

REWRITING THE REP: MODERNIZING THE ENSEMBLE EXPERIENCE THROUGH
CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

by

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Honors Project

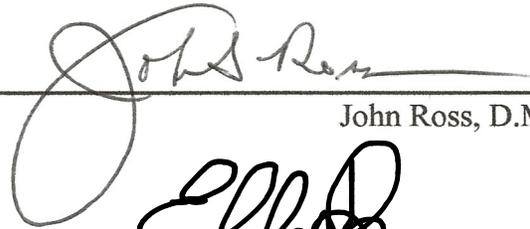
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Abstract

In an effort to fight classism in music, composers of the past integrated recognizable folk tunes into “classical” performances, creating wildly successful pieces that drew people from all walks of life to the performing arts. Today, there is a new rift between “classical” and contemporary music, one that firmly separates what can and cannot be performed in wind ensemble settings. Consequently, music education rarely includes contemporary genres in its curriculum, leading music students to continue choosing only the same “classical” repertoire yearly. With arrangements of music from *The Last of Us*, *Steven Universe*, Phoebe Bridgers, Johnny Cash, Harry Styles, and Radiohead, I propose ways to modernize the ensemble experience through contemporary media.

For this project, I created arrangements of six contemporary songs from pop, rock, indie, and country, as well as the music from television shows and video games. The main goal of this project was to experiment with arranging as a tool for education, and with how music from today’s contemporary media would sound formatted for wind bands. Other goals included increasing my personal knowledge of arranging techniques and softwares, as well as creating a product that showcases modern, recognizable songs formatted for the characteristic wind band sound.

Introduction

In history, we know that music began as a form of storytelling and communication. Through the ages, as the classification of theory and unification of musical practice became more defined, the ability to participate in music became less and less accessible. By the time the Baroque era was in full swing, music was becoming a hobby for the rich, upper-class of society, and the performance of music was becoming a status symbol reserved for those who could afford the lessons to do so. Of course music outside of this remained, but a deep rift had been formed between the folk music of commoners and the closely controlled, socially elite genre played in concert halls. Close to all musical training one could receive at this time focused on the type of music being performed by the famed orchestras of Europe, and the famous composers who are still revered today. In the 19th century however, some of those involved in the arts began to get nervous about the exclusivity of the trade. Historically renowned composers such as Béla Bartók, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Percy Grainger were among those who feared the folk traditions of their countries and beyond were dying out. This led to a push to preserve songs, dances, and other artistic traditions through several different means such as recording projects, publishing of song books, schooling initiatives, and compositions. These composers featured popular folk melodies through arrangements and original compositions alike. This opened many doors within music - recognizable melodies meant that more people could relate to and participate in “classical music.” These folk-song-based compositions would prove to be wildly popular and bring many people to instrumental music.

This thesis project explores what modern music integrated into “classical” music would sound like, in an effort to showcase the potential of arranging contemporary pieces for academic settings . Through the use of notation software, I created six original arrangements of contemporary songs across six different genres. These arrangements utilize multiple musical settings such as full ensemble, sax sextet, brass quintet, and even a flex band arrangement. They demonstrate that music from contemporary media can simultaneously fit into the “classical music” box while also pushing the envelope of what music for ensembles can sound like. The following descriptions give more information on the background of the songs I chose, the instrumentation choices, and my overall argument for the benefits of including these wind band arrangements in academic settings.

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All arrangements by Lindsay Hinkle

The Last of Us - Gustavo Santaolalla

“The Last of Us” is an American video game developed by Naughty Dog LLC which was originally released in 2013. Since its release, it has grown into a small franchise itself; with both a remaster and full remake of the first game being released in 2014 and 2022 respectively, a sequel game “The Last of Us Part II” released in 2020, and a television adaptation of the first game released in January 2023. The first game follows two main protagonists, Joel Miller and Ellie Williams, through a post-apocalyptic world in which the player has to navigate through both the physical dangers of the cordyceps outbreak, as well as the morality of doing what it takes to survive. Joel, a middle-aged smuggler in the Boston Quarantine Zone, is tasked with smuggling Ellie, an unassuming yet comically aggressive fourteen-year-old, across the country to the base camp of a rebel group known as the Fireflies. Not long into the game, it is revealed that Ellie had been bitten by an infected a few weeks prior and never fell ill. This is when players discover that she is immune to the cordyceps fungus, and is likely the first and only person with immunity. Players follow the game’s mantra, “endure and survive,” as they make their way across the country and are forced to consider what they would do when faced with morally impossible choices.

