

When I started composing music in high school, I had no clue that this hobby would lead to a course of study and eventually the opportunity to present my music as my University of South Carolina Honors College Thesis. In considering what I was going to write for my thesis, I knew I wanted to write a piece of music for a large ensemble, but with that came the choice of writing for orchestra or wind band. I ultimately decided that writing for wind band would be more challenging and push me as a student. As a student, I have learned a lot about writing for orchestra in a formal educational setting, but have had little formal training of writing for wind band. When I decided to write for wind band, I had to confront the issue of how to use the wide array of instrument colors associated with wind band. As soon as I put a note down, that note will have a color, timbre, and musical expectations, affecting not only that note but also the rest of the piece.

I first began writing *Sonority* on a whim: a rare instance of inspiration that usually eludes me. I began physically writing the piece in a way that I rarely do, using pencil and paper. The inspiration for this piece came from a fragmented idea from “Farben” from Arnold Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra*. In this movement, Schoenberg writes a slowly changing harmony but maintains interest by mixing timbres of instrumental colors around notes and chord tones. I aimed to use this idea at the beginning of my piece but on the same pitch class rather than a chord. I wanted sounds sneaking in and the colors shifting around, much like Schoenberg. I started writing the piece by sketching out small sections that eventually became the beginning of the piece. Once I had the beginning established, I started formulating a melody that would be introduced part by part throughout the opening section. From there I decided on a general shape and harmonic

structure for the piece: F – Bb – Eb – Ab – Gb – all the way back to F. (I only ended up using the beginning of this progression for the piece.)

This initial musical idea is not fully realized of *Sonority* until measure 30. Even so, I did not use my full first sketch in its entirety; rather, I took parts of the first sketch and used them to create the phrases that comprise the first section of the piece. The concept of orchestrating color around the same pitches is an idea that helped me to develop the piece, and very much influenced how I structured the beginning of the work. I wanted the colors at the beginning to be vibrant and loud, transforming as the piece progresses, to melding timbres which create a more complex and darker tone that is less vibrant but still very interesting.

Recently, I gained new insight into how I might construct music. I started considering music as a collection of colors and sounds rather than simply melodies and harmonies. I developed this idea by listening to percussion ensemble works. Some of today's percussion ensemble music is centered on the quality of the sound, rather than the actual attack of the sound. This concept changed my perspective on creating my own music, and much of *Sonority* is about how sounds interact together and what the effect sounds like. This does not mean I did not focus on harmony or melody; but rather I tried to think about writing music from a broader perspective.

I knew from the onset that I wanted the piece to be in an arch form, and I worked to realize this arch form through the range of the harmonies, texture, and color perspective used in the piece. I wanted these ranges to expand throughout the piece. I began with brighter timbres that progressively get darker and darker, while still trying to maintain vibrant colors throughout. I wanted the texture to start small and quiet, progressively

getting more agitated and louder. I utilized an ABA form to structure these ideas. I used some parts of my beginning sketch to form a melody that I wanted to hint at in the A section, and finally reveal in the B section. This melody is a chorale, which I harmonized, in one of my beginning sketches.

After I had an initial idea, I struggled with to complete the score because I was overwhelmed with all the different instrument parts I had to write. After talking with my Thesis Director, Dr. John Fitz Rogers, I realized that the individual parts and musical lines do not matter as much as the overall composite formed from those parts. The progression of musical ideas throughout *Sonority* was more important than what any particular part would be. With help from Dr. Rogers, I created a short score to sketch out the entirety of the piece, so I could focus on the important musical moments. This short score was similar to a condensed score: I used four staves to start sketching out the piece from the beginning. In order to get a feel for how I wanted the piece to actually progress, I also drew some sketches to visually represent the form. These drawings on the score represented specific musical moments that I wanted but had not yet written out. This and the short score helped me complete a first draft of the piece. I didn't compose linearly; rather I blocked out the musical moments where I knew I wanted them to fall and then left dead space in between those moments.

Building off the arch form, one of the major organizational forces of this piece is the idea of a wave. I tried to implement this wave idea as many ways as possible, using every aspect of the wind band, as well as using various compositional and orchestrational elements like rhythm, number of players, dynamics, colors, timbres, etc. I also incorporated this idea by trying to blur the rhythmic progression throughout the work. At the beginning

of *Sonority*, I originally wrote the horns starting every whole note, but that seemed a little too straightforward and did not fit with my goal of creating wave ideas musically. Instead, I drew on the idea of waves by having the horns crescendo every time they come in, which makes it feel like a wave coming in at the beach. To expand the concept further, I changed the length of the sustained notes by increasing and decreasing their durations, like the tide coming in or going out. The horn and trumpet notes at the beginning increase in duration at a regular place. At the end, the saxophones and trumpets repeat this tidal idea, but in a more natural way. The durations of the notes increase and decrease rather irregularly, so instruments attack frequently, then once again recede back into the texture.

Another tool I used to structure the piece is the number three, which created a unifying force to connect the piece together. I took this idea from the great composers Hindemith and Beethoven. For example, in Hindemith's *Sonata for Flute*, Hindemith repeats musical ideas three times back to back, to emphasize them as important elements.

Hindemith no doubt took this musical power of three from Beethoven himself. In the first movement of *Symphony No. 5*, the opening musical idea that will form the rest of the piece is three short repeated notes, followed by a fourth longer note that is the musical interval of a third away. Beethoven scores two tutti iterations of motive, with the third iteration expanding out into the A section of the movement. *Sonority* is divided into three sections creating an ABA form. In the first A section, I use three separate Tubular Bell strikes to separate this section further into 3 parts, each gaining momentum into the B section. In measures 60-64, three articulated concert E flat major chords are used to indicate the beginning of the B section. The B section itself is also divided into three parts: euphonium and horn solos, the low brass march, and the full chorale sections. Before the ending

section, or the recapitulation of the A material, three Tubular Bell strikes announce the end of the B section. There are a few times I discard my rule of three, such as measures 46-59, in which there are four instrumental entrances: horns, trombones, trumpets, then woodwinds. The ending section also has four horn entrances restating the A themes, rather than just three. In both instances, I think the breaking of the rule of three keeps the interest going and adds finality to both A sections that the piece demands.

