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The Journey, A suite in five movements for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and percussion

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The Journey
A suite in five movements
for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and percussion

Honors Capstone Project Erin Goad Spring 2008

Approved by:

April Tale

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Abstract

The Journey is a musical suite for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and mixed percussion. Written for the composer's honors capstone project, The Journey describes stages of a mountain hike. Inspiration came from the composer's love of nature. Movement one, "Morning Sunrise," depicts preparations for the hike with a dawn valley scene. Eager preparation is shown musically by a constantlymoving accompanimental pattern and a syncopated melody. This moves directly into the second movement, "Sunpatterned Leaves." Conga drums and a march feel paint the brisk trek through the forest. Movement three, "Darkening Pathways," journeys into the depths of an unexplored cave. Haunting melodies, repetitive woodblock motifs, and carefully structured texture changes create a dark atmosphere. "Beneath Dark Clouds", the fourth movement, resumes the forest hike, this time during an afternoon rainstorm. Sweeping clarinet melodies represent wind-blown trees, and staccato motifs in the other instruments represent raindrops. "Mountaintop Sunset", the final movement, depicts the mountain's summit as the sun sinks below the horizon. A majestic climax depicts the sun's setting rays. Fading into silence on a warm, dark chord, the musical journey is complete. The Journey was performed and recorded by the composer and three student musicians in November of 2007.

Introduction

All great performers make their living translating pages of music notation into beautiful sounds. For musicians, learning to play an instrument is only half the battle; one must also learn how to discover the original intent of each composer and successfully interpret his or her music. Listening to recordings and studying literature on musical style is one way to reach this goal; however, creating music for oneself goes a step further. My honors capstone experience project centered around taking this step. During my compositional journey, I have found composing to be highly beneficial. I have been making music since the second grade, but composing has illuminated a new musical world.

This project quickly expanded to include composing a piece, rehearsing and performing it on a recital, and finally, recording it. Looking back, each piece of this musical journey has benefited me in many ways, from the first scrawls on manuscript paper to the finished project: a musical creation captured on CD. My piece is titled *The Journey*, a musical suite in five movements for oboe, Bb clarinet, bassoon, and percussion that describes a day-long hike up a mountain. In the pages that follow, I would like to explain the different steps of the project in detail and their benefits, then provide a musical analysis of my composition, *The Journey*.

The Composition Process

I began writing *The Journey* in October of 2006 and completed it in August of 2007. I had very little compositional experience before this project, so I expanded my knowledge by taking composition lessons from Dr. Michael Kallstrom, the music theory instructor at Western Kentucky University. He guided me through choosing a topic, setting up the instrumentation, and using Finale music notation software, and provided much-appreciated suggestions and encouragement along the way. A few main steps of the compositional process will be discussed here.

The first element of my piece to be determined was the overall theme. After a week of contemplation, I chose to write about nature. I have always loved the outdoors, and spent many childhood days playing outside and hiking with my family in the mountains surrounding the Tennessee Valley. Nature is a broad topic, however, and it was necessary to further clarify my theme. I played with several different ideas, eventually deciding on a day-hike up a mountain. This is a scenario I have experienced often, hence I had many memories to rely on when creating my piece.

After establishing a theme, it was necessary to sketch a basic form for the piece as a whole. There are many options for form, such as one long piece, many short movements, or a few long movements. I chose to write a musical suite in five relatively brief movements. The first and final movements focus on the beginning and end of the journey, and the three inner movements provide ample

room for several different moods and musical colors. Each aspect of the journey is different, yet all are held together within a larger unifying framework.

The next step was choosing instrumentation. Because I planned to perform the piece on my junior oboe recital, the oboe was included as one of the voices. A lower voice was needed to balance the higher range of the oboe, and the bassoon seemed the best choice. Bassoons and oboes are both members of the double reed music family, and their timbres compliment each other well. Rather than use a third double reed instrument for a mid-range voice, I chose to include clarinet in Bb. Clarinets are members of the single reed family, and their smoother sounds blend very well with the more textured tones of the double reeds. In addition to these three main instruments, I included various percussive instruments. The wide variety of percussive sounds available aids in individualizing and coloring each movement. Also, I thought this would be an excellent opportunity to learn more about percussion instruments.

