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Lake Pleasant

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Lake Pleasant

by
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Lake Pleasant

For Wind Ensemble

Ryan Blauvelt

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Introduction

Lake Pleasant, a work for wind ensemble, receives its title from the composer’s memories of visiting a cottage on a small lake that straddles the border of Indiana and Michigan. The primary influence of the piece derives from the howling sound produced by the echoes of traffic noise one hears while standing on the opposite side of the lake in the quiet of night. The recollection of this soundscape takes the musical form of nine clarinets spread throughout the audience accompanied by pairs of flutes, oboes, saxophones, trumpets, and a single piccolo. While the placement of performers in the audience allows for the music to emulate the atmosphere evoked by the work’s influence through the use of physical space and timbral similarities, the spacial relationships explored through the music also serve as primary structural elements. A stark contrast in instrumentation creates a dichotomy between the music produced on stage and the sound emerging from the audience. Lake Pleasant’s narrative emerges from a dynamic relationship between these two groups of performers, the performers on stage and the performers in the audience.

Narrative

Lake Pleasant’s overall structure primarily functions to support and present the narrative over three sections. The way in which each section of the piece uniquely treats the relationship between the stage and audience groups largely defines each section, and how the relationship evolves from section to section creates the narrative of the piece. Each section serves a separate purpose. Section [A] introduces both groups separately along with the material generally associated with each group, Section [B] sets up the climax of the piece by generating tension on
stage in the absence of the audience, and Section [C] marks the climax of the work with a
dramatic shift back to the audience and works towards the piece’s conclusion by unifying the two
groups.

Section [A] establishes the relationship between the two groups by presenting each group
with contrasting material and then allowing that material to interact. The first two measures
suggest the independence and light interaction of the stage and audience with a drone in the
double bass on stage receiving one full measure before the audience’s entrance in m. 2. M. 1-9
feature the material that will be consistently linked to the audience, swelling harmonies that
overlap. A shift in focus to the stage musicians from m. 10-27 introduces the melodic gestures
and broken chords common of the stage group. Harmonies in the audience occasionally swell in
response to the activity on stage. The first interaction of this kind occurs between the harp and

Example 1: m. 11-12 (condensed), The first interaction between the stage and audience
piano, and three clarinets at m. 11-12 (Example 1). These interactions become more frequent until the final dialogue between m. 27 and 28, which results in the focus returning to the audience indicating the end of the section.

The second section, [B], leaves out the audience performers entirely creating tension in their absence as the music builds to the climax. The return of the stage’s [A] material at m. 67 without the original dialogue provided by the audience highlights the audience’s absence and increases the anticipation of the audience’s return.

The final presentation of the two groups as separate forces occurs between m. 75-76 when a cutoff on stage reveals six sustaining clarinets in the audience. The cutoff marks the beginning [C], the final section, which serves to unify the two groups. The audience begins with material typical of the group, slow shifting harmonies that swell in and out, but by m. 86, melodic fragments earlier presented by the stage begin appear throughout the audience. Towards the end of [C], both groups share the same melodic material reconciling the dichotomy of the two groups.

Form

Each of the three sections of Lake Pleasant serve the narrative by building tension to mark key moments. The tension of [A] increases with the dialogue between the two groups and releases with the silencing of the audience performers. The music builds towards the highest level of tension at the end of [B] marking the climax of the piece and heightening the drama of the return of the audience. [C] builds in energy with the reconciliation of the two groups, which eventually gives way to present a brief dialogue between the stage and audience signaling the
end of the piece. The periodic growing tension results in each section taking the shape of a ramp with an overall arc that spans the three sections (Figure 1).

![Diagram of Lake Pleasant's Form](image)

**Figure 1: Diagram of Lake Pleasant’s Form**

All three sections primarily receive their shape from the progression created by the music’s texture, timbre, and dynamics. A textural shift from clarity to obscurity defines the shape of each ramp with each section transitioning towards a more obscure texture through unique means. Each section gradually explores new and a greater variety of timbres as the music approaches the peak of each ramp while the transition into new registers either helps to further clarify or obscure the texture. Furthermore, both texture and timbre help to define the dichotomy
and resolution of the two groups, as well as create unity between the three sections producing an arc across all three sections. Gradually increasing dynamics help to shape each ramp and the work’s overall arc.

**Themes**

While reoccurring themes do appear in *Lake Pleasant*, they serve less to define the structure of the work, and instead unify the piece across its three sections. The themes do not develop in the traditional sense, but appear in reimagined forms based on the context of the given

1st Theme - first appears in Flute, m. 18

Variation of 1st Theme

2nd Theme - first appears in Piano, m. 13

Variation of 2nd Theme

3rd Theme - first appears in Bass Clarinet, m. 14-18

4th Theme - first appears between Piano and Harp, m. 15 - 16

**Example 2:** Four themes and common variations
section’s texture. The first section clearly presents four melodic gestures across multiple instruments in the stage group, the second section presents the themes on top of a soundmass background, and the last sections presents the themes throughout both the stage and audience. These four themes, in order from most to least prominent, appear in Example 2.

