



Mini-Lesson:

Writing & Communicating with a Composer

OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the process of writing *Sweet like that* for Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School and consider what they would request of a composer if a piece was written for their own band.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will:

- learn about the ideas behind *Sweet like that*
- use musical language to convey their musical preferences and interests

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Composer Biography (in Teacher's Guide)
- Program Notes (in Teacher's Guide)
- 4x6 cards for each student

PROCESS

1. Share the following information with your students
 - a. Christopher Theofanidis wrote *Sweet like that* for an actual band, the Betsy Ross Arts Magnet Middle School Band in New Haven, CT. He composed the piece at the request of the American Composers Forum as a part of *BandQuest®*, a series for middle and junior high school bands.
 - b. The composer really did ask the students to tell him what they wanted in the piece. Here are some of the things from their list:
 - The tuba player wanted to be featured (so there is a low brass emphasis in the opening and closing measures)
 - The flute players wanted to play piccolo (so half the flutes play piccolo)
 - The percussion section asked for a drum set to be included (so there is)
 - The percussion section also asked for several unusual instruments (vibraslap, whistle, egg shaker, sleigh bells, and slapstick, among the many other cool percussion instruments are included)
 - The brass players wanted to use mutes (so there are a couple of passages with straight mutes in them)

cont.

2. Ask students to imagine that a composer has been commissioned to write a piece for their band! She wants to know what you want her to consider putting into the piece – the things you like to play, the styles of music you like listening to and playing, what can your own instrument can do, and what you wish you could play.
3. Have your students:
 - a. Create individual lists on 4 x 6 cards telling the composer what they want in their piece. Turn the cards into the director who will read some of the responses out loud in class.

Optional: Divide into small groups of mixed instruments and create a group list for the composer.
 - b. Share the lists from all the groups to learn what other band members are thinking. What was mentioned most often? (The band director can also compile and share a wish list.)

EXTENSION

Investigate the possibility of commissioning a work for your band! Ask groups of band students to write a letter communicating their requests and requirements for the piece. Interested in doing this but don't know where to begin? Contact BandQuest (BandQuest@composersforum.org) at the American Composers Forum for advice!