Dark Challenger

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DARK CHALLENGER

by

Adam J. Benefield

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

The University of Memphis
December 2023
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Delaney, whose love, patience, and support helped me get through the duration of this degree. She is also the very source of inspiration for the piece. The title itself is derived from her name. Of Irish origin, Delaney means dark challenger.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of my teachers, professors, and mentors, both former and present, for their hard work and dedication in regard to my education. I could not have done this without any of you. You all know who you are! I would also like to especially thank my doctoral committee for their time, efforts, and help with getting me over the finish line, Dr. Kamran Ince (Chair), Dr. Jack Cooper (cognate professor), Dr. Mahir Cetiz, Dr. Janet K. Page, and Dr. Jeremy Orosz. A huge shout out goes out to my friends and family, especially my wife, for their endless love and support.
Abstract

*Dark Challenger* is perhaps my most personal composition to date. Since the title of the piece is named after my wife Delaney, I looked to both her musical background and my own musical background for inspiration in order to represent the journey of two different people with vastly different personalities coming together and falling in love. I employed the use of musical topics to represent these different backgrounds, like when Gustav Mahler used Klezmer music in his compositions, representing his Jewish background, or when Sting used jazz and hip-hop in “Englishman In New York,” signifying its New York setting. The topics that I used from Delaney’s background are flamenco rhythms and harmonies, Afro-Cuban rhythms, pop music, Broadway, and Disney Renaissance. From my own background I used contemporary music, classical, jazz, rock, metal, and film.

Also occurring at various points throughout the piece is a theme, a Delaney theme if you will. It first appears in m. 38, and it reappears several more times, in mm. 221, 227, 233, and 348. It can also be heard in mm. 392, 396, and 400 where it interrupts the return of the B section theme. I think of this theme similarly to how Hector Berlioz used his *idée fixe* in *Symphonie Fantastique* to represent his muse, the actress Harriet Smithson, only mine is less obsessive. When the Delaney theme first appears, it is quite strong and intense, but later returns in a softer, warmer manner before returning to its original fierceness.
Dark Challenger

By Adam J. Benefield

For Symphony Orchestra

2023
Dark Challenger

C Score
(Octave transposition still in effect for piccolo, glockenspiel, crotales,
xylophone, contrabassoon, and double bass.)

Instrumentation:
  Piccolo
  2 Flutes
  2 Oboes
  English Horn
  2 Clarinets in Bb
  Bass Clarinet in Bb
  2 Bassoons
  Contrabassoon

  4 Horns in F
  3 Trumpets in C (3 doubles on Picc. Tpt. in Bb)
  2 Trombones
  Bass Trombone
  Tuba

Timpani (Large Chinese cymbal needed for roll on timpani head)

Percussion 1
  Bell Tree, Drum Set, 2 Medium-Large Suspended Cymbals,
  Medium Woodblock, Bass Drum, Tam-tam, Wind Chimes

Percussion 2
  Crotales (2 Octaves), Medium-Large Suspended Cymbal,
  Chimes, Vibraslap, Xylophone

Percussion 3
  Chimes, Glockenspiel, Vibraphone (2 Bows Needed), Brake Drum,
  Congas, Medium Triangle, Tambourine, Whip, Large Cowbell

Piano (guitar pick needed for strumming)
  Harp

  Violin I
  Violin II
  Viola
  Cello
  Double Bass

Duration: 17"
Program Notes

*Dark Challenger* is perhaps my most personal composition to date. The title is derived from my wife's name, Delaney. Of Irish origin, Delaney means dark challenger. *Dark Challenger* tells a story of two different people with vastly different personalities coming together and falling in love. To illustrate this, I incorporated musical topics from both of our musical backgrounds. The topics I used from Delaney’s background are flamenco, Afro-Cuban, pop music, Broadway, and Disney Renaissance. From my own I used contemporary, classical, jazz, rock, metal, and film music. Also, at various points throughout the work, there appears a Delaney theme. It is first heard in m. 38 where it is bold and fierce. It reappears many more times, first in a softer, warmer manner, and then again with its original fierceness. I thought of this theme similarly to how Hector Berlioz thought of his idée fixe in his *Symphonie Fantastique*, only mine is less obsessive.
Percussion Setup

Conductor

Orchestra

Percussion 1

Timpani

Cymbal

Gong

Tambourine

Ride

Snare Drum

Percussion 2

Cymbal

Tambourine

Ride

Snare Drum

Percussion 3

Vibraphone

Celesta

Organ