

*Fergal Carroll*  
**Winter Dances**  
*for Concert Band*

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# A GUIDE TO REHEARSAL & PERFORMANCE

## Fergal Carroll's *Winter Dances*

Mark Heron

### Commissioning History

The Cultural Services Department of Warrington Borough Council commissioned *Winter Dances* with financial support from the Regional Arts Lottery Programme for the North Cheshire Concert Band. The impetus for the work was the opening of the new Pyramid Arts Centre in Warrington, although the first performance was given by the NCCB with me conducting at the BASBVE International Wind Festival at the Royal Northern College of Music in March 2002.

The work was conceived to be suitable for performance with dancers, although this is by no means a prerequisite.

*Winter Dances* is published by Maecenas and lasts around nine minutes. The work is included in the National Concert Band Festival Repertoire List at grade 3.5. I would caution conductors against programming *Winter Dances* with a band whose upper limit is grade 3.5 and feel that 4 to 4.5 is more appropriate.

### Fergal Carroll

Carroll (not to be confused with WASBE 2007 conference organiser Fergus O'Carroll, who also composes) is an important figure in the band world in Ireland. Following studies in Ireland, he undertook the Master of Music in Composition degree course at the Royal Northern College of Music with Tony Gilbert and Adam Gorb. Well used as Fergal is to working with young players on a practical level, it is no surprise to find in all of his works a keen appreciation of the level and nature of the players he is writing for.

His first wind work, *Amphion*, was written for Manchester University Wind Orchestra. Following a performance of *Winter Dances* at the Canford School of Music, Timothy Reynish commissioned the seven minute tone poem *Song of Lir* at school band level, and a number of easier works written subsequently form part of the Maecenas *Genesis* series. A further commission by Reynish, for the William Reynish Commissioning Project, resulted in a work called *Backwater*. All of these works seem to me to be proof of Carroll's skill at writing inventive, well-crafted and enjoyable works for a specific ability level.

A full list of works, durations, and information about the composer can be found on the Irish Contemporary Music Centre's website, [www.cmc.ie/composers](http://www.cmc.ie/composers)

### Instrumentation considerations

*Winter Dances* is scored for a fairly standard line-up:

piccolo; flute 1 & 2; oboe 1 & 2 (2nd oboe doubling cor anglais in the slow movement); Eb, 3 x Bb, alto & bass clarinets; AATB saxophones (1st alto doubles soprano in the slow movement); 4 horns; 3 trumpets; 3 trombones; euphonium; 2 tubas; timpani & 3 percussion.

The soprano saxophone has an important part in the second movement, which is not cued elsewhere (in fact there is no cuing throughout the work). Technically it could be played on the alto although the composer clearly had the sound of the soprano in mind and I feel performance of the work without a soprano would be less successful.

Less critical is the cor anglais. Again the part is theoretically possible on the oboe with only one relatively obscured note being out of range. The most exposed passage is the opening three bars, which should not be a problem for a reasonable oboist. The second alto or perhaps a good bassoonist could take any problematic passages in the rest of the movement. Having said that, the correct instrumentation is to be preferred and this is not really a work suitable for extensive cross-cuing.

The percussion writing is integral to the work and all four parts are important. A competent timpanist is required as is a strong tuned player for Percussion 3. Percussion 1 has some prominent tom-tom writing, Percussion 2 is more straightforward. Percussion 3 is the only part with tuned percussion.

Although two tubas are specified there are no split parts and so the work can be performed entirely successfully with one player.

The alto clarinet part does have some essential lines and so it is desirable to have one; however it would be possible to cue these into other woodwind parts if no instrument was available.

### Rehearsal Suggestions

*Winter Dances* is in three movements: *November*, *December* & *January*. The composer points out that as Ireland uses the Celtic calendar those are in fact the three winter months – notwithstanding that given the Irish climate it would not be inconceivable to have called one of the movements August!

A more detailed discussion of specific rehearsal and performance issues follows, and having a score to hand will be of some benefit.

## First movement: 'November'

The tempo of crotchet = 148 is entirely appropriate and should be maintained throughout.

