

TO: MEMBERS OF THE PMEA 2021 ALL-STATE ORCHESTRA
FROM: STEVEN AMUNDSON, GUEST CONDUCTOR

CONGRATULATIONS to each of you for being accepted into the PMEA All State Orchestra!! I am fortunate to have conducted this incredible ensemble in 2014. There is no question that it is among the finest of its kind in the United States and it is a high honor to be selected to participate in this illustrious ensemble!

Of course, before this challenging year of Covid, we couldn't have imagined proceeding with this event virtually, but I'm so pleased that PMEA chose to forge ahead with this event! I am excited to make music with you as we create what I'm sure will be a stunning performance!!

A little bit about my background: I was educated at Luther College, Northwestern University, the University of Virginia, the Aspen Music School and the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria. I've spent most of my career building the St. Olaf Orchestra, the top of two symphonies at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. My orchestra has toured to 42 of the United States and 14 countries, and has been featured on NPR and PBS. The St. Olaf Orchestra has twice won the *American Prize* among colleges and universities in the U.S. I've been fortunate to have many opportunities to conduct professionally and I've been the music director of both the Metropolitan Symphony and Bloomington Symphony in Minnesota. I've served as both a resident and guest conductor at the International Interlochen Summer Arts Camp, and I've conducted 25 of the 50 all-state orchestras in this country, many of them multiple times. I am happy to say that the PMEA All-State Orchestra was one of my all-time favorite all-state experiences! Pennsylvania is known for the depth of its music programs and you are the cream of the crop! I'm proud of the many dedicated staff and teaching professionals in PA who work tirelessly to support this program. Foremost among those supporters is Mary Lynne Peters, the coordinator of the PMEA All-State Festival. I had the pleasure of working with Ms. Peters the last time I served as the conductor, and I can tell you that she is a gem who cares deeply about making your experience the best it can possibly be. We both look very much forward to working with you!

As you know, the piece I've selected is Dvorak's *Carnival Overture* - one of my favorites in that genre. This brilliant Czech composer may not have ever reached world acclaim without the assistance of his friend Johannes Brahms, who turned out to be his greatest champion and connected Dvorak with a well-known publisher. Once his Slavonic Dances hit the marketplace, his career took off! Dvorak became highly acclaimed for his chamber music, concertos, his operas and of course, his nine symphonies and many other wonderful orchestral works. You probably know that Dvorak also spent a good deal of time in the U.S. where he composed the "New World" Symphony, the famous American String Quartet and his beautiful Cello Concerto.

Dvorak composed his *Carnival Overture* in 1891 as part of a series of concert openers within a year of his first trip to the United States. These three overtures were crafted on the themes of nature, life and love. Can you guess which one best describes Carnival Overture? You guessed it - LIFE! But, we hear plenty of nature and love in the slow, middle section of the piece. You can't miss the gentle fluttering of leaves in the soft string tremolo, the bird calls in some of the woodwinds, plus Dvorak paints a musical picture of two lovers who leave the carnival to get away from the crowds, signified by the flute and violin solos, and beautifully accompanied perhaps by a chaperone (English horn).

The main reason I chose this piece is that it's a great tune! Second, I chose it because it will provide each of you with a rich and rewarding musical challenge, and I know you're up to the task! Upon starting your work in preparing your part, you will certainly realize that it's rather difficult - not intended for the average high school student - and that it will take plenty of focused practice before you are ready to record your part. So, I'm hoping you will all get to it as soon as you can! **It's important that each of you come to this PMEA all-state event with your parts well in hand. This will greatly help us dive into the more subtle aspects of this piece so that we can truly make music at the highest level!**

DVORAK CARNIVAL OVERTURE PRACTICE/REHEARSAL NOTES:

Thanks for looking through the following “conductor suggestions” as you prepare your music. I admit that the list is rather long and comprehensive, but I believe these directions will be helpful in bringing this piece to a high the highest level of performance. I encourage you to mark your parts as appropriate. Many of the comments apply to everyone, but others are for individual players or sections.

ALL: Those of you have eighth note pickups to half notes (such as in pickups to ms. 5), try to accent the eighth note and be sure it has plenty of “snap” and that it isn’t early. Keep this in mind each time this figure recurs.

ALL: Take note of the dynamics from ms. 12 to letter A and from A to ms. 20. Note the subito piano and then a gradual cresc to forte. In ms. 20, it stays forte, but save a little bit for the cresc into B. It would be good to have plenty of trb 1 and 2 the bar before B.

Cellos, Basses, trombones and Bassoons: 5 after B to 8 after B, bring this part out.

ALL: Pickups to 3 before C, please make this mf and then cresc into C.

ALL: At C, be full and broad on the whole note and be sure it’s completely unrushed. This should be a special short moment of repose in contrast to the fiery motion that precedes it.

Everyone (after C) with dotted quarters followed by eighths (C to about 11 after C): Be sure that the eighth note doesn’t fall into the guise of a “triplet.” Keep the eighth as quick as possible, almost as if you are trying to double dot the quarter note. This takes a good deal of bow control (violins in this case).

