FOREVER'S SILENT SONG
FOR
CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
AND
MEZZO-SOPRANO

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

By

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This work is a setting of two poems by E.E. Cummings for chamber orchestra and mezzo-soprano soloist. The approximate durations of the first and second movements are respectively seven and one half, and six minutes. The music was inspired by the poetry and attempts to highlight the cyclic syntax which hallmarks Cummings' style.

The first poem ("pity this busy monster, manunkind,")) presents a sarcastic analysis of the progress of society. The compositional techniques used in the first movement involve elements of ostinato and fragmented motivic development to punctuate the penetrating message of the poem. The second movement ("these children singing in stone a") offers a marked contrast in texture and is a peaceful resolution to the agitated frustration of the first poem.

Chromaticism is an essential element in defining the melodic and harmonic style. The vocal writing is largely declamatory and presents the vocalist with challenges of tessitura, intervallic complexity and extended technique.
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DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Elements of Form

The first movement is set to the following poem:

pity this busy monster, manunkind,
not. Progress is a comfortable disease:
your victim (death and life safely beyond)

plays with the bigness of his littleness
-electrons deify one razorblade
into a mountainrange, lenses extend

unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish
returns on its unself.

A world of made
is not a world of born-pity poor flesh

and trees; poor stars and stones, but never this
fine specimen of hypermagical
ultraomnipotence. We doctors know

a hopeless case if-listen: there's a hell
of a good universe next door: let's go.¹

The music uses the poem to define a through-composed
formal scheme (Fig. 1). The poetry describes mankind as an
entity destined to fall prey to its own progress and points
out the fact that the future looks bleak unless man
reappraises his situation. Cummings chides man for

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Nancy T. Andrews. From COMPLETE POEMS 1913-1962 by
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failing to recognize his plight and scathingly proposes that all of mankind is doomed to selfishness and conceit. The second half of the poem mourns for a world that has been devastated by mankind's "progress," and it even abandons all hope at the end.

In an attempt to portray the enormity of mankind, the introduction opens with dense and expansive textures. Much of the harmonic vocabulary throughout the movement is a mixture of secundal, polychordal and quartal sonorities, which are often expanded by octave displacement. The
example (from the introduction) is reflective of the harmonic style of the movement (Fig. 2).

The material in the horns (measure 3 of the above example) forecasts the first important motive in the movement. Recognized easily by its durational pattern (short-long), this motive represents "progress" and is used symbolically throughout the movement. The first entrance of the voice signals the close of the introduction and is characteristic of the accusatory nature of the poem (m. 7).
After the introduction the first formal division (the A section) opens with an ostinato in the bass. The tritone interval at its outset, coupled with an avoidance of pitch duplication, produces an asymmetrical, martial character. The rhythmic patterns are continually displaced, as if accompanying a corps of marchers periodically missing a step. The first four pitches of the ostinato make up the second important motive of the movement, "manunkind" (Fig. 3).

![Fig. 3--Ostinato showing "manunkind" motive](image)

The pitch, E, was chosen in order to pay homage to E.E. Cummings and provides a pitch center throughout the movement.
The bass ostinato (Fig. 3) gives way to a new, delicate ostinato in the violins (m. 27) which is derived from the "progress" motive. This subsection (marked "mysteriously") depicts the dream world out of which man has made a reality through his delusions of grandeur and conceit. The key phrase, "plays with the bigness of his littleness," is a bitter reminder to man that he is not always the paragon of virtue he thinks he is. Fragmented usage of both "progress" and "manunkind" motives is evident here, both in isolation and in various combinations. The section reaches a midpoint at the word "razorblade" with a snap pizzicato which is representative of the author's effort to awaken mankind before it is too late.

The closing portion of the A section becomes progressively agitated with solo winds and strings taking part in dense counterpoint culminating in a musical pyramid (m. 48) symbolizing the word "mountainrange" in the text. The voice is woven into the orchestra at the close of this section ending with an emphatic punctuation containing the highest note possible for all involved.

The second definable section (B) begins with a permutation of the "manunkind" motive. The motive occurs on different pitch levels as if to illustrate the instability of the world due to mankind's "progress." The poem at this point laments these evils and mourns for the
earth and cosmos as victims of the destruction of man. Glissandi are used in the voice and orchestra to depict sorrow and sobbing. Dissonant sonorities containing seconds, tritones and sevenths are used to enhance the movement's emotional impact as well as to generate high energy in order to complement the poem. The final expression of grief in this section occurs in m. 87 as the voice and orchestra end with the lowest note possible.