Texture

The highly varying textures presented by the stage and audience heighten the narrative created from the group’s dichotomy by further distinguishing the two groups and emphasizing their reconciliation in [C] with one unifying texture. Each ramp transitions from a clear to more obscure texture in a unique way, which supports the three section form. Imitative textures, first presented as simple echoes, foreshadow the unification of the two groups in the last section. Textural similarities and contrasts, and the level of textural obscurity reached by each section support the overall arc of the work.

In Section [A], the audience maintains an entirely homophonic texture throughout in contrast to the stage’s horizontal, layered texture. Early in the section, groups of three or more instruments throughout the audience swell in and out with sustained notes roughly together creating vertical sonorities that produce a harmonic progression. However, starting at m. 10, the instruments on stage act far more independently with parts entering individually and presenting material specific to their instrument. As the audience and stage begin to interact in this section, the contrast of texture emphasizes the groups as separate forces. Throughout the middle of [A], m. 10-27, the texture pushes towards obscurity with accumulating, increasingly active lines and more frequent interplay with the audience. The peak of [A] presents an obscured version of the
audience’s vertical texture previously discussed. The audience evolves from the clearly presented sonorities of the opening to continually shifting harmonies without clear transitions or audible sense of progression, and the introduction of sporadic low percussion further obscures the texture.

The stage returns at the beginning of [B] with a new dynamic texture in which parts shift between the foreground and background seamlessly. The background consists of improvised sound mass, swelling sustained notes, and broken chords. Some notated parts are intended to sound improvised and blend with the sound mass. Occasionally these parts will shift from the

Example 3: m. 45-48 (reduction), Flute, Bassoon, and Bass Clarinet shift from the soundmass background to the foreground to present the 1st and 2nd themes
background into the foreground and present one of the themes creating ambiguity between the background and foreground material. The thematic material draws the listeners attention to the moment a part shifts into the foreground. Example 3 shows the flute, bassoon, and bass clarinet entrances between m. 45-48. Each of these three instruments first appears to blend with the soundmass background created by the improvisation of the saxophones and harp, but quickly shift to the foreground with the first and second melodic gesture found in Example 2.

Layered melodic gestures, and accumulating and increasingly varied improvisation drive the section forward shaping the ramp of [B] and pushing towards the climax of the piece with increasingly chaotic material. The section reaches the most active and chaotic textures of the piece from m. 60-63, which serves as a deceptive peak for the section (Example 4). The improvised background dissolves from m. 64-67 to reveal the stage’s horizontal and independent texture of [A], now

Example 4: m. 60-63, Deceptive peak of [B]
without the contrasting vertical sonorities of the audience, which highlights the absence of the group. The texture rapidly expands from m. 71-75 with the return of the improvised background, rapid gestures, an improvised *molto accel.*, and pulsing chord in the brass to mark these real peak
of [B], the climax of the piece (Example 5), which is immediately followed by the return of the audience.

The opening of [C] presents the dramatic return of the audience with a texture reminiscent of the peak of [A], irregular swelling sustained notes that create shifting sonorities with sporadic percussion. The texture maintains clarity by diverging from [A]’s lack of harmonic motion with a new clear harmonic progression. From this texture, [C] pushes towards a more obscure texture with introduction and accumulation of melodic gestures in imitation.

The imitative texture realized by [C] is first hinted at in the [A] section. The first two swells of the audience in [A] between m. 2-3 sound as an echo with identical chord voicing separated by a major 2nd and emphasized by the spatial separation of the instruments (Example 6). Similarly, in m. 11, the stage presents an echo with a major 3rd in the piano followed by a major 3rd in the harp, now separated by a major 9th (Example 1), which is again emphasized by the spatial separation of the harp and piano on stage.

Example 6: m. 1-3, First echo
Example 7: m. 86-93. Imitative texture of [C]
[C] first suggests an imitative texture in m. 81 with a descending melody presented by the oboe imitated by the english horn on stage. Both the stage and audience sharing the same material unifies the two groups for the first time. The figure continues to repeat in both instruments to form an ostinato that serves as a foundation for the expanding imitative texture to come. All four themes are presented in imitation between m. 86-93 (Example 7). The gestures appear in both their original form and in slight variations. In order to gradually obscure the texture, the themes and their imitations appear with increasing frequency, and the more active melodies, themes 3 and 4, are withheld until the last four measures of the texture. While the texture expands, an increasing number of stage musicians participate to help balance the two groups. M. 86-89 only present one theme in imitation at a time, theme 2 appearing first followed by theme 1. The peak of [C], m. 90-93, showcases all four themes in imitation, which accumulate to 9 independent melodies sounding simultaneously in the final measure of the texture.

The texture of Lake Pleasant helps shape the work’s overall arc by connecting the first and last section with the similar textures of the peak of [A] and the opening of [C]. The piece ends with a reimagining of the middle of [A] now with the two groups united by the first theme appearing in the audience’s

Example 8: m. 96-97 (reduction), Reimagined [A] texture in last two measures
flute as opposed to its appearance in the stage flute in [A] (m.13) and [B] (m.67) (Example 8).
The texture further supports the arc of the piece by presenting the most chaotic texture, and therefore creating the most tension, in the middle section, a dissemblance that is further augmented by the slight increase in tempo at [B] from 60 to 72 BPM.

