

VAN GOGH PORTRAITS is a major work for concert band inspired by five paintings by the great Dutch master Vincent Van Gogh. The composition is dedicated to Capt Larry H. Lang and the United States Air Force Air Combat Command Heritage of America Band. I have been drawn to Van Gogh's art for many years. When Capt Lang approached me about writing a new band work, I suggested this project, he suggested the title, and I began composing.

The piece consists of five contrasting movements which share the relationships established by three pitches; Bb, D, and A. The movements are further unified by the "Van Gogh motif" which goes through transformations as it progresses through each of the movements. VAN GOGH PORTRAITS is approximately seventeen minutes in duration and is scored for standard modern American concert band instrumentation.

THE POTATO EATERS, the inspiration for the first movement, is a very dark painting from the artist's early period employing primarily the colors black and dull yellow. It presents a poor family of coal miners eating a simple meal of potatoes in a dimly lit room. Van Gogh spent sometime as a missionary in the Borinage region of Belgium and was drawn to the plight of these peasants whose lives, like his own, were burdened with care. The music is often tragic and somber. The sound is mostly dark and the instruments are largely confined to their lower tessituras. The "Van Gogh motif" is stated by the solo euphonium in bars 2 - 5 and again in bars 52 - 55 in the closing measures of the movement.

LA BERCEUSE is the lighthearted and rollicking second movement of the set. It draws its inspiration from five portraits which Van Gogh did of the maternal Madame Roulin, the wife of his postman. The artist thought that this image of a mother beside her infant's cradle could serve as a consolation to the lonely, a reminder of happier days. I however take the paintings at face value; a rather chubby woman with a "matter of fact" snooty expression and dressed in green with orange hair stands out against a background of oriental looking wallpaper of green with pink flowers. Van Gogh even noted in a letter the counterpoint of reds and greens to be found in these portraits. The music contrasts the "chubby woman" theme, first introduced by low brass at the beginning of the movement, with the oriental flavor of the background depicted by quartal harmonies, parallel fourths, and pentatonic scales. Piquant solos for trombone, tuba, and Eb clarinet are rudely interrupted by trombone glissandi and bass drum strokes, reminding one of a nagging mother-in-law continuously interrupting a conversation! The Eb Clarinet solo should indeed be played in a "nagging" style! The "Van Gogh motif" appears in a full tutti statement in bars 71 - 74 of this movement.