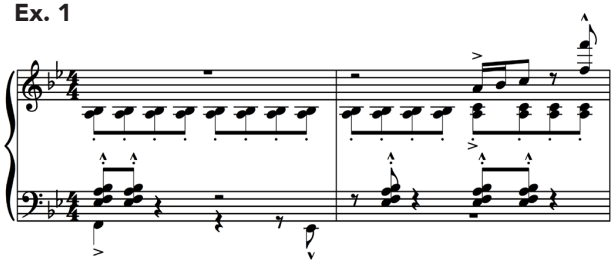
MICHAEL MARKOWSKI'S

SUNNY-SIDE UP

An Interpretive Analysis by Dr. Marc R. Dickey

While Michael Markowski may claim not to be a morning person, whoever the star of this piece is is definitely a morning person. Maybe it's you! *Sunny-Side Up* begins with a series of industrious thumps, as if you've leapt out of bed and started your day shadow boxing in front of a mirror to wake yourself up. *Jab Cross! Jab! Jab Cross!* While jabbing away to an *ostinato* of minor seconds in the clarinets and marimba, you whistle a little ascending tune. This tiny motive is heard in the first clarinet and first trumpet in the third beat of m. 2. It starts with that same interval, the minor second **(ex. 1, mm. 1-2, Jabs and Crosses with a little ascending motive)**. All of this hovers around an "F" in the bass line.

Ex. 1



Enough of that, time to get the day started. Speaking of time, we are not in a hurry today. Looking at the notation, this looks like a fast piece; but looking at Markowski's tempo marking tells us it is not. A nice rambling quarter note at 124 or so is called for.

Following the four-measure introduction, the first sense of melody appears at m. 5. It's a diligent little tune of mostly descending, mostly conjunct syncopated eighth notes in the flute, oboe, and xylophone, exuding a sense of purpose like an orderly To-Do List for the day. Be sure your students observe the accents and approach this with a slightly detached style.

These two measures are answered by a Sassy contrasting line in trombones and euphonium, veering away from that To-Do List with promise of distraction **(ex. 2, mm. 5-8, To-Do List Question followed by Sassy Answer)**. Observe the accents in the accompaniment (clarinets and cabasa). And, the bass line has shifted away from centering on and around "F" to a center of "A♭." You'll notice that the movement of the bass line contains familiar pop idioms while also friendly for young wind bands.

At. m. 9 the flute/oboe/xylophone melody returns, but halfway through its second bar it is stolen away by the addition of the piccolo, clarinets, and first trumpets, who take the melodic line to new heights, and in the most soaring *legato* style heard so far on this new day. The Sassy response returns in m. 11, now in the 3rd clarinet, tenor saxophone, and horn, accompanied

by broader gestures in the bass line (bassoon, bass clarinet, tuba, and tympani). The snare drum signals in Morse code that something is about to happen.

At m. 13 the character of the piece shifts as the shaker, suspended cymbal (with stick on bell) and cowbell take over. (Have your students hold the shaker and cowbell up at their eye level so everyone can hear, see, and feel them suddenly shift the mood.) It feels as if the Sassy line has won out over the To-Do List! Thirteen measures in, we are wide awake, and it's going to be a Very Fun Day! Now firmly rooted in F Major, the whole ensemble celebrates with syncopation **(ex. 3, mm. 13-16, Very Fun Day)**. Remember that line from Ferris Bueller's Day Off?: *"The question isn't 'what are we going to do?', the question is 'what aren't we going to do?"* One thing we ARE going to do is to bring in the trumpets at m. 17, big time, up a dynamic and "to the fore." Not time to go crazy with this, just have a little fun **(ex. 4, mm. 17-20, trumpets to the fore!)**.

Time to calm down and examine our choices a bit at m. 20, a paradoxical point of repose with a high level of rhythmic activity. The saxophone section provides a musical Hairflip background based on a Major second, while the trombones bring back a quick but heavy Jab-Cross that is answered by the too-cool-for-school tubas in m. 21—no heavy duty accents here. The dialog continues and increases in pace in m. 23, and then it's on again.

