

Inside The Score: True North

This chart is one of my favorites. I really like the melody, the cool “open” sounding chords, and the vibe. I’ve directed it several times, and have heard it many times at festivals where I’ve been an adjudicator/clinician. Here are my tips...the things I say most often.

At the top: bass, play as legato as possible, and 8va if possible. Match the phrasing of the alto. Play each phrase with a little dynamic arc.

At m. 13: small group of horns, same phrasing note as above. Tpt. 2 joins alto for the melody, and bass returns to the rhythm section (adjust volume accordingly!) Same thing at m. 33 (melody now alto 2 + tpt. 2)

Rhythmic “gotchas”: There are a lot of spots where the melody has to land on the downbeat. Too many times it ends up on the 4+ before (the players are locked into the syncopation mode I guess.) The usual culprits are mm. 11, 23, 80, and 100. Remember...the last note of the melody is on “one!”

Balance: saxes, go easy in mm. 23 – 26; the melody is in bones, then trumpets.

Solo section: The written alto solo (mm. 33-40) should have a contemporary vibe. Feel free to stylize and interpret. The solo changes are designed so that the soloist can hang out in the key of F major (concert) for the entire time. Start with simpler, melodic ideas, and play “inside the vibe” of the rhythm section and backgrounds. As things build, the solo needs to build also...register, density, intensity, volume. Check out the soloist on the demo at the Kendor web site...sounds great!

The solo practice track on the Kendor web site is SO GOOD! Inspiring to practice with, and it’ll give your rhythm section something to shoot for.

Rhythm section: It’s not super clear in the score, but drums should start the solo section at m. 46 with hihat and cross stick. I’d switch to ride cymbal and snare at m. 54, but same some heat for m. 62! The emotional peak of the chart is at m. 70, for sure. Make sure the band comes down around m. 74. Piano has some nice “ear candy” at mm. 74 – 77 and 90 - 91; judicious use of the damper pedal works well here. Guitar (mm. 46 – 53) let the F and c notes ring together; think chord, not single notes. A chorus pedal is great here!

Color: Vibes are nice doubling the melody. I wish more bands would use the optional wordless vocal as a melody double too...very cool! If you go this route, keep the vocal sound very light and airy. Have the sound person mix it just under the alto melody (it’s a texture, not a vocal feature.) This is super important at festivals, when a stranger is running sound.

I hope this “Inside the Score” gave you some things to work on at your next rehearsals. Please let me know if you have any other questions. And, if there’s a cool video of your group’s performance, send me the link!

--Mike