A Symphonic Rhapsody

by

Richard Choe
Class of 2014

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Music

Middletown, Connecticut  April, 2014
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 2

Analysis and Explanation of Main Thematic Material ............................................... 4

Analysis of Structure and Aesthetic ............................................................................ 11

Balancing the Orchestra ............................................................................................. 16

Preparation, Interpretation, and Conducting .............................................................. 20

Reflection on Live Performance ................................................................................. 24

Acknowledgements/Closing Remarks ....................................................................... 26

Bibliography ................................................................................................................ 27

Appendix ....................................................................................................................... 28

Appendix A: Concert Program- Cover and Acknowledgements

Appendix B: Concert Program- Program and Performer List

Appendix C: Score- “A Symphonic Rhapsody”
INTRODUCTION

“A Symphonic Rhapsody” premiered at Wesleyan University’s Crowell Concert Hall on April 6th, 2014 with an orchestra of 31 performers. The performance represented a culmination of a year of composing along with approximately ten hours of rehearsal with the ensemble. This paper attempts to track and analyze the process—from composition to performance—of how this piece came to be, including the influences, orchestrational choices made, and the aesthetics that the piece attempts to capture with the individual sections and as a whole.

As a rhapsody, (in keeping with the rhapsodes of classical-era Greece) is a single movement, free flowing piece that does not adhere to a rigid or strict structure—the main thematic materials are used as a foundation upon which the piece evolves and develops in a flowing manner where one idea gives rise to another, unrestricted by the structural confines of an established compositional form (for instance, the basic Exposition-Development-Recapitulation found in a Sonata Allegro form). Instead, a rhapsody can be comprised of a myriad of musical ideas within the same piece, providing compositional freedom to experiment with transitions and interplay between different themes. The piece began as a four-movement symphony (I: Sonata Allegro, II: Adagio, III: Scherzo, IV: Sonata Allegro, Presto); however, after consideration of the timeframe and thematic material, the artistic decision was made to take the existing thematic material and to synthesize a free-flowing, single movement piece—the piece took the form of a rhapsody to allow for the intended unrestrained nature.

The Rhapsody functions on multiple levels, the first and foremost of which is on the level of imitating a Late Romantic style. Many aspects of the piece utilize works by
Romantic composers as orchestral and textural models. In addition, the piece attempts to capture some of the characteristics indicative of the Romantic era: emotionally evocative, dramatic music featuring a thicker orchestral texture (with respect to the Baroque and Classical orchestras), larger orchestras, and use of contrasting elements of texture, timbre, subject and mood (Taruskin, 2010). Using these Romantic characteristics as an overarching layer, the second layer of functionality—an homage to many of the Western Classical Music performance ensembles at Wesleyan—was introduced. Many of the main themes pay tribute to performance ensembles (most notably the Orchestra, Wind Ensemble, and Cello Ensemble) in an effort to characterize and celebrate my personal experience as a student in the Music Department. The existence of these two functionalities works to represent both a culmination of a four-year long curriculum of musical academic studies, and a capstone and retrospection of a personal, exciting, and fruitful career as a student of music.

In an attempt to thoroughly explain the process and influences, this paper will explore the passages of the piece and the compositional elements with respect to inspirations and orchestral/artistic choices. The structure of the piece will be explored to elucidate the finer details of how the musical ideas were ordered and strung together, following a thorough explanation and analysis of the key themes, transitions, and sections. The preparation (conducting, interpreting, rehearsing) of the piece will be discussed as well, with emphases on interpretation (and the disseminating of such in a digestible manner to the performers) and finding balance in the orchestra. Finally, a reflection on the concert will also be given, including statements on the programming and general ideas on live performances.
ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF MAIN THEMATIC MATERIAL

The opening passage of “A Symphonic Rhapsody” works to introduce one of the main themes: the melody shared by the clarinet, bassoon, and horn. The string section pizzicato accompanies the melody. As shown in Figure 1, this orchestration is very similar to the opening passage of Dvorák’s 8th Symphony. The mysterious and somewhat darker, damper timbre that is displayed in the opening of the Dvorák symphony was the desired characteristic for the opening of the rhapsody, thus it was orchestrated very similarly. However, to maintain a somewhat lighter texture, the trombones and second bassoon were left out, and the clarinet and horn were solo instead of a due. The ambient sonorities of the clarinet, bassoon, and horn provide a darker color, which introduces the main theme; the strings lay down a quiet accompaniment consisting of some first-inversion chords to build and quickly relieve harmonic tension. The third measure of the piece consists of a subito forte, introducing very early on the spontaneous nature of the rest of the piece. The entire ensemble descends in forte to a V/V chord, which is resolved to a dominant, making way for the oboe solo that plays a slight variant of the main theme. The horns introduced moving in thirds in measure 11 are meant to provide a fuller sound
to the orchestral build; the trumpets in thirds at measure 13 are meant to add brilliance to the texture. The celli in measure 16 take the melody and pass off the dominant G to the timpani, whose roll leads into the Allegro, the initiation of forward momentum that drives the piece.

