CHAMBER SYMPHONY

BY

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Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Music,
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Accepted by the faculty of the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Music.	
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MIKE SWEENEY

Chamber Symphony

- 2014 -

PROGRAM NOTES

Chamber Symphony was originally going to be a different piece, called Episode. Here was the idea. (and by telling you all this, I trust you to understand that most of this concept doesn't exist in the piece anymore, except for a couple things I'll talk about, so don't go looking for it. Just don't do it!)

I was going to take an episode of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and use it as the form for the piece. Specifically, the episode "The Buzz Aldrin Show," one of my favorites, and one of their all time best. The episode is chock full of all the good little interconnected bits you'd expect from Monty Python, and so I was confident that the piece would be suitably bizarre and full of short juxtapositions, but somehow still hold together cohesively.

So I began sketching. First, like every good composer who is short on actual melodic ideas, I decided to spell out "Monty Python" in note names, using a hodgepodge of note-to-letter techniques. M=mi, O=do, N=G (French System), T=ti, Y=D (Fr.), P=Bb (Fr. and I decided to add a flat), Y and T like before, H=B (in German), O and N as before too. So you get E C G B D Bb D B B C G. Turned out to be sort of a fun motive with lots of 3rds, so it went in.

Second, I started writing music for a couple of sketches from the episode. It begins with a cartoon showing a verdant morning scene, into which creeps a caterpillar that is actually a man in a trenchcoat and hat with a mustache (the man, not the hat). He bumbles along the leaf, muttering, enters his house, and goes to bed under some covers. Time elapses. Eventually his alarm clock goes off, and a resplendent butterfly that looks like Liberace emerges. The opening of the piece paints that scene, with morning

music and the contrabassoon playing little muttering lines.

The other major part was based off of an image from the "Architect Sketch," where John Cleese explains to some investors his plan for an ultra-modern block of flats that would "carry the tenants in extreme comfort past murals depicting mediterranean scenes, toward the rotating knives." The investors inquire if he's planning to slaughter their tenants, to which he responds, "Does that not fit in with your plan?" The musical image in the piece is the conveyor belt, represented by the undulating bassline that starts after the morning music.

After that, other ideas didn't take off, and I had a problem: the caterpillar, rather than morphing into Liberace, wanted to morph into the conveyor belt. So now I had to get from the morning music into the conveyor belt music. And I felt it needed more time to make that transition than the fast pace set by the short sketches. Long story short, it wasn't working. That's when I ditched the *Episode* idea, and suddenly the piece clicked. The rest of the piece just grew out of the pre-existing materials and where they wanted to go. So there you go.

Now, in every piece of music, there's always compromise between a composer's initial plan and the way the materials want things to go, but this time, the materials sort of hijacked the proceedings and forced me to toss my plan. Not that that's a bad thing, but that kind of uncertainty can be scary. One of my favorite cartoonists, Lynda Barry, describes her creative process as "being able to stand 'not knowing' long enough for something alive to take shape." In *Chamber Symphony*, I can safely say there was plenty of "not knowing" on my part.

Mike Sweeney, April 2015

INSTRUMENTATION

CONCERT SCORE

Instruments that sound at the octave or double octave are notated at their written pitch.

Flute / Piccolo Oboe / English Horn Clarinet in Bb Contrabassoon

Horn in F Trumpet in C Trombone Tuba

Harp Piano / Celesta (one player)

Percussion 1 - 2 Suspended Cymbals (Small And Medium)*, Medium Bass Drum*, Medium Tam-Tam*, 5 Temple Blocks*, Vibraphone*, Marimba

Percussion 2 - Vibraphone*, 5 Temple Blocks*, 2 Tom-Toms, 2 Bongos, Medium Tam-Tam*, 2 Suspended Cymbals (Small And Medium)*, Medium Bass Drum*, Chimes, Glockenspiel

Violin 1 Violin 2 Viola Violoncello Contrabass

^{*} may be shared



Chamber Symphony

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^{*} Legato indicates stress - keep emphasis on those notes as the subdivisions shift.

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