Another composer I borrowed compositional ideas from was Charles Ives. In many of his pieces, he has numerous melodic ideas in mind, but reveals them bit by bit throughout his works. He uses a melody as a motivic idea to structure the piece and rarely shows the melody in its entirety until the very end, much the fifth movement “Allegro Molto Vivace” from *Symphony No. 2*. In this movement, Ives hints at melodic elements that he never reveals in its full form until the very end. He announces the end of the work with a tutti section in which the orchestra is playing all the motivic elements harmoniously, indicating a finality to the Symphony. Like Ives, I also consider myself a composer driven by melodic motives. I created a melody in this piece that I fragmented and introduced piece by piece until the whole melody is revealed at the B section. This melody is also broken up to create fragments that form the background accompaniment material. Some of the harmony and rhythmic ostinati are derived from the melody.

To further create wave textures, I utilized different rhythmic techniques. In addition to making durations of sustained notes progressively longer or shorter at the beginning and end, I used this idea of change of duration throughout the piece in various ways. Like the horns and the trumpets in the beginning, the E-flat major chords in measures 60-64 increase in duration with each note. The melody in the Euphonium solo at the beginning of

the B section increases in duration in measures 65-71 with the repeated motive E-flat – B-Flat – C. Also, in measures 78-93 I used a rhythmic canon between the low brass and the trumpets, meaning the low brass play the melody twice as slow as the trumpets. This contributes to a wave effect, with the trumpets's melodic arc pushing out of the texture of the low brass's melodic arc, like a wave crashing over another wave in the ocean.

I encountered several problems that I had to work through while writing a piece of this size. I struggled with breathing for the parts, which is something that has plagued me as a composer, despite being a wind player myself. While composing, I do not always consider when the performers will need to breathe. However, in a piece that is centered on sounds and textures rather than melody, controlling the space that will be left empty by the performers while breathing is extremely important. To help both the players and myself, I strategically placed eighth rests as a guide for the players, allowing the players to breathe while keeping the integrity of the work as a whole. I also considered when to leave time for brass players to recover. While thinking about brass chops, I had to keep in mind that brass players cannot play for too long, nor especially loud or high, without having a couple seconds of break to recover. This knowledge naturally affected the way I orchestrated the piece. For instance, in the first chorale section, I originally had the trombones playing the counter melody that the horns now have. I decided that it would be a little too taxing to have the trombones come from a loud, sustained, and lengthy passage, to playing a countermelody, only to then play a loud full band section at measure 103.

The instrument group with which I struggled most was percussion. Percussion can either be used as their own group, but in bigger ensembles, percussion is often used to reinforce the sounds of the winds and strings. In addition, percussion instruments are the

group I studied the least in my formal educational. There are so many options for sound in percussion; I was a little overwhelmed with all the timbral possibilities I could create. I tried to use percussion to add texture and fullness to the wind sound, but I am sure that I could have utilized these instruments more throughout the work.

Since I am a flutist, my early music education was focused on melodies and singular musical lines, making it easier for me to compose lines and melodies. I am a melodic and motivic driven composer, so melody and harmony take precedence for me, but this piece pushes those boundaries and ventures into more textures. I tend to write music in layers, delegating certain instruments to certain roles (i.e. sustain, rhythmic texture, melody, etc.), which runs counter to the focusing on textures. I could have individual parts more interesting by not delegating a single role to only one instrument. Meaning I could intertwine different roles, such as foreground, background, and sustain in one instrument line, therefore breaking up the musical ideas and blurring the textures. This is something that I am aware of and will continue to work on.

Perhaps my biggest challenge was how to orchestrate the piece. Orchestration has been an interesting puzzle, because as a composer, I have to balance the musical needs of the piece with how exciting a part would be to play. Orchestration is not a democracy, and not every instrument can play all the time. It is a delicate balance between the needs of the piece and engaging the performer. If the performers do not feel engaged with the material, they might not perform it to the fullest potential. I also needed to be careful not to over-score any section. I tried to maintain the integrity of the different musical ideas and keep the pacing of the piece, while not fully scoring every gesture. If I over-scored from the

outset, then I would have nothing left to show the audience later in the piece. Because of this, I chose to scale down several scoring choices throughout my compositional process.

It is interesting to see how one can use different instruments in ways that are unexpected. For instance, in measures 111-120, the saxophones are doubled with muted trumpet, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Trumpet articulating the beginnings of the notes at the peak of the wave to help reinforce this wave-like idea. Combining the different timbres of the saxophones and the muted trumpets helped to create an uncommon sound. Without much experience knowing what things will sound like when I score them, it is often hard to tell what will actually be the end result. MIDI playback does a good job at presenting basic ideas of how the music will sound, but it won't show the true depth and colors of the sounds that will be presented.

Over the course of a year, *Sonority* has come to life. From early melodic ideas to musical sketches and now my final piece, this compositional journey has taught me a lot about my own writing and the processes involved in band writing. My emphasis on instrumental colors and waves of sound guided my writing as I worked to complete this piece. Those key concepts helped to shape the melody, rhythm, and form of this piece. Writing *Sonority* was certainly an educational experience for me, and I am proud to present this piece as a representation of my work over the past year and as the final step to my Honors Thesis.