TWO MOVEMENTS FROM THE DELPHIC SUITE:
A COMPOSITION FOR ORCHESTRA

THESIS

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MASTER OF MUSIC

By

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*Delphic Suite* is a composition for orchestra that depicts specific events narrated in Homer's epic tale, *Odyssey*. For the purpose of this thesis the second movement, *Raid on Ismarus*, has been omitted so as to focus on the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic structures of the first movement, *Lament from Troy*, and the third movement, *Ruler of the Winds*. Each of these musical parameters will be analyzed in order to illustrate the *Suite*’s imitation of compositional techniques exemplified in the music of Homer's era, and the musical results obtained by juxtaposing those parameters upon a twentieth-century tonal scheme that provides the *Suite* with an eclectic ambience.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF EXAMPLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES OF COMPOSITION</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melodic Structures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmic Structures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonic Structures</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>xxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>xxxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORCHESTRAL SCORE: TWO MOVEMENTS FROM THE DELPHIC SUITE</td>
<td>xxxii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>xxxii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>xxxiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lament from Troy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruler of the Winds</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Anonymous Greek melody, Epitaph of Seikilos, measures 1-2</td>
<td>xlv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Anonymous Greek melody, First Delphic Hymn, measures 21-22</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anonymous Greek melody, Hymn to Nemesis, measure 2</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anonymous Greek melody, First Delphic Hymn, measures 1-4</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kevin Walczyk, Delphic Suite, Lament from Troy, measure 59</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kevin Walczyk, Delphic Suite, Ruler of the Winds, measures 83-84</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Anonymous Greek melody, First Delphic Hymn, measures 14-17</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kevin Walczyk, Delphic Suite, Lament from Troy, measures 2-3</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Kevin Walczyk, Delphic Suite, Ruler of the Winds, measures 139-140</td>
<td>xxvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Kevin Walczyk, Delphic Suite, Ruler of the Winds, measures 53-57</td>
<td>xxviii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Kevin Walczyk, Delphic Suite, Ruler of the Winds, measures 105-106</td>
<td>xxix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Basic constituents of ancient Greek melodic structures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Four classifications of Greek rhythmic structures</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tonic and dominant pentatonic scales employed in Lament from Troy</td>
<td>xxii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pentatonic progression in Lament from Troy</td>
<td>xxii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Primarytonal centers of Ruler of the Winds</td>
<td>xxiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A sample primary tonal axis and its secondary tonal axis</td>
<td>xxiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ruler of the Winds primary tonal axis and its two secondary axes</td>
<td>xxv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The two conjunct Dorian tetrachords that form the dance in Ruler of</td>
<td>xxvii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES OF COMPOSITION

Introduction

Delphic Suite is a composition for orchestra that depicts specific events narrated in Homer's epic tale, Odyssey. For the purpose of this thesis the second movement, Raid on Ismarus, has been omitted so as to focus on the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic structures of the first movement, Lament from Troy, and the third movement, Ruler of the Winds. Each of these musical parameters - melody, rhythm and harmony - will be analyzed in order to illustrate the Suite's imitation of compositional techniques exemplified in the music of Homer's era, and the musical results obtained by juxtaposing those parameters upon a twentieth-century tonal scheme that provides the Suite with an eclectic ambience.
Melodic Structures

The relics of Greek music from Homer’s era, 8th century B.C., continue to elude musicologists and archaeologists. In fact, the oldest musical relic from Greece, Pindar’s First Pythian Ode, is dated from the 5th century B.C., but no source has been found to confirm this date, speculating that in all likelihood the Ode is probably fraudulent.1 The compositional attributes of two Greek relics, the First and Second Delphic Hymns (ca. 250 B.C.), are believed to best represent, particularly via their pentatonic make-up, the music of Homer’s era and the setting of his Odyssey.2 Therefore, I have chosen the First Delphic Hymn as the primary melodic material for the composition, hence the title, Delphic Suite.

