

Judging Report of altoboy291's "Penelo's Theme"

Technicality: Some direction is needed in the beginning beside the metronome marking, especially for an ensemble piece where interpretation would be even more difficult than with a solo. The volume markings are good, but individual specifications needn't come in before the notes. The main issue, technically, with the music is centered around harmonics and voice-leading. Harmonically, the piece is often very thin, with unisons, perfect intervals, and occasional dissonances that, though perhaps interesting in their own right, don't mesh as well as they could because of the lack of more expressive chord tones. In the leading, parts often move in similar, sometimes parallel, motion, which robs many of the lines of individuality. A good example of both problems is in the first three measures: The harmony is generally formed of only two tones, sometimes in fourth or fifth intervals, while the bass has no original tones at all and is usually doubling another line. The soprano lines in these measures have no individuality, and though somewhat syncopated, follow the main melody without deviation or interest. All this harshness stems from one root: Over-orchestration. Though the ensemble has the potential to create good music, reducing the scale to refine the elements of line and harmony is necessary before being able to write convincingly for multiple players. Despite these crucial points, the score is laid out well, with careful attention paid to volume and dynamic. Phrasing has been forgotten, however, which is a vital component for a wind piece. **65%**

Musicality: The ideas behind this work are very good. The timbres are well-suited to mix with each other, though the violin-writing may require further experimentation to come across naturally in a composition with no other strings. The percussion is engaging throughout. The main theme is treated very well, and altogether this arrangement is excellently proportioned, being neither too long nor too short. The accompaniment meanders somewhat during the development, with very repetitive arpeggiations and step-wise motion meant to hold the listener's attention. The interrupted subjects beginning at :23 are very good, and the basslines throughout the piece, despite often being doublings, show moments of energy, such as at :14. The entrance of the main theme at 1:05 is handled sensitively and is quite beautiful. The slow-down at 2:00 before the coda is well done, and the coda itself is likely the best section in the piece, displaying characterization in the parts that tend to be absent elsewhere. Overall, the only thing truly holding this arrangement back is experience. With a further study into harmony and part-writing, this composition could make a fine addition to the concert band repertoire. **79%**

Personal Tilt: I like this arrangement, and its treatment of the source material is something I'd enjoy attending live, once the necessary refinements were made. The ideas in the composition are all worthy of interest, though the rough edges are still enough to deter my listening in a purely musical sense, as opposed to an academic one. While I'm unable to score my opinion as higher than 'good' at present, in a year, I'm sure a revised copy would increase this by ten points, if not more. **79%**

Final Score: **74.3/100**

Judging Report of Blayke Waldrep's "Penelo's Theme"

Technicality: The score should definitely have possessed initial direction to tempo, volume, and performance style. There are a few harsh harmonic passages, such as as measure 4, where the first beat strikes a perfect fifth, and overall the work tends to sound a bit thin, with many octaves and perfect intervals in and between the parts, despite a few three-dimensional phrases that outline fuller progressions. This is relieved in the middle section somewhat, though the development could have gone farther with more adventurousness. The transition four measures before the last is quite excellent, though, as is the harmony leading up to it. The end is a bit truncated, but there were otherwise no obvious grammatical errors in key, spelling, or leading, and, if any were overlooked, they aren't noticeable. **75%**

Musicality: Most of the musical considerations stem directly from the technical ones in this arrangement. The arrangement itself is very faithful to the source material, which is fine, and possesses some creative harmonic alteration in the development. The biggest problem, though, musically, is that the piece is cut short: It states the source once through and ends, without leaving a great impression upon the listener. Ideally, a variation on another composition should develop an idea that matches the interest and satisfaction of the original, albeit in a different way, while this work sounds more like an improvised sketch of "Penelo's Theme." It certainly is a pleasant one, though, and the infrequent chromatic steps in the left hand are particularly nice. High points include a defined rhythm, logical harmony, and left-hand 'fanfare' triplets that occur every so often in the main theme, though there is room for growth and curiosity. **75%**

Personal Tilt: I like this work very much, though moreso as an improvised pianoforte solo than a formal arrangement, as it doesn't quite step up to the original with much vigor. Nonetheless, I can't criticize the composer's ear, the midsection's potential, or the writing's key ideas, and, if lengthed and elaborated, this foundation could be an excellent keyboard translation of the original's charming music. **75%**

