Frozen in Time

Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2007
Duration: 25 min
Orchestration: 3(pic).2.3(Ebcl,bcl).asx+tsx.2/4.3(Dtpt).2+btbn.1/2timp.2perc/hp.cel.pf/str
Publisher: G Schirmer Inc

Program Note

Composer's Note
The title Frozen in Time refers to imaginary snapshots of the Earth's geological development from prehistoric times to the present day. Although we cannot be sure what the Earth looked like millions of years ago, most scientists agree that the separate continents used to be one mega-continent (as most agree that mankind descended from one prehistoric womb). Each movement imagines the music of a large prehistoric continent at a certain point in time:

I. Indoafrica: The piece opens with a grand gesture, like an avalanche, that is followed by a "time freeze." The main theme of the first movement is based on South Indian rhythm cycles (Tālas) and scales. The range of the theme is gradually expanded like a spiral, as it would in classical Indian improvisation. The second theme is based on the inner rhythm of the Tāla, which is also found in some traditions of West-African music. As the solo percussionist starts playing the theme on the Marimba and the Cencerros (a keyboard of cowbells), it becomes more similar to Gamelan music of Southeast Asia. The soloist then returns to the drum-set and takes the music back to it African origins building the movement up to an ecstatic culmination. At this point, the opening avalanche returns as a burst of emotions rather than a natural phenomenon. After a short cadenza, the movement wraps up with a fugue that recaps the themes of the opening section.

II. Eurasia: The second movement is an exploration of the darker sides of the mega-continent of Eurasia where emotions run deep but are kept quiet (the movement mainly deals with the traditions of central Europe and central and eastern Asia). The opening bass drum rhythm (which is borrowed from the Siciliana) and the long high notes in the strings separate this movement from the outer ones in terms of geography and climate. Also, the fact that the soloist only uses metal instruments in this movement makes it colder and more northern in character. The melodic materials of this movement are inspired by Mozart's Sicilianas which appear in some of his most intimate and moving movements (Piano Concerto K.488, Sonata K.280, Rondo K.511 and the aria "Ach, ich Fühl's"). One can hear that war is brewing under the surface throughout the movement although it only erupts briefly in the form of central Asian bells and modes that invade the introspective mood of the Siciliana. The movement ends with a long meditation on the opening theme — with many moments frozen in time.

III. The Americas: The final movement is a snapshot of the present (The Americas are, in fact, still one continent). Moreover, the mixture of cultures is a staple of modern America. The final movement is constructed as a rondo. The refrain represents mainstream American styles (Broadway at first, American Symphonic style in its second repeat, Mellow Jazz in the third, and Grunge Music — Seattle Style Rock — in its final repeat). The episodic sections explore other sounds of the Americas: the Tango, AfroCuban Jazz, Swing, and Minimalism. As American music is by nature inclusive, the movement includes a recapitulation of African, European and Asian music, tying the piece together.

— Avner Dorman

Avner Dorman
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