

PRESENTING
THE FIRST PRIZE WINNER
MICHAEL MARKOWSKI
FOR **SHADOW RITUALS**

CATEGORY 2—YOUNG BAND
USA



by Dr. Keith Kinder

Photo by John Markowski

Shadow Rituals, by the impressive young composer Michael Markowski, was the unanimous winner of Category 2 — Young Band, of *The Frank Ticheli Composition Contest*, sponsored by Manhattan Beach Music in the spring of 2006. The work is a dazzling display of rhythmic energy, attractive melody and colorful scoring, but beyond those considerations it is also a wonderfully integrated composition that demonstrates the imagination a fine composer can bring to the use of limited musical material.

The highly rhythmic context is established immediately in a

short percussion introduction and in the first theme. [See Example 1: Theme A, bars 5–14 (clarinets)]

This melody, played in unison by the clarinets, promptly creates a number of rhythmic principles that will pervade the composition. Much of the work is in 5/4, but the meter signature changes frequently. All of the thematic materials present syncopation that

is enhanced by accents and staccato articulations. The phrasal structure incorporates antecedent and consequent phrases of different lengths.

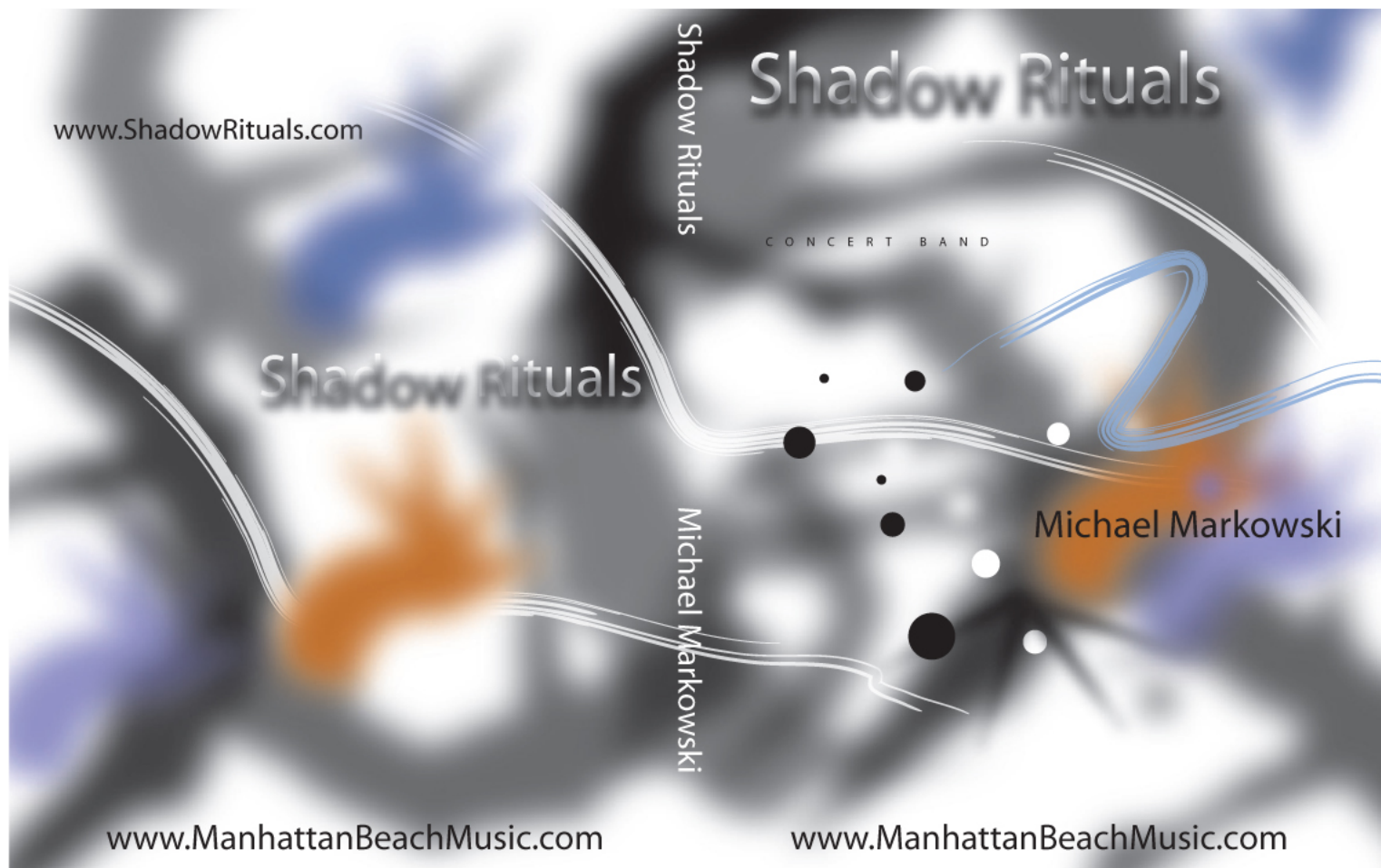
Theme A introduces other important concepts as well. Har-

Example 1, Theme A, *Shadow Rituals*

monically, it appears to be in Phrygian mode, but the intervallic content—P5, m2, P5, m3—is more important to the construction of the piece. The melody is repeated three times. At its second appearance it is scored for flutes and glockenspiel over an imitative accompaniment based on the descending minor third from the end of the second bar. A new consequent phrase, played by clarinets, low saxophones and horns and later by trumpets, flutes and oboes, is extended to nine bars. At the third statement the tune is again in the clarinets over another

drum. Not surprisingly, Markowski's percussion scoring drives the music forward and reinforces the rhythmic structure; however, he also enhances the articulation by employing choked cymbal and slapstick. A short transition leads to Theme B. [See Example 2: Theme B, bars 45–53 (horns)]

While this is the first full statement of the secondary theme, the transition that precedes it has already introduced the initial motive, and, indeed, this motive appeared as early as bar 18. Also, the two themes are unmistakably closely related through



accompaniment based on motives from Theme A. An extended consequent (clarinets and flutes) leads to a full band unison statement of the motive, B-flat, D-flat, E-flat at bar 34–5, which signals the end of the primary theme area. Overall, this opening section firmly establishes the compositional principles that Markowski will employ throughout the work. Virtually every melodic fragment can be directly related to the primary theme, but the composer creates variety through scoring, dynamics and articulation, generating a masterful blend of unity and contrast. The percussion writing is exemplary. While six players are required, the only “exotic” instrument called for is one brake

intervallic content. Contrast to the initial theme is provided by scoring and rhythmic structure.

Theme B elides into a substantial, multi-sectional development that presents a remarkable series of episodes based on fragmentation and recombination of the two themes. The initial episode is focused on the opening motive of theme A and presents it in augmentation in low brass, at its original speed in the striking combination of trumpets, piccolo and glockenspiel, and then in canon in the high woodwinds. In the second episode, Theme B appears in the upper woodwinds accompanied by fragments from Theme A.

The two episodes that begin at bars 82 and 92 are extraordinary. The first is a chorale in 5/4 in which the first and second bars of Theme A are set in counterpoint against each other. Both the 2+3 and the 3+2 rhythmic patterns in 5/4 are presented simultaneously, creating an engaging cross rhythm with accents on both beats three and four of each bar. The ensuing

ful “held back” quality, as if it is struggling against the meter, which, of course, it is. Simultaneously, the woodwinds and horns present Theme A in augmentation (one-quarter speed). The slow progression of this version of the tune adds to the restrained character of these bars, while flute/clarinet flourishes consisting of contrary motion scales and loud percussion out-

Example 2, Theme B, *Shadow Rituals*



episode introduces what might be called Theme C, except that it uses the exact notes of the initial motive of Theme A, somewhat re-ordered. [See Example 3: Theme C', bars 94–100 (euphonium)]

This theme is a precise palindrome, and in the subsequent bars is developed canonically.

Shifting meter, which requires a lot of syncopation, might obscure the sense of canon, but Markowski cleverly set the first set of entries for solo players on bassoon, alto saxophone and clarinet and the spare texture plus timbral contrast preserves the answering effect.

An episode employing canonic development of the opening motive of Theme B leads to a restatement at bar 139 of Theme A in almost its original form. These bars sound like a recapitulation; however, only the initial phrase is articulated; the consequent is a blending of the two principal themes in a climactic passage employing full band.

What follows is another marvelous musical moment. Theme A appears in trumpets in exactly its original form, except rhythmically altered to fit into 6/4 meter instead of 5/4. The hemiola required to accomplish this design gives the melody a wonder-

ful “held back” quality, as if it is struggling against the meter, which, of course, it is. Simultaneously, the woodwinds and horns present Theme A in augmentation (one-quarter speed). The slow progression of this version of the tune adds to the restrained character of these bars, while flute/clarinet flourishes consisting of contrary motion scales and loud percussion out-

bursts maintain forward momentum. At the coda (bar 164) all sense of restraint vanishes. Rapid woodwind swirls, held brass chords and restatements of the opening motives of the two themes bring the work to a rousing close. With this work, Michael Markowski has established himself as a major new voice in the world of band composition. While the most immediately appealing aspect of this work is its rhythmic vitality, the score reveals a highly imaginative musical mind capable of creating compelling melodic materials, well integrated harmonic contexts and colorful soundscapes. Perhaps most impressive, however, is his adeptness in working with his chosen musical materials. What will follow *Shadow Rituals*? One cannot but be excited by the possibilities.

Dr. Keith W. Kinder is Associate Professor of Music at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, where he conducts the concert band and the chamber orchestra, leads the Music Education program and teaches courses in conducting and music education. As an recognized expert in wind literature and performance, he presents regularly at conferences worldwide. He is the author of *Best Music for Chorus and Winds* (Manhattan Beach), *The Wind and Wind-Chorus Music of Anton Bruckner* (Greenwood), and *Prophetic Trumpets: Homage, Worship and Celebration in the Wind Band Music of Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt* (Pendragon).

With this work, Michael Markowski has established himself as a major new voice in the world of band composition.

Example 3, Theme C', *Shadow Rituals*

