Flaher for Wind Ensemble

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FLAHER FOR WIND ENSEMBLE

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By:
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Western Kentucky University
2015

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ABSTRACT

Music compositions are vehicles of communication. Organized music ensembles in schools allow for students to share in the process of music-making and extramusical expression within the curriculum. As of late, school districts have made a push in mental health awareness and suicide prevention within professional development seminars. This project views the music classroom as an important, open environment for such pressing social subjects. In such, my composition—Flaher (pronounced “flare”)—pays homage to a friend, Anthony Flaherty, who committed suicide (keeping his namesake in the work’s title). Flaher is an accessible piece for high school or college band that directors can use to discuss pressing challenges in students’ lives. The work explores melodies derived from a chord of solace discovered in the coping process after hearing of the suicide. These melodies are presented in the alto flute, representing the initials—A.F.—of my friend. This theme is then developed throughout the band. The theme undergoes formal contrapuntal techniques to create a varied aural landscape leading to melancholy remembrance. Flaher was premiered by the WKU Wind Ensemble at their April concert, with hopes of being published soon thereafter.

Keywords: Capstone Experience, Thesis, Music, Composition, Flaher, Wind Ensemble
Dedicated to

Anthony Xavier Flaherty, a true and forever friend
whose shared moments of laughter will never leave me

Mary Flaherty, for the love of a mom is unparalleled for her only son
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work would have remained a private, reflective journey without the help and support of so many people in my life. First, I am immensely appreciative of Dr. Kallstrom for being patient with me during composition lessons. I know my creative productivity is irregular, but your insight is constant and so very valuable. Second, I would like to thank Dr. Schallert for programming Flaher for the wind ensemble. You have been a mentor and role model to me for years, and it is a deep honor for your ensemble to play my music. Third, I would like to thank Dr. Duffin for being on my committee and bringing her insights on Flaher from a psychological perspective.

Also, I would like to thank the Honors College for their support in this process. I would like to thank the organizing team of the Spotlight on Creative Activity in conjunct with the WKU Student Research Conference; your support for the arts in academia is much appreciated, and it was a real treat to bring my message to university bigwigs and laypeople, alike.

I am deeply indebted to my peers in the WKU Wind Ensemble for their hard work and support for bringing Flaher to life. My friends have been the best cheerleaders for making my vision become a reality. Next, I would like to thank the best parents in the world, Pete and Jamie Lee, for being the most supportive people in my life. Lastly, I
would like to thank Anthony Flaherty for his friendship, compassion, and lifelong memories that have changed my life and led to this piece.

I am so fortunate to have met you.
VITA

July 30, 1993..........................................................Born – Russell Springs, Kentucky

2011.................................................................Russell County High School,
Russell Springs, KY

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Music Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a composer, creating music is a personal experience that channels the soul, caresses the heart, and challenges the mind. My experience with music is an intimate one: I have been involved since age five, and I intend to have a career in music. By writing music, I am able to express my most unadulterated emotions, and invite the listener to be open, as well.

I believe the arts classrooms are the perfect place for students to explore expression and emotions. Frankly, I am biased and find the band room to be an even more effective venue. My goal was to craft a work appropriate for advanced high school and collegiate wind ensembles that would provide an opportunity to honestly discuss life and loss. At this stage in life, students are especially vulnerable to our ever-complex world.

Music publishers categorize band music by difficulty, usually from grade 0.5 (beginning band) to grade 6 (college/advanced). Per the advice of Dr. Schallert, director of bands at WKU, I endeavored to compose a grade 4 or 5 piece and not too long in length. Depending on adherence to tempo markings, \textit{Flaher} is a bit longer than six minutes.
I also made sure to use a mostly traditional instrumentation for band. An unusual instrument choice I made is the alto flute. Traditional band ensembles usually only have soprano flutes and piccolos, but the alto flute is used as a mellow, dark solo voice in *Flaher*. Many colleges have access to these instruments, and high schools can purchase or rent alto flutes from music dealers; however, I wrote the alto flute solo where it could be played on a soprano flute, but with a brighter timbre.

