

Task 4 Commentary

Stories can be depicted in a variety of ways through music. The context, historical background and the setting of a specific time period influences the style and structure of the composition. The personal experiences the composer goes through also influences the way they interpret life and social relations. The experiences develop their personal identity, and the context of the time period significantly influences their cultural identity. Composers utilize a variety of musical components in order to convey a story, such as articulation, dynamics, tempo, texture and pitch. My understanding of storytelling through music has developed through this unit, acknowledging the way Camille Saint-Saëns portrays stories. *Danse Macabre* op.40 and *The Carnival of Animals* are some of Saint-Saëns' most popular compositions. *Danse Macabre* showcases a French poem written by Henri Cazalis, the story is focused on the day of the death also known as Halloween, and skeletons and dead souls dancing to the melody. Saint-Saëns purposely utilizes symbolism to represent the main components of the poem. For example, he creates the beginning of the composition so that the harp plays a single note 12 times to represent 12AM, midnight. In the Western environment during the time the composition was created in, the violin abundantly associated to the death. The melody line was played by the violin in his composition to represent the skeletons dancing along. *The Carnival of Animals* was another composition he created, which contains 14 Movement each representing different groups of animals. Both of the compositions are a type of program music which displays the visual events of images of the story. *The Carnival of Animals* is composed with a variety of melody lines

played with different instruments that represents and imitates the animals at its best ways. For example, Saint-Saëns depicts the donkeys with two pianos playing down and up the two octaves with a fast tempo to represent the donkeys jumping around. Additionally, a slow tempo is used to imitate the slow movement of the turtles. His technique of creating the composition allowed me to recreate my own creation by applying his techniques which included utilizing imagery through the imitation of music. The manipulation of music allows the audience to interpret a visualization of the story. I used this specific technique to apply to my composition because my intention was to have the audience examine the specific ambience of the scenes by listening to the composition.

With the understanding of the compositions revealing a story through different ways, I applied this into my own composition development. Inspired by the way Saint Saëns composed his compositions, I decided to create a program music as well. My story was about a man being chased after the tigers, he runs until he reaches the cliff and realizes that there is no where else to escape. Therefore he swings himself down the cliff by hanging onto a vine, and realizes there were more tigers down the cliff. While he panics, a several amount of mice approach the vine he was hanging onto and gnaws it down. While the man was sure of his death, he suddenly finds a bright red, fresh looking strawberry. He rapidly grabs it and tastes the most delicious strawberry he's ever tasted. My story originates from a Japanese Zen tale, the cultural components can be found on the story because of the powerful influence of religion in Japan at the time period of the Silk Road. The religion of Buddhism transferred through the trading route from India to the Far East, which caused an impact to Japanese citizen's everyday life. The Japanese cultural

components include having an abundant amount of respect for any other people they meet, being humble, calm, being quiet in public environments and honesty is one of the most significant components for the Japanese. Buddhism was able to transfer the religious beliefs to the cultural identities, Buddhism consists of living the current life with integrity, honesty and humbleness to be able to live a much better life for the next faith. The religious and cultural identities relate to the plot and morality of the story as well, the story conveys a message of 'Life will never be as sweet when it is in trouble'. The tigers chasing the man in the beginning represents the fear in the present, the tigers under the cliff showcases the pain in the future and the mice gnawing on the vine depicts the scarcity of time. At last, the delicious strawberry represents the delicious taste of life. The hidden messages relate to the morality of the story that life won't always feel as great, and a lot of conflicts will occur, you just have to keep up without giving up and the way of living life at its sweetest will come easily. Additionally, the best moments of life comes when you least expect them, every moment of your current life will be a benefit.

I wanted to create a program music for this so that it lets the audience to visualize each main scene from the story. I wanted to utilize a variety of instruments that could take the melody line for each scene, for example, I decided to have the tuba play a low pitches melody to imitate the tigers heavy steps of chasing the man. I used the alto saxophone to imitate the sound of the wind blowing off of the cliff. I applied Saint Saens' way of utilizing symbolism and imitation. In addition, I used dynamics and articulation to best fit the ambience of the scenes.



For example, I decided to use staccatos for the trumpet melody of when the man finds the strawberry to emphasize the happiness. In addition, a crescendo was used to have the melody build up to a climax to fortississimo. First of all I chose the main melody line and instrument for each scene, and after the melody was created I added the background harmony to support the melody. I had the drum set play a rhythm that matched with the melody to have the composition sound more unified. The ending of the composition portrays the expression of joy and pleasure to deliver the morality of the story; the sweetest moments of life comes to the ones who kept up with the toughest conflicts of the past. Joy is expressed with the dynamics of most of the instruments playing fortissimo, forte, mezzo forte and crescendos. High pitches are utilized to create a harmony of grace.

I expressed my personal identity in my composition because all of the instruments that played a role in my composition were instruments that I was able to play. I enjoy being a multi instrumentalist, and I often participate and perform on stage in orchestras and bands to play instruments. The features and morality of the story that are depicted in my composition relate to my thoughts as well, as a teenager we go through lots of doubts on reality juxtaposed by the things we desire to accomplish. I feel that we have conflicts in our stage of life, but I also realize that the young life won't come back again and I'm enjoying this moment by just how it is. As mentioned earlier, the story I chose comes from the culture of Japan. The culture of Japan is

conveyed through my composition with a variety of feelings delivered to portray the morality of the story. The significant cultural aspects of living the moment of the life with diligence is conveyed with the tough, dull beginning where life is at its toughest. On the other hand, the joyful and graceful expressions are felt in the ending of the composition to show the cultural morality that you will gain what you deserved. Japanese citizens find it critical to contain integrity in the present for the aftermath and consequences in the future. My artistic response on composing a program music to depict the story of the strawberry has developed my understandings of storytelling. I was able to learn and analyze the way Saint Saens created the two varying compositions which were influenced from his personal and cultural identities. The Western culture in the time period had a great impact on the storytelling of his composition and the fact that he had troubles with his social relations as a child influenced his personality of not being open to a lot of people and worrying about being judged by people. This caused him to only perform The Carnival of Animals two times privately while he was alive. The way that composers and musicians tell a story has a significant influence to the world. As the composers include their creativity in their compositions, their creativity is shared with the world, they're making it public to the people in the world about their depiction of storytelling. With the compositions, the composers are acknowledging the audience a specific story and environment they want the people to understand. In conclusion, the composers were able to tell stories in ways by manipulating musical elements including the pitch, tone, dynamics, articulations and tempo.