When composing each movement, I always took a week to ponder the topic addressed before I began putting down notes. During this time, inspiration usually came in the form of a melody, rhythmic figure or melodic motif. I then began developing the harmonic flavor and establishing which percussion instruments to use. After writing a few lines of music, I could roughly sketch out the remainder of the movement. While putting musical notes on paper, I often ignored subtler aspects such as dynamic, articulation, or expressive markings. These markings were added after all the notes written down. Using Finale Music

Notation Software, I input my music into the computer and played it back, listening for anything that needed altering.

The complete compositional process took nearly one year, from October of 2006 to August of 2007. At this point *The Journey* was ready to be rehearsed and performed.

Rehearsing, Performing, Recording

Although composing *The Journey* took the bulk of my project's time, three important and highly beneficial steps took place after the piece was complete: rehearsing, performing, and recording. Throughout September and October of 2007, an ensemble made of students from Western Kentucky University's music department joined me in bringing my piece to life. These students were Courtney Greenfield on clarinet, Spencer Wills on bassoon, and David Phillips on percussion. I played the oboe part and coached the ensemble. Dr. Michael Kallstrom and Dr. Michael Fiala also listened to several rehearsals and offered advice. Rehearsing consisted of scheduling rehearsal times, reserving rehearsal locations, leading rehearsals, listening to recordings, and offering corrective advice. The ensemble met once or twice each week for over two months.

On November 11, 2007, I gave my junior oboe recital, and *The Journey* was included on the program. I felt that presenting my piece in a performance setting was essential to my honors capstone experience. The pressures of performing for a live audience are a difficulty every musician faces at some point. Performing in a small ensemble presents even more difficulties then playing in large ensembles such as bands and orchestras. Each part is exposed, and if one individual makes a mistake the entire piece could come to a halt. The goal of performing my work in such an environment aided me in considering how best to coach the ensemble, not to mention the experience of actually performing the piece. The performance also provided the opportunity to display my hard work for friends and family.

Several days following my recital, *The Journey* was recorded professionally in the Ivan Wilson Fine Arts Center Recital Hall by Mr. Tom Wilhelm, founder of Predilection Studio. Recording is a part of the performing musician's life about which I knew very little. The recording process is quite different from performing in several aspects. Recording demands much more stamina and sustained high level concentration. For instance, we recorded between three and four "takes" of each individual movement from *The Journey*. Later, these takes would be spliced together to attain the highest quality product. Also, we had to be as quiet as possible while recording, refraining from ordinary motions such as toe-tapping or coughing. It is also necessary to keep the environment as quiet as possible. I posted signs in order to diminish the level of outside noise, such as door slams and loud conversation.

After the ensemble's recording session, I was able to meet with Mr. Wilhelm to decide how best to splice the different takes into one recording. This involved close listening to each take, marking the strong and weak portions, and looking for spots that could be unnoticeably spliced. After this process was completed and final touches were made to the recording, I received a CD of my first composition, and my capstone project was complete.

Benefits of the Process

Every musical experience broadens my horizons and benefits me in some way, and this project was no exception. Each step benefited me greatly, but also integrated various aspects of my musical training.

Every music student at Western is required to take four semester of music theory. During these classes, students compose short pieces in various styles; however, composing a full-length, multi-instrument work incorporates theory in a new way. I rarely based a movement on chords or cadences, but my theory knowledge often proved helpful during the process. For instance, the first movement's harmonic progression is very static, meaning nearly every note in the melody fits into one main chord. At first I found it difficult to create fitting accompanimental patterns; however, after analyzing the harmonic progressions, I could quickly write patterns that worked well. Also, after jotting down a melody, I could analyze which scale or modal pattern I had employed, then continue to use those notes, or better know how to modulate to other musical keys.

By composing, I also learned how to better interpret and appreciate the music of others. As a performing musician, I constantly try to discover the original musical intent of different composers, an often difficult process. As I composed my own piece, I began to understand how difficult it is to put a specific musical idea on paper in such a way that other musicians can easily

derive the same musical idea. This has encouraged me to treat interpretational markings in the music of others more carefully.

Music majors at Western also take a music technology course. As part of this course, students learn to use Finale Music Notation Software. Using the knowledge from this course, I was able to transform my rough pencil sketches into professionally notated music. Writing this piece provided an opportunity to use my Finale skills and expand my knowledge of the program. Finale is an incredibly useful program that I plan on using in the future, and this early training has already proved useful.