Fortunately, I have experience writing music for large ensembles; I have arranged over 10 contemporary marching band shows for high school bands. This process involves taking source music from other composers (e.g. classical music, film music) and crafting a musical framework around a visual concept. I have diversified my composition portfolio at WKU since studying with Dr. Michael Kallstrom, my theory and composition professor. I have written works for percussion ensemble, vocal solos, and instrumental chamber music.

An opportunity to honor a life and write original music for band appeals to who I am: one who does not care to say what is on his mind and one who thinks music is the ultimate form of expression. Ultimately, the purpose of this project was to provide a healthy, educational outlet for suicide prevention and awareness while challenging me musically to craft an original work for a large ensemble.
CHAPTER 2

THE INSPIRATION

*Fla*her is inspired by its namesake, Anthony Flaherty. I met Anthony in the summer of 2009 at a national student-in-government conference through the YMCA. He was one of the most animated, kindhearted, and hilarious human beings I have ever met. His fervor for life and love of others was infectious.

Anthony had overheard me talking about the Federal Reserve, wars, and all of this nonsense with which our government should not be involved. He walked up to me and said, “Oh...so you’re one of those Republicans?” That was day one of being best friends.

Anthony was one of those special characters in life. He would make you laugh so hard until you would wet yourself; but Anthony did not shy away from honest, “real talk.” Anthony had a compassion about him that made everyone feel special. He was a true servant leader through his involvement with his Catholic church, University of Louisville SGA, and in high school through St. Xavier High School’s Y-Club.

Anthony was an inspiration to many. If you knew him at all, you knew that he was wise beyond his years and he loved his mother dearly. He was always able to provide insight to a situation. I always said Anthony was a generation or two removed: listening to Frank Sinatra; watching *The Golden Girls*; wearing sock
suspenders by day and "man-robe" by night. His friends nicknamed him “Flaher Bear.”

Anthony and I maintained a strong friendship throughout high school and early years in college. He lived in Louisville and I lived in Russell Springs: two starkly different places, to say the very least. We were unable to see each other much, but whether we talked daily, weekly, or monthly, it was as if we went to the same school. It took us months to arrange a time where I could come up and visit in the summer of 2012. We went to a parish fundraiser, ate like kings, and spent time in his suburb of the city.

On September 12, 2012, I was outside Bates-Runner Hall at an ice cream social sponsored by the Honors College. I will never forget this for as long as I live. I received a phone call from a mutual friend asking if I was sitting down.

Anthony had taken his own life at his home.

For the first time in my life, I was truly in shock. I simply did not believe her at first, and I called his phone; a family member answered, and confirmed the news to me. I attempted to cope with this issue by calling other mutual friends and thinking about the good times we had with Anthony, but that aid was temporary.

I went to my place of solace: the practice rooms on the 3rd floor of the Fine Arts Center. My head fell onto a piano and I began to pray to God, begging for answers. After taking the time to feel sorry for myself for a moment, I truly began my attempt to cope and understand. I escaped to the piano like I have for so many other problems in my life, but I felt no inspiration. I half-heartedly allowed my right
hand to fall onto the high extremity of the keyboard: it fell on a chord that was so unique and melancholy that it felt like a direct line to heaven was opened.

This chord is a major chord—which provides such happiness and finality to music—mixed with a suspension, which indicates a resolution is nearing. The mixture of these chords is a musical purgatory, a mix of finality and waiting to understand. This chord continues to be a channel of comfort where I feel as if I can contact Anthony as much as humanly possible.

*Flaher for Wind Ensemble*—pronounced “flare” and taken from Anthony’s last name, Flaherty—begins with this chord and I explore the melodic possibilities with it at the forefront of my palette.

![Flaher chord](image)

*Figure 2.1*
CHAPTER 3

COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT

After discussing instrumentation and a performance opportunity with Dr. Schallert, I began composing Flaher during the fall of 2014. Every fall since I have graduated high school, I have actively worked with marching bands; thus, I always feel like I am in “teacher mode” in the fall. For the past few years in the spring, I have arranged many marching band shows during the semester. In such, I always feel in “composer mode” in the spring. It was a challenge for me to mix being in both teacher and composer mode in the fall, because I usually do not have opportunities to allow for that.

