



The Brass Herald

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Bruce Broughton



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Bruce Broughton in conversation Philip Biggs

PB Hello Bruce and welcome back to *The Brass Herald*.

BB Thank you, Philip. Actually, I'm never far from *The Brass Herald*. I read it to see what's happening in the brass world.

PB It was great to see you in Chicago at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Brass concert. I so enjoyed the CSO Brass performing *Fanfares, Marches, Hymns and Finales*. It was commissioned for Bay Brass, I believe?

BB It was great to meet up again. Yes. I met The Bay Brass more or less through a movie connection. Jonathan Ring, who leads the group, contacted me because he knew and liked my film work. I'm pretty sure he knew nothing about my brass background. In fact, the one work he referenced was my score to the movie "Tombstone", which of course is big, brassy and very over-the-top. I enjoy a nice association with the group. And, of course, they play great.

PB Did you tell me that you have conducted the work with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Brass?

BB Yes, I conducted it a few years ago, but much preferred sitting and listening to someone else lead the piece. It is, I think, the only piece the group has repeated in their concerts over the years, so I was quite flattered.

PB I believe the work is being transcribed for brass band.

BB Yes, Roger Argente asked to take on the job. I put him in touch with the publisher, Masters Music. I'm hoping this will give the piece broader access to brass players worldwide.

PB You were born into a Salvation Army family and I assume you would have been involved with the SA Music Programme.

BB In my family, I couldn't get away from music and the SA music programme was at the heart of it, always. It's probably the real reason I went into music as a career. My grandfather was a composer, of course, but my other grandparents were all musical. One grandmother had trained as a singer. I had an uncle who was a songwriter and an aunt who was a pianist. Both my parents played the piano, played brass instruments, could sight-read and sing. My brother, Bill, was a professional trombone player in the

movie studios and is also a composer/arranger. When Bill and I were in our teens, we had a family brass quartet and one time we all performed an arrangement I made of *Country Gardens* for piano eight-hands. We were all big people and made the piano look small. Actually, when I was a kid I wanted to be an animator, but there was really no family support for such an idea. Having said that, I've met many animators who either began as musicians or who have a sibling who is a musician. So, I suppose the distance isn't all that wide between the two disciplines.



Bruce Broughton.

PB So you grew up with music all around you?

BB There was no way to escape it, not that I ever wanted to. My parents were Salvation Army officers for many years, so I learned the Salvation Army musical world. It was the only steady life I had, since we moved often. The songs I grew up with were a mixture of hymns, folk songs and music hall ditties. The band world included a lot of classical transcriptions as well as marches and medleys. Contemporary music, meaning Bartók or Stravinsky or anything later, didn't exist in my house, but Tchaikovsky was alive and well. The advantage of growing up this way was that I developed a solid musical foundation. The disadvantage, of course, was that it was a very narrow and very conservative slice of the musical world. I began learning music around the time I could read and summer band camps were important in acquiring an early understanding of basic theory. The harmonizations of the hymns and folksongs also had a strong impact on my development. I know how to write a good tune and I know how to harmonize properly, a fading art these days. I'm sure that anyone who takes a good listen to much of my movie music can see the fingerprints of my musical childhood smeared all over. I think, for example,

that the theme to "Tiny Toon Adventures" probably had its roots in Sunday school.

PB What were the instruments you played in your formative years?

BB I began almost simultaneously on cornet and piano. Piano won. In the SA I usually played alto horn. I played horn in the US Army band, but I was never better than a passable player. For one season I managed to hold down the 3rd horn position in the Monterey Symphony, but I think that was primarily because they didn't have to pay me. Playing a brass instrument probably saved me from

having to go overseas during the Vietnam War, however. As it turned out, my overseas service in the military was spent in Italy. Our band did a lot of touring, playing concerts in little villages as a sort of NATO goodwill ambassador. But after the army experience, I never picked up a brass instrument again. Every playing musician knows his/her real instrument and mine was obviously the piano. My

brother plays the piano, but he's really a trombonist. Although I was always a mediocre horn player, I became a very competent pianist, although I could mostly only play what I read. I had absolutely no commercial experience or ability as a pianist. I could bore you quickly with my "piano stylings". But I was a terrific sight-reader. I think it was the way I became acquainted with new and unfamiliar music. When I was younger, if I could read it, I could generally play it.

