ABSTRACT

Scenes From The City

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Scenes From The City is a one-movement orchestral work approximately ten and a half minutes in duration. The work was inspired by a weekend trip to New York City in January of 2005. It is a programmatic piece, with obvious attempts to paint an aural picture of different Scenes, experiences, locations, moods, and sounds from one weekend in New York City. The piece is written as an overture and employs rounded binary form (ABA). The order of Scenes represented in the piece is: riding a train into Penn Station, seeing the size of the buildings, Ground Zero, leaving Ground Zero, and finally, leaving the city.
Scenes From The City

by

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A Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................ iv

Acknowledgments...................................................................................................................................... v

Dedication ................................................................................................................................................. vi

Chapter One .............................................................................................................................................. 1
  Introduction.......................................................................................................................................... 1
  Origin.................................................................................................................................................. 2
  Musical Explanation of Origin/Introduction...................................................................................... 5
    Measure 26: Stepping Out Onto the Street from Penn Station.................................................... 9

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................................................. 13
  Ground Zero........................................................................................................................................ 13
    Explanation of Experience............................................................................................................. 13
    Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 16
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Dave Matthews example ................................................................. 2
Figure 2. Jonathan Raveneau's version of Dave Matthews example ............... 3
Figure 3. Harmonic reduction of measures 26-30 ......................................... 3
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To my family
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

*Scenes From The City* is a one-movement orchestral work approximately ten and a half minutes in duration. The work was inspired by a weekend trip to New York City in January of 2005. As a birthday gift, my girlfriend at the time arranged travel to and accommodations in New York City so that we could attend a concert at Zankel Hall in the Carnegie Hall Building on 57th Street and 7th Avenue. The concert was comprised of duets between double-bassist Edgar Meyer and mandolinist Chris Thile. The concert was one of the most amazing musical experiences of my life. To see these two master musicians having a dialog through music--much of it through-composed, but also much of it improvised--was a true demonstration in communication. The concert was definitely the highlight of the trip, but my entire time in New York City and all of my experiences there left a powerful impression on me. I believe that I have captured those impressions in music through this piece, *Scenes From The City*. The purpose of this paper is to explain in detail the inspiration and origin of the work, where I feel the work should be placed in a perspective of musical history, and to comment on various compositional techniques used in the piece and how they relate to the *Scenes* that they represent. The paper also includes a brief discussion of the overall structure of the work, and how my musical influences show themselves throughout the work.
Origin

Scenes From The City is approximately 10 ½ minutes long. It is scored for full orchestra and employs a wide variety of percussion and twentieth-century compositional techniques for both strings and winds. It is a programmatic piece, with obvious attempts to paint an aural picture of different Scenes, experiences, locations, moods, and sounds from one weekend in New York City. The piece is written as an overture and employs ternary form (ABA). The first section of the piece lasts until measure 114. A new, slower and softer section (B) lasts until the return of the boisterous opening material from the opening (A) section at measure 308. After this material has been briefly reintroduced, a coda is suddenly interjected at measure 317, and is comprised of almost all of the different motives in the piece.

The original musical germ for the piece came from something that I heard one day during a break from a Baylor Symphony rehearsal shortly after I had returned from my trip to New York. Jonathan Raveneau, who plays violin in the Baylor Symphony Orchestra, but is an exceptionally fine jazz pianist, was at the piano in the corner of the rehearsal room. He was playing a request from a young lady for the song “Tripping Billies” by the Dave Matthews Band. The harmonic content of the introduction of the song is really quite simple. It is comprised only of diatonic thirds moving about in an unremarkable manner in the key of D Major (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Dave Matthews example.
In all of the different recordings that I have heard of this song by the band, this
introduction only serves as a musical palette for drum fills by the unbelievable drummer
Carter Beauford. Jonathan, however, not being able to play drums and the piano at the
same time, compensated for Beauford’s absence by throwing in several minor and major
sevenths, thus “jazzing up” this harmonically simple collection of notes (Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image1.png)

Figure 2. Jonathan Raveneau's version of Dave Matthews example.

