"Given time..." for soprano and orchestra.

Alex Isackson
University of Louisville

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GIVEN TIME...

for soprano and orchestra

By
Alex Isackson
B.M.A., Brigham Young University Idaho, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Music of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Masters of Music in Music Composition

School of Music
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2017
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GIVEN TIME...

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B.M.A., Brigham Young University Idaho, 2013

A Thesis Approved on

May 4, 2017

by the following Thesis Committee:

______________________________
Steve Rouse
Thesis Director

______________________________
Krzysztof Wołek

______________________________
Kimcherie Lloyd
DEDICATION

To my children,
and to their children, and their children,
and so on…
that their imagination and joy of learning might never
diminish, and that they may always love and appreciate
this beautiful world and wondrous universe
that God has made
for them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would foremost like to thank Dr. Steve Rouse for all of his time and expertise that helped me through this project and all the other projects that lead up to it. I’m so grateful for the many helpful hours he spent with me in his office and also at home checking every square inch of my scores. I’ve learned so much from him and hope to be able to keep learning from him in the future.

Krzysztof Wolek also deserves many thanks for serving on my thesis committee and for his willingness to share his many talents and experiences as a teacher and friend. He has inspired me to do more and be better.

I also want to thank Kimcherie Lloyd for serving on my thesis committee. She has also been very helpful and generous in allowing the university’s orchestra to prepare and premier an earlier piece of mine last year. I’m so grateful for all the experiences I’ve had here at the University of Louisville, and that was certainly one of the highlights.

There have been many other faculty members that have been especially helpful, friendly, inspiring, generous, and knowledgeable and have made an invaluable impact on me here at this university—John Ritz, Jennifer Potochnic, Frederick Speck, Mark Yeary, Mark Dickson, Matthew Ertz, Krista Wallace-Boaz, Caroline Ehman, and Allison Ogden. I enjoyed learning and associating with them.

I need to thank my family and especially my wife, Lindsy, for all the love and support and prayers that helped and encouraged me. They make everything in life better and I’m so grateful for them.

I would also like to thank my poet, Kenny A. Chaffin. Although we have never met, he was so willing to let me use his inspiring and thought-provoking poems as the text for this work. I set out looking for literature about the cosmos and the endlessness of time and eternity. Of the countless poems I read, Chaffin’s were exactly what I hoped to find and I was blessed that he was kind enough to let me use them. It was my goal to bring out the wonderment I felt as I read these beautiful poems.
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Given time…

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INSTRUMENTATION

Flute 1-3 (2nd doubling Alto and Bass Flute, 3rd doubling Bass Flute and Piccolo)
Oboe 1-3 (3rd doubling English Horn)
Bb Clarinet 1-2
Bb Bass Clarinet
Bassoon 1-2
Contrabassoon

F Horn 1-4
C Trumpet 1-3
Trombone 1-2
Bass Trombone
Tuba

Timpani

Percussion 1: Tam-tam, Suspended Cymbal, Bass Drum, Tubular Bells (*shared*),
Marimba (*shared*), Temple Blocks, Sizzle Cymbal
Percussion 2: Glockenspiel, Tubular Bells
Percussion 3: Vibraphone, Marimba

Harp
Piano

Solo Soprano

Strings (Minimum: 8, 7, 6, 5, 4)
PROGRAM NOTE

The title of this work, *Given time*... is meant to be less of a title and more like the beginning of a deep thought. Time is one of those things that I think humans just don’t understand and don’t give very much thought to, especially considering how much time has already passed and how much time left there is in the universe. Where does space and time end? And where do we (or I) fit in all of it? Does everything I do have any lasting impact on the eternal scheme of things? The list of questions goes on seemingly forever, but pondering them has always been stirring to me. Setting some of these thoughts and feelings to music was a new challenge that I loved every step of the way.

This work sets three poems by Kenny A. Chaffin. Several more of his poems were selected to be included in the work at a later date. Each poem introduces a new way of looking at or thinking about the vastness of the universe, the endlessness of time, and in some cases, our potential impact or fate as a human race.

“And They All Danced” is about an incomprehensibly slow dance that has gone on for billions of years and will continue to go on forever. It is the dance of the galaxies as they move, twirl around, and sometimes collide with each other. The music is slow but filled with anxious anticipation. It is meant to give the impression of something small and docile, yet enormous and powerful at the same time—just like the drifting galaxies through space. There are a couple moments in the music where I imagined an extremely slow “downbeat” as if we were listening to the dance music of the universe slowed down by a thousand times—or is it sped up?

