THE LIMINAL VOICES

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Committee:
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ABSTRACT

Marilyn Shrude, Advisor

_The Liminal Voices_ for orchestra is a single-movement, seven-and-a-half minute work scored for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets in B-flat, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns in F, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, three percussionists, piano, harp, and strings. It is a reflection on my time spent in the woods of Northeast Vermont, inspired by the sounds of native woodland birds and the crumbling remains of old farms that are hidden there.

The aural intent of _The Liminal Voices_ is to capture the sounds of the forests where I love to walk, and blend this soundscape with themes inspired by them. Therefore, a major sonic component of the work is the use of bird songs, which I recorded and transcribed. Each bird’s song is paired with a specific instrument, giving it a distinct timbre and character. Several texts also served as sources of inspiration—in particular, Robert Frost’s poem, “Directive.” This poem describes the experience of climbing a mountain in New England and discovering remnants of an old town—similar to experiences I have had in my own backyard—and is ultimately a reflection on how getting lost can lead to self-discovery.¹

For Oscar Perron, his descendants, and the land they call home.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INSTRUMENTATION

3 Flutes (3rd doubling Picc.)
2 Oboes
English Horn
2 Clarinets in B flat
Bass Clarinet
2 Bassoons
Contrabassoon

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
3 Trombones
1 Tuba

Timpani

3 Percussionists:
  Percussion 1:
    Woodblocks (2)
    Glockenspiel
    Vibraphone
  Percussion 2:
    Suspended Cymbal
    Tam-Tam
    Marimba
  Percussion 3:
    Concert Bass Drum
    Orchestral Chimes
    Guiro
    Triangle

Harp
Piano

Strings
NOTES FOR PERFORMANCE

Duration: ca. 7’

Accidentals carry through the measure in which they appear.

Grace notes may begin on or before the beat, at the players’ discretion.

- Pitch is slightly higher or lower than given note, though embouchure adjustment.

- Blow air through the instrument (using any fingering) on the syllable “sh.”

- Gradually decrease note duration over the course of the gesture (e.g., thirty-second to eighth).

- Crescendo from silence

- Decrescendo to silence

- Fall: bend pitch down from initial note

Program note:

To be liminal is to be on a threshold – in particular, it is to exist between two states of being or of consciousness. *The Liminal Voices* was inspired by my experiences walking in the woods of Vermont. When I leave my parents’ house for a walk in the woods, I begin by crossing the dirt road that runs along the northern boundary of their property. Ten minutes later, I am far enough away from humanity that no audible signs of it remain. The wind rustles the leaves on the trees, and brooks trickle— but the sound that dominates is that of the birds singing. As I climb the steep hills, I am immersed in a wash of these transcendent songs, which seem almost human, but are at the same time otherworldly. If I am especially lucky, or if I search long enough, I come across my favorite singer – my namesake – the hermit thrush. As I listen, I think of lines from Whitman and Frost that exalt this little bird’s song. These poets’ words, like the sound they describe, have the capacity to transport one’s mind. No other place, sound, or experience means so much to me; nothing makes me feel more like myself.