

CMP Teaching Plan: Four Royal Dances

Title: Four Royal Dances Composer: Eric Ewazen
Ensemble: Orchestra Performance level: Middle School or High School
Submitted by: Leyla Sanyer; Oregon School District (les@oregon.k12.wi.us)

Background

Written in 1991 by invitation from Boosey and Hawkes, this piece was taken out of publication sometime after 1996 and just recently reprinted again after requests from many string teachers around the country. As a cellist, Ewazen is particularly comfortable with the needs of young string players, yet he does not compromise his integrity as a fine composer when writing for them. His most famous works include pieces for brass ensembles, chamber music and solo brass instruments.

The Four Royal Dances were written after the composer spent some time in Great Britain, where he may have familiarized himself with the environment and history of the English court and the characters who inhabited those environs.

Elements of Music

Movement I -- The Lord

Form A section = Eight 4-bar phrases
Phrase 1-4 melody in Vln. I
Phrase 3-4 harmony in Vln. II
Phrase 5-6 melody in Vln. II/harmony in Vla.
Phrase 7-8 melody in Cello/harmony in Bass

B section = Four 2-bar phraselets
Tonality shift every two measures
Use of syncopation in accompaniment figure

A section = Two measure transitional figure in lower strings
Two 4-bar phrases with the last four measures in rhythmic augmentation

Rhythm - motivic rhythmic figures (eighths and two sixteenths against syncopation) in 2/4

Melody - duple meter melody in D dorian; energetic, regal and gives the impression of someone on horseback or walking briskly to arrive at a destination

Harmony - modal quality with interspersed minor and ending major tonality. (piccardy third)

Compositional Devices - Ambiguity between major, minor and dorian mode. (compare to Hindemith 8 Pieces for Strings)

Movement II -- The Lady

Form Two measure introduction
7-bar phrase - split into 3 and 4 with melody in Vln. I
5-bar phrase - split into 4 and 1 with melody in Vln. II and Vla.
7-bar phrase - split into 3 and 4 with melody in Vln I/harmony in Vln.II

4-bar phrase with melody in Cello
5-bar phrase with melodic material mainly in upper strings
6-bar phrase with melodic material in Vln. I
Two bar transitional material using quarter/half figure
Three bar phrase elided into three bar transitional material
3-bar introduction to the Coda
Coda - 6 measures bringing back introduction plus 4 bars

Rhythm - rhythmic ostinato in bass (quarter/half) in 3 / 4

Melody - flowing triple meter melody in E minor that glides, turns and hesitates gracefully.

Harmony - E drone sets up E minor/B minor travels to G Major/minor and back to E minor, ending on E Major chord (piccardy third).

Compositional Devices - Use of the drone and ostinato (compare to Holst St. Paul Suite--Dargason for ostinato and Corigliano Voyage for color and expression)

Movement III -- The Jester

Form 1-bar introduction
A 8-bar phrase - AAB
 4-bar phrase - split into 2 and 2
 6-bar phrase - split into 4 and 2
A Two 4-bar phrases
B 8-bar phrase split into 4 and 4
A 10-bar phrase - split into 4 and 4 and 2

Rhythm - quarter note pulse notes (2 quarters/eighths) in 4/4

Melody - a jaunty, edgy tune in duple meter in C mixolydian punctuated by running lines

Harmony - C mixolydian with suspensions in meas. 9 and 27 resolving in F Major on final chord, giving whole piece a dominant leading to tonic feel.

Compositional Devices - Use of repetition passing between voices/sections (compare to Britten Simple Symphony - Movement I)

Movement IV -- The Knight

Form 2-bar introduction
A 8-bar phrase with last measure eliding into 2-bar transition
 8-bar phrase
B 7-bar phrase followed by 2-bar transition
 8-bar phrase - split into 4 and 4
A 8-bar phrase consisting of 2-bar figures - the last one a transition
 10-bar phrase with the last 4 measures as an augmentation

Rhythm - mixed meter (6/8 and 9/8), hemiola and syncopation using ties and augmentation in last 4 measures

Melody - a wild gallop in G minor with repetitive eighth note figures and syncopation.

Harmony - open 5th introduction/B section, G minor focus with pedal 3rd and 5th degree under chord changes as well as V-I relationships at meas. 29

Compositional Devices - Use of mixed meter. (compare to Harrison's Here Comes the Sun)

Timbre

Timbral changes in this piece are caused by changes in bowing style. There are examples of legato, slurs, combination bowing (The Jester) and spiccato bowstrokes. Melodic lines are passed between voices, further causing the listener/player to hear different timbres.

Texture

The movements are primarily homophonic in texture with the melodic line passing between voices and duo sections and the accompaniment is vertically scored. However, there are contrasting moments where the texture is thinner or more polyphonic, such as in The Lady where the use of a drone and fifths gives the work a kind of medieval quality. The 4 bar "coda" is imitative. In The Jester the bass part is used as textural emphasis.

Expression/Dynamics

The expressive nature of this piece influences its capacity to draw pictures of these royal characters. The musician is required to show some understanding of how bowing style affects expression. The dynamics play into the dramatic quality of the "stories" that are being sketched out for the musician. Ewazen is skillful at crafting a contemporary sound in a very classical context.

Crisp articulations represent a regal lord. Flowing lines and subtle dynamics depict the elegant lady. Sudden and short crescendos characterize a leaping jester. Accented syncopations and intense crescendos ride with the knight.

