

***Symphonic Scenes from Romeo and Juliet*** was composed in 2005 on a commission from the Kansas State University Symphony Band, Dr. Frank Tracz Director. The work is dedicated to this great ensemble and its conductor who have been performing and commissioning my music on and off since 1997! When Frank approached me about commissioning me again (he had already commissioned *OLYMPUS* in 1999), I presented him with proposals for three possible pieces. Frank was most intrigued with ***Romeo and Juliet*** so that set my creative wheels in motion.

***Symphonic Scenes from Romeo and Juliet*** does not seek to delve into the entire Shakespeare tragedy but instead focuses on only five events in the play. The work is about fifteen minutes in length and is scored for standard American concert band. It is cast in five movements.

The first movement, *I. The Brawl* (Act 1, Scene 1), depicts the strife between the Capulets and the Montagues. The music features abrupt changes in harmonic systems and melodic materials. Minor chords are pitted against dissonant and modal harmonic strands intermingled with eerie chromaticism symbolizing the restless nature of a street fight.

As expected, the second movement, *II. The Masked Ball* (Act 1, Scene 4), is an impassioned study in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time with brief excursions into a duple feel. Even though the mood is mostly bright and happy there are occasional outbursts in the minor mode (m. 28) which hint at Romeo's sense that his appearance at the ball is the beginning of his (and Juliet's) tragic demise. Midway through the movement a brief, busy, and more subdued section in duple feel (m. 95) denotes that the servants are working feverishly to prepare the hall for the great ball. Immediately after this, we return to the triple feel with ever increasing passion and flirtations (m. 115). Soon the woodblock enters and shortly after that the movement reaches a feverish pitch. The waltz rhythm disappears and we find ourselves once again in a duple feel as the lovers embrace and kiss to impassioned music (m. 157). The waltz later returns and the movement ends with a recap of various thematic ideas.

Many of the most important scenes in the play take place very late at night or very early in the morning and *III. The Balcony Scene* (Act 2 - Prologue - Scene 1) is no exception. This third movement is the delicate nocturne of the set and features various solo instruments. Another key feature is the frequent dialogue between a high pitched praise and one intoned by lower pitched instruments. This is symbolic of the action in the play where the lovers take turns expressing their thoughts about each other ("O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo...But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.")

*IV. Queen Mab's Dreams* generally brings comic relief to the composition. In Act 1, Scene 4, Mercutio delivers a dazzling speech about a fairy queen mab who rides her wagon (walnut carriage pulled by insect steeds) through the night bringing dreams to sleepers. The dreams she brings generally do not bring out the best sides of the dreamers but instead confirm the vices that they are addicted to - for example, greed, violence, or lust. Mercutio's description of Queen Mab is complete nonsense, albeit vivid and highly colorful. The music "sparkles" with delicate brightness as we progress through contrasting dreams. The percussion instruments used are mostly of the delicate variety and the brass are largely in mutes. Lovers dream of love (trombone glissandi signal flirtations); each successive dream descends more into deeper depravity (macabre music in the opening and periodically throughout the movement); and finally when soldiers dream of "cutting foreign throats", the band pulls out all the stops and breaks into an ultra brutal and barbaric loud dance!

The Finale, *V. Death of the Lovers*, is patterned after the tragic sequence of events which leads to the demise of the lovers: First, Juliet drinks a potion that makes her appear dead. Thinking her dead, Romeo then drinks a poison that actually kills him. Seeing him dead, Juliet stabs herself through the heart with a dagger. The work opens with trombones, bass drum, and gong accompanying a mournful alto sax solo (this scene takes place in a churchyard). Augmented

chords (m. 16) symbolize the eerie states of mind of the lovers. This is contrasted with more dissonant outbursts (m. 19) as each finds the other "dead". Romantic outpourings (m.24) represent the laments of each of the lovers. Finally, after both lovers are dead, a peaceful and ascending line signals the lovers' wish to unite for eternity. There is then a bit of triumphant music brought back from a previous movement, and, since Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy, the music turns dark once again and the whole piece ends in a loud chord of anguish!!

The material for the program notes of *Symphonic Scenes from Romeo and Juliet* is drawn from both the Shakespeare tragedy as well as from the "Spark Notes" study guide to the play.

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