Measure 22 introduces what will hereafter be referred to as “oscillating seconds,” as in the minor second repeating units in the concert G to concert Ab. These oscillating seconds will be important as countersubjects and transitions later on in the piece: they are introduced early on in the piece. They represent a sort of musical “teetering” and a feeling of instability that drives the contours of the piece later on.

Rehearsal “B” ushers in another main theme in the horns, which is reiterated at rehearsal “C” by the oboe and clarinets with a pizzicato string accompaniment. It is a strong melody, one that emerges from a large tutti dominant cadence when first introduced. The first presentation of the melody is stately and bold, while the next in the oboe and clarinets is a bit more whimsical and forward-moving, thanks to the pizzicato in the strings.

The transition between the horn melody and the reiteration of the melody by the oboe and clarinet features another minor motif in the piece; 3 before rehearsal “C” introduces the 5th scale degree in the brass. Emphasis is placed on these notes by ensuring that the sound will cut through the orchestra: the two trombones are in unison on a low G while the trumpets are in octave concert G’s above. The whole note is marked sforzando to indicate the importance of this note.

4 before rehearsal “D” is a transitional passage that returns later on in the piece; this transitional passage is a fragment of a longer melodic line that is played in full at
rehearsal “X”. The fragment is introduced before “D” as an anticipatory construct; it is played very strongly and in unison among violins 1 and 2, with large accented hits in the lower strings and accompanying brass and winds, foreshadowing eminence and that the fragment would be elaborated upon in the ensuing passages. The lead-up into “D” modulates from C-minor the relative major Eb-major by way of the F-major chord 2 before “D” functioning as the V/V to Eb-major. The unison horns 1 before “D” provides a strong establishment of the new key, with the octave leaps in the concert Bb, and finally landing on concert Eb, the tonic (in Horn 2), and concert G, the third (in Horn 1) to establish the new tonic triad.

The chord progression found in the main theme of “D” (I-V-ii-vi) provides a stately basis for which the melody remains firmly planted. The fourth descents in the bass line (from Eb to Bb, and then again a second higher from F to C) evoke a bit of a more sullen emotional response, quickly resolved by the IV-I-V progression immediately following. This resolution is emphasized by the brilliance of the 1st trumpet overtaking the melody from the horns 2 after “D”. This melody (henceforth referred to as the “March Melody”) is derived from a theme of the “Poco tranquilo” section of the Scherzo.
from Dvorák’s Piano Quintet, Op. 81 (Figure 2), in which the scale degrees proceed in the simple pattern: 3-2-4-3. The scale degrees of the “March Melody” on beats one and three of the first two measures follow suit: 3-2-4-3. The elaborations on these scale degrees provide shape and forward-moving contour to the melody, whereas their use in Dvorák’s work was as a stagnation of motion and a settling down from an exciting Scherzo furiant. The countersubject—the running 16\textsuperscript{th} notes in the second violins and the winds—at measure 51 (5 before “E”) also functions to provide shape and contour to the melody, and function to lead into the snare drum roll and timpani, which leads into “E”. A blunt snare drum roll, embodying the militaristic nature of the marcato march section that follows, abruptly cuts off this long line of flowing 16th notes. The melody is elevated from the stately tune it was at “D” to an orchestral tutti march section at “E”. The crash cymbal is saved until this point for emphasis; this is the first passage in the piece to which the crash cymbal would add meaningful color.