“Seeking Contact” comes from mankind’s current perspective and relationship with the universe. For decades now we have been probing the galaxy and listening for any kind of a response. It reflects our innate desire to answer the question—are we alone in the universe? As Arthur C. Clarke famously said, “both [answers] are equally terrifying.” The music reflects our persistent effort to reach out in search of life beyond this planet and possibly a hint of apprehension at finding out the answer.

“Millions of Years from Now” is an attempt to reflect the thoughts of someone living millions of years from now as they remember their solar system of origin. After having populated the rest of the Milky Way and beyond, would we look back with fondness or disdain? I imagine the speaker of this poem as a spoiled and distracted twenty-something living millions of years in the future who’s decided that the new, cool, retro thing is the Oort Cloud—a spherical shell of icy objects that exist in the outermost reaches of our solar system.
And all the Galaxies Danced

It was a slow dance
slower than anything
comprehensible by
mere mortal humans.

M81 and 82 twirl
like lovers enthralled.
Dancing, merging, twirling about
under billions of brilliant stars.

The Milky Way dips
Andromeda and swings
her out and away, before
pulling her tight again.

The dance goes on above our heads
though we never see,
galaxies dancing for billions of years
to a lilting cosmic beat.

Seeking Contact

Like gossamer threads reaching out
we seek the stars

Driven to know, to grow, to search
we push ever outward

No matter the quantum odds
no matter the impossible distances

We seek others of our kind, in our image
reflected in the stars

Billions of Years from Now

The Oort Cloud now is cool again
not in the sense of temperature
though surely it’s cooled a bit

It’s cool because after billions of years
of spreading out seed over
distant galaxies and times

we’ve turned our attention
with a sense of nostalgia
to the place where we were born.
Given time...
1. And They All Danced

— Alex Isackson 2016
With cresc. also broaden range of strings.
Poco più mosso ($\approx 100$)

- **Vln. 1**: 4
  - Dynamics: $pp$ to $p$
  - ornaments: Trills
- **Vln. 2**: 4
  - Dynamics: $pp$ to $p$
  - ornaments: Trills
- **Vla.**: 4
  - ornaments: Trills
- **Db.**: 4
  - ornaments: Trills

**Details**
- Silently depress the notes on the keyboard while strumming up on the same register of strings with the thumb of the right hand.
- The dynamics and ornaments are marked explicitly on the score.
CURRICULUM VITAE
Alex Isackson
Composer, Pianist, Music Educator
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EDUCATION
University of Louisville, MM in composition, to be completed in 2017
• Studying composition with Dr. Steve Rouse and piano with Dr. Dror Biran and Dr. Krista Wallace-Boaz
Brigham Young University – Idaho, BMA in music composition and piano, 2013
• Studied composition with Darrell Brown and Daniel Kerr, and piano with Stephen Allen
• Minored in Education and Entrepreneurship
• GPA 3.93
Clark College (WA), music composition and piano, 2010
• Studied piano with Kathy Charles, and studied composition with Ben Moll
• GPA 3.96

NOTABLE COMPOSITIONS WITH PERFORMANCES
Short Cut – for orchestra (2016)
• Premiered by the University of Louisville Orchestra at the University of Louisville’s 2016 New Music Festival
Duo – for oboe and piano
• Commissioned and Premiered by Dr. Jennifer Potochnic, Mar, 2017
Fairy Tale – for soprano and piano (2017)
• Premiered by Emily Johnson (sop) and Alex Isackson (pno), Mar, 2017
Nos Immortales, II. – for soprano and piano (2015-2016)
• Premiered by Emily Yocum Brown (sop) and Alex Isackson (pno), Nov. 16, 2016
Piano Concerto – for concert band with piano soloist (2014-16)
• Premiered the second movement, July 2015 by the BYU-Idaho University Band; Darrell Brown, conductor; Alex Isackson, soloist.
On a Short Leash – for electronics (2016)
• Premiered by the composer, March, 2016
Time Does Not Stand Still – for piano solo (2014)
• Premiered by the composer, April 2014
Cataclysmia – for concert band (2013)
• Commissioned and premiered by the Gem State Clinic Band; Darrell Brown, conductor, Feb. 2014
Chasing the J Train – for piano solo (2013)
• Premiered by the composer, Dec. 2013
The Great Conflict – cantata for tenor, baritone, and 2 pianos (2013)
• Premiered by the BYU-Idaho Opera Group, Dec. 2013
Box 'o' Chocolates – for three players (2013)
• Premiered by student performers at Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2013
• Performance by University of Louisville New Music Ensemble, April 2016
the space between light and dark – for concert band (2012)
• Premiered by the BYU-Idaho University Band, March 2013