At m. 24 the clarinet/marimba *ostinato* from m. 1 is again combined with the To-Do List melody from m. 5, but now it is bolder, in the trumpets. The bass line has landed on B♭. The To-Do List is again interrupted by the

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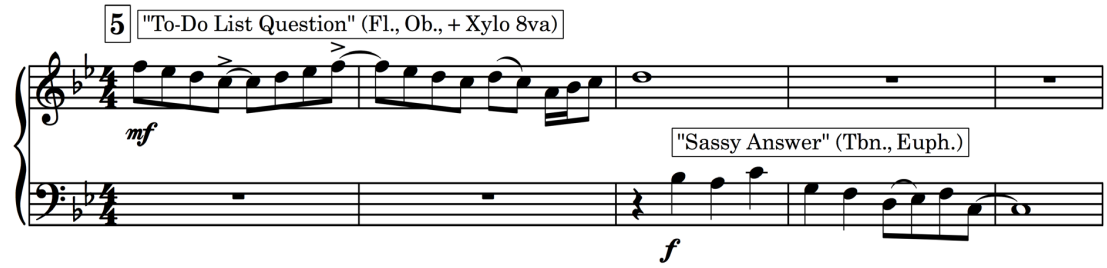


Ex. 3

Ex. 4

"Sunny-Side Up begins with a serious of industrious thumps, as if you've leapt out of bed and started your day shadow boxing in front of a mirror to wake yourself up. Jab Cross! Jab! Jab Cross!"

sassy trombones in m. 26, but this time it is even sassier due to the cavalier content of the intervals between the trombone parts. Bring these trombone parts out a bit, and make sure they are well balanced with each other to hear the fun. This sense of devilishness rears up again in m. 29 in the syncopated, *sforzando* accompaniment in the 2nd and 3rd clarinets, alto saxophones, and horns **(ex. 5, m. 29, devilish syncopation)**.

Ex. 5

The buildup to the Very Fun Day theme takes one bar longer than it did the first time—Markowski makes us wait for it—but we know it's coming. When the Very Fun Day theme returns at m. 33, Markowski lays a new *ostinato* over it, one which sounds stolen from the Western film he stayed up too late watching the night before. It's a good fit! **(ex. 6, mm. 33-37, Western ostinato with Very Fun Day theme)**.

The trumpets come in with the former "to the fore" line from m. 17, but it is not marked "to the fore" this time because we are transitioning in a different direction now (m. 37). It's time to relax just a little bit, as suggested by the saxophones' Hairflip motive from m. 20 returning at m. 40. A little *legato* first flute *soli* beginning with a big minor seventh leap in m. 41 is an attempt to calm things down, and in spite of a little protesting rambunctiousness in m. 42, the *legato* tune is taken up by the first clarinet in m. 43 to complete the transition to a contrasting development section.

Avoid the temptation to slow down until you see that slight *ritard* Markowski has written in m. 43. And, more importantly, note that the tempo change is not much of one! The more important indication here is "More Relaxed." This feeling of pulling back a bit in tempo is more important than an exact metronomic relationship with the first tempo.

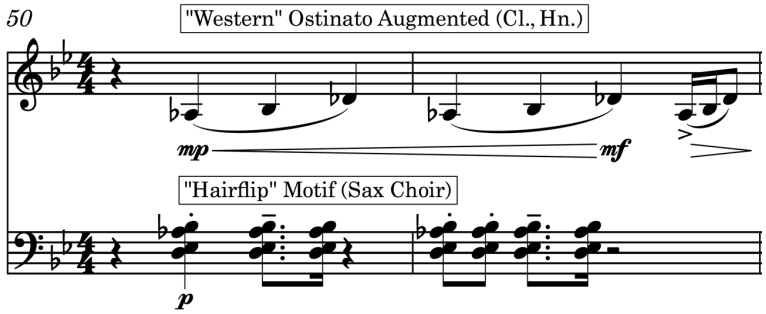
In this slightly slower development section, Markowski utilizes cells from previous motives, little tidbits of sounds we have encountered before. Take a look and listen: the Hairflip is there, some Jabs and Crosses, the minor second *ostinato*. In m. 50, the Western *ostinato* is recast into a rhythmically augmented melodic line in the clarinets and horns **(ex. 7, mm. 50-51, Western ostinato augmented in legato style, accompanied by the Hairflip)**, passed to the oboe, and then to the alto saxophone in a slight *ritard*.

Continuing in the more relaxed tempo at m. 54, Markowski continues to tease with bits and pieces. It seems as if there are so many possibilities that he and we can hardly decide what to do next. You may want to rehearse this section from mm. 40-70 or so even a bit slower, encouraging each section to play their parts with confidence, and to emphasize the *subito* dynamic changes and *crescendos* and *diminuendos* throughout. There is no *tutti* band here…every section in the band has its moment or two!