The next theme introduced is in 6/8 time. The 1\textsuperscript{st} clarinet introduces this theme (which was planned to be the theme for the scherzo in the Symphony) with second clarinet and second bassoon as the accompaniment. The fermata on the last note, along with the fermata in the last note when the flute has the melody immediately after, emphasizes the “Meno mosso” feel. The starting and stopping of the melody passing from the clarinet to the flute is intended to capture the whimsical nature of the passage. The strings then enter with a chromatic ascension of the theme, with a hemiolic figure leading into the orchestral tutti at measure 74 (1 before “F”). The horns provide an ephemeral counter-melody 4 before “G”, in unison to ensure that it able to present itself with enough strength alongside the melody, and not secondary to it.
The horns 1 before the Adagio (2 before “I”) are meant to provide the momentum for the constant triplets found in the Adagio. This downward drop of a fifth in the 2nd horn and the downward drop of the third in the 1st horn are meant to be symbolic of the physical property of potential vs. kinetic energy. As a body falls due to gravity, the potential energy is converted to kinetic energy (the energy of motion) (Giancoli, 2004); thus, the falling of the horns into the minor tonic triad (concert A-minor) is meant to provide the energy for the triplets to begin. The energy given off by the horns settling into the tonic catalyzes the propagation of motion. This occurs again in the bass and 2nd trombone 1 measure before “I” (falling from the E to the A) to provide momentum for the “cello ensemble solo” (an homage to the Wesleyan Cello Ensemble). Instruments slowly begin to make their entrances to create a build and a thickening of texture culminating in the descending thirds in the celli 2 before “J”. The oboes in unison again provide the descending fall to initiate the next passage, a restatement of the “cello ensemble solo” in the key of VI, F major.

At “J”, the violins take over the melody, but require reinforcement by the flutes in octaves with 1st clarinet on the harmony for a brighter color. The woodwinds then exit (save for the 2nd clarinet on the constant triplets) to make way for a warmer, richer texture in the closely spaced brass that overtake the melody. Another spontaneous orchestral tutti initiated by the percussion at 3 before “K” leads into the dramatic climax of the Adagio section.

The Adagio is an example of how orchestrational decisions can create drama within the passage. The section begins in a very low register: the 2nd clarinet is at the bottom register of the instrument, with the bassoon in the same register as the clarinet.
The viola is also at the bottom end of the instrument’s range. The celli and bass are placed in the middle ranges of their instruments, which allows for three things: the maintenance of a relatively warm and rich texture, the assurance that the melody would be heard clearly, and a slightly more strained timbre to emphasize the solemn nature of the passage.

The next main theme is introduced at rehearsal “N” with a clarinet solo. The strings (expect the bass) have a pizzicato accompaniment. The bass was left to play arco to provide a solid basis for the theme, and to fortify crescendi and diminuendi that would be lacking due to the un-sustained notes in rest of the string section. The conclusion to the clarinet solo invokes the virtuosity found in clarinet concerti of the earlier Romantic composers Carl Maria von Weber and Louis Spohr, with the 1st clarinet ascending to the high written B. The violins and 1st oboe reiterate the melody with a thicker accompaniment of woodwinds and timpani.

We turn our attention to rehearsal “T” to observe the next and final recurring theme in the piece, played by the flutes, clarinets, and first horn. The orchestration of this section to include only these instruments provides a cleaner, thinner texture to allow for a feeling of stasis. The simple chord progression follows: IV-iv-I. This chord progression is used at times in the piece to provide temporary and useful moments of clarity and

---

Figure 3: final 5 measures, Puccini’s “Suor Angelica”, piece ends on C-major triad (Octave C’s in strings). Second measure of the system presents a second inversion iv chord (F-minor)
retrospection. The minor iv chord is used in this fashion—to provide a moment of solace, and to create an ethereal aura—by many Romantic composers (most notably Puccini, in the striking and retrospective conclusion to his opera “Suor Angelica”, Figure 3).

This progression is utilized in “A Symphonic Rhapsody” in much the same way. Furthermore, in the 10th measure of rehearsal “T”, we find a subito fortissimo with the brass on the same chord voicings as the woodwinds were a measure before. This is in an attempt to imitate the finale of George Enescu’s “Romanian Rhapsody No. 1”. As seen in Figure 4, the chord harmony remains the same during the final iteration but the trombones, tuba, bassoon, strings, and snare drum are added to increase the fullness of the chord and to introduce another level of dynamics. In the case of 9 and 10 measures after “T”, the chord is played as woodwind tutti alone; the measure after, the brass, strings, and percussion enter to create the feeling of a spontaneous, sudden, and significant growth, filling out the chord and providing a richer, more well rounded and gripping texture.

Figure 4: The final 3 measures of George Enescu’s “Romanian Rhapsody No. 1”.
ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE AND AESTHETICS

As a rhapsody, this piece features a temperamental changing of moods on a spontaneous basis. However, to provide some sort of structure and to ensure the presence of the main themes of the piece, the beginning up until rehearsal “P” was written as a sort of extended expositive orthologue; this portion of the piece introduced the thematic material without much development of the ideas. Other materials were introduced later on in the piece, but placed in a way that it would rise to the same eminence of the material introduced earlier on—for example, at “T”, the VI-vi-I chord progression. Rehearsal “T” follows a long passage of a restatement of the theme introduced by the horns at rehearsal “B”, and follows immediately after a brass and percussion tutti that invokes the feeling of the marcato march from “E”. However, this denial of the expectation of a march segue allows for a stark change in mood with the long, static, sustained chords in the flutes, clarinets, and 1st horn, thus ensuring that this material would strike the listener as noteworthy. This piece is built upon contrasts and juxtapositions; the presentation of simplicity and complexity in succession fuels the temperamental rhapsodic nature of the piece.

