Joan

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Joan

by

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Thesis
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Eastern Michigan University
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MASTER OF MUSIC

in

Music Composition

Thesis Committee:

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Abstract

*Joan* is an original, programmatic piece for orchestra, with an approximate running time of eight minutes. It is inspired by the life of Joan of Arc, the French heroine at the end of the Hundred Years’ War. Themes evoking major characters are presented as the piece unfolds. Along with original material, melodies from several folksongs are used in the themes representing Joan and the English. The English “Agincourt Carol” dates to the Hundred Years’ War. Joan’s themes, “Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella” and “He is Born,” are both familiar French carols. In addition to these two themes, the piece begins with a solo offstage horn (God), which is then joined by the brass section in a triumphant clarion call. Thematic material changes and interacts throughout the piece, leading toward an inevitable (and yet surprising) conclusion.
Sarah Bauerle

Joan

for Orchestra
INSTRUMENTATION

3 Flutes
   Piccolo (Fl. 3)
3 Oboes
   English Horn (Ob. 3)
3 B♭ Clarinets
3 Bassoons

4 Horns in F
3 C Trumpets
3 Trombones
Tuba

Timpani
Percussion (3 players)
   Bass Drum
   Chimes (Tubular Bells)
   Crash Cymbals
   Suspended Cymbal (Medium)
   Woodblock
   Floor Tom
   Tambourine
   Snare Drum

Violins I
Violins II
Violas
Cellos
Basses

Transposed Score
Duration: ca. 8 min.
Program Notes

*Joan* is an original, programmatic piece for orchestra, inspired by the life of Joan of Arc, the French heroine at the end of the Hundred Years’ War. Themes evoking major characters are presented as the piece unfolds.

The piece begins with a theme representing God, played by a solo offstage horn. The other brass players join in, before the action settles down to Earth. Joan’s theme is introduced as a sprightly village dance, led by solo violin. Her motif is a melding of two French folksongs, “Il est ne, le divin Enfant” (“He is Born, the Holy Child”) and “Un flambeau, Jeannette, Isabelle” (“Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella”). Coincidentally, Joan was nicknamed Jeanette, and her mother’s name was Isabella. Before long, the brass breaks in once again, calling Joan to her divine mission. The English theme lumbers onto the scene like an inexorably advancing juggernaut. Their melody is based on the “Agincourt Carol,” a song composed to commemorate the English victory at the battle of Agincourt, which occurred a few years after Joan was born. The themes for Joan and the English interact, scattering into a flurry of percussion and a dissolving of both themes into battling fragments. In the end, Joan is overpowered after a fierce struggle. A low rumble begins in the strings, as the flames lick at the edges of the woodpile and begin to grow. Joan lets out one last keening wail, as the English theme breaks apart in frenetic, mocking celebration of her demise.

In history, Joan’s story ends there. But perhaps, if it were possible to see beyond, the story might end a bit differently. God’s theme emphatically interrupts one last time. The flames are choked out as the entire orchestra comes together, finally coming to rest on a shimmering, rippling chord. As the piece ends, the 1st horn plays God’s opening fifth motif one last time, and Joan’s solo violin responds with an echoing fourth, rising up to meet the orchestra’s last “Amen.”