We Are 'Camerado'

Analysis by Dr. Marc R. Dickey

Michael Markowski's inspiration for this effervescent and accessible work is the last few lines of Walt Whitman's poem "Song of the Open Road," from his collection *Leaves of Grass*. When Whitman couldn't find just the right word in English for his needs as a poet, he was known to borrow and alter words from other languages, sometimes making up new words altogether. In this case, "Camerado" is likely a derivative of the Spanish *camarada* (or possibly the French cognate *camarade*), which means comrade, friend, partner, companion, buddy. Whitman chose to make a special, unique word rather than using an obvious English one to describe this relationship.

Markowski's *Camerado* is quite playable by an advanced middle school or a young high school band. The piece utilizes standard wind band instrumentation and is in *alla breve* throughout, at a very friendly 86 beats per minute. Markowski's rhythmic writing here is characteristically (and literally) off beat, but consistently within the 2/2 meter. Various eighth note patterns give the piece its vitality, with nary a sixteenth note to be seen. If your group does not read the syncopation well, rehearsing sections of the piece in a slower 4/4 and then cranking back up to the published tempo *alla breve* will yield big dividends. The highest pitches in the B♭ clarinet and trumpet are the A above the treble clef staff, and the highest flute note is the G four ledger lines above the staff. The piece is written for five percussionists and tympani, utilizing standard percussion instruments.

Set in the key of E♭ Major, the piece begins with shaker, suspended cymbal struck with snare sticks, tympani, and clarinets stating a mysterious, syncopated introduction, softly and a little shyly. Soon enough, in m. 5 the upper woodwinds and first trumpets add an insistent *ostinato* ("come with me–come with me–come on–with me").

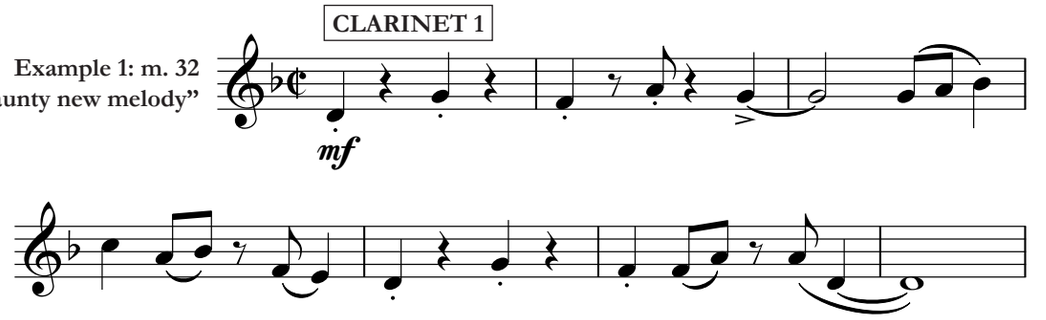
An ascending scale in m. 8 brings us to the "A" section at m. 9, and to the *Camerado* melody, an infectious, ambling four-bar tune that has an inspired sense of camaraderie that just makes one want to pick up a horn and join the band. The consequent four measures toy with the materials presented so far, including a little triadic question-and-answer in the upper woodwinds versus the saxophones and trumpets (m. 15).

The ascending scale returns, leading us to a second presentation of the melody from m. 9, now at m. 17. Rarely one to write literal repetition when fun can be had mixing it up a bit, the version at m. 17 moves material from one set of instruments to another, and the percussion unexpectedly drops out for three measures.

A tri-tone in the bass line at m. 23 signals something is about to change direction, and indeed the second iteration winds up to a climactic *tutti* second inversion E♭ chord in m. 26, which soars about for two measures and then returns to *ostinato* material from mm. 5-7, this time in a dare devil "don't fall into the rests" duet between the winds and percussion (mm. 28-29). Throughout the first 32 measures of *Camerado*, be sure that your percussionists observe the various accents Markowski has notated—it's an important part of the rhythmic fun.

The pitches in the flute part in mm. 26-27 are re-ordered in mm. 30-32 to create a transition to a contrasting section in which the first clarinets are

Example 1: m. 32
a "jaunty new melody"



at first the solitary voice. This jaunty new melody is introduced sparsely in terms of both texture and rhythmic content (m. 32). This tune differs from the first: it is in c minor, it consists of larger intervals, and its melodic contour is overall ascending rather than descending. The *ostinati* referred to earlier are in the percussion now, *mp*.

