Song of the Lonely Mountain

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Honors Project in Music Education and Music Performance Proposal

Song of the Lonely Mountain for Clarinet Ensemble
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As stated in the guidelines for the Honors Project, “the Honors Project demonstrates a student’s culmination of learning throughout their undergraduate experience. As the final demonstration of a student’s learning, the Honors Project will demonstrate a satisfactory level of learning within the four privileged learning outcomes: oral communication, written communication, integrative learning, and critical thinking.” Based on that definition, I believe that my Honors Project, *Song of the Lonely Mountain for Clarinet Ensemble*, became an incredibly worthwhile project on a multitude of levels by the time of its completion.

The primary goal of this “creative form” project was to arrange a piece for my senior recital that would be entertaining as well as serve an educational purpose for all involved. The piece that was arranged in this case is titled *Song of the Lonely Mountain*, the music of which is featured in the modern film *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* based off of the popular novel written by J.R.R. Tolkien. Instrumentation for the arrangement included two Bb soprano clarinets, two Bb bass clarinets, and one Bb contrabass clarinet. The reason this specific instrumentation was effective for this arrangement because it presides primarily in the lower register of the clarinet family, the bass clarinet sounding an octave lower than the Bb soprano clarinet and the contrabass clarinet sounding two octaves lower than the Bb soprano clarinet. In the movie adaptation of *The Hobbit*, the vocal parts maintain a heavy, bass dominant theme when performed in the film; the solo line itself is sung by a bass vocalist. Then, as the song progresses into the full orchestra setting, the upper voices begin to be audible. This is represented by how I chose to begin with a low clarinet feature, and then move to a climax in the upper tessitura of the clarinet.
Along with arranging the piece itself, another goal was to recruit performers who had not necessarily played the instruments they would be assigned to in order to teach them new pedagogical aspects of the clarinet family. The performers of my piece are as follows: Jeffrey Anderson (graduate performance student) on Bb clarinet, Aaron Mancini (undergraduate music education student) on Bb clarinet, myself (undergraduate music education student) on bass clarinet, Kyle Richards (undergraduate music education student) on bass clarinet, and Elizabeth Johnson (undergraduate dual music education and music performance student) on the contrabass clarinet. In the cases of Kyle and Elizabeth especially, I wanted to give the experience of playing different instrument, as neither one of them had played the aforementioned instruments in a college setting before.

As with any musical ensemble playing any piece, oral communication was crucial when it came to executing the music to its full potential. Since I wrote the piece, I needed to express my thoughts and opinions as to how different sections were to be played by the ensemble. By acting as an ensemble coach throughout the rehearsal times before my senior recital performance, I used my oral communication skills to deliver prepared, purposeful presentations at each meeting designed to promote a change in the ensemble members’ beliefs regarding how the music was supposed to sound. Without communicating orally during rehearsals, the final product would not have been effective in the slightest since every member of the group would have been playing the piece from a different viewpoint.

In the realm of written communication, I used various forms of social media to make sure the ensemble as a whole was aware of what we were supposed to rehearse, when we were to rehearse it, and where we would be meeting. If I had done so in a manner that was neither clear nor concise, there would have been incredible amounts of confusion and we would not have been
able to prepare or execute the piece in the end from a logistical standpoint. Also, in a much more straightforward manner, music itself is a form of written communication. By arranging the piece myself, I imparted my own thoughts and ideas through the medium of notes, rests, measures, etc. Had I not written the piece down using music writing software, the ensemble would not have been able to come together and play it because there would have been no way to know what was supposed to be played at each point in time throughout the piece.

The nature of a musical ensemble is one filled with integrative learning. Sight-reading a piece of music the first time is incredibly difficult, and more often than not sounds like a jumbled mess. The more music is practiced, the more effective it will sound in the final performance. By recognizing simple themes in the notation of each measure, the ensemble was able to practice and transfer said themes to the entire piece. This method of starting small and simple and ending large and complex is one that musicians apply to all forms of music they practice and play, so it was the intent to build that disposition in the ensemble through the process of learning this particular work of music.

Finally, critical thinking played a part in this project as much as the previous three learning outcomes. If I had not been able to critically think about all of the aspects of the music before the ensemble rehearsed it as well as all of the assumptions the musicians would have made while playing it, I would not have been able to execute any of the aforementioned learning outcomes. Had I not been prepared and understood the logical construction of my piece from the beginning, communicating any of my musical ideas would have not been possible. Therefore, the final performance of the piece would not have been cohesive or up to par.
To conclude, I felt that my Honors Project not only demonstrated a satisfactory level of learning within the four privileged learning outcomes, but also that the piece itself was executed in a creative and entertaining manner. It also was meant to demonstrate the culmination of learning throughout my undergraduate career by combining musical arranging, performance, clarinet pedagogy, critical thinking, and communication with a group of people in a successful manner. This final assessment set a standard of excellence above and beyond what other music education students perform for their senior recitals and was not only the hallmark of my Honors Program experience, but also contributed to the final hallmark of my undergraduate career.