Secondary melodic materials employed in the Suite are established in accordance with the geographical regions Ulysses encounters throughout his journey. For example, the first movement, Lament from Troy, employs as its secondary theme a Turkish Moiroloti (lament) that depicts the aftermath of the Trojan war. Still, other secondary melodic materials are newly conceived melodies that are constructed upon the foundations of folk songs indigenous to the

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particular geographic region being portrayed. Where original sources are scarce, these 'new' melodies (for example the dance in *Ruler of the Winds*) assume the role of authenticity by quoting the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic structures of their ancient ancestors.³

*Lament from Troy* depicts the besieged city of Troy and its defeated inhabitants. Two melodic structures develop throughout the movement, even though *Lament from Troy* begins with only a harmonic pastiche that comprises the pentatonic configuration of the *First Delphic Hymn*.

The first of the two melodic structures to emerge is the lament itself. This highly ornamented folk melody originates from modern day Turkey and conveys, through its text, the devastation brought on by the Trojan war:⁴

> Like a green bird I sing in the desert, my wings are broken.  
> I am left without father and mother in exile.  
> If I do not mourn myself who is there to mourn me?⁵

Two unison flutes (measure 59) initiate the melody of the lament and at the same time summon the other woodwind instruments

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³The compositional parameters of these 'new' melodies are achieved not only through the study of surviving relics but also through 1) the process of transcribing (recorded) folk songs from particular geographic regions that continue the practice of oral tradition, and 2) via the theoretical treatises, articles, books, and other writings pertaining to the musical traditions of a specific culture.

⁴Harold Courlander, notes in the supplement *Folk Music of Greece* from the record album of the same title, perf. by James A. Notopoulos (Ethic Folkways Library Album FE 4454), p. 13.

⁵Ibid., p. 14.
(measures 61-77) to mount a resurgence against the Greek infiltrators. This resurgence by the woodwinds is answered by the brass (measures 62-65, 68-71, 73-84) who present fragments of the First Delphic Hymn as the second and final melodic structure of the movement. In musically representing Homer’s Greek warriors, the brass section serves to extinguish the uprising of the Trojan warriors (woodwinds) at measure 80. Melodically, the First Delphic Hymn prevails over the Trojan lament, thus symbolizing the outcome of the Trojan war itself.

With a final fragment of the First Delphic Hymn stated by the strings (measure 85-88), the movement concludes as it began, with the pentatonic pastiche of the First Delphic Hymn.

In Lament from Troy the oppressive complexion of the First Delphic Hymn personifies Homer’s characters in time of war. However, a transition occurs throughout the Delphic Suite that allows the melodic structure of the First Delphic Hymn to be cast in various dispositions. Ruler of the Winds presents the First Delphic Hymn in a festive mood. This is appropriate since Ulysses and his men, having just escaped the cave of Polyphemus, are celebrating on the Island of Aelous.

The melodic fragment that is featured in Ruler of the Winds originates from the middle portion of the First Delphic Hymn, the same melodic fragment that is introduced by the brass section (measure 80) in Lament from Troy.

Pitch content of this fragment constitutes the opening material, which is presented by the horns (measures 1, 4, and 10), while its
rhythmic traits are developed throughout the movement by various sections of the orchestra. The fragment is first presented in its entirety by the woodwinds (measures 17-24) in stretto. In subsequent entrances the melodic fragment is offered as either a solo (trumpet, ms. 32) or a duet (horn and cello, ms. 123; trumpet and trombone, ms. 131). This fragment from the First Delphic Hymn is juxtaposed upon a lydian harmonic scheme which gives the movement its festive atmosphere.

A second melodic structure appears in Ruler of the Winds beginning at measure 83. This melody, unlike that of previous melodic structures presented in the Delphic Suite, is not derived from either a Greek relic or a folk song from an indigenous area; rather, this dance melody was newly conceived by the composer and constructed from existing music treatises, books, and articles based on the compositional structures of ancient Greek music.

The dance is introduced by a flute and solo violin, while a muted string quartet and percussion trio supply an intimate accompaniment. A counter melody is added to the texture in measure 91 by an oboe and another flute. The harp provides a sustained rhythmic pattern that accentuates the rhythmic division of each measure. The dance is transmitted throughout the orchestra, slowly evolving into a large orchestral statement (measure 109) that depicts the festivities of Homer's characters.