Immediately upon hearing this ever-so-slightly changed introduction, I was
aurally taken back to New York City, and heard in my mind a large portion of the grand
opening section of what would eventually become called *Scenes From The City*. I raced
home immediately to begin work on this idea and very quickly arrived at what would
finally become mm. 26-36, which I originally perceived as the opening for this work
(Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image2.png)

Figure 3. Harmonic reduction of measures 26-30.
I was particularly comfortable employing an orchestra for this piece for several reasons. If I were to be making a musical representation of something as large and emotionally charged as New York City, and with such vastly different visual Scenes as those of the City, I would need an ensemble with the capability to make equally varying and emotionally powerful sounds. Furthermore, since most modern orchestral compositions tend currently to be performed at the beginnings of concerts, I thought it appropriate to design the composition in length and tone as a concert opener.

Once I had what I thought was this grand opening, I began mapping out different sections of the piece. I had thought that maybe I would have roughly five to seven “scenes,” each with a different character, each representing a different location of The City. However, I soon realized that rather than having a “musical tour of the city,” it would be better to comment on a mere snapshot of ideas that make up the city as a whole, as a living, breathing entity. As I reflected upon my time there, a few ideas stood out in my mind.

The first was my memory of walking out of Penn Station from underneath Madison Square Garden. I was almost disoriented by the hugeness of the surrounding structures, including the realization that, yes, that was the Madison Square Garden. The incredibly large number of people who were all around me--some moving very intently while many others were standing around in the same state of awe as mine--was a totally new experience for me. This was the place to which I was immediately transported when I heard Jonathan at the piano. It was the sound of size, and movement. Sonically, most of Scenes is not open and broadly voiced as are many of Aaron Copland’s compositions, but rather is closely compacted, with major and minor sevenths, ninths, flat fifths, diatonic
tone clusters, and other jazz-related orchestrational techniques. Rhythmically, the employment of extreme syncopation is also very characteristic of jazz. These compositional tools are used to represent how these millions of people are so tightly compacted, and how the entire city is constantly moving. Also, these tools are used to portray the landscape of the city, particularly the skyline that constantly changes as the observer moves about the city. It is a jagged skyline that I was viewing from its base, with another tall building appearing around every corner and from behind every other building.

My reaction was based in part on the fact that I have always lived in either Texas or Alabama, in cities that never exceeded 150,000 in total population. This has always afforded me an “urban,” or, at a minimum, “suburban,” environment. This upbringing may have meant that I knew what “cities” were like, but I was never in the heart of a major metropolitan area for any length of time, and the countryside was never far away. This familiarity with open space has always had a very profound effect on me, and continues to be the type of environment that I prefer. I have a great appreciation for what I have heard referred to as one’s “Immediate Personal Space.” For these reasons and others, I never anticipated being fond of New York City.

Musical Explanation of Origin / Introduction

Once I thought that I had finished the piece (or at least a substantial first draft), with the double bars being at m. 26 and the end of the piece, I came to realize that I had begun my piece “in” New York City, without any explanation of how I got there. This idea was very important for me to convey, as it was a musical story to tell in itself. Despite how well a loud, boisterous beginning to the piece would serve it as a “concert
opener,” I decided that the train ride into Penn Station from the Newark, New Jersey Airport needed to be depicted, and would serve well as a musical introduction to the piece. I was reminded of the high, rhythmic screeching sound of metal scraping against metal as the train wheels would press against the rail, along with the very ambiguous sound of the whirring, almost roaring wind created by the air being parted by the train. To depict this, I employed a section of violins playing their octave E string harmonic *molto sul ponticello* (meaning that the violinists draw their bow very close to the bridge of their violin, thereby getting a very “glass-like” or metallic timbre for the pitch that they are playing), which I found very reminiscent of that train sound, especially if the violin notes were to be played in a repetitive, rhythmic fashion. The wind noise could be easily recreated by a tight, soft drum roll on a (tenor) marching band snare drum.

This discovery of the “train motive” quickly led me to the realization that railed transportation, whether it be trains or subways, is a vital part of The City, and the entire eastern seaboard. This was the way that all New Yorkers are bound together. Even His Honor, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire, rides the subway to and from work, and always has. I realized that the subway is the pulmonary system of the city. Thus, the idea of the train would serve as transition not only physically, but also musically. It would demonstrate that we were leaving one *Scene* and were en route to another, thereby connecting the different scenes together into one adventure. I soon returned to what I had thought was a nearly finished piece in search of my memory, looking for places where I was in transit between different scenes that I had tried to portray musically in *Scenes From The City*, and began to interweave this train motive into what was already there.
Fortunately, this process was relatively easy, as, interestingly, the material that was originally there was highly receptive to this compositional “over-dubbing.”

