ABSTRACT

Remergence

Alex Ayala, M.M.

Mentor: Scott McAllister, D.M.A.

Remergence is a piece for orchestra, about nine-and-a-half minutes in length, that I wrote in the first two semesters of composition lessons with Dr. McAllister at Baylor University and finished editing in the third semester. It is a non-programmatic piece of music whose subject matter is made up solely of musical ideas. This piece, like all of my music, holds its greatest meaning as a manifestation of my musical beliefs: that a piece of music is at its most significant when there is a clear structure which produces dramatic moments and a logical sequence of ideas, that these ideas stem from as few sources as possible to unify the work and presented in different contexts to add greater meaning to them, and to achieve all this with a good deal of polyphony and craft. *Remergence* is perhaps the clearest and most successful manifestation thus far.

Remergence

by

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A Thesis

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Background Information

It was decided I would write a piece for orchestra during one of my meetings with Dr. McAllister in the Fall of 2017. I had entered Baylor as a viola performance major and had not composed much in the past several months. Wishing not to abandon composition completely, I arranged a meeting with Dr. McAllister requesting that he look over my music, not expecting that this meeting would eventually lead to my decision to switch my major to composition. A combination of Dr. McAllister's encouragement and a growing dissatisfaction with the viola prompted me to make the switch, and we then began to discuss which of my pieces to include for the application to the composition program. It was suggested to me that I should write a piece for orchestra, both for the application and for my continued growth as a composer, and so I began in the middle of that semester.

Unfortunately, since I was out of practice with composing and it was the first orchestra piece I had ever tried to write, it was slow work. By the time I had to submit the application I had completed only the introduction and first theme of the work, and this is what I submitted along with a few other pieces. After that point, my primary motivation for finishing the piece aside from wanting to get some more practice writing for large ensemble was to use it in applications for summer festivals the following year and,

eventually, for DMA applications. I finished all the editing work early in the Spring semester of 2019.

The title of the piece comes from a diagram that I had to prepare for Dr. Lai as part of my assistantship. It was a diagram illustrating (as best as I could understand) the emergence and re-emergence of Chinese music in the Western world, and I saved the file on my computer as "Remergence Diagram". This incident occurred at near the same time that I was finishing up my piece and was attempting to think up a title. I chose "Remergence" because it has an approximation of meaning yet, as it is not a real word, it has no true meaning. An aside: my previous composition teacher during my undergraduate studies, like myself, was an absolutist; he seldom wrote pieces based on or even inspired by programmatic ideas. Yet, he still gave his pieces pseudo-programmatic titles because he had come to realize that the winners of composition competitions often had interesting titles, and it seemed they had often won more on the basis of their program than on their music. The advice he gave me was, if a piece was non-programmatic, to give it a title that is vague or abstract in order to give a suggestion of meaning in its absence.

This is the goal I had with the title "Remergence", no more nor less; from my perspective it is essentially a marketing tool. However, neither am I opposed to a listener inventing their own program rather than understanding my music purely abstractly; I believe that the final step of every composition takes place in the listener's mind as they filter the music through their own understanding, biases, and experiences. The respect I have for each person's unique perspective and ability to form their own ideas is what makes me reject the notion that a person can be *made* to feel or think something by a composer's work; that is, I do not believe a piece of music can be objectively "sad" or "angry", or that

thunder, birds, or anything else can be clearly communicated to everyone via what we now understand as music. What I believe happens is that certain patterns in music come to be associated with certain ideas, and composers can use these patterns as a shorthand for these ideas, but these associations must be *learned* and are not innate.

So, of course, in the composition of *Remergence* the evocation of a specific mood or character was never the goal. Rather, as with all of my compositions, I began by developing short phrases and motives, and then building the rest of the piece with these motives using a predetermined form as a way to provide structure and cohesiveness to the work. If *Remergence* can be said to be "about" anything, it is "about" these motives coming together and interacting with one another.

Analysis

The form imposed upon these motives is as follows: introduction (mm. 1-23), A (mm. 24-106), B (mm. 107-164), A' (mm. 165-264), B' (mm. 265-298), coda (299-331). This simple form is, of course, known as the *sonatina* form or the sonata without development and was the standard form for opera overtures in the later 18th and early 19th centuries, making *Remergence* a concert overture. However, the A' section is not a direct recapitulation, but rather acts as a developmental area for the work, making the B' section the true recapitulation; the form of the piece may be thought of equally well as a sonata form which skips the primary theme in the recapitulation and instead heads right from the development to the secondary theme. Additionally, the B section includes motives that were previously heard in the A section and even the introduction; my designation of A and B to these areas has more to do with character and rhythm than the usage of specific themes.

My mention of the "character" of the different sections may be confusing as I have already stated I do not try to recreate specific characters in my music, so allow me to qualify that statement: I do have an idea of the feeling and character of music I want to write, but it is never my goal that the audience should think or feel exactly what I do when hearing my music. The character of the A sections is based on its rhythm, exemplified by the motive which begins in m. 25: duple-based, notes tied over the strong beats. The character of the B section is exemplified by the accompaniment figure as seen in m. 108: eighth-note triplets. There can be found rhythmic elements of B in A and of A in B; these changes in the rhythmic character appear at the end of a section in order to aid in the seamless transition from one idea to another, as in mm. 101-106 at the end of A, mm. 147-164 at the end of B, and mm. 261-264 at the end of A'. But there can also be found triplets in A and A' and tied-over rhythms in B and B'; as I mentioned previously, the form was *forced* upon the motives to give the piece some cohesion, to impose order to an otherwise free use of melodic ideas.

