

## Introduction or A few thoughts on genre:

In a lot of places, when the term "classical music" is uttered, old, dead white guys with powdered wigs, snooty intellectuals and concert halls filled with stuffed shirts routinely come to mind. When you ask about it, some people will say they respect it, and that they wish they had more of an "appreciation" for it, but most likely, though perhaps curious, they'll probably never voluntarily go and listen to it on their own.

I've known this for a long time and I think it's unfortunate that the term classical music dredges up images like this; since I first heard it, I have always thought of classical music as being very dynamic, emotional, and beautiful to the mind as well as the ear. With every performance and in every composition, I strive to make my music evoke these qualities.

If you don't mind a little history, I'd like to tell you a bit more about where I'm coming from.

In the discussion from earlier, if asked for a name, Mozart or Beethoven would probably come up first; these men are quintessential "classical" composers—that is, they come from the Common Practice Period (approx. 1600-1900), a time when they and people like them used instrumentation and established harmony in creative, but broadly consistent ways. Now, when talking about later composers such as Wagner, Scriabin, Debussy, Stravinsky or Prokofieff, they're squeezed under the umbrella term of "classical" too, but they're not classic classical. They came after the CPP, and for them, in their lives work, they either used instrumentation and harmony in ways *inconsistent* with the established norm, or in some cases have chosen to abandon the establishment altogether. They exist at the edge of "classical" music, and when we talk about the composers who came after them like Arnold Schönberg, John Cage, or Philip Glass...Conlon Nancarrow or Charles Ives, THOSE guys are more likely to be put in an entirely different section altogether such as "avant-garde" instead of classical.

As a composer, I can tell you that men from this last group would probably use more specific terms to describe their work, such as aleatoric, minimalist or using advanced techniques. Me? I don't like the term "classical music", it's usually inaccurate or vague. I prefer "art music": Art where the medium is constructed sound.

While I use older musical forms such as fugue or variation like the classic classical guys did, I use repetition and large scale development in ways that the archetypes, like Mozart or Beethoven, might never have used. I rarely touch extended techniques like Ives or Nancarrow did. And in general, I do approach instrumentation and harmony in similar ways to later "classical" composers like Rachmaninoff or Brahms but I don't mind leaving the world of keys when absolutely necessary.

I've never set out to *try* and write music that sounds different. With every piece, I try to make my own voice stronger, clearer and more understandable. So, when I think of genre, I think,

"Who'd be interested in this?"

This is music for people that are interested in "classical" music, but who also want something fresh.

## Program Notes

### La Scarlatine (2001, revised 2011)

This piece went through more iterations over a greater period of time than probably anything else I've ever done. It started as a "holy moly" idea I happened across while I was practicing one day. There's a piano at my alma mater with a very glassy tone, and I discovered that a high broken chord played with both hands followed by a smashing low note sounded fantastic. The timbre of the piano gave the tone a two-tiered sound: an initial explosion of glassiness followed by the rest of the piano sound envelope, and it made me think of the buildup of electrostatic charge and then the sudden release of lightning. While I was toying with those ideas, the melody came to me, and I had the idea to base the piece around this idea of buildup and release. After ten years of cuts, additions and complete rewrites, the piece in its current form came into existence.

### Rhapsody (2011)

This piece actually began as an exercise in which I played a mistake that sounded pleasant; taking that with a handful of wistful fragments of melody and some mildly clever chord progressions, I set out to write a short, simple piano solo that was dashing, elegant and colorful. I wanted a work I could show at parties when someone asks me to play a little something.

### Elegy (2001):

I entered college as a freshman in the Fall of 2001, and I came to campus just days after the September eleventh attacks. Like everyone, I was nonplussed and searching for a way to make sense of the emotions and thoughts I was having. This piece began as part of a heated effort to complete my first piano sonata.

During my freshman year, I got it into my head that I wanted to write a piano sonata entitled "Thoughts on War". The first movement, "A Call to War" was a rousing battle cry depicting the surprise and realization of what a person might feel upon receiving a draft letter. It had a short, forceful theme repeated without variation, a slower section that was a kind of sad mockery of the national anthem, and then a brief recap of the main theme with a crude, violent coda. The second movement, "Thoughts of Home", represented the feelings of homesickness while the recipient is away fighting. The third movement, "Elegy" is a lament coming from discovery of the death of the recipient. The fourth movement was entitled simply "War", and had all the things you'd expect out of a piece with such a title.

Sadly, the movement you're hearing is the only section of that sonata worth hearing. I wrote it during Christmas break of my freshman year.

### Interrupted Lullaby (2008, revised 2011)

This work began about 10 years ago as an attempt to build a piece out of the melody to the nursery rhyme "Hush, Little Baby".

Because the main theme was so melodic, I decided to use counterpoint to develop the theme whenever possible, and not wanting to dilute it, I avoided devices that manipulated it by making it longer or shorter. The only place where I did so was in the middle section, and it uses augmentation (stretching the theme by making all the notes longer) and fragmentation, otherwise, the theme is kept whole throughout. This piece is dedicated to a former student, Henry Paulsen.

### Maneater (2010)

This piece started just with me hearing the piece and thinking it would make a good piece for solo piano. The arrangement of the notes for two hands was a little tricky because it covers a very wide range, although transcribing it was very easy.

### Grenade (2011)

I liked this Bruno Mars song when I heard it on the radio, and thought it would make a compelling solo piano track. I transcribed it, arranged it for two hands and added my own special touches in appropriate places.

### The Sinking of Venice (2007, Revised 2011)

When I was living and working in Nice a number of years ago, I had the occasion to take a paid vacation and I decided to see the city of Venice, Italy. Wanting to be prepared, I looked up tourism information for Venice and I quickly found stories about the fact that Venice is sinking at the rate of about two inches every ten years. In an article on this, I read about some of the ideas engineers had devised to keep Venice from sinking such as: diverting water flow from the city, at the expense of stagnating the water, and making the whole city stink, impregnating the city bedrock with a hardener, putting Venice on a giant pallet and jacking it up, to name a few—and none of them seemed like real solutions.

A few years later, I wrote what was to be the main theme of this piece and I started sketching out what I wanted. I knew the theme had a massive, ominous, circular, monolithic quality to it, and I wanted to create a piece that used this theme without distorting it or sacrificing its character. Within a few months, the piece was starting to take shape and I started looking for a title. No title came. As the piece lay fallow over the following months, I started work on my

novel, and I remembered my trip to Venice. The title immediately presented itself. This piece doesn't *depict* the sinking of Venice—the scope, the recurring, obsessive return to the theme, the omnipresence of the motive—never rising, never falling but swelling and ebbing and shrinking ceaselessly—with regard to the intractable problem of a city on the water, this piece *is* the sinking of Venice.