The first game was extremely successful, winning over thirty awards across over a dozen different gaming and media award events, many of which were Game of the Year titles. The soundtrack was written by Argentinian musician Gustavo Santaolalla, a member of the Latin Songwriters Hall of Fame. Santaolalla received critical acclaim for his original score for *The Last of Us*, and later returned to compose the score for the sequel. His minimalistic style draws upon his musical and cultural background in Latin folk. The main

theme for all installments of the game is appropriately titled “The Last of Us.” Hauntingly beautiful, the main instrument featured is the Ronroco, a contemporary South American instrument, which is a 10 string hybrid of the traditional 6 string guitar and 8 string mandolin. The Ronroco plays the melodic material, while other instruments begin to build underneath in support. This accompaniment never overtakes the melody, even when the texture is at its thickest. The repetitive melody can always be heard above the noise, persistently marching along. This consistent repetition is what gave me the idea to arrange it to resemble a march.

In the beginning, the tuba leads a series of staggered entries from the brass before entering again, alone. This represents Joel. The flute begins the melody soon after, which represents Ellie, and is accompanied by the droning tuba. The occasional, sporadic interjections from other instruments represent the confusion of the early stages of the game where players see Ellie hastily passed from the Fireflies’ care into Joel’s - the purpose for her journey still unclear. The subsequent build up and transition represents entering into the first half of the game. Joel accompanies Ellie out into the dangerous waste beyond the Boston Quarantine Zone (QZ) with no true understanding of the situation they have put themselves in. Suddenly, as they are outside of the QZ for the first time, the texture of the piece becomes thick and dark. Ellie’s song is still at the forefront of this noise, but it is mostly alone in its melody. The accompanying lines in this first section move independently of one another, representing the sheer, overwhelming danger that Ellie and Joel face when first escaping from Boston. The sudden silence that follows represents the moment where Ellie reveals her secret immunity, and Joel finally understands the significance of their mission. The next section is just as thickly textured as the previous section, but much more major. Suddenly, other voices join the flute melody in rhythmic unisons to represent the help the protagonists

find along the way, and the fleeting moments of hope among the chaos. Joel and Ellie make their way across the country, face countless obstacles, and eventually reach their destination. However, the ending of this narrative is not as simple as players would expect. It becomes clear that creating a cure was never possible- only a vaccine - one which is still not guaranteed to work. The worst realization of all, Ellie would lose her life in the process of creating it. Joel, overcome by grief at the thought of losing her forever, decides to do the unthinkable and choose Ellie's life over what seems to be humanity's salvation. As it was Joel and Ellie alone in the beginning, and it is Joel and Ellie alone at the end. The tuba and flute are equally matched in the final phrase, leaving off on a solemn, minor note, as Joel and Ellie begin a new life after their perilous journey. This piece demonstrates a complex and intriguing narrative that students can enjoy, regardless of their familiarity with the video game.

Stronger Than You - Rebecca Sugar

“Stronger Than You” is a song originating from the hit Cartoon Network series *Steven Universe*. Written by Rebecca Sugar and performed by British singer-songwriter Estelle, the song premiered in the show’s 52nd episode of Season 1 titled “Jail Break.” *Steven Universe* premiered in 2013 and had a five-season run, ending in 2019. The show follows a central protagonist named Steven, a young half-human, half-alien boy who lives in the fictional town of Ocean City, Delmarva. While initially gaining popularity due to its unique art and dialogue styles, the show later began to garner attention for its exploration of deeper themes. Each arc of the series centers around self-worth, healthy interpersonal relationships, and love. Characters are also shown explicitly dealing with issues such as generational trauma, discrimination, anxiety, and even PTSD. The show developed a cult following largely due to its depiction of LGBTQ+ characters; the wedding of characters Ruby and Sapphire was reportedly the first-ever same-sex wedding featured in a cartoon. It was this very relationship that inspired the song featured in this arrangement. The lyrics express the two characters’ feelings for one another, and explain Garnet’s existence as a physical manifestation of the love they have for one another.