PB Who were your teachers?

BB When I was a kid, my father worked hard to find good piano teachers for me. As I mentioned, we moved often, but I always had a good piano teacher. When I was in my late teens and my interest in piano gave way to my interest in composing, I met Emil Soderstrom and I studied composition with him for several years. I credit him with being my primary teacher. Other than one really fine orchestration teacher at USC, Tony Vazzana, I can't say I learned a lot at university. Once again, however, Soderstrom was very conservative, but the university wasn't. Typically, of course, my technique as a composer came really as a result of the great amount of music I had to write later for television. Composing is like playing an instrument; you need to

practice a lot and television gave me a lot of practice.

PB When did you know you wished to be a composer.

BB I went into music simply because I couldn't think of anything else. Or so I thought. One day, shortly before I graduated university, I was driving my car, listening to a new song on the radio, and realized it made me feel great! That's what I want to do, I thought to myself. I wanted to write music that would make people feel something. I quickly came to the decision that the most likely medium for expressive music was the movies, so I think that's when I decided to become a professional composer. The truth was, I didn't know how to do anything else.

PB You attended the University of Southern California School of Music.

BB Yes, I graduated with a Bachelor of Music Composition. When one is in school, the question always is: "What are you going to do when you get your degree?" The answer is often: "I'll get my Masters or Doctorate" or "I'll teach." But I had no intention of becoming a teacher, so I went off in search of a job after my degree.

PB What was your first job after graduating from Southern California School of Music?

BB I got very lucky. I got a job as an Assistant Music Supervisor for CBS Television. Neither the job nor the music department exist any longer. I was with CBS for ten years doing all sorts of music jobs and eventually ended up managing the department as Assistant Director of Music for CBS. Essentially, my job was to "track" music into the shows we produced, series like "Gunsmoke" and "Hawaii Five-0". But while I was there, I began writing for the shows, as well. My first professional credit is on "Gunsmoke". I'm even in the film, playing piano in the saloon - the beginning and end of my acting career. I eventually became involved with hiring composers, negotiating with the musicians' union, music licensing, music preparation, studio bookings and recordings. In short, while I was at CBS I truly learned the business. It was invaluable. I left when I knew I was not cut out for management and immediately - and fortunately - became busy working in television as a composer on shows like "Quincy" and "Dallas".

PB You have a reputation for being one of the world's most versatile composers. You write for film, video game and television soundtrack as well as every kind of classical group to full symphony orchestra.



Bruce Broughton conducting at Sony.

BB I owe all of that to my many years writing for television. I was fortunate to do a lot of work on series that had a lot of stylistic variety. I determined that I would always change my orchestral combination when writing for a series. With a show like "Dallas", there wasn't much variety from week to week in the plot. I knew that if I didn't change my instrumental combination, I'd begin repeating myself. So I never wrote for the same combination more than once. As a result, I became a very good orchestrator. The orchestra size for television shows ranged typically from around 18 to 35 musicians, depending upon the studio you worked for. I learned to experiment. Once I got into the movies, I had already developed a substantial writing technique and could adapt my style into the needs of productions with larger budgets. Soderstrom taught me that if you could write a good string quartet, you could write for a symphony. The opposite isn't true, by the way. I credit him with pounding technique into my consciousness. "Music is more than pretty sounds," he said. "The notes mean something." It's very different for composers beginning today. For one thing, live music is not so common and young composers begin writing on samplers, which are much more available. I love technology, but samplers have little in common with acoustic music. They're really instruments in themselves; in order to make them sound good and convincing, you have to write for the sampler in a specific way. Making a brass or string section sound good is something very different.

PB Do you have a preferred form you enjoy writing for?

