Title
Symphony no. 1 'Hai no Kage'

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Symphony no. 1 ‘Hai no Kage’
for soprano, Japanese percussion ensemble, and full symphony orchestra

A thesis submitted in satisfaction of
the degree requirements from the degree
Master of Arts in Music Composition

By

Mason Swan Lewis
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Program notes for

Symphony no. 1 ‘Hai no Kage’

By

Mason Swan Lewis

Master of Arts in Music Composition
University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Ian Krouse, Chair

The genesis of the symphony dates back to the fall of 2015, at the conclusion of a vacation in Japan. Having toured the ancient Imperial capital of Kyoto, the bustling metropolis of Tokyo, and the serene beauty of Hakone, I felt the desire to compose a work set in Japan, with music that accurately depicts the history and picturesque landscapes. However, it was not until a year later that I began work on the initial material. Before I knew the music would become a symphony, the idea was to compose a dramatic opera in 5 acts, titled *Masayo To Masashi*. The work follows the stories of two characters, a husband and a wife, who are separated when the former is drafted into military service. Masashi, the husband, is sent to fight on Iwo Jima, where he is instructed to fight until death. Meanwhile, Masayo endures numerous tragedies, including the bombing of Tokyo. Both, however, survive their various conflicts and are given false news of
each other’s demise. After the war, a heartbroken Masashi returns to Japan, only to discover Masayo is indeed alive. The opera concludes brightly, with both characters looking to the future with optimism and hope.

Despite the creation of a promising plot to an Opera, I decided to set the music to a symphony first, focusing specifically on Masayo’s perspective. The result are five highly-connected movements that are a narrative of their own though familiar and reoccurring themes, motifs, and instrumental solos. Several instruments — such as the piano, solo flute, taiko drums, and koto — assume the role of various characters in the Opera, while a soprano solo assumes the role of Masayo. I think of this symphony as an operetta without words, that is, until the fifth and final movement when the soprano joins the orchestra.

The first movement imitates an overture of an opera, designed to thrust the audience back to Japan in the year 1945. At roughly three minutes in length, it is the shortest movement of the symphony. Even eighth-note patterns in asymmetrical intervals clash against heavy dotted-eighth-note patterns, paying homage to ancient court music of Kyoto. Tension is built harmonically as each eighth-note pattern passes, ultimately landing on a soft violin harmonic. The mood changes significantly, with the music growing more haunting and sparse. The movement ends leading in to its successor, with a final statement of the eighth-note pattern melting away as lower strings grow in volume, imitating an air-raid siren and the ominous sound of B-29 squadrons.

Beginning where the first movement left off, the second, titled 3-9-45, sets to music the infamous
firebombing of Tokyo. All of the orchestral forces engage together in violent passages and flurries of notes over the course of several minutes, until the orchestra is interrupted by the trumpets, imitating the air-raid siren. This “eye of the storm” moment does not last long, with the orchestra stirring itself up again to conclude the movement in the manner in which it began.

The third movement is a flashback in time, returning to the years before the war began. Titled Kaisō, or Reminiscence, the overall mood is serene and calm. The koto and piano make their first appearance in this movement, while the solo flute and strings accompany both. The “sakura” theme (a prominent and reoccurring melody throughout the symphony representing harmony and peace) reveals itself several times throughout the movement. However, the promise of peace is hindered by harmonies that contain subtle tension, a reminder the plot is looking to the past and is not of the present. Overall, the third movement is a “flower between two chasms”, serving as a buffer between the turbulent second movement, and the horrors that lie ahead in the fourth.

Similar in nature to the second movement, the mood of the fourth is consumed with agony and despair. Although not as frantic as the second, the fourth makes up with dense orchestration and unpredictable tempo changes. Titled Nenshō, or Burning, the music reflects the hellish conditions that resulted from the bombing campaign. The movement continues from the third without pause, as the dreamlike state of the third melts away slowly, ushering in darker and more menacing sounds. Finally, with a sudden, sharp chord consisting of brass and woodwinds, the turbulence resumes. The horrors unleashed in this movement are not constant, however, with a sudden interruption of material related to the third appearing without warning. Like the transition
of the third movement to the fourth, this interruption melts away like fire to wax, picking up speed at a rapid pace, finishing the movement with tremendous volume and intensity.

Similar to the final movement of Shostakovich’s controversial Symphony no. 4, the fifth movement is by far the longest and weightiest. A threnody, the beginning nature of the music is dark and heavy. Japanese tradition is demonstrated from the start, with the sound of a traditional Shinto Rin Gong, struck 3 times: a symbolic call to the spirits. After approximately 28 minutes of music from the beginning of the symphony, the soprano finally joins the orchestra, assuming the role of Masayo from my opera-in-development, Masayo To Masashi. She sings to her dead loved ones and ancestors, with her vocal lines noticeably static and bleak. Having survived the bombing of Tokyo, she is war-torn and shellshocked. Some of the saddest moments of the entire symphony occur in this movement, for example, when a lonely piano passage accompanied by a single note held by the 1st violins appears out of nowhere, representing the spirit of Masayo’s dead child calling out to his mother. Despite many melancholy moments, the movement progressively becomes more optimistic and positive. By the end of the threnody, Masayo sings of hope and a future, while nevertheless still aware of her dark past. With the ominous and reoccurring “E” pitch — representing pain and suffering — long gone, the mood and style of the third movement returns, insuring the audience that the darkness and turmoil of the previous music is forever gone, and only replaced by peace and tranquility.
The thesis of Mason Swan Lewis is approved.

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2018
Symphony no. 1 'Hai no Kage'
for soprano solo and orchestra (2017)

I. Maegaki - Preface - 前書き

Mason Swan Lewis
Footnotes

* Bowing should be heavy, but not overly forceful or harsh.

** Each cello assigned to its various pitch should slowly converge to the eventual pitch, D, with the exception of cello stand 4.

*** Vibrato is very fast, alternating between 1/3 pitch above and below the given pitch, D.
Senza misura (\( \approx 90 \text{ ca} \))
Footnotes

* Each cello stand is assigned a starting pitch, then glissandos freely based on the written curved line.
III. Kaisō - Reminiscence - 回想

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Adagio cantabile} & \quad \text{\textdash} \quad 52 \text{ ca}
\end{align*} \]
IV. Nenshō - "Burning..." - 燃焼
Footnotes

* The Violin II section is divided into two parts. Seven stands pluck the highest possible (indefinite) pitch of their instrument, unsynchronized and as fast as possible. The remaining seven stands tap their instrument, unsynchronized and as fast as possible.

** Strike with wooden stick or mallet.
V. Nageku - Threnody - 嘆く

4/4

25

Adagio, freddo e lontano \( \frac{1}{4} \) = 40 ca

6/4 4/4

Piano

309

6/4

Poco più mosso \( \frac{1}{4} \) = 44 ca