Let us now turn to a discussion of these melodic ideas. The first which appears is a descending Locrian scale from the fifth degree to the first on B, the primary tone of the piece. The first measure features this scalar descent doubled in thirds over a B major triad; the F-natural and D-natural of the Locrian scale clash with the F-sharp and D-sharp of the major triad. This dissonance is resolved in m. 2 as the scale descends to B and F-sharp, or rather, it would be resolved had the bass continued to sound and we were not left with merely a fourth in the flutes. The Locrian scale also begins with a grace note a half step above the first tone; this half-step grace note motive is also common throughout the piece. Some notable uses of this motive include the quotation of the beginning of the piece at the

start of the A section in mm. 23-24 and the start of the B' section in mm. 265-266, and as the main theme of the B and B' sections (mm. 112-120 in the oboes, bassoons, and horns, and mm. 268-274 in the strings).

The next idea presented by the flutes in m. 2 is based upon a hexatonic scale that is itself a subset of the octatonic scale. This scale is in two parts a tritone apart, each consisting of first a half-step interval then whole-step interval. Starting on B, this scale would be B, C, D, F, G-flat, A-flat; starting on D-sharp as it does in m. 2, it would be D-sharp, E, F-sharp, A, B, C. A variant of this motive occurs in mm. 2-3 as the scale begins to leap first in thirds and then a fourth. Starting on B this would be B, C, D, F, A-flat, D-flat. This is perhaps the most widely used motive in the piece as it is scalar and symmetrical, and so it is easy to use as a building block for larger structures. It can be found in every section of the piece, in augmentation, diminution, and inversion, as accompaniment and as primary melody. Much of the introduction features melodic ideas based on this motive; as accompaniment, this motive is heavily used in the B and B' sections, but then comes into the foreground as the marimba and harp solo in mm. 141-151; the fugato beginning in m. 177 includes this motive as accompaniment to the "subject" and "answer" themes, and is then used as a bridge to the next section in mm. 205-213.

Another idea which appears in these few measures can be found in the timpani in m. 1: B-E-D-A. These notes are the tonal plan of the work: the introduction and the A section are on B, the B section is on E, the A' section has cadences on D and on A (m. 214), and then B' onwards is on B. The tonal plan is also found on a smaller scale in the introduction: the piece begins on B, then there are cadences on E (m. 5), D (m. 12), and A (m. 16) before going back to B for the A section. The opening of the A section undergoes

a similar harmonic treatment: after the cadence on B at the beginning of the section (m. 25) there are cadences on E (m. 32), D (m. 36), and A (m. 41) before the transition back to B (m. 60). The tonal plan is manifested as a motive in mm. 21-22 as the bass of the "chorale" theme, appearing right before the A section. Unlike the previously mentioned musical ideas upon which this work is built, the chorale theme does not appear in the B or B' sections of the work; after its appearance in the introduction, the chorale theme shows up at the *fortissimo* of the A section (mm. 66-75), at the beginning of the A' section (mm. 165-176) and at the closing of the A' section (mm. 238-240, 246-248, 254-260), and finally in the coda (mm. 306-318). Additionally, the first four notes of the soprano voice of the chorale theme are featured, in diminution, as the head of the fugato theme (m. 177).

The final motive to appear can be found near the beginning of the A section, in mm. 25-26. Its pitch content is similar to the first motive: the first five notes of a Locrian scale (except in this case with the second degree, G, missing); alternatively, it may be thought of as a subset of the hexatonic scale which makes up the second motive, specifically a subset of the scale beginning on D-sharp or A (D-sharp, E, F-sharp, A, B, C) with the missing tones of D-sharp and E. The most significant feature of this motive, however, is its rhythm: m. 26 introduces a new rhythmic idea to the work which helps to differentiate the A section from the introduction despite the use of the same motives. It is also, by my judgement (which is subjective), the most memorable idea of the work. The inspiration for this motive actually came from Dr. McAllister who, after seeing an early draft of the work, felt that the rhythm was too stale and suggested I make it more interesting; this was my attempt to do so. The use of this motive is ubiquitous within the A and A' sections, as well as the coda. Some notable uses of this motive include its introduction in m. 25, at the

fortissimo in mm. 60-66, in the transition to the A' section in mm. 147-164, as the fugato theme starting in m. 177, and at the coda.

   Remergence represents the development of a style that I've been cultivating since I first began composition lessons. I've always been interested in music which possesses an economical use of themes, a clear structure with climactic moments, and a healthy amount of polyphony and craft, and these are the qualities I have been striving for in my compositions. With *Remergence*, I had the opportunity to apply these concepts to the orchestral genre for the first time, and although it was slow, difficult work, I believe I accomplished what I intended.