

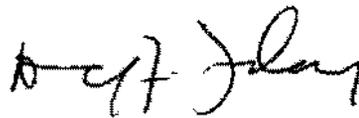
Senior Composition Recital

An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

Kyle Cothem

Thesis Advisor
David Foley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Foley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line through the middle of the letters.

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Graduation
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SPC 211
Thesis
2004
124
2004
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Abstract

In order to illustrate my diverse compositional study and practice on a collegiate level, I have chosen to present a senior composition recital as part of my honors creative project. The six selected works have been written for voice and instruments in a variety of solo and ensemble settings. Each of the original pieces experiments with form, harmony and texture while marking significant growth in my own musical style. In addition, the autobiographical sketch and artist's statement reveal personal influences in the pursuit of a music degree and an overview of the preparation for the recital. The recital program, program notes, and a compact disc recording have also been included in order to document the recital.

Acknowledgements

- I wish to thank Mr. David Foley, my thesis advisor, for his personal involvement in my recital. He has provided wonderful guidance, wisdom and encouragement throughout this experience.
- I would also like to thank Drs. Joanne Edmonds and James Ruebel for their advice in organizing and formatting the creative project.

Opus in Progress: An Autobiographical Sketch

Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. Such a statement may not mean much, especially because I often cannot recall people's names, lyrics of my favorite songs, or the food I had for lunch the previous day. In fact, the little details that slip from my mind in such a fast-paced world make storytelling a struggle for me, even in creating a simple autobiography. Still, enough memories somehow seem to linger in the mind of this Indiana boy to remind me of where I have been, who or what has inspired me, and how I have become the person I am today.

Early life in a small city was pleasant and filled with many blessings. I was born on a sweltering summer day in 1983. Interestingly, my mother decided to mow the lawn in order to induce her labor. My father chose the name Kyle, while my mother decided on the middle name of Joseph. As the youngest of four children, life was good. I had several opportunities to learn from the examples of my older brothers and sister and to follow in the footsteps that I preferred.

By the time I began my teenage years, however, I started to sort out my own musical path. Lessons in piano and voice, plus involvement in school and community choruses and theatre, quickly became more than simple hobbies. It was around this time that I began to think seriously about a career in music. In retrospect, I seemed to ignore the results of career tests and surveys that encouraged me to pursue teaching or social work. Instead, I found myself torn between the encouragement to follow my dreams and the pragmatic appeal to find a dependable job. The critical decision point came when I began to shop around for a suitable college. I became interested in the music technology program at Ball State University because it seemed to offer me a chance to enrich my study while preparing me for a secure job in the music business.

A year into the program, however, the courses in this program had already become my least favorite. I realized then that music engineering was not for me, no matter how appealing it had seemed in the past. In looking for a new direction, I reflected on the courses that I enjoyed the most: composition and voice lessons. I saw that vocal study gave me a wonderful outlet for musical expression, while composition became a very personalized method to understand the techniques used to create music. In addition, my positive music theory experience had allowed me the opportunity to tutor some other students, a fact that gave some validity to my earlier career tests. Thus, I selected music composition as a major because it had great versatility in course selection and incredible attention to personal growth.

Fortunately, I did not have to make this decision on my own. I consulted the help and advice of trusted friends, family members, and advisors who were able to guide me to a better understanding of what I saw that I needed. The most encouraging voice came from Eric Wilson, my first composition teacher. He noticed that my first compositional ideas were advanced for a music technology student who was just beginning composition lessons. In addition, my first academic advisor, who also heads the music technology program, agreed that I had great potential in seeking out a new direction. Such exuberant support from these influential figures had a very positive effect on my new ambitions as a composer.

In studying with different composition teachers, I have tried a number of methods to challenge my own personal growth as a composer. Music listening and score study have become some of my favorite ways to explore the music of other composers in order to uncover their techniques. In this way, I have become familiar with a larger number of great pieces. A regular amount of daily composition time is also important when I am working on a piece. Whether exploring harmonies at the piano or singing melodies and motives in my head, I use that time to

put different ideas together. Each of these compositional practices helps me to develop my own personal style and shape my compositional voice.

When I consider the features of my own music, I must recognize the influences of other composers and musical styles that find their way into my original work. My earliest classical influences draw from the piano pieces that I have played in private study. In performing these works, I have observed a variety of textures and forms from different musical periods, and I have gained confidence in my own ability to write music for a versatile instrument. Vocal study has also given me an ear for melodic phrasing and a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of text-music relationships in vocal works. While every piece of music I encounter, whether classical or commercial, sacred or secular, has an impact on my aesthetic sensibility, my greatest influences are those composers of the Romantic and Impressionistic periods. The sensitivity that I find in their works has spoken to me from an early age, and I tend to exude a similar sentiment. It is necessary, however, to continue to push beyond my own aesthetic comforts to explore new music and communicate ideas that speak to a contemporary audience in a fresh way.

