TECTONICS
for orchestra

by

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ABSTRACT

Tectonics is a composition written for orchestra with an instrumentation of piccolo, flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. The piece is ten minutes in duration and had its premiere at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, on April 2, 2012.

The music of Tectonics expresses the sheer immensity and power of the Earth's tectonic processes. The title refers to a field within geology that studies tectonic plates, the structures within the earth's crust. The inspiration behind this work is the concept of continental drift: the gradual but inevitable motion of tectonic plates. Tectonics is a musical representation of the incredible power of these processes, using over-arching harmonic relations and orchestration to express aspects of the earth's geology.

The progression of pitch centers through the work reflects the very gradual motion of tectonic plates. After opening over an extended C-sharp pedal, the music settles on a D pedal near the halfway point (m. 69). When the opening material returns in m. 103, the climax of the piece unfolds over an extended C-natural pedal. The final thirty seconds of this ten-minute work sees the opening C-sharp return (m. 140), transformed in a violent manner.

I use orchestration to give the listener a timbral impression of the earth's geology. The opening gesture, a swell in the contrabassoon and low horns, creates the ground that supports all other musical figures. The tuba solo (m. 16) grows organically out of this foundation with earthy tones, emphasizing the low brass section's role in portraying the solidity of the earth. During the extended climax of the piece (m. 111-144), I divide the orchestra into three distinct sections – winds and strings, high brass, and low brass. These three groups move at different paces and collide indiscriminately of dissonance, representing the friction between tectonic plates. This friction is responsible for earthquakes, and this kind of cataclysmic event is represented in the music by the chaotic trills and glissandos on the final page of the score.
INSTRUMENTATION

1 Piccolo
1 Flute
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in Bb
1 Bassoon
1 Contrabassoon

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
3 Trombones (3rd is bass)
1 Tuba

Timpani (4 drums)
Percussion (2 players):
1. Glockenspiel, Crotales, Chimes (share with 2), Snare Drum (share with 2), 3 Susp. Cymbals (sm, med, lg) (share with 2), Brake Drum, Large Tam-tam (share with 2)
2. Chimes (share with 1), Small Triangle, Snare Drum (share with 1), 3 Susp. Cymbals (sm, med, lg) (share with 1), Large Tam-tam (share with 1), Bass Drum

Harp

Strings

Transposed Score
Duration: ca. 10'