This is Garnet.
 Back together.
 And I'm never going down at the hands of the likes of you because I'm so much better.
 And every part of me is saying "Go get her".
 The two of us ain't gonna follow your rules.
 Come at me without any of your fancy tools.
 Let's go, just me and you.
 Let's go, just one on two.
 Go ahead and try and hit me if you're able.
 Can't you see that my relationship is stable?
 I can see you hate the way we intermingle.
 But I think you're just mad 'cause you're single.
 And you're not gonna stop what we made together.
 We are gonna stay like this forever.
 If you break us apart, we'll just come back newer.
 And we'll always be twice the gem that you are.
 I am made
 O-o-o-o-of
 Lo-o-o-o-ove.
 O-o-o-o-of
 Lo-o-o-o-ove.
 Lo-o-o-o-ove.
 Lo-o-o-o-ove.
 This is who we are.
 This is who I am.
 And if you think you can stop me,
 Then you need to think again.
 'Cause I am a feeling,
 And I will never end,
 And I won't let you hurt my planet,
 And I won't let you hurt my friends.
 Go ahead and try and hit me if you're able.
 Can't you see that my relationship is stable?
 I know you think I'm not something you're afraid of,
 'Cause you think that you've seen what I'm made of.
 But I am even more than the two of them.
 Everything they care about is what I am.
 I am their fury. I am their patience.
 I am a conversation.
 I am made O-o-o-o-of
 Lo-o-o-o-ove.
 O-o-o-o-of
 And it's stronger than you.
 L-o-o-o-ove.
 O-o-o-o-of
 L-o-o-o-ove.
 And it's stronger than you.

This arrangement is a flex band arrangement, also known as an adaptable arrangement, which means it is scored with five parts plus percussion. Arrangements like these are typically made for smaller programs who may have unbalanced or incomplete instrumentation. They are playable with any combination of woodwinds, brass, or string instruments, similar to an SATB choir arrangement. The original song relies heavily on electronic percussion, spoken vocals, and synthesized instruments. I took on the challenge of arranging a flex version to try and capture the energy and joy of the song on instruments that would be available to students in real band programs. I only arranged through the first verse and chorus but all that would be needed to lengthen this would be a few repeat signs throughout due to the general repetitiveness of the original song.

I chose to make an arrangement of this song not only because of my own interest in the show, but also because of the message behind the song. Love overcoming evil might seem overplayed in media, but this is different. This song is a joyful, taunting, and unarguable declaration of queer love. In this arrangement, I used an alto saxophone to cover the vocals from the song, a regular drum set to replace the electronic percussion, and various brass and high woodwinds to fill out the harmony parts. The separate parts build upon one another throughout the piece up until the first chorus, where the energy is the highest. The chorus features several rhythmically unison lines, including harmony to go along with the melody. I experimented with different drum fills and chord voicings while arranging this song as well, trying to match the color and style of the original while not simply imitating it. Overall, this song would provide a fun and upbeat flex tune to students who might not be able to play typically scored repertoire.

Garden Song - Phoebe Bridgers

“Garden Song” is the second song on American singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers’ *Punisher* album, as well as being this artist's second most popular song with over 90 million streams on Spotify alone. Bridgers, 28, has expressed an emphasis on mental health and finding happiness through self-work and therapy in previous interviews, stating how this was a broader inspiration for *Punisher* as a whole (Graves 2020). She explains that although she has been blessed with everything she wants, such as a successful career as a musician and a strong support system, she has not found the happiness that she is looking for. “Garden Song” calls upon this yearning feeling, and explores what it means to work out internal conflict.

The eerie, dreamlike track is a rumination on past memories, hopes and desires that Bridgers experiences as dreams and nightmares. The arrangement follows the lyrics for most of the song, but does break off at times to introduce original lines. I chose to have the trumpet as the main melody line representing Bridgers. The texture is thin at first, featuring just the trumpet and sparse chord changes. The stopping and starting of the melody represents the hesitation one might have when choosing to dwell on complicated memories. As the song progresses toward the chorus, more instruments and layers are added, to mimic the story about her dreams she talks about in the lyrics. The first climax of the piece is meant to convey the overwhelming feeling of re-experiencing emotions pushed down internally - a central theme of Bridgers’ original version of the song. The tension builds throughout the chorus up until a point which mirrors the lyrics “I have everything I want.” Bridgers has everything she wants in life, but is still unable to be happy due to her experience with mental

illness, indicating there is still work to be done on her part to truly be happy. At this difficult admittance, the texture thins back out, and overall mood shifts more major again. The main trumpet melody plays with another voice now, reliving these dreams in a more positive light. At the end it is just trumpet and flute, which is in contrast to the trumpet and brass at the beginning of the piece, showing a much lighter weight on Bridgers after taking the time to process her thoughts and emotions.

