

MP3 — CLASSICAL MUSIC

DREAM SUITE — FOR STRING ORCHESTRA by John Thrower

DREAM SUITE was first composed in the late 1980s and was then entitled BOOK OF DREAMS. It was commissioned and recorded by the CBC Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (strings), Mario Bernardi conducting.

Then it was a collection of atonal movements with one tonal movement (WITHIN THE INNER LIGHT). After hearing the recording, I left the work and went on to other compositions. Many years later, I came back and revised the work, now calling it DREAM SUITE. The atonal movements were deleted and I opted for a more tonal, film-jazz ambient with only a few <atonal> contemporary elements (hardly any).

The work as it stands today is in six movements and is slightly under 30 minutes in length. The recordings that you hear are live performances and have not been edited — excerpts only.

One thing became very clear to me in the live performances. A work like DREAM SUITE is difficult and not to be underestimated. It requires a very good string ensemble, one which can be flexible in rhythm and more or less grasp the idea of jazz and modern tonal influences.

I would go as far as to say, a work of this nature is more difficult to perform than an atonal work. Why this? You can hear every mistake in this stylistic ambient, whereas in atonality, it is much more difficult to discriminate between correct playing and near-correct playing. Obviously, when you have a group of jazz harmonies or progressive tonal statements, they are immediately recognized, whereas in a modern atonal work, of complex nature, it is difficult to ascertain if the last two desks were playing wrong notes or were slightly rhythmically out of sync. In DREAM SUITE — you hear every mistake.

This is not to say that the work is difficult only because of its modern tonal approach. The rhythmical demands even though obvious can be extremely demanding. Take the 2nd movement for example. It is an extremely straightforward idea: You have a unisono bass/cello ostinato, a slightly different chordal accompaniment in the violas and 2nd violins... and above this a wandering melody in the 1st violins. Sounds easy, but try to get a bass section to do that for 48 measures, or try to get the 1st violins to move together in that slightly syncopated 48 measure long lyrical melody line. That is challenging.

Or take the 4th movement — starting on beats in the cello/bass and offbeats in the viola/violins. When you ask for rhythmical precision of that nature, that is not easy.

Therefore, I would, at the outset, suggest that one not use a very large ensemble, only if they are really experienced and really disciplined. Other than this it is better to use 6,5,4,3,2 whereas the 2 Bassi are necessary for divisi passages. This smaller ensemble should allow the conductor more potential for expression. The larger the ensemble, the more difficulties with rhythmic precision.

Also, just a note on the expressive ambient. Actually, I envision this suite to be more 'impressionistic' in interpretive feeling than, let's say, romantic. There is enough emotion in the music itself so it is not necessary to get into too much 'bauch' as the Germans say. That means swelling on every 2nd note in an display of romantic emotionalism. This is definitely not the intention.

Play it somewhere between a clean 'classic' ambient and a cool 'impressionistic' sound. Here you do not want a strong concertmaster who decides he is going to 'lead' the section. It has to be totally integrated, the sound, with not one player coming forth more than the next. Thus the idea of a smaller, more compact ensemble is probably the easiest way to do this piece. Again, if you have a tremendous 12,10, 8,6,4 — then proceed as usual, yet it has been my experience that even very good ensembles can be surprised by the content of this music. It should not be underestimated.

The music for the website (WITHIN THE INNER LIGHT) is the 5th movement complete.