Rehearsing my piece helped me accomplish several unsavory tasks for the first time. I found scheduling to be the most difficult and stressful process of my project; however, it is incredibly beneficial to have the experience of organizing and scheduling an ensemble at such an early stage in my career. Also, I do not naturally step into leadership roles, particularly in rehearsal settings. For this project I had no choice but to coach my ensemble. My piece does not follow the style of any particular time period or composer, making it even more imperative that I should guide my ensemble. Successfully taking this leadership position boosted my self-confidence and has helped make my participation in other musical and non-musical groups more active.

As I mentioned earlier, performing and recording are both possible aspects of my future career. The good musician must not only be able to play exceptionally well, but also handle the nerves and pressure of performing on all

types of occasions. Every opportunity to perform, particularly in ensembles with unique instrumentation, strengthens my skills as a performer. Similarly, recording sessions can be daunting the first few times. After recording my piece, I was much more prepared for several auditions I recorded the following semester. The entire experience, from composing to recording, expanded and strengthened my musical capability and knowledge.

The Journey

The Journey is based on a day-long hike through the low-lying mountains of the Tennessee Valley. The piece is not based on one actual event, but on numerous hiking and camping memories. The hike takes the listener from a valley in the early morning to a mountain's summit, just as the sun sets below the horizon. In the following pages, each movement is briefly described and explained. The score for *The Journey* is attached in Appendix A. The movements are not measured continuously, so if a measure number is provided, it refers to the specific movement being discussed.

Movement One - "Valley Sunrise"

The piece opens in a fog-threaded valley just before dawn. Smooth low notes sustained in the three wind instruments represent light diffusing through the fog. Crotales, a high-pitched percussive instrument consisting of small metals discs, add the thin chill of the dispersing fog. The sudden entrance of the vibraphone (measures 8-9) initiates a mood of excitement that builds throughout the movement as the hike is anticipated.

This movement juxtaposes the excitement of a journey with the idea of preparation. These two elements are indicated musically in several ways. The melodic line, first in the oboe (m. 13) and then in the clarinet (m. 29), use a great deal of syncopation. Syncopation means emphasizing the weaker musical beats or sections of beats. Foot tapping illustrates this well: the foot taps the floor on

the strong section of the beat and is in the air on the weaker section. By emphasizing the weaker section, the music continually gains more drive than it would otherwise have. The melodic line also employs large leaps, adding even greater energy. The other element, preparation, is established by two main features: accompaniment patterns and harmonic progression. As seen in the clarinet line in measure 11, most of the accompaniment patterns are based on constantly flowing eighth notes. These eighth note patterns continue from measure 11 until the end of the movement. By constantly moving, yet never actually changing pattern, the accompaniment gives both the impression of excitement and non-motion. The effect is similar to that of a river: the water constantly flows downstream, yet the river remains in one location. The harmonic progression also supplies the static nature of the movement. Music is usually built around chords, stacks of notes that form harmonies. In this first movement, much of the melody can be played while holding an F major chord. With so few chordal changes, the movement lacks a strong sense of development. Three measures from the end a change occurs. The continuous accompaniment pattern ceases and the opening measure of the melody is passed from bassoon to clarinet to oboe. Each of these phrases is in a different key, providing a strong push into the second movement.

Movement Two - Sunpatterned Leaves

This second movement takes place as the hike begins. A six/eight meter

provides a more bouncy, walking feeling. In six/eight meter, each beat consists of three small beats instead of two. Conga drums are employed throughout most of the piece, adding to the energetic, marching feel. The movement begins with an emphatic bassoon line, topped with Scottish snaps in the oboe (for an example, see m. 5). The oboe begins the A section of the melody in measure 16, a light-footed, joyous passage. The clarinet repeats this A section (m. 24) while the oboe returns to the Scottish snaps. In measure thirty-two the clarinet plays the B section of the melody against a variation of the A section found in the bassoon. The bassoon and clarinet exchange lines at measure 40, and the oboe soars above with a new melodic motif that contains both Scottish snaps and ornamental triplet figures. The three wind instruments then play the A section one last time, now broken into fragments as the hike loses energy. A drastic ritardando occurs in measure 56, leading to a much slower version of the B section as the hike comes to a brief halt. Here the conga drums drop out for the first time, helping to emphasize the idea of rest. The hike resumes in measure 73, and the movement ends with strong fortissimo dynamics.

