

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 2nd, 3rd and 4th 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 1st and 3rd beats of each bar respectively, and phrasing that occurs on the 1st 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 (4th trombone bar 15) then two (3rd 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 (4th tenor trombone – bar 87) and one (3rd 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 2nd and 3rd tenor trombones against its inversion in the 4th 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 four trombone parts: 2nd Tenor Trombone, 3rd Tenor Trombone, 4th Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone. The score 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. A first ending bracket labeled '1' spans the first two measures of each part.

Figure 1. 2nd, 3rd and 4th 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

mp *mf* *p* *f* *pp* *f*

Detailed description: This figure shows the first five staves of a musical score for bars 8, 9, and 10. The staves are labeled from top to bottom: Alto Trombone, 2nd Tenor Trombone, 3rd Tenor Trombone, 4th Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone. The Alto Trombone part consists of sustained notes with dynamic markings *p*, *f*, and *pp* leading to *f*. The four Tenor Trombone parts (2nd, 3rd, 4th, and Bass) play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with dynamic markings *mp*, *mf*, *p*, and *f* for the first two parts, and *p*, *f*, *pp*, and *f* for the last two parts. The Bass Trombone part has a dynamic marking *pp* leading to *f*.

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

Detailed description: This figure shows three staves of a musical score for bar 18. The staves are labeled: 3rd Tenor Trombone, 4th Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone. Each staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The 3rd Tenor Trombone part starts with a half rest followed by eighth notes. The 4th Tenor Trombone part starts with a quarter rest followed by eighth notes. The Bass Trombone part starts with a quarter rest followed by eighth notes.

Figure 3. 3rd and 4th tenor trombones and bass trombone bar 18

43 C

3rd Tenor Trombone

4th Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

mp

Detailed description: This figure shows three staves of a musical score for bar 43. The staves are labeled: 3rd Tenor Trombone, 4th Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone. A common time signature 'C' is enclosed in a box above the first staff. Each staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Bass Trombone part has a dynamic marking *mp* at the beginning.

Figure 4. 3rd and 4th tenor trombones and bass trombone bar 43

Figure 5 shows the musical notation for the 3rd Tenor Trombone, 4th Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone parts at bar 58. The score is marked with a box containing the number 58 and the letter E. Each part is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The 3rd Tenor Trombone part starts with a *mf* dynamic. The 4th Tenor Trombone part also starts with a *mf* dynamic. The Bass Trombone part starts with a *mf* dynamic. The notation consists of eighth and quarter notes across four measures.

Figure 5. 3rd and 4th tenor trombones and bass trombone bar 58

The rondo section also features a new motif in the 1st trombone (see figure 6). In the second and subsequent iterations of the rondo, the alto trombone recalls the opening bar of the 2nd tenor trombone, thereby melodically linking the introduction and the rondo section. Initially these features alternate, for example the 1st 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.

Figure 6 shows the musical notation for the 1st Tenor Trombone part at bar 19. The score is marked with the number 19. The part is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation consists of a half note followed by a quarter note, with a *p* dynamic marking below the staff.

Figure 6. 1st tenor trombone bar 19

The first episode is from bar 33 to bar 42. It consists of a figure presented first in the 2nd and 3rd trombones bar 33 (Figure 7), then in an extended modified version in the 4th 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.

Figure 7 shows the musical notation for the 2nd Tenor Trombone and 3rd Tenor Trombone parts at bars 33-36. The score is marked with the number 33. The 2nd Tenor Trombone part is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The 3rd Tenor Trombone part is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation consists of eighth and quarter notes across four measures. The 2nd Tenor Trombone part starts with a *mp* dynamic and ends with a *p* dynamic. The 3rd Tenor Trombone part starts with a *mp* dynamic and ends with a *p* dynamic.

Figure 7. 2nd and 3rd 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 2nd 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 3rd and 4th 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. 3rd 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 2nd tenor trombone (Figure 11) where the shift positions are 6 (alternative position for F), 4, 2, 1, 3.

Figure 11. 2nd 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 1st and 2nd 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 4th trombone of the motif of bar 67 (Figures 10 and 13).

Figure 12 shows the musical score for the Alto, 1st Tenor, and 2nd Tenor Trombones in bar 89. The score is in 3/4 time and features a rhythmic motif of eighth notes. The Alto Trombone part starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The 1st Tenor Trombone and 2nd Tenor Trombone parts also feature the motif, with the 2nd Tenor Trombone part marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

Figure 12. Alto, 1st and 2nd tenor trombones, bar 89

Figure 13 shows the musical score for the Trombone parts (Alto, 1st Tenor, 2nd Tenor, 3rd Tenor, 4th Tenor, and Bass) from bars 94 to 96. The score is in 3/4 time and features a rhythmic motif of eighth notes. The Alto, 1st Tenor, and 2nd Tenor Trombone parts are marked with mezzo-piano (*mp*) and forte (*f*) dynamics. The 3rd Tenor Trombone part is marked with forte (*f*) dynamics. The 4th Tenor Trombone part is marked with mezzo-piano (*mp*) and forte (*f*) dynamics. The Bass Trombone part is marked with forte (*f*) dynamics.

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.