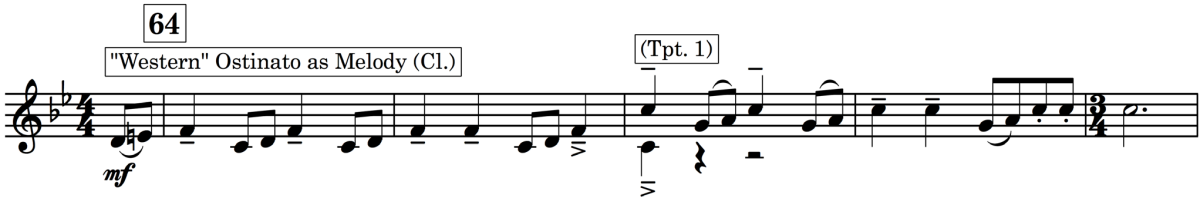
There is a subtle horn entrance loosely based on the Sassy theme in m. 60 that takes on an increasingly prominent role of longer rhythmic values as it *crescendos*. In fact, one could say this is the longest, slowest gesture in the piece. It then fades into the clarinet playing with the Western film *ostinato* as the bassoon, bass clarinet, and tenor and baritone saxophones reminisce *via* a variation in augmentation of the To-Do List melody from

Ex. 6

Ex. 7



Ex. 8



m. 5. This is all foreshadowing.

At m. 66 we return to the original tempo, but not the original material. If you are looking for a return to the "A" section, this is not quite it yet. Here Markowski gives the first trumpets a full blown augmentation of the Western movie theme, unexpectedly turning a former accompaniment line into the melody, with some parallel triads wandering about in the low brass over a "C" in the bass line **(ex. 8, mm. 64-68, Western film former ostinato as melody)**.

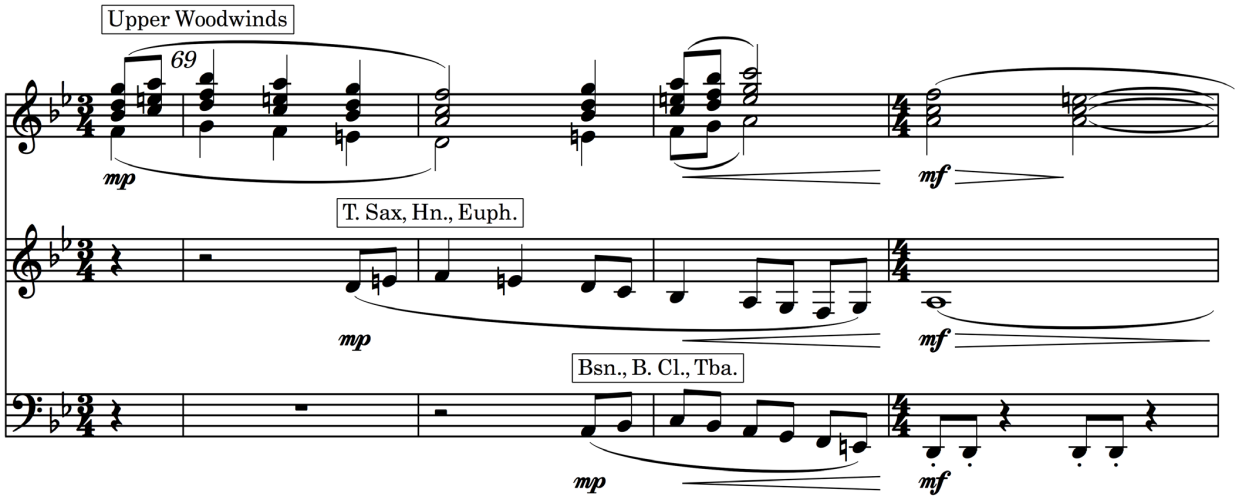
Even more surprisingly, the new trumpet tune is followed by a sweet *legato* three-part *stretto* in the woodwinds, conical brass, and bells. Make sure your students reflect the metric accents in these lines; the emphasis should be on beat 1, not on the pickup note on beat 3! **(ex. 9, mm. 69-72, three-part stretto)**.

The next four measures are a contrasting bit of boom-chick, founded on a "D" in the bass, and increasing in volume and rhythmic activity as we end up with an a minor 7th chord over the D bass. The most

