MERRY CHRISTMAS, STEPHEN LEACOCK  
(a chamber opera for string quintet and three singers)

CONCERTINO  
(for two pianos and percussion)

STRING QUARTET #1  
an excerpt from  
THE MASTER'S STROKE  
(an opera for seven singers, chorus, and instrumental quintet)

by

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B. Mus., The University of Manitoba, 1989

FOUR MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
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School

Department of Music (Composition)

The University of British Columbia
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Date May 11/99
Abstract:

Four separate compositions make up this thesis.

The chamber opera *Merry Christmas Stephen Leacock* is conceived as a one-act opera for film. There are three characters, portrayed by soprano, tenor and baritone voices, and musical support is provided by a string quintet with the following configuration: two violins, viola, and two cellos. The text, from a Leacock short story, was adapted into a libretto by writer Pamela Post. Composition of the work started in September 1997 and was completed in December of that same year. Revisions were completed by June of 1998.

Total duration: ca. 18 min.

The instrumental piece, *Concertino*, was started in October 1996 and finished June 1997. The musical forces required for this piece are two pianos and two percussionists playing the following: vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, toms, snare drum, and crotales.

The piece is in four movements:
I. Commotion
II. Comfort
III. Carnaval
IV. Convergence/Confluence
V. Coda

Total duration: 18 min. 10 sec.

The composition of *String Quartet #1* (first movement of a set of variations on an original theme) was started in late February and completed on March 15, 1998. A theme from an earlier orchestral piece, *Suite for Orchestra* (1995), is developