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ARTICLE

Wind Band Composers You Should Know

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Introduction

If you are aware of the history of classical music, you are aware that from a historical perspective, it has not been an entirely welcoming field for women; this is especially true of the wind band medium. Though we have experienced more inclusivity for women in the last decade, there is still much work to be done to ensure that women composers are programmed, performed, and recognized at the same level as their male counterparts. With that in mind, here are a few women composers from the wind band medium of which I think we should all be aware.

Dr. Erika Svanoë (b. 1976)



Dr. Erika Svanoë (b. 1976) is a conductor, composer, and educator, currently serving as the Conductor of the Augsburg Concert Band at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Prior to joining the Augsburg faculty, she was Director of Bands at Bemidji State University in Bemidji, MN, and Director of Athletic Bands at the University of New Hampshire.

Dr. Svanoë earned a D.M.A. in conducting from the Ohio State University, an M.M. in Wind Conducting from Oklahoma State University, and a B.M.E. from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She is an active freelance composer and won The National Band Association Young Band Composition Contest in 2014 with her composition, *The Haunted Carousel*. She currently lives in Menomonie, WI with her husband, designer and graphic novelist Erik Evensen.

Featured for this post, her piece *Steampunk Suite* (2017) was adapted from her earlier work, *Steampunk Scenes* for chamber ensemble. It is a four-movement suite that features a series of vignettes from a “speculative-fictional” Victorian era.



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Movement 1: Charlie and the Mechanical Man Marching Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuuxlGMX4m4>

Movement 2: The Strange Case of Dr. Curie and Madam Hyde

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jVPNfMqZz4>

Movement 3: Bertie Wells attends Mr. Verne's lecture on flying machines

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdyEv3CMdSk>

Movement 4: Barnum & Tesla's Tandem Bicycle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUk1jISz5M8>

For more compositions by Dr. Svanoë, check out her website:

<http://www.erikasvanoë.com/>

Tara Islas (b. 1966)



Tara Islas (b. 1966) A native of Mobile, Alabama, Tara Islas, recently retired as hornist and music arranger with The United States Air Force Band in Washington, D.C. During her more than 21 years in the band, she has performed more than 4,000 ceremonies before the highest-ranking officials, including the President and Vice President of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Featured below, her fanfare *Ascent to the Summit* (2016), was performed by the Dallas Winds, as a winner of the Dallas Winds 2016 Fanfare Competition. *Ascent to the Summit* was later performed by the Monarch Brass at the 2017 International Women's Brass Conference in New Jersey.

Ascent to the Summit (2016):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90jueguWlzl>

During the pandemic, Tara also created six sets of *Nine Miniatures for Concert Band* (2020-2021), featuring flexible instrumentation that are available on her website:

<https://www.taraislas.com/copy-of-chamber-music>

For more compositions by Islas, check out her website:

<https://www.taraislas.com/>

Elena Specht (b. 1993)



Elena Specht (b. 1993) Elena Specht is currently working on a Doctor of Musical Arts in composition and a Master of Music in music theory at Michigan State University, where she is a University Distinguished Fellow. Her music is inspired by the grandeur of nature, captivating questions, and compelling stories. Elena's music is enjoyed by both beginning and professional musicians, and it reaches diverse audiences. She specializes in music for bands and wind ensembles, and she is currently the composer/arranger of the Wind Ensemble of the Greater Boulder Youth Orchestras.

Featured for this post, Elena's composition *Scenes from Home*, won the 2019 Wind Ensemble Category in the annual MSU Honors Composition Competition. Elena writes the following about the piece:

"When conceiving of *Scenes from Home*, I had a strong desire to write music in response to specific images. I chose to use the artwork hanging in my own home as inspiration. I encounter these four paintings every day, and as a composer, I thought it only logical to give a soundtrack and a story to each. The paintings I have are all second-hand art, collected from thrift stores and previous owners who no longer wanted them. Consequently, I know little or nothing about their creators, but each work brings character to my home. *Scenes from Home* is, then, drawn literally from

scenes in my own home, but the subject matter of each painting is very much something not in my home. Each of these images carries me out of my house to another place. Some remind me of specific places I have been, while others are truly only scenes I can imagine from these paintings. Scenes from Home explores not just what is literally depicted in the paintings, but what else I imagine is occurring – what would happen if we pressed “play” on each of these snapshots. I imagine wildlife struggling for survival, seagulls cawing as they soar, children playing on a summer vacation, waves roaring as they crash against the shore, and more. Scenes from Home brings each painting to life, allowing us to imagine each scene in action.”

Scenes from Home (2019)

- I. Mountain Lake
- II. Seagulls in Morning Light
- III. Winter Forest
- IV. Cottage by the Shore

https://youtu.be/_4M6Tuzs1w

At the Grade 2 level, Elena’s work *Zig Zag* (2019), is another piece that was featured by the Michigan State University Campus Band in its original version, but was later arranged for flexible ensemble in 2020-2021:

Zigzag for Concert Band (2019):

<https://tinyurl.com/2dte6zah>

Zigzag for Flexible Ensemble (2020-2021):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtO6OTJioJO>

For more compositions by Elena Specht, check out her website:

<http://www.elenaspecht.com/>

Valerie Coleman (b. 1970)

Valerie Coleman (b. 1970) Well-known as a composer, performer, and teacher, Valerie Coleman-Page is an Assistant Professor of Performance, Chamber Music, and Entrepreneurship at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami (FL). Listed as “one of the Top 35 Women Composers” in the Washington Post by critic Anne Midgette, Dr. Coleman Coleman has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, American Composers Orchestra, The Library of Congress, the Collegiate Band Directors National Association, Chamber Music Northwest, Virginia Tech University, Virginia Commonwealth University, National Flute Association, West Michigan Flute Society, Orchestra 2001, The San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, The Brooklyn Philharmonic, The Flute/Clarinet Duos Consortium, Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Chamber

Music Northwest, and the Interlochen Arts Academy to name a few. She is the founder, creator, and former flutist of the Grammy® nominated Imani Winds, one of the world’s premier chamber music ensembles, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Performance, Chamber Music, and Entrepreneurship at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami.



Roma for Concert Band is meant to depict the language of the Romani people (an Indo-Aryan people, traditionally nomadic itinerants living mostly in Europe, as well as diaspora populations in the Americas). Their traditions, their language (Roma), legends, and music are present throughout music around the world – the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Iberia, and also here in the Americas. Roma pays homage to their culture, featuring five illustrative themes, as seen from the viewpoint of Romani women in all places and spaces: “Romani Woman,” “Mystic,” “Youth,” “Trickster,” and “History,” featuring melodies and rhythms that readily fuse the elements of Romani cultures and the styles represented within (the malagueña of Spain, the Argentinian tango, Arabian music, Turkish folk songs, 3/2 claves, and jazz).

Roma for Concert Band (2009):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=curK8_07Q-O

Umoja for Concert Band (2008):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHlxqNW7aG8>

For more compositions by Valerie Coleman, check out her website:

<https://www.vcolemanmusic.com/>