Bar 1 The main feature of this movement (and its greatest challenge) is an unrelenting quaver pulse which runs almost uninterrupted throughout. It is vital to note that the first bar is only *forte* and if the high woodwinds play too strongly here both the brilliance of the later *fortissimo* will be lost and the accents which begin in bar three will have less impact. I ask the woodwinds to think of the first bar as *forte ma leggiero*, then to play slightly less in the second bar when the xylophone joins them.

From bar three, the *mf* quavers must have a *forte* kind of energy when they are accented, but be much softer and more *leggiero* when not. The nervous energy of this movement relies heavily on this variety of articulation and it is critical that the constantly evolving pattern of accents is clearly heard.

- 3 The triangle player can be encouraged to treat the first few bars as *solo*.
- 5 The low winds and brass make their first attempt to interrupt the pulsing quavers. These short fragments benefit from some attention in rehearsal, perhaps thinking of the crotchet duration notes as slightly *tenuto*, the quavers *poco staccato* and phrasing through the 2/4 bar. It is important throughout the movement that the articulation of the repeated notes is clean in these figures.
- 12 The timpanist will welcome your attention at the end of the 5/4 bar.
- 15 This bar is a test of how successful you have been in keeping the

The image shows a page of a musical score for the first movement 'November'. The score is written for a large orchestra and includes staves for various instruments: Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, Cor Anglais, Bassoon, Clarinet, Alto Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, Saxophones (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone), Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, Euphonium, Double Bass, and Percussion. The score features a complex rhythmic pattern of quavers and accents throughout the movement.

quaver ostinato light. The bass group, the tom-toms and the semiquaver run in piccolo, clarinets & altos are all *forte* yet this is not a big gesture and so they should not play too strong. Plus...

- 16 ...as the ostinato moves from the high woodwind to the saxes and lower clarinets it must not sound as if the bottom has fallen out of the music. It is worth working at this transition with only the repeated quaver lines playing to try and achieve consistency of articulation and projection.
- 16 The horn melody needs to have a heroic character without being too loud. I asked for the quaver to be slightly short, a slight stress on the third beat and plenty of energy on the two Bbs. As this material is passed around the rest of the brass it is important that the players get out of the way on the long notes.
- 25 This is the first *tutti fortissimo* bar and should be a significant moment without being anything like the biggest gesture of the piece. Use these arrival points, as already mentioned at bar 15 to check the accompaniment hasn't become too strong.
- 33 It is not easy to get these two bars exactly right: the quaver rest in the ostinato makes it very obvious if the horns & saxes don't get through their triplet semiquavers in time and the accents can upset the rhythm of the winds. As with so much music written in this style, e.g. John Adams, it is important that the short melodic fragments are played very *espressivo* but rhythmic accuracy is also needed. The conductor should make sure the gesture is not too large here or things will slow down.
- 36 I find that the accents in the brass phrase encourage a rather brash articulation; perhaps a *tenuto* with a firm articulation is more appropriate, and a lyrical gesture from the conductor will help to achieve the right feel.
- 37 The horns should play their rising triplet strongly to balance with the falling semiquavers in the winds.
- 43 In contrast to bar 36, the *marcato* accent here should be very sharp and given with lots of energy by the conductor.
- 47 The second movement contains a more overt reference to Christmas, but evidence that the festive season is upon us well before then can be found in the horns, alto sax and alto clarinet here. I must confess to re-composing here as I felt the alto clarinet sounded rather lonely playing an octave lower than two horns and a saxophone – I asked the second horn to play an octave lower.
- 49 A nice feature of Fergals's scoring is that he treats the horns quite orchestrally – here the fragment is quite low so it is given to the second and fourth players.
- 52 There is little danger that the first beat of the semiquaver scale will be too loud so encourage the second bassoon and bass clarinet.
- 56 The *fortissimo* wind semiquavers should be dazzling and it is important the brass is aware that they should not balance up. Ask the winds to phrase towards the accent at the beginning of 58 so that the scale doesn't die with the falling register.
- 61 The figuration of the tenor sax, low horns, euphonium and double-tonguing first trumpet can be wonderfully delicate and whimsical if they can play a true *mezzo forte*. In order to achieve this though I think

the ostinato has to come down to *mezzo piano* with the energy returning for 64-66.