Though I cannot predict the future, I trust that music will always be a part of my life. Within the past few years, I have been discerning other paths that may or may not align with the compositional study I have pursued, but I know that the opportunities I have experienced will not go to waste. In looking to what may come next, I have been advised by some to plan ahead, but not too far ahead. I am seriously exploring the possibility of monastic life. Such a choice may certainly allow for further musical adventures, and the calling is especially appealing to me.

Tracing my life's journey, one may connect the memories I have shared and discover the unique voice that came from such experiences. The people and places I have encountered have

helped me to look inward and perceive the life that I am drawn to lead. Above all, I continue to find that music weaves its way throughout my living tapestry.

Artist's Statement

After four and a half years of study as an honors composition student in the School of Music at Ball State University, I have accumulated enough original pieces to assemble an appropriate sampling of my work. The six compositions that appear on my recital reflect six unique directions that my music has taken while I have sought to find my own personal style. These pieces also happen to be the most complete and mature efforts that I undertook in composition lessons and course assignments.

Salve Regina was a project that came to my mind during a choral rehearsal in the spring of 2004. Inspired by a number of great sacred choral works in the group's repertoire, I began to look for a religious text of reasonable length that had the potential to evoke different moods. I chose to set the Latin version of this hymn in order to study how to maintain the syllabic stress and imagery of a text in a foreign language. The piece opens the program both as a clear invocation and a subtle personal prayer for a successful recital performance.

Following this work for the largest ensemble on the program, I chose to provide contrast with an intimate setting of secular poetry. The piece *Erosion* for vocal duet and string bass accompaniment has a thin texture of three contrapuntal lines that create biting dissonances, a clear departure from the thick texture and lush harmonic language of the preceding choral piece. *Erosion* challenged me to provide continual interest through variation above an ostinato pattern. When setting out to include a large number of unresolved dissonances in the music, I looked for contemporary poetry with dark potential. The choice to manipulate the text with simultaneously sung stanzas highlights

the connective imagery in the overlap, but can also obscure the meaning for a first-time listener.

I composed the song cycle *Windsongs* for a close friend, which allowed the opportunity to write music for a specific voice that was very familiar to my ear. In setting three different styles of poetry within a larger musical framework, I explored different techniques to create a musical flow between the different songs. The yearning mood of the first song, for instance, ends with a fragile figure in the accompaniment that dovetails with the opening motive of the second song. Although the final song remains more distinct, its presence shapes the musical story in drawing fitting closure to the romantic longing of the first two songs.

While the first three pieces represent diverse areas of study in vocal composition, the *Suite for Flute and Piano* presents my first venture into music for instruments. The piece has become the most well received work on the program, especially because the clear ternary forms in these movements help to make the music accessible. In studying how to write for flute, I became fascinated with the different colors of each register and the overall agility of the instrument. Each movement of the suite makes use of the flute's wide range as the performer works through quick ornamentation and lyrical melodies.

The piece for brass quintet originated from a very demanding semester of composition lessons. While my teacher advocated modern compositional techniques and atonal harmonies that led me away from my comfort zone, I also challenged myself to write a complex piece for an instrumental ensemble that was unfamiliar to me. I wanted to include the piece on my recital to demonstrate a unique exercise in my study, but I had incredible difficulty finding a group that was willing to perform it. The piece is

deliberately tricky, making use of complicated rhythmic subdivisions and wide instrumental ranges that require incredible endurance from the performers. While I am confident that I did not write an unplayable piece, the work remains unperformed.

The final piece presents my exploration into the realm of electronic music. Though I hesitated at first to compose in this genre of music, I became intrigued by the incredible freedom from rhythmic structure and the enormous variety of styles among composers. In concluding the recital with a biblical subject, the program comes full circle with a more unique display of sacred music. The inclusion of *Psalm 137* also allowed me the opportunity to experiment with the sound diffusion system, an eight-speaker setup surrounding the audience that can shift the sound around the space of the performance hall in real time from a mixing board.

The overall experience has offered several opportunities for learning life lessons in composition, especially by developing networking and organizational skills in securing performers and supervising rehearsals. As I have witnessed these pieces come together for the recital performance, I feel relieved that these varied expressions of ideas from my broad compositional study and practice have been transformed into actual music ready for an audience's response. The diverse works that represent my activity and study on a university level now distinguish my voice as a composer.