Movement Three - Darkening Pathways

During the hike, an unexplored cave is discovered along the path. This is a common occurrence in the limestone heavy Tennessee Valley. A slow descending line in the clarinet and bassoon describes the cautious descent into the cave. Rolls on the suspended cymbal are used to imitate the howl of wind

blowing across the cave entrance. Another nature sound imitated in the percussion is the woodblock motif that begins in measure 7 which represents water drips heard in wet caves. This motif is two and a half measures long, meaning the pattern varies over a series of measures. This keeps the woodblock pattern from becoming repetitious, and allows it to sink into the background, similar to the human ear's adjustment to water drops in a cave.

The long, lyrical oboe melody plays alone with only the woodblock accompaniment (m. 11), creating the thinnest texture heard thus far in The Journey. This makes more prominent any reverberations heard in an effort to increase the dark, hollow atmosphere. The bassoon and clarinet both enter on subtle low notes (mm. 15 and 20), marking levels of growing familiarity with the cave. In measure 27 all three voices stop, leaving the woodblock line bare until the third beat of measure 28. Accented sixteenth notes in the bassoon and short, sharp eighth and sixteenth notes in the oboe and clarinet take the movement from enjoying the cave's beauty to cringing from the unknown. Psychologically, caves are a frightening place. This section from measure 28 through 39 is fragmented and full of dramatic entrances, in an attempt to increase the idea of underground disorientation and growing panic. A new melodic line occurs in the clarinet in measure 40, a rough inversion of the first melody, played much shorter and at a brisker tempo. The exploration is quickly becoming less enjoyable and more fearful. In measure 50, the two melodic lines are traded back and forth on the oboe and clarinet, while the bassoon reaches to its lowest

register and the woodblock stops for the first time. Finally, when all seems lost, the cave entrance is located, and the descending notes are heard once more, this time in the clarinet and oboe (m. 60).

Movement Four - Beneath Dark Clouds

The hiker's path leads back into the forest just as an afternoon rainstorm strikes. The vibraphone was chosen to set the backdrop of the storm, its soft, metallic pitches pinging throughout the movement. More than rain, this represents water dripping off trees, bushes, and other forest objects. The oboe's staccato, repetitive motif, beginning in measure 5, signals the sparkle and splash of raindrops hitting the ground. The clarinet enters in measure 13 with an expressive, legato melody, painting the forest trees bending beneath the weight of the wind.

A change comes at measure 24 when the voices cease their previously constant movement, landing on a bright G major chord, a sharp contrast to the previous G minor sounds. Sunrays poke through the cloud cover, lighting up the dark forest. The melody is handed to the bassoon and the vibraphone takes the oboe's raindrop motif while the clarinet's smooth eighth note accompaniment pattern rolls underneath. Each of the motifs in this movement has utilized short notes, mainly eighth notes. In measure 31, the oboe plays a new motif consisting of dotted quarter notes, a much longer note value, that soars over the repetitive patterns in the other three instruments. The voices

gradually die out when the movement changes to 3/4 meter, and the clarinet moves back to G minor as the sun hides behind clouds once more (m. 39 – 41). During the remaining nine measures, the clarinet trades its moving line with bassoon that then fades down into sustained pitches beneath the vibraphone's original motif. This line also gradually fades away into silence as the storm passes and the last water droplets fall from the tree branches.

Movement Five - Mountaintop Sunset

The hike has passed through forest, cave, and thunderstorm, and now the day is nearly done. Much of this movement returns to sounds heard previously. For instance, the opening returns to the sustained low pitches in the wind instruments, topped with crotales, heard first in "Valley Sunrise". The oboe's melodic line is slow and tired. Each set of two eighth notes leads to the quarter note on the next beat, a pattern that naturally gives little sense of movement forward. This mimics heavy footsteps at the end of a journey, where the goal becomes simply putting one foot in front of the other.

