

Greg Wood

Math, Music, and Identity

Prof. Gareth Roberts

5/4/15

The Holy Cross Chamber Orchestra: Spring Concert (April 22, 2015)

During stressful weeks of schoolwork, it's a nice treat to escape into the world of live music. Directed by Eric Culver, the Holy Cross Chamber Orchestra gave listeners just that experience on the night of its 26th annual spring concert. Including works by Bordogni, Bach, Hindemith and Copland, the orchestra's captivating performance showed once again the beauty of natural music.

J.S. Bach's "Brandenburg Concerto #4 in G major" was the highlight of the show. The piece begins in staccato string parts alternating with melodic woodwind harmonies. The two parts then trade off melodic lines. Underlying lower string parts make quick ascending and descending movements up and down the G major scale. High violin lines drone a high G note. A soothing legato violin solo is underscored by staccato bursts of strings and flutes. As the piece develops further and changes key in to E minor, a fast and downright impressive violin solo, performed by Christopher Goessling, darts up and down the E minor scale. The piece quickly returns to its original key of G major. Two violins harmonize the G major scale as lower strings and woodwinds continue to underscore the chord series. The 1st movement concludes with a return to the coda at the intro.

The second movement is considerably slower. In E minor, the composition is more centered on alternating i and V chords than striking melodies. The movement concludes in a very interesting way. The final chord played by all voices is a B minor chord – an unusual chord

in the context of E minor. Following this, a lone flute solo plays a short melodic line that ends on an E.

The third movement begins with driving staccato movements between upper and lower strings. Much faster than the former movement, the third movement in G major features extensive string solos and legato woodwind harmonies. At some points, the piece transitions to E minor, in which all voices perform harmonic movements between chords in unison. The piece ends on a triumphant G major.

Another favorite of mine was Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring." I've always enjoyed Copland's playful and dramatic music. His works have always evoked a feeling of the American West to me, particularly in this piece. Copland writes in jarring tempo changes. Long legato string chord series suddenly give way to erratic xylophone solos. At some points, Copland makes use of dissonant chords, reflective of some of the more esoteric composers of the 20th century. But he never fully commits to atonal music; the sounds of Copland are soothing and pleasing to the ear. I wouldn't be surprised if Copland was a major influence on film score composers like John Williams. This piece in particular screams *Indiana Jones* to me. The piece's conclusion is dramatic and perhaps a bit over-the-top. Loud dynamics give way to soft legato strings, performing the recurring motif of the piece. The piece fades away, like a solitary voice calling out in the great American West.

The Holy Cross Chamber Orchestra's Spring Concert was an uplifting and captivating escape from the otherwise strenuous life of schoolwork. Sometimes it's nice to be reminded of the joy which pure music can bring to a human being.