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FIGURES FOR AN APOCALYPSE
AN ORATORIO FOR CHORUS AND WIND ENSEMBLE

A Document
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

By
ROLAND BARRETT
Norman, Oklahoma
2000
FIGURES FOR AN APOCALYPSE
AN ORATORIO FOR CHOIR AND WIND ENSEMBLE

A Document APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

BY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Carolyn Bremer for her support, encouragement, and inspiration; to the members of his committee: James Faulconer, Eugene Enrico, Steven C. Curtis, and Lawrence Larsen for their invaluable assistance and dedication; to David Hilger and Kamas Rooney for their spirited help; to his parents for their continuing support; and to his wife, Marie, and children, Emily, Benjamin, and Jessica, for their love, support, and patience while daddy was “writing his music.”
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................. iv

TABLE OF FIGURES ....................................................................................... vi

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRO & BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION .................. 1

CHAPTER TWO: EXAMINATION OF SELECTED TEXT ....................... 8

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS ................................................................. 12

CHAPTER FOUR: NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR ................................. 32

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................ 36

APPENDIX 1: INTRO PART C, MOVEMENT III .............................. 37

APPENDIX 2: TEXT ..................................................................................... 38

APPENDIX 3: COMPLETE SCORE ......................................................... 42

   MOVEMENT I. GO YE FORTH .......................................................... 43

   MOVEMENT II. ADVICE TO MY FRIENDS .................................. 66

   MOVEMENT III. THE FALL OF THE CITY .................................. 103

   MOVEMENT IV. IN THE RUINS OF NEW YORK ....................... 130

   MOVEMENT V. THE HEAVENLY CITY ......................................... 145
# TABLE OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Beginning &amp; Ending Keys, Entire Oratorio</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement I</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement II</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Orchestration Example, Movement II</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement III</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement IV</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Measures 1 through 7, Movement IV</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement V</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Measures 35 through 42, Movement V</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>C Section, Movement I</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Measures 49 through 62, Movement IV</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Minor 3° Motive, Movement III</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Germ Cell with Additional Material, Movement III</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Original Cell Expanded Fully, Movement III</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Transposed Minor 3° Motive, Movement III</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Measure 9, Movement I</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Measures 13 through 15, Movement II</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Measures 3 &amp; 4, Movement III</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Verse One, Movement I</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Verse One, Movement II</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Final Choral Statement, Movement V</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This document contains the complete musical score for *Figures For An Apocalypse*, a five-movement oratorio for choir and wind ensemble, based on text taken from a portion of Thomas Merton's 1947 poem of the same name. The text has been selected from sections I, II, III, IV, V, and VIII of Merton's poem, and is used by permission of the New Directions Publishing Corporation. In addition to the full score, the document presents definitions of the term "oratorio," introductory information about this specific oratorio, biographical information about Thomas Merton, and an examination of the selected text. The document also presents an analysis of formal structures, key centers, harmonic materials, motivic use, and melodic content, and ends with a section providing notes and instructions to the conductor.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

This document will examine and discuss *Figures For An Apocalypse*, an oratorio for choir and wind ensemble written by this composer. Beginning with a definition of the term “oratorio,” it will then discuss the instrumentation and performance demands of this specific oratorio, and will present biographical information about the life and career of Thomas Merton, the author of the text. In addition, the document will provide an overall description of the selected text, its imagery and its message, and will conclude with an analysis and a conductor’s guide which investigates compositional elements such as formal structure, motivic development, and tonal and harmonic language.

-Definition of the Oratorio-

The oratorio has been an important choral-instrumental genre since its inception in the early seventeenth century. Various sources refer to the oratorio as “sung drama on a religious or moral story but without action, scenery, or costumes,”¹ as “an extended musical setting of a sacred text made up of dramatic, narrative, and contemplative elements,”² and as “a composition with a long libretto of religious or contemplative character that is performed in a concert hall or church without scenery, costumes, or action, by solo voices,

chorus, and orchestra."^ The oratorio's early origins were as a portion of extra-
liturgical services in Roman prayer halls, or oratories, where part of their
function was to entice music lovers back into the ranks of the Counter-
Reformation movement. Toward the middle of the seventeenth century, the
term "oratorio" came into use, as these works were most often performed in the
oratory, the portion of the church where lay societies met to hear sermons and
sing devotional songs.  

-Introductory Information About Figures For An Apocalypse-

Having studied these definitions, this composer decided to create an
oratorio entitled Figures For An Apocalypse, using as its text a portion of Thomas
Merton's 1947 poem of the same name. Figures is a twenty-six minute work,
consisting of five movements of approximately equal length. Paying an
historical debt to Handel, its vocal emphasis is on the full chorus, rather than on
solo arias and recitatives. Although there are three solo passages and one
recitative, all in the first movement, the majority of the vocal activity
throughout is assigned to the full choir. This work differs from traditional
oratorios in that it uses a wind ensemble instead of an orchestra to accompany
the choir. Not simply treated as mere accompaniment, the wind ensemble is
frequently featured for extended periods of time and plays a major descriptive
role in the apocalyptic third movement. This ensemble's instrumentation
consists of: piccolo, flutes 1 & 2, oboes 1 & 2, English horn, bassoons 1 & 2, Bb

