

The Riddle of the Sphinx was commissioned by H. Dwight Satterwhite and the University of Georgia Wind Symphony in 1998. The work is dedicated to Dr. Satterwhite and the ensemble. The group gave the world premiere performance of the piece on March 3, 1998.

The Sphinx is a tone poem for the band describing the three ages of man. It takes its cue from the well-known tale of Oedipus and the Sphinx. Dur-

ing the time of Oedipus, the ancient Greek City of Thebes was guarded by a Sphinx. The Sphinx would kill any traveler who could not correctly answer her riddle. The Sphinx would ask, "What animal walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?" to which the correct reply is, "Man in the three ages of his life."

The Sphinx begins with INTRODUCTION - DAWN OF LIFE. The material stated in this section forms the basis for the entire work. Of particular importance are the gradually descending sustained tones B-flat, A-flat, G-flat, D-flat followed by an ascending E-flat as well as the ascending motif of F, C, and E-flat. Three solo instruments (piccolo, flute, and alto saxophone) intone rather frenetic and jerky short motifs symbolizing the movements of a human fetus. Gradually the movements become more profound and involve the entire ensemble.

LIFE is announced by triumphant horn calls over a cacophony of percussion. This is contrasted by a tense polytonal section signifying the trials and tribulations that face all human beings after life begins.

A short timpani solo gives way to THE SPHINX music. A theme in low hollow open fifths portrays the archaic being, while the modal music that follows is indicative of the ominous nature of the Sphinx. An incessantly repeated polychord on an active rhythm becomes the transitional chord to the first of the three ages of man. After a complete break we arrive at the next movement.

CHILDHOOD is largely about the playfulness and unpredictability of the first age of man. This section is lightly scored and features exposed solo work for various instruments. We even hear the vibes "posing" as a music box putting a child to sleep. Tritones symbolize the mischievous nature of kids. After the solo oboe intones the "love theme" over the motif of the Sphinx. The music builds in excitement with an *accelerando* and the listener is led to the second age of man.

ADULTHOOD is the fast section of the work. This energetic music symbolizes the fast paced "hustle and bustle" of man in the years of adulthood. This section is largely built on the eighth note ostinato of B-flats and A-flats which sets the pace at the beginning of the section; an idea which was briefly stated in the introduction of the work. Temple blocks imitate the sound of a clock ticking away the minutes as man works to defeat daily deadlines. After another brief timpani solo, the tense polytonal music of the introduction returns once again to symbolize the struggles and obstacles faced in adulthood. The incessantly and actively repeated "transitional" polychord of the introduction is heard once again and this section ends in a powerful tutti under a fermata.

THE TWILIGHT YEARS is bold and majestic, symbolizing the wisdom of the elders. It contrasts a heroic melody, first intoned by the horns, with triplet fanfares for the brass. This mood is briefly interrupted by an oboe solo symbolizing the nostalgia for days of long ago. The "wisdom" music returns once again in a highly dramatic setting.

Suddenly the volume is reduced to a whisper and the three soloists of the introduction return as the "elders" and begin "reverting" to their childhood ways. The soloists are eventually accompanied by the Sphinx music. A loud B-flat gradually diminishes in volume and afterward the solo oboe once again intones the primary motif of the work. Soft and solemn "funeral fanfares" signal the end of earthly life. However, soon there is "light" again. The music grows in volume as a brisk and jubilant Coda joyously recalls the themes of the work. Oedipus correctly answers the riddle and after one final brass statement of the Sphinx motif, the work ends with the self-destruction of the Sphinx in an "explosion" of gong and cymbals. *Notes by the composer.*