Desiderata
for Cello, Timpani, Harp and String Orchestra

by

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A composition submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
(Music: Composition)
in the University of Michigan
2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance with whom I have been privileged to work, including Bright Sheng, Michael Daugherty, Erik Santos, Paul Schoenfeld, Evan Chambers, Kristin Kuster, Mark Clague, Christopher Lees, Karen Fournier, Ramon Satyendra, Wayne Petty and Judith Petty.

I am also profoundly grateful to my family, friends, colleagues and mentors who have inspired, challenged, encouraged and supported me throughout my studies, including Elim Chan, Roger Zare, Paul Dooley, David Biedenbender, Bret Bohman, Patrick Harlin, Evan Ware, Ming-Hsiu Yen, Ching-Mei Lin, Hyukjin Shin, Jeremy Crosmer, Jarita Ng, Daniel Poceta, Yaniv Segal, Thomas Osborne, Donald Reid Womack, Sydney Hodkinson, Daniel Mew, Craig Young and Henry Miyamura.
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ABSTRACT

Desiderata is a composition written for chamber orchestra with an instrumentation of solo cello, timpani, harp and strings. The piece is twenty minutes in duration and was premiered April 6, 2014 at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, performed by cellist Daniel Poceta and conducted by Elim Chan.

The music of Desiderata expresses the soul-searching journey for purpose and tranquility that is often the subject of religious homily. The title is taken from the poem Desiderata (1927) by American poet Max Ehrmann and refers to things desired for happiness. The inspiration behind the work comes from the poem’s didactic and devotional principles that confront personal and interpersonal struggle. Desiderata is a musical representation of the poem, using directional harmonic relationships to express challenges in life and a recurring developing motif to symbolize positive affirmations that can lead towards harmony.

There is one primary musical motif, a four-note arc consisting of an ascending and descending contour that signify musical sighs and desires. The figure begins the piece, which is consistently repeated in the solo and orchestral music representing the poem’s constant reminder to remain positive. After an extensive rumination in the opening cadenza, the solo cello weaves the figure as a head motif to different strands of melodic material that progress from the lyrical, assertive, anxious to serene qualities. A brief cadenza (m.163) in rapturous energy leads into an extended orchestral interlude reprising transformed materials heard earlier.

The harmonic progression is directional to reflect a transcendent journey filled with challenges. The orchestral music is rooted in B-Aeolian (m.2) as a modal key area and journeys through pitch centers of D (m.37), G (m.64) to C (m.164). The initial B area and B♭ of the opening cadenza gradually hint towards upward resolution to C (m.164, 215, 236) to signify an optimistic trajectory with the high point of the orchestral interlude centered on the dominant G (m.193). The piece concludes ambiguously on the dominant sonority in C (m.257), with a swaying motion between C♭ and B♭ in the violas symbolizing the freedom to choose a pursuit of happiness.
INSTRUMENTATION

Timpani
Harp

Solo Cello
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
Bass

(Minimum String Count: 5.5.4.4.2)

Duration: ca. 20:00
Desiderata

for Cello, Timpani, Harp and String Orchestra

Andante - senza misura, \( \frac{4}{4} = 96 \)

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with increasing intensity...

Solo Vc.

pushing forward...

Solo Vc.
160

Hn.

163

senza misura

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Hp.

Vc.





3

ff

più ff

pizz.

arco

p

p

molto
236 L'istesso tempo \( \frac{q=60}{\text{rit.}} \)

243 rit. sempre \( \frac{q=76}{\text{Lento,}} \)

\( \text{Vln. 2} \)

\( \text{Vla.} \)

\( \text{Vc.} \)

\( \text{Db.} \)