clarinets 1, 2 & 3, bass clarinet, alto saxophones 1 & 2, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, Bb trumpets 1, 2 & 3, horns 1, 2, 3 & 4, trombones 1, 2 & 3, euphonium, tuba, string bass, piano, timpani, mallet percussion 1 & 2, and percussion 1, 2 & 3. This composer recommends a minimum performing force of sixty vocalists plus forty-eight instrumentalists. The following wind ensemble parts should be doubled: 1st flute, 2nd flute, 1st clarinet, 2nd clarinet, 3rd clarinet, 1st trumpet, 2nd trumpet, 3rd trumpet, 1st trombone, 2nd trombone, 3rd trombone, euphonium, and tuba. Additionally, fairly extensive percussion instrumentation is required. This instrumentation includes: orchestra bells, xylophone, vibraphone, chimes, marimba, crotales, timpani, snare drum, 4 toms, regular concert bass drum, an extremely deadened bass drum, large one-headed concert bass drum, small suspended cymbal, medium suspended cymbal, large suspended cymbal, very small splash cymbal, hi-hat cymbals, ice bell, crash cymbals, large gong, 4 small tuned gongs, 4 small bell plates, small brake drum, small cowbell, triangle, mark tree, sleighbells, tambourine, wood block, claves, cabaza, large rainstick, large log drum, vibra-slap, thunder sheet, aquaphone, and wind machine.

Figures For An Apocalypse consists of five separate movements, entitled Go Ye Forth, Advice To My Friends, The Fall Of The City, In The Ruins Of New York, and The Heavenly City. Their respective time durations are approximately 5', 4', 5', 5'30", and 5'30", combining for a total performance time of slightly over twenty-six minutes. The composer intends this piece to be performed by mature university-level or professional ensembles, as its degree of difficulty is in the grade V to VI range.
As stated previously, the text for this oratorio is taken from a portion of Thomas Merton's 1947 poem entitled *Figures For An Apocalypse*. Merton was a fascinating figure, a brilliant man of letters who chose to be a Trappist monk. Although a member of an order devoted to silent meditation, contemplation, and manual labor, Merton (through his writings and lectures) communicated eloquently and passionately with his fellow man. During his lifetime, Merton produced dozens of books and articles, as well as several volumes of poetry, establishing himself as a person of significant influence in both the theological and secular worlds. He was, to quote one source, "many complex, and perhaps contradictory, things: an intellectual, a liberal, a converted Protestant-secularist, a child of the Enlightenment, a sophisticated poet, a cosmopolitan traveler, and above all a Catholic and a contemplative."\(^5\)

Thomas Merton was born on January 31, 1915. He was the son of artists Owen Merton, a native of New Zealand, and Ruth Jenkins, an American. After his mother's death in 1921 Merton spent his youth and early adolescence in a somewhat nomadic fashion, living alternately with his father in various European locations and with his mother's family on Long Island.\(^6\)

In 1933 Merton won a scholarship to study modern languages at Clare College in Cambridge, but dropped out after only one year. He subsequently enrolled at Columbia University in New York in 1935, where he studied social


sciences until Mark Van Doren, one of the primary early influences in his life, persuaded him to pursue the study of literature. While at Columbia, Merton served as editor of the 1937 Yearbook and as art editor of the Columbia Jester. He received his B.A. degree in 1938 and his M.A. degree in 1939.7

After graduating, Merton taught English at St. Bonaventure University in upstate New York from 1939 to 1941. At the same time, he began what would be a lifelong love of writing by contributing reviews to the New York Times Book Review, the New York Herald Tribune, and other literary magazines. Although he seemed well on the way toward a successful career as a university professor and scholar, Merton had also gradually developed a profound fascination with contemplation and meditation (beginning during his study of William Blake as he completed his M.A. thesis). Seeking total immersion in the contemplative life, he decided to become a Trappist monk, entering the Abbey of Gethsemani south of Louisville, Kentucky on December 10th, 1941. The Trappist movement, or Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, greatly appealed to Merton because of its emphasis on silence and contemplation. Merton dearly loved the monastery, stating in a journal entry, "This is the center of America. I had wondered what was holding the country together, what has been keeping the universe from cracking in pieces and falling apart...this is the only real city in America—and it is by itself, in the wilderness. It is an axle around which the whole country blindly turns, and knows nothing about it."8

During the 1940s, the living conditions at Gethsemani were arduous.

7 Woodcock, 11.
8 Woodcock, 16.
The labor was physically demanding and the diet poor. The monks slept on straw and boards in unfurnished dormitories. The monastery was only marginally heated during the bitter Kentucky winters, and there was little relief from the heat in the hot summer months, during which the monks worked in the fields while wearing their heavy black robes.