Final Score: 75/100

Judging Report of Conqueso's "Penelo's Theme"

Technicality: There is very little to criticize technically in this piece. Direction and phrasing are plentiful, each line is clearly drawn and separated, key changes and chord spellings are logical, and accidentals are provided for clarity. The only points to consider, perhaps, are that some dissonances could occasionally be resolved more smoothly, and there are parallel fifths, as in measure 61, but, as both seem to be stylistic decisions, they affect the technical score little. A minor suggestion would be that breaking the barlines at syncopated rhythms, such as at measure 19, can make the beat easier to sight-read, but the score is legible, and such considerations are mainly informed by preference. It's also generally best when sustained voices on the pianoforte don't have their tone repeated in another voice; thus, at measure 54 and other places, the F above middle C would have been more accurately written as an eighth-note in the higher voice, rather than as a held whole-note. Like the barlines, however, this is a superficial concern that would ease sight-reading but doesn't especially confuse the notes otherwise. **95%**

Musicality: The musicality in this arrangement is solid and confident. Proportion is good, with no section being under- or overdeveloped. The rhythm is nice, syncopated, and lively, and the occasional unexpected meter change, as to 6/8 from Common, is charming. The music beginning at measure 34 is beautiful, as is true of the source. I like how the ending emphasizes a previous theme and how the two final, highest tones don't belong to the tonic triad. I would have liked to see rhythmic change become a motive, as is hinted at by the aforementioned change to 6/8 and the final shift to 6/4. The material is developed well, with the main theme presented in a variety of ways and pitches, and the structure taken from the original works well. More creativity taken to bend the music or shape it into a new and personal character would have challenged the listener a bit more, however. The harmony sets about to do this, and succeeds with its many jazz and non-chord tones, but by the end of the piece, it tends to feel like a filter through which the source music is playing, rather than a fully-realized vision. This is enforced by the fact the piece settles into its groove very quickly and doesn't stir very much afterward. Something radical, like a major change in mode, rhythm, or tone, would have provided the contrast to make this a more-fully engaged experience. That the most important word, as it relates here: Contrast. Though the music is polished, well-defined, and often lovely, it presents what it has to offer from the first few measures, and never builds much upon its central idea. The music doesn't disappoint, but because there's only one expression, it lacks the momentum to hold the audience's attention as well as it should. Finally, although the piece is mostly accompanied melody, the writing is sensitive and never resorts to empty virtuosity. **85%**

Personal Tilt: There's nothing wrong with this arrangement as a stand-alone composition. However, being familiar as I am with the composer's style, I felt he was somewhat lax with this music. Conqueso is very proficient with the writing of jazz and Romantic pianoforte arrangements, and he no doubt has a strong system to go about approaching such subjects; however, I don't feel he stretched himself very much for this contest, and I would have liked to see himself test his style to new limits. Perhaps this is what he has done, and I am merely not noticing it. Certainly, no one doubts the composer's skill or talent, but I didn't perceive the feeling of creative jubilation that can make arrangements so delightful. The music is without question good, but when put into the collection of the rest of the composer's repertoire, I'm left wanting more, moreso than if a less accomplished composer broke his pre-existing limits to create a lesser achievement. **79%**

Final Score: **86.3/100**

Judging Report of Josh Barron's "Eruyt Village"

Technicality: 'Mysteriously' in Italian should be spelled 'Misterioso', with an 'i' rather than a 'y', though the direction is welcome. The key is a fifth off; rather than B-flat minor, the actual center is E-flat minor, meaning the accidental C-flats and B-naturals needn't be written out of signature. The volume direction is very good. The key, again, at 25 is confused; it isn't truly A-flat major and seems to be centered around either B-natural or C-flat. Spelling won't be counted against the score, but, again, the Italian for 'expressively' is 'espressivo', with an 's' rather than an 'x'. The key is corrected at the recapitulation, which is good. The harmony is very thin, which is unfortunate; it is quite full of perfect intervals and unisons, and much of its beauty is undercut by a lack of chord-tone center, with lines neither belonging to nor creating tension against a backdrop. Thus, they often sound directionless. For example, at measure 29, the string quartet plays a B, A, and A-flat (or G-sharp), for two beats, which resolves to a B, A, and G-flat (F-sharp); the notes seem to float between indefinite sound, which can produce beautiful ambiguity but here seems unintentional and counteractive to the more driven and emotional atmosphere that the composer wants created. The string writing is playable, and, though there may be parallelisms, they would be sorted out with the above harmonic concerns. **69%**