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Adjunct Faculty
Brigham Young University – Idaho (2015)
• Course: Musicianship II (Music Theory and Aural Skills)
• Duties: Full responsibility for instruction and grading
Staff Accompanist
Brigham Young University – Idaho (2012-2015)
• Duties: Accompany various recitals for music faculty and full-time position candidates
Adjudicator
UMTN/A Composition Competition – Utah (2014-present)
• Judge and provide feedback for works entered by elementary to high school student composers
Teaching Assistant/Vocal Coach
Brigham Young University – Idaho (2011-2015)
• Course: Group Vocal (non-music major vocal instruction)
• Duties: Accompanied classes and voice labs; occasional class instruction; vocal coaching; creation of song arrangements to fit students’ needs
PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE – CONT.

Private Piano Teacher

Vancouver, WA; Rexburg, ID; Jeffersonville, IN (2008–present)
- Beginning and intermediate piano students from ages 5 to 60

Music Tutor

Brigham Young University – Idaho (2012)
- Courses: -Music Theory I-IV (Music Theory and Aural Skills)
- Duties: -Tutored individual music students on music theory concepts of the acquisition of aural skills

Teaching Assistant

Brigham Young University – Idaho (2010-2012)
- Courses: -Basic Musicianship (Music Fundamentals and Basic Ear Training); Musicianship I-II
- Duties: -Small group instruction for weekly and bi-weekly labs; occasional class instruction; partial responsibility for grading; administering of aural exams

Assistant Choral Director/District Accompanist

- Courses: -Washougal High School: Chamber Choir, Mixed Choir, Women's Choir; Jemtegaard Middle School: 7th Grade Choir, 8th Grade Choir; Canyon Creek Middle School: 8th Grade Choir
- Duties: -Accompanied choir rehearsals and concerts, accompanied musical rehearsals and shows, occasional class instruction, occasional selection of repertoire for study and performance

PERFORMING EXPERIENCE – LARGE ENSEMBLE

- University Wind Ensemble, University of Louisville, 2016
- University Band, Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2013-2014
  - Including Soloist - Henry Cowell Concerto Piccolo for Piano and Wind Ensemble, Dec 2014
- Symphony Band, Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2014
  - Included CBDNA regional conference in Reno, NV
- RixStix Percussion Ensemble, Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2013
- Rexburg Tabernacle Orchestra, 2012-2013
- Piano Trio, Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2012
  - Included coaching from the Parisii String Quartet
- Piano Ensemble, Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2010-2011
- Symphony Band and Orchestra – Clark College, 2009-2010
- Jazz Band, Clark College, 2008-2010
  - Included jazz festivals in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico and Vancouver, WA

PERFORMING EXPERIENCE – SMALL ENSEMBLE/ACCOMPANYING

Ensemble NJP (2015)
- For the premier of Gene Coleman’s Synth for chamber ensemble

New Music Ensemble (2015-2016)

Staff Accompanist

Brigham Young University – Idaho (2012-2015)
- Duties: -Accompany various recitals for music faculty and full-time position candidates

Private Accompanist

Brigham Young University – Idaho, Rexburg, ID; and Clark College, Vancouver, WA (2009–2015)
- Duties: -Accompanied individual music students for private lessons, rehearsals, recording sessions, and performances of various types

Teaching Assistant/Vocal Coach

Brigham Young University – Idaho (2011–2015)
- Course: -Group Vocal (non-music major vocal instruction)
- Duties: -Accompanied classes and voice labs, occasional class instruction; vocal coaching; creation of song arrangements to fit students’ needs

AWARDS/ACHIEVEMENTS/RECOGNITION

- Bomhard Fellowship in Music Composition, University of Louisville, 2015
- Graduate Student Dean Citation, University of Louisville, 2017
- Winner – Student Composition Competition, with This Walk in Beauty for tenor and piano, 2013.
- Featured Composer – Hymn Today Magazine, with two original hymns, May I Be In Twain and To One This Sweetest Day of Rest, 2013.
- Piano Scholarship – Brigham Young University – Idaho, 2011.