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Symphony No. 3 "Ragnarok" Final Movement Orchestration for Wind Ensemble

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Degree:  Computer Science

Full title of project:  Orchestration of Symphony No. 3 Final Movement for Wind Ensemble

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Abstract

This project consists of re-orchestrating the final movement for Symphony No. 3 from its original scoring for orchestra into a scoring for wind ensemble. Complications in this project include choosing a key signature that best supports a group of wind instruments, mapping parts originally written for non-wind instruments to appropriate instruments in the wind ensemble, and adapting the music to best fit the wind instruments’ ranges. To assist me with this project, Dr. Sanders is my project advisor.

History

As with many of my compositions, “Ragnarok” was based around a story of my creation. It is a musical interpretation of a story from a mythical world. The word Ragnarok is an ancient Germanic word essentially meaning “Armageddon”. The closest translation of Ragnarok is “the end of powers” and it refers to the belief in ancient Germanic mythology that the German pantheon of gods was destined to be destroyed. I adopted the name because my story in some ways resembles this German myth.

When I began work on “Ragnarok”, I had intended to write it in an orchestral suite format. It was to have eight short movements, each telling the tale of a character, place, or event. As the composition began to mature, however, I quickly realized that the
pictures and moods I was attempting to portray would not be given justice with the short movements I had originally intended. I then decided to adopt a format consisting of longer movements. Eventually I decided on five movements each between six and fifteen minutes in length. Thus "Ragnarok" changed from Suite No. 1 to Symphony No. 3.

The final movement of "Ragnarok" (also named Ragnarok) specifically depicts the destruction of the mythical deities and end of the world. It is intended to be the ultimate climax of the piece. The movement opens and closes with a dramatic marshmallow-like theme depicting the death of the ancient gods. The middle of the movement consists of an active march-like theme that represents the supernatural conflict followed by a more majestic, noble theme that represents a sacrifice made by the nobler of the deities to save humanity.

Re-orchestration

By its very nature, the final movement of "Ragnarok" requires a massive ensemble to achieve the proper affect. It also contains many special effects that require professional talent. These attributes in particular made the movement difficult to orchestrate for Wind Ensemble. The Wind Ensemble version requires a large number of wind instruments as well as a large amount of professional talent. There was a complication in orchestrating one of the final themes where the violas play a rapid, ever-changing pattern of notes. There is no wind instrument that could easily take the part. Eventually I assigned the part to the bassoons, but this was with reluctance because the bassoons have a very distinctive sound that does not fit the gentle, flowing nature of the part as well as the violas. Another difficulty was the fact that a large number of
instruments in a wind ensemble are based in the key of Bb instead of C increasing technical difficulties. In the end, I transposed the entire movement from its original key, D major, to C major so that it could be more easily played by wind instruments. Again, this extensively changed the tone of the piece.

The composition of this piece, as well as the orchestration of the final movement for wind ensemble has been a very challenging project. It has taught me a great deal, not only about composition, but also about orchestration for both orchestra and wind ensemble.

**Acknowledgements**

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Jason Richardson
Suite No. 1
Ragnarok
Movement VIII

Flutes
Oboes
English Horn
Bb Clarinets
Bass Clarinet
Bassoons
Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
Contrabass Saxophone

Horns in F
Trumpets in Bb
Trombones
Tuba
Timpani
Bass Drum
Cymbals
Tam-tam
Triangle
allet Percussion