Timbre and Register

The variety of timbres present in the wind ensemble serve both the narrative and formal structure of the Lake Pleasant in a number of ways. Key moments in the piece are marked by stark timbral shifts. The dichotomy of the stage and audience is accentuated by the timbral contrasts of the two groups. The three sections explore and introduce new timbres of the ensemble at an increasing rate to support the forward motion of each ramp. The exploration of different registers add to the clarity or obscurity of the various textures presented in the piece and influence the amount of tension generated by each section.

Section [A] utilizes the distinct timbres of the audience and stage to emphasize the two groups as contrasting forces. Starting from the outset of the piece, nine clarinets serve as the core of the audience group. In contrast, the introduction of the stage displays a wider variety of colors. The combination of flute, piano, and harp is closely linked to the stage group and serves to tie the three sections together. A significant part of the momentum of the first ramp derives from the slow trickling in of new colors in the audience. The first new instrument, flute 1, enters in m. 15. The timbre of the audience continues to evolve with the saxophone’s entering in m. 20 followed by the piccolo in m. 23. All colors available to the audience appear at the peak of the first ramp
supporting the shape of the [A] section. The appearance of the entire audience group just before the end of [A] draws attention to their absence in the following section.

[B] utilizes timbre to emphasize its role of building towards the climax of the piece. The section opens with most of the instruments within an octave of middle C, but throughout m. 36-63, the music slowly expands into the lower, darker registers of the ensemble reaching as low as Bb0 in the piano at m. 63, muddying the already chaotic texture of the climax and increasing the tension achieved at the deceptive peak of the section. Furthermore, the instrumentation of the sound mass changes at an increasing rate propelling the section towards the climax, a feature exemplified by the evolving improvisation. The first 45 seconds of [B], m. 36-48, revolve around improvisation in the saxophones and harp. At m. 49, the bassoons and bass clarinet replace the harp shortly followed by a big shift in the sound mass texture at m. 55, which introduces improvisation in the flute, english horn, contra bassoon, and euphonium while the piano replaces the harp. Between m. 60-61, the improvisation is taken over by the two trumpets and bass trombone, and at the same time, the piano pushes into its lower register. The most active and chaotic moment in the piece, m. 63, presents the improvised soundmass in the trumpets, bass trombone, tuba, low piano, and timpani, while the flute, english horn, bassoon, and bass clarinet improvise on melodic gestures related to the themes. Both the expansion into darker textures and the evolving timbre of the sound mass support the ramp shape of the section and together make the deceptive peak of [B] one of the most tense moments of the piece reinforcing the work’s overall arc. The return to the stage material of [A] in m. 67 is marked by the familiar combination flute, piano, and harp.
The greatest moment of timbral contrast occurs between the stage and audience at the transition into [C], m. 75-76, highlighting the climax of the piece. Section [C] mirrors [B] with the audience exploring progressively higher registers of the ensemble by opening with the clarinets centered around middle C and gradually expanding upward until the piccolo reaches A6 in m. 93. While the material grows increasingly more active, the naturally clear high register of the wind ensemble allows for the music to retain much of its clarity and keeps the music from approaching the chaotic texture created by the dark, low register of [B]. The [C] section also parallels [A] by opening with solely clarinets and gradually accumulating the other instruments spread throughout the audience. This similarity in timbral development further links the first and last section and helps to shape the arc of the piece. The work ends with the return of the reoccurring stage combination of flute, piano, and harp (Example 8). The final appearance of this combination ties all three sections together and helps shape the form’s arc.

**Dynamics**

Dynamics serve an essential role in increasing the tension of each section and shaping each ramp, as well as defining the arc that spans the entire form of the piece. All three sections utilize gradually increasing dynamic marks which are further heightened by steadily expanding orchestration. The peak dynamic of each ramp adds contrast to each section and shapes *Lake Pleasant*s overall structure. [A] reaches a *mf*, [B] reaches a *f*, and [C] never surpasses a *mp*, which together with the opening dynamic of *ppp* and the closing dynamic of *pp*, creates an arc spanning all three sections.
Conclusion

The inception of *Lake Pleasant* stems from the composer’s childhood memories of listening to the echoes of traffic while standing on the edge of the lake at night. This memory manifests itself in the form of nine clarinets spread throughout the audience doubled by several other wind instruments. Placing part of the wind ensemble in the audience resulted in a dichotomy between two instrumental groups, those on stage and those in the audience, and the progression of the relationship between the stage and audience musicians defines the work’s narrative. In the first stage of the relationship, the two groups appear as separate but interacting forces with the audience overshadowing the stage. In the second stage, the audience disappears entirely while the stage grows more chaotic and unwieldy. The final stage refocuses on the audience and eventually reconciles the dichotomy of the two groups. Each stage of the relationship forms a sections of the piece, and each section takes the shape of a ramp to support the narrative. Texture, timbre, and dynamics all serve to define the progression of each section, as well as distinguish the two groups as separate forces and ultimately bring about their reconciliation.