

# Eurotänze

## Dance Suite for Brass Ensemble (2006)

4 Trumpets in Bb, doubling flugelhorn, and Trumpets I & II doubling Bb piccolo;  
2 Horns in F; 3 Trombones; Bass Trombone; Tuba

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Jon Jeffrey Grier

### Program Notes

This suite of stylized dances is modeled on dance suites of the Baroque era, though none of these specific dances were included in typical 17th- or 18th-century suites. The sequence of moods and tempi in *Eurotänze* is symmetrical: movements I and VI. are fast and wild, II. and V. slow and pensive, and movements III. and IV. are upbeat, performed continuously, and with a brief return of III. Much of the harmony is jazz-derived.

Obvious from the outset, as it is tossed among the trumpets, is a melodic cliché, the *turn*: a quick motion up from, back to, down from, and back to a starting note. Though historically used most often to ornament a simpler bit of melody, the turn is here elevated to the status of an essential and obsessive melodic element. It is abundantly present in all of the dances, with variations in tempo, rhythm, shape, and prominence-- analogous, perhaps, to the many regional variations of basic European ideas.

**I. Prelude** As with many dance suites of the Baroque, *Eurotänze* begins with a free-form *prelude* devoid of dance rhythms. It presents the majority of the melodic and harmonic ideas employed in the dances that follow. Colorful, fast and agitated, its level of excitement will not be equaled until the last dance of the suite.

**II. Walzer** The *waltz* evolved in Germany around the turn of the 19th century from the *ländler*, an Austrian peasant dance, and has remained perhaps the world's most popular dance form in triple meter. Soon after its invention the waltz was adapted for formal composition by many composers of stature. This one is slow and wistful, ending in question and melancholy. Extended trumpet duets recall the two short trumpet duets of the Prelude.

**III. Habanera** The *habanera* is a slow, sensuous dance in duple meter that grew to enormous popularity in the latter part of the 19th century. Developing in Spanish-controlled Cuba and named for its capital, Havana, it is the ancestor of a number of later dances, including the Argentinean *tango*. Many European composers composed habaneras, including the famous example from Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), mischievously quoted here. In the loudest passages the habanera rhythms morph easily into another New World melting pot style, a jazzy funk. The Habanera proceeds without pause to--

**IV. Reel (& Habanera reprise)** The *reel* has ancient roots, likely in Ireland; it remains popular across the British Isles and is a staple in Celtic groups today. Written in a moderately fast quadruple meter, the tune is usually busy and relentless. Here the exuberant, tinny melodies of fiddles and penny whistles are imitated by piccolo trumpets; eventually all the instruments take their turn (!) with the frivolity. A lyrical trombone solo foreshadows the return of the Habanera, which serves as a long *coda* after the theme of the reel has wound itself out. This A-B-A form (habanera-reel-habanera) anchors the symmetrical middle of the suite and is similar to the common pairing of Baroque dances, such as *minuet and trio*.

**V. Pavane** The *pavane*, a sober processional dance in quadruple meter, is likely of Italian or Spanish origin. It became popular across Europe, especially in Spain, and was often paired with the faster *galliard* (from Fr. *gaillarde*, "merry"). The first arrangements for instrumental ensembles were published in the mid-16th century in France; a number of later French composers, impelled by a nostalgia for Spanish style and custom, composed pavanés, including examples by Saint-Saëns, Fauré, and the famous *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899) by Maurice Ravel. Much of the melody in this movement--borrowed from movements I. & II.-- is given to the alto trombone, an instrument now making a comeback after being largely ignored since the early 19th century. The Pavane proceeds without pause to--

**VI. Tarantella** The *tarantella* is named after the town of Taranto in southern Italy and is popularly associated with the large local wolf spider or "tarantula" (*Lycosa tarentula*, also named for Taranto) whose bite was allegedly deadly and could be cured only by frenetic dancing. In fact the venom is not hallucinogenic or especially dangerous, and the spider strives to avoid human contact; it may be that the amusing association of spider bite and therapeutic dance was a later invention designed to circumvent church proscriptions against dancing. The *tarantella* is in fast 6/8 meter with a vigorous, perpetual-motion melody. Dozens of composers, including Liszt and Chopin, have written stylized tarantellas. The present example is true to the classic model and balances the character of the opening Prelude.

## Practical & Interpretive Suggestions

**I. Prelude** Tempo fast and absolutely steady so that no forward propulsion is lost in exchanges between instruments. Small notes at ends of *glissando* lines are target pitches, to be reached at the end of the *glissando*. Diamond-headed notes in horns represent whatever highest note can be reached; precise pitch is not important. Dynamic contrasts extreme.

**II. Walzer** Gentle and lyrical most of its length; modest *rubato* in solo passages is appropriate. At rehearsal B. (and similar places), strive to balance entrances for a blended and bell-like texture. Optional: the trumpet parts call for flugelhorns at the end, but flugelhorns may be used for the entire movement if desired.

**III. Habanera** Slow, but spirited and propulsive; be careful not to rush rhythms within the beat. Solo lines should be played with great passion, even when soft. At rehearsal C. the ensemble should be loud and boisterous, but be sure to let the horns sound through with the theme at their entrance. As the next movement is begun *attacca*, the trombones and tuba are provided with movement-overlapping parts to facilitate page turns.

**IV. Reel** (& reprise of Habanera) Fast, propulsive, generally light and transparent. Be careful not to let accompaniment parts become too heavy; be sure to observe rests in these parts. At bar 129, the return to the tempo and expressive mode of the Habanera should be instantaneous.

**V. Pavane** Slow and dark, this is primarily a solo for alto trombone, interrupted by a flügelhorn solo. Though tempo remains steady until the end, rhythms should be generally soft-edged and solo lines should be rendered flexibly. As this movement ends on a phrygian cadence and the next movement is begun *attacca*, the horns are provided with movement-overlapping parts.

**VI. Tarantella** Wild, frantic, diabolic. Avoid losing tempo in 3/4 bars (8<sup>th</sup> notes are constant). A more mysterious mood should prevail in the development section at bar 75; this returns at 143, turning quickly into the ultra high-octane finish.

**Score is completely notated in actual sounding pitches.**

## About the Composer...

Jon Jeffrey Grier holds a B.A. from Kalamazoo College, where he studied composition with Lawrence Rackley, an M.M. in Composition from Western Michigan University, studying with Ramon Zupko, and an M.M. in Theory and a D.M.A. in Composition from the University of South Carolina, where he studied with Jerry Curry, Dick Goodwin and Sam Douglas. Jon has taught Advanced Placement Music Theory and Music History at the Greenville Fine Arts Center, a magnet school of the arts in Greenville, SC, since 1988. He composes frequently for student and faculty ensembles at the FAC, usually when he really should be grading papers. Jon has also been a writer/keyboardist with the jazz-fusion ensembles Oracle and Edgewise since 1984. He lives in Greenville with wife Marion, sons Benjamin and Daniel, and lab-mix-mutt Sally Mae.