

# Christopher Marshall's *Rondorlando*: Comments and Impressions

Joel Moody

Firstly that name! The composer states: “*Rondorlando* is so named simply because it is in rondo form and is an affectionate tribute to my adopted city.” Chris moved from New Zealand to Orlando more than two years ago and is based at the University of Central Florida.

Richard Greenwood led the Orlando Concert Band in the world premiere of *Rondorlando* on January 19, 2008, in a program titled ‘Song and Dance’. As the name suggests all the pieces had a connection either to song or dance through the ages. According to Chris, the inspiration for the piece was just the requirement to write “a song-like, dance-like piece playable by high school and community bands”. An additional influence he admits to is Bernstein’s *Candide* overture.

Listening to *Rondorlando* for the first time what struck me was its use of melody. It is full of good tunes, as well as energetic rhythms. In fact the main theme is built over a 7/8 rhythmic ostinato:



The graceful third theme is in 2/4 yet built over a regular 3/8 beat that moves in and out of sync:



My other first impression was: this isn't easy! I was concerned all those rhythms would present difficulties to my high school wind ensemble. That was certainly true for a while. But the band quickly came to enjoy *Rondorlando*. Part of this was the music itself, and probably, also the feeling of ownership since we were one of the members of the commissioning consortium. That gave them an incentive to get past the counting problems. Listening to the recording of our own premiere, I think now that the players are more at home with the technical challenges. In future performances we will be able to relax into the fun spirit of the piece.

I would grade *Rondorlando* at around 4 to 5. Rhythm is its toughest aspect, but for the most part the meters are stable within sections. The hardest passage is the only one in mixed meter — a climactic passage before the return of

the main theme. But the momentum leading up to this section seems to carry the players through. The band is a large one and includes a piano, four B flat clarinets and an E flat, also English horn and string bass. And six percussion players (!) including three with well-written but sometimes challenging mallet parts.

*Rondorlando* was commissioned in late 2007 by a consortium of four wind bands, three from the Central Florida area and one from Kentucky. The story behind this project is a sign of the times. Dr. Greenwood who organized the commission originally recruited nine Florida community and high school bands in addition to his own. But well before the current economic crisis, the implementation of property tax cuts by Florida state government meant substantial losses to education and the arts. Six of the bands withdrew. The four remaining groups were:

Orlando Concert Band — director, Richard Greenwood  
Scott County High School — director, Tom Brawner  
University High School Symphonic Band — director, Philip Obado  
Winter Park High School Wind Ensemble — director, Joel Moody

At the time of this writing, four performances of *Rondorlando* have been given — all by the commissioning ensembles.

In speaking with the other conductors, it is clear *Rondorlando* is a hit with audiences. Rick Greenwood's premiere in front of an audience of 1200 in St. Luke's Church Oviedo, FL was greeted with a standing ovation and cheers. Tom Brawner in Georgetown KY reported his audience loved the piece. I would definitely say the same of my performance in October. I was not able to attend Phil Obado's performance in east Orlando, but according to Chris Marshall, that audience was enthusiastic too. The tunes and rhythms seem to draw listeners in, and the momentum and excitement keeps building right to the end.

I strongly recommend *Rondorlando* either as an upbeat concert opener, or a finale that will leave the audience singing one of its catchy themes. Chris states he wrote with community and high school bands in mind. I would agree to a point: for any competent high school or community band, which thrives on a challenge, it would be excellent.

Working on *Rondorlando* has been rewarding for me and for my band. I count it among my favorite new works and I am on the lookout for opportunities to program it again.

*Rondorlando*, is subtitled 'A Festive Overture for Wind Band,' and is approximately 7'20" in duration. It is published by Subito Music Corporation (©2007) and is available online at <http://www.subitomusic.com> or from Shattering Music Company at <http://www.shatteringmusic.com>

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