

## Voyage

### *For Trombone Sextet*

Voyage is a medium-scale chamber work, specifically for six trombones. The orchestration is for one alto trombone, four tenor trombones and one bass trombone.

The alto trombone part is not high; indeed, it is not outside the range of a good tenor trombone player. However, an alto trombone instrument is called for because of the lightness of tone compared to a tenor trombone.

The title of the music was chosen after the first draft of the piece was completed – the ostinato rhythm of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombones and bass trombone is reminiscent of the mechanical beat of a large engine, such as that found on an ocean going liner. Voyage is not, however, programme music; for example, the mental image of an ocean liner is not to be shared with the listener, who, instead, must be left to imagine any type of large engine. Neither is the type of ship or the type of voyage specified.

The engine effect, indicated by the mark “*quasi motore*,” dominates much of the music. This effect comes from the foursquare rhythm, accentuated by the ostinato’s unison F and Bb on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> beats of each bar respectively, and phrasing that occurs on the 1<sup>st</sup> beat of each bar. These unisons also give the ostinato a slow two-in-a-bar feeling – this slowness of beat is why the meter is marked 4/2 using quavers, rather than a 4/4 using semi-quavers, and why the beat halves from 132 to 66 at bar 11, returning to 132 at the coda at bar 99.

Three devices build up the engine effect:

- The ostinato figure includes more notes each time it is reiterated, with the exception of the rhythm figure of bar 85, which is the same as bar 58.
- Each entry from the bass trombone and two of the tenor trombones is introduced in turn. The time elapsing between the entry of each player changes with each iteration; the first iteration, at bar 11, has four (4<sup>th</sup> trombone bar 15) then two (3<sup>rd</sup> trombone bar 17) bars between each entry, the second and third iterations, at bars 43 and 59, have all parts entering at once, and the final iteration, at bar 84 has the entrants after two (4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombone – bar 87) and one (3<sup>rd</sup> tenor trombone – bar 88) bars respectively.
- Every iteration increases in dynamic over the previous one, *piano* (bar 11), *mezzo piano* (bar 43), *mezzo forte* (bar 58), *forte* (bar 85). These devices also maintain the musical interest and development.

The first device can seem to be a contradiction in terms, but the sense of ostinato does work even though the number of notes increases. It works because the ostinato is of rhythm, not melody; the strong beat notes, which are the most important in this work, are present from the first time that the figure appears, in bar 11.

In early drafts, all of the players of the ostinato rhythm played all of its notes every time the ostinato appears, and all played from the start of a section where the rhythm appears. The second and third devices appeared in later drafts.

Although *Voyage* is a short piece – it lasts approximately five minutes – it has been conceived with a large-scale structure, this structure is emphasised by the recapitulation of the introduction at bar 99.

There are many rests in the parts to allow easier phrasing on trombones and to help to ensure that the phrasing used by performers is in line with the expectations of the composer.

The introduction is based around a motif (Figure 1), which is used and developed throughout the work. This motif is played first by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tenor trombones against its inversion in the 4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombone and bass trombone. The motif is a trumpet-call that heralds the start of the voyage. The contrary motion creates more interest in an opening declaration than would four parts moving in parallel.

The figure shows a musical score for the first bar of the introduction, marked with a first ending bracket labeled '1'. It consists of four staves, each representing a different trombone part: 2nd Tenor Trombone, 3rd Tenor Trombone, 4th Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone. The music is in 4/4 time and marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The 2nd and 3rd tenor trombones play the motif in parallel motion, while the 4th tenor and bass trombones play its inversion in contrary motion. The motif is a trumpet-call that heralds the start of the voyage.

Figure 1. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombones, and bass trombone bar 1

The motif is reintroduced in bar 4 up a tone, however this time all parts are in parallel. The juxtaposition of parallel motion against contrary motion creates further interest.

The short bridge passage of bars 8 to 10 (see figure 2) increases tension by repeating the same figure, however each repetition is shorter than before. For example, a minim is replaced by a crotchet, and in each repetition the dynamic contrast is larger than the previous repetition. Tension is further increased by the addition of the alto trombone an octave above the bass trombone, which then drops an octave.