KYLE COTHERN

SENIOR COMPOSITION RECITAL

Salve Regina (2005) Kyle Cothorn
(b.1983)

Choral Ensemble
Jill Burleson, conductor

Erosion (2004)

Text: Linda Pastan

Megan Upchurch, soprano – Nathan Jones, baritone
Andrew Wirtz, double bass

Windsongs (2005)

1. I am not yours

Text: Sarah Teasdale

2. Maybe (2002)

Text: Carl Sandburg

3. Chamomile Tea

Text: Katherine Mansfield

Molly Widolff, mezzo-soprano

Ying Zhu, piano

Suite for Flute and Piano (2003)

1. Jack in the Box

2. Shadow Dance

3. Tango

Balie Gren, flute

Liz Seidel, piano

Flux Tangent (2005)

Joel Matthews and John Van Patten, trumpet

Martha Sternberg, French horn – Trent Lockhart, trombone

Brian Calvert, tuba

Psalm 137 (2005)

Kyle Cothorn is a student of David Foley, Kenneth Froelich, Joseph Harchanko,
Keith Kothman, Michael Pounds, David Stern and Eric Wilson.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Bachelor of Music with a major in Music Technology
and the requirements for the Honors Program at Ball State University.

Refreshments will be served in the lobby
immediately following the recital.

SURSA HALL
Monday, October 10, 2005
8:00 p.m.

Series LX
Number 31

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Program Notes

Kyle Cothorn: Senior Composition Recital

Salve Regina

To demonstrate the composer's fondness for sacred choral music, this piece sets a traditional Marian hymn in Latin for unaccompanied mixed chorus. A clear feature of the music is a motive made up of two intervals of an ascending and descending perfect fourth. With a variety of textures and an overall fluid tonal structure, the piece explores the imagery of contrasting moods in the through-composed form of the hymn.

Salve, Regina, mater misericordiae;
Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevae.
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
In hac lacrymarum valle.
Eja ergo, advocata nostra,
Illos tuos misericordes oculos
Ad nos converte.
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
Nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail, Queen, mother of mercies;
Life, sweetness, and our hope, hail.
To you do we cry, exiled children of Eve.
To you do we sigh, moaning and weeping
In this valley of tears.
Ho! Therefore, our advocate,
Those your merciful eyes
Turn to us.
And Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb,
Show unto us after this exile.
O clement, o holy, o sweet Virgin Mary.

Erosion

This vocal duet was completed for coursework in a study on 20th-century counterpoint. As a passacaglia for three voices, the vocal lines contain free-form variation supported by the ostinato pattern of the string bass. The simultaneous singing of alternating stanzas of the poetry highlights the estranged relationship of the two separated characters as they clamor to explain their side of the situation.

Windsongs

In order to tackle the goal of continuity in larger musical works, the composer has expanded his first compositional study "Maybe" into a song cycle for mezzo-soprano. Each song serves to capture varying emotions in the evolution of a romantic relationship from a singular point of view. The listener may note expressive figures in the vocal line and piano accompaniment that paint particular textual images.

Suite for Flute and Piano

The suite draws on the versatility of the flute to create three movements that are whimsical, tender, and passionate, respectively. The dynamic styles express the composer's inspiration to musically express the movement in these 'dances.' The predominant use of ternary form outlines the structure of each movement.

Flux Tangent

The title of this brass quintet piece declares the quick-changing style of its distinct sections. A variety of textures help to provide balance among the different brass parts, while the intense rhythmic patterns and dynamic contrasts drive through the piece.

Psalm 137

This study in electronic music draws influence both from the music concrète pieces of Pierre Schaeffer and the tradition of prayer through music. In juxtaposing natural and manipulated sounds, the piece captures the imagery of a biblical psalm that mourns the loss of one's homeland and vividly expresses humanity's tendency for seeking revenge.

A note about the composer:

Kyle Cothorn began his childhood musical study with piano lessons and participation in community choruses. From these common experiences, he developed an ear for creating melodic phrases, influenced largely from playing Romantic piano miniatures. His early collegiate music experience as a fledgling Music Technology major brought him into composition, where he began to find some solid ground. His passion for music, influenced greatly by the sacred music of his past, may continue to play a prominent role in his life as he seeks to become a religious monk.

A few words from the composer:

I gratefully acknowledge my family and friends, especially my parents Paul and Mary, for their continual support and guidance. I also would like to thank those teachers and mentors who had the patience to listen and the wisdom to respond, especially Dr. Jeffrey Carter, Dr. Keith Kothman and Mr. David Foley.