The dance appears to be abandoned when the First Delphic Hymn fragment returns in measure 123 as Ulysses and his men are
about to reach the shores of their homeland. But when the crewmen become aware of a leather-wrapped gift that Ulysses had received from the wind-god Aeolus, they seize and open it, thinking the leather bag would be filled with great treasures. Instead the crewmen become dismayed when they realize that the leather bag releases captive winds that initiates a mighty storm, sending Ulysses and his men back to Aeolus' island. Measures 147-155, which depicts the storm, is followed by the return of the dance motive in the piccolo (measure 157), and completed by the oboe and horn (measure 161), wherein the movement ends.

The presence of the First Delphic Hymn as the primary thematic material maintains melodic continuity throughout the Delphic Suite while secondary thematic material provides an overall sense of thematic balance and contrast that is essential in preserving and reflecting the narrative of Homer’s tale.
Rhythmic Structures

The rhythmic structures throughout the Delphic Suite reflect the mathematical exactitude with which the ancient Greeks expressed their music. The brevis, the Greek counterpart to our present day eighth note, was considered the chrónos prôtos (unit of time), which constituted the rhythmic make-up of feet (measures). These feet were usually divided into two or more sections (beats) of either equal or unequal length. These sections, when combined to represent a foot, do not necessarily have to form (at the smallest level) rhythmic structures that fall into clear, organized time signatures like that of Western music; rather, the sections usually employ various rhythmic structures that allow greater variation of rhythmic stress points, a concept predicated on the fact that the rhythm of ancient Greek melody is derived first and foremost by the poetic structure of the text (refer to figure 1).6

\[ \text{Sections} \quad \text{--- --- --- --- ---} \]
\[ \text{Feet} \quad \text{---- ---- ---- ---- ----} \]

Figure 1. Basic constituents of ancient Greek melodic structures.

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6 Sachs, op. cit., 269-278.
The *Epitaph of Seikilos* (example 1), an ancient Greek melody,\(^7\) is a case in which the same rhythmic structure is employed throughout each *section* of each *foot* \((3/8 + 3/8)\); thus, allowing the rhythmic accent to fit a western time signature of \(6/8\).


![MIDI notation of the Epitaph of Seikilos](image)

The *First Delphic Hymn*\(^8\) (example 2) is a case in which different rhythmic structures are used throughout each *section* of each *foot* \((2/8 + 3/8)\), and whose *feet* are also varied \((2/8 + 3/8 & 3/8 + 2/8)\). Although adhering to an overall pattern of \(5/8\), the *First Delphic Hymn*, with its shifting rhythmic stress, illustrates the fact that ancient Greek melodies do not always fit precisely into Western time signatures in which rhythmic accents can be broken down into recurring, predictable patterns. This unpredictable shift of accent makes Greek melody uniquely antique and clearly distinct from that of western melodies and provides the *Delphic Suite* with a non-Western rhythmic flavor.

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\(^8\)Ibid., 35-36.

These various rhythmic structures were classified by the ancient Greeks as one of four types based on the ratio of the rhythmic lengths of the two sections: 1:1, 2:1, 3:2 or 4:3. Figure 2 illustrates the four different rhythmic ratio groups, their Greek classification, and their present day temporal equivalents.

Figure 2. Four classifications of Greek rhythmic structures.

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9Sachs, op. cit., 260-262.
The First Delphic Hymn is featured in each movement of the Delphic Suite and employs an unequal foot (rhythmic ratio) of 3:2, which is central to the hymn’s rhythmic language. With the information obtained from figure 2, one can classify (as the Greeks did) the rhythmic structure of the First Delphic Hymn as a paemonic foot or hemiola (3/8 + 2/8 or 5/8).