At the beginning, not only did I want to introduce the train motive, but I also wanted to express the angst that I felt approaching the city. This was expressed in the strings in mm. 4-26. Once I had the train motive (the repeated E natural harmonic in the violins) beginning the piece, I simply “heard” that the low strings would enter on a long D pedal. D minor is quickly introduced and aggravated through counterpoint to increase the intensity of the drama under the major ninth in the upper first violins.

Intensifying the drama and angst of the opening is the introduction of an idea that is presented more often, and is even more important than the train motive. This idea would represent the most important part of the city—the people.

One instrument executes a crescendo from the downbeat of a long note to a rapidly descending, sixteenth-note scale that proceeds to execute a decrescendo after an accent on the downbeat. This instrument hands this motive off to other instruments that do the same. This has the overall effect of musical “panning” (in which a listener hears something moving from one side to the other). I employed this compositional device to represent the people that I saw, and their scurrying around the city with determination and direction. The recurrence and overlapping of this motive, sprouting from different instruments on the stage, represent millions of people.

This musical representation makes its debut in m. 15 in the 1st oboe part, and is repeatedly interjected, beginning on different beats of measures, by the rest of the woodwinds for the remainder of the introduction. The almost random-sounding placement of these four-descending-sixteenth-note interjections serves to disorient the
listener, and to represent the heightened activity as people prepare to get off the train. Not only is this motive repeatedly interjected, but also these interjections are compounded, in that each appearance of the motive follows the last more closely, until one comes directly after the last, and finally more than one occurs simultaneously. This functions very effectively in the introduction in the context of the previous and simultaneous string parts to portray the young anxious Texan, watching the people, slowly, one by one at first, and then more and more, standing up early on the train, quietly leaving their seats to prepare for their imminent arrival at Penn Station. We are left with a rhythmically driving pattern, and though using the same notes as what follows, this driving pattern can enunciate the notes within the diatonic tone-cluster that follow directly thereafter more clearly (m. 35).

At this point, the same musical material has represented not only angst about individual persons (on the train, m. 15), but also the drive and focus of an entire population of people, merely by changing the surroundings of that descending sixteenth-note motive.

To comment further on the angst and excitement that I was experiencing as the train began to slow for its arrival at Penn Station, this four-sixteenth-note motive passes from its original, pessimistic minor presentation (D, C natural, Bb, A) to alternating between the minor and a new hopeful, idealistic and triumphant presentation in major mode (D C# B A) on beats two and four in mm. 23-24. This is a representation of the battle of emotions that was going on within me as I approached stepping out into New York City. Should I be scared? Should I be excited? Am I going to be assaulted, or are these people too driven, focused and busy to notice that I am even there? How should I feel about these possible answers? I wanted to convey these feelings, and to persuade the listener also to feel these emotions with me.
Another thought that crossed my mind as we approached Penn Station was the fact that there was no turning back. I could not simply “stay on the train,” and miraculously arrive back at my doorstep in Waco, Texas. This feeling of being “forced” out of the train doors is represented in m. 24 by a gradually accelerating rhythm in the timpani on D (tonic), and a three-measure *accelerando* throughout the orchestra (23-25). The harmony arrived at a D major triad one measure before this event (m. 23), but the entrance of the timpani serves as a wake-up call to the listener to say, “Yes, we really have arrived at D major, and you know where we’re going.” This is the musical representation of the thought that I had while the train was coming to a stop at Penn Station: “Yes, I really have arrived at Penn Station, and I know where I’m going.” This timpani entrance demonstrates my emotions shifting from fear and confusion, and becoming overcome by sheer excitement. After having come to grips with the fact that there was no turning back, and that all the people on the train at this point were beginning to stand and make their way to the doors, an overwhelming sense of excitement and nervous anticipation took over. This is represented by the now consistently major presentation of the sixteenth-note figure (m. 25), which also serves as the motive for the intense drive, purpose, and most importantly, *resolve* of the people of New York City that appears in the chimes at the end of the piece.