Partly because of his frail health and largely because of his literary experience and ability, Merton was assigned the task of handling all the monastery’s correspondence, and was also asked to write such things as biographical books about little known Cistercian saints, studies of the monastic life, and any other such projects that the abbot deemed necessary. In the 1940s and 1950s Merton was given two hours per day to complete his writing assignments. Typically arising at two o’clock in the morning, Merton did his writing in the abbey’s unheated library, where on some days the temperature was so low that he had to move the typewriter closer to one of the windowsills on the east side of the building in hope that the sunlight coming through the icy windowpanes would provide him with a little more warmth. Although the physical demands and workload at Gethsemani were extreme, Merton managed to find time for his first passion, creative writing. He quickly gained national recognition by receiving in 1948 an award from the Literary Awards Committee of the Catholic Press Association of the United States for *Figures For An Apocalypse*, a work which they regarded as “the most distinguished volume of verse published in English by a Catholic poet in 1948.” In 1949 Merton won
the annual Catholic Literary Award for *The Seven Storey Mountain*, an honor presented annually by the Gallery of Living Catholic Authors.9


Thomas Merton's life ended tragically on December 10, 1968 while attending a religious conference in Bangkok, Thailand. Although the exact circumstances of his death were never fully determined, Merton was apparently electrocuted in his hotel room after accidentally touching the exposed wiring of an electric fan. He died at the age of fifty-three, twenty-seven years to the day after he had joined the monastery.10

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9 Baker, 23.
Merton's *Figures For An Apocalypse* is an eight-part poem depicting the Second Coming of Christ and the fall of present-day New York City. The messages are dark and emphatic: that mankind's time is quickly expiring, that people need to realize the significance of the rapidly approaching day of judgement, and that material goods and wealth will offer neither comfort nor protection from the terrible onslaught of the apocalypse. Rich visual imagery and bold metaphorical phrases (trademarks of Merton's style) permeate much of the work, and paint a bleak and alarming picture of the destruction of mankind. At this point, an examination of the text will provide some valuable background information for the prospective listener.

The first movement, *Go Ye Forth*, announces the Second Coming and sets the ominous mood by sounding a dire warning to mankind. Its opening statements are a direct scriptural quotation from Matthew 25:6, "And at midnight there was a cry made: Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him." After this initial alarm Merton uses visual images of light and fire to warn mankind of its impending doom: "The waters shine like tin in the alarming light, Thine eyes are furnaces," and "...make the brazen waters burn beneath Thy feet." Merton pauses to ask, "From the beginning of the world, how few of us have heard the silver of Thy creed?", before continuing his ominous predictions with a forecast of the Bridegroom's intended violence: "Splitting the seven countries with the prism of Thy smile, confound all augury. Sever our continents. The world's last night, clad in the wrath of
Armageddon.” The alarm has sounded, immense destruction has been
prophesied, and the terrible stage is set.

The second movement consists of Merton’s personal warning to his good
friends Robert and Edward. As they sit at the hotel bar, seemingly unaware of
the terrible fate which awaits them, Merton describes their thoughts: “Down at
the Fauntleroy Bar, brimstone in our sorry drink, we sit with eyes as sharp as
stones, writing our names in code, fearing to look where the windows ache.”
Oblivious to the pandemonium outside, Robert and Edward do not even notice
the establishment of martial law and the police in the streets. They sit “with
eyes as mad as rocks, ...the skylights of our intellects as grey as frost.” They
eventually realize their tragic plight, but are trapped: “We’d ask the man for a
timetable, but the timetable’s gone. And so we sit with eyes like towers in the
hour, in the final hour.” Too late to escape, they are unable to heed Merton’s
warning to “Get out while you can!”

In the third movement, The Fall Of The City, mankind’s worst fears are
confirmed as the apocalypse brings complete devastation to the city. Merton’s
text, based on scripture verses from the Book of Revelations, 14:14, prefaces the
actual hour of destruction: “Look in the night. Heaven stands open like a little
temple, with a man at the door having a sickle in his hand.” Merton sounds a
desperate last-minute warning, “Fly to the mountains. Fly to the hills,” and
describes the intended weapon, “The steel is cleaner than ice. The blade is

Original version, from The Open Bible: “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud
one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And
another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy
sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he sat on
the cloud, thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.”

9
sharper than thought. The curve is like an intellect.” Finally, the horrible moment arrives. “He raises the sickle. The blade flashes like a cry. He thrusts in the sickle, and it begins to sing in the wind.” The destruction of the city ensues, and it is complete.

Movement IV, In The Ruins of New York, presents a bleak and barren depiction of post-apocalyptic New York City. In the midst of the desolate landscape, Merton urges mankind to come to its collective senses, to reflect on the events which have led to such catastrophe: “Come to your windows. Rise up in your rooms. Come down to your doors, rich women.” With these lines, Merton metaphorically begs people to re-examine the foibles of their society in an effort to avoid the same catastrophic fate in the future. Seeing this as the foremost message of the piece, this composer placed a great emphasis on these lines of text by using them repeatedly throughout this portion of the oratorio. Verses 1 and 2 begin with “Come to your windows,” as well as the contrapuntal B section which leads to the major impact point of the movement. Merton further admonishes humankind to “Weep for the bangles on your jeweled bones.” Surveying the ravaged land, he asks, “Shall the spirit be poured out upon this land? Shall ever life swell up again, as wild as wine?” The final message is completely disconsolate: “Come to your doors, rich women. Die in the doors of your need. For the vintage at the end, the gathering shall come no more.”