Due to this, the beginning of the composition process felt quite labored. I felt comfortable working with Finale Music Notation Software and created a full score with every instrument part represented in the WKU Wind Ensemble. This is more instrument variety for which I have ever composed; seeing so many empty staves was like a blank canvas mocking me with my thin brush in hand. I knew I wanted to begin Flaher with the Flaher chord in piano and mallet percussion. I also had composed two of the main themes for the piece a year previous, and scored them in the alto flute as a placeholder.

Beyond these details, I had no vision for the piece. I went to my next lesson with very little completed. Dr. Kallstrom was patient with me, as usual. He encouraged me to write freely and not be so critical as I write—compose, then edit. He also encouraged me
to write textures in short score, using a limited amount of staves to lessen the intimidation of the full score. This allowed me to compose melodies, countermelodies, and textures while not worrying about orchestrating simultaneously. It also allowed me to hear these melodies with a neutral playback sound: piano.

Once I felt comfortable with these ideas, I began to input them into the full score, assigning instruments to play the melody and harmony I composed. Finale has a decent playback engine that allows me to hear a synthesized playback of what I composed. I felt comfortable with the fast section of the piece, and began working on layers within the climax point through this method. However, I had no real vision how to start or end Flaher.

Due to my mother’s beckoning, I have become a good notetaker of musical ideas. I carry around a notebook with me at all times, and use a shorthand to chronicle ideas as a brainstorm occurs. Through this, I came up with a draft of a fanfare ending and a way to begin the piece. By halfway through the fall semester, I had these unrelated ideas orchestrated in full score. I needed a way to link these ideas together for a homogenous product.

In order to think of transitions, Dr. Kallstrom encouraged me to think of Flaher using traditional music form. By this method, I began to map out the piece’s emotional progression: melancholy, spritely, playful, ethereal, and ending with celebratory. This gave me more guidance to develop each section further, thinking of pacing and leading to the next idea. I composed a fleshed out beginning and climax, and thought of a transition to the ending fanfare.
By the end of the fall semester, *Flaher* was not complete. Although I did not express this to my mentors, I was quite stressed out about the direction of the piece. There was something about it that simply did not feel right. During winter break, I usually begin work on marching band arrangements for the next fall, but I focused solely on *Flaher*.

I reimagined the piece. I was too scared to explore Anthony’s struggle. How could I possibly realize what was going through his brain to make such a decision? By evaluating parts of the piece I had already written, I came to the realization that I was being too “politically correct” with my exploration of negative emotions: I barely scratched the surface.

Thus, I expunged my entire opening. Select, shift, and delete, and hours of work were gone. I then let *Flaher* take a life of its own. I went back to Anthony’s text messages, Facebook messages, and tweets. I thought back to every memory of Anthony to draw inspiration. I found a tweet posted the year of his death: “It is true that life is difficult, but if it were not difficult we would not have a story worth telling.” This quote would later be on the top of every instrument part used by performers. Needless to say, this process was emotionally taxing and lengthened the composition’s development further.

Finally, I developed the correct emotional map of the piece: essentially moving from remembrance—both in sadness and the happy memories—to the decision to celebrate life. The piece quickly came together after being inspired. After entering in the notes, I added articulations, dynamics, and shaping markings. I then spent much time
editing the score, creating parts with text to aid in performance, and writing program
notes with a brief explanation of the piece.

Then, I sent the piece to my mentors and anxiously awaited their opinions.
CHAPTER 4

MUSICAL ANALYSIS

*Flaher* is a programmatic work for wind ensemble that musically represents the ebb and flow of life, struggle, loss, and remembrance. A macro analysis of the piece divides it into many sections based on the emotional content explored in thematic development. The introduction introduces the *Flaher* chord and slowly breathes life into the main melody, hinted at by high brass but explored by an alto flute and flute duet. The A section develops the first theme and allows the listener to associate a mood of melancholy remembrance with his melody. The B section is a playful rendition of the melody, using the second half of the first theme to create a second theme to represent the fun shenanigans of friendships. The C section is a dark, hollow transition into the climax of the piece where the first two themes interact with each other to demonstrate struggle. The next section is reminiscent of the A section, but with different textures and a slightly altered (now ascending) melody to represent the afterlife. A glorious fanfare concludes the piece to honor life. Ultimately, the end invites listeners to build a network of communication, love, and solemn meditation to help them celebrate living and overcome daily struggles. The following musical analysis will provide a microscopic look into these sections.
**Introduction (“With reflection”) mm. 1-12**