The flexibility of the thematic material allows for maximum utilization of it in different circumstances. Also, in keeping with the rhapsodic style of using the material as a foundation to return to in order to gather one’s thoughts, the themes function to serve the purpose of familiarity upon which the ideas built and shaped. For example, the March Melody seen in rehearsal “D” and “E” is presented in a different manner by the oboes and bassoons at “S”, where the melody is utilized playfully and cheerfully with a string pizzicato accompaniment. The blending of sound between the two double reed
instruments provides a beautifully rich, yet light, texture and timbre that captures the whimsical nature of the passage. This melody, previously presented as a militaristic march, exemplifies the pliability necessary for it to be attributed to different moods.

Indeed, further along in the piece, namely at the Maestoso at “HH”, this melody is again used; however, in this circumstance, it is used as a broad exaltation with long sustained chords, inspired in part by Ravel’s orchestration of the “Great Gate of Kiev” of Mussorgsky.

The general inclinations of the piece were inspired by the “Romanian Rhapsody No. 1” of George Enescu, which begins with a single voice in the woodwinds—a solo clarinet—which grows and builds to a lively “Trés Vif” (quarter note= 176 bpm) tutti at the end. This forward momentum is seldom broken, with each passage typically being faster and livelier than the previous one. However, “A Symphonic Rhapsody” strived for a more tumultuous shape of the piece. Juxtaposition of calmer passages with those of driving intensity creates a feeling of anticipation throughout the piece, and lends the air of spontaneity that was desired.

For the driving passages, Enescu’s approach to creating this intensity was modeled. Specifically, influences of his use of heavy notes on the beat coupled with off beat hits (Figure 5) can be seen in at rehearsal “LL”, where the bassoons, trombones, timpani, and bass have heavy accented notes

Figure 5: excerpt from “Romanian Rhapsody No.1” of George Enescu, featuring heavy accented notes in the
alternating between the tonic and the dominant marked “pesante” with the trumpets and violins on the off-beats. This creates the intensity that drives the passage, providing forward momentum, and also providing an arrival point for the previous passages “JJ” and “KK”. In order to add color—color unrelated to instrumental timbre—to the passage, which would otherwise feature relative harmonic stagnation, a Neapolitan Chord is added 4 measures after “LL” (Bb-major harmony in key of A-minor). The addition of the flutes in the 5th and 13th measures of “LL” provides a busy and chaotic feel; although the notes of the flutes are not entirely audible, the running sixteenth note rhythm is discernable through the thicker texture of the rest of the ensemble—this adds to the forward momentum of the section and allows the mood to change from “LL” to 4 after “LL”. The addition of the flutes, along with the roll in the snare drum, gives 4 after “LL” a more connected texture, which contrasts with the relatively detached feeling of the first 4 measures of “LL”.

The overall aesthetic quality the piece embodies is that of contrast—contrasting elements of simplicity with those of complexity: elements of stasis with those of a more chaotic nature. It is interesting to observe the mechanisms by which the transitions from calm to agitated and vice versa function to achieve the same effect of adding new energy. 3 before “K”, is an example of a passage that begins calm and is spontaneously invigorated with the addition of dynamic intensity and the number of instruments playing. This spontaneous broadening of the scope and enhancement of the texture works as a catalyst to provide momentum for the passage to move forward. To study the way in which the same affect is achieved by going in the opposite direction (from a large orchestral tutti to a softer, thinner passage), the passage between “R” and “S” can be
observed. The orchestral build that begins at “R” crests and breaks 7 measures before “S”. The flutes and 1st violin descend and the sustaining instruments have a molto decrescendo. This rapid and stark change in dynamic is intriguing, in that it creates an aura of anticipation; the anticipatory feeling is the energy that is stored in such a moment. The relative quiet juxtaposed to a climax that immediately preceded allows for changes in mood and the ability to continue the piece on a new idea (in this example, to re-present an established melody with a familiar pizzicato accompaniment). This piece explores the energy stored within contrasts in dynamics, utilizing both spontaneous eruptions of sound that provide the energy to proceed with musical ideas and exploiting the potential energy stored within the calming down of a passage to create anticipation and the capacity to introduce a new musical thread.