Merton’s text begins Movement V, The Heavenly City, with a condemnation of modern day prophets. Merton had often been very critical of Karl Marx, one such philosopher, believing that Marx had not been able to deliver what he had promised. In Merton’s eyes, the rhetoric of the 1920s and
1930s had brought only war—not the utopian society envisioned by these philosophers. He rebukes them with such questions as, “Of these your prophecies, oh prophet tell us: When is the day? When is the day of our success?” More imagery of the devastation follows: “The rivers are poisoned, the skies rain blood. The springs are brackish with the taste.” Merton then closes with a description of a new city, a gift descending from God: “City, when we see you coming down, coming down from God, shine with your lamplight, shine upon the world. You are the new creation’s sun. Amen.” The final message is that of ultimate hope, of great belief that there will be a new beginning, a fresh start, a second chance, an opportunity for mankind to strike a new course, this time avoiding the tragic repercussions of its previous actions.

\[12\] Kramer, 51.
CHAPTER THREE
ANALYSIS

This chapter will examine and discuss the formal structures and key centers, tonal materials, and motivic development used in Figures. While the formal structure and layout of each movement is frequently determined by the text, certain traditional formal strategies are employed and will be discussed. The melodic content of Figures is predominantly modal in nature, most often based on the Dorian mode. The harmonic approach is largely triadic; long one-chord ostinato sections typically alternate with passages of quicker harmonic rhythm, and frequently feature mediant-based movement and direct modulation. The oratorio also employs motivic repetition, development, and manipulation as important unifying devices, both within movements and throughout the work. These, too, will be examined, beginning on page twenty-five.

-Formal Structures and Key Centers-

The overarching formal structure of Figures' five movements is as follows: Movements II and IV are in ABA form, while Movements III and V are through-composed. The first movement has an ABACB form, setting it apart structurally from the other movements. Its formal independence from the symmetry of the remaining four movements is intended by this composer to help underscore the message of the text in establishing the first movement's role as introductory.
The broad-scale key scheme of the oratorio may be shown in the following manner (figure one):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Opening Key</th>
<th>Final Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>Eb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>g minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>Eb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Bb Major</td>
<td>d minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>c minor</td>
<td>C Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1: Beginning & Ending Keys, Entire Oratorio

As the above chart indicates, this composer sought to achieve an element of tonal symmetry with his choice to end the first, third, and fifth movements in major keys, while the second and fourth movements end in minor. In addition, mediant relationships are an extremely important feature in this work (and will be discussed frequently in this chapter). Examples of such relationships in the overall key scheme include 1) the third-based relationship among the final keys of Eb Major, g minor, and C Major in Movements I, II, III, and V, and 2) the Bb Major to d minor movement in Movement IV.

Another factor illuminated by the key scheme chart is a large amount of d minor. This composer selected d minor for two basic reasons. First, it is an excellent wind-instrument key, with its one-flat key signature and its good intonation properties, and second, since many of the choral melodies sung during these and other sections begin on the fifth degree of the mode or scale, it was important to select a key which placed the fifth degree comfortably within...
the range of each of the four voice classifications. D minor, with its fifth degree of A, fulfilled this need.

Figure two shows the formal layout and key centers of the opening movement of Figures. A short recitative precedes the opening A section; the second B section is followed by a closing extension and a short instrumental coda.

Figure 2: Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement I.

The introductory solo bass recitative establishes d minor and serves as a dominant-level preparation for the g minor of sections A, B, and A’. The C section drops one step to f minor, a decision warranted by the text; whereas previous sections communicated agitated messages of alarm, this segment’s text is more questioning and introspective, indicating that a key change might be appropriate. Reflecting the anxiety and tension of the text, the key then shifts quickly through several centers, eventually modulating to Eb Major for the climactic delivery of this passage’s final vocal lines. D minor returns in the B’ section before a closing extension and coda section revert again to Eb Major (the key of Eb Major returns at the choir’s final declaration of this movement,
"Light then Thy way. Behold the bridegroom."). The decision to move from d minor to Eb major, rather than remaining in the same key or employing more traditional tonic-dominant or mediant-based movement, was a compositional choice designed to underscore the dramatic, shocking, and unexpected nature of the text.

The second movement, *Advice To My Friends*, is an ABA form. The first A section is prefaced by a three-part instrumental introduction. The final A section is followed by a "reverse-order" presentation of portions of the introduction, reinforcing the symmetry of the rounded binary form. The movement comes to a close with a short coda section (figure three).

![Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement II](image)

Contribute to the effectiveness of the above-mentioned symmetry in Movement II is the orchestrational style used in these sections. These passages (Introduction Parts A, B, and C) feature the eerie, ethereal timbre of tuned water glasses and a high-tessitura ostinato effected by a combination of upper-register piano, glockenspiel, crotales, triangle, sleighbells, and small suspended cymbal on crown (figure four). Marked registral contrast is then achieved through a
chalumeau-register presentation by the clarinet section (figure four). This striking timbral and registral change is used for its element of surprise and shock, the odd juxtaposition signifying the plight of this movement’s protagonists who are happily drinking at the bar while terror and alarm permeate the streets outside their hotel.

