

About the Work “Musica Mobilis”

“*Musica Mobilis*” is a work that was originally written for brass choir in 1996. It was commissioned by the Indianapolis Museum of Art to pay tribute to the work of Alexander Calder. Born on July 22, 1898, in Philadelphia. Mr. Calder became famous throughout the world as the visual artist who made sculpture move. He is perhaps most famous for his work in large mobiles. Just as his artistic mobiles are constantly moving and changing, so is the music in “*Musica Mobilis*.” A mobile has a set number of pieces that are in constant flux, creating new images as the juxtaposition of the pieces change. The concept for this composition is derived from the same approach.

The work opens loudly, painting the musical picture of a person’s first impression upon seeing one of Mr. Calder’s large mobiles. The immense stark power of the metal work is reflected in the opening chords in the brass. At the same time, musical harmonies and motives are being stated that becomes the basis for the entire composition. The main interest while listening to this work is to follow the evolution of the music as these basic motives change position, like a mobile. The work stays in one basic tonality representing the unchangeable pieces of the mobile. When examining one of Mr. Calder’s mobiles on display at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Mr. Beckel specifically looked at a work entitled “*Five Pieces Suspended*.” He decided to base this work primarily on five basic notes: A, F#, G, C, and D; as heard in the opening chords of the composition. As these notes rearrange themselves, the music takes on different moods, similar to the effects of the movement of a mobile. The only real deviation from this model is an occasional E natural used as a passing note in fast runs and a very intentional G# to cadence the work at the very end. A similar false cadence is also alluded to in measure 51, 52, and 53.

This four and a half minute work is constantly changing, from the ominous opening to the pensive and reflective middle section, then transforming into an exciting finale. “*Musica Mobilis*” is meant to reflect the magic of Alexander Calder’s moving sculptures.