The introduction of *Flaher* begins with the *Flaher* chord in the piano and metallic mallet percussion in F major (F for Flaherty). Alto flute solo enters and this interesting harmony is then passed to chalameau clarinets and mid-range bassoon (m. 3). A register change for clarinets, addition of alto and tenor saxophones, and solo oboe mark the second statement of the *Flaher* chord (m. 5). The third *Flaher* chord, representing finality, is voiced in low brass and reed voices with a musical “flare” in the timpani and gong rolls (m. 6).

During the *tutti* (full band) texture (m. 7), the oboe line dominates. Alto sax and French horn countermelody hint at the first theme to come later (m. 13). Chalameau clarinet bolstered by bassoons as well as subtle movement in low voices give this section a dark, rich feeling. The trumpet entrance is a variation of the second half of the main melody and is then passed to upper woodwinds in the subsequent measure (m. 9-10). Textures building a humongous *Flaher* chord in the dominant occurs with the slowing of tempo and “flare” in rolled timpani, suspended cymbal, bass drum, and gong.

**Theme A and Development (mm. 13-33)**

Theme A (see figure 5.1) in its most basic sense is introduced by the alto flute solo (mm. 13-14) and passed to the soprano flute solo (mm. 15-16). These voices are accompanied by a marimba playing a music box pattern. The piano enters later in a complementary harmonic fashion (mm. 14-15). Alto flute (A.F.) represents Anthony’s voice throughout the piece; the marimba and piano are the instruments I most enjoy playing, and are representative of the dialogue of first meeting my dear friend.
Reed instruments continue this idea to create a longer phrase: clarinets on the melody; alto saxophones playing the theme offset by a beat; and bass clarinets and bassoons creating movement (mm. 16-20). This idea resolves (m. 20) using a Picardy third feeling to create another Flaher chord. In the “Moving ahead” section (mm. 21-26), brass cover a brighter rendition of the theme. Trumpets, mostly in unison, play a countermelody while the first theme is within the brass texture in the horns (mm. 21-24). Transitionally, another Flaher chord and a woodwind run are used to modulate briefly to F minor, the parallel minor (m. 26).

In the “Melancholy” section (mm. 27-33), Theme A is presented in its darkest manner yet by the woodwinds and then chords (mm. 27-28 and 29, respectively). A sudden texture change (m. 50) builds suspense to the first statement of a static Flaher chord in the winds (mm. 32-33).

*Theme B (“Light and fun” and “Jolly,” mm. 34-91)*

In the transition to the fast section of the piece, Theme B is hinted at in solo piccolo, oboe, and clarinet (mm. 34-37). Theme B is a diminution of the second half of Theme A along with an arpeggiation of the Flaher chord (see Figure 5.2). Mallet
percussion and piano create suspense and rhythmic interest in Eb lydian (mm. 38-45).
The piano and vibraphone hint at Flaher chords with a quick harmonic motion. Winds begin to enter with Flaher chords in the saxophones and horns (m. 46). Solo oboe (mm. 52-53) anticipates Theme B statement (at m. 54).

The second theme in its most basic sense is played in the flutes and clarinets with harmonic accompaniment by low reeds (mm. 54-60). A clarinet solo creates interest going into the second statement of Theme B (beginning at m. 61) with layers becoming more complex as layers are staggered to create a tutti texture (building to m 67). Tension and release figures in trumpets and woodwinds (mm. 67-68) lead to the development of the second theme.