ALL: Ms. 50, same interpretive comment regarding the whole notes at letter C.

STRINGS: Ms. 55 - 61. This is, of course, an important part for you. Use a heavy bow stroke with as much articulation as possible (off string). Violas, cellos and basses need to make a quick diminuendo over two bars at the end of this passage.

STRINGS: Ms. 61 – 64. Violas need to play this louder than marked (at least mp) since this is your “solo,” but pull back to piano in ms. 65 so that first oboe can take over. (Cello and basses stay piano throughout).

ALL: Ms. 73 – 73. Everyone plays forte with a quick diminuendo (twice) EXCEPT FOR VIOLIN 1 who should STAY FORTE since this is the most important part.

TRB 1 and 2, ms. 77-80. Both trombone parts are “solos” here so please project and please play dotted halves (quarter rest following) instead of half notes with half rests in order to make it a little more connected. These four pitches, starting with second trombone and concluding with first trombone form one “line.” Also, at 3 before D, the trombone 1 part is important (the only part with this figure).

ALL STRINGS except basses: ms. 82 - 86. These triplet figures move very fast. Stay nimble and try not to lose tempo. Of course, figures like this can be stressful and cause tension, so do your best to stay relaxed.

ALL STRINGS except basses: ms. 88 - 98. Be sure the eighth note is exactly on the down beat of each measure (the eighths are of course always upbow). The dotted halves (seconds, violas and cellos) must be very rhythmic. VIOLIN 1, you have the two eighth notes at the end of each measure. Be sure these two eighths are always pretty weighted so as not to be at all discounted. Since the first violins are the only ones playing these figures, they need to be prominent. Finally, all strings should note the dynamics coming way down to **ppp** in ms. 99 (all should be ppp in this bar – just a whisper).

ALL: 3 before letter E, we gradually slow down into the new “poco tranquillo” tempo at E. You’ll need to be very attentive when listening to the click track at this moment because our success depends on EVERYONE taking the same tempo at E. Cellos and violas, of course you have the most important part here with regard to tempo, so do your best to be well prepared to play this accurately.

VIOLINS at letter E and following: This is such a beautiful tune, but as I like to say: “Bowings have their ups and downs!” What do I mean by that? I mean that it’s often difficult to make a long, seamless phrase with the bow, that necessarily needs to change: up – down – up – down. I’m hoping you can create a seamless four ms. phrase – like someone singing this on one supported breath. Avoid any unnecessary swells in each separate bow. Also, I’d like just a BIT of cresc in the first two bars and then a diminuendo into the fourth bar. The final B should definitely be the softest note. You’ll see that the next four bars actually show this shape (cresc/dim), but this time it can be a little more exaggerated. Again, strive for seamless bow changes and be sure to honor phrase rather than succumbing to the potential drawbacks of the bow. I hope that makes sense.

Woodwinds at ms. 119 to F. Now the woodwinds get to “sing” the tune and the strings accompany with little short interjections, just as the woodwinds did during the section at E.

VIOLAS and CELLOS: Letter E to F. You’re the real heroes of this section, along with basses. You create the foundation and framework for this section. This will obviously take some time to get really clean and in accurate tempo, but it’s just so great when it works! Thanks for your diligence with this!

ALL who play at letter F (for 6 bars). This is a magical orchestration! I love the subtle tambourine, triangle and gentle first trumpet fanfares, plus the dancing quarter notes in clarinets and bassoons! And then we add the wonderful offbeats with pairs of eighths in the violas and the wonderful pizzicato in cellos and basses! Keep this all quiet and yet sparkling. It’ll be Amazing!! Over this, the first violins play the tune: the sixteenths need to have plenty of spark (strong articulation). When we get to the 7th bar of F, strings should honor the dynamics, including “fp” if you have that.

****STRINGS: Four before G to G.** This is a tricky section where the upper strings need to “interlock” with the lower strings. Strive to make sure it is absolutely rhythmic and incredibly tight. Here are my quick thoughts: Cellos and basses, be sure that the dotted quarters are EXACTLY on the beat and try to keep the eighth note articulate and “quick.” **ALL OF YOU SHOULD USE HOOKED BOWINGS HERE.** I believe this is NOT marked in your parts, so you’ll need to add this. Violins and violas, start SLOW and be sure to think in FOUR so that the accented quarters fall EXACTLY on beat 2 and 4. I believe the hooked bowing will help, since the ultimate tempo is quite fast! Second violins, your part is especially hard because you continue this rhythm for two extra bars and then the violas and cellos continue for yet another two bars. It’s a very cool transition!

ALL who play at 5 after G: Strings must stay very soft (cymbals and horns too). Clarinets will have fun with their solo passage – hoping you’ll be sure that the dotted eighth sixteenths figures are accurate. Avoid letting them turn into triplets.

HORNS: 9 before H to H. This is of course a very exposed passage. Do your best to be sure the dotted quarter eighth note figures are exact (not tripletty) – same idea for everyone else who has this rhythm.

