

# **Air for Band**

**By Frank Erickson**

**Publisher: Bourne Co**

**Grade: 2**



## Objectives:

Having studied *Air for Band*, students will sing the 'a' section of this piece on their individual parts.

Standards 1, 5

Having studied melodies and harmonies, students will identify the harmonic and melodic lines in *Air for Band*, to be graded on a checklist.

Standards 5, 6

Having studied C major and minor scales and *Air for Band*, students will perform scales and a selection from *Air for Band* on a playing test, to be graded on a rubric.

Standards 2, 5

Having participated in a daily rehearsal, students will reflect and evaluate their musical performance in writing, to be graded on completion.

Standard 7

Having studied *Air for Band*, students will write a poem using the same form as this piece, to be graded on a rubric.

Standard 5, 6, 8

# “Air for Band”

## Frank Erickson

### Unit 1: Composer

Frank Erickson was born on September 1, 1923 in Spokane, Washington. He began his music career at the age of 8 with piano lessons, at 10 with trumpet lessons and he was composing by his senior year of high school. During WWII Erickson served in the US Army Air Force and arranged pieces for army bands. Post WWII he studied with Maria Castelnuovo-Tedesco and arranged music, this time for dance bands. In 1950 Erickson received his bachelor's degree and a year later his master's degree from the University of Southern California where he studied with Halsey Stevens. Erickson has taught at both UCLA and San Jose State College and held editorial positions at many major music publishing companies including Bourne, Belwin, and G. Shirmer. He is a member of Phi Mu Alpha, Kappa Kappa Psi, and ASCAP. So far Erickson has over 250 compositions and arrangements to his credit with over 150 published including: *Arianova*, *Mexicana*, *A Boy Named Paul*, and *Balladair*.

### Unit 2: Composition

This work was first published in 1956 and later revised in 1966. It is 53 measures long and lasts about 3 minutes. This work has long taught young musicians about phrasing and listening skills while developing intonation skills and the ability to perform long sustained lines. The expressiveness of the simple yet tuneful melody along with the flowing harmonic lines allows young students to truly be successful in making music.

### Unit 3: Historical Perspective

“Air for Band” was written in 1956, early in Erickson's career then was revised later in 1966. He was very concerned with creating a piece that young students could be successful in performing that also had an educational value. The desire to create pieces that were melodically interesting and educational in nature was one of several composers in this era. Erickson wanted to help young musicians grow so he favored simple and harmonically uncomplicated ideas that were playable, interesting and that still have a musically worthwhile idea. The term *Air* was adapted from the term *Aria*. It is used to describe a tuneful melody in a vocal or instrumental line. Traditionally such a vocal line would be strophic, syllabic, and homophonic. The French also had a more serious version of this term known as *Air de cour*, or court air. This was a poem-like melody that had extensive phrasing. This piece stays true to its name with its very tuneful melody carried primarily in the clarinets.


#### Unit 4: Technical Considerations

This piece is not extremely technically challenging. The scales used are C major and C minor and the eighth note is the smallest division of the beat. During the second half of the piece there are some entrances on the & of the beat in most of the parts. These entrances are rarely alone but rather are played by multiple sections of the band giving a greater sense of confidence to the performers. This piece has no major range issues to contend with but the flutes are mostly in the upper register which could be an intonation problem. There are only two percussionists needed to perform this piece and very large amounts of rests in those percussion parts.

#### Unit 5: Stylistic Considerations

This piece is in a very slow tempo that will require great amounts of air support to perform the long sustained lines. Throughout the piece there are many accidentals to watch out for in the harmony parts, particularly in the c minor section of the piece. Along with the slow tempo this piece is dynamically challenging. Most of the piece is piano to mezzo-piano. The key is to keep the sustained lines in tune and in proper balance and blend dynamically. Students must also accomplish noticeable phrasing within these quiet dynamics and long slow crescendo/decrescendo moments in the middle and end of the piece.

#### Unit 6: Musical Elements

Musicality is a key element that can be taught with this piece. The tuneful melody has natural shape to it that allows the triadic harmonic accompaniment to support it gracefully. The balance between the harmony and melody provides the interest for the piece. The trade off of the  motive in the second half of the piece provides interest as well. The tonality will shift from C minor to C major leaving the listener with a triumphant feeling in the end.