At m. 68, the oboe section takes over the texture for quite some time. Interjections by other instruments are varied: horn, tenor sax, and vibraphone quoting Theme A (mm. 68-69); alto saxes on Theme B snippet (m. 68); flute and xylophone figures (m. 69); and richness from bassoons and trombones (mm. 68-71) all add to create a more quirky aural landscape. At m. 72, trumpets use harmon mutes to create a playful texture similar to that from the movie *Up*. Oboes add harmony and more interjections are used to establish emotion (mm. 73-76). Middle and low voices begin a short chorale (m. 76) with woodwind melody on top, accompanied by bursts of muted trumpets.
Increasingly shorter mixed meters, more active counterpoint, and a thickening of the band sound are used to create a drive to the cadence (mm. 81-86).

At the section marked “Jolly” (at m. 87), tutti band plays a dancelike pattern using the same harmonic structure as Theme B. Low voices quote Theme A in a descending pattern and the next tempo marking is set up by the previous measure (mm. 89-91).

Build to the Climax (“Foreboding and conflicted,” mm. 92-108)

The 1/4 measure in m. 92 is used as metric modulation (half note becomes the quarter note) and as a grand pause to allow textures to ring. Timpani solo and low brass attack set up this dark section in F minor (m. 93). Huge melodic leaps in the alto flute solo represent Anthony’s crying out in pain during his decision-making process; close intervals and hollow band textures are used in accompaniment, along with a moving chalameau clarinet line (mm. 93-98).

Horn and tenor sax take over melody at m. 99 as the harmonic rhythm and tempo quickens. Solo alto flute line, Anthony’s voice, is shrouded by Theme A and hints of Theme B (mm. 99-102) as the demands of the world overcome him. A grand slowing down occurs while trumpets set up a dark fanfare and middle and low voices descend to dark depths (mm. 103-104).

Movement in the chimes and drums represent Anthony’s struggle (mm. 105-107). Alto saxes and horns have grand calls (m. 106) with an ominous response by the trumpets (mm. 106-107). Woodwinds create suspense as the brake drum as struck 5 times: 4 empty, attempted shots to Anthony’s head and the fifth killing him (m. 107). The piccolo does not use vibrato to be the flatline signifying death (m. 108).
Climax (‘With finality,’ mm. 109-126)

In the climax of the piece (beginning at m. 109), Themes A and B are juxtaposed on top of one another in the key system of Ab major or F minor: a nice irony, considering Anthony’s initials. Flutes, clarinets, and alto saxes play the fun moving second theme as trumpets mightily herald the first theme. Movement in middle to low reeds and brass help bring harmonic motion to this section. Countermelodies in the trumpets, horns, and trombones are derived from the Flaher chord (see Figure 5.3). Counterpoint in the drums signify Anthony’s struggle (mm. 110-112, for example). Likewise, the ringing of triangles (mm. 109-110 and mm. 113-114) represent the two phone calls made that night: one to me stating Anthony’s death, and the second to Anthony where I pleaded for that not to be true.

![Countermelodies](image)

Figure 4.3

The end of the climax contains the second theme clearly stated in the melody (m. 117) and the first theme within tenor and bari sax, trombone 3, and euphonium (m. 118-19). Anthony’s final “flare” of life is represented in a grand percussion flare in m. 120. A forceful Flaher chord is stated in the woodwinds and high brass (m. 121) and slow resolved by low voices (mm. 121-123). Alto flute solo with metallic percussion and
piano accompaniment demonstrate Anthony’s soul departing from Earth (mm. 123-126). Glockenspiel solo quotes Theme A and leads out of the climactic section (m. 126).

Theme C and Build (“Ethereally,” mm. 127-151)

This section is supposed to sound like an ethereal environment indicative of the afterlife; it also is supposed to musically represent a growing communication of those who loved Anthony, remember him, and the importance building such a trusting network with whom to share life.

This section begins with ringing metallic percussion and silence (mm. 127-128). Piano and vibraphone play an Eb Fläher chord, adding wind chimes, bowed crotales and (later) bowed vibraphone (mm. 129-130). At m. 131, piano solo voices the Fläher chord in second inversion, preparing the entry of clarion and some altissimo sustained clarinet (beginning in m. 132). Piano continues and percussion becomes thicker with random triangle interjections and bowed crotales (m. 133). Flutes join in the middle range below the clarinets adding resonance along with solo piccolo (m. 134). Solo piccolo introduces Theme C, which is like Theme A but ascends in nature (see Figure 5.4). Low reed choir (mm. 135-137), horns (mm. 138-139), and trombones (mm. 141-142) all contribute to create a longer phrase among the ethereal texture.