As if to further punctuate the preceding lament, Cummings' next line of poetry, "but never this fine specimen of hypermagical ultraomnipotence," derisively satirizes the monster "manunkind." The accompanying music (m. 88) begins softly and delicately but is rudely interrupted by the "progress" motive in m. 91. Entrances of the motive are staggered and rise quickly to the highest tessitura in the movement. Perhaps the most emotional usage of the "progress" motive occurs after this point (m. 97), but it is a fleeting moment not unlike the often transitory nature of progress and success. The energy dissipates after m. 97 with more dialogue in the orchestra.

The concluding section is representative of Cummings' apathy toward humanity and his proposal that it start over again. The voice delivers the penultimate line ("We doctors know a hopeless case if-listen") followed by
the last ostinato of the movement which is evocative of the martial character of section A. For additional excitement, the last statement is spoken by the voice accompanied by scattered fragments in the winds. A final "progress" motive in the horns is punctuated by the piccolo and flute to end the movement.

The second movement is a musical realization of the following poem:

these children singing in stone 
a silence of stone these little children wound with stone flowers opening for
ever these silently lit
tle children are petals their song is a flower of always their flowers

of stone are
silently singing
a song more silent than silence these always

children forever singing wreathed with singing blossoms children of stone with blossoming

eyes
know if a little tree listens

forever to always children singing forever a song made of silent as stone silence of song.

\(^{2}\)Copyright 1939 by E.E. Cummings; renewed 1967 by Marion Morehouse Cummings. From COMPLETE POEMS 1913-1962 by E.E. Cummings by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
The poem offers inspiration and a possible answer to the accusations posed in the first. The reference to children and song creates a feeling of forever, and the seemingly stone-carved message of hope emerges. (Children have always provided an element of hope for mankind, and often that which seems obvious to a child remains unobvious to adults). The reference to a "little tree" (not a grown tree) also serves to point out that time is forever and that the immortality symbolized by a child's song cannot go unrecognized. (Perhaps "manunkind" would do well to listen to this "silent song.")

The form of the movement is presented below (Fig. 4)

![Formal Scheme (II)](image)

Fig. 4--Formal Scheme (II)
The movement opens with a drone consisting of the interval of a perfect fifth, symbolizing antiquity, immortality and forever. The second movement is centered around the pitch, A, in the tradition of tonic-subdominant key schemes (mvt. I uses the pitch E as a unifying factor). Soon after the introduction of the drone, the oboe and flute enter with an improvisatory Arabian-flavored dialogue. The voice follows with a motive named "flowers" (m. 126) on the syllable "ah" and is treated melismatically as if it were functioning as another wind instrument (Fig. 5).

The first setting of the text also uses the "flowers" motive and is accompanied by the drone which ends the introduction.
The A section begins in m. 137 and utilizes the following melodic material in the voice (Fig. 6).

![Image of a musical notation]

Fig. 6--"Children" motive

This motive and its various derivatives permeates the section and much of the movement. Strings and brasses are used to provide lush background sonorities to accompany the voice. Fragmented conversation continues among the winds, imitating the mood set in the introduction.

The next section (B) uses the word "petal" as a point of departure into a different texture. The interval of a descending half-step is used as a repetitive motive ("petals") to create a muted texture in the strings. The
vocal writing also contains the half-step as an integral part of the melody (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7—"Petals" motive

The "petal" motive develops into a 4 section reminiscent of a childhood song and the section soon ends with the half-step motive on the word "silence."

After a short interlude, the voice re-enters with the "children" motive in a section which resembles the A section in prime form. However, this segment also employs the "flowers" motive and the texture found in the B section (m. 174-5). The drone also makes a short appearance in
m. 177 as an accompaniment to the motivic fragments in the winds. A brief reminder of the "progress" motive from the first movement brings this section to a close.

The climax begins with a wavering monotone in the voice and tremolos in the strings (m. 184). Gradually the texture thickens with the addition of more strings and brasses, but the entire orchestra drops out in m. 192 as the voice delivers the most crucial line of the poem. This melodic material can be traced to the previous reference to the word "forever" (m. 146-7), and is subsequently echoed by the orchestra (Fig. 8).

