

Sarah Jean Sknerski
In A Senior Honors Composition Recital

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Kothman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Abstract

A Senior Composition Recital is a requirement of all Music Engineering Technology majors at Ball State University. It demonstrates the development of a student as a composer throughout the duration of the program. It is a culminating event that allows friends, peers, family, and faculty to observe a student's progress while studying music at Ball State. Students are not only required to compose traditional acoustic works, but also electronic music. Electronic compositions involve various methods of sound synthesis, manipulation, and design. Elements such as gesture, texture, and form are part of all types of musical composition.

This thesis contains an extended version of the program notes that were distributed at the concert performance on November 14, 2003. It also contains insight into the compositional process, such as inspiration and technical methods learned. Also included is a reaction by the composer of the works presented and the process of creating a recital.

Program Notes

Introduction

There were a variety of sources that inspired me to compose the pieces I did - the music of other composers, professors, and books. Each piece has its own story. Each piece also was created by the technical knowledge learned each semester by a number of professors.

China Suite

This electronic music piece was created as a final project for Mumet 327 under the instruction of Dr. Keith Kothman, as well as a creative project for Dr. Laurie Lindberg's Honors 189 class. The honors global studies class included the study of China, and I have long been interested in music of the east. To create this piece I manipulated samples of Chinese guitar and percussion in programs such as SoundHack, Peak, and Kontakt. It was sequenced in Digital Performer 3.

This piece is divided into three movements: *Little Moon*, *Wine Mad*, and *Thunder*. They are titled after the folk song that inspired the movement. Although *Thunder* uses instrument samples native to china, it is actually inspired by Kodo drumming of Japan.

In my years as a Ball State student I have studied eastern culture, especially music. I have done research in several honors classes on the topic, such as western influence on Japanese music and female musicians in Japan. In the global studies class that this piece was used as a creative project for, several non-Western cultures were

studied through literature. In *Women of the Silk*, we studied Chinese culture.

In Mumet 327, we studied several sound synthesis and manipulation techniques that were used in this piece. The foremost is granular synthesis. In programs such as Thonk, Cecilia, and Kontakt this knowledge was turned into application. Cecilia is a front end for Csound in which the composer can use modules to manipulate or create sound. I used granular synthesis modules such as Stretcher and Warper in this program. Kontakt has its own plugins for granular synthesis. These are "Tone Machine" and "Time Machine." Kontakt also allows MIDI control of sounds manipulated. Using Kontakt sounds can be altered over time within the program itself.

These tools were a foundation for composition. With a creative project in mind, and the technical requirements for another class, I feel that this piece was very successful. It is a rather unique combination of traditional Chinese folk music and electronic music.

Go By

This acoustic work for Violin and Cello was composed during my second semester of study with Dr. David Stern. It is in ternary form with the "A" sections being in D major and in a fugue-like form, and the "B" section is in A minor. I often listen to film scores as inspiration for my music. The "B" section of this piece was inspired largely by the soundtrack to the film *Pearl Harbor* composed by Hans Zimmer. *Go By* was performed by Tyler Gill on cello and the composer on violin.

Apology

This was my first electronic piece, and was completed as a final project for Dr. Harchanko's Mumet 325 class. It is meant to be somewhat humorous, as the speech samples are examples of the many humorous things said while tracking a CD. "I'm sorry" tends to be the most common thing I caught on tape. The sounds were created and manipulated using Max/MSP, Kontakt, and Peak. It was sequenced in Digital Performer 3 (DP3).

In this class we spent a great deal of time discussing form, texture, and gesture. It was my intention to create a piece that was building in complexity, with sections separated by a specific sound. The "cricket" sounds are the separating force in-between the text. The text gets more complex as the piece progresses, with more density and more phrases.

One

This is the first piece I ever composed at Ball State. It was written under the direction of Dr. David Stern. It begins in Dorian mode, but floats to a variety of keys. As a violinist I wanted to compose a piece similar to a Romantic era violin sonata. As a first try, I feel this piece was a success.

24 Hours

A good friend and former professor of mine, Adrienne Jones, inspired this piece. As a class project for Honors 199, her students were instructed to keep a journal of every technology they interacted with in a 24-hour period. They almost invariably began with an alarm clock. While composing this piece I not only thought of

the technologies we interact with, but the confusing and overwhelming way in which everything we do and hear within a day comes at us. Sometimes the real world seems more like a bad dream.

To create this piece, the sounds that were sampled were manipulated in Kontakt, Peak, SoundHack, and Metasynt. It was sequenced in DP3.

