedom. *Birds of Paradise* is a concerto for alto saxophone and the culmination of my trilogy *Congo Square*, *Storyville*, and *Minton's Playhouse*. These works, composed over a nearly 30 year span from 1994 (*Minton's Playhouse*) to this work in 2023, are tied together by their search for freedom through the seminal movements in jazz. The pre-jazz sounds in *Congo Square*, the early jazz in *Storyville*, the bebop in *Minton's Playhouse*, and now the post-bop sounds in *Birds of Paradise* are all metaphorically searching to be uncaged and free to fly. This work looks to the post-bop sounds of John Coltrane, modal jazz, and free jazz.

After a mysterious beginning and the sounds of bird calls, the first movement launches into fast sax lines reminiscent of John Coltrane and Chick Corea over punchy brass chords and driving bass lines. The second movement repeats the opening mysterious sounds then moves into a dark dirge featuring sad lyrical lines. The energy develops from sadness and frustration into anger and rage, like a "caged bird". The third movement ascends into hopeful lyrical lines between the soloist and woodwinds. As the music rises the soloist fades away. The music descends and the soloist plays soft fast bebop lines from its past that fade into the night like a ghost in the jungle. The rare birds are finally free, at peace, and fly off into paradise. Commissioned by a consortium of 11 universities led by Dr. William Hochkeppel. Duration: 20'

*"As a soloist, I found it challenging and it gave me things to work on that I had not encountered before. Bits of Trane and Chick, even a bit of Bird; but at times, I was reminded of Messiaen, Mahler, and Maslanka. At various times it whispers, sings, screams, floats, soars, or dives, but it always emotes."*

~ William Hochkeppel, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

*“James Syler has once again crafted a significant, profound, and beautiful new work that combines elements of virtuosic sax technique with nuanced and intimately quiet moments. The music evokes vivid intrigue, excitement, joy, and sadness in this essay celebrating the late 20th century jazz masters.”*  
~ Daniel Belongia, Arkansas Tech University

Live at Arkansas Tech University, Nathan Mensink, soloist. Dan Belongia, conducting.

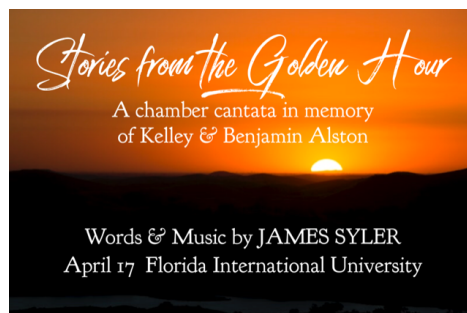


Live at Florida Atlantic University, Kyle Mechmet, soloist, Kyle Prescott, conducting.



#### **14. STORIES FROM THE GOLDEN HOUR *NEW!***

A Chamber Cantata for Narrator, Soprano, Women's Chorus, Chamber Ensemble, and Organ



The title refers to the golden hour before sunset as a metaphor for the later years of life when remembering and stories become especially important. The work is inspired by the lives of Kelley and Benjamin Alston and told through six stories about the land, hard work, justice, family, death, and homegoing. The Alston's were

both children of tobacco farmers from Conway, South Carolina who married, built a family, persevered through many challenges, and lived a long life. They passed away within six months of each other. Their life story inspires all of us to remember, fight for what is right, live with dignity, and in the end celebrate life.

The work is a type of chamber cantata drawing on the traditions of spoken word, chamber music, and choral music. Each story illuminates a certain characteristic of Kelley and Benjamin and is introduced by a third person narrator. The first story, *Under the Fields*, is where their life began in the country and is a reminder that no one really owns the land. It sings for those who can hear it and it's where we ultimately end. The second story is *Crit* and celebrates their work ethic in the form of repetitive rhythmicised language that never gives up. Next is *What is worth fighting for?* and reminds us that there are times to stand up for justice just as Kelley and Benjamin did. After a reading of more than 300 years of racial violence, the narrator asks questions that reference segregation, the murder of Emmet Till, and the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King.

The fourth story, *In the Summer*, is a nostalgic remembrance from a child's point-of-view about a summer night filled with mystery and meaning. The next to last story, *Golden Light of Home*, is in the style of an old spiritual and is about quietly waiting and listening as the end is nearing. The sixth and final story, *Homegoing*, is a simple hymn that speaks to the hope that we will meet again. Commissioned by Dr. Brenton F. Alston in memory of his parents Kelley and Benjamin Alston.

