The Shores of Light

for orchestra

by

Kevin Lau

Duration: 12 minutes
Score in C

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition
Faculty of Music
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Composer: Kevin Lau
Title: The Shores of Light
Degree: Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition
Year: 2012
Department: Faculty of Music, Department of Composition
University: The University of Toronto

The Shores of Light is an orchestral composition which seeks to explore musical processes of coherence and evolution at a deeper level. The piece charts the journey of a single musical identity across a shifting aural landscape. This thematic idea—a strongly modal melody reminiscent of both plainchant and folksong, which serves as both the initial premise and foundation for the piece—is rooted in serene yet archaic stasis. After a brief introduction, the theme is subjected to tremendous pressure by external forces, which eventually crush it beyond recognition via a series of ‘destructive’ harmonic, contrapuntal, and acoustic procedures. Reduced to a shadow of its former self, the theme then undergoes a series of transformations, culminating in restoration—not to its original form, but to a new identity which functions as part of a whole, a ‘master’ entity whose components have been discreetly but gradually cohering throughout. This final realization is glimpsed but not necessarily fulfilled (hence the “shores of light”) and the work, while striving at every register to return to its initial tonic, ends on a note that suggests (somewhat ominously) the possibility of a cyclical process.

It is the essential tension between hierarchical complexity (tonality) and disorder (perceptual dissonance generated either by highly chromatic aggregates, acoustic saturation, aleatoric ‘noise’, or all three) which plays the most crucial role in this discourse. The evolution toward greater and greater cohesion is achieved, necessarily, in opposition to the chaotic undercurrent which threatens to overwhelm or shatter the ‘cohering’ elements at every turn. The final chorale is a triumph of the ‘meek,’ as the elements of noise and distortion (i.e. chaos) are stripped away to reveal an image of great simplicity.

The use of tonal and non-tonal material as metaphors for order and chaos seems to betray an arbitrary initial condition—after all, there is no explicit logical connection between these parameters. Indeed, it is not my intention to draw a one-to-one correlation between process and metaphor. But order, like beauty or meaning, is a perceptual phenomenon that transcends its processes. For me, the true complexity of the tonal hierarchy lies in its emergent qualities—the layers of content that emerge from a highly structured syntax. Thus, the gradual accretion of jumbled musical letters into recognizable words, then coherent sentences, then paragraphs imbued with specific meaning, carries with its own symbolism and structural significance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notation Guide</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instrumentation

Piccolo
2 Flutes
Oboe
English Horn
2 Clarinets in B-flat
2 Bassoons
4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
3 Trombones
Tuba

Timpani

Percussion (3 Players)
- Drumset 1 (Bass Drum, 4 Tom-toms, 2 Bongos)
- Drumset 2 (Tenor Drum, Snare Drum, 2 Cowbells)
- Tubular Bells
- Suspended Cymbal
- Sizzle Cymbal
- Tambourine
- Tam-Tam
- Anvil
- Slapstick
- Claves
- Maracas
- Vibraphone
- Glockenspiel
- Xylophone
- Crotales
- Mark Tree
- Waterphone

Harp

Strings

Duration: 12 minutes
Score in C
## Notation Guide

### GENERAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🐄</td>
<td>three quarter-tones flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🐄</td>
<td>one quarter-tone flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🐄</td>
<td>one quarter-tone sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🐄</td>
<td>three quarter-tones sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>for winds: blow air through instrument (no pitch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>for winds: whisper tone (blow gently into embouchure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>highest note possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>lowest note possible (pedal tone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>for winds: unspecified (but resonant) multiphonic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MALLET SYMBOLS (PERCUSSION)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🍰</td>
<td>soft mallets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🍰</td>
<td>medium mallets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🍰</td>
<td>hard mallets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>bass drum / tam-tam beater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>hammer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>snare drum sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>tubular bell mallet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>triangle beater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>blasticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>play with hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎼</td>
<td>with double bass bow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PERCUSSION NOTATION

#### Drummer 1

- **Bass Drum**: repeat the figure rapidly, independent of tempo.
- **4 Tom-Toms (Low to High)**: play any notes as rapidly as possible.
- **2 Hanging (Low, High)**: for strings: increase bow pressure through figure, distorting pitch.
- **Snare Drum**: accelerate through figure.

#### Drummer 2

- **Snare Drum**: play any notes in any order till the bracket.
- **2 Cowbells (Low, High)**: for winds: random key clicks.
The Shores of Light

Andante ($q = 69$)

Kevin Lau

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repeat notes rapidly in any order, using a variety of techniques (trills, runs, growl, etc.)
Tempo Primo ($q = 60$)

Duration marks on flute graphics are for the performer to use in any tempo.

Ad lib: blow gently into the embouchure to create "whisper tones" on these pitches; play in any order, independent of tempo.

Tempo Primo ($q = 60$)

Ad lib: slowly alternate between artificial harmonics in any order, independent of tempo.

* ad lib: blow gently into the embouchure to create "whisper tones" on these pitches; play in any order, independent of tempo.

Db.

Picc.

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Timp.

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Tba.

Hp.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Eng. Horns

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

C Tpt. 3

Vibes

Bells
Ad lib: play these pitches rapidly in any order, independent of tempo. Do not synchronize with other players.
Picc. 1
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Eng. Hn.
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
Hn. (1,2)
Hn. (3,4)
C Tpt. 1
C Tpt. 2
C Tpt. 3
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
B. Tbn.
Tba.
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Hp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.

August 2011, Toronto