Figure 4: Orchestration Example, Movement II.
Movement II, like many of the other movements, employs some unusual tonal progressions in keeping with the chaotic and frantic nature of the text. After a lengthy d minor introduction, a modal move of an upward step establishes e minor at the A section. This odd juxtaposition of key centers is intended to create an element of surprise, thus contributing to the overall tension of the movement. E minor then drops a major third to c minor before another sudden upward step, this time to D Major. At this point a more traditional harmonic function ensues, with D Major acting as a dominant-level preparation for the subsequent key of g minor and the final lines of text. It is at this point that Robert and Edward, the subjects of this movement, realize their terrible plight and admit that they are trapped. The dominant to tonic cadential activity which prepares this segment is intended to heighten the impact of this final verse.

Movement III, representing the actual apocalypse, is through-composed. A four-section introduction precedes the A section, and a transitional/developmental-type passage is inserted between the B and C sections (figure five). While other movements contain some "return" of material or of formal sections, this movement's text, imagery, and purpose prompted this composer to opt for a through-composed approach, in an attempt to depict the chaotic nature of the apocalyptic events and the profound changes which they have effected.
The key centers of Movement III begin in d minor and end in Eb Major, similar to those of the first movement. They differ from the first movement, however, by beginning their motion in fifths: from d minor to g minor (via F Major), then to c minor. A mediant jump to Eb then occurs, followed by an upward chromatic shift to E Major before settling back to Eb Major. The sudden move to the major mode and the unusual chromatic progressions near the end are intended to add to the ambience of suspense and surprise.

Although figure five shows d minor as the opening key center of the third movement, it should be noted here that this tonality is ambiguous, due largely to the dissonant low brass/low woodwind tone clusters (an appropriate relationship to the rubato, unmeasured feel of the entire introduction). The introductory material does have a d minor feel due to the trumpet passage in measures 3-4, the initial pitch of the woodwind statement in measure 8, and the trumpet cells which initiate the improvised activity at measure 12. Appendix 1 on page thirty-seven shows Part C of the Introduction. Orchestral elements at work include the previously mentioned dissonant low brass and woodwind clusters and the initial improvised trumpet cells beginning on D. Gradually, several additional improvised cells are introduced, at various unrelated pitches. The resulting orchestral effect is a sustained escalation.
of tension, eventually reaching a frenzied and chaotic level shortly before measure twenty.

Movement IV, *In The Ruins*, is written in a modified ABA form. As mentioned previously, the decision to use such a construction in the second and fourth movements was an attempt to create some symmetry in the overarching structure of the entire oratorio. A two-section instrumental prelude introduces the first A section, while a short coda following the second A section closes the movement (figure six).

![Figure 6: Formal Structure and Key Centers, Movement IV.](image)

Orchestration plays a key role in conveying the fourth movement's feeling of emptiness and desolation. Soli horns, chosen for the darkness of their timbre, open the movement in a passage built on minor and major thirds. They are scored a perfect fifth apart, primarily with the intent of creating an open, haunting sound (figure seven). They are joined in the eleventh measure by solo flugelhorn, an instrument of similar timbre. The dark quality of sound generated at the beginning of this movement is in marked contrast to the high-tessitura ostinati of Movement II and the pounding apocalyptic wind and percussion statements at the conclusion of the third movement.

![Figure 7: Measures 1 through 7, Movement IV.](image)
The remainder of the fourth movement is acappella, a compositional choice intended to create a significant difference between this and the other movements. This segment is the choir's only unaccompanied passage in the entire oratorio. It was this composer's intent that the purely choral sound not only be a striking textural change, but also a device through which to better focus the listeners' attention on the message of the text.

The key scheme of Movement IV shows a more harmonically static approach than any of the other four movements. While previous movements depict terror and destruction and the immense changes they bring, Movement IV represents the aftermath and the barren, unchanging picture of the city in ruins. After a twenty-one measure introduction in Bb Major, the remainder of the movement is in d minor. This long stretch of unchanging key center is intended to accentuate the text's desolate image of the destroyed city, frozen in time.

The formal structure of the fifth movement is, like that of Movement III, largely through-composed, reflecting the text's description of mankind's journey from absolute desolation to the hope and faith promised by the newly created Heavenly City. After a two-part introduction, the form is ABC, with a shortened repeat of the introduction inserted before the C section and a coda, based on the same material, following the same section (figure eight).
The key centers of Movement V move in a mediant-based journey, mirroring the text's description of mankind's odyssey to a new beginning, The Heavenly City. Beginning in c minor, the keys progress to Ab Major, to f minor, and eventually back to c minor. Then, in a stunning move, the tonal level suddenly shifts in mode from c minor to C Major. Significantly, this final section is not only one of but a few major-key melodies in the entire oratorio, it is the first appearance of this particular key. These factors are intended by this composer to help rivet the listeners' attention on the text's most important message of the piece, that of ultimate hope and faith in the wake of the terrible events which have transpired.

-Harmonic Materials-

The harmonic language used in Figures is predominantly triadic. Generally stated, Figures employs three basic harmonic plans: 1) long periods of harmonically static ostinati, over which melodic lines move modally and without regard to the ostinato's pitch center, 2) homophonic sections in which the harmonies move at a much quicker rate, frequently shifting in mediant-based progressions, and often modulating to prepare new keys for subsequent
ostinato sections, and 3) contrapuntal passages which mainly employ imitation (usually tonal, rather than strict) and overlapping stretto entries, and also rely heavily on modal and mediant-based tonal progressions.

