

MAKING MUSIC MATTER

Frank Ticheli's *Beginning Band Method, Making Music Matter*, has just hit the stores. What has the superstar of concert band music come up with? Here is our interview of Frank Ticheli (who wrote the music) and Gregory B. Rudgers (who wrote the exercises and created the pedagogical sequence).

BY BOB MARGOLIS, DIRECTOR, MANHATTAN BEACH MUSIC

Margolis: When you first started to work on the method, were you determined to make your book different from what is out there?

Ticheli: Yes. Through the discussions I had with colleagues, especially in regard to how the book would begin, we were. Other books begin with these unison notes on a B-flat major scale, which allows the teacher to work with the kids in unison exercises, and there's validity to that. But by doing that the instruments start on notes that are not the most natural notes for them. We went in another direction entirely.

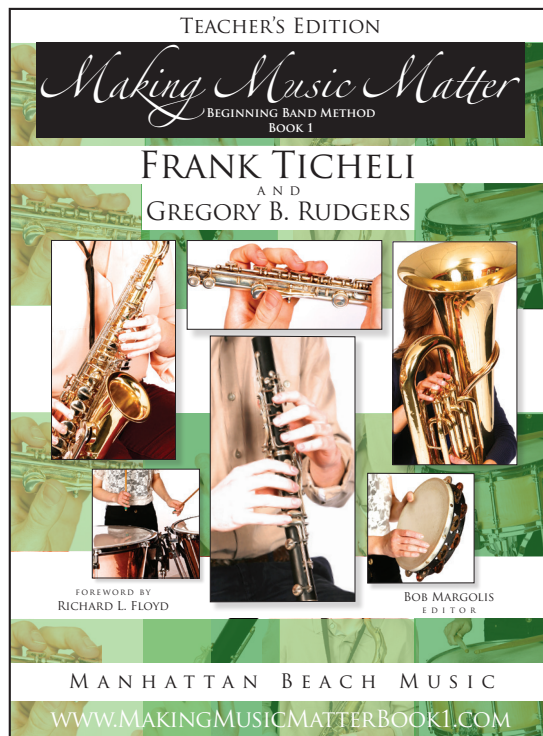
Margolis: Did you and Greg select the "First 3 Notes" together?

Ticheli: We talked a lot about it together, and one of our field testers, Cindi Sobering — I remember she was talking about the flute — she said, "wouldn't it be nice if you didn't have the flute crossing the break on the first three notes?" since other books do that. And after addressing that Greg and I began talking about the other instruments. For example, why not have the saxes just play only left-hand fingerings at the beginning? And then, why not have the horns play in a register where they can actually hear those partials, instead of playing the same notes as the trumpets (which puts the horns so high they can't find the notes). So, through discussion it gradually evolved into the note choices that we made. The question we always asked was, "what would be the most natural notes for the instrument?"

There were other considerations. We could have gone to just left-handed fingerings on the flute. That would have been B, A, and G — but B-natural is just too far away from what a beginner would see in band. So we compromised, and did A, G, and F, which is almost as easy.

Margolis: And in some ways maybe more useful.

Ticheli: Yes, I think in a way that's true: So now, the flutes are not crossing the break; instead, you get to introduce their right hand (with the F). Though they're not crossing the break, now their right hand is involved.



Margolis: I know that the "First 3 Notes" were picked to be easy notes to play — but how important was it to do this?

Rudgers: I think it's a critical factor in the book. Other books that I've experienced challenge certain instruments with some really difficult maneuvering on their instrument in order to produce their first three notes. Having taught at this level myself and having observed some teachers and student teachers I know it's always a stumbling block.

Margolis: Let's talk about the pedagogy behind the book. The music is Ticheli's, the pedagogy is Rudgers'. Tell me about how you decided to pick the rhythms you taught first.

Rudgers: Basically the overriding factor in the rhythm of the book is developing the sense of subdivision. In Lesson 1, we have whole notes and quarter notes, which is quite unusual for beginning lesson books.

They usually start with one or the other. But I thought if had both a whole note and a quarter note in the first lesson the kids would begin to understand the concept of subdivision and feel the four beats inside the whole note. And that really drives the entire book. When they move on to eighth notes it's developed in a subdivision format; same thing with sixteenths. That was the guiding force in rhythmic development.

