Music Inspired by the Works of Robert Frost

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Music Inspired by the Works of Robert Frost

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Composition

by

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the graduate council.

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Abstract

Many years ago on Easter, my mother gave me a book of Robert Frost’s poems as a gift. As a child, I enjoyed his rhyming schemes and the characteristically simple, beautiful, natural imagery he portrayed in his verses, but the deeper meaning of the words was largely lost on me. As I grew, I would revisit the poems from time to time and would enjoy discovering a subtly hidden metaphor or experiencing new feelings and emotions evoked by a poem I had already read dozens of times. When looking for inspiration as a music composition student here at the University of Arkansas, Frost’s poetry proved to be an ideal source as it not only provided me with a wealth of visual imagery to try and recreate (pizzicato strings mimicking the blinking of fireflies at the end of “Fireflies in the Garden” for example), but also contained a bevy of personal thoughts, emotions, and memories ripe for being morphed into musical ideas.

Like James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* or Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, some of Frost’s poems leave the reader with no clear message or conclusion. Writing like this used to frustrate me. However, I have since come to understand that the words, although they do not necessarily always form an easily discernable and coherent thought, just like pieces of instrumental music, *do* still elicit an emotion from me and *that* is perhaps where the bridge between language and music resides in part.

Although the poems were the main inspiration for this music, much of it is informed by my study of jazz. Musical ideas from some of my favorite jazz artists including Billy Strayhorn, Django Reinhardt, and Coleman Hawkins are echoed throughout these pieces. Electronic musical introductions/interludes featuring both hardware and software synths along with videos were part of these pieces in their conception. I leave it up to the performer(s) to experiment with this idea. I hope I have done a good job in translating the feelings I have felt reading these poems into sound.
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1. Nocturne

Ryan Martin

Freely ($\approx 66-84$)

Violoncello

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{5}
\end{array} \]

accel.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{9}
\end{array} \]

fff

Slower

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{13}
\end{array} \]

mp

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{17}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{21}
\end{array} \]

rit.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{25}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{28}
\end{array} \]
2. The Road Not Taken

For Viola & Guitar

Hauntingly ($\approx 70$)

Viola

Acoustic Guitar

$p$

$\text{ad lib - similar pattern}$

Copyright © 2020
With Confidence

mf ad lib - similar strumming pattern
legato throughout
rit. . . . . . .

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Note 1} \\
\text{Note 2} \\
\text{Note 3} \\
\text{Note 4}
\end{array} \]
3. Fireflies in the Garden
For Alto Saxophone & String Quartet

Ryan Martin

Alto Saxophone

Playfully ($=115$)

Violin I

mf

Violin II

mf

Viola

pizz

mf

Improvise Solo 2nd Time

E6

D♭7

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Improvisation 2nd Time

\[ \sum \sum \sum \]
Play pitches in random order, gradually more sparsely until end.

Play pitches in random order, gradually more sparsely until end. (CA. 20 secs)

Play pitches in random order, gradually more sparsely until end.

Play pitches in random order, gradually more sparsely until end.

pizz.

pizz.

pizz.
A Late Walk

Reminiscent \( \downarrow = 100 \)

Voicings & fills ad lib

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Ryan Martin
Wind and Window Flower

Purely & Serenely $\frac{1}{\text{quarter}} = 50$

copyright 2022
Like the beginning

\[ q = 50 \]
6. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
For Alto Saxophone & String Quartet

Uncertain $\dot{=} 60$

Alto Saxophone

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

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33 Playfully $\dot{\text{\textbf{S}}} = 105$

pizz

37

pizz