****ALL: LETTER H. This is important! EVERYONE should mark in an accelerando at H that covers four measures.** It’s a gentle accelerando, the purpose of which is to get us back very close to the opening tempo of the piece. Since the “poco tranquillo” section had us in a significantly slower tempo, I choose these four bars to get us back to the main tempo. If you listen carefully the click track here, you should be in great shape.

BRASS: From H to ms. number 182, please don’t play too strong (forte is plenty). But, in ms. 183-184, I’d like a little crescendo to give us some momentum into ms. 185, when the trumpets play a fanfare figure (bring

this out). Brass, in GENERAL, should NEVER keep long notes at a fortissimo dynamic, even if the music says to do so. The idea is that the brass will cover other important parts (timpani is also an issue) if you sustain at that level. Instead, **please come in strong on each whole note and then do a quick diminuendo to mf, and do that again and again each time you play a long whole note figure (or tied whole notes).** BUT, there will be times when I want you to crescendo the FINAL of the whole notes, such as ms. 187 (horns and trombones/tuba). When we have meetings during the All-State event, I'll clarify all these spots for you.

Bassoons, Clarinets, horns 1-2, letter I for 3 measures): Have fun with this! Be as articulate as you can and project.

HARP at letter I. Project these wonderful arpeggios. Five after I and following, these half notes should all be quickly arpeggiated. The last six chords should be played with no arpeggiation. In 212 – 213, make a large crescendo. This is such a wonderful color!

MS. 197 – Flute, Clarinet, Violin 1: Woodwinds should accent the beginning of each four-note figure and diminuendo slightly away on the other three notes. First violins, this is a wonderful showy passage for you. Start strong and honor the dynamics. Once the half notes begin, there will be a gentle ritardando. Follow the click tracks.

ALL who play in the Andante section at ms. 219 and following. I ask that the solos are played by one person. These are the instruments involved: Flute 1, Oboe 1, Clarinet 1, Eng Horn. This is from ms. 219 through ms. 250. (I believe I will hear auditions for these passages.)

VIOLIN 1 solo: I will choose one first violinist to play the solo at letter K to ms. 249. This solo needs to be well projected.

TAMBOURINE at ms. 251 and following: It's marked pp, but strive to be sure all notes are played evenly and exactly in tempo.

ALL: One measure before L, we will take a slight ritard. Listen carefully for the click track here. The cello part is especially vulnerable because of the sextuplet.

At letter L, we go back to the "original" tempo of the piece and this section (L to Q) presents the most challenging passages for the orchestra overall. We call this section the "development" section and it's the one that features the most chromatic writing and plenty of exposed passages for strings and winds. There are a ton of subtle dynamic changes - plenty of softs and then that wonderful spot that suddenly "explodes" at letter O! Four bars before O, the orchestra should practically disappear in order to enhance this wonderful surprise!

TROMBONES 1 and 2: You have a grand sequential duet in bars 366 – 376. How unusual that the piccolo accompanies you! (Strings, too). Work for strong tone and intonation. It's a great moment in this piece!

VIOLIN 2: ms. 377 – 381. Our second-to-none violin section needs to project here. Be sure the eighth notes stay strong at the end of each measure.

ALL: Ms. 382- Q. Everyone should make a nice crescendo into Q. Pull back just a bit at ms. 382 in order to enhance the effect, except for trombones, bassoons, cellos and basses (stay strong throughout this passage).

Note for ALL:

The section at Q is called the recapitulation (return). Note that this section is pretty much the same as the opening of the piece. At ms. 446, there should be a sense of a building (cresc) to letter T. Pace yourselves and try to feel the momentum throughout this passage.

BRASS, TIMP, TRIANGLE, WOODWINDS AT T: *BE SURE TO START EVERY TWO MEASURES STRONG, BUT DIMINUENDO TO MF EACH TIME.* Without this adjustment, the violins – who have the tune – have little chance of being heard.

BRASS IN MS. 466. Here is a moment where you will shine. Herald this fanfare (through ms. 471) and then do as before with the long notes. Start strong, then pull way back (mf at most). But in ms. 478, we'll be adding a cresc into U.

ALL: LETTER W. This is the Coda. Be ready to GO! We will of course take a faster tempo here. Again, just listen carefully to the click track. Stay nimble, be ready to move! Second violins, this quick tempo is hardest on you in ms. 501 and 502. Do the best you can!

VIOLINS/VIOLAS: Ms. 507-511. This is a passage you'll want to "own." It's quick, but it's also very exposed. Thanks for working hard to be sure you can play it at tempo.

TROMBONES: Another shining moment for you in the last five measures of the piece. Second trombone has the third of this A major chord. It can easily be too high, so take care to be sure it's just a little bit lower than you might otherwise play it. Trombones should be sure eighth notes are as strong as the half notes.

Here is a link for a recording that is pretty close to the tempos we'll be aiming for:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1jNQgTVYrY>

I encourage you to spend some time with this recording and listen carefully for how your part fits into the full orchestration. I think you'll find that most of the detailed instructions I've provided are brought to fruition in this exciting performance of the London Symphony.

THANK YOU SO MUCH for investing your time and talents in this endeavor! I very much looking forward to working with you!!

Sincerely,

Steven Amundson
Conductor of the 2021 PMEA All-State Orchestra