

Megan Gourley
Senior Composition Recital
Program Notes

Elements: A Marimba Duet (2009) – 6’

This was my first attempt at composing for pitched percussion. As I began to research the various percussion instruments, I quickly found myself being inspired by the earthy, natural resonance of the marimba. It didn’t take long to decide a piece revolving around nature made perfect sense for the marimba. Therefore, I decided to compose a short 4-movement piece where each movement portrays one of the 4 elements of nature: Water, Fire, Earth, Wind.

Film Score Series (2010 - 2011)

As of November 2010, I have signed on to compose for Studio 51 Music, a music library that provides music to various television networks and other media outlets. This series is an accumulation of my work over the past year representing a variety of styles and genres I have written while studying commercial music composition with Professor Black.

Documentary - 3’ :: Mystery - 5’25” :: Drama - 4’30” :: Electronic - 4’05” :: Epic Energy - 5’

“The Fall” – A song cycle to poetry by Dennis Nurkse (2009) – 6’30”

I stumbled upon D. Nurkse’s poetry while conceptualizing a vocal piece and was intrigued from the start. The poems I chose to set to music come from the first of 3 large poetry sets all included in one collection simply called “The Fall”. In this first set of poems, Nurkse portrays the childhood of his main character through various activities and events he experienced. Although the statements seem childish and playful, Nurkse incorporates a consistent undertone of reality and truth applicable to life in general. The boy’s want for a stronger relationship with his father quickly becomes a continuous theme.

My goal with the piece was to portray this childish naivety while also accenting the darker themes underlying the events being told. Primarily the clarinet plays the secondary character role (aside from the singer) including: the ant in “Sunlight”; the dog in “The Dog”; the father in “Cat’s-Eye”. The strings both take on their own roles in “Initials” each portraying one of the children, and the violin in “At the Stage of Riddles” portraying the poet.

The final movement is the last poem in the first set, concluding the section with the father’s death and the young boy’s reaction to this event.

Sunlight

I trained a magnifying glass
on the ant with the crumb
and he stepped away
from the pool of light.
I held the beam
wherever he was going.
At once he shriveled
to a tiny black line
whose ends rose slowly
to meet each other.
I aimed at my hand
and sensed that fire
infinitely distant, close,
then inside me:
when I dropped the lens

I felt no comfort
and called my father’s name.

The Dog

At twilight we walk each other
in the snowy park.
The leash yanks us apart.
Our trails mix crazily.
Haven’t we always traveled
in a series of lunges
away from a missing center?
Something we can’t name
obsesses us at the plinth
of the birdbath,
and again under the belly
of Sherman’s bronze horse.
Is there a secret passage

to squeeze through and be free
of the endless command?
We should heel, our voice
slurs with longing, at last
we’ll enter our own lit door
and there undo our studded collar,
mete out stale Friskies, comb
matted hair, turn three times
on nothing, and whimper
in a dream whose ending
everyone knows but us.

Initials

We'd been drawing in chalk,
surprised they would allow us
to sign the world.

We made the grid for a game,
a ladder to paradise.

I wrote her name.
She entered mine.
I inscribed a heart, she the date.

We'd been given everything:
the little dusty box,
the road stretching
all the way to the neighbor's house.

The threshold,
the invisible watcher,
the huge hour until sunset.

At the Stage of Riddles

I tiptoed behind my father
and cupped my hands
over his eyes and whispered:
Guess who?

Always he thought hard
and answered gravely:
Eisenhower. Or DiMaggio.

And I was happy, knowing
he was safe from my love.
Almost I envied him
the brevity of his confinement
in the unknowable darkness.

Cat's-Eye

My father waved good-bye.
I didn't wave back,
scared I might drop
my new cold smoky marble.

At the core a spiral
glinted and coiled
like a small windy flame
turning in on itself.

That night my mother
shook me from a dream,
whispering he was dead,
he was dead, he was dead,
as if to teach a language
and I answered: He is dead.

Even in sleep
my hands had not opened.

Theme and Variations for Piano (2010) – 6'30"

This was my first attempt to write a virtuosic solo piano piece. I realized early on that a perfect way to explore the possibilities of the piano would be to write a simple theme and then elaborate on style, tempo, key, rhythmic patterns, and surface activity through variations on the theme. This particular theme and variations consists of the statement of the theme, and then travels through 6 variations, each holding its own feel.

A Day at the Movies with a String Quartet (2010) – 6'

As a film score enthusiast, I found it fitting to write a piece that reflected my love of movies. This piece is in 3 movements, each representing a different movie genre.

The Princess and the Magical Music Box (2009) – 5'30"

Once upon a time....

There was a young princess. One day, the princess was outside enjoying nature and her surroundings when she stumbled upon a music box near the edge of the forest. She slowly opened the box and an entrancing melody began to emit from within. The princess was captivated, unable to pull away from the music box's embrace. As the tune began to continue, her surroundings began to grow dark; The once cheerful sky was now ominous; The trees grew sinister; The once cheerful animals were no where to be found. Suddenly, the princess realized she was being enchanted and immediately began trying to escape from the music box's magic hold. She fought against the magic, but with every shove she found herself being thrown back into the enchantment. Finally, in a desperate attempt to break free, she grasped the music box and threw it to the ground. The box shattered, its magic scattering. The princess slowly looked around. The curse had been broken. The blue sky returned. The animals slowly began to appear, and the trees looked welcoming and bright once again. The princess continued back to her carefree adventures, quickly dismissing the danger she had encountered, knowing she would live happily ever after.

Back in the forest, the broken music box slowly begins to play...

The end?