

"How does one write a concert closer, making it joyous and exciting and celebratory, while also acknowledging, at least to myself, that this piece is rooted in unimaginable loss: The death of a child?"

"The other challenge was connecting the piece to Alaska - a place I'd never seen in person. I kept thinking about all of this in literal terms, and I just wasn't getting anywhere. My wife, who titles all of my pieces, said I should focus on what it is that draws people to these places. People go to the mountains—these monumental, remote, ethereal and awesome parts of the world—as a kind of pilgrimage. It's a search for the sublime, for transcendence. A great mountain is like a church. "Call it The Frozen Cathedral," she said. "I clearly married up."

The most immediately distinct aural feature of the work is the quality (and geographic location) of intriguing instrumental colors. The stark, glacial opening is colored almost exclusively by a crystalline twinkling of metallic percussion that surrounds the audience. Although the percussion orchestration carries a number of traditional sounds, there are a host of unconventional timbres as well, such as crystal glasses, crotales on timpani, tam-tam resonated with superball mallets, and the waterphone, an instrument used by Mackey to great effect on his earlier work "Turning". The initial sonic environment is an icy and alien one, a cold and distant landscape whose mystery is only heightened by a longing, modal solo for bass flute—made dissonant by a contrasting key, and more insistent by the eventual addition of alto flute, English horn, and bassoon. This collection expands to encompass more of the winds, slowly and surely, with their chorale building in intensity and rage. Just as it seems their wailing despair can drive no further, however, it shatters like glass, dissipating once again into the timbres of the introductory percussion.

The second half of the piece begins in a manner that sounds remarkably similar to the first. In reality, it has been transposed into a new key and this time, when the bass flute takes up the long solo again, it resonates with far more compatible consonance. The only momentary clash is a Lydian influence in the melody, which brings a brightness to the tune that will remain until the end. Now, instead of anger and bitter conflict, the melody projects an aura of warmth, nostalgia, and even joy. This bright spirit pervades the ensemble, and the twinkling colors of the metallic percussion inspire a similar percolation through the upper woodwinds as the remaining winds and brass present various fragmented motives based on the bass flute's melody. This new chorale, led in particular by the trombones, is a statement of catharsis, at once banishing the earlier darkness in a moment of spiritual transcendence and celebrating the grandeur of the surroundings. A triumphant conclusion in E-flat major is made all the more jubilant by the ecstatic clattering of the antiphonal percussion, which ring into the silence like voices across the ice.

— Jake Wallace

Blow It Up, Start Again (2012) Jonathan Newman

If the system isn't working anymore, then do what Guy Fawkes tried and go anarchist: Blow it all up, and start again.

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BGSU WIND SYMPHONY

KENNETH THOMPSON, conductor

Saturday, October 22, 2016

8:00 p.m.

Kobacker Hall

Moore Musical Arts Center

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PROGRAM

Bowling Green Philharmonia

Seelenruhe (2015) Emily Custer

Robert Jay Garza III, conductor
World Premiere

Winner of the 49th annual BGSU Competitions in Music Performance, Composition Division

In the summer of 2015, I revisited a small lake in central Minnesota while fishing with my family. Tucked away in the woods, this particular lake has no public boat access. To reach it, a person must drag their canoe down a steep, overgrown slope, before lowering the canoe into a marshy swamp. After pushing through the muskeg, the reeds finally part, giving a person their first glimpse of the lake.

“Seelenruhe” (“state of calm, peace of mind”) was conceived as an aural representation of my experiences of and reflections on this beautiful bit of the northland, as well as a musical rendering of the imagery itself.