*Measure 26: Stepping Out Onto the Street From Penn Station*

Upon stepping out onto the street from Penn Station, I was struck by several things. The diatonic tone clusters that appear in the woodwinds in m. 35 give a sense of the large population of New York City, and in what close proximity they all live to each other. The repetitive, driving, straight-eighth-note rhythm harkens back to seeing part of
that large population moving so quickly, with such purpose. The motive that arrives in m.
39 (bass, contrabassoon, bass trombone, etc.) also supports the intense purpose, direction,
and drive that I saw from the people. This motive, extended and manipulated through m.
51, and then re-orchestrated in m. 52, is heavily accented to emphasize the syncopation of
the figure. It is interrupted every other measure by running sixteenth notes in the violins
in thirds (mm.40-51). Here also, these violin interjections are heavily accented, providing
a scurrying, almost angry and irritated gesture. Even the accompanying diatonic tone
clusters have accents that are specifically designed to disorient the listener from his/her
feeling of the meter. This serves as musical “head-jerking.”

At measure 61, the piece moves from a rhythmically driving 4/4 meter to a
sweeping 3/4 with some elements of 6/8. This serves as the closing to this opening
section. It is a musical representation of me becoming physically dizzy from trying to
take in and sort out all of the sights and sounds that I had just encountered. I simply could
not assimilate all of the information that I had encountered up to that point. So many
people, such grand structures, so many languages and other sounds going on around me
all at once--I wanted to portray a person just standing in the middle of it all spinning
around and around, having only the capacity to realize that he was being overwhelmed by
sensory overload.

Furthermore, the contrabassoon, trumpet 1, and tuba begin their phrases
(dramatically ascending) on beat three of m. 55, with their rests on beats one and two
serving as a one-beat breath on the downbeat if felt in two. That duple feeling is
introduced by these instruments, and is continually solidified by the entrance of similar
instruments with similar material in mm. 55-61. The perception of simple duple meter
accomplishes different goals. It gives the section implied forward momentum, which is further helped by crescendos in the rest of the instruments of the orchestra. Also, the simple duple here makes the possible perception of simple triple at the 3/4 meter that arrives in measure 60 even more disorienting.

At the arrival of the 3/4 meter in m. 60, different techniques work to portray a spinning, overwhelmed sense of the immediate memories that I had just made. Perhaps the most obvious is the figure in the violins. This pattern (from m. 60 to m. 63) sweeps up and down the scale very quickly, as if one were looking up and down quickly in an attempt to “size up” a number of buildings. Its repetitiveness also serves to create a strong “dizzying” effect. Furthermore, the oboe 1 is playing quarter notes, which clash with most other moving lines playing dotted quarter notes. This hemiola figure is designed to jar and disorient the listener even further. All of this takes place over a D pedal, which, at a minimum, serves to prolong the grand resolution to the opening section that has been so keenly anticipated to this point. Interestingly, the dotted-quarter-note rhythms that so emphasize the compound-duple meter in the 3/4 section are exactly what give the dotted-quarter-note figures before and after the 3/4 section their syncopation, energy, and drive. Therefore, though the compound duple feel of the actually simple triple 3/4 meter might seem jarring, it is in fact quite seamless with the material that surrounds it. This makes mm. 60-63 a smooth transition to m. 64, which is both the end of the opening section and the beginning of the next “transitional” section.

What follows (starting in m. 68) is a section that is much more contemplative and introspective in comparison to the brashness of the opening section. Even though the thematic material is very similar to that of the opening section, it is handled here much
more delicately, with considerably less accompaniment. In m. 66, the tightly packed
diatonic tone cluster in the woodwinds is now replaced by only octave Ds in the
marimba. Limiting the accompaniment to only one pitch class (instead of the woodwinds’
previous five-note tone-cluster) gives the sonority a much smaller, more intimate, and
hollow character. It also increases harmonic possibilities, making it easier to move in and
out of tonalities without the burden of a multitude of pitches to try to make fit somewhere
in the new tonality. This area of the piece (mm. 68-112) is the transition from the end of
the opening exposition to the beginning of the next section. The strings enter in m. 96
with material from the opening section. This material is developed by having different
instruments make entrances at different times, thereby recalling a the style of
instrumental, through-composed “phase music.” Phase music was pioneered by the
American minimalist composer Steve Reich. The pieces that he wrote in using this
technique (such as Violin Phase and Piano Phase) begin with two instruments, or one
instrument and a recording of the same instrument playing exactly the same thing in
unison. Gradually, one instrument will slow down, and therefore bring their unity “out of
phase.” Phase music can also be disorienting for a listener. However, it is in that
disorientation that the listener is open to receive new “psycho-acoustic” musical events
that are perceived even though these events are not present in the score. This pattern (in
m. 96) does not come back “into phase,” as Reich’s phase pieces do, but the idea of
having unison material played “out of phase” certainly recalls the genre of phase music
and its psycho-acoustic effects. Through descending in this uneven pattern, the strings
achieve a certain introspective quality. This represents my realization that it was
imperative for me to go to Ground Zero.
CHAPTER TWO