With the basic rudiments of rhythm established, the Greeks were able to combine, in any variation, the four rhythmic groups, so as to obtain more complex rhythms required for more complex textual structures. The Hymn to Nemesis,\(^\text{10}\) example 3, illustrates this procedure by combining a pair of iambic feet with one dactylic foot (3/8 + 3/8 + 2/8). The composite rhythmic structure can be, and often is, written as 4/4 but the accents require the feet to be written and agogically stressed in performance, as follows:


\[
\begin{array}{c}
\begin{align*}
3 & \div 2 \\
\end{align*}
\end{array}
\]

The two Delphic Hymns have been inappropriately transcribed by scholars like Hugo Riemann who alters the original 3:2 foot (5/8

\(^{10}\text{Sachs, op. cit., p. 243.}\)
time signature) in order to force the melody into a 2:2 foot (2/4 time signature).\footnote{Sachs, op. cit., 262-263.} This awkward transcription takes away the agile alternation of differing rhythmic structures and shifts the agogic stress to a constant predetermined down beat, merely transforming the rhythmic structures of the Delphic Hymns into a quasi-western rhythmic pattern. This pattern is quite removed from the rhythmic structures that make up the characteristic feet of ancient Greek music.

It is significant, rhythmically and melodically, that the concept of the above mentioned ratios are intrinsic to the compositional attributes of ancient Greek melodies, for these ratios also coincide with the harmonic ratios of the unison, octave, fifth and fourth, thus creating an inherently Greek ideology that ordains rhythm and harmony as one.

The First Delphic Hymn, whose rhythmic sections remain paeanic throughout, is represented in all movements of the Delphic Suite. This melody is first introduced in the horns and low brass (measure 62) in Lament from Troy. Although the basic unit of time varies, the hymn's rhythmic attributes always exhibit a hemiola (paeanic 3:2, 2:3) relationship as seen in example 4.

The rhythmic structure of the lament's melody, which begins in the flutes (Lament from Troy, ms. 59), appears to be extremely complex; however, once the ornamentation is extracted, the basic rhythmic skeleton of the melody becomes more evident. Each

measure (measures 59-77) can be divided into two distinct sections \((5/8 + 5/8)\). As indicated in figure 2, one can label the lament’s rhythmic structure as a hemiola or a structure based on paeonic rhythms \((3:2\) or \(2:3\)) similar to that of the First Delphic Hymn.
Example 5 illustrates the actual rhythmic structure of the lament’s first measure without ornamentation and with re-configured beaming that indicates two separate \(5/8\) sections as opposed to one \(5/4\) section.

The dance that appears in *Ruler of the Winds* (measure 83) in the solo violin and flute is also rhythmically intriguing when more closely analyzed. The rhythmic sections of this dance, through its obvious shifting of accents and 7/8 meter, are more apparent than those of the lament and, therefore, can be distinguished quite easily. Example 6 points out a two measure pattern that remains consistent throughout the dance \((2/8 + 2/8 + 3/8 \& 3/8 + 2/8 + 2/8)\). The rhythmic sections can be identified, in reference to figure 2, as an epitrita (4:3 or 3:4).

Harmonic Structures

The harmony of Delphic Suite is structured according to two methods: the first is derived from the melody; the second utilizes root progressions of a major third establishing primary and secondary tonal regions. The former method is employed in Lament from Troy, while both methods appear in Ruler of the Winds.

The origin of the pentatonic scale utilized in Lament from Troy can be traced back to the fifth century B.C. This scale's pentatonic make-up is depicted in the First Delphic Hymn.


The pentatonic scale is constructed from intervals of a major third, then a semitone, and again a major third and a semitone. Even though this particular scale has only been traced back to the fifth
century B.C., many modern scholars believe that this scale, as stated earlier, represents the harmonic language of earlier Greek music (1000 B.C.) and the music of Homer's era.\footnote{Sachs, \textit{op. cit.}, 208.}

The pentatonic scale, whose fundamental is based on the upper most scale degree (C), begins in the second measure of \textit{Lament from Troy} (example 8). Each scale degree is present, forming a modal montage that sets the musical stage for the aftermath of the Trojan War.


\begin{music}
% symbolic music input
\abovalign=M
\newmusicpage
\input{example8}
\end{music}

These opening measures establish C as the primary key area. In order to stabilize a dominant to tonic relationship, the scale is simply transposed up a perfect fourth but, unlike the tonal area of the tonic scale, retains the lower most scale degree of G as the fundamental (as opposed to F, the upper most scale degree). Figure 3 illustrates the
two pentatonic scales and their fundamentals, which are represented by white note heads.

