A Thesis

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Abstract

Natural disasters are for the most part difficult to predict, and there is not much that we can do to control them. But scientists can make educated predictions about what will happen and help provide resources the public needs to take the initiative of preparing themselves for these catastrophic events. This piece parallels that idea of not being able to influence external factors and force us to consider what is and is not within our control. But the main idea of the piece is that we can be ready and prepared for whatever comes our way to the best of our ability.

I am the kind of person that expects consistency and predictability when it comes to having my music performed live. And I usually prefer that the musicians play exactly what I write in the score. For this thesis, my goal was to begin the process of stepping out of my comfort zone and relinquish some of my compositional control to the musicians. Mallet percussion and winds quietly introduce the musical "droplets" that will pervade the entire duration. Some slightly dissonant chords imply that all is not well and serve as a foreshadowing of what is to come. As the piece goes on, more instruments are gradually introduced, building a chordal texture that ebbs and flows, mirroring the calm before the storm. As the music builds in intensity, aleatoric gestures create uncertainty and an unstable quality, causing the gradual build up to collapse, followed by a moment of stillness.

The last section of the piece pieces back together the previous "droplets" in the form of a hopeful and triumphant theme that is symbolic of humanity's ability to overcome obstacles and come together in unity to help one another.

Writing this piece was a unique journey to say the least. The composing of the narrative timeline was non-linear, which is something I had never done before. In the past, whenever I got stuck composing from "left-to-right", I would tend to wait until the very last moment for inspiration to spark. That led to stressful late nights, which were not beneficial for my mental health. By working in a non-linear fashion, I was able to jump from section to section whenever I was having trouble coming up with ideas, thus being resilient. In some ways, this parallels the experiences of Native American coastal tribes who were able to leave areas they called home, wait for the earthquake or tsunami to pass, and come back where they came from to rebuild and start over. And by living through these devastating events, they were able to pass down stories, such as "Thunderbird and Whale" to the next generations, teaching lessons from the past to prevent the same mistakes.

My hope with this piece is that everyone who plays and listens to the piece will recognize that there will be situations that are unavoidable but be inspired to help one another and use resources such as "ready.gov" to be prepared for the unknowns of the future.

Acknowledgments

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Dedication

I would like express gratitude to my family for their support and allowing me to live in a different state and pursue my dreams. A big thank you to Danielle Jagelski, Josephine Jones, and Orion White for their time and expertise. Also, a shoutout to my graduate student colleagues who have been fantastic office neighbors and friends. I am going to miss you very much.

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Performance Notes

Whenever notes are tied to eighth notes, cut offs should be short and crisp. For bars 31-38, the feathered beaming represents the P-waves of an earthquake, and the notes should be played faster as the beams widen and slow down as the beams shrink. The number of notes played by the musician under one feathered beam does not matter. All the aleatoric boxed notation in bars 39-51 should be played very fast and out of time. Once we get to the last section of aleatoric notation in bars 52-56, the downward musical gestures should be slurred and played over and over, similar to the waves of a tsunami crashing down. The acceleration of the music for bars 40-56 should be as gradual as possible so that it is not immediately apparent that the music is speeding up. At bar 83, the vocal parts are in concert pitch, not transposed. The key signature for the whole composition is "atonal", meaning all accidentals will be visible for the score and parts.

Instrumentation

Piccolo & Voice 1

Flute 1 & Voice 2

Flute 2 & Voice 3

Oboe 1, English Horn & Voice 4

Oboe 2 & Voice 5

Bassoon 1 & Voice 6

Bassoon 2 & Voice 7

Clarinet (Bb) 1 & Voice 8

Clarinet (Bb) 2 & Voice 9

Clarinet (Bb) 3 & Voice 10

Bass Clarinet (Bb) & Voice 11

Alto Saxophone (Eb) 1 & Voice 12

Alto Saxophone (Eb) 2 & Voice 13

Tenor Saxophone (Bb) & Voice 14

Baritone Saxophone (Eb) & Voice 15

Trumpet (Bb) 1

Trumpet (Bb) 2

Trumpet (Bb) 3

Horn (F) 1

Horn (F) 2

Horn (F) 3

Horn (F) 4

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Bass Trombone

Euphonium (C)

Tuba

Piano

Double Bass

Timpani

Percussion 1: Xylophone, Crotales, Chimes & Anvil

Percussion 2: Bass Drum, Vibraphone, Mark Tree & Snare Drum

Percussion 3: Suspended Cymbal, Tam-tam, Glockenspiel & Toms

Chapter 1: Score



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