Our Resident Composer

Linda Johnson – New Horizons Band of Northern Colorado, Fort Collins, CO

How many New Horizons Bands have resident composers? We are lucky enough to have one in our group....John Benton! John is a longtime percussionist, who just recently expanded his musical credentials by becoming a composer of band music. John, a larger than life presence in the band (he stands 6'7” literally), has written several scores over the past few years which have been performed by local bands.

John grew up in Fort Collins and graduated from Colorado State University with a BA degree in Speech/Drama and a teaching endorsement in K-12 Music and Secondary Speech/Drama/English. He has always loved music and the arts. His favorite percussion instrument is Timpini although he wishes they were made taller! He has also played French horn, English handbell, and Baritone horn.

John taught music and theater for many years and performed in various choirs and bands including the Fort Collins Symphony, the Longmont Symphony, and the Grand Junction Centennial Band. He is currently a percussionist with the Loveland Concert Band and the Foothills Pops Band as well as in our New Horizons Band and is also a choir member of the First United Methodist Church in Fort Collins.

He first dabbled at writing music back in 1967 as a senior in high school when he wrote an arrangement of “Cinco de Mayo” by Herb Alpert for the Fort Collins High School Pep Band. John recalls, “It was the coolest thing ever to hear it played!”

Years later when his daughter was in the Children’s Choir at church, a musical piece was needed to include the Children’s Choir with the Adult Choir. John wrote a procession on the hymn, “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna.”

The recent improvements in music software (John uses Sibelius 7) rekindled his interest in composing and he now has authored several band scores.

John’s first band composition was “New Horizons Concert March” and our band performed this during one of our concerts. Other scores followed and here are some titles and what prompted his musical themes:

- “Adjutant’s Call March” is based on the bugle call from the Civil War.
- “Kansas Morning”, a beautiful melodic piece, was created using John’s impressions of waking up early on his grandparents’ farm. You can hear birds, John Deer tractor, and hymn tunes throughout the piece.
- John wrote the melody of the “Perfect Pickle Polka” to actually fit lyrics. The title refers to an Andy Griffith Show episode where Aunt Bea makes terrible pickles. Andy replaces them with “perfect pickles” from the grocery store.
- Variations on a French Carol”, adapted from Noel X by Louis-Claude D’Aquin, was commissioned for our band member, Gail McNeil.
- “Deep Winter Christmas” combines Holst’s “In the Bleak Midwinter”, parts of Dvorak’s “New World Symphony”, movement 2, and “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring”.

Part of his fascination with clocks resulted in his “Westminster Musical Clock” composition. There are many clocks, 2-against-3 rhythms, cuckoos, ding-dongs, and the Big Ben theme song. He thought about the Harry Janos Suite by Kodaly as he wrote it.

His most recent piece, “Stephen Foster Frolic”, is a compilation of several Stephen Foster melodies.

John would be honored to have other New Horizons Bands perform any of his pieces at no charge, with the stipulation that his name remains on the music as composer and/or arranger, and that copies are not made and passed out to other bands. He will release additional copies, as required. Contact John at: bentonj1950@gmail.com