This journey has a destination: the top of the mountain. This is first glimpsed in measure 18 as the music switches to the bouncier 6/8 meter used in "Sunpatterned Leaves". The vibraphone now takes the oboe's melody, transforming it into a lively, triple meter romp accompanied by bassoon and clarinet. In measure 30, the clarinet plays a variant of this vivacious melody along with bouncing rhythms in the other instruments. Measure 38 brings the

oboe to the fore with motifs very similar to those found in the second movement, with conga drums entering two measures later and Scottish snaps in the clarinet to emphasize the similarity.

Finally, just at sunset, the hike reaches the mountain's summit! The tired melody heard at the opening is now played at fortissimo dynamic levels in the oboe with close clarinet harmony and very low notes in the bassoon. Widening the range between the higher and lower instruments helps this small ensemble sound as majestic as possible. During this, the vibraphone plays a series of rapid sixteenth and thirty-second notes, providing the strong orange-red rays of sunlight. As the sun dips below the horizon, the vibraphone ceases its frantic running notes and a general dynamic diminuendo occurs in the other instruments. The movement ends on a very soft, warm restatement of the first four notes from the opening melody. Crotales also play, and *The Journey* ends almost exactly as it began.

Conclusion

My project centered around composing a major musical work for small chamber ensemble. It also included rehearsing, performing, and finally, recording this work. I benefited in so many ways from undertaking and completing every step of this project. I learned important skills such as using Finale Music Notation software and organizing, scheduling, and coaching an ensemble. More importantly, I delved into an area of music I had never before experienced. I had attempted composing in high school on a small scale, and always given up swiftly, assuming this was a talent I could never develop; after composing *The Journey*, however, I have found writing music to be a very personal creative process, one which I hope to continue throughout my life. I am already close to completing a second piece, *Overheard on a Saltmarsh*, for oboe, cello, and piano. This project has been such a valuable experience from start to finish from which I will continue to benefit for years to come.