The c minor melody returns at m. 40, now anything but solitary. Many of our *camerados (cameradi?)* join in, and a very cool heavy backbeat as well as a discernible bass line are mixed in. The scoring of the contrapuntal textures in these eight bars is reminiscent of much more advanced wind band pieces such as Walter Piston's *Tunbridge Fair* or Peter Mennin's *Canzona*. The rhythms bang up against each other in a most satisfying way, and in their own way swing as hard as any jazz you've ever heard. Note that even as the backbeat comes in, the percussion are once again *tacet*. Make sure that the *crescendo* in many of the instruments at m. 47 (unlike m. 45) is observed, so that the *diminuendo* in the echo in mm. 48-50 is effective.

The c minor melody returns a third time, here stated in a playful canon with entrances at mm. 50 and 52, and an aborted one at m. 54. The third canonic gesture sets up a transitory section that utilizes primarily conjunct motion in the melody, alluding to material utilized earlier (e.g., mm. 11-15, mm. 42-47). Here the melodic material is less vital, while the harmonic content shifts from c minor to primarily A♭ Major. The rhythmic content is what is interesting here: the backbeats are back at m. 58, more cunning this time, in that dare devil "don't fall into the rests" way!

The last four measures of this transitory section use familiar material to bring us back to the *Camerado* melody first heard in m. 9. The material from mm. 74-92 is a literal revisitation of mm. 9-27, and then the trumpets remind us that there is a second tune, stated as a bit of a fanfare this time (mm. 93-95).

A slowly ascending off-beat line in the low range of the flute, plus tenor saxophone and horn, leads us from the little fanfare to create a lovely elision to the "B" section of the piece, beginning at m. 98. While the "B" section of *Camerado* is generally lighter and more sustained in style than the "A" section, it still has much rhythmic vitality and motion. The "B" section's first sub-section utilizes the jaunty c minor theme from m. 32, but the rough edges are smoothed out, it is augmented from its original four-

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Example 2: m. 40

measure length to eight, and it is in a major mode now. The woodwind choir scoring here is particularly lush and lovely. The phrase begins in E♭ Major and ends on a beautiful suspension to a c minor chord (mm. 104-105). Note the slight but welcome *crescendo* and *decrescendo* here, in only the 2nd clarinet, tenor saxophone, and horns; there is some colorful magic here waiting to happen.

In the second sub-section, centered on C Major, another Q&A dialogue develops in the trumpets vs. upper woodwinds and horns in mm. 107-113. Be sure to put some grit into the *crescendo* in mm. 108 and 111, to stage the transition from sustained to *staccato* gestures! A brief transition with a long F in the flutes and a *legato* clarinet line condensed from the jaunty theme brings us to the third sub-section at m. 117, this one once again utilizing mostly conjunct motion and focusing in F Major. This section begins with a conversation of beautiful sustained lines that become more angular bit by bit; let the *cantabile* lines sing, and keep the dialogue light through here.

Although the triangle part in mm. 113-114 and 126-127 is marked *mp*, it should be played with courage! Note that the only triplets in all of *Camerado* occur at the end of m. 122; the 1st clarinet, alto saxophones, and horns should take their time here and enjoy the moment, but without making too big a deal of it. There is a wonderful point of repose in mm. 125-126. Note the *decrescendo* and relish this musical moment, set up by a nice little suspended cymbal roll. This is a Markowski signature found in several of his compositions.

At m. 127 the conjunct materials are layered with both sustained and light *staccato* musical styles. Be sure to observe how Markowski extends the motive from G A B♭, to G A B♭ C, G A B♭ C D, and so on, to bring us back to the material of the first sub-section (from m. 98, originally from the jaunty theme at m. 32). This occurs over a stable, insistent *ostinato* on the pitch G in the marimba. Listen to and look at the parts; there is some real *Camerado* going on here. Every wind part ascends, sections taking turns, each doing its part, working together to climb toward a common goal.

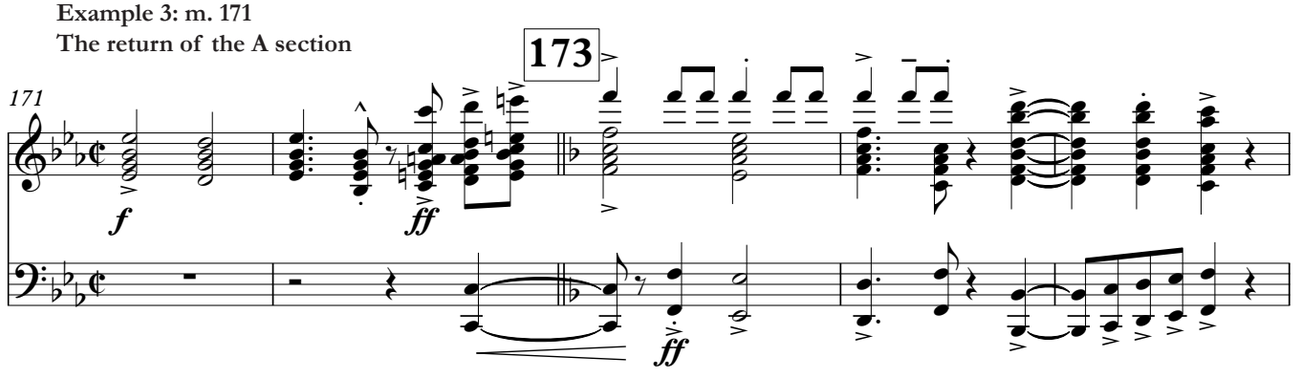
The passages from 127-147 contain quite a bit of imitation and counterpoint to balance, which seem to heighten the suspense and growing tension. At m. 135 the theme is more fully orchestrated, thicker but still very sustained. The G A B♭ cell from m. 127 morphs into a bass line at m. 135 that plays out into a wonderful fully articulated scale pattern. Notice how this phrase also ascends for the next seven measures. The tight little *crescendoed* rolls in the tympani and bass drum at m. 136 are subtle but important, coaxing the bass line along.

