

Jeu de timbres

Steven Stucky (1949–2016)

Written: 2003

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Four minutes

Steven Stucky has an extensive catalogue of compositions ranging from large-scale orchestral works to *a cappella* miniatures for chorus. He is also active as a conductor, writer, lecturer, and teacher, and for 21 years he enjoyed a close partnership with the Los Angeles Philharmonic: In 1988 André Previn appointed him composer-in-residence of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and later he became the orchestra's consulting composer for new music, working closely with Esa-Pekka Salonen. Commissioned by the orchestra, his *Second Concerto for Orchestra* brought him the Pulitzer Prize in music in 2005. Steven Stucky taught at Cornell University from 1980 to 2014. He provides the following notes for *Jeu de timbres*:

According to one rule of thumb for categorizing 20th-century music, works that emphasize thematic development and counterpoint are "German," while those that emphasize color, atmosphere and the beauty of individual harmonies are "French." Look at it closely enough, of course, and such a simplistic dichotomy fails right away—just think of the thematic development in Debussy, or the harmonic sorcery in Schoenberg or even (on a good day) Hindemith—but still it has its uses. If by "French" we mean music that follows Debussy's example in prizing the rich harmonic sonority or the delicate instrumental effect for its own sake (as opposed to valuing it mostly for its logical function in the musical grammar), then I am happily a composer of "French" music. Among my household gods are not only Debussy but also several other composers for whom sonority and color are not cosmetic frills but fundamental building blocks, including Stravinsky, Ravel, Varese, Messiaen, and Lutoslawski.

In its four-minute span, *Jeu de timbres* spends most of its energy on rhythmic verve and luminous orchestral colors. There are two themes, to be sure, but the first of them, a descending line of splashy chords, is mainly about its own splashiness, and even the second, though it is an honest-to-goodness lyrical melody in the strings, would make a poor candidate for a symphonic working-out of the Beethoven or Mahler sort. The title (play, or game, of musical colors) both alludes to these Gallic tendencies in general and makes a small, specific inside joke: *jeu de timbres* is the French name for the orchestra bells or *glockenspiel*, an instrument that makes an occasional appearance in this piece. There are other inside jokes, too, including two admiring glances at works by Ravel—one oblique, the other (at the end) quite direct.

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Travels in Time for Three

Chris Brubeck (1952–)

Written: 2010

Movements: Four

Style: Contemporary/Eclectic

Duration: Twenty minutes

“One of the goals that I have in any piece I write,” says composer Chris Brubeck, “[I] want the musicians on stage to have a really good time.” Chris Brubeck comes from a *very* musical family. First there is his father, the legendary Dave Brubeck. Then there are his brother, Darius (piano) and Daniel (drums). Chris plays bass, trombone, piano, guitar and sings and has earned international acclaim as a performer and leader of his own groups. He is also a much sought-after composer, and in the last few years has been commissioned to write many innovative works.

A consortium of seven orchestras, including the Boston Pops, Indianapolis, Wichita, Portland (Maine), Youngstown, Anchorage, IRIS, and the Colorado Music Festival commissioned Chris Brubeck to write a “triple concerto” for the group *Time for Three*. As the composer wrote for the premier with the Boston Pops:

The piece is tailor-made for the versatile members of *Time for Three*, and embraces many musical genres, from jazz to country, funk to classical, and even some gospel! The common thread throughout the work’s movements and various styles is the main theme, which reappears in many guises. This theme came to me as I was riding a train to Philadelphia in 2009 to work with the group. Zach, Nick, Ranaan, and I had several jam sessions that I recorded, giving me a sense of what musical directions Tf3 wanted to explore. The “train” theme stuck, and you will hear it in the first movement in its original, jazzy style before it is transformed through a series of musical adventures, appearing finally in a very Baroque presentation. Moving quickly from the 1700s to the 21st century, the piece conveys the feeling that the musicians are “musical time travelers,” hence the title *Travels in Time for Three*.

In the last movement, *Clouseau’s Mardi Gras*, I made the note *Misterioso burlesco* in the score, as this movement takes the audience on a humorous ride from a sneaky, Mancini-influenced opening, to a Cajun fiddle / Mardi Gras funk parade, to a gospel-funk-country groove in 7/4 time, complete with blazing fiddles on top, that matches the intensity of rock ‘n’ roll. After individual cadenzas, the entire piece climaxes into a fast 7/8 version of the original theme. This serves as a vehicle to propel the celebratory music to an exciting conclusion.

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Concerto for Orchestra
Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Written: 1943

Movements: Five

Style: Contemporary

Duration: 36 minutes

Bela Bartók was safe in America after fleeing the horrors of World War II Europe, but he was not a happy or well man. He was poor, desperately homesick and, although he didn't know it yet, dying from a form of leukemia. And he wasn't writing any new music. Finally, two Hungarian compatriots, Joseph Szigeti and Fritz Reiner, approached Serge Koussevitsky—the conductor of the Boston Symphony—and asked him to commission a work from Bartok. Even though Koussevitsky wasn't particularly fond of Bartok's music, he agreed and personally delivered the first check to Bartok.

Bartok wrote the *Concerto for Orchestra* in less than two months. Bartok provided a short outline of it: “The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death song of the third, to the life assertion of the last one.”

Bartok got virtually all of the important material for the various movements from his studies of folk music. But this is not obvious to the listener. Bartok's genius is the way he abstracts those elements and then uses them within “traditional” classical music.

The first and last movements of the *Concerto for Orchestra* are in a standard “sonata” form with an exposition area introducing the main themes, a development section, and then a restatement of those main themes. A chain of short sections, each played by a pair of wind instruments, makes up the second movement. The brass interrupt with a short chorale, and then the five pairs of winds return. The fourth movement features two folk-like melodies. Bartok interrupts that movement with a quotation from Dmitri Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony* and then restores the peace with a return of the two themes. The central movement, what Bartok calls the “death song,” is a nocturnal setting of one of the themes from the first movement.

Bartok's health was good enough for him to hear the premiere of his *Concerto for Orchestra* in December of 1944. However, he was still desperately homesick: “. . . I would like to go Home – forever.” The war had ended but he didn't get his wish. In September of 1945, his health took a turn for the worse. He died in New York.

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