![Piccolo](image)

**Figure 4.4**

Horn melody and upper woodwind gestures move this build along, quoting material from Theme A (beginning in m. 143). This melody is soon passed to trumpets in
m. 145 as the band grows in volume and accelerates tempo. A fanfare statement in high 
brass (mm. 148-149) hints at the conclusion yet to come. A Flaher chord-based 
arpeggiation in metallic percussion and piano transitions to the ending.

“Celebrating” (mm. 151-161)

Beginning in m. 151, pass around gestures in the style of a fanfare derived from 
an Eb Flaher chord (concert pitches: Eb, G, Ab, and Bb). Oboe and clarinet 3 play a 
soaring slow melody of a descending Flaher chord (mm. 151-152). Other upper 
woodwinds use rhythmic interest to create a harmonic accompaniment to the brass lines. 
Metallic percussion and piano continue arpeggio figures while crash cymbals, suspended 
cymbal, and bass drums help accentuate this celebratory ending.

At m. 157, the band is in rhythmic unison on a brief Eb major chord before alto 
saxes and horns create a Flaher chord in m. 158. Upper woodwinds sustain a Flaher 
chord (m. 159) before solo timpani sets up a tonicized tutti Flaher chord (mm. 160-161). 
Chimes, glockenspiel, crotales, and timpani players are told to “improvise fast rhythmic 
figures” using the Flaher chord (mm. 160-161). At the end, rolled suspended cymbal, 
triangles, and bass drum (along with aforementioned percussionists) create a long-lasting, 
brilliant resonance after the band release.
CHAPTER 5

REHEARSAL, PERFORMANCE, AND REFLECTION

Upon returning after winter break, Drs. Schallert and Kallstrom discussed my piece with me. I was encouraged by their approval and sent parts to band managers for printing and dispersal to ensemble members. During the spring, the wind ensemble gave three concerts: *Fläher* was performed on the third one on April 24th. Because of the snow days and already limited rehearsal time, we did not begin work on *Fläher* until after the second concert.

The WKU Wind Ensemble meets three days a week for an hour and half. During the third concert, we performed five different music selections. By this logic, my piece would receive no more than one-fifth of the rehearsal time (15 to 20 minutes a rehearsal). Besides wanting to honor Anthony, I wanted the ensemble to perform this piece well so we could record a professional recording to be sent to music publishers. I wrote *Fläher* with a message to be explored as many times as possible, and a good performance is key for that goal.

Dr. Schallert conducted the first sight-read of the piece on Wednesday, April 1st. I was thrilled for my friends to perform my music, but also nervous and wary of their initial opinions of the piece. Thankfully, Dr. Schallert gave me the opportunity to tell the ensemble about the piece beforehand. I was humbled by the receptivity of the ensemble to Anthony’s story and the need to explore wake-up calls about life and loss.
The ensemble’s performance of the first section of the piece was not only quite good, but it was also very emotional. When the piece picked up tempo and difficulty, I descended back to the real world: no one had ever played this piece before. No one had heard this piece before, so there were no standards or expectations. Wrong notes occurred more frequently and poor attempts at phrasing were present because no recording could be used as a basis for performance. Besides Dr. Schallert, I was the expert in the room of how Flaher sounds, and the remaining two-thirds of the sight-read performance was quite painful. Dr. Schallert rehearsed the first problematic spot, fixed some missed pitches, and then we were out of time. Time is a perfectionist’s worst enemy.

During the next rehearsal, Dr. Schallert reinforced the work he did on Wednesday, and kept isolating performance issues. He asked me questions for clarification on interpretations and what is being programmatically represented in the music. More great work was done in the third rehearsal on the fast section. To my surprise, Dr. Schallert asked me to plan to conduct the fourth rehearsal of Flaher. He was taking a few students aside to work on an extended technique during the Maslanka Symphony #4.