We made it! An impromptu party breaks out in the percussion section at m. 147, the trumpets voguing an engaging dance motive in G Major conjunct motion, ratcheted up to B♭ Major as the woodwinds help them do it again three measures later. This is interrupted by bringing back the material that immediately precedes the party scene, a variation on the motive from mm. 145-146. This earnest sounding motive starts to take on a party life of its own, between its increasingly syncopated rhythm and style at m. 153, and the ascending bass line that urges it on in mm. 155-156. *How can a B♭ Major scale possibly sound this happy?!* And, there is some really nice antiphonal choir writing to enjoy through here as well.

The party winds down into a chain of suspensions at m. 163, tension and repose (make sure your band executes the *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, especially in the lower voices!), and then some scale passages over a B♭ pedal that bring us all home to the *Camerado* theme.

The A section returns in m. 171, *a la* m. 9. For two measures.

Example 3: m. 171
The return of the A section



"There is something about clapping hands together that brings us together, unifies us, whether it's clapping along with the last strain of 'The Stars and Stripes Forever' at a summer band concert, fans applauding a home run at a ball game, or an ovation acknowledging a friend for a job well done."

What the heck is going on?

Markowski takes what at first appears to be a standard recapitulation, and unexpectedly parodies what sounds like a cliché modulation to bring excitement as we approach an ending. Not so fast! He proceeds to deftly apply everything up his very long sleeve to uncliché the cliché. The modulation is set off by an *ostinato* fanfare in the flutes and glockenspiel, and a new punchy syncopated bass line (m. 173). In m. 176, a new chromatic counter-line enters, primarily in the tenor saxophone and horns, but split up amongst a few other voices as well. This line culminates with a full-on blue note in m. 179. Be sure your players know to bring out this line if they have all or part of it!

To further decliché the cliché, the F Major iteration of the *Camerado* tune now devolves back into E♭ Major (m. 182). This last rendition of the *Camerado* theme is nearly the same as when we heard it in the "A" section back at m. 17, but this time when we reach the second inversion E♭ Major chord (originally at m. 26), that sweet, sweet blue note comes back in a *fortissimo* (bring this out!!) counter-line in the 3rd clarinet, alto saxophones, and horns (mm. 191-192).

Camerado's coda begins at m. 195, with a melodic *ostinato* fashioned from the jaunty theme, accompanied by an insistently syncopated B♭ bass line. Like a Beethoven coda, you figure out soon enough it is the end, because the B♭ goes no where but B♭, stays on and in B♭, forever and ever for the final twenty-one measures (roughly ten per cent of the piece!).

For all of its three flats in the key signature, *Camerado* ends in a very emphatic B♭ Major, reveling in its own offbeat (again, very literally) nature to its conclusion. Note the dramatic, rapidly shifting dynamics required for the tympani roll in the penultimate bar, *fp* to *ff* in less than two seconds.

A new percussion instrument is added in the coda as well, namely hand clapping. The hand clapping begins in the percussion section, and sections of wind players join bit by bit. A counter line of the familiar jaunty materials enters in the tenor saxophone and horns at m. 200, and by m. 201 there is a whole lot of riotous counterpoint going on, even including two-part counterpoint amongst the hand clappers.

The hand clapping in *Camerado* feels like just the right thing at the right time in the right piece. This is not the first wind band work to ask wind players to hand clap, but this hand clapping seems to emanate from some place very sincere; it doesn't come across as contrived or gimmicky, but rather naturally and musically. There is something about clapping hands together that brings us together, unifies us, whether it's clapping along with the last strain of *The Stars and Stripes Forever* at a summer band concert, fans applauding a home run at a ball game, or an ovation acknowledging a friend for a job well done—when we applaud together we are partners, comrades, buddies.

We are *Camerado*.

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