An example of the first category, the ostinato, is shown in figure nine. This reduced excerpt from the final movement shows the A section's melodic line, its implied modal harmony, and the static c minor ostinato beneath.

Figure 9: Measures 35 through 42, Movement V.

An example of the second category, the linking/transitional homophonic section, occurs in the first movement. After forty-three consecutive measures of g minor ostinato, which are followed by a nine-measure repeat of the opening choral statement, the harmony suddenly becomes homophonic, begins to change at a significantly faster rate, and includes a combination of tonic-dominant progressions, mediant-based progressions, and more distant progressions. This combination of quicker harmonic rhythm, sudden shifts to unrelated keys, and mediant-based progression contributes to a harmonically
unsettled feeling, providing pronounced contrast to the previous and subsequent ostinati sections (figure ten).

Figure 10: C Section, Movement I.

In addition to the ostinato sections and the homophonic transitional sections shown in figures nine and ten, *Figures* also features a significant amount of contrapuntal writing, usually used for contrast between two homophonic passages. One such example occurs in the fourth movement, at measure 49. A four-measure soprano statement begins this canonic passage in d minor, with overlapping stretto entries by the rest of the choir beginning one measure later. The imitation is not always strict, as is the case in the tenor
statement, where pitches have been altered to preserve the largely consonant vertical sonority. Free imitation begins in measure 56, with the harmony beginning to move more quickly, again using mediant relationships. While the harmonic movement here is similar to that described in the second category, shown in figure ten, the contrapuntal texture provides important variety, contrasting with the ostinato and chordal sections. Figure eleven shows this passage, with its contrapuntal texture and its implied mediant-based chord progressions:
Motives and their repetition, development, and manipulation are major unifying features in Figures. Small fragments which state or outline minor and major thirds (rising or falling) recur throughout the work, helping to establish consistency and cohesion within movements and sections as well as over the course of the entire piece. Importantly, these motives also play a major role in the harmonic language of the piece, as numerous passages depend on mediant-based chord progressions and their corresponding root movement in minor and/or major thirds. Additionally, major sectional key centers frequently move by minor or major third, rather than in tonic-dominant relationships. For examples of this motion, refer to figure three (c minor B section moving to Eb major coda), and figure four (Bb major introduction moving to d minor for remainder of movement).

At the small-scale level, several segments of Movement III may be used to demonstrate motivic development as a unifying compositional device within an individual section of a specific movement. At measure 34 a descending
minor third figure is stated by the tuba, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, and 3rd clarinet (figure twelve).

![Minor 3rd Motive, Movement III.](image12.png)

Functioning as a germ cell, the figure appears again in measures 40 through 42, with additional material added (figure thirteen).

![Germ Cell with Additional Material, Movement III.](image13.png)

Additive treatment and variation continue as the original cell grows in length to six measures, which results in the passage stated in measures 47 through 52, still by the same group of instruments (figure fourteen).

![Original Cell Expanded Fully, Movement III.](image14.png)

At measure 62 the material returns to its motivic essence, the original descending minor third germ. Transposed now to Ab and F, and in the form of two consecutive eighth notes, the motive serves as the basis of a short canonic segment. Shown in reduction in figure fifteen, the resulting passage features a
short burst of very intense rhythmic activity, much stretto, and rapid changes of texture, factors which all contribute to the escalation of tension so necessary in this apocalyptic movement.

![Figure 15: Transposed Minor 3rd Motive, Movement III.](image)

In addition to its function as a unifying element within sections and movements, the motive is also used to establish consistency from one movement to another, thereby helping to achieve cohesion in the oratorio as a whole. For example, the interval of the minor third used in the opening full-choir statement at measure 9 of movement I (figure sixteen) provides the basic material for numerous other sections and passages throughout the entire work. Descending minor thirds are the building blocks of the recurrent “siren-like” motive in movement II (see figure seventeen) and of the stark trumpet calls near the beginning of the third movement (figure eighteen).

![Figure 16: Measure 9, Movement I.](image)
Generally, the melodic content of Figures is predominantly modal, the Dorian mode being featured most often. Many of the melodies (particularly in the first and last movements) demonstrate plainchant qualities with their relatively narrow range, strong linear concept, (achieved mainly through the use of the intervals of the second and third), relatively short phrases, and simple quarter note-based rhythms. These chant-like properties seem to lend a persistent, emphatic quality to these melodies, accentuating the delivery of the text. Figure nineteen shows a typical example: the first verse of text from Movement I, delivered over a constant g minor ostinato:
Figure twenty, verse one from the second movement, shows a different style of melodic writing. Compared to the previous example, this melodic line demonstrates a more complex rhythmic content, more elements of syncopation, and longer phrase lengths.

![Figure 20: Verse One, Movement II.](image)

The final melodic example, shown in figure twenty-one, occurs near the end of the piece and is built on the C Lydian mode. Although no F# is actually present in the melody, the harmonic structure beneath this line consists of alternating C and D major chords, implying Lydian and its F#.