As homage to the life of a student in the Wesleyan Music Department, it is appropriate for the piece to end with a Presto, moving into Prestissimo in the final 7 measures of the piece—a race to the finish. Indeed, the Maestoso that leads into the Presto is also appropriate, as the stately, grandiose section provides a chance for the listener to collect their thoughts, as this passage evokes a feeling of arrival and achievement (a sentiment hopefully shared by all Seniors in the Music Department). The repeats used at “JJ” and “KK” extend the short thoughts, which would be much too ephemeral if not repeated, as the entrance of the winds at “JJ” is important in recalling the oscillating seconds that were used throughout the piece. At “NN” the opening theme of the piece is played first in the horns, then in the trombones, with a restatement of the transitional passage following at the 5th measure of “NN”. “OO” restates the IV-iv-I chord progression, which again lends a moment of clarity in the midst of the commotion.
5 measures after “PP”, the horns return in unison with the written G-Eb-D, invoking the essence of the theme they introduced at “B”. This theme is repeated and then dilated 4 measures before the Largo for added emphasis and anticipation of the end of the piece. A perfect authentic cadence is reached at the Largo; however, the cello sustains the dominant scale degree (G, in the key of C-minor) and plays a minor variant of the clarinet solo at “N” in this small quasi-cadenza. As the cello reaches the cadence on the tonic, the Prestissimo takes flight, dashing to the end of the piece; the final note—an orchestral tutti unison C—is sustained beneath a fermata, representative of a characteristic conclusion to a Romantic era symphonic piece made famous by the symphonic works of Tchaikovsky and others. The concluding sections (Presto, short Largo, Prestissimo) call to memory many of the main themes used in the piece and tie them together in a manner that also invokes the rushed feeling desired. Most of the concluding passage is written at full score in part to maintain the drive and relentlessly maintain the intensity, but to also provide for one last time a huge contrast—the full orchestra fades away to present a single cellist on a small cadenza, which leads the listener directly back into a full orchestral conclusion.
BALANCING THE ORCHESTRA

“A Symphonic Rhapsody” was premiered by an orchestra of 31 performers, comprised of Wesleyan Students, Faculty, and Community Members—fortunately, the recruited orchestra consisted of highly talented performers. This fact allowed for rehearsals that were aimed at familiarizing the ensemble with the music and working on musical aspects effectively and efficiently. This section of the paper will focus on interpretation of the music, communication of ideas and musical thoughts and conducting the orchestra. We will begin the discussion, however, with the issues that arose during the rehearsals regarding balance of the orchestra and recruitment of players.

The concert performance featured an Alto Saxophone covering the part of the 1st French horn. Although the piece was originally scored for two Horns, only one horn player was recruited as none other could be found—furthermore, this horn player was a specialized low horn player (2nd and 4th horn parts). Being that the 1st Horn part is crucial to the piece, an alternative to the 1st horn was necessary; after searching for a suitable brass instrument as a replacement proved unfruitful, the Alto Saxophone was brought in to cover the 1st Horn part. According to Henry Brandt’s method of instrumental classification, the horn and the saxophone both share the same number for their volume/fullness with regards to balancing the winds, which is 2—as opposed to 1 for the flute, clarinet, oboe, and bassoon, and a 4 for trumpets, trombones and tubas (Brant, 2009). The Alto Saxophone shares some of the same timbres with the French horn in their mellow tones and rounded sound, and although the ideal situation would be to have the saxophone play the lower part and the horn play the upper part (to sound as two horns, according to Brant, 2009), by necessity the circumstances were switched with the
Saxophone playing above the horn. The resulting texture exposed the saxophone’s unique timbre in a way that it did not sound as an imitation of a horn. Had the saxophone been under, however, it would result in a beautiful blending of the sounds with the horn timbre emerging as dominant. Along the lines of missing instruments, the concert featured only one bassoonist although the score calls for two. Although an appropriate substitution might have included a viola or cello covering the part, it was decided that the 2nd bassoon part was not immensely important to the piece, and substituting a viola or cello for it would not be cost effective, given the number of string players recruited (an issue addressed below). Another anomaly in the orchestra was the presence of two 2nd clarinet players: a result of a double-booking misunderstanding and an enthusiasm from both players, which led to unwillingness from both parties to quit the ensemble. Since both were adamant about participating, the both were allowed to remain so long as they were aware and conscious of the rest of the ensemble and careful not to throw off the balance.