Musicality: The music, aside from some harmonic malnourishment, is full of good things. The proportion is excellent, with enough weight in development and repeated material to balance variety and coherence. The playing forces are nicely handled. The contrabass is a bit heavy for chamber music but it could reasonably add richness. The pianoforte seems somewhat unnecessary in the scope of things: Its timbre is naturally rather boring when compared to the singing quality of the strings, and it doesn't command a lead in the composition, but I could be persuaded that its gentle *apreggiations* provide reason enough for its inclusion. The effect is quite lovely, after all. Lovely, too, is the flow and entrance of the parts in the beginning, as at measure 9 for the violoncello. It is a great help to this arrangement that the source music is beautiful itself, but many of the arranger's changes manage to stand on their own, though the melody at measure 15 begins to meander slightly. The writing at 47 has a powerful upper line, but the parts move a bit too similarly, as in the pianoforte, and the lines follow each other up or down without independence, which is true of other sections as well. The pizzicato playing between the the inner voices at measure 75 is good. I like the ending, beginning at measure 92, and especially the contrabass line three bars from the last, which is then inverted on the pianoforte. Despite the fact it must work through the aforementioned technical problems and is thus considerably crippled, it is apparent there was remarkable thought and emotion put into this work, and with time the ear of the composer will no doubt become tuned to produce even more convincing arrangements. **89%**

Personal Tilt: My opinion of this work is mixed, though overall it is good. There is obviously a very strong musical pull in it an even stronger desire to express it, but it is severely hamstrung, sometimes even silenced, by core harmonic concerns. The key signature mistakes and other errata are insignificant to the sound, if not to the performance, but the harmonic problems are critical, perhaps above anything else. My guess would be that the focus on melody absorbed the composer, the horizontal taking focus away from the vertical, as it were, whereas the two must live together to create good music of the sort sought after here. There is a great deal of good in the music, but I'm unable to always connect with it because of its occasional harshness. Time and eventual revision will solve all this, I'm certain. **79%**

Final Score: **79/100**

Judging Report of Nickthoven's "The Zertinan Caverns"

Technicality: The lack of a key signature is interesting. Despite the fact the piece does eventually settle into an A minor of sort, it initially is set in an unusual, if not atonal, mode. I like the pitch slides in the strings; this shows a very good understanding of what the string family is capable of, uses them idiomatically, and produces a neat effect. Certain pitches would be quite difficult to slide between, but that isn't the case in any of the examples here. Meter changes are engaging throughout, and it's an all too uncommon sight to see up and down bow markings for those who need them. The percussion of stand-beating is a fun conceit to bring a new sound into the mix, and it works well, though the composer might want to include the need for such things on the score's front page. It would be extremely difficult to sustain a forte triple-stop on the first violin, as written in measure 53; the note clusters, however, here and elsewhere, give an intense, almost Pendereckian feeling. There are many parallel fifths in the pianoforte beginning at measure 78, but, as they are virtually constant, they appear to be a stylistic decision. Otherwise, there's really nothing to criticize here, and the arrangement is confident in its technical language. **95%**

Musicality: The opening chords are striking, as are the slow slides on the second violin. Measures 12-17 are fine and do their job, but measure 18 onward is again very good, with its high violoncello notes, deceptive slide back to C on the second violin, and harmonically slow progression. The pizzicato direction was a nice touch, as was the repetitive pianoforte bass. The frenetic sections are decent, though I'm not certain the extreme dissonance adds much to the expression. The sustained tones, however, noted above as being Pendereckian, are good and would be quite haunting or terrible in live performance. The register schism at measure 72 between the violins is impressive. The music from measure 85 is quite expressive, almost comparable to a soundtrack from a film. I like how the sound opens up in the strings at measure 91 and 94. The last five measures are delicately written and are an exemplary ending: One doesn't quite know the piece is coming to a close until the last bar, but the sound is also completely resolved. The musicality is most outstanding in this arrangement during the slower sections, where the composer allows it to be human and emotive, which is what carries the piece as a whole. Some choices are questionable, such as the violin trills in measure 16, and large sections of the faster movements which lose and alienate themselves from the somber, mysterious tone set early on. They're not bad by any means, but I don't believe they serve a higher purpose in the structure except for stark contrast. **89%**

