

1218 Overture

By Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr.

Program Notes

When my family moved from Mulberry, IN to Lafayette, IN, our new house had a street address of 1218. One of my colleagues, who enjoys puns and word play and knew that I wrote the *Mulberry March* in honor of my Mulberry home, jokingly asked when I was going to write the *1218 Overture* for my new house. The idea rolled around in my head for quite a while. I thought that the title would appeal to band kids because most of them know the *1812 Overture* and would see the humor in the title. After a lot of experimenting, I finally found the right blend of new ideas, based on a musical application of the numbers 1218, and quotes from the Tchaikovsky classic.

Performance Notes

When writing this piece I initially tried applying several compositional techniques (retrograde, inversion, etc.) to prominent *1812* melodies but nothing worked for me. It all sounded too academic. When I started thinking about the title in terms of solfege instead of doing a parody of *1812 Overture*, everything came together.

When my beginning wind players can all finally play the concert pitches Bb, C and D I begin referring to pitches by their solfege number in the Bb concert scale. This gives me a chance to have the kids focus on tone production separately from note reading during a series of warm-up exercises. Lately, I have spent more time getting the kids to use their ear by teaching them rote melodies by the note numbers. This process has not impeded their note reading skills at all but I have noticed an improvement in their tone. When we begin to learn about key signatures and work on our second major scale, Eb concert, referring to the numbers relative to their new key center helps them in understanding the scale. They soon begin applying the rote-number tunes to the new scale. They begin to understand how scales and key signatures work.

With a little guidance students will be able to see how the scale degrees 1-2-1-8 are used throughout the piece as the seed for the melody, bass lines and harmonies. Following a brief introduction the melody at 3 clearly presents the 1-2-1-8 motive. The students will recognize this theme as it occurs several times in the opening Allegro section.

The motive is used in Eb major at 45 in a totally different style. The students will have to listen for the 1-2-1-8 idea as it is split between different instruments. Demonstrating how the trumpet line in 45 leads into the flute melody in 46 on a piano will more clearly illustrate the scale degree relationships.

The final Allegro at 61 uses a mallet ostinato to establish 1-2-1-8 in this section. The bold harmonies in 65-72, using the 1-2-1-8 notes, are an easy way to introduce students to dissonance. The chord progression in 73-76 should sound familiar to the students and acts to tie the entire piece together. The *1812* quotes begin at 77 and are tied to the concept of the piece through the mallet ostinato.

An optional part for clarinetists who can play over the break is included in this piece and certainly adds to the piece.

Any keyboard instrument will work for the mallet part but xylophone will project the best. The mallet part was written with inexperienced mallet players in mind. Once learned, this part can be performed with confidence and is prominent enough to convince the younger percussionists that mallet playing really is pretty cool.

If the timpani part is used, please impress on your players the beating spot and how to execute the “popping” of the mallet off of the head to get a big resonant tone. These two points are the most important things to worry about. I have my beginning timpani players aim their right hand to the right of the pedal and their left hand to the left of the pedal about 1/3 of the way from the rim to the center. They will soon recognize a good tone and hopefully find it on every stroke.



Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr. lives in Lafayette, Indiana with his wife Kim and four children. He is a band director in the Lafayette (IN) School Corporation where he currently directs the concert and jazz bands at Tecumseh Middle School and is an assistant director at Jefferson High School. During his 20+ years as a public school teacher he has taught instrumental music at every level from elementary band and orchestra through teaching applied percussion at Purdue University. Jeff holds degrees from Butler University and Northwestern University where he studied band arranging with John P. Paynter, Don Owens and Don Casey. In addition to a busy teaching schedule he is active as a freelance percussionist with many regional jazz and concert groups. He is an experienced adjudicator, clinician and arranger for concert, jazz, marching and percussion ensembles and is a member of the Central States Judges Association. He can be seen (briefly!) as the band director in the Paramount Pictures movie “Blue Chips” with Shaquille O’Neal and Nick Nolte.