Figure 3. Tonic and dominant relationship in *Lament from Troy.*

The scale whose fundamental is G exudes a phrygian-like tonality which, because of its greater dissonance in relationship to the fundamental, exhibits a tendency to resolve to the tonic scale. Figure 4 illustrates the tonic to dominant progression that is based on the above pentatonic scales.

Figure 4. Pentatonic progression in *Lament from Troy.*
The pitch C represents the tonal center and signifies the prevailing dominance of the First Delphic Hymn, or, in keeping with Homer’s story, represents the Greek’s military domination over the inhabitants of Troy. This tonal area elevates to D at measure 59. It is at this point that we hear, for the first time, the lament which unfolds in the woodwinds over a period of twenty-one measures. Its sporadic pleas cry for mercy, never completing its descending fourth gesture. The lament can only descend an interval of a third before it is abruptly obstructed by the strings and percussion and the return of the First Delphic Hymn in the low brass. The incessant resurgence of the Hymn’s intensity culminates at measure 80, which also marks the return of C as the tonal center, and continues to the down beat of measure 85. The movement concludes with the same pentatonic montage that was heard at the outset. The finality of C (as the primary tonal area) suggests harmonically, as it did melodically, that the First Delphic Hymn succeeds in suppressing the Lament from Troy.

The harmonic structure of Ruler of the Winds employs a Bartokian model, in which either of two key areas can serve as the primary tonal center. The first primary tonal center is obtained by simply choosing one key area. By drawing an axis on the circle of fifths from the chosen key area to the key area that lies directly across from it, the second primary tonal center is obtained (Figure 5). Since the intervallic relationship between notes that lie across from each other on the circle of fifths is a tritone, the primary tonal centers of Ruler of the Winds are B-flat (chosen key area) and E (the key area
that lies directly across from B-flat on the circle of fifths). This system, employed by Bartok, is known as the *axis system.*\(^{13}\)

![Diagram of the circle of fifths with B-flat and E as primary tonal centers.](image)

**Figure 5.** Primary tonal centers of *Ruler of the Winds.*

A secondary tonal center can be achieved simply by selecting another axis and juxtaposing it with the primary tonal axis (figure 6).

![Diagram of the circle of fifths with B-flat and E as primary tonal centers, and C-sharp and G as secondary tonal centers.](image)

**Figure 6.** A sample primary tonal axis (B-flat & E) and its secondary axis (C-sharp & G).

Ruler of the Winds employs two secondary tonal centers (figure 7): one is based on an interval of a major third above the primary tonal centers of B-flat (D) and E (A-flat); the second is based on an interval of a major third below the primary tonal centers of B-flat (G-flat) and E (C).

![Diagram of tonal centers]

Figure 7. Ruler of the Winds primary tonal axis (B-flat & E) and its two secondary axes (D & A-flat; G-flat & C).

The symmetry of this double axis system forces the process of progression to be closed. In other words, Ruler of the Winds' harmonic structure is allowed to freely progress only to and from the primary tonal axis (B-flat & E) and the two secondary tonal axes (D & A-flat; G-flat & C). This process initiates a closed system by confining progression to these same six tonal centers throughout the movement.

In keeping with the programmatic effect of this movement, cadential patterns, in the sense of traditional harmony, are all but eliminated. Ruler of the Winds achieves its progression simply by

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14 Root progression by fifths.
abruptly side-stepping from one key area to the next. Example 9 illustrates this procedure with two different examples from *Ruler of the Winds*.


Example 10 alludes to an ambiguous dichotomy that is developed throughout the movement; that is, a key area’s struggle to gain dominance over its tritone counterpart when the two key areas are presented simultaneously juxtaposed against one another.

