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April 1, 2009

2009 MENC Submission Essay

The inspiration for *Gothic Memory Land* begins with winter; I wanted to write a piece of music that creates a picture of a memorable Christmas with a dark twist. I started *Gothic Memory Land* in mid-winter by experimenting with simple, related chord progressions. I came up with C minor, Eb major, G minor, and Bb major; the major and minor chords seemed to piece together really well in a way I preferred for this particular composition. The piece begins with this chord progression as a series of arpeggios played by many different instruments.

The first instruments introduced are among my favorite; a harp, a string bass, and distorted bells. These special bells, named “Water Bells” in Logic Pro, emphasize a percussive element already established by the harp and staccato bass. As well, they produce these subtle whizzing sounds that add to the desired mystery of the composition. After four measures, the melody is introduced along with a more defined background. The melody is played by a piano and introduced by a glissando; another musical element that I find creates a complex and interesting way to introduce a phrase. The background harmony is composed of modulated bells playing ascending minor arpeggios and descending major arpeggios. These bells create an extremely shimmering texture along with the very subtle “Buzzing Bells” on the first beat of every measure and the sleigh bell shake on the third beat of every measure. In my opinion, this shimmering texture reminds the listening of snow and falling snowflakes.

After the main melody is introduced; a second, simpler melody is added by the piano. This melody is accompanied only by the sleigh bell, water bells, and tapped wine glass. The combination of these instruments is supposed to create a nostalgic feeling. More instruments are re-introduced such as the buzzing bells and a glockenspiel in order to keep interest. After these four measures, melodies and harmonies are traded to different instruments to create a variation. Afterwards, a very beautiful yet different transition occurs for six measures. This transition is composed of tapped wine glass, water bells, and a church choir; it is the transition which brings the listener to the dark side of the piece. After the six measures, the listener is plunged into a chaotic revisit of arpeggios, except the six measures are completely in minor keys.

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Measure 42 begins a new phrase played by the modulated bells, the harp, and four measures later, a glockenspiel at a much slower tempo of 65 beats per measure. This new idea is supposed to instill images of icy-coldness as well as mystery. An excerpt of the melody is played quietly in the background by the “Mystic Bells”. This instrument creates similar whizzing sounds as the water bells do, as well as a wonderful shimmery texture that carries through for a few beats after a note is played. This adds to the constant theme of mystery and nostalgia.

Measure 49 begins another new phrase introduced by the string instruments, harp, wine glasses, and glockenspiel. The chromatic elements are supposed to invoke a theme of mischievousness, like children sneaking around on Christmas Eve. Measures 53-57 bring out a counterpart of what was introduced; the use of quarter notes makes the phrase have a slower feel even though the tempo has not been altered. The slower feel is supposed to bring the image of adults trying to supervise excited children on Christmas night. These two themes continue until measure 69, with various increased tempos and key changes.

Measures 69 through 72 are the first part of the final transition. The tapped wine glass, glockenspiel, and piano continue elements from the previous idea but the string instruments (including the harp) reintroduce the chord progression from the beginning of the piece. The mystic bells play the sixteenth note harmony that was prominent at the beginning of the composition. This leads into the same harmony but played by the original instruments in measures 73 through 76. The original piano glissando plays into the original melody that lasts for 8 bars. A ritardando occurs in measure 84. The composition ends with the modulated bells, wine glass, and water bells at a slow tempo as in measures 42 through 48.