Ground Zero

Explanation of Experience

To get to the southern tip of Manhattan Island, I took the subway, which is represented by the reappearance of the train motif in the 1st violins at m. 105. On my short walk from the Rector Street subway station to Ground Zero, I was struck by how quiet, still, and peaceful everything was. I made this journey into the heart of the financial district, where hundreds of thousands of people worked, and countless skyscrapers surrounded me, but there was hardly a soul to be found. This was because I had gone on a Sunday afternoon. There were no cars around, there were not any sirens bouncing off the cavernous buildings, and there was not the multitude of languages that there had been the previous day. It was completely different from the hustle and bustle from which I had just come near Fifth Avenue. It was as if the entire City of New York knew that I was coming to pay my respects and grieve, and had vacated the area so that I could do so privately. There was virtually no sound.

The aural emptiness provided a foundation for the visual emptiness that I experienced simultaneously. Surrounded by these hundreds of skyscrapers that I knew so well already from having seen them on television, I was shocked to see the broad expanse before me. I do not know the total acreage of the “Footprints” of the buildings, but the immense size of the several stories-deep hole in the ground is simply stunning. The towers were such noble structures, I could only imagine how grand they would have been had they been standing before me. I was overwhelmed with sadness and awe. However, a
new emotion began to sweep over me, almost as if in waves. It was the most ferocious, passionate anger I have ever felt in my life. It was at that point when a brief moment of clarity arrived within me. All of my sadness and anger were washed away by the notion that everything was going to be all right.

I tried to discuss all of these ideas musically in the second large section of the piece (mm. 113-308). At the beginning of this section, the woodwinds finish their phrase, leaving only the strings holding tied whole notes, entering slowly, section by section. We are left with a brief example of Copland’s broad fifths, setting the musical foundation for a wide-open space or large expanse. At this moment in a performance of the piece, the entire orchestra is to stand slowly. I am not aware of another piece that asks for the performing ensemble to stand to show respect for victims of a tragedy. Not even in Penderecki’s famous *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* is this act specified. However, when an ensemble performs the *Hallelujah* chorus from Handel’s *Messiah*, the audience traditionally stands. I wanted to create a sense of confusion in the audience. I think that the audience will know that this section is referring to Ground Zero, as it will be listed in the program as the second movement “2. Ground Zero” preceded by “1. Penn Station, *attacca*.” I think they will also understand why the orchestra is standing. I want members of the audience to ask themselves and each other, “Should we stand too?” with the goal being that they come to the realization for themselves, “Of course we should stand!!” This would bring an extra level of drama to the concert experience, and make more of an intense personal connection of the listeners to the piece.

Two sweeping chords make their appearance: a G Major 9 add 6 (m. 125), and then a g minor 9 add 6 (m. 130). These chords represent me seeing the hole for the first
time, and having these strong emotions wash over me. The repeated sixteenth-note figure which was so prominent in the opening section is now gone, showing musically that there are hardly any people around. At this point, a G natural is held in the violins while the cellos (divided inside players and outside players as Cello 1 and Cello 2) travel through very sad, introspective, and retrospective harmonies. This section is to be conducted very freely. Each phrase should be shaped, without the tempo dominating the moment. The woodwinds enter with slightly longer and gentler, more melodic phrases that support and connect the material in the cellos. With the arrival of a G Major 9 chord in measure 174, the winds take over from the strings in a more prominent role. At measure 183, the flutes introduce a new motive, and an important one at that. The triplet pattern that they play is very similar in mood to the triplet figure played in the trumpets from the soundtrack of the movie *Patton*. The figure from *Patton* is used to text-paint the idea of soldiers dying. I wanted to make reference to this musical idea because, simply, we are now at war.