Instrumentation: recorded narrator track, solo soprano, women's chorus, 11 chamber winds (fl, ob, cl, bsn, a.sax, 2 tpt, 2 horn, 2 tuba) percussion, and organ. Duration: 30'

Visit my YouTube page at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYkl\\_Zlrf1\\_5lmOrgHhGTTw/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYkl_Zlrf1_5lmOrgHhGTTw/videos) to watch the full 30 minute premiere performance of *Stories from the Golden Hour*.

*"... in this incredible tribute to my parents and their families history, James Syler has created a poignant and passionate experience for the performers and audience through the exploration of six stories of a personal and public nature. There is so much about this work that is personal that it is difficult to fully express what it means to me. What really makes this work stand out is not just its unusual instrumentation, or the 30 minute arch of expression, but the beautiful music and skillfully written stories that cause a transformative experience through our universal human experience. This landmark work is worthy of deep exploration. The experience is "Golden."*

*~ Brenton F. Alston, commissioner and conductor, Florida International University*

*"I was fortunate to be in attendance for the world premier of James Syler's 'Stories from the Golden Hour' performed brilliantly at Florida International University. The overall mood of the composition is beautiful and there is an overriding sense of longing, introspection, and melancholy throughout. However, the work also provides a sense of the joy and sadness of loss rather than being overwhelmingly tragic.*

*The subtle beauty of the work is captivating and invites the listener to experience the visceral emotions at the core of this outstanding work. I believe it is a deeply personal and genuine work and deserves a careful and thoughtful consideration to be performed by our wind ensembles. James has given us a work of tender and expressive significance."*

*~ Gary Green, retired, Frost School of Music, University of Miami*

## GRADE 6

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### 1. MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE for Sax Quartet and Wind Ensemble

A modern one movement concerto grosso for sax quartet and wind ensemble that explores the connection between the Baroque and bebop jazz. Inspired by the famous 1940's New York jazz club in a "third stream" type setting. No improvisation required. Commissioned by the United States Air Force Band, Washington, DC. Duration: 10'

*"One thing that is particularly effective about MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE is that one feels it is a piece for jazz ensemble, 'framed' by the colors and textures of the wind ensemble."*

~ Fanfare Magazine

*"The audience thoroughly enjoyed the fresh sounds of this piece. Syler has achieved a pleasing marriage of the bebop idiom and the sonic possibilities of the wind band. His use of simultaneous musics is extremely effective."*

~ Fred Allen, Director of Bands Emeritus, Stephen F. Austin State University

*"What a romp! Any serious conductor who's also a true lover of bebop should know about MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE. It's great fun, artistically conceived, and skillfully orchestrated."*

~ Stephen Squires, Chicago College of the Performing Arts



### 2. A BLUE STREAK for Chamber Winds and Jazz Drummer

High energy music that exists between notation and improvisation, tonality and atonality, jazz and classical. Based on the expression "to talk a blue streak" as a continuous stream of words. It builds to a 12-tone fugue and a break down of communication.

Features optional electronic trumpet and trombone by using a practice mute plugged into a guitar amp. Requires a high energy bebop-style jazz drummer. Commissioned by a consortium of twenty colleges. Duration: 7'





**JAMES SYLER** (b.1961) is a composer, teacher, and writer born in Hyde Park, NY. For more than 40 years his works have been performed throughout the world. Equally at ease with modern and traditional techniques, he has developed a personal style that is eclectic and innovative, yet able to communicate with a variety of audiences. Educated at Northern Illinois University, the University of Miami, and the University of Texas at Austin, he has studied composition privately with composers Alfred Reed and Michael Colgrass.

Awards include two grants from the American Music Center in New York, the 2016 CBDNA Young Band Composition Contest for "Wu Xing: Concertino for Two Percussion", the 1993 NBA/William Revelli Composition Award and the United States Air Force Band Arnald Gabriel Composition Award for "The Hound of Heaven", and more than 40 guest composer residencies at colleges and universities. His choral music is published by Fred Bock Music, Santa Barbara Music, and self-published through Music Spoke. He has been featured in numerous articles and books, two doctoral dissertations, and "A Composer's Insight: Thoughts, Analysis and Commentary on Contemporary Masterpieces for Wind Band" published by Meredith Music. For 15 years, he owned and operated Ballerbach Music, a music publishing company specializing in contemporary music.

Since 2001, Mr. Syler has been a lecturer at the University of Texas at San Antonio and the University of the Incarnate Word where he teaches composition, Orchestration, and music industry courses. His creative writing has been featured in many of his vocal/choral works and the popular "2 Minute Histories" series for Piano Teacher Academy. He is married to pianist and pedagogy specialist Elizabeth Gutierrez and is co-owner of [www.pianopassport.com](http://www.pianopassport.com) a music publishing company featuring new & classic downloadable music for pianists. They reside in San Antonio, Texas.