8

Alto Trombone

2nd Tenor Trombone

3rd Tenor Trombone

4th Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

Figure 2. Bars 8–10

The work is in rondo form, based on the ostinato rhythm figure, with a series of four episodes of varying length. The figure begins at bars 11, the lines appearing one by one; all of the lines are in place by bar 31 (Figure 3), 43 (Figure 4), 58 (Figure 5) and 85 (which is the same as bar 58).

18

3rd Tenor Trombone

4th Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

Figure 3. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombones and bass trombone bar 18

43 C

3rd Tenor Trombone

4th Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

Figure 4. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombones and bass trombone bar 43

58 E

3rd Tenor Trombone  
*mf*

4th Tenor Trombone  
*mf*

Bass Trombone  
*mf*

Figure 5. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tenor trombones and bass trombone bar 58

The rondo section also features a new motif in the 1<sup>st</sup> trombone (see figure 6). In the second and subsequent iterations of the rondo, the alto trombone recalls the opening bar of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tenor trombone, thereby melodically linking the introduction and the rondo section. Initially these features alternate, for example the 1<sup>st</sup> trombone plays at bar 45 and then the alto trombone answers at 46. In later iterations, these features are played at the same time, for example, in bar 59. This is another way in which the rondo develops.

19

1st Tenor Trombone  
*p*

Figure 6. 1<sup>st</sup> tenor trombone bar 19

The first episode is from bar 33 to bar 42. It consists of a figure presented first in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> trombones bar 33 (Figure 7), then in an extended modified version in the 4<sup>th</sup> and bass trombone at bar 37. The modifications (different leaps and inversion of the first two quavers) maintain the interest. Both times consist of two halves *mezzo piano* then *piano*; the last time (bar 42) incorporates a crescendo into the extension that forms a bridge passage into the rondo at 43.

33

2nd Tenor Trombone  
*mp* *p*

3rd Tenor Trombone  
*mp* *p*

Figure 7. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> trombones bars 33-36

The second episode is from bar 55 to bar 57 (Figure 8). This short episode starts with a bar of quavers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> trombone, which is answered in inversion in the bass trombone; then an arpeggio figure that leads into a short rondo iteration from bar 58.

Figure 8. Bars 55-57

The third episode begins at bar 63 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> trombones and bass trombone. Whilst there is an almost non-stop quaver rhythm, the pulse changes to maintain the interest, for example bar 64 which is in 8/8 has three beats in a 3+3+2 structure (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. 3<sup>rd</sup> trombone bar 64

Tension is created in this episode by the semi-tone motifs in the alto and bass trombones (Figure 10). The tension is increased by reducing the length of the first note from a dotted crotchet to a crotchet and, finally, to a quaver.

Figure 10. Alto and bass trombones bars 67-68

Careful thought is needed on the semi-quavers because of dexterity issues with the trombone. Running semi-quavers are written so that there are never more than two shift positions between notes, for example, bar 69 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tenor trombone (Figure 11) where the shift positions are 6 (alternative position for F), 4, 2, 1, 3.

Figure 11. 2<sup>nd</sup> trombone bar 69

Tension is then released as the number of players decreases to two at bar 75, then one at bar 76. Three crescendi in succession (bars 80 to 84) lead into the rondo at bar 85. This final presentation of the rondo is the most complex with more notes in the

ostinato against the alto trombone and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> tenor trombones recalling the opening motif in bar 89 (Figure 12). This figure is played four times, each time the number of beats between the time it appears reduces. The rondo is played twice with a short episode of quavers over an inversion in the 4<sup>th</sup> trombone of the motif of bar 67 (Figures 10 and 13).

Figure 12. Alto, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> tenor trombones, bar 89

Figure 13. Bars 94-96

Voyage closes with a coda starting at bar 99, marked *tempo primo*, which reuses material from the introduction closing with an extra note in bar 108 compared with bar 10. This symmetry gives shape to the work and indicates to the listener that the work is reaching a conclusion.