![Figure 21: Final Choral Statement, Movement V.](image)
The overarching formal structure of *Figures For An Apocalypse* shows symmetrical properties in that the second and fourth movements are ABA forms, while the third and fifth movements are through-composed. Movement I differs from the other four movements with its ABACB form; its formal independence helps establish the first movement as introductory in nature. Symmetry is also demonstrated in the choices of final key centers: Movements I, III, and V end in major keys, while Movements II and IV end in minor keys.

Mediant relationships are an extremely important unifying feature throughout the piece. They are present in the overall scheme of ending keys, are used extensively in the chord progressions of homophonic and contrapuntal passages, and are a factor in the oratorio's motivic dependence on minor and major thirds.

Orchestration frequently plays a significant role in reinforcing and/or underscoring a segment's mood or ambience. Various examples shown earlier in this document demonstrate orchestral elements used to create and build tension, to create unusual juxtapositions of timbre and register, and to create atmospheres of emptiness and desolation.

Harmonic elements are largely triadic, and consist of three basic plans: 1) long periods of harmonically static ostinati, 2) homophonic sections in which the harmonies progress at a much faster pace, frequently moving in mediant relationships, and 3) contrapuntal sections, also using mediant harmonic movement, inserted for contrast between homophonic sections.
Motivic repetition, development, and manipulation are a major unifying force in Figures. Small fragments which state or outline ascending and/or descending minor and major thirds are presented throughout the piece. They are used to establish consistency and cohesion within movements and sections as well as over the course of the entire piece.

Finally, the melodic content of the oratorio is predominantly modal, with the Dorian mode being featured most often. Many of these melodies possess plainchant qualities with their relatively narrow range, strong linear construction, relatively short phrase lengths, and simple quarter note-based rhythms.
CHAPTER FOUR
NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR

-Movement I-

The opening recitative of movement one should have an unhurried feel—allow the bass soloist considerable freedom in effecting the rubato. Measure 9 must be very dramatic, solid, and fortissimo. The sound should be accented and connected. It should be noted that the accents used here and in all similar passages denote sharp attack, heavy weight, and full note length—there should be no separation between notes. When separation between notes is desired, a "roof-top" accent will be used.

In the ostinato at measure 19 and in all ostinati throughout the piece, care should be taken to ensure that no one percussion voice dominates the texture—strive for a blend of percussive sound. The choir's delivery at measure 31 should be accented and slightly detached, the goal being an urgent and emphatic delivery of the text. The mood at measure 71 should change significantly, having a more cantabile and unhurried feel. In addition, the accompanying piano line must be heard here.

At measure 115, it is important that the subito-piano dynamic level be executed, followed by a steady crescendo to fortissimo at measure 123. Similarly, the subito-piano at measure 133 must also be observed, followed by a sharp two-measure crescendo. The final rainstick spill should be performed very slowly, using a large authentic instrument.
-Movement II-

The first two measures are very important in setting the mood of this movement, and should be sustained for at least twenty seconds before proceeding to measure 3. Make sure the tuned water glasses are as close to the concert pitches of D and A as possible. The “siren” motives at measures 13-16, 19-21, and elsewhere must be performed with a crescendo-decrescendo as indicated. The section beginning at measure 49 is to have a jaunty, bouncing, march-like quality and should be accented accordingly. The wind machine at measure 102 is for effect only, and should not dominate the sound at this point. In order to achieve much needed contrast, the choir at measure 107 should strive for a more cantabile style than in the previous march section. The overall feel at measure 174 should be more raucous and overt than in the other march-like sections.

-Movement III-

The first twenty-five measures of the third movement should have a very unmeasured, rubato feel, in keeping with the ominous and mysterious effect desired in this introduction. Measures 12 through 19 should have an improvised, aleatoric quality. The conductor should cue each entrance, conducting only the downbeat of each measure. Instrumentalists who play the cells should repeat each cell as many times as possible, increasing the tempo and intensity as measure 20 approaches. This section should build to a very frantic and chaotic level, and the intensity should continue entirely through measure 19 with no break in sound prior to the downbeat of measure 20 (some
performers may have to interrupt the final statement of their cell in order to accomplish this). The entire process should last approximately forty seconds.

The choir's delivery at measure 71 should be crisply articulated and emphatic. The instrumentalists should perform measure 113 in a very aggressively accented manner, making sure that all notes are full length. The entire section from measure 148 to the end should have an overpowering, over-the-top feel, with extreme fortissimos and strong percussion statements. The percussion section should be allowed to improvise for approximately ten seconds in measure 159, and the goal should be the musical creation of absolute chaos and violence. The gong in the final measure should be allowed to ring until all sound is gone before proceeding to the fourth movement.

-Movement IV-

As the mood of the fourth movement is to be lonely, bleak, desolate, and empty, great care should be taken to not rush any of the tempi. At measure 11, the flugelhorn sound should blend with the horns, not dominate them.

The choir should strive for a subdued, veiled quality until the four-measure build into measure 63. The sound here should be full-bodied and open before returning to a more subdued sound at measure 70.