Margolis: Had you given any thought to teaching half notes and quarter notes at the beginning?

Rudgers: No, we wanted to have a four-beat format in the first lesson so that the kids would get used to feeling four beats in a measure. And when half notes are introduced, they are introduced juxtaposed against quarter notes. So they also learn to feel the two beats inside the half-note.

Margolis: Frank, the other big news for this book is of course your original pieces and I see that the first piece you have written uses just the "First 3 Notes," and has actual harmony. What were the challenges in writing that one? 'Cause, what you wrote is fabulous,

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and I don't know how you did it.

Ticheli: [laughs] The challenge is that all the instruments have three notes, but they're not the same three notes, so you've already got chords to deal with. Also, it's set up — and this is a challenge for me — the notes are such that if you just took the most simple route you'd have all the players playing these first inversion chords all the time. But there's a lack of stability playing first inversion chords. So you can't just run them all in parallel motion. I had to get creative with the composing so that I'd have more root position triads and get greater stability, which kids at that age need. The challenge was taking the notes that I was given and still making the most stable harmony possible.

Margolis: But it's not just stable harmony, it's interesting harmony.

Ticheli: Oh well thanks! It's partly through having some players not move while other players move, so you get this passing tone thing happening —

Margolis: — there you go!

Ticheli: Just simple tricks to make it work. I've found that any time you're faced with problems as a composer that's something to celebrate, because problems lead us down a path that at least in my case I'm often not smart enough to figure out on my own. The problems will lead us down a path to create a solution. So actually I celebrate problems, and this book was filled with those kinds of problems which are challenges.

Margolis: You had 24 problems per book, right?

Ticheli: [laughs] That's right, and this is the tricky part: Each of these 24 pieces gradually adds new elements — different notes, different rhythms — a little at a time so you're constantly having to keep track. For example, "did clarinet learn that note yet?" You can't drop the ball and introduce something they've not yet learned.

The first six pieces, all of the exercises as well as the compositions, are chordal. By the time you get to Lesson 7 the students have learned enough notes such that they can actually play unison exercises. Thus, the seventh piece, "Dance of the Jack O'Lanterns," has more of a kind of a two-voice harmony and there's more reliance on unison writing contrasting with chordal writing. So I was able to start varying the textures more and more. It's a real milepost in the book — the variety of the musical textures starts to open up from that point on.

Another milestone is Lesson 13, where they get to eighth notes. I wrote "A Short Ride on Horseback" where you have this sound of a horse trotting along with woodblocks, and the players with a "trotting" kind of theme. In Lesson 16, I'm excerpting my own piece, "Amazing Grace," and I love that these kids just starting out get to experience the simple, pure beauty of the melody and harmony of that piece. In fact, the topic of my upcoming talk at the Midwest Clinic is "Beauty from the Beginning." Likewise, having beautiful music right away was an important goal of this book. And at the end of Book 2, I leave the kids with this simple and beautiful melody in excerpting my own setting of "Shenandoah."

Margolis: And conversely, some of the original works you wrote just for this book one day are going to make their way into becoming Grade 1 pieces.

Ticheli: Indeed, I estimate at least a third of these works are really good candidates to be expanded into full-blown Grade 1 pieces.

Margolis: Well, there's more than one kind of big news for this book. There's the method itself, there's the 24 original ensemble pieces that you composed, there's the solo pieces for each of the instruments that you composed (plus the percussion ensemble work in the percussion book). This makes this method different in construction, and the whole way you thought about it, right?

Ticheli: Yes, and speaking of the construction, this is amazing to me: It seems so obvious, but none of the books out there (if they're there, we didn't see them) are constructed into sequential lessons. Why not divide a book into lessons so that kids have a constant stream

FIRST THREE NOTES

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FIRST JOURNEY

COMPOSITION NO. 1

FRANK TICHEL

Flute
Oboe
Bells
B♭ Clarinet
B♭ Bass Clarinet
B♭ Trumpet
E♭ Alto Saxophone
E♭ Baritone Saxophone
B♭ Tenor Saxophone
F Horn
Bassoon
Trombone
Euphonium
Tuba
Snare Drum
Bass Drum
Piano Reduction
(for rehearsal only)

The first musical composition in the book, "First Journey," uses just the three notes learned in Lesson 1.

of rewards. Now, here we are with Lesson 13 and now we learn this so that we can play that piece. Next in Lesson 14 we learn that and we can play this piece now. This makes the learning experience more clear-sighted to me, and clarity is an important thing to kids when they're starting out.