I am blessed with the opportunity to stand in front of many high school bands with which I work during marching band and concert band season. However, I have not stood in front of such a talented ensemble to work on music to be performed; additionally, this ensemble consists of the most nerve-wracking of all: one’s peers. Instead of working on the fast section of Flaher, I wanted to clarify my approach to dynamics and isolate layers during the opening. I explained how I feel that many advanced bands try to push themselves to get as soft of a sound as possible, but I feel
many sacrifice good tone quality in the process. I instructed them to play each layer with their best sound possible and to never play beyond that ideal, characteristic tone quality.

Sadly, Dr. Schallert had to leave town for the next few rehearsals: his parents were gravely ill, and he needed to be with them. This was the most unfortunate news. My heart broke for him, but I was reminded that the message I am trying to share with Flaher is universal: we all experience times of life and loss, some more painful than others. Our Friday rehearsal was a sectional. Dr. Schallert told section leaders to spend time on my piece, which was welcomed by me. The ensemble was struggling with parts of the piece with which I did not anticipate problems.

Although the situation to get me in front of the ensemble was not ideal in the least, I was pleased to get to explain every facet of my piece and rehearse such a great ensemble. I love to write music and I love to teach, so that opportunity truly was extremely enriching for me as a composer and educator. Before rehearsals, I was able to make edits to parts in pencil or clarify melodic lines on a personal level while not wasting the whole ensemble’s time. It was my responsibility to make this piece come to fruition, and it was the ensemble’s responsibility to work hard in Dr. Schallert’s absence.

Dr. Schallert returned for the concert week rehearsals. He allowed me to rehearse the ensemble on Monday to clarify interpretational elements at the end of the piece; he also was assessing the ensemble’s performance level. After rehearsal, he worked with me on my conducting technique and gave me the score: I was charged with conducting Flaher on the concert. I now had the responsibilities of writing, rehearsing, and conducting the piece. I will forever overflow with appreciation for that opportunity.
On Friday evening, I enjoyed a nice dinner with Mary Flaherty and Anthony’s aunt. We discussed the piece and what a band concert entails. After visiting with Mary, I was even more motivated to make sure this premiere was special for her. After conducting the most emotional run of Flaher the ensemble had ever performed, I felt fulfilled. Mary said this piece was “one of the most awesome experiences she has had in three years.” At this point, I knew writing Flaher was well worth my time.

I conducted a recording session of Flaher on April 27th in Van Meter Hall. This recording will be doctored around the end of the semester, sent to interested parties, and shared on social media to advertise for this piece’s second performance. I sent Flaher to a recommended publisher, per Dr. Schallert, on April 30th. Also, I submitted Flaher for consideration to be on the 2016 Kentucky Music Educator’s Association band repertoire graded list.

As I reflect on my project, I realize that I seized the extramusical opportunities provided by Flaher. Instead of viewing Flaher as a chance to create music for band, I earnestly endeavored to share Anthony’s story. Anthony died at an age where, conceivably, he could be forgotten in ten or so years by those who were not close to him. In some regard, honoring his life through music gave him a hint of immortality.

Ensemble and audience members alike approached me after the premiere and shared with me how they felt like they “knew” Anthony through my music. Ensemble members confided in me stories of the universally uniting themes of life and loss. They said playing Flaher provided comfort after losing a friend, parent, or other loved one to fate of suicide. They had a the choice of disregarding this piece as just another thing on
their to-do list; however, I will forever be moved by their passion to make Flaher a meaningful experience.

Additionally, I found a special sense of solace with Anthony’s story. Through this process, Mary shared with me every detail imaginable amount September 12, 2012. We remembered the good and the bad, a conversation of both laughter and choked back tears. I shared similar conversations with the WKU Wind Ensemble, countless professors, a music appreciation class, and a poster presentation and speech at the WKU Student Research Conference. If one life is touched by Anthony’s story, my mission is complete; and in that regard, I have achieved success. “The Hill” now reverberates with Anthony’s story. I have started a conversation that people need to have. My work is far from over.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

*Flaher* is written for advanced high school and college band students who are experiencing some of the most complex years of their young lives. Bands are often families, and as a family, we must be empathetic, honest, and loving. Selfishly, *Flaher* is my attempt to honor and remember my dear friend, Anthony Flaherty. However, through the performance process, I believe this piece has become something greater than I could have imagined by students reaching in to honor those experiencing loss in all facets of life.

