

Distant Stars

Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr.

Program Notes

Distant Stars was written for the young percussion section of the Sunnyside Middle School Beginning Band in Lafayette, Indiana. These wonderful students were excited about going to solo/ensemble contest and I was eager to write this piece for that event. The title has a dual meaning. First, with their fine potential, I felt that, in the not too distant future, they would be stars in the band program. Secondly, Sunnyside Middle School was the “Home of the Stars” and I thought that using this title would mean something special to these young Sunnyside “Stars.” The kids did a fine job at contest that year I have had several local school groups play *Distant Stars* since then.

Performance Notes

Distant Stars employs several rhythmic ideas that are passed around the ensemble in various instrument combinations. The idea that begins at 25 is a 4-measure phrase that has a hemiola-like feel to it. It is a pretty neat pattern to listen to but young players have to really concentrate to continue to find count 1 even though it doesn't always feel like count 1. Unison rhythmic landmarks, like measure 4, are placed at the ends of many phrases as a unifying musical device and as an aid for students to find their place if they happen to get lost.

The tom-tom parts are best played with snare drum sticks using standard snare drum matched-grip technique. It is standard practice to set concert toms like you would set up timpani: the low drum goes on the left. Timpani sticking rules apply to most tom parts, the exceptions being (1) parts that are written for marching toms and (2) parts that act like toms on a drumset. In the latter case, many players set their toms high to low, left to right.

If you do not have 4 concert toms you can substitute bongos, congas, timbales, drumset toms or different pitches snare drums.

If at all possible, the bass drummer should use a concert instrument and use hand dampening as opposed to internal muffling (like on a marching bass) or draping a cloth or towel over the instrument. I like to teach my students that bass drums should be played with good technique that includes using different beating spots and hand dampening. In this piece, loud passages can be played toward the middle of the head and all other passages can be played @ halfway from the center to the rim. A bass drum is not just a big loud target that anyone can hit! It takes special skills and fine musicianship to be a good bass drummer.



Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr. lives in Lafayette, Indiana with his wife Kim and four children. He is a band director in the Lafayette (IN) School Corporation where he currently directs the concert and jazz bands at Tecumseh Middle School and is an assistant director at

Jefferson High School. During his 20+ years as a public school teacher he has taught instrumental music at every level from elementary band and orchestra through teaching applied percussion at Purdue University. Jeff holds degrees from Butler University and Northwestern University where he studied band arranging with John P. Paynter, Don Owens and Don Casey. In addition to a busy teaching schedule he is active as a freelance percussionist with many regional jazz and concert groups. He is an experienced adjudicator, clinician and arranger for concert, jazz, marching and percussion ensembles and is a member of the Central States Judges Association. He can be seen (briefly!) as the band director in the Paramount Pictures movie "Blue Chips" with Shaquille O'Neal and Nick Nolte.