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Permissions for Large Symphony Orchestra (2020)– Dissertation

I. Instrumentation:

Piccolo
Flute 1, (2 dbl. Alto Flute)
Bb Clarinet 1, 2
Bb Bass Clarinet
Oboe 1, 2
English Horn
Bassoon 1, 2
Contrabassoon

F Horn 1, 2, 3, 4 (straight mute)
C Trumpet (straight mute, cup mute, harmon mute with removable stem)
Flugelhorn
Trombone 1, 2 (straight mute, cup mute, harmon mute with removable stem)
Bass Trombone (straight mute, cup mute, harmon mute with removable stem)
Tuba

Timpani
Perc.:
1. Crotales, both octaves (bow)
2. Vibraphone (bow)
3. Toms (4), Medium Sus. Cymbal (bow), Whip
4. Bass Drum (snare sticks)
Piano (preferably lid removed)

Solo String Quintet*
Strings

*A quintet of solo strings (Solo Violin 1 & 2, Solo Viola, Solo Cello, Solo Bass), will act as continuous soloists throughout the entire movement and should be extracted from the tutti strings – specifically, the principal players of each string section should fulfill this role. The removal of the principal players from the tutti strings is integral to the expression of the piece and should not be compromised by bringing in additional soloists or extracting them from further back in the sections.

While the instruments are arranged in score order, the orchestra is grouped into seven ensembles based on timbral commonalities, registral overlap, and likeness of music-making. The ensembles are as follows:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Piccolo	Flute 2	Oboe 2	Bass Clarinet	Solo String	Tutti Strings	Percussion
Flute 1	Bb Clarinet	English Horn	Bassoon 2	Quintet		(excluding
Oboe 1	1 & 2	Bassoon 1	Contrabassoon	(unified)		vibraphone)
Crotales/ Glockenspiel	Horn 2	Horn 1 & 3	Horn 4			
Piano	Vibraphone	C Trumpet	Trombone 2			
Solo Violin 1	Sola Viola	Flugelhorn	Bass Trombone			
		Trombone 1	Tuba			
		Solo Violin 2	Solo Cello			
			Solo Bass			

The separation of the orchestra into these ensembles does not necessarily suggest that they be reseated to accommodate them.

II. Duration: 12 min

III. Program Note

This piece is a response to the current state of the American orchestral institution – one which is concerned mostly with music and musical practices from the late 18th through early 20th centuries. This preoccupation with music from the past, nuanced as the situation may be, has led to the perpetuation of ideas and attitudes that I find problematic. My efforts to subvert these ideas led me to each decision I made about this piece.

Before I wrote a single note, I knew I wanted to write a piece that would grant the winds and brass a special kind of permission – one that would give them the opportunity to be the leaders in the dramatic scenario of the piece. However, instead of using them as a single unit, they are separated into several “chamber” ensembles based on certain qualities. These qualities include timbre, range, and other instrumental characteristics. These ensembles create several blended “voices”, each with their own specific musical profile.

Granting this special permission to the winds and brass changes the way the strings participate – the strings shadow and imitate what is happening around them. Without any strong sense of unifying identity, the tutti strings are torn between the various wind and brass ensembles resulting in a musical profile that is varied and ambiguous. To heighten the drama of this treatment of the tutti strings, the principal players of each string section are removed from their traditional position of leadership and are divided amongst the wind and brass ensembles during portions of the piece. The members of this solo string quintet move fluidly between their roles as participants in the wind and brass ensembles, as a unified ensemble in and of itself, and as the only group sympathetic to the tutti strings.

The opening tutti is the simultaneous presentation of the ensemble’s identities and lines, urgently clamoring over each other in a manner that makes it impossible to discern any of them individually. In this moment, all of the materials manipulated in the piece make themselves known. The lines from the opening tutti echo through the ensembles as they pass from one ensemble to another. While the lines themselves remain mostly the same, their qualities are changed according to the ensembles who are performing them. This cycling of lines through the various ensembles conjures reactions of resentment, sympathy, and even apathy, depending on the characteristic patterns of behavior exhibited by the responding ensemble. The highest moments of conflict usher in the other three tutti of the piece.

In total, there are 4 “lines” that make their way through the ensembles. Each time one of these lines occurs, it tries to establish a stronger sense of independence and individuality in the shadow of the opening tutti. At the same time these lines begin to emerge in more prominent ways, the musical fabric begins to unravel as moments of disorder begin to permeate the score. This way of playing is taken up largely by the tutti strings. Ultimately, the progress of the lines is cut short by the executive action of a trio of percussion who, until this moment, have participated in the most subordinate way. Their ominous warnings freeze the action of all the ensembles except the tutti strings who proceed without any input from the other ensembles except the percussion’s brutal hits.