Responses (2013/16, premiere of orchestral version) Dalit Warshaw

I. Op. 119, no. 1

II. Op. 116, no. 5

III. Op. 76, no. 3

“Responses” is a set of three intermezzi written as complements to three Intermezzi of Brahms (Op. 119 no. 1, Op. 116 no. 5 and Op. 76 no. 3). As early as I can remember, I have gravitated toward the piano music of Brahms, and the act of playing through his Intermezzi during intense periods of writing always provided me both emotional fulfillment and compositional guidance. Each “Response” capitalizes upon selected characteristics from the original intermezzo. The “slow tears” of Op. 119 no. 1, for example, becomes an avalanche, the three-sixteenth-note motive of the middle section transformed into a bird call, the final prolonged unfolding of the original B minor tonic leading to an abrupt surprise resolution. Op. 116 no. 5 struck me as a fairytale gone awry, its persistent heartbeat-like main rhythmic motive somewhat relentless, its eighth-note rests stark and alarming: I therefore enhanced its ominous quality by adding rhythmic irregularity and using registral extremes to create a demonic danse macabre. As in the original intermezzo, after a vulnerable and plaintive middle section, the original material returns on a false tonic. The final “Response” is an homage to Op. 76 no. 3, whose pp arpeggios on an Ab pedal tone suggested to me an eerie transparency and nostalgic clanging of bells, and the potential for a temporal expansiveness.

Kinah (2015) Leonard Slatkin

Penny Thompson Kruse, violin

Brian Snow, cello

In December 2015 the world premiere performance of Slatkin’s “Kinah” was met with favorable reviews, with critics remarking on its eloquence, poignancy, and evocative use of percussion and strings. Slatkin wrote the piece as an elegy to his late parents, Felix Slatkin and Eleanor Aller of the Hollywood String Quartet, to mark the 100th anniversary of his father’s birth. For the premiere, Slatkin’s brother, Frederick Zlotkin, played the offstage cello solos on the instrument that once belonged to their mother. The piece incorporates themes from the slow movement of the Brahms Double Concerto, which Slatkin’s parents were scheduled to perform together for the first time when Felix died of a heart attack at the age of 47.

Tocar y Luchar (2010)..... Dai Fujikura

Maria Mercedes Diaz Garcia, conductor

“Tocar y Luchar” was composed for the 30th birthday of the Venezuelan-born conductor Gustavo Dudamel, who conducted the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra in the world premiere. Also this work was written to celebrate 36th anniversary of “El Sistema” a public support programme for children in Venezuela.

To prepare to write this work, I have researched “El Sistema”. The programme enables the children to learn an instrument and play it in an orchestra. I decided the concept of “Tocar y Luchar” was ‘swarming’, just as birds or fish swarm in nature; a lot of small birds fly together and become one big bird. I thought this a great idea, as I understand, in El Sistema, there are a lot of children coming from different places with various backgrounds, who get together in one place and make music as one entity. So musically, the entire piece is like one big melody, which is composed of lots of little phrases, sometimes together, sometimes in counterpoint, but they always fly/swim together as one big phrase. I am interested in making the transition from texture into phrases, phrases into rhythmic patterns and back into vast shaped phrases.

- INTERMISSION -

PROGRAM

BGSU Wind Symphony

My butterflies (2012/13) Dai Fujikura

When my wife Milena was pregnant with our daughter Mina I remember she was telling me one of her many first feelings was of butterflies in her stomach, which is a good early sign of pregnancy.

When starting to write this work I had this and an image of macro photographs of seeds which I had seen in a science magazine in my mind.

Therefore this piece features extensive use of fluttertongue for flutes and clarinets, which are like closeup photos of flower seeds. The brass - usually much louder instruments than the woodwinds - come in very softly with various mutes on, as if they are protecting the fluttertongued woodwinds.

As each woodwind fragment gets larger and larger, they seem stickier and softer and start to form a lyrical texture. Sometimes the brass play sforzandi which then makes this texture explode into small, hard surfaced fragments. These float in the air and start changing form.

My intention is that one should be able to “see” and “taste” these sounds, and feel the process of the textures changing.

Frozen Cathedral (2013) John Mackey

The Koyukon call it “Denali,” meaning “the great one,” and it is great. It stands at more than twenty thousand feet above sea level, a towering mass over the Alaskan wilderness. Measured from its base to its peak, it is the tallest mountain on land in the world—a full two thousand feet taller than Mount Everest. It is Mount McKinley, and it is an awesome spectacle. And it is the inspiration behind John Mackey’s “The Frozen Cathedral”.

The piece was born of the collaboration between Mackey and John Locke, Director of Bands at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Locke asked Mackey if he would dedicate the piece to the memory of his late son, J.P., who had a particular fascination with Alaska and the scenery of Denali National Park. Mackey agreed—and immediately found himself grappling with two problems.