ESPRIT
(for violin and piano)

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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After the performance of a composer's piece, the question is always asked, "What gave you the idea or inspired you to write the composition?" Perhaps by recalling how I came to write "Esprit" I can explain my methods of composing as well as give a theoretical analysis of the composition, itself.

"Esprit" is made up of three sections. It has been four years in coming. What eventually became Section 2 was first composed as an independent piano composition.

Like all of my compositions, I first found a series of chords that I liked. In this case, it was chordal succession around E. Then I broke the chords up into arpeggios. All that remained was to find an appropriate melody.

After experimenting for three days, I finished the piano solo. However, it went unwritten on staff paper and nameless for a year.

My sophomore year of college, I was given the assignment to write a violin sonata in theory class. A sonata usually is made up of several sections or movements, so I knew I had my work cut out for me. Again, I began with finding a group of chord progressions that I liked and a rhythmic pattern. Section 1 of "Esprit" was written in a week.

Because of the limited amount of time I had to complete the assignment, I decided to make Section 1 (which started in C) end on E so I could add on Section 2, which was already composed on E in my memory. I gave the melody of the piano solo (Section 2) to the violin, keeping the bass the same in the piano and the treble clef harmonizing in thirds with the violin.
The transition seemed to work but I still had one more section to write. Anxious to end the piece, I went back to the prominent melody of Section 1 for the last 15 measures of the sonata, but this time with C as a tone center.

The piece was performed my junior year as a violin sonata and shelved along with my other theory projects.

Since becoming an honor student, I'd always hoped that my senior thesis could be one of my compositions. I decided with the help of my advisor that my violin sonata was the most mature example of my composing. On examining the sonata, it was decided that the third section was entirely too short and left the listener unsatisfied and hanging. So the third section of "Esprit" was expanded the fall quarter of my senior year.

I kept the idea of using the theme from Section 1. And again, I began the final section on 1, but this time progressed to C in order to end the piece on the same tone center as I began it.

The section was lengthened to a certain extent by a slower tempo, but mainly by repetitions of the main theme separated by chordal passages exploiting triplet figures first introduced at the beginning of the section.

The total performance time of "Esprit" is fifteen minutes. The title of the piece conveys the mood of the music for the listener as well as the performer. "Esprit" is a French word meaning "spirit". Each section of the piece paints a different interpretation of spirit.

Section 1 represents a confident and cheerful spirit. Section 2 moves from tranquility to anxiety. Section 3 expresses a spirit of pride and boastfulness. All emotions spent, the composition ends in peaceful sleep.
Additional detail about the form of "Esprit" may be of interest. Section 1 contains two statements—the main statement beginning the piece and a variation of that statement at the transposition into E (measure 38).

Transitional material starting at measure 45 connects Section 1 with the beginning of Section 2 at measure 51.

The second section is characterized by a great amount of melodic transformation of the material found in its first three measures. Some of the transformational devices used include retrograde, interpolation, transposition, interval expansion, interval contraction, inversion, retrograde inversion, displacement, change and mixture of mode, and rhythmic change. Transformation in the violin part is labeled on the attached sheets. Imitation between violin and piano occurs at measures 39-44 and measures 106-117.

As mentioned earlier, I used material from Section 1 in Section 3, giving a ternary aspect to the composition. (Among musicians, "3-part or ternary" form implies a return to original material.)

I began the third section with a transposition to A of the main statement from the first section. The statement is heard again in abbreviated form on measure 158 transposed to C. At the end of the final section the main statement and its variation are played simultaneously by the violin and piano in C.

The piece, itself, is somewhat demanding on the violinist. The performer must produce the rich, mellow sounds on the lower register of the violin and yet be prepared to make an immediate transition to the sweet, singing vibrations of its uppermost positions.
Following is a harmonic analysis of "Esprit".

Blue represents the tone centers. They are heard in the following order: C, E, A, C, E, A, F#, E, C, I, C, A, and C.

Green represents chord roots that circle around a tone center and orange chord roots go from one tone center to the next.

Purple notes represent roots of cadential chords preceding roots on a tonic cadence point.