



FEBRUARY 2006:  
Commissioning news from  
Westwind Brass  
619-501-3562  
info@WestwindBrass.org

# Interview with **Bruce Broughton**

## TOP STORY

# Three American Portraits

BY BARRY TOOMBS

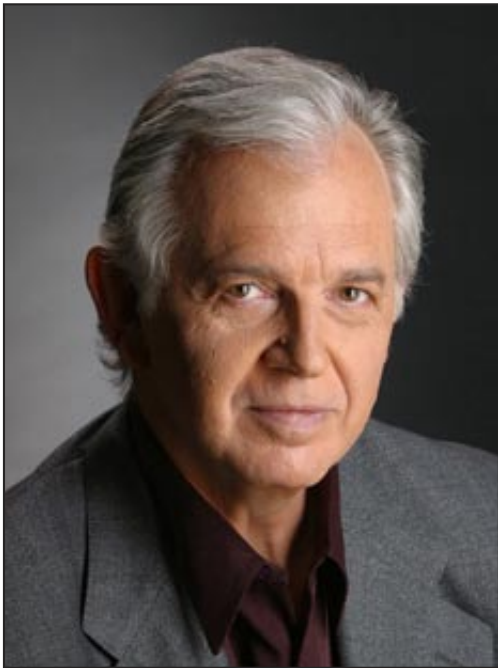
We sat down with Bruce Broughton the other day as he was finishing up composing “Three American Portraits” for Westwind Brass. Broughton (b. 1945) is an Emmy Award-winning TV and film composer whose more than 60 film scores include Silverado, Young Sherlock Holmes, The Three Musketeers, Tombstone, Lost in Space and Bambi II. Among his 10 Emmys are awards for “Warm Springs,” “Glory and Honor,” “O Pioneers!,” “Tiny Tunes Adventures,” “The First Olympics,” “Buck Rogers,” and “Dallas.”

### **What part of the country did you grow up in?**

I was born in Los Angeles, but raised throughout the western USA. I grew up in San Francisco, Washington State (Wenatchee, Walla Walla and Seattle), Denver, Phoenix and graduated high school in Honolulu.

### **How did you get into music and composing?**

My family worked for The Salvation Army, which has a big music program. When I was a little kid, around age 7, I went to summer band camp and learned to play a trumpet. My grandfather was a band composer, an uncle was a songwriter and an aunt was a pianist. My parents both were amateur musicians and my brother is a professional trombonist/arranger/composer. The family was thick with music. My main instrument was piano, which I started around the same time as trumpet, and I studied composition at USC.



Bruce Broughton  
[www.brucebroughton.com](http://www.brucebroughton.com)

*Three American Portraits was made possible by a generous grant from the James Irvine Foundation.*

[www.irvine.org](http://www.irvine.org)



**Who gave you your first break/  
breaks starting out?**

After college, I went to work for CBS-TV as a music supervisor. My first commercial writing began there, for shows like *Gunsmoke* and *Hawaii Five-O*.

**What was your best moment  
in your professional life?**

I really couldn't answer this one. There have been too many surprises and exciting times.

**What has been your greatest  
thrill in orchestral composing and  
who are your heroes and influ-  
ences?**

I remember that the score to *Young Sherlock Holmes* caught me by surprise. It sounded a lot better than I thought it would. That recording session was probably the most exciting time I've had in a studio.

My influences are literally everyone, dead or alive, known or unknown. There's no one that I listen to that I don't pick out something, either that I like or don't, which includes the music of my friends. Though there are some composers whose music I greatly admire, I can't think of any whom I would consider a "hero," though there are one or two I find almost unapproachable musically, like Bach, Wagner or Debussy. Or Bartók. I like many composers for many different reasons.

**What was it like winning your  
10th Emmy (for "Warm Springs")?**

Surprisingly exciting.

**What is your role as board  
member for ASCAP?**

I'm one of twelve writer members, elected by the membership for a two-year term, whose job it is, along with twelve publisher members, to help focus and determine the course of the organization. I find the ASCAP board enormously interesting, challenging and of fundamental importance in the way music is used and perceived in this country.

**Concerning the composition  
"Three American Portraits," how  
did you decide to agree to write a  
piece for the brass quintet?**

I decided to write the quintet because I was comfortable with writing for brass, and thought I could come up with something more interesting than the brass quintet I wrote as a student nearly forty years earlier.

**What intrigued/interested you  
most about the commission?**

That it would get performed well.



Napoleon Hill



Calvin Coolidge



William T. Sherman

**Your subject for this piece  
"Three American Portraits" is an  
unlikely trio of Americans: Napo-  
leon Hill, Calvin Coolidge, and Wil-  
liam Tecumseh Sherman. How did  
you decide to pick a salesman, a  
politician and a soldier for char-  
acter studies in this piece?**

The idea for the title actually came about after I was well into the piece. Both the first and second movements were already in progress, but it seemed to me that they each had a quality that I couldn't quite define. Identifying them with the specific individuals actually helped get the pieces completed. Though the piece musically is not in any way "Americana," the three individuals portrayed all exhibit a very archetypal American quality, that of never giving up.



# Napoleon Hill

**was an American author who was one the earliest producers of the modern genre of personal-success literature. His most famous work, *Think and Grow Rich*, is one of the best-selling books of all time. What characteristics of Hill's did you focus on in this composition?**

I associate Napoleon Hill with the power of positive thinking. In fact, the marking for the movement is "with a positive mental attitude," known to anyone who has read Hill simply as PMA.



