

Email from Jim Ripley about Jessie's Well – 07 Jan 2008

Hi Ralph,

Happy New Year!

Time has flown by pretty quickly over the holidays, but I wanted to make sure I sent these brief—but sincere--comments about your music to you.

The experience of performing "Jessie's Well" at the Wisconsin Middle School Honors Project (All State) in October 2007 was truly extraordinary. Both for myself and the students. While extremely challenging from the standpoint of musicality and subtlety of texture, it was just as rewarding in working through these challenges with the students. You could sense with the young people that they were reaching the point in their playing where they were turning from technicians and decoders to feelingful musicians. Having a work to perform such as "Jessie's Well" allowed many of those young people to experience several musical thrills (some for the first time). Thank you for such a wonderful composition.

I am becoming more and more aware of a pervasive kind of "ether music" that I find present in exceptional compositions, such as "Jessie's Well", but also "Masada" and your "Symphony". My feeling is that all music exists in some "unheard space", and what composers and performers do is somehow contact that music and bring it into our awareness. "Jessie's Well" is such a wonderful example, as we hear just partial touchings of the tune at the outset--then become more aware of the presence of the musical formula (and form) as the work progresses. At some point the listener internalizes the idea, and reaches the understanding that indeed this music is now being realized. Amazing...and wonderful. Bach was able to capture this kind of music in his fugues, Beethoven more regularly in his development of motivic material, but lesser lights such as Henry Cowell in his "Shoonthree" or John Barnes Chance in the "Variations on a Korean Folk Song" bring us to understand this "ether music" through introduction and realization.

For this gift, we can only thank our Maker, and composers like you, Ralph, for bringing music to us.

All best wishes,

Jim

Dr. James C. Ripley
Chair, Music Department
Director of Instrumental Music Activities, Music Education
Carthage College
2001 Alford Park Drive
Kenosha, WI 53140

Secretary, World Association of Symphonic Bands and
Ensembles (WASBE)
Music Director, Kurashiki Sakuyo University Wind
Philharmony

Office (262) 551-5854
Home (262) 948-1406

e-mail: jripley@carthage.edu