ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: Fragments: A concerto for violin and orchestra
Mark Wesley Nowakowski, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2013

Dissertation Directed by: Dr. Mark Edwards Wilson
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Fragments, a concerto for violin and orchestra, was composed in fulfillment of the dissertation requirements for the DMA in Composition degree at the University of Maryland. It is a 22'30 minute long work dedicated to the violinist Emily Ondracek Peterson. The work is scored for violin soloist, two flutes, one oboe, two Bb clarinets (with the second doubling on bass clarinet), two bassoons, four horns in F, two trombones, timpani, three percussionists, piano (doubling celesta), and full strings (with divisi in movements one and three.)

The work is composed in two main sections divided by a substantial interlude, though the movements are labeled 1-2-3. (Movements one and two are played with only a slight pause between them, while the gong that ends movement one is still ringing.) The interlude or second movement acts as an interlude or island of repose between the larger first and third movements.

The musical material for the beginning of the first movement is drawn conceptually from the sound of wind chimes, with the violin solo emerging slowly from the undulating diatonic wash that results. The resulting joyful music in this “A” section is not allowed to develop fully, instead being curtailed prematurely only to be revisited near the end of the work. A short transition and cadenza section lead us into the more linear, dark, and increasingly aggressive material of the “B” section that remains until the end of the first movement. The meditative second movement contains a comparatively simpler music underscored by a single pulsating “B”, repeated in the harp and assorted instruments every three beats. The third movement picks up with the “B” material from the end of the first movement, developing it into a short dance-like section which moves between the whimsical and the aggressive. This section fades away, leaving the violin exposed for a second small cadenza. As the cadenza material concludes, a transformed version of the opening “A” material emerges, this time being allowed to develop fully into a joyful and vibrant finale.
FRAGMENTS: A CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA

by

Mark Wesley Nowakowski

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctoral of Music Arts
2013

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FRAGMENTS

A concerto for violin and orchestra

Composed by Mark Nowakowski
Fragments: A concerto for violin and orchestra (22’30)

Composed by Mark Nowakowski in 2012-2013

Completed in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the DMA degree in Music Composition at the University of Maryland.

Instrumentation:
2 flutes, 1 oboe, 2 clarinets in Bb (second doubles Bass Clarinet), 2 bassoons
4 horns in F, 2 trombones, timpani
3 percussion (Tub. Bells, glockenspiel, vibraphone, marimba, large gong, bass drum, xylophone)
Piano (doubling celesta)
Solo violin
Full strings (Vl1,Vl2,Va,Vc,Db) (div. in portions of first and third movements.)

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Notes from the composer:

There is something seemingly universal about mankind’s reaction to the sound of bells, testified to in their frequent presence in various religious and civic practices and ceremonies worldwide. While I have always been haunted and fascinated by bells (the various sounds of bells appear throughout much of my work), this concerto owes its origins to a particular set of alluring wind-chimes in our neighborhood. These chimes would regale my son and I during our walks on particularly windy days, and I eventually decided to engage in a process of partial trespass in order to make a recording. I would later listen to this recording repeatedly, studying the rhythmic patterns, timbral peculiarities, haunting decay (and interrupted decays) of each bell, and of course the giggling of a toddler who found the entire situation more than amusing. When I began to “transcribe” (the word is used with caution) these sounds, I found that rather than study the nature of these bells, I was compelled to set these types of sounds to a large ensemble. While doing so I lost the particular timbral quality of the windchimes; the resulting diatonic stream of sound became the first steps of my violin concerto. The work is composed for the violinist Emily Ondracek Peterson, for whose husband Erik Peterson I composed the Storm Bells concerto for violin in 2008. While largely contrasting works, I view these pieces as a matched pair; the bells theme in both works is an unintended coincidence which nevertheless further links the two concertos.

Where Storm Bells is a morose, uncertain, and sometimes aggressive work, the circumstances in my life surrounding the composition of Fragments compelled me to explore an inverse narrative which progresses from an innocent joy through a series of conflicts and uncertainties, ultimately arriving at a conscious and chosen joy of experience. While the initial text snippet tells of the origin of the work, the remaining literary quotes emerged from some of the more compelling things I found myself reading while composing this concerto, namely the author Michael O’Brien, the poets Henry Vaughan and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Saint Augustine, and sacred scripture. These quotes are only an echo of my own creative process, though they all interlock and imply a substantive philosophical sub-narrative. The image of the kingfisher is also drawn from both O’Brien's luminous and heartbreaking novel Island of the World, and the related Hopkins poem from which he drew so much inspiration for his novel. It would be disingenuous to the work of these authors to attempt a summary of these connections; only a thorough reading would do.

The work is composed in three main movements, with the second movement acting as an interlude or island of repose between the larger first and third movements. In a sense the first and third movements are thematic mirror-images of each other: the first begins with an undulating theme of innocent joy which is interrupted before completion, progressing towards a darker and eventually frantic music. The third movement begins with the energetic motion that concludes the first movement, eventually transitioning into a transformed version of the opening musical material of the first movement: here the joyful bell-like music is allowed to fully develop into an exuberant final gesture.
Fragments: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

I. There are the thin places

(The wind chimes sparkle in the breeze...Matthias laughs...)
"He laughs, laughs at this playing, this unabashed childish joy, as streams of water run down his cheeks, his happiness so close to sorrow, yet infinitely above it..."
"...stopping his ears lest he hear of bloodshed..."
- Isaiah 33
Fl.1
Fl.2
Ob.
Cl.1
B. Cl.
Bsn.1
Bsn.2
4 Hn.
2 Tbn.
Timp.
Tub. B.
Glock.
Vib.
Hp.
Cel.
Vln.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

accel. to next tempo change . . . .

Espress.

accel. to next tempo change . . . .
very much faster!

\[ \text{march at } j=110 \]

much faster!
"There is, some say, in God a deep but dazzling darkness."

-Henry Vaughan
hold until silence
III. Where kingfishers catch fire

\( \text{q} = 25 \) accel to m. 209

\( \text{mf} = 40 \)

\( \text{fp} \)

\( \text{accel to m. 209} \) continue accel. to m. 209

\( \text{continue accel. to m. 209} \)
(dampen immediately)
"He laughs, laughs at this playing, this unabashed childish joy, as streams of water run down his cheeks, his happiness so close to sorrow, yet infinitely above it. The sorrow is the lower air through which the bird must pass to reach higher winds." - Michael O'Brien
Glock.
Vln. 2
Vln. 1
Vln.
Timp.
Bsn. 2
Bsn. 1
Mar.
Xyl.
Vla.
Cl. 2
Cel.
Fl. 2
Hp.
Vc.
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"As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
How strange things done are done are done in name;  
Do not dampen that being indoors each one dreads;  
Selves — gone to self:  
It speaks and spells,  
Crying 'What do I see; for what's I mean'  
- Gerard Manley Hopkins