## THREE AMERICAN PORTRAITS



Hill just does not allow for anything more than a positive attitude. This movement seemed to me to be essentially energetic and positive, and repeats the same motive over and over, just like Napoleon Hill. It didn't seem too much of a stretch to identify the music with his personality.



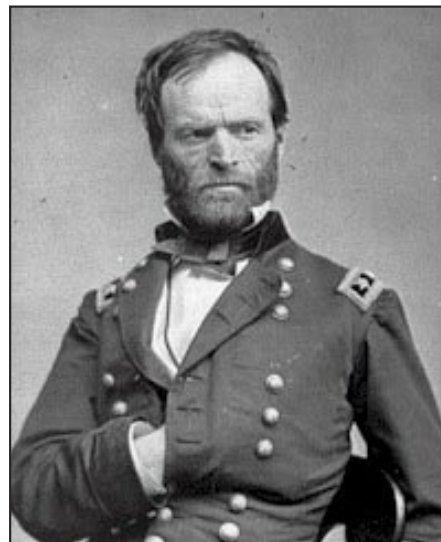
## Calvin Coolidge

**was the 30th president of the United States and known for his dry Yankee wit. His frugality with words earned him the nickname "Silent Cal". Coolidge was "distinguished for character more than for heroic achievement," as a Democratic admirer, Alfred E. Smith, wrote. What trait of Coolidge's dominates in the second movement of your composition?**

Whenever I think of or read about Calvin Coolidge I've noted more his consistency, to the point of dullness, than any other quality. Taciturn "Silent Cal" could never be caught laughing or expressing himself in any enthusiastic manner. He

has always seemed to me emotionally flat. His father, a notary public, swore him into the presidency after the death of Warren Harding, whose "return to normalcy" program Coolidge carried out. This movement portrays, if anything, consistency, relying upon no dynamic or harmonic modulation, and depends upon the positive motive from the Hill movement as an ostinato underpinning for the entire movement.

It should be noted that under Coolidge's administration, the country became enormously prosperous.



## William Tecumseh Sherman

**was an American soldier, businessman, and author. He served as a general in the United States Army during the American Civil War (1861–1865), achieving both recognition for his outstanding command of military**

**strategy, and criticism for the harshness of the "scorched earth" policies he implemented in conducting total war against the enemy. Military historian Liddell Hart famously declared that Sherman was "the first modern general." What part of Sherman's life did you focus on when writing the third movement?**

Sherman was relentless. While reading U.S. Grant's memoirs, it was obvious to me that Sherman was the one general that Grant could rely upon for getting a job done. Though it was Sherman who famously said, "War is hell," I made no attempt at trying to reconstruct the terror or emotional content of that statement. It was the unrelenting energy I was mostly interested in.

**As a former brass player, how do you feel about writing for brass instruments alone versus orchestral scoring?**

To write for brass is to work with a specific sound. An orchestra has more varied textures. I think of myself as having been a mediocre horn player. Though I never gained, nor was I interested in, the same proficiency as a brass player that I had as a pianist, my experience as a wind player gave me a sense of line and of phrasing that I doubt I would have had if I had never played that particular instrument in bands and orchestras.

**What do you feel are the limits of brass quintet to be, and what kind of instrument is it for you to work with?**

I grew up with English style brass bands and am aware of the technical facility of brass,

**FEBRUARY 2006:**  
Commissioning news from  
Westwind Brass  
619-501-3562  
info@WestwindBrass.org  
www.WestwindBrass.org



which is far greater than commonly realized. Having said that, the brass quintet itself is a pretty specific organization with specific limits, especially with regard to range, sonority and texture. It also has some limits in the emotional results it can produce.



There is a basic aggressiveness in the sound that has to be taken into account whenever one writes for it.

**How is the brass quintet different from other small chamber groups that your have been commissioned to write works for?**

I think of the brass quintet as being less pliable than some other chamber combinations.

The brass sound has an immediate quality and, as mentioned above, a certain aggressiveness, even when played softly. And though brass instruments can be technically agile, it's a very different sort of agility as compared to a woodwind, string or percussion instrument. With a brass quintet one has to be prepared to make a statement. It's not enough to just make a gesture.

**Do you plan to write other works based on historical figures, and in general what's next for you?**

The use of historical figures in this piece came about because I was trying to determine the character of the music I was working on. In general, I find that sketches, portraits or other real life association puts one on rather shaky musical ground.

In terms of concert music, I have commissions for a trumpet piece for Malcolm McNab, a chamber orchestra piece for the Sunflower Chamber Musical Festival in Kansas next summer, and a trio for horn, viola and piano.

Commercially, I rarely know very far in advance what's next, although at least one theatrical motion picture and a TV movie are high on the possibility list at the moment.

**What was best about this experience and how did *Three American Portraits* fit in with the overall "arch" of your career?**

I'm not sure what the overall "arch" of my career is, except to be able to write as well as possible in as many media and styles as I can and to hear as much of what I write performed. For me, every piece of new music is a new set of problems to solve. The best part of this ex-

perience will be to see how well I solved the problems when I hear the piece played.

## WESTWIND BRASS

will premier  
*Three American  
Portraits*

on

May 1, 2006 • 7:00 pm  
The Neurosciences Institute  
10640 John Jay Hopkins Dr.  
San Diego, California 92121

For tickets call  
619-237-7982  
info@WestwindBrass.org  
www.WestwindBrass.org