-Movement V-

Movement V should begin in a bold, forceful style—accent and articulate accordingly. The bassoon/bass clarinet ostinato at measure 27 is to be played staccato, light and separated rather than accented and heavy. The choir's
delivery at measure 35 should be accented and detached, similar to measure 31 of the first movement.

Measure 52 should have tremendous impact, and needs to be solid, accented, sustained, and fortissimo. Subsequently, measure 74 should show marked contrast. A more subdued quality should be effected by the choir, giving the passage a more quietly reflective ambience. Measures 90 through 102 should slowly and steadily crescendo, finally reaching a very majestically sustained maestoso style at measure 106. The final coda section, measures 124 through the end, should be performed with a furious, driving quality.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1

Introduction Part C, Movement III.

Conductor: this section (m.12 through m.19) should be played as if unmeasured. Conduct downbeats only, cuing each entrance. The entire section should last approximately 40 seconds.

Instrumentalists who play the "cells": after your entrance, repeat the cell as many times as possible before the downbeat of m.20. Increase the tempo/intensity as you approach m.20.
APPENDIX 2

TEXT

I. Go Ye Forth

And at midnight there was a cry made:
Behold, the Bridegroom cometh. Go ye forth to meet him.

Come down! Come down! Come down beloved.
Come down! Come down! And make the brazen waters burn
beneath Thy feet.

The mountains shine like wax.
The cliffs, for fear of Thy look.
The waters shine like tin in the alarming light.
The seas all ring their bells of steel beneath Thy terrible feet.
Thine eyes are furnaces.
The mountains shine like wax clad in the wrath.

Come down! Come down! Come down beloved.
Come down! Come down! And make the brazen waters burn
Beneath Thy feet.

From the beginning of the world,
How few of us have heard the silver of Thy creed?
Or paid our hearts for hours of emptiness with gold of Thy belief?
The eyes that will not coin Thy incarnation,
Figured in every field and flowering.
How shall they pay for the drink of those last nights,
Poured out on them that expect thee?

Splitting the seven countries with the prism of Thy smile,
Confounded all augury.
Sever our continents.
The world’s last night, clad in the wrath of Armageddon.

Come down! Come down! Come down beloved, and make
The brazen waters burn beneath Thy feet.
The waters burn.
Light them Thy way.
Behold the Bridegroom!
II. Advice To My Friends

Down at the Hotel Sherlock Holmes, the walls being full of ears,
We sit with eyes as bright as milk, writing to the lords of the bloody prison.
Down at the Fauntleroy Bar, brimstone in our sorry drink,
We sit with eyes as sharp as stones, writing our names in code,
Fearing to look where the windows ache.
Down at the Hotel Wonderland, with eyes as mad as rocks,
We swear at the wine as blue as fire in the glass of our phony grail.
The skylights of our intellect have gone grey as frost.
We’d ask the man for a timetable but the timetable’s gone,
And so we sit with eyes like towers in the hour, in the final hour.

Down at the Hotel Sherlock Holmes, it’s too late to get away.
The cops come down the street in fours with clubs as loud as bells.

Advice to my friends Robert, Edward:
Get out while you can!

III. The Fall Of The City

Look in the night. Look, look in the night.
Look in the night, look in the night.
Heaven stands open like a little temple,
With a man at the door having a sickle in his hand.

Fly to the mountains, fly to the mountains.
Fly to the hills, fly to the hills.
The steel is cleaner than ice.
The blade is sharper than thought.
The curve is like an intellect, neat!

He raises the sickle.
The blade flashes like a cry.
He thrusts in the sickle,
And it begins to sing in the wind.
IV. In The Ruins Of New York

Come to your windows.
Rise up in your rooms.
Come down to your doors, rich women.
Weep for the bangles on your jeweled bones.
How long has silence flourished in the houses of their joy?
See, now, the broken window panes.
Sing to them in their years without harvest, keener than a violin.
Shall the spirit be poured out upon this land?
Shall ever life swell up again, as wild as wine?

Come to your windows.
Rise up in your rooms.
Come to your doors, rich women.
Weep in the doors of your treasuries.
Come to your windows.
Weep in the doors, weep for the bangles.
Weep in the doors.
Women, women,
Weep!, Weep!
Die in your doors.

Come to your windows.
Rise up in your rooms.
Come to your doors, rich women.
Die in the doors of your need.
For the vintage at the end,
The gathering shall come no more.
V. The Heavenly City

Oh prophet, when it was afternoon you told us:
Tonight is the millenium, the withering of the state.
The skies in smiles shall fold, shall fold upon the world.
The trees stand like figures.
There comes a prophet, running for his life.
The rivers are poisoned, the skies rain blood.
The springs are brackish with the taste.
Of these your prophecies, oh prophet tell us:
When is the day? When is the day?
When is the day of our success?

City, when we see you coming down,
Coming down from God.
Shine with your lamplight, Shine upon the world.
You are the new creation’s sun.
Amen

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APPENDIX 3

THE COMPLETE SCORE

OF

FIGURES FOR AN APOCALYPSE

an oratorio for choir and wind ensemble

by

Roland Barrett

42
II. Advice To My Friends
III. The Fall Of The City
IV. In The Ruins Of New York
V. The Heavenly City