71 Don't allow the horns to start too loudly but then encourage them to crescendo through the augmentation of their opening melody. The accents in 73 should ring out with staccato quavers in 74 and *tenuto* triplet crotchets in 75 where the saxophones, bassoons and bass clarinet should also have a *subito piano crescendo* marked. This leads to 76 where all concerned except the horns (who have made their mark and can now retreat) should play *tutta forza*, the conductor giving jagged beats with the baton and encouraging a line with the left hand.

78 The brass *forte* should be understated after the exuberance of the preceding bars.

80 Note the tam-tam writing here and previously at 75. The sound should release from the accented downbeat, therefore the player needs to stop the roll before the barline.

89 The two 7/8 bars present no problem if beaten out as suggested in the score. Of course the brass and low winds should release their crotchets and dotted crotchets to aid clarity. The dominant voice should be the timpani.

90 There is an *errata* in the bass clarinet whose rhythm should be consistent with the bassoons and low brass.

91 The stopped notes in the horns should be brought out, but everyone else should be encouraged to get right out of the way as soon as they hit their long note. It is difficult to keep momentum in these last few bars and for me there should be no *rallentando* with the *staccato* quaver on the last beat of the penultimate bar carefully observed. The timpani glissando is difficult to execute and actually can sound somewhat disappointing if the drum is not of good quality. I would also suggest that the *diminuendo* is unnecessary as this will happen naturally as the skin loosens with the glissando. The D on the final bar should be struck confidently.

## Second movement: 'December'

For me, the metronome marking of crotchet = 72 is a little fast. After the energy of the first movement the introductory three bars offer a moment of repose and can easily take a tempo nearer to crotchet = 60.

Bar 1 Carroll is crystal clear and spot on with his dynamics, the flute and cor anglais being the dominant voices, the glockenspiel next in line and the clarinets and bassoons adding *sostenuto* to the bell tones. Intonation is difficult in the three bar introduction, both between the two soloists and the clarinets and glock. The clarinets must articulate in the same manner as the glock, albeit in a more distant gentle manner. Again the tam-tam *crescendo* must not continue after the down beat and the conductor will need to judge the acoustic carefully to make sure the overhang into the third bar is audible yet not so loud that he or she has to wait an eternity to start bar four.

4 The second and third clarinets could perhaps play *mezzo piano* with a *diminuendo* to *piano* during bar five. If there are multiple players in the clarinets, I strongly suggest this passage be one to a part. The tempo can move forward a little here, perhaps crotchet = 66, allowing the soloists some space but maintaining some motion.

5 A feature can be made of the single strike of the tubular bell.

6 The soprano saxophone solo is of course very exposed and intonation is difficult on a cold instrument. I suggest that the player should change to soprano before the last bar of the first movement. There is plenty of time and although it is only one bar it will help the solo in the second movement to be more confident. In bar 12 there can be some freedom in the triplet figure – this is the only time it is played by one player.

13 Let the second and third clarinets know you haven't forgotten them by drawing some phrasing from them on this last bar of the phrase.

14 Few readers of this article will need me to tell them that the combination of euphonium, soprano saxophone and piccolo playing unison in three octaves presents intonation difficulties! The marking in the euphonium part that it should be softer than the saxophone is interesting, and I am tempted to suggest that if the lower of the three octaves is the softest, intonation becomes even more difficult. Once you have the melodic line in tune, make sure the cup muted trombones aren't upsetting things. The colours and textures of this movement are most attractive but there is much exposed writing for many of the players – bad intonation will have your audience squirming in their seats.

14 Whenever the rising semiquaver figures appear, the first group needs to be encouraged. Here it is cor anglais and first bassoon, at 21 it is tenor sax and first bassoon.

19 The alto saxophone should be very *espressivo* with the counter phrase here.

23 Fanfare-like though the horns must be in this bar and the next, you must make sure they play very expressively in the upbeat to 25 or the line of the phrase is lost. Keep the trombones out of the way here.

27 If the euphonium has played with suitable panache the tenor saxophone's answering semiquavers will need to be brought out.

29 The horns, saxes and low brass need to *diminuendo subito molto* here so that the first note of the trumpet figures are heard. I guess the muted second trumpet should play *mezzo forte* so that a *mezzo piano* sounds to echo the first player.

31 The 'line and a dot' marking in the woodwinds should not be too short. Unless the acoustic is very lively only a slight hiatus between the notes is needed.