In My Hands

This piece is based on text excerpts from the book *In My Hands* by Irene Gut Opdyke; it was required reading for Dr. Lindberg's Honors 203 in spring 2003. The book is a powerful memoir of a Polish girl who not only survived the Holocaust, but also rescued several people from the Nazi's in Poland. Irene was a nursing student when Germany and Russia simultaneously attacked Poland. She worked in a Russian hospital for a while before escaping back to Poland. Once in her native land once more, the Nazi's took her and her sister to work as waitresses for the high-ranking officials. There she was able to feed people in the nearby Jewish ghetto, as well as overhear the Nazi party's plans for them. She later was housekeeper for Major Rügemer. She smuggled several of the Jews she worked closely with into his basement, and saved their lives. The imagery included in the moving story was inspiration for a piece. The most prevalent was the imagery of a bird, symbolizing freedom and a need to escape. It also was the image she used to replace something much darker. Some of the excerpts I used in the piece are included as follows:

There was a bird flushed up from the wheat fields, disappearing in a blur of wings against the sun, and then a gunshot and it fell to the earth. But it was not a bird. It was not a bird and it was not in the wheat field, but you can't understand what it was yet.

How can I tell you about this war? How can I say these things? If I tell you all at once - first this happened, and then this, and these people died and those people lived and then it was over - you will not believe me. Sometimes I wonder if these things could have happened. Was it me? Was that girl me? Was I really there? Did I see this happening? In the war, everything was unnatural and unreal. We wore masks and spoke lines that were not our own. This happened to me, and yet I still don't understand how it happened at all.

(Opdyke, 1)

The war was a series of choices made by many people. Some of those choices were as wicked and shameful to humanity as anything in history. But some of us made other choices. I made mine.

(Opdyke, 235)

The text is read by Tiara Wuethrich, and manipulated in Metasynth, Peak, Thonk, and Sound Hack. The piece was then sequenced in DP3. It was composed as a final project for Professor Mike Pounds's MUMET 425 class. We explored the uses of Metasynth. This program uses a unique graphical interface to manipulate and create sounds. For this piece I primarily used the graphical filters to alter sounds.

El Eria e Mor (A Star Rises Out of Darkness)

This piece was composed for woodwind quintet while studying with Dr. Eleanor Trawick. It was originally begun as a string quartet, but after discussion about expanding my compositional skills with Dr. Trawick, I

composed it for wind quintet. *El Eria e Mor* is elvish and taken from an excerpt of *Lord of the Rings*. This piece, like the popular stories of middle-earth, is set in medieval times.

The quintet opens in C minor with a slow melody in the Horn line. After contrapuntal additions of melodies in the upper instruments, a tumultuous middle section begins. This section shifts to G minor, and the melodic line is buried by a continuous rhythm that is shared by all instruments. After this section cadences, a thinner texture begins. The flute and clarinet share a moving two-part melody; the horn re-enters with the dark melody from the opening. This motive is reworked and leads the shift back into the original key of C minor for the final cadence.

Chaconne for Violin and Tape

The *Chaconne* was inspired by my many semesters of studying Bach. This "neo-baroque" piece is the result. It was a challenge to create a piece for instrument and tape; Dr. Keith Kothman and Mike Pounds were very helpful in the process as instructors. It uses excerpts from Bach's *Chaconne* from the *D minor Partita* for solo violin. Also I reworked sections of the original Bach piece for the violin part, and manipulated violin recordings and samples for the electronic part.

The most challenging part of composing this piece was working out a way for the violinist to synchronize with the tape part. I discovered that flexibility was in this case the answer. Although there are substantial electronic and acoustic sections, it is more a series of events than exact precision. I wanted to use Bach's technique of allowing

time to be flexible. In my experience performing Bach's violin Sonatas and Partitas, it is much more artistic to slow tempo in portions of the piece. I believe that borrowing this technique worked well for this piece.

Composer's Reactions

Creating music and presenting it in the form of a Composition Recital proved to be a challenging task. When I began the Music Engineering Technology program, I really knew very little about it. The idea that I would be composing was very frightening, as I had never composed before. I believe that over the semesters, composing became a part of my life. Creating music was a worthwhile endeavor, and I feel my skills improved. Three of the last pieces I wrote proved to be my favorites. *In My Hands* is not only a touching story, but I feel the piece I composed is moving as well. *El Eria e Mor* was very challenging to write, and I am extremely proud of the result. Quite possibly the piece I worked the most diligently on, however, is the *Chaconne for Violin and Tape*. This piece combined the skills I learned as a violinist with the skills I learned for composing electronic music. I feel it is the most artistic work I composed.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who made this possible. First and foremost is Dr. Keith Kothman, who as my faculty advisor and a professor for several semesters. His guidance in organizing my recital, as well as reassurance when I had doubts, was incredibly helpful.

Adrienne and Jim Jones have been supportive in every way - from being a great boss to a great friend, and inspiration along the way, thanks Adrienne!

My family has always been supportive of all my endeavors. From always coming to performances to emptying their pocketbooks, they are the greatest.