Margolis: *And the exercises that you wrote were specifically designed to teach what was needed to play Frank's pieces?*

Rudgers: Actually it went the other way. [laughs] I wrote the exercises and put handcuffs on Frank by saying, "OK. Here's the new elements. So write a piece with these notes and elements." But the guy's a genius. There are times I'd send him something, saying "there, you can't fix that" but he did. There's a wonderful synergy at work between the pedagogy and the music, as each is adjusted to fit the other. This book is designed for dedicated teachers who will take the time to be sure that every exercise is mastered. When there are fewer exercises, as for example in Lesson 1, it's encouraging a master teacher to spend the time on each of those exercises so that the

students are completely in control of the elements. It's a critical link between the exact same elements in the exercises and in the Frank Ticheli piece that closes each lesson. First you have to be in control of the physical elements and notes and rhythms and dynamics, and then you get to make some music.

Ticheli: One other new thing in the book is that we have these creative exercises called "Creative Corner" where I devise these little very simple compositional exercises. What I like about them is that they, for the most part, allow all of the students to be on same plane — on the same playing field. That is, the kid who's had ten years of piano is on the same playing field as the kid who's just starting on the trumpet. It's because these compositional exercises don't rely upon your knowledge of harmony, form, chord structure, things that a kid who's played piano would have an advantage over. These exercises bypass that and they get to the heart of what composition is, which is imagination, just sounds unfolding in time, and asking questions like, "what if?" Rather than getting bogged down with, "oh, should I double that note," or "my teacher told me I shouldn't double this leading

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See the whole book & hear the recordings:

www.MakingMusicMatterBook1.com

tone or move that interval in parallel motion,” the students can just have fun creating.

Margolis: And for anybody who wants to see what you did, they can look at the whole book online.

Ticheli: It's all there online at www.MakingMusicMatterBook1.com where they can look at the entire teacher's book and a couple of the sample student books as well.

Margolis: With respect to the 15 solo pieces, I can remember when I asked you if you'd do these, and that was the three days of silence, right? [laughs] but you decided it was a good idea.

Ticheli: Yes, something in the back of each book as a kind of reward for the kids for completing the book, wouldn't it be great to give them this gift? In three days I surprised you with several pieces with optional piano accompaniments.

Margolis: Yes, you wrote 14 to my 2 (which we're not using—we have yours!)

Ticheli: That was even fast for me! Sometimes your best music comes quickly like that. So they're in the back of the book and there's a wide expressive range in these. For the solo parts I had to be really careful, after all, this is the end of Book 1 — I couldn't exceed the ranges and the notes learned, but I could exceed it in the piano accompaniment. Even though they're really simple, there are aspects in the piano ac-

companiments that the kids haven't learned yet. So we start to hear these rhythms, and hear this chromaticism they haven't started to play. It's kind of cool — they get introduced to musical ideas they'll learn later down the road.

Margolis: Final question goes to Greg. When somebody decides which band method to use, whether they're changing over from one they've used for a long time, or just starting out, how do they decide which one to adopt? What are they going to see here?

Rudgers: Having been a band director for 35 years, and having worked at all levels, as well as with college students who are studying to be beginning band directors, I'm very well aware of the various stumbling blocks encountered by beginning band students. Knowing that, we've included a progressive, developmental approach, so that those stumbling blocks will be easier to handle. For example, one of the hardest times when teaching beginning clarinetists is when they get to go over the break. In our book, our field testers came back and said, “finally, our clarinets are learning to go over the break easily.” There are many of those elements in the book. Long tones and lip slurs starting as early as possible for the brass players so that kids are asked to play fundamentals, but in an entertaining way, each time they pick up the instrument. But the real attraction is going to be the Frank Ticheli music. One of our field testers came to us and said, “Ms. Posegate, we sound like real players now — we sound like a real band.”

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