When the opportunity for *Flaher* to be performed was bestowed to me, I have become increasingly thankful for those mentors in my life who believe in me. Likewise, I believe in this message. I believe this message should be heard by as many listeners as possible. If this piece is published, more students will talk about mental health and any proceeds will go to one of his two scholarship funds. If I am not published, I will self-publish and spread my message as best as I possibly can.

Every human being is connected to a story of loss. However, it is important to celebrate the beauty of life. It is important to talk about touchy subjects. If we can’t feel and express openly, we are not alive.

*Flaher* is Anthony’s story; and his is a story worth telling.
APPENDIX

Flaher
for wind ensemble
Dedicated to Anthony X. Flaherty

(2015)

Ben Lee
Instrumentation

Piccolo
Flute 1
Flute 2
Alto Flute Solo
Oboe
Clarinet 1
Clarinet 2
Clarinet 3
Bass Clarinet
Bassoon
Alto Sax 1
Alto Sax 2
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax
Trumpet in Bb 1
Trumpet in Bb 2
Trumpet in Bb 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Trombone 1
Trombone 2
Trombone 3
Bass Trombone
Euphonium
Tuba
Double Bass
Mallet Percussion 1 (Glockenspiel, Xylophone, etc.)
Mallet Percussion 2 (Vibraphone, Sus. Cym., etc.)
Mallet Percussion 3 (Chimes, Marimba)
Timpani
Piano
Percussion 1 (Crotale, Sus. Cym., Crash Cymbals, Bass Drum, Tambourine, Brake Drum, Wind Chimes)
Percussion 2 (Tam tam, Snare Drum, Low Tom, etc.)
Percussion 3 (Large/medium/small triangles, etc.)

*Etc. implies shared accessory percussion equipment.
Performance Notes

“It is true that life is difficult, but if it were not difficult we would not have a story worth telling.”

-Anthony Flaherty

On September 12, 2012, one of my dearest friends, Anthony Flaherty, took his own life at his home. I got the call at an ice cream social. A mutual friend told me the details. I didn’t believe her, so I called his phone. A family friend answered and confirmed. I rushed to the 3rd floor of the campus fine arts center: that’s where the pianos are. The piano has always been the medium by which I could feel. Unadulterated feeling. The power of music.

For many hours I felt sorry for myself. I let my head lie on the keys. I prayed to God and asked for comfort through this situation. I didn’t understand it, and knew I probably never would. I let my right hand fall in the top register of the keys. My hand fell on a harmony of enlightenment and comfort to me: a mix of a major chord and suspension, completeness and confusion.

Through this chord, I feel like God gifted me with a vignette of peace. I am happy to honor Anthony through a namesake piece. Anthony was a one of a kind friend: loving and compassionate to all, supportive, hilarious, and eccentric. He was passionate about young people finding their voices through public service. He was a generation or two removed. He listened to Frank Sinatra, loved The Golden Girls, wore sock suspenders, and had wisdom beyond his years. A true friend.

His suicide shocked his family and friends. I struggled (and continue to struggle) to understand his decision. Flaher is my attempt. Flaher (pronounced “flare”) explores the melodies and harmonic fabrics through the Flaher chord. An alto flute—A.F., his initials—is used to express his voice. Musical
“flares” in the percussion show the ebb and flow of life, and are used at the conclusion as explosions of life. I celebrate the memories, friendship, crazy shenanigans, and his playful personality. I explore Anthony’s pain of coming to this decision, and then the converse effect of grief for those he left behind. A celebration of life is built from the network of love communicated by those who remember and love Anthony. We are all connected to a story of loss. But it is important to celebrate the beauty of life. It is important to talk about touchy subjects. If we can’t feel and express openly, we are not alive. 

_Flaheer_ is Anthony’s story. And his is a story worth telling.