A repeated harmonic rhythm makes an appearance in measure 191, and, as the result of the orchestra repeating this general idea several times and eventually adding the timpani and the bass drum, the mood turns more militant. This represents the anger that was slowly awakening inside of me. Spectacular dissonances are approached and resolved to demonstrate not only how fierce this anger was, but also how easily it was consuming me. Each time this phrase repeats, the orchestration becomes thicker. The rhythm in the timpani also is agitated, moving from a duple pattern to triplets, heightening the intensity. Surprisingly, in the final occurrence of this eight-bar phrase (measure 244), the “people” motive makes a return. This is the point in New York at which I started to think about the possibility that though we were attacked, the republic
would survive and we as a people would move on. The return to D major in measure 253 signifies the first clearly defined thought in this new direction. Aiding this new resolved momentum, the orchestra finally sits down.

One of my favorite combinations of musical motives takes place here, as the sad *Patton/“funeral”* motive is inserted in this new, hopeful character (m. 258). The violins also join here to remind the audience that I have gotten on a subway and am leaving Ground Zero. The combination of all of these motives and ideas is used to show musically how we can move on and be stronger as a people and a nation, while never forgetting those we lost that day. However, this hopeful mood does not remain for long, as anger was still very near to the surface of my emotions. In m. 264, a very small, but very fierce and passionate, fugato section in the strings demonstrates that anger was winning the emotional battle momentarily as I boarded the subway heading back north on the island. This is followed (in m. 270) by a glance back at the more hopeful emotional material that recalls the motives from the opening section.

**Conclusion**

*It’s Going to Be All Right/American Resolve*

After I had returned to the northern part of the island, and had again been surrounded by thousands of people shopping, eating at restaurants, walking freely down the streets, proceeding with their lives, I grew more confident in my resolve that, despite the attack, everything would be all right. We had been through the most serious terrorist attack we had ever faced, and the Republic still stood. Society kept moving.
Musically, this is represented with the arrival of the A pedal point in m. 278 in the contrabassoon, tuba, and double basses. The themes of the first section are further contrasted with the now incessantly repeating Patton triplets. The pedal A now portrays this battle between the motives in a new light. It is now not even a battle at all. Both motives appearing in the same space represent the fact that it is part of our history, and we will move on, with direction. The loud, fully-orchestrated and densely harmonied material that begins in m. 296 is one final acknowledgement of the struggle that the country has endured. The return of the original theme represents how we made it out of that struggle, and had gotten back to daily life, only stronger because we have endured it.

My favorite moment in the piece is when this original motive returns in m. 308. This moment is not my favorite simply because the original motive returns. What strikes me about this moment is how the driving, four-descending-sixteenth-note “people” motive is absolutely screaming when it returns. At the beginning of the piece, everyone in the orchestra is playing either the rhythm of the melody (winds, strings, high brass), or the accents on beat two (low strings, low brass and percussion). Rests are meticulously planned to accommodate unison pauses for added weight, accents, and breadth. However, when this motive returns at the end of the piece, those meticulously planned breaths and rests are bull-dozed by this sustained and passionately driving four-descending-sixteenth-note motive. The way that this is done here has extreme significance for the broader message that I am trying to convey in the piece. That message is that the people of the city are in fact the heart of the city. They might use the trains and subways as a pulmonary system, and the skyscrapers might be the skeleton, but they are what make the city what it is.
The brief coda that follows this serves as a brief summary and reminder of all the images, sounds, memories, and historical background to those memories that I encountered in New York. I left the City on the train back to the Newark airport, and all of these brief flashes of my weekend there were flying around my head as the excitement was winding down.
Scenes From The City
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Scene introduction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Setting 1</td>
<td>Establishing urban landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Setting 2</td>
<td>Transition to a different environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ambiance 1</td>
<td>Setting the mood with music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ambiance 2</td>
<td>Enhancing atmosphere with additional elements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interaction 1</td>
<td>Characters engage in conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Interaction 2</td>
<td>Development of character relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Moving to a new scene or location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Scene Change</td>
<td>Change of setting or environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>Continuation of the storyline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>Further development of the narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>Conclusion or resolution of the storyline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>Final thoughts or reflections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scenes From The City

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160
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