Bibliography

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Shore, Howard. The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring Soundtrack. Compact Disc. New Line Productions, 2001.

Zimmer, Hans. Pearl Harbor Soundtrack. Compact Disc. Warner Brothers, 2001.

Go By

S. J. Sknerski

$\text{♩} = 90$

Solo Violin

Musical notation for Solo Violin, measures 1-5. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. The music consists of eighth and quarter notes. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*.

Solo Cello

Musical notation for Solo Cello, measures 1-5. The staff is in bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. The music is mostly rests, with a few notes in the final measure. Dynamics include *f*.

S.Vln.

Musical notation for S.Vln. and S.Vlc., measures 6-10. The S.Vln. staff is in treble clef and the S.Vlc. staff is in bass clef, both with a key signature of two sharps and a 3/4 time signature. The S.Vln. part features eighth and quarter notes. The S.Vlc. part features eighth and quarter notes. Dynamics include *f*.

S.Vlc.

S.Vln.

Musical notation for S.Vln. and S.Vlc., measures 11-14. The S.Vln. staff is in treble clef and the S.Vlc. staff is in bass clef, both with a key signature of two sharps and a 3/4 time signature. The S.Vln. part features eighth notes with triplets in measures 11 and 12. The S.Vlc. part features eighth notes. Dynamics include *f*.

S.Vlc.

S.Vln.

Musical notation for S.Vln. and S.Vlc., measures 15-18. The S.Vln. staff is in treble clef and the S.Vlc. staff is in bass clef, both with a key signature of two sharps and a 3/4 time signature. The S.Vln. part features eighth notes. The S.Vlc. part features eighth notes. Dynamics include *rit.*

S.Vlc.

19 Slower
Vln. *mp*
S.Vlc. *p* *mp*

23
S.Vln. *p*
S.Vlc. *mp* *mf*

27
Vln. *mp* *f*
S.Vlc. *mf*

31
S.Vln. *mf*

1. Vln. *p*

S. Vlc. *mf*

S. Vln. *rit.*

S. Vlc. *rit.*

1. Vln.

S. Vlc.

S. Vln. *pp*

S. Vlc. *f*

f

mp

51

Vln.

S.Vlc.

55

A Tempo

S.Vln.

S.Vlc.

rit.

mf

mf

rit.

59

Vln.

S.Vlc.

mf

f

63

S.Vln.

S.Vlc.

67

Vln.

S.Vlc.

f

71

S.Vln.

S.Vlc.

rit.

one

sknerski

♩ = 86

Solo Violin

Musical score for Solo Violin and Piano, measures 1-5. The Solo Violin part consists of whole rests. The Piano part features a melody in the right hand starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a bass line in the left hand starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 4. Handwritten annotations include "Pia" under the first and third measures, and an asterisk (*) under the second measure.

S.Vln.

Musical score for S.Vln. and Pno., measures 6-10. The S.Vln. part consists of whole rests. The Pno. part continues the piano accompaniment. Handwritten annotations include "Pia" under measures 7 and 9, and an asterisk (*) under measure 8.

S.Vln.

Musical score for S.Vln. and Pno., measures 11-15. The S.Vln. part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 12. The Pno. part continues with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Handwritten annotations include "Pia" under measures 11, 13, and 15, and asterisks (*) under measures 12, 14, and 15. A crescendo hairpin is shown below the piano part, starting at measure 11.

S.Vln. *mp*

Pno. *mp*

16 3 3

Red * 3 *Red* *p* *

S.Vln.

Pno. *f* *mp*

21 3 3

Red * 3 *

S.Vln. *f* *mp*

Pno. *p* *mf*

26 3 3

S.Vln.

Pno. *p*

31 3 3 3

S.Vln. 36

Pno. 36

3 3

Tea 3 *

S.Vln. 38

Pno. 38

mf 3 3

S.Vln. 42

Pno. 42

3 3 3 3 3 3

mp

Tea *

S.Vln. 46

Pno. 46

p //

3 *p* //

Tea * *Tea* *

51

S.Vln.

Pno.

p

tea *

tea

56

S.Vln.

Pno.

tea *

tea

61

S.Vln.

Pno.

tea *

tea

66

S.Vln.

Pno.

rit.

p

tea *

tea

El Eria e Mor

A Star Rises Out of the Darkness

♩ = 90

S.J. Sknerski

Musical score for the first system, featuring five instruments: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, and Horn in F. The music is in 3/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 90. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The Flute part begins with a *pp* dynamic and a melodic line that moves to *mf* later in the system. The Clarinet in Bb part starts with *pp* and later changes to *p*. The Bassoon part starts with *p*. The Horn in F part starts with *mf*. The Oboe part is mostly silent in this system.

Musical score for the second system, featuring five instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bb Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Horn (Hn.). The music continues from the first system. The Flute part continues its melodic line. The Bb Clarinet part begins with a *mf* dynamic. The Bassoon part starts with *p*. The Horn part starts with *mp*. The Oboe part remains silent.