The next issue to be addressed is the string section. The string section consisted of four Violin I, four Violin II, two Violas, three Celli, and a single Double Bass. This posed quite a problem in the earlier rehearsals; the percussion and the brass overpowered the small string section in orchestral tutti’s and other generally fuller sections. The brass, although a much smaller section than a more standard Romantic ensemble of 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, and a tuba (as found in the Dvorák and Tchaikovsky Symphonies), still greatly overpowered the strings. Some of the thickly textured brass passages drowned out the strings to a point where their playing had no effect on the output of the sound. The string timbre, however, was necessary to supplement these
passages; for example, at rehearsal “AA”, the strings provide the chaotic texture with the
sixteenth note iterations of each note. Beneath the brass, this was barely audible, and
although the shape of this countersubject was heard due to the 1st trombone an octave
above the celli and double bass, the sixteenth note texture in the strings that was meant to
provide an even more compelling forward motion was lost—the entrance of the violins
and violas 4 measures after “AA” aided a small amount, but was still relatively drowned
out by the brass.

This issue that presented itself was a conflict between diminishing the brass sound
to provide better balance to the ensemble, and maintaining the “blastissimo-like”
intensity of the full brass section at these passages. As it turned out, the resolution of the
balance issue would also resolve the issue of maintaining intensity. How this passage is
written—and as it was interpreted and performed by the players—is orchestrationally
unbalanced. However, slightly decreasing the volume of the brass so that the
accompaniment is audible diminishes the intensity of the brass section, but also
exponentially increases the intensity of motion through introducing the presence of the
persistent underlying sixteenth notes in the strings. This balancing of the orchestra
brought character to this passage (and others like it) to rise above the merely bombastic
nature by adding color and greater depth of texture.

The small size of the ensemble also forced an active balancing of the percussion.
The piece typically utilizes the percussion section as a unit—the snare drum, bass drum,
and crash cymbals seldom play unaccompanied by the timpani or by one another. This
directly challenges Henry Brant’s rule of having tuned percussion and non-tuned
percussion playing at the same time, but the desired effect of a “percussive unit” called
for this sort of instrumental configuration. The percussion was meant to add character; the section enters and exits to provide emphasis and color to passages that require it, and to also provide homage to my time as a percussionist in the wind ensemble. However, in early rehearsals, the percussion posed a threat to the balance of the orchestra as a loud domineering entity that washed over the entire ensemble, rendering many of the other instruments virtually inaudible (strings mostly, due to the small size of the string section). The percussion section was asked to be sensitive to the size of the ensemble, and to ensure that any and all underlying instrumentation could be heard. Furthermore, a downsize the percussion parts to decrease the presence of the percussion throughout the piece was advised; however, upon hearing the section with sensitivity and balance in mind, it was evident that the percussion acted as a character in the narrative of the piece, providing dramatic emphasis in those passages that required it most. Overwhelming percussion would not be ideal in any situation, but a complete lack of percussion in those passages most likely would have led to a texture too thin to provide the drama and contrast that this piece calls for.

Overall, the balance of the orchestra was meant to allow certain instruments of the orchestra stand out from the rest. This organization and interpretation—and the communication thereof—required extensive rehearsal. The piece was rehearsed for a total of approximately 10 hours before being performed. In this time, interpretive ideas were crafted and shared to form the basis for creating a broad and universal understanding among the performers. The next section delves into the rehearsal process and the preparation of the piece.
PREPARATION, INTERPRETATION, CONDUCTING

We focus our attention now on the rehearsal of the piece—namely, this next section will elucidate the details of interpretation and conducting. The interpretation was a collective effort; indeed, single sided interpretation and creative dictatorship on the part of the conductor leads to discord with the musicians, who strive for their voices to be heard in the creative process, as indicated on a larger scale by the nature of Ricardo Muti’s resignation from La Scala\(^1\) Opera House (Horowitz, 2005). The process in rehearsing and interpreting “A Symphonic Rhapsody” was in a large part a collaborative effort. For example, the violins at the Prestissimo, 7 measures before the end of the piece suggested, rightfully so, that the separate articulation of the notes instead of legato slurs of the large sixteenth note runs would more effectively convey a rushed feeling. Furthermore, an understanding and familiarity of the main expository thematic material allowed for players to understand which instruments needed to be heard at specific passages; for example, 5 measures after “PP”, it is important for the theme in the horns to come through over the rhythmic accompaniment in the upper strings. This understanding of the thematic material allowed the orchestra to ensure that this passage was consistent with the thematic arc of the entire piece, and not just a random rhythmic segment.