![Voice and "Forever" motive](image)

Fig. 8-- "Forever" motive

Following this emotional peak, the alto saxophone restates the "progress" motive from the first movement. Out of the accompanying chord emerges the drone which has
been inverted to a perfect fourth. The voice presents the final statement of the text (set to the "flowers" motive) amidst fragmented motivic material in the winds.

Aspects of Pitch Organization

The six aforementioned motives play a central part in unifying the work as a whole. Their significance in symbolizing various elements in the text has already been established. All but two motives employ aspects of intervallic symmetry, as can be seen in the following figure (Fig. 9).³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Set</th>
<th>Pitch Class</th>
<th>Symmetry in Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>progress</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>0 3 6</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monster</td>
<td>5-22</td>
<td>0 1 4 7 8</td>
<td>ABb C# Db Ef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mankind</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>0 1 6 7</td>
<td>E ABb Eb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flowers</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>0 1 2 5 6</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td>5-34</td>
<td>0 2 4 6 9</td>
<td>C# D# F# A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forever</td>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>GG#ABB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 9--- Motive Symmetry**

Together with the six central motive sets, additional sets 3-1, 3-5, 3-9, 4-5, 4-Z15, 6-5, 6-Z6 and 6-Z12 were used consistently throughout the piece. These sets are found in prominent places in the melodic or harmonic texture of the work, often in close proximity to the motives themselves. The following figure lists these sets and gives their locations in the piece.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SETS</th>
<th>PITCH CLASS</th>
<th>VECTOR</th>
<th>MOTIVE OR MEASURE NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-5</td>
<td>0,1,2,3,6,7</td>
<td>422232</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Z6</td>
<td>0,1,2,5,6,7</td>
<td>421242</td>
<td>Aggregate of similar pitches in motives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Z12</td>
<td>0,1,2,4,6,7</td>
<td>332232</td>
<td>Aggregate of similar pitches in motives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>0,1.2.5.6</td>
<td>311221</td>
<td>flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>0,1,6,7</td>
<td>200022</td>
<td>mankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>0,1,2,6</td>
<td>210111</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>0,1,2,3</td>
<td>321000</td>
<td>forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Z15</td>
<td>0,1,4,6</td>
<td>111111</td>
<td>difference notes in motives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>0,1,2</td>
<td>210000</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>0,1,6</td>
<td>100011</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
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<td>3-9</td>
<td>0,2,7</td>
<td>010020</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>0,3,6</td>
<td>002001</td>
<td>progress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 10--Most Used Sets

Set 6-5 emerged from the above list of sets as the nexus set in a series of networks. Below is the central network shown with two related networks.
In conclusion, the six motives in the work provide an intuitive link with other diverse elements in the work. Although the piece was conceived in a freely atonal style, the pitch structures described above were discovered to play an important role in unifying the piece.
INSTRUMENTATION

2 flutes
oboe
alto saxophone in Eb
bassoon
2 trumpets in Bb
2 horns in F
trombone
strings
3 percussion

1st  vibraphone, marimba
2nd  snare drum, suspended cymbal,
triangle, wind chimes
3rd  bass drum, snare drum (shared),
suspended cymbal, tam-tam
mysteriously  f = 54

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plays with the big-ness of his lit-tle-ness
Our voice

where un

returns on its un-self!
voice

a world of made

is not a world

of born

---
Poor trees!
Poor stones!
If we doctors know a hopeless case of listen!

Voice: to marimba

Ex. 1

Violins:
1
2

No vib.

Flutes:
1
2

No vib.

Oboe:

No vib.

Saxophones:

No vib.

Strings:

No vib.
there's a hell of a good universe next door. Let's go!
(2+3) - 42.
	these children singing
in stone a silence of stone
ever these silently little children are
petals their song is a flower of always their
flow-ers  al-ways  flow-ers  of  stone  are
s- lent-ly sing- ing _ sing- ing _ a _ song _
for e-ver sing
-55.-

Wreathed with singing blossoms

Sing

-ing
children of stone  children of
stone with blossoming eyes
know if a lit-tle tree lis- tens for-ev' er
to always children singing
made of si-ent as stone — si-ence of song