13

Fl. *mf* *mp*

Ob. *mf*

Bb Cl. *mp*

Bsn. *mp*

Hn. 13

18

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl. *mf*

Bsn. *mf*

Hn. 18

23

Fl. *mf* *f*

Ob. *mf*

Bb Cl. *mf*

Bsn. *mp*

Hn. *mp*

28

Fl. *mf*

Ob.

Bb Cl. *mf*

Bsn.

Hn.

33

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

mf

37

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

f

mp

f

mf

mf

40

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

mp

mf 3

43

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

mp

46

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

mp

This system of musical notation covers measures 46, 47, and 48. It includes five staves: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bb Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Horn (Hn.). The Flute part begins with a melodic line in measure 46, which is then taken up by the Oboe in measure 47. The Bb Clarinet and Bassoon provide harmonic support with various rhythmic patterns. The Horn part starts in measure 47 with a single note, followed by a melodic line in measure 48. A dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano) is present in measure 48. The key signature has two flats and the time signature is 4/4.

49

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

This system of musical notation covers measures 49, 50, and 51. It includes five staves: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bb Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Horn (Hn.). The Flute part continues its melodic line from measure 49. The Oboe and Bassoon parts have more active lines, with the Bassoon playing a rhythmic pattern. The Bb Clarinet and Horn parts provide harmonic support. The key signature has two flats and the time signature is 4/4.

51

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

This system of musical notation covers measures 51 and 52. It includes five staves: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bb Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Horn (Hn.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. In measure 51, the Flute and Oboe play a melodic line with eighth notes, while the Bb Clarinet and Bassoon play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Horn plays a simple eighth-note pattern. In measure 52, the Flute and Oboe continue their melodic line, the Bb Clarinet plays a more complex eighth-note pattern, and the Bassoon and Horn play a similar eighth-note accompaniment.

53

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

p

This system of musical notation covers measures 53 and 54. It includes five staves: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bb Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Horn (Hn.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. In measure 53, the Flute and Oboe play a melodic line with eighth notes, while the Bb Clarinet and Bassoon play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Horn plays a simple eighth-note pattern. In measure 54, the Flute and Oboe continue their melodic line, the Bb Clarinet plays a more complex eighth-note pattern, and the Bassoon and Horn play a similar eighth-note accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present in the Oboe staff at the beginning of measure 53.

55

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

56

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

mf 5

rit.

mp

p

rit.

p

rit.

60 A Tempo

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

65

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

69

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

p

mp

73

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

p

mp

78

Fl.

Ob.

Bb Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

rit.

pp

p

rit.

rit.

rit.

78

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for woodwinds, starting at measure 78. The score is written for five instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), B-flat Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Horn (Hn.). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The Flute part begins with a melodic line in measure 78, which continues through measure 82. The Oboe part has rests in measures 78 and 79, followed by a melodic line in measure 80. The B-flat Clarinet part has a melodic line in measure 78, followed by a sustained note in measure 80. The Bassoon part has a melodic line in measure 78, followed by a sustained note in measure 80. The Horn part has a melodic line in measure 78, followed by a sustained note in measure 80. Dynamics include *rit.* (ritardando) in measures 80 and 81 for all instruments, *pp* (pianissimo) for the B-flat Clarinet in measure 80, and *p* (piano) for the Bassoon in measure 80. There are also slurs over the notes in measures 80 and 81.

Chaconne

for Violin and Tape

S. J. Sknerski

Violin

$\bullet = 80$

mp

6

mf *f*

12

V

18

5

28

22

54

mp

60

3

mf

68 Musical staff 68: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 68-72. Measure 72 ends with a fermata and a forte (*f*) dynamic marking.

73 Musical staff 73: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 73-77. Measure 77 ends with a fermata.

78 Musical staff 78: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 78-80. Measure 80 ends with a fermata.

81 Musical staff 81: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 81-84. Measures 82-84 contain triplets marked with "3".

85 Musical staff 85: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 85-93. Measure 85 starts with a 3/4 time signature change. Measure 85 includes "Legato" and "mf" markings.

94 Musical staff 94: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps, 4/4 time. Measures 94-99. Measures 94 and 99 contain triplets marked with "3".

100 Musical staff 100: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps, 4/4 time. Measures 100-111. Measure 100 contains a fermata with "10" above it. Measures 110-111 contain triplets marked with "3". Measure 111 ends with a forte (*f*) dynamic marking.

112 Musical staff 112: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 112-114. Measures 113-114 contain triplets marked with "3". Measure 114 ends with a 3/4 time signature change.

115 Musical staff 115: Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 4/4 time. Measures 115-119. Measures 115-118 contain triplets marked with "3". Measure 119 ends with a fermata and a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic marking.