An important aspect of interpreting and rehearsing the piece was the difference between level of performance of the actual written notes and technique, and the directionality of the piece—the desired destination and the overall narrative arc of the piece. Christopher Adey, in his book on orchestral performance, states:

\(^{1}\) The musicians of La Scala voted for Muti’s resignation after not being able to continue with his dictatorial grasp on the creative process of making music. Muti agreed to resign, stating “the hostility manifested in such a coarse way by persons with whom [he has] worked for almost 20 years makes it really impossible to carry on with a relationship of collaboration” in his statement issued by La Scala in 2005.
“It is very important that the rehearsal of any ensemble, whether amateur or professional, orchestra or chamber group, should not be approached from the point of view of instilling an interpretation, but rather from that of moulding one. While interpretation will remain the prime factor in any musical statement, it must be viewed from a far larger perspective the mere choice of tempi and rigid, predetermined design. Rehearsal…is not so much to determine how something goes as where it goes. If the essential framework of familiarity, technical ability, style, dynamic variation and sound in successfully instilled, then tempi, rubato, accompanying levels and dramatic influence can all be subtly adjusted within the context of the performance” (Adey, 2012).

Indeed, the truly refined sound and nature of upper level music making stems from the ability of the players to shape the piece along its musical contours to provide directionality and progressive and appropriate motion throughout. Making music for the purpose of moving or arriving at a particular spot is the true nature of interpretation (Matthay, 1913). This sentiment, written by Matthay in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, still holds true today; this is testament to the role of interpretation in the synthesis of music and the importance of forward momentum and movement to a predetermined area as a point of arrival.

“A Symphonic Rhapsody” consists of many points of arrival, the largest of which is seen in the Presto leading into the Largo (mm. 497). The directionality of the preceding passage points towards this arrival with an increasingly and relentlessly thickening texture and a persistent rhythmic complexity beginning on the 5\textsuperscript{th} measure of
“PP”. The performance interpretation of this was to pick up the tempo at 5 after “PP” ever so slightly to simulate the rushed feeling of forward motion and directionality towards the arrival at the Largo. This rushed feeling is also corroborated by the dotted-eighth-note sixteenth-note figures that help to propel the rhythmic motion onwards.

The areas of “arrival” were generally understood to be climactic moments in their respective passages; however, there were a few passages in which this “arrival” was anticipated but denied. For example 6 measures before rehearsal “P” presents a very strong cadential 6/4 landing on a V⁷ chord 5 measures before “P”. This V⁷ is extended an extra measure, drawing out the anticipation, which is suddenly changed when, one measure later, the chord changes to a C-degenerated ⁷ chord. This change in anticipation from an expectation of a tonic cadence to an expectation of modulatory sequences and a change in mood (indeed, this is the transition into the “development section orthologue”) was rehearsed extensively, mainly for the accelerando 2 measures before “P”, but also for the familiarity with the change in color and character. This familiarity allowed an understanding of the attempted mood change, to which the performers—only four instruments at this point—to soften the pizzicato, and then for the woodwinds to come in one measure later on a softer attack, creating a mysterious characteristic in the winds. This unspoken understanding of the direction of this passage emerged from a thorough understanding of the general arc of the piece on the part of the players, and to a certain extent body language.

Conducting added another level of complexity to the progress—having taken the conducting course with Angel Gil Ordoñez two years prior, I was a bit out of practice conducting such a large ensemble. The performers’ ability—and willingness—to
cooperate and follow the baton helped to alleviate this; however, sections with abrupt changes in tempo and meter (including 9 measures after “D”, the accelerando 2 measures before “P”, the transition into the Presto 4 measures before “JJ”, and the lead in to the Prestissimo 7 measures before the end) required much attention and an even higher level of communication between the players and myself. Large, exaggerated movements of the arms and a more open gesture (meaning a larger 3-dimensional area in which the gesture occurred) helped quite a lot. These areas of stark changes in tempo, character, and meter occur typically at areas where a only a few instruments are playing.

To cope with these scenarios, in addition to the larger exaggerated gestures, I found helpful suggestions in a recorded master-class with Valery Gergiev published in 2002 by the BBC\textsuperscript{2}. In it he states (humorously) to his student: “If you like a girl, do not look at everyone else on the street…she will disappear…you have to follow her!” in response to the student’s cues to the orchestra. This stuck with me for unexplainable reasons, but helped tremendously in delivering helpful cues to the orchestra. Namely, in the passages with stark changes, repositioning the body to face the performers that required guidance proved highly effective in getting the message across—indeed, the performers who are not playing during these passages do not require terribly much guidance, and thus measures should be taken to ensure maximum visibility of the conducting for the performers who are important in the success of these passages.