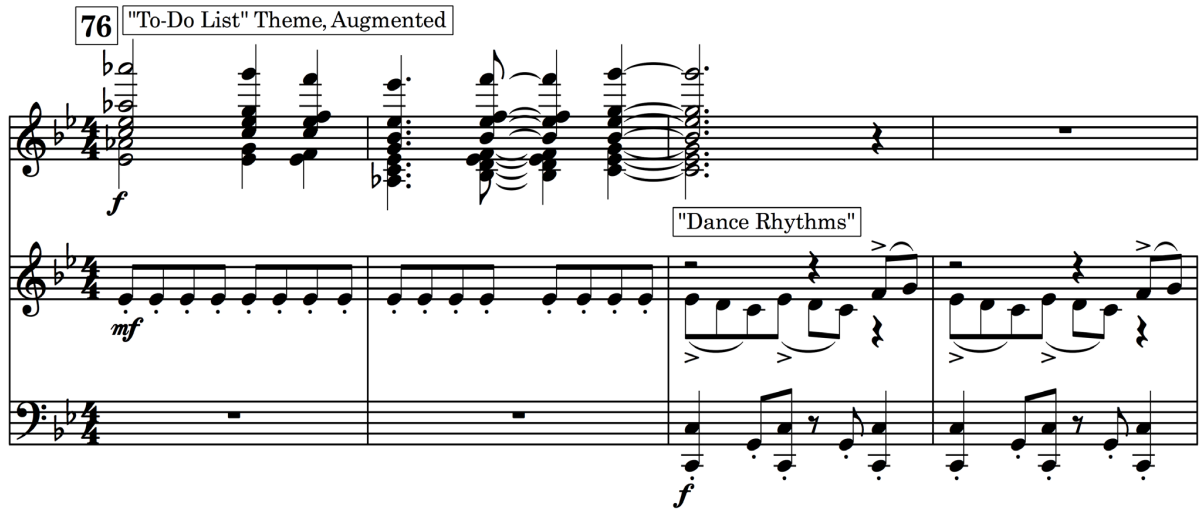
majestic moment of *Sunny-Side Up* comes at m. 76, surely the highlight of the Very Fun Day as the a minor 7th/D shifts rather easily into A♭ Major at the climax…but that bass line…woah...it pounces from its former D down a tritone to the A♭. This is that moment when a snow capped mountain comes into view, or you walk into a museum gallery and stand in awe of the unanticipated beauty of a powerful painting or statue. Markowski recreates the question and answer from mm. 5-8 here by bringing in a dance rhythm in the bass instruments following the first two bars of glory **(ex. 10., mm. 76-79, most majestic moment, followed by dance rhythms)**.

Familiar materials return in bits, again with widely varying dynamics for several measures, reminders of what a good time we are having. Sure enough, the percussion break out as they did at m. 13 into party mode, but…an ominous presence of increasingly dissonant harmonies gives us a sense of danger. The Sassy trombone tune from m. 7 is there to try to reassure us (m. 85), but by m. 87 it is clear that something has gone terribly wrong with our Very Fun Day. We know because we are accosted by a big fat ominous E♭ augmented triad over a D♭ bass on beat 1 of m. 87, followed by increasingly disturbing harmonies

Ex. 9



Ex. 10



"Sure enough, the percussion break out as they did at m. 13 into party mode, but... an ominous presence of increasingly dissonant harmonies gives us a sense of danger."

over the next several measures. **(ex. 11, mm. 87-88, big fat augmented chord followed by dissonant harmonies)**. Even with lots of cowbell, this is scary stuff!

Ex. 11

In fits and starts, accomplished particularly with the *crescendo* emanating from the *subito piano* in m. 96, it feels as if maybe we can find our way out of this dire situation. By m. 99 we are back in the daylight and breathing fresh air! The Very Fun Day theme from m. 13 returns full out here, now in a brilliant C Major. A bit short lived, because finally…

…we get our recapitulation, at m. 104. Four measures of Jabs and Crosses, back in the original key center (F). We hear from our To-Do List (m. 108), and this time the trumpets provide the Sassy response (m. 110).

Ok, now remember how we heard the Very Fun Day theme for the first time at m. 13, and then when it returned at m. 33 it took one extra measure to get there? Well now, in an even greater case of delayed gratification, Markowski adds even one more bar before we get back to our Very Fun Day (see mm. 116-118 and compare the approaches to m. 13 and m. 33.) Bumps along the road are reflected in the intentional "wrong note" dissonances such as the alto saxophone and horn pitches and trumpet part on the fourth beat of m. 115. And the woodwind cluster on beat four in both mm. 116 and 117. Insidious!

Nevertheless, by m. 118 we are hanging out once again in fun-filled F Major, with trumpets returning to the fore at m. 122. It's been a Very Full Very Fun Day. The Western film *ostinato* reappears in the clarinets at m. 127, and this final "to the fore!" is for *tutti* brass plus low reeds. We back off a bit one last time to enjoy the little *legato* line with the big minor seventh leap from m. 41 (see m. 135, in octaves this time).

This tightly constructed composition comes to a big finish with a dissonant suspension in m. 139. The pitches in the suspension are resurrected from the Major second and minor second in the very first beat of the piece (E♭, F, A, B♭). The gritty suspension resolves into a very welcome B♭ Major chord with a satisfying B♭ rebound in the bass instruments.

Back to Ferris: *"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."* May your eggs always be *Sunny-Side Up*.

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