#### Unit 7: Form and Structure

Measure:	1	9	17	28	36	44
Section:	a	a	b	a1	b1	a2
	C minor			C Major		

The first time through the A section the clarinets 1 & 2 have the melody.

The second time through the A section the flute/oboe/trumpet 1 join clarinet 1&2.

The melody in the b section is in the clarinets for measure 17-20 and moves to the flute/clarinet 1&2/oboe/trumpet 1 in measures 21-25 then is continued on by the trumpet 1 through measures 26-27.

The a1 section is marked by a melody in the clarinet 1&2 for the first 4 measure s that is joined by the flutes and oboes.

The b1 section has trading motives forming the melody at first then the melody is in the oboe/flute/clarinet 1/trumpet for measures 40-41 that is taken over by the trumpets for a measure and finished out by the flute and clarinets.

The a2 section has the small motive throughout the traditionally harmonic parts underneath the flute/oboe/clarinet 1/trumpet 1. For once the baritones get to be important as well rather than playing the harmony entirely.

### **Unit 8: Melodic Content**

The melody is passed throughout the upper woodwinds and brass throughout the piece. The melody is mostly scalar and the range is moderate. This allows the players to focus on the phrasing of the melody instead of worrying about notes too terribly much.

### **Unit 9: Harmonic Content**

This work is in a chorale style so the harmonic motion is simple but constant. The progressions are relatively standard so there should be little difficulty with the actual notes that make up the harmonic parts. The difficulty lies in balance and blend. It is crucial to have a well blended ensemble so that the harmonies sound appropriately balanced and do not overpower the melody.

### **Unit 10: Rhythmic Content**

The rhythmic content in this work is not complex. The most difficult rhythms are an occasional dotted quarter note or a passage of running eighth notes. These sections should not be difficult because the tempo of the work is not extremely fast. The harmonic line is primarily made up of half notes and there are few rhythmic issues with the rhythm in these parts.

### **Unit 11: Suggested Listening**

J.S. Bach, *Air for G String*

Frank Erickson, *Balladair*

Frank Erickson, *Chorale for Band*

John Gibson, *Resting in the Peace of his Hands*

Percy Grainger, *Irish Tune from County Derry*

### **Unit 12: Additional References and Resources**

Balent, Andrew. "Frank Erickson—The Composer's Point of View". *The Instrumentalist*, XL April 1986, pg 28-34

Berger, Kenneth. *Band Encyclopedia*. Evansville 11, IN: Band Associates Inc. 1960

Burnais, Michael. "Frank Erickson: Air for Band," [Young Band Repertoire Project : Literature Analysis](http://music.utsa.edu/~bharris/ybrp/Analyses/S00/airforband.html). Revised Fall 2000, accessed 2-20-06  
<<http://music.utsa.edu/~bharris/ybrp/Analyses/S00/airforband.html>>

Dvorak, Thomas L. *Best Music for Young Band*. Brooklyn, NY: Manhattan Beach Music, 1986

Randel, Don Michael. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1986

Rehrig, William H. *The Heritage Encyclopedia of Band Music*. Westerville, OH: Integrity Press, 1991

Hitchcock, H. Wiley. *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*. New York, NY: Macmillan Press Limited, 1986

## **Daily Activities:**

### **Journal Writing:**

At the end of every rehearsal give the students a couple minutes to write a short reflection on that day's rehearsal. These reflections can be used for multiple purposes. The first purpose is of course for the students to be constantly self evaluating their performance. They are asked to write a few sentences about what they noticed in their performance that day, other section's performances, questions about the piece and their daily technique. Another purpose for this activity is to have the students practice their writing skills and simply to take attendance. (Provided it is not necessary to turn in an attendance sheet at the beginning of every class period).

### **Warm Ups:**

While working through this piece the daily warm-ups should included tuning, C major and c minor scales, and a selection from the following melody and rhythmic activities.

### **Melodic Warm-Up:**

Each student has a copy of the opening melody from "Air for Band" in their student packet. The melody has been transposed so all instruments may play together in unison. Have the students play the melody together focusing on phrasing and dynamics. Remember to discuss the importance of phrasing in this piece and how the melody is passed through the instruments. This will both reinforce the melody for this piece and reinforce the previously taught concept of melody.