The brass progression in example 11 depicts this harmonic struggle between *Ruler of the Winds*’ primary tonal (axis) centers of B-flat and E. Two chords (marked with asterisks) serve as exceptions to the tritone dichotomy and help to break up the monotony of the parallelism between B-flat and E. Yet, even the bass notes of these two interrupting chords, B-flat and A-flat, maintain harmonic continuity by representing two of the six restricted tonal centers.


The penultimate struggle for tonal domination begins in measure 147, and again involves the primary tonal centers of B-flat and E. This section of the movement culminates in E at measure 155, diminishing in textural complexity. The next musical statement (measure 156) supports E as the tonal center, but this key area quickly side-steps its way through the remaining five tonal centers in as many measures. The movement ends just as it began, in B-flat.
The harmonic language of the dance, which appears at measure 83 in *Ruler of the Winds*, was constructed from two *conjunct* dorian tetrachords (figure 8). The term *conjunct* refers to the fact that the two tetrachords, which combine to form a heptachord, share a gravitational (linking) note that is equidistant from either end of the heptachord. In the case of the dance (measures 83-98), G serves as the linking note while D serves as the tonal center.

![Figure 8. The two conjunct (dorian) tetrachords that form the dance in Ruler of the Winds.](image)

The dance continues throughout the movement, highlighting four of the six tonal centers from the primary and secondary axes: measure 99 (C), measure 103 (G-flat) measure 105 (D), and measure 109 (B-flat). The last two statements (just mentioned) shift the harmonic structure of the dance from Dorian to Lydian. This is accomplished by presenting the dance in one key area while the accompaniment outlines another. Example 12 illustrates this bitonal

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15Sachs, *op. cit.*, 216. Dorian was not just a term that described a mode but a term that constituted the diatonic genus of early Greek harmony. Ancient melodic systems and scales gravitate around the Dorian concept.
approach. In measures 105-108, the dance subject (oboe 1 & violin 2) and counter subject (oboe 2 & trumpet 3) utilize the conjunct (Dorian) tetrachords based on the key area of E, while the low strings simultaneously provide a harmonic accompaniment in the key area of D.


The harmonic transition from Dorian to Lydian provides not only harmonic continuity, but also melodic continuity between the First Delphic Hymn fragment (utilized in this movement) and the dance.
Conclusion

Delphic Suite is a composition that represents a synthesis of old writing practices with new writing practices. The melodic structures employed in the Suite range from ancient Greek relics and folk songs to newly conceived melodies based on past compositional methods. The Suite's rhythmic structures are presented in western notation but, at the micro-level, reflect the rhythmical complexity of ancient Greek music. The harmonic approach seems to be the most eclectic; imposing a twentieth-century harmonic scheme (Bartok's axis system) on ancient melodies, utilizing tetrachords that reflect the Greek Dorian system, and juxtaposing tertian harmonies on melodies that were never intended to be harmonized.

It is through these procedures that give the Delphic Suite its continuity and unique structural identity that parallels the epic tale of Homer's Odyssey.


Delphic Suite

Three Movements for Orchestra

by
Kevin Walczyk
Instrumentation

Transposed Score

Piccolo
2 Flutes
2 Oboes
English Horn
2 Bb Clarinets
Bass Clarinet
3 Bassoons
4 F Horns
3 Bb Trumpets
3 Trombones
Tuba
4 Percussion
Harp
Strings

Time of Performance

Lament from Troy: ca. 4' 40"
Raid on Ismarus: 3' 45"
Ruler of the Winds: 6' 05"
Total Duration: 14' 30"
Lament from Troy

Più andante
* Lament from Troy *
* Lament from Troy *

"L'istesso tempo"
Lament from Troy
* Lament from Troy *
Lament from Troy
* Lament from Troy *
3. Ruler of the Winds

Allegro ma non troppo
* Ruler of the Winds *
*Ruler of the Winds*
* Ruler of the Winds *

Meno mosso
* Ruler of the Winds *

Moderato
* Ruler of the Winds *
* Ruler of the Winds *
* Ruler of the Winds *
* Ruler of the Winds *
* Ruler of the Winds *