Personal Tilt: This is a great piece. Most of my personal opinion has already been expressed above, but I'll reiterate that I don't believe the source music could have been easily translated better to the string quartet form, and the pianoforte is a pivotal and interesting counterpoint to them. I've mentioned Penderecki throughout this review, and I believe aspects of his "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima" come through strongly, not melodically, but in the use of broad effect to create a reaction. Perhaps there's a bit of George Crumb thrown in, as well. I'm not fond of the dissonance in this composition, partly because I believe its type is rather academic as opposed to musical, but mainly because it disrupts the tone of the work. Despite tie-ins, such as the motivic pitch sliding, there's a fifth or so of the piece I don't care for much. Nonetheless, the four-fifths I do care for are accomplished, expressive, and approach vulnerability. The human outweighs the machine, in this case. **89%**

Final Score: 91/100

Judging Report of Pandemonium's "Battle for Freedom~Rebellion"

Technicality: I was neither able to open the .not file nor download the program needed online to read the score. However, since a file and link were provided, the latter via SquareSound's forums, the problem lies with me. No technicality score will be given, but such issues as they are discernable by ear will be considered heavily in the musicality and tilt scores. **N/A**

Musicality: This is most certainly an arrangement inspired by the great wealth of Romantic pianoforte repertoire passed down by Beethoven, Liszt, and Rachmaninov, among others, and it widens the musical breadth of this competition. I like how the two source pieces intertwined with one another, "Rebellion" entering during the middle and again at the end. The proportion of the arrangement is debatable. On one hand, the material being arranged is itself quite lengthy, but, on the other, this keyboard translation does tend to become carried away by its own sound and thirteen minutes is a long time to hold an audience's attention. Though conciseness is always a virtue, the indulgent length here does complement the general Romantic excess for which the piece strives. The orchestral effects from the original music brought to the pianoforte are often impressive, and the opening is a moving parallel of its source. The heavy chords at 1:03 are resonant and effective, on par with a similar moment from Mussorgsky's "Great Gates of Kiev." The virtuosic run that follows, and the same goes for runs that follow, is sufficient, but not more. I would have preferred a more organic transition based on line and harmony rather than somewhat empty arpeggiations, both for musicality and ease of playing, as, although virtuosos are wont to spice up their own work with displays of technical skill, it's often better to appeal to taste and the average performer. The fact that the opening is repeated and varied upon at 1:26 is good, but the repeated chords are monotonous and too explicitly spell out the beat. This piece would do well with more part-writing. As it stands, it's mostly comprised of accompanied melody or mass-effect harmonic changes, and breaking the music into multiple, independent tonal parts would have added greater interest and refinement to the work. This is done sporadically, as at the beginning and end, but producing lines that blend into a whole is what makes the pianoforte as an expressive instrument rather than a simple continuo tool. I hear the music and the melody and the harmony, but a sense of relationship and tension and resolution is lacking.

I love the energy from 4:12, and I can hear the parts' individual characters more. Again, however, the melody/accompaniment at 4:28 is much too bare and blunt, and the harmony is quite harsh because of the perfect intervals in the left hand. Otherwise, "Rebellion" picks up quickly, and, though some harmonic changes don't resolve as well as they could, the translated orchestral passages are solid. In spite of myself, I am eventually won over by the enthusiastic arpeggios at 8:12, though it's good the technique is used sparingly. The Beethovenian melodic progression beginning at 9:02 is excellent. The consideration to line that I have been wanting to hear makes a strong appearance at 11:16, and it's very good, despite harmonic unevenness. The repeat of the opening at the end is good, but the strong resolution at 11:45 robs it of some momentum, even though the variation upon its emotional melody is affecting. The final few moments are utterly drawn out, but one could hardly begrudge them the chance to be so. **81%**

Personal Tilt: This is a good piece, and the things it lacks now will be made up for in time. Primarily, taste, harmonic refinement, and attention to line are the most important points that could be strengthened, but all three are among the most difficult aspects of composition to master, and this work's ambition and energy help to make up for its occasional lack of them. It certainly does have creativity and an ear behind it, and time and revision should hone this arrangement's precision and power to outstanding levels. **81%**

Final Score: **81/100**