Amesha Spenta for Two Pianos and Orchestra

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts (Music: Composition) in the University of Michigan 2017

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Dedicated to Evan Chambers
Acknowledgements

Completing a project of this scope would not have been possible without the help of many inspiring individuals, with whom I was incredibly fortunate to collaborate. I am greatly indebted to Professor Evan Chambers for his continued guidance, his kindness, and generosity of spirit in the process of creating this composition. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Deborah, for her love, encouragement, and patience during the many months of writing, and for her incredible performance of the second piano part at the composition’s premiere. She was an indispensable part of this project throughout its entire creation process, from the initial concept, to its final realization.

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Abstract

*Amesha Spenta* is a 9-minute musical composition for two pianos and orchestra (2fls., 2cls., 2obs., 2bsns., 2hns., 2pts., tbn. b. tbn. , timp., perc., and strings). It incorporates the Zoroastrian story of creation as its narrative framework and is the account of a struggle between the Zoroastrian supreme deity, Ahura Mazda, and its adversary, Angra Mainyu (the destructive spirit). Angra Mainyu, later referred to as Ahriman, is the oldest known portrayal of the devil in a sacred text. The Amesha Spenta (divine sparks) are six divinities, each possessing a different divine character, created by Ahura Mazda with the intention of protecting the world, and defeating the evil Angra Mainyu. There is a close correlation between the dualism of good and evil as portrayed in Zoroastrianism, and the concerto form utilized in the composition: in both, we see a struggle for dominance between the various forces present.

This piece is on one hand an attempt to cultivate better understanding of the Zoroastrian culture particularly in the United States, Canada, and Iran, and on the other, demonstrates the interconnectivity of musical traditions as far East as India, and as far West as Greece. My research shows a clear relationship between Zoroastrian chant, which dates back to 1500 BCE, and its successors, Western plainchant, and the Quranic recitation. While the work doesn’t contain any direct references to Zoroastrian chant, it incorporates Persian folk melodies, and shares commonalities with descendants of the above styles.

*Amesha Spenta* is written in an attempt to address important current global concerns, including the persecution and unjust treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in countries such as Iran, while bringing these issues to the attention of a morally divided North American society. It aims to find cultural and artistic commonalities between various ethnic groups, to unite the followers of these religions through the language of music, and to celebrate them for their diversity.
Programme Notes

*Amesha Spenta* incorporates the Zoroastrian story of creation and the account of a struggle between Ahura Mazda (the supreme deity) and its adversary, Angra Mainyu (the destructive spirit) as its narrative framework. Angra Mainyu, later referred to as Ahriman, is the oldest known portrayal of the devil in a sacred text. The Amesha Spenta (divine sparks) are six divinities, each possessing a different divine character, created with the purpose of protecting the world, and defeating the evil Angra Mainyu. The piece is on one hand an attempt to cultivate better understanding of the Zoroastrian culture particularly in the United States, Canada, and Iran, and on the other, celebrates the interconnectivity of musical traditions as far East as India, and as far West as Greece.
Instrumentation

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in Bb
2 Bassoons

2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in C
1 Trombone
1 Bass Trombone

Timpani
1 Percussion (Snare Drum, Whip, Bass Drum, Sus Cymbal, Tenor Drum)

2 Pianos

1st Violins
2nd Violins
Violas
Violoncellos
Double Basses
Amesha Spenta
Amesha Spenta
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
B-Cl. 1
B-Cl. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
Hn. 1
Hn. 2
C Tpt. 1
C Tpt. 2
Tbn.
B. Trombone
Timp.
Perc. 1
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
Pno. 1
Pno. 2

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