32 The accompanying flutes must play one to a part and very soft so that the cup muted trumpets can play their *Coventry Carol* quotation with tenderness. With the mutes clarity of articulation becomes even more difficult so make sure the repeated notes are clear. The side drum with snares off should be very soft and played close to the edge of the skin.

35 The piccolo interjection should perhaps foreshadow the manner in which the horns will play it at bar 43.

38 Conduct the second trumpet's suspension.

40 The trombones must of course play with a beautiful tone here but don't allow them to wallow. The tempo should continue to flow and the articulation should be clean. This is a place where the alto clarinet part is vital. If there is no player the second bassoon could continue its

line upwards. A good balance between the movement's main theme, the trombone chorale, and the accompaniment is difficult to achieve here.

- 49 The accompanying woodwinds and saxes must know that they make up one line until 54 or a very disjointed effect can result.
- 56 The figure in the baritone saxophone, tenor trombones and euphonium can be very majestic and triumphant, perhaps indicated by the conductor with a raised fist.
- 57 In contrast to bar 31, the tendency here is for the brass to play their 'line and a dot' notes too heavily and so a little more separation might be necessary. It should also not be too loud.
- 58 If the *mezzo piano* quavers are too loud it is difficult hear the glock and clarinets reprising the first bar of the movement. Admittedly they are marked one dynamic higher than in the opening but I think slight accents help.
- 62 The crotchet from the brass on beat three should played with a full sound and not too much gap before the bar line – like a string section playing a full up-bow and stopping the bow momentarily before the down-bow on the next downbeat. Again, the trumpets and horns must articulate clearly within their legato style in 63 and 65 especially.
- 63 The first clarinet, first bassoon and soprano saxophone can play very confidently in their semiquavers, as they should do even more so in the last beat of 66.
- 67 I found we needed to do a *subito mezzo forte* on the bar line in order to keep control of the intonation in the *crescendo*. The second trumpet is wrong in the score and the part – the second beat of bar 67 should be a written G. The players must phrase towards the D major chord on the second beat of 68, keeping the sound going. I found this last chord needed a little more tonic in it so the second flute played a D instead of a unison F# with the firsts. As the diminuendo proceeds the conductor must keep the gesture 'alive' whilst indicating the diminuendo in a way which doesn't encourage the pitch to go flat. The length of this chord can be free, but I would recommend that you demand a real *ppp* before going *attacca* into the last movement.

### Third movement: 'January'

Again crotchet = 152 is perfectly possible, although in a generous acoustic a step down from that would be advisable. A slightly slower tempo which is then maintained is better than an ambitious one which drags.

Bar 1 Fergal will kill me if I suggest this boisterous and lively movement is *Riverdance* for band but the very first bar must set the thing alight with electricity and alacrity. If the rhythm isn't coming exactly right get your snare drummer to play continuous quavers so that everyone can hear how it fits.

This is a great movement for rhythm training and when I think I can get away with it I ask the players to sing the whole movement through. They can sing any pitch they like but rhythm, dynamics, articulations and phrasings must be observed and exaggerated. Doing this without the nuisance of an instrument getting in the way can really sharpen up the ensemble's rhythmic skills.

I conducted this piece in Israel a couple of years ago with their National Youth Band and they loved the singing so much that they

insisted on doing this movement twice in the concert, first time sung, second time played!