BB I spent so many years writing music on demand that I can't say I have a huge preference. I find myself doing a lot of chamber music. I think that's because it's available, I can get performances and I like the specifics of the instrumental combinations. As far as a real "form", such as a symphony, concerto or sonata, I really have no preference. The one thing

you don't learn doing film music is form. It's absolutely no issue. Consequently, it's hard for me to put together a piece that has to exist on its own merits. After all, film music is essentially accompaniment. When there's no film, the music has to be complete in itself. I do, however, enjoy writing music that both performers and audience can enjoy, and I suppose that my SA background has a lot to do with that. Certainly, growing up with the massive sound of brass was an element in my writing style. I remember being severely underwhelmed when

I first heard the opening to Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony played by an orchestra. I was used to hearing the Bramwell Coles version played by the Los Angeles Congress Hall band, which I think at that time numbered about 50 players and there was little grace in that playing. Tchaikovsky was no aural match for Coles and Congress Hall. But the opportunity to write for, say, four harps is something entirely different. There's no way you can overwhelm anyone with the massive sound of harps. There simply isn't any. The music itself has to do it. And the sonic palette is entirely different.

PB Looking at your list of credits, it almost blows me away. You have over 20 Emmy nominations to your credit and have received a record number of ten. These include HBO's *Warm Springs*. You've also won Emmys for *Eloise at Christmastime*; *Eloise at The Plaza*; *Glory & Honor*; *O Pioneers!*; *Tiny Toon Adventures Theme Song*; *The First Olympics, Athens 1896, Part I*; *Dallas: Ewing Blues*; *Dallas: The Letter*; and *Buck Rogers: The Satyr*.

BB The very best thing about working in television for me was that the work was fast and, if you were associated with a specific series, you wrote a lot of music in a very short period of time. There was always the necessity to experiment and try out new styles, new combinations. In the early days of my independence from CBS, I worked 14-16 hour days, seven days a week, and I always had an orchestra to play with. You never knew what you'd have to do next. The list above gives a small idea of the musical range a commercial composer has to have. And it doesn't stop. This summer I did an arrangement of *Luck Be A Lady* for Seth MacFarlane that he and John Williams performed at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. After all these years, it was my first commercial song arrangement. It sounded pretty good.

PB Your TV credits are many and various and just as impressive, and include the main titles for *JAG*, *Tiny Toon Adventures*,

and *Dinosaurs*, as well as scores for *Amazing Stories*, *Quincy* and *How The West Was Won*. Movies for television include *Lucy*, *Bobbie's Girl*, and *O Pioneers!*; and the mini-series *Roughing It*, *The Blue and the Gray*, and the Emmy-nominated *True Women*.

BB As a commercial musician, it's important to be a musical moving target. For a while, I worked in dramas, then soap operas, then afternoon cartoons. In the movies, I've been primarily associated with westerns, comedies and children's films. It's one of the things I like best about this sort of work. It's not that different from writing a flute trio and then working on a piece for brass band. I love variety. Still, every time I start a new piece or a new project, whether it's commercial or concert, I feel very much like a beginner. I think the variety also keeps you musically honest. It's one thing to write *Silverado*, but another to write *Tiny Toon Adventures*. One doesn't slide into the other.

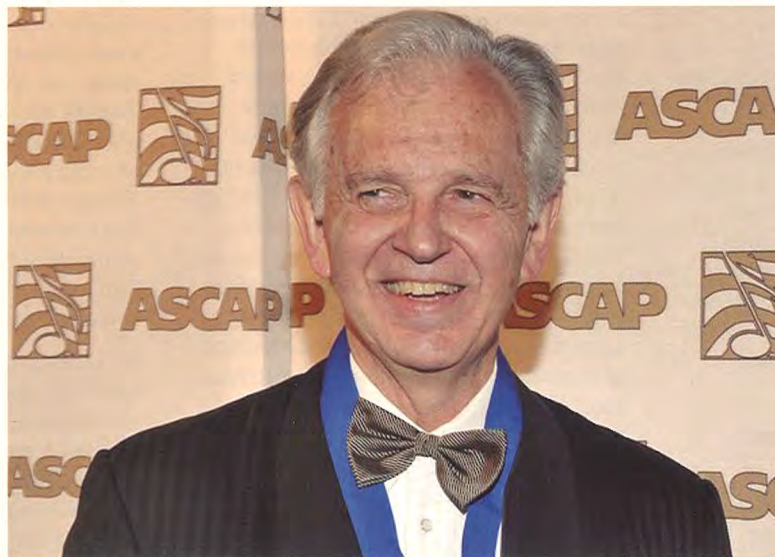
PB You have conducted and recorded many of your original works, including "Mixed Elements," commissioned by and premiered at the Sunflower Music Festival, "Modular Music," composed for the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; "The Magic Horn," commissioned jointly by the Chicago, Seattle and National Symphonies for the Magic Circle Mime Company; "Excursions," commissioned and premiered by The United States Air Force Band in Washington, D.C.; "English Music" for Horn and Strings; "And on the Sixth Day" for oboe and orchestra; "Tyvek Wood," commissioned by the Debussy Trio; a piccolo concerto; a tuba concerto; several solo works for winds; numerous chamberworks and many more.