Appendix A - The Journey Score

Movement One - Valley Sunrise

Movement Two - Sunpatterned Leaves

Movement Three - Darkening Pathways

Movement Four - Beneath Dark Clouds

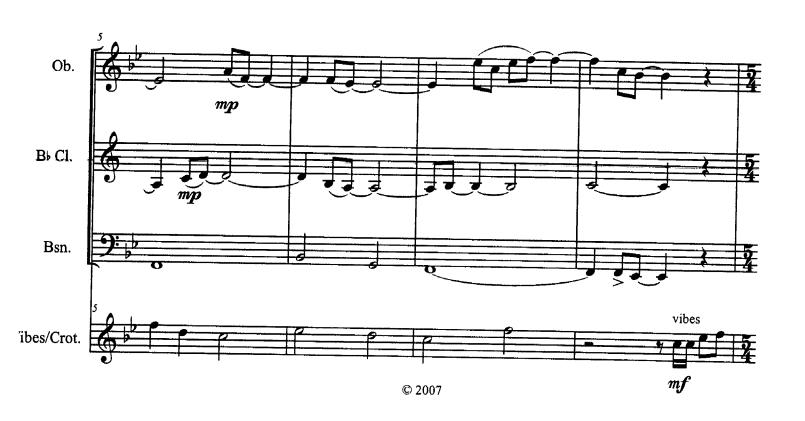
Movement Five - Mountaintop Sunset

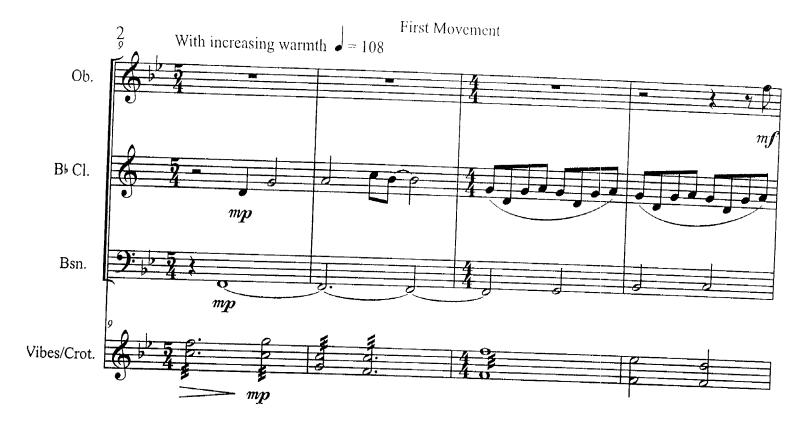
Mvt. 1 - Valley Sunrise

Score

Erin Goad