- 3 The conductor's downbeat must in effect be an 'upbeat' to the timpanist's second beat (it's a bad translation – the German *Auftakt* has no connotation of 'up', it is more accurate to describe it as a preparation). In bar five the trombones should get out of the way and the clarinets could maybe play *forte diminuendo* so that their second beat is heard.
- 7 The accompanying figure between clarinets, euphonium, tuba and xylophone must be rock solid, making sure the dotted crotchets are not sloppy and the second crotchet of the bar is well articulated.
- 9 The horns kick off the main theme of the movement which must be lively, bright and vibrant but not forced or too loud. I find the tendency is for the crotchet tied to the dotted crotchet to be too long so the conductor may wish to find a gesture that encourages the players to get off that second beat. Not conducting too big is a good start, as is making sure that the players can clearly see where the second beat is going to occur.
- 16 The trombone figure can be featured with a short first note and some accent in the syncopation. From 17 the flutes and clarinets will no doubt make the same mistakes as the horns so you could save some time by getting them all to play the melody together to make sure it is consistent.
- 25 If the trombones play *mezzo forte*, and perhaps with a *diminuendo* as well as a *tenuto* feel the trumpets don't need to play too loud. This should be tidy and crisp. If that is happening check that the players aren't doing that classic inexperienced trumpeter thing of blowing straight into the music with the bell about six inches from the paper.
- 28 Bring out the third trumpet in this bar, leading to the second and third players playing really quite *legato* in the crotchets of 29 and 30.
- 33 Try to get the oboes and alto saxophones to keep thinking quavers and then they shouldn't be late in bar 36. The *sfzp* in 37 should have a real sizzle to it.
- 39 Give the horns an encouraging smile before bar 39 and don't scowl at them if they split the top B – it happens!
- 41 I found that this section needs to be *meno forte*, *molto leggiero* e *energico*. If the tubas start getting carried away it can sound a bit like Iron Maiden.
- 46 I made a feature of the horns' final two quavers, with an accent on the first and the second one quite short.
- 50 This is a dangerous spot if the conductor's head is in the score and the beating is not clear. Stand up straight, be very clear and make eye contact with the percussionists.
- 54 Don't let the trumpets and horns give too much in bar 54, the following bar is where it needs more sound. The 4/4 bar needs some intensity so observe Carroll's *tenuto* and keep the sound there until the end but make sure everyone comes off cleanly for the crotchet rest at the start of bar 58. Bar 59 should be beaten out, but with passive beats so that there is no chance of anyone coming in early.
- 61 The low winds should be very big in the start of bar 61, but then the

conductor must encourage a rapid *diminuendo* whilst keeping the tempo going so that bar 65 is the same tempo as the opening of the movement.

- 67 Here is another important part for the alto clarinet who could conceivably play louder than marked with a slight *diminuendo* on each note.
- 73 The bassoon, bass clarinet, euphonium and tenor saxophone entry should come as a surprise and be very brightly articulated with a strong *crescendo* leading into the trombone glissando, which is written only in the second and bass parts, the first player joining with the melody on the second beat of bar 75. These first few bars will have the slides flying around and necessarily quite short notes; however from bar 79 they must play lyrically.
- 83 Two very dramatic timpani bars are followed by a tricky tambourine part and then some 'body percussion' in the form of most of the players clapping the opening rhythmic figure. This of course goes down well with the audience and the players alike but make sure that it is together and well executed.
- 85 The motive that begins here in the flutes and oboe must have a real swagger to it. There are no articulations marked other than slurs because of course the correct feel is very much implied in the style of the music, but the second of each slurred pair should be shortened as should the articulated quavers following it. Don't miss the accent in bar 91.
- 97 Show the phrasing here as the quavers alternate between the flute and oboe group and the clarinets. Make sure all of this does not get too loud - other than the timpani bars there is not a *fortissimo* in sight for forty bars.

- 115 There is no indication as to the dynamic that the *diminuendo* should drop to. I would suggest *piano*, or less, allowing the timpani to ring out at *fortissimo*. Equally, the *crescendo* in bar 117 should not go too loud as the trumpets and horns continue the line to the *fortissimo* of 119.
- 121 The *diminuendo* here is probably dependent on tempo and acoustic. The bigger the drop the more dramatic the effect, but all the notes need to be heard.
- 124 At the risk of sounding like a stuck record, keep the general *forte* dynamic in check here. There are 22 bars before the *fortissimo* and there is a lot happening here. Go for energetic but tidy playing with lots of articulation.
- 141 The *diminuendo* of 141 and 142 should not start prematurely and although the effect of the drop away in sound should be dramatic make sure that the triplet against quaver figure of the clarinets and trumpets is clearly audible. As is so often the case with wind players, delay the *crescendo* that begins in 143. Achieving a consistent balance in the rising figures is difficult and you may wish to rehearse it with players stopping the sound as soon as they reach the long note.
- 147 The pattern of the 5/4 bars is 3+2 and the conductor must be in contact with the xylophone player to achieve a clean transition into the *più mosso* of the last seven bars. The *fp* of 151 should be thought of as a release from the dynamic already reached rather than a further increase. The *piano* must come quickly to clear the way for the bass figure in which the conductor's attention is probably best directed to the trombones before sweeping the high woodwinds into the last note with a flourish.

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