BB As I say, I like variety. Fortunately or not, I'm not so well known as a concert composer, so I get a lot of variety, meaning I don't have multiple concertos or symphonies to my credit. Most of the pieces you mention were commissions and they vary a lot. A few of them, like *Modular Music*, I wrote for myself and found performances. I still haven't heard the oboe piece, however.

PB Could you tell readers about your composing for video games please.

BB I only wrote one game and that was "Heart of Darkness". It has the distinction of being the first such game to have an orchestral music track. It is a particular favourite. The production team was in Paris, and I have many

happy memories of flying back and forth for meetings. I still stay in touch with the guys who made it. However, unlike contemporary games, this one was structured like a long, half-hour animated movie in which the game portion took the player to the next part of the story. To get to the end of the story, you had to be able to play the entire game, which, I was told, was hard. But it's a very well animated film. They tried to imitate the style of "The Rescuers Down Under", a Disney movie and simply called the composer, me. The funny thing about that is that I was asked to do "The Rescuers Down Under" because of "Silverado" I was enthusiastic because of my interest in animation and Disney. The work associations that led to the video game are not obvious.



Bruce Broughton at an awards ceremony.

PB I well remember Bramwell Tovey programming your *Masters of Space and Time* for the National Youth Brass Band's 2007 Easter Course.

BB So do I and I will be forever grateful to him for conducting it. The piece had a very rocky start and I was not at all certain that it was even very good. I had only just met Bramwell in Los Angeles and talked to him about it. He asked me to show it to him and a few months later he let me know that he would be performing it in Manchester. I learned a few things from that experience. First of all, it pays to have someone other than yourself conduct your work, especially if he or she is a good conductor. Second, the success of a piece depends very much on how it is performed. My wife, Belinda, is a violinist and we found out soon after getting together that we hear music somewhat differently. She hears "performance", I hear "construction". We both tend to agree on the acceptability of a piece, but we get to the agreement sometimes by different routes. In any case, this particular performance was very special to me.

PB You travelled to UK to hear the performance and also deliver a Masterclass to the fortunate members of the NYBBGB.

BB Well, I wanted to know whether the piece was as bad as I feared. It wasn't. I was trying something out that was new to me and I wasn't at all sure it was successful. I needed this performance to let me know. The piece is harmonically static, a complete contradiction of my upbringing. From beginning to end, it's solidly in Eb with a very restricted set of chords and combinations. I think the folks who commissioned it were expecting *Silverado*, but I did this instead. So, I think that I was the fortunate one with the members of the NYBBGB.

PB I believe you are in London in early 2015 for the première of a Harp ensemble at the Royal Academy of Music.

BB Yes, in mid-January I will be briefly in London to hear an evening of my harp music, including a piece I wrote for four harps. There is nothing massive about the sound of a harp and four of them are nothing like a brass quartet, so the entire approach to writing for that combination is unique. I think it's a hard instrument to write for successfully. One of the other pieces is for two harps and mallet percussion, and the third is for harp, flute and viola, the same combination as Debussy famously used. I wrote the quartet at the invitation of Skaila Kanga, professor of

harp at the Royal Academy. I know Skaila as a studio musician, however; a person we would refer to as "the top harpist in town".

PB Please can you share with readers your future plans.

BB I have just finished composing a tuba quartet to be premiered in a few months. In March, I have a concerto for cello and chamber ensemble being premiered at a contemporary music series. I am just beginning work on a television mini-series about the origins of Texas, which I'm co-writing with my friend John Debney. There's over three hours of music to be composed in two months! And in the middle of that, I continue teaching orchestration at the Scoring for Motion Picture and Television programme at the University of Southern California and have composition students at UCLA.

PB Bruce, thanks so so much for this interview. Myself and everyone connected with *The Brass Herald* are thrilled that you have agreed to appear in the magazine.

BB Philip, it's been a real pleasure.