

Dear Berks County String Teachers,

February 24, 2008

Greetings from a Chester County String Teacher! I am honored to have been selected to conduct the Berks County Elementary String Festival on March 15th. I'm looking forward to meeting all of you and working with your students.

I hope you have enjoyed working on the five selections for the Festival. I know I really enjoyed going through all your suggestions that Charles sent me and hope that the final selections will prove to be entertaining for both the audience and musicians. To add a bit of interest, I have asked Charles to help me amass a variety of percussion instruments, among them a bike horn, duck call and coo-coo whistle. I look forward to hearing virtuoso performances on these from many of you (practice your duck call chops!). There are 7 assorted noisemakers for the Tangerine Rag alone which should be especially fun and some heavy chains that need droppers in the Castle Lore piece. Speaking of Castle Lore: does anyone play a bodhran? They do add a very nice Irish touch although I have to admit that I had to look up what it was!

As I look through all the pieces tonight I thought I might bring to your attention a few of the possible pitfalls. You probably don't need this information as you've long ago discovered them--that is unless you have had too much on your plate or have had too many snow days. If so, this list might save us some time and frustration on the 15th. By composition, here are some of things that may need attention:

SUNBURST: Dynamics

THEMES FROM SYMPHONY NO. 8 (Third movement): Besides the hooked bows the biggest problem with this will probably be intonation. Although most of these notes are in easy passages each section has some challenges in this realm:

BASSES: Eb and G# with half pos. in m21, m53, m88 and m93

CELLOS: G# (forward extension) in m29

VIOLAS: Eb, Db and F# (H3 on C string) in m30, m35, m62, m63

2ND VIOLINS: Ab, Eb, G#, and A# in m27, m30, m60, 64 and m74

1ST VIOLINS: Bb, D#(H3) and Eb(L4) in m1, m30 and m58, m80

DRAMATIC ESSAY: Spiccato (preferred) or staccato bowing in m15-39 (sticky bows for the basses!), unexpected rests and dynamics. I am going to have only the first stand from each section play in m9-15 and m51-57. This should provide a DRAMATIC pianissimo.

TANGERINE RAG: Dynamics, unexpected rests and a couple of intonation problems (Bb in cellos and 2nd violins).

CASTLE LORE: Awkward passage at m26-32 and m50-56 for the violins and possibly a rhythmically difficult passage at m34-41 for the cellos and basses.

That's about it for now. I look forward to meeting all of you and to a satisfying musical experience on the 15th.

Sincerely, **Tom Breton**

Tom Breton, Downingtown String Teacher and Associate Conductor of the Chester County Youth Orchestra