\textsuperscript{2} “The Master and His Pupil” Master Class documentary by the BBC filmed September 2002, three students prepared two works by Scriabin to conduct the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. This particular quotation comes from the segment of the documentary in which Alexis Soriano was conducting.
REFLECTION ON LIVE PERFORMANCE

The intended affect of the concert as a whole was that of somberness—not a debilitating somberness, but one that would inspire introspection and pensiveness. The pairing of “A Symphonic Rhapsody” with Brahms’s “Clarinet Quintet” provided a larger scope of Romantic Music (larger than if the Rhapsody was performed alone). The darker themes of both pieces complement one another due to the nature of their deliverances. The Brahms offers very subtle, yet highly effective nuances to build tension and produce musical and emotional contours. This is possible in smaller ensembles settings, where subtleties can be used to convey ideas due to each instrument being highly exposed. This allows the audience to hear the subtleties in the nuances (consciously or otherwise), to successfully create an effective conveyance of musical ideas. This contrasts to the larger scale of “A Symphonic Rhapsody” in which any subtleties in the score and by the performer are generally muddled and unheard, the exception being in solo and relatively exposed passages. Instead, larger ensembles such as this orchestra require a more direct and transparent method of delivering the musical ideas—the subtleties in this case come not from nuances but in the use of the instrumentations and colors available in the ensemble. In this way, the contrast between the Brahms Quintet and “A Symphonic Rhapsody” is interesting—very similar musical ideas and characteristics were presented in very different ways regarding nuance, subtlety, and ensemble size.

The acknowledgement to Nadya Potemkina in the concert program thanks her for “reminding me of the power and beauty of orchestral performance”. This section is a discussion of that beauty—more generally, the beauty of live performance. It is absolutely fascinating how an ensemble comprised of 5 performers can fill a concert hall
in terms of fullness and energy to the same extent as a larger ensemble, namely a symphony orchestra. Energy is exuded in many facets of live performance—it comes from the visual aspect of the actions of playing instruments being translated into sound, from the movement of performers with each other as communication, from the sonority of the concert hall and the blending of overtones, from the in-the-moment feeling achieved from a one-time shot at an astonishing performance. Live musical performance furthermore provides the chance for an interaction between performers and audience members. The performance provides the time and venue for a sharing of ideas and stories; in his TED lecture from 2009, Itay Talgam wonderfully articulates the beauty and depth of this sharing of stories. He states:

“The joy is about enabling other people’s stories to be heard at the same time. You have the story of the orchestra as a professional body. You have the story of the audience as a community. You have the stories of the individuals in the orchestra and in the audience. And then you have other stories unseen—the people who built the concert hall, the people who made all those beautiful instruments—and all those stories are being heard at the same time.” (Talgam, 2009)

Of course, this is a very optimistic view of live performance, but perhaps an idea to strive to whenever preparing for a concert. The interaction between the performers and the audience is a strong one—it is the responsibility of the performers to convey ideas to the audience in the form of music. It is then, the responsibility of the audience to listen, receive, respond, and react to the thoughts and moods that have been presented. It is a dynamic interaction that makes way for the relationship between performers and
audience members that consists of conveyance and reception. This ideal is one that inspired this thesis concert; it was a desire to achieve communication without words, and to synthesize a relationship between the audience and the performers. The story of the success of this concert lies in the realization that the performers played, the audience listened, and that the energy that filled the concert hall was a collaborative effort between the two parties.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CLOSING REMARKS

“A Symphonic Rhapsody” provides a capstone to my career as an Undergraduate Music student at Wesleyan; the entire experience has been extremely gratifying and informative. The growth I have experienced as a musician and as a person through this process remains unparalleled by any other event in my college career. The function of the piece as homage to my time as a Music student gives my college experience closure by providing a musically documented account of my journey.

It is notable that at the concert the orchestra played better than it ever had during rehearsals. This is due, perhaps, to the adrenaline stimulated by the “performance-day-jitters”, or perhaps due to the excitement that comes from the presence of an audience to perform for. In any event, I would like to state my infinite gratitude to the performers for rising to the occasion and for performing “A Symphonic Rhapsody” with the utmost dedication and enthusiasm. I also extend my sincerest thanks to Neely Bruce for the time and effort he has invested in helping me achieve my goal, and for providing wisdom and guidance throughout this arduous process. Lastly, I would like to thank the Music Department as a whole for providing students with the priceless opportunity to undertake projects such as this and for supporting us every step of the way.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


“The Master and His Pupil”, Dir. Sonia Herman Dolz. Perf. Valery Gergiev. BBC’

2003. Documentary Film

APPENDIX

A: Concert Program- Cover and Acknowledgements
Choe 29

B: Concert Program: Program and Performer List

C: Score: "A Symphonic Rhapsody"
Rhapsody

Richard Choe

©Richard Choe, 2014
Rhapsody
Rhapsody
Rhapsody
Rhapsody
Rhapsody
Rhapsody