

HILL DANCE for Concert Band by David Avshalomov (Program note by the composer)

This lively piece began as one of three movements, each projecting a different type of energy in a different outdoor setting, which I wrote across 2008-2009 at the request of Margaret Thornhill for the Los Angeles Clarinet choir. Of the three, this one was always the best candidate a concert band version, and in 2015 I fleshed it out for full band, without changing any of the music itself. The scoring still features the clarinet choir and soloists, but gradually works in the other choirs and culminates with full band. (The clarinet writing takes the players back to their Eastern European back-country folk music roots, the *tarogato* and *chalumeau* and their shrill outdoor use at weddings and festivals—before clarinetists had to smooth out their musical manners to join the orchestra.)

Here we have **human energy**. Music for the body, all about rhythm—a lively Bulgarian-style folk dance up in the hill country. The meter is quick 5/8, which across pairs of bars creates an asymmetric four-beat rhythm, long/short, short/long. The group builds up a repeating main dance theme in three sections, over a low *ostinato* accompaniment, with the spotlight alternating between low and high voice groups. This dance music keeps coming back in various forms, with short brass interludes. In between are showy klezmer solos for the shrill *E♭* Clarinet, solo *B♭* Clarinet, and Bass Clarinet, with lots of ‘shmearing’ and note-bending, accompanied with simple rhythms by the clarinet “choir” who add crisp short echo phrases in folk style between the solo riffs.

In the middle episode the band drops to half speed in a steady even 2 beat, and the clarinets lay out some heavy Jewish-flavor circle-dance tunes, as though for a rustic wedding. Then the clarinets and saxophones *all* cut loose on their own individual melodies—as though the musicians are finally so drunk that everybody in the band suddenly thinks *they* have the solo; there is an exuberant if slightly inchoate tangle until it settles down. Then they quietly resume the first fast dance, building up to full band, and quickly whip to a wild loud fast ecstatic ending.

And here is the outdoors source: I invented and polished the main tunes for this piece in my head during a daylong solo hike in California’s Sierra Madre, from Tioga Campground at 9540’ across from Tioga Lake up through the ruins of Bennettville, bagging a half dozen small lakes in the open country of the Hoover Wilderness, ending with the precious Treble Green Lakes at 10,360’ at the foot of the Mt. Conness couloir, then returning down grassy Lee Vining Canyon along the creek. (Photographs are available on my Flickr page.) *In wilderness lies salvation.*