The Heart

The heart of this piece is the way the composer uses melody, rhythm, expression and compositional devices to depict the characters of the royal court of England, specifically the lords, ladies, jesters and knights. In a very short musical space the composer's intent is clear in giving life to these people.

In teaching *Four Royal Dances*, the teacher has the unique opportunity to share how composers have always told stories and fleshed out human character through music. The technical aspects are subdued so that the musical complexities can be more easily studied. The metric and harmonic structures are fresh and interesting. Through the study of this piece, young music students can be introduced to many other works that may or may not be appropriate for their present performance level.

Introducing the Piece

The introduction of this piece can be done through a series of strategies spread out over a few rehearsals before looking at the *Four Royal Dances*.

Play a call and answer review on D major and D minor scales. Ask students to choose a scale, choose their own bowing style and play it for the class to imitate. Play the D minor scale with a raised 6th degree and teach the D dorian scale by call/answer. Use a visual aid (such as the marker board or keyboard model) to show half and whole steps.

Pass out colored paper laminated squares with note names on them to groups of 8 students. Ask them to stand in the relationships related to each scale while holding the note name squares.

Introduce a eurhythmic exercise to experience 2 against 3. Feet move in 2 while hands clap in 3. Switch!

Share a recording of Carnival of the Animals (The Elephant and The Swan). Hand out blank pieces of paper and ask students to draw pictures of the animals and describe them in words that could translate to music. You may want to discuss one animal as a class and ask the students to each write their own description for the other.

Begin class with a warm up exercise in which the students imitate the teacher and/or student leaders who play short motives with expression (articulation, dynamics and style).

Outcome #1 – SKILL

The students will examine the construction and performance of major, minor and dorian scales.

Strategies

1. Review D dorian scale and use for warm up exercise. Using rhythms from The Lord, play a game with major, minor and dorian scales.
2. Ask students to sing the scale with eyes closed, while using note names, numbers or solfege. Open eyes and use note names while singing and looking at a keyboard model.
3. Ask a student leader to point at notes on keyboard model while others sing or play. Change direction often.
4. Discuss and mark whole and half step placement.
5. Play and compare the D major and D dorian scales using instruments and manuscript paper.
6. Groups of 8 students will demonstrate the placement of half steps using numbered pieces of paper.

Assessments

1. Pair students with friends or stand partners. Ask each student to choose a scale in D (major, minor or dorian). Assess each other as to accuracy of half steps, as well as clear tone and smooth bow changes.
2. Hand out a piece of manuscript paper with scale names listed. Each student will write out their own D Major, D minor and D dorian scale (one octave). Teacher will collect papers and check for accuracy and clear notation.
3. Teacher will choose a piece in D dorian (jazz tune or Dorian Variations) for a sightreading exercise. Assess through observation whether the intonation and accuracy is evident in the group.

Outcome #2 -- KNOWLEDGE

The student will analyze how a composer defines a character using melody, rhythm, expression and compositional devices.

Strategies

1. Give the students notational exercises for clarity in their writing. Spend time reviewing note spacing, stem length and lines and spaces.
2. Pair students and give them time to improvise melodies for each other using the D dorian mode. Any interested student can then share with the whole class.
3. Teacher plays a well known melody like Twinkle and ask students to try it in different meters and rhythms.

4. Play a recording of the Enigma Variations by Edward Elgar. Explain the composer's purpose in writing this piece to depict his family and friends, using their initials to label each movement.
 - Discuss adjectives (light, bouncy, heavy, powerful, sinister, etc.) that might be used to describe the expressive nature of pieces.
 - Ask students to listen to two or three different movements and between each, give them a little time to write down a few adjectives.
 - Discuss compositional devices such as contrast and repetition. Listen for these devices in the Elgar.
 - Make a chart to show these terms and then write down ideas for how the music could be written to show these characters.
5. As a class, look at the expression markings in The Jester and make decisions about adding markings to create a more definitive musical performance.

Assessments

1. Give out half sheets of manuscript paper for students to write a short melody in D dorian using expression markings, dynamics and rhythms to characterize one of their friends or family members.
2. Perform some of these pieces in class and/or on a concert. Record these pieces and use self assessments after the project is complete to let students make decisions about their work.
3. Take out a piece of music that contains clear expression markings and sightread.

Outcome #3 -- AFFECTIVE

The student will discover their own musical personality.

Strategies

1. Examine one spot such as the last chords in The Lord. Ask students to close eyes while playing and share how it feels when the major third is introduced.
2. Split students into groups, hand out 3 x 5 cards with "attitudes" on them. Each group must find a way using their instrument to share their word.
3. Choose and discuss a list of words that would describe each of the movement characters. Next to these words, write musical techniques that might more clearly illuminate these characters.
4. Play the movements with different dynamics, tempi and articulations to see what effect these techniques have on the pictures in the music.
5. Students each bring in a recording of a piece of music that they feel best represent their personality and who they are as a person. Ask them to write down the musical attributes of this piece that create this description of character.

Assessments

1. Journal about each student's individual ideas on the compositional devices used and how it makes them feel.
2. Ask students to write poetry to share with each other and in concert for parents or in a "published" literary journal.
3. Ask each student to write a short piece for string orchestra that represents themselves musically.
4. Perform some of these pieces in class and/or on a concert. Record these pieces and use self assessments after the project is complete to let students make decisions about their work.