

A Derwentside Suite

Sandy Smith

The suite was commissioned by David Jackson and Consett Brass. The idea for a piece involving not only young Brass players but also the talents of other school children came during the visit of White River Brass.

A Derwentside Suite is set in five movements, each telling the story of a particular period in history of the local area.

I. Romans

Starting with a fanfare for Cornets, this movement depicts the march of a Roman Legion as it departs towards Hadrian's Wall from one of the local forts of Ebchester or Lanchester. A contrasting lyrical melody is heard in the Euphoniums before this is combined with the fanfare. The music quietly fades away as the legion disappears into the distance.

II. Blanchland

French monks arrived in the area in 1120 and established an abbey at Blanchland. Local legend tells of an attack on the abbey by Scottish Raiders who were alerted to its whereabouts by the tolling of the abbey bell which had been mistakenly rung by the monks to signify their escape from attack. The music first depicts the plainchant of the monks which is interrupted by the bell and the subsequent attack on the abbey in a faster section where the plainchant theme can still be heard above the violence of the attack.

III. The Industrial Revolution

This movement begins with the sounds of vast industrial machinery starting up in the Derwent Iron Company and the grinding monotony of both the factories and the lives of the workers. As the music progresses, the sound of the local Salvation Army Band - the first in the country - can be heard before the movement ends in triumphant Victorian and Edwardian style as the town reaps the benefits of prosperity and expansion.

IV. Conflict - World War I / World War II

Like all areas of the country, Derwentside paid a heavy price in the two great conflicts of the 20th century. This "military elegy" remembers those who lost their lives and recasts the roman fanfare melody of the first movement in more sombre mood. A more hymn like section follows before the music ends reflectively.

V. The Present Age

The finale ends the suite on a note of optimism and salutes the youth of today in an upbeat, rhythmic movement which gives all the players in the band a chance to shine.

Sandy Smith
May 2014