I chose to make an arrangement of this song for a few reasons. Firstly, I wanted to experiment with arranging indie music as a wind band piece; indie music is usually much less rhythmically structured than other genres, and doesn't tend to follow most music theory rules. To capture this, I added in features such as meter changes, frequent pauses, and non-standard chord changes, all of which would provide a new and interesting challenge for students in an academic setting. Beyond this, I personally really love Phoebe Bridgers' work, and think that the topics she is able to touch on with her music are universally important. Her music can appeal to a wide variety of people, because things like mental health, grief, love, and acceptance are things nearly everyone will experience in their life. "Garden Song" paints a beautiful picture of the struggles to be had with mental health and the significance of self-realization and self-love.

Hurt - Johnny Cash (Nine Inch Nails)

“Hurt,” a song originally by the band Nine Inch Nails, was covered by Johnny Cash and featured on one of his last albums before his death. The original was a Grammy-nominated rock song, so when approached by Cash’s team for a cover, songwriter Trent Reznor was hesitant. Cash was very well known at the time, a staple in post-world-War-II country music, but was still just a country artist. How could he possibly capture the seriousness and severity of the original song in his own style? What resulted was a hauntingly beautiful rendition of Reznor’s “Hurt” which baffled listeners everywhere, so much so that Reznor actually claimed that it was Cash’s song after the release of the cover (Groves 2022). It became the most streamed Johnny Cash song of all time, with over 532 million streams on Spotify alone.

“Hurt” delves into very serious topics such as self-harm, depression, and grief. Cash perfectly creates this grave atmosphere with sparse guitar accompaniment below his gravelly baritone vocals. I decided to arrange this song for a brass quintet, as I wanted it to feel more personal and scaled back. The guitar accompaniment is imitated by a series of staggered entrances in the low brass. This accompanying line continues on as the trumpet begins the main melody, acting as Cash’s voice. I matched the voicing and pacing of the arrangement to the cover closely at first, as I felt it was important to capture the solemn mood of the cover as this first verse plays out. I intentionally created very tight harmonies in this arrangement with frequent dissonant intervals, which are meant to represent the continuous discomfort and tension the singer was feeling in his life at the time. As the chorus plays on, the trumpet melody continues to get higher and higher, while the accompaniment stays closely scored

and repeats in the same range, symbolizing the emotions building up behind the melody; Cash pulls himself further and further away from the heavy, low, monotonous emotions he feels, only to end right back where he started at the end. After this chorus I wrote in a short intermission in which the brass take turns adding to a phrase, slowly building to a revamp of the chorus. This second time through, the accompanying brass can be heard having more independent lines than before, often quoting pieces of the melody intermittently. In the end, the trumpet is back to being alone. Repeating the final phrases of the melody with little accompaniment, it is reminiscent of the lyrics of the song: “everyone I know goes away in the end.”

I chose to make an arrangement of this piece mainly because of the depth of emotion that was poured into both the original and the cover. I think that it would do well in a live performance as a highly recognizable piece, and a beautiful one at that. In an educational setting, I think that this song could not only be a learning opportunity for students when it comes to Johnny Cash as an influential musical artist, but also an example of music as a means of self expression. Music is not always about love, fun, or adventures, but can sometimes also be about the deeper emotions we have that words fail to express. I would imagine it would take a more mature group to cover a song like “Hurt,” but the right group could really create something magical with it.

Adore You - Harry Styles

“Adore You” is the third song on Harry Styles’ *Fine Line* album, as well as his third most streamed song at just over 1.3 billion streams. Hailing all the way from Great Britain, Harry Styles is a modern-day pop icon. He rose to fame after a failed run on the show “The X Factor,” where he was brought back to join the pop group One Direction. This group quickly amassed a large following in its 5-year runtime before splitting up in 2015, lending what was left of its success to the individual members’ solo careers. Styles began releasing solo albums as well as dabbling in the acting field, where he most notably starred in *Dunkirk*, *Marvel Eternals*, *My Policeman*, and *Don’t Worry Darling*. Today, Harry Styles is a household name, and his music career has solidly established itself in the mainstream pop world.