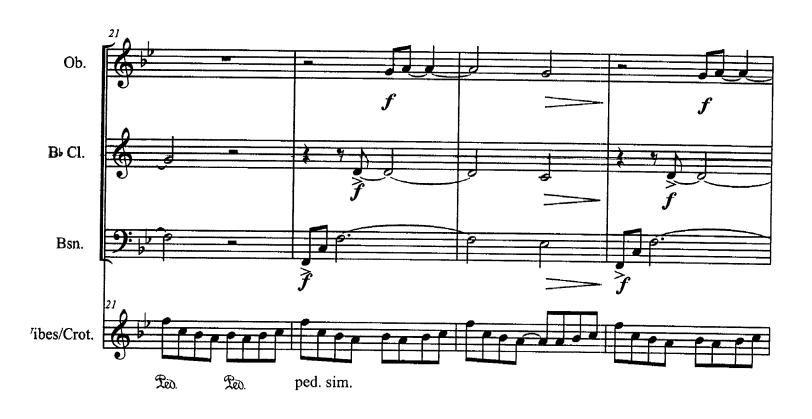






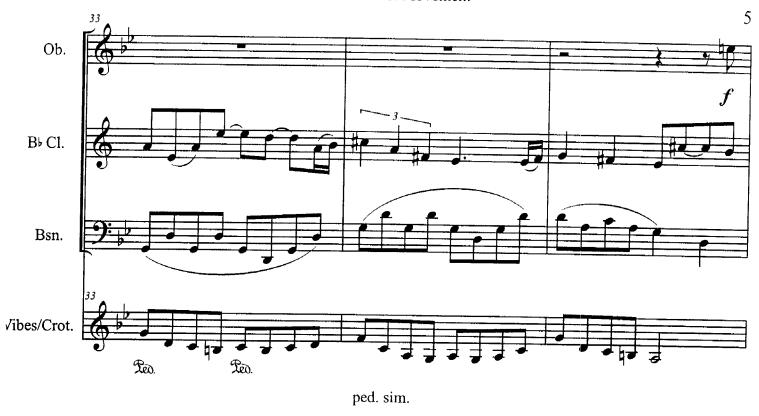




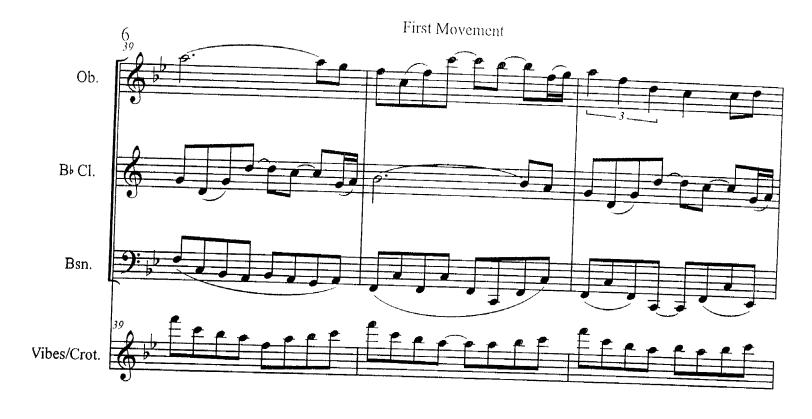


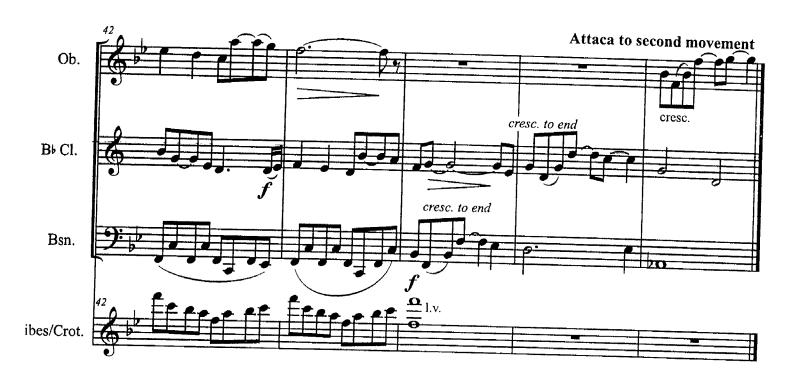












Mvt. 2 - Sunpatterned Leaves























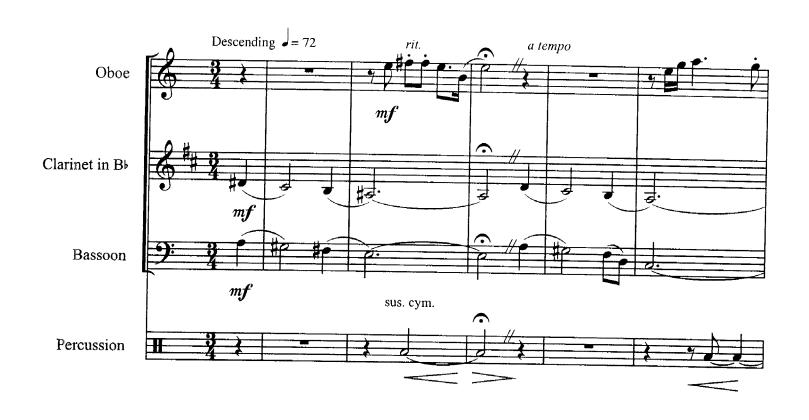




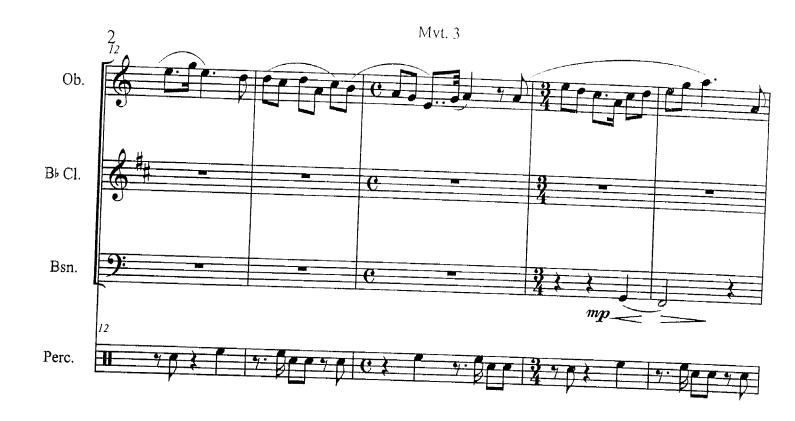




Mvt. 3 - Darkening Pathways