### **Rhythmic Warm-Up:**

Have the students clap line one together and then break them up into 2 groups so they can clap lines 1 and 2 simultaneously. This passing of the eighth note rhythm is found towards the end of the piece and tends to be a difficult passage to work through. After clapping through the rhythm exercise play it using scales or just a single pitch.

### **Post-Sight Reading Analysis:**

This worksheet should be a standard worksheet used for every piece of literature studied. The purpose is to have the students look critically at the piece and analyze a few elements that will be crucial to their performance of the work. After grading (looking for completion) these papers return them so the students can use them as a reference guide. If there was any mass confusion or there are special musical issues with the piece discuss them upon returning these papers.

## Harmony vs. Melody Group Assignment

Standard	<b>Standard 6:</b> Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
Lesson Goal	Students will become familiar with the balance between melodic and harmonic material in the work <i>Air for Band</i> by Frank Erickson.
Lesson Objective	Having studied melodies and harmonies, students will identify the harmonic and melodic lines in <i>Air for Band</i> , to be graded on a checklist.
Guarded vocabulary	Harmony, melody
Materials / visuals / equipment / sources	Harmony vs. Melody handout, recording of <i>Air for Band</i> , colored pencils, several copies of the score
Set up	Groups of 5 students, each group must have a woodwind and a brass player, each group must consist of students from different sections

Minutes	Activity
4	Introduce the assignment and review the concepts of harmony and melody with the students
2	Get the students into groups and pass out materials.
15	Have the students do the activity
5	Warm-up the ensemble
15	Rehearse concert pieces

Accommodations, Modifications, Adaptations	(leave blank for this plan)
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Debriefing (evaluation ?s)	N/A (discuss papers after they are graded)
Notes of changes for future lessons	(leave blank for this plan)

### Checklist for Harmony vs. Melody

- \_\_\_\_ Participation
- \_\_\_\_ Neatness
- \_\_\_\_ Following Directions
- \_\_\_\_ Correct Melodic Coloring
- \_\_\_\_ Correct Harmonic Coloring

**Total: 10 points**

## Singing as a tool for listening

Standard	<b>Standard 1:</b> Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
Lesson Goal	To activate the student's listening skills and practice balance/blend
Lesson Objective	Having studied <i>Air for Band</i> , students will sing the 'a' section of this piece on their individual parts
Guarded vocabulary	Balance, intonation, blend
Materials / visuals / equipment / sources	Music to <i>Air for Band</i>
Set up	Typical rehearsal set-up

Minutes	Activity
8	Have the students sing their individual parts during the 'a' section of this piece. Instruct them to listen carefully to balance, intonation and blend. The process of singing their parts will help them to use their listening skills because singing requires a different process than just playing notes. Use this exercise to discuss the balance between melody and harmony and to discuss musical phrases. Have the entire ensemble sing the melodic line from their warm-up and discuss how to phrase the line when singing and how that translates into playing. Then have the ensemble sing their parts again to listen for the melodic phrasing and how the harmonic parts must fit into that phrasing as well.
30	Rehearse Concert Pieces (Of course...rehearse the section above immediately after singing to work on applying the process of singing to playing)

Accommodations, Modifications, Adaptations	(leave blank for this plan)
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Debriefing (evaluation ?s)	
Notes of changes for future lessons	(leave blank for this plan)

## Playing Test:

In a blind setting, have students perform their C major scale, c minor scales (3 forms) and a select passage from the music. Evaluate their performance on a checklist.

- unsatisfactory
- √ satisfactory
- + excellent

### C Major Scale

- \_\_\_\_\_ Tempo (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pitch Accuracy (fingerings) (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhythm (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tone (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intonation/Breathing (1 pt)

### C Natural minor Scale

- \_\_\_\_\_ Tempo (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pitch Accuracy (fingerings) (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhythm (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tone (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intonation/Breathing (1 pt)

### C Harmonic Minor Scale

- \_\_\_\_\_ Tempo (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pitch Accuracy (fingerings) (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhythm (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tone (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intonation/Breathing (1 pt)

### C Melodic Minor Scale

- \_\_\_\_\_ Tempo (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pitch Accuracy (fingerings) (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhythm (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tone (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intonation/Breathing (1 pt)

### Musical Excerpt

- \_\_\_\_\_ Tempo (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pitch Accuracy (fingerings) (2 pts)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhythm (2 pts)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tone (1 pt)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intonation/Breathing (2 pts)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dynamics (2 pts)

Total: \_\_\_\_ / 30