I made an arrangement of this song for a much simpler reason than the others: it’s fun! It’s poppy, a little jazzy, and all around a very classic, upbeat track. I chose to set it to a saxophone sextet mainly because I felt it had a similar vibe to most sax chamber pieces, but with the twist of contemporary music. The baritone sax gets the bassline usually reserved for bass guitar, the tenor saxes get some harmonic moving lines, while the altos get to share the harmony and melody throughout the whole arrangement. The falls, glissandos, and other ornamental figures lend more emphasis to the jazzy feel throughout, most obviously heard in the opening lines of the chorus. I thought that this piece would make for a fun, carefree small group performance, and could definitely be translated into a marching band arrangement easily as well. Sometimes students deserve to just have a little fun with the music their director programs, and as popular as Harry Styles is today, few people wouldn’t feel compelled to tap their foot along with this arrangement.

Creep - Radiohead

“Creep,” released in September of 1992, is the debut single of the band Radiohead. Initially fairly successful with 6000+ copies sold in the UK, “Creep” was suddenly taken off many of the country’s radio playlists as it was deemed “too depressing.” This led to an overall decline in popularity for the band as a whole, as their subsequent singles were unsuccessful as well. Radiohead’s saving grace was actually an Israeli radio station that added “Creep” to its regular playlist, sparking national acclaim for the song and the band. After touring through Israel, Radiohead began finding some success throughout the United States in the grunge/emo scene. “Creep” fell into the pool of alternative and grunge classics such as “Smells Like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana and “Loser” by Beck. Surprised by their quick rise to fame, the band reissued “Creep” in the UK one year after its initial release where it reached number seven on the country’s charts. Overall, “Creep” has accumulated several impressive rankings such as *Rolling Stone*’s 16th greatest debut single, as well as number 118 in their list of 500 greatest songs.

The arrangement is set for a full wind ensemble, featuring multiple instruments in solo capacities. I chose to not include a drumset in the arrangement, as I wanted to try and fully hear “Creep” in a wind ensemble capacity. Where the original song features a guitar vamp over drumset for the first several bars, I arranged more of a chorale-like introduction. This intro builds in tension and volume until the first entrance of the main melody on euphonium. The volume and intensity is reset as the melody begins to build across multiple sections. I added staggered entrances throughout the entire band for this building section, but made sure to always have the melody line audible in some voicing. When the chorus arrives,

there is a huge buildup with running sixteenth notes in the upper woodwinds. For the first time so far in the arrangement, most instruments are finally in unison. It doesn't last long though, as the texture spreads back out for the last lines of the chorus. I then moved straight into the bridge from here, playing with color and dynamics. The bridge builds up several times with the last climax of the piece ending this section, and leading into a softer, woodwind centered final verse.

I chose to do an arrangement of this piece as a bit of a challenge. I really wanted to try transforming a classic rock song into something for a concert band/wind ensemble, without a heavy rock drum set or the power chords of the guitar. I wanted to make something really beautiful out of something very aggressive and driving, so I was very happy with the result. As the last song I arranged out of the six in my honors thesis project, it encompasses most of the lessons I learned creating the former arrangements. A longer, complete version of this would definitely turn heads at a wind ensemble concert, and would be extremely recognizable to say the least. This song would be great to teach how everyone can attribute meaning to music in different ways, and one song might mean something different to everyone who listens to it.

Conclusion

I had never arranged music in any capacity prior to creating this project, so I am very happy with the product I finished with. I had to learn a lot about the functional ranges of each instrument, as well as things like drum-set notation, software capabilities, and track automation. My knowledge of music theory was also an area I had to review going into creating these arrangements. Overall, my goals for this project were simple:

- To experiment with arranging as a tool for education.
- To experiment with the ways music from today's contemporary media could sound formatted for wind bands.
- To increase my personal knowledge of arranging techniques and softwares.
- To create a product that showcases modern, recognizable songs formatted for the characteristic wind band sound.

I believe that I accomplished these goals and more throughout the process of creating this project. I now have experience arranging and, as I enter my own career in education, I feel comfortable using this skill to create fun pieces for my students. For each song I arranged, I tried a multitude of different styles and sounds before I settled on the final version. I utilized both online, open-source composition softwares like Flat.io and BandLab as well as downloadable ones such as Sibelius.

It is my hope that contemporary media will become more and more integrated into both public education and professional performance in the years to come. The songs I chose are some of the most well-known across the genres and media outlets they represent. If the purpose of arranging contemporary music for education is to increase recognition and

connection to the repertoire, these songs accomplish that. The ability to recognize and relate to the music you hear is a treasured aspect of the art, one that is all too often taken for granted.

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