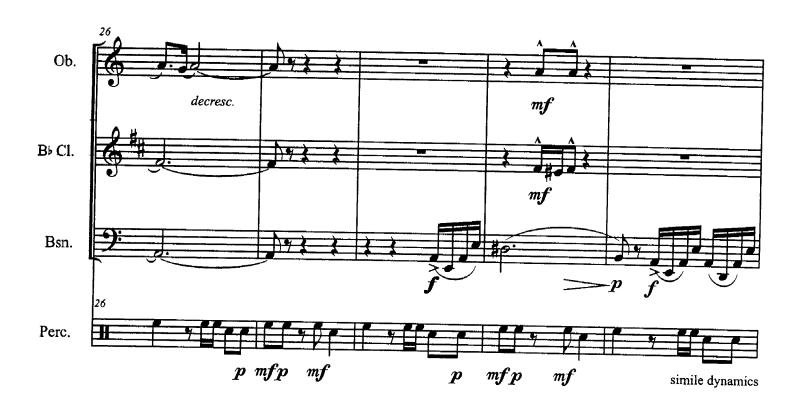




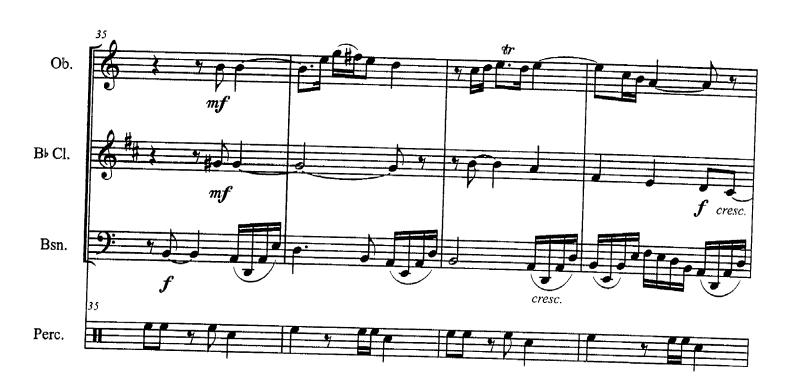


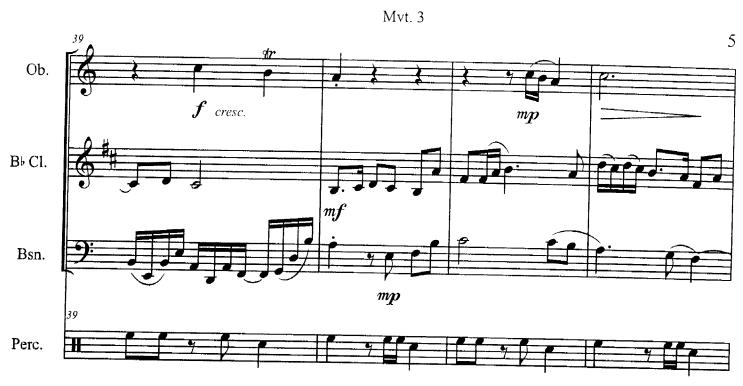




















Mvt. 4 - Beneath Dark Clouds

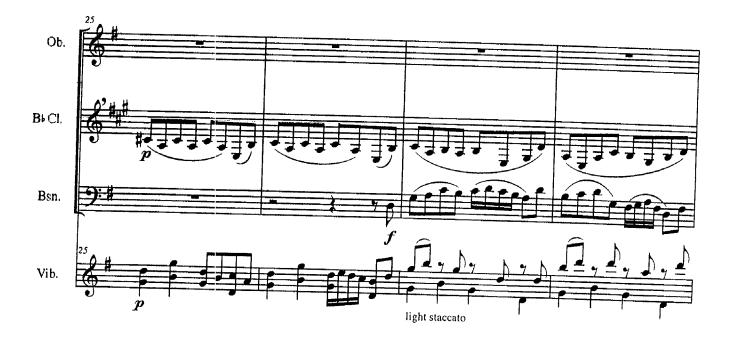










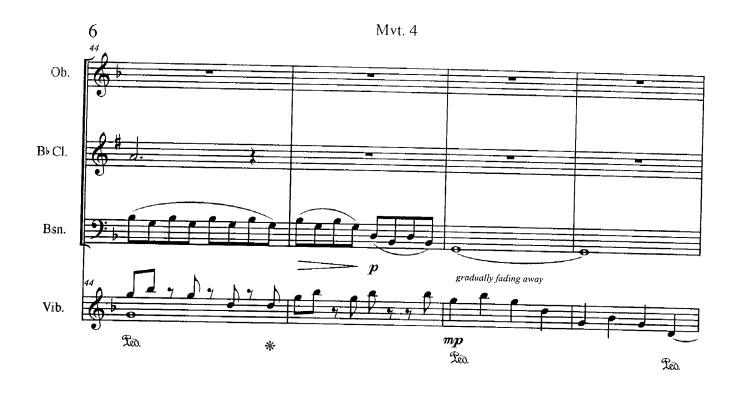


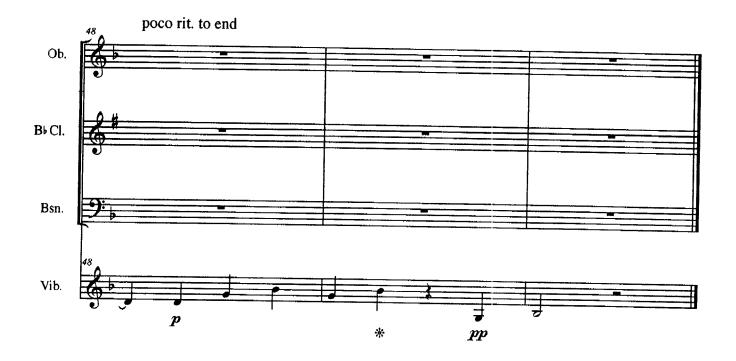












Mvt. 5 - Mountaintop Sunset

