

Composer recreates piece for Texas State Symphony

By Candice Brusuelas

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Margaret Brouwer had always thought she would become a professional violinist. Instead, she is now a successful composer, something her younger self didn't know still existed. Most recently, she has transcribed her work "Pulse" from an orchestra arrangement to a symphony piece, which will be played for the first time tomorrow by the Texas State Wind Symphony, and is in San Marcos to enjoy the show. "When I was growing up I just assumed I would be a violinist," Brouwer said. "I think for a long time I didn't think there was such thing as a living composer. I was composing all the time, but I was doing it as a fun, extra thing to do."



Margaret Brouwer

Brouwer grew up in Michigan and moved around much of her life. Brouwer freelanced in Dallas and played with the Fort Worth Symphony for a while before returning to school to earn her doctorate in composition at Indiana University. She was also the head of the composition department at the Cleveland Institute of Music. "Once I started teaching composition there was not much time for the violin," Brouwer said. Brouwer isn't teaching anymore, but is an active composer. "I spend a lot of time trying to make interesting, creative sounds, I think that's one of the things I'm known for," she said. "Also, the fact that I use melodies. A lot of composers don't use melody. Twenty years ago I was one of the few using melodies, but I think at this point other composers are doing more melodic things. I think I seem to have a flair for writing nice melodies."

Caroline Beatty, the conductor of the Texas State Wind Symphony, took a liking to "Pulse" and contacted Brouwer. "I didn't know her, she didn't know me, but she heard the piece. She got in touch with me and asked if I'd be interested in doing a transcription for wind symphony," said Brouwer. "And I actually thought it was a great idea, because it's a piece with a lot of woodwind solos in it and a lot of percussion; there's a lot of rhythm. It really features the woodwinds, so it seemed like it'd be a natural for a woodwind ensemble." "Pulse" has played in many different orchestras, but never a wind symphony.

Tomorrow's performance will be a preview to the official world premier at the Southwest Regional College Band Directors Association in Arkansas. "I was at the rehearsal yesterday, and they're a wonderful group and Caroline is a terrific conductor. They play beautifully, so I think it's going to be a terrific performance. It's sounding really good," said Brouwer. Brouwer says she feels the piece gains "pizazz" and vigor with the wind ensemble.

The piece is short, only about six minutes long. “It has a strong beat to it and little rhythmic patterns that overlay, that have lots of layers to it, of different instruments. Then there’s a middle section that, there’s still a pulse going, but there’s all these kind of whispering rustling sounds and little solo melodies that culminate in a much longer melody that’s played by a lot of the higher, woodwind instruments. It is a lot of rhythm and melody in it. It’s a happy piece.” Brouwer has never heard the piece before “outside of her head” and is excited to hear the performance. She says that she has mostly chamber music coming up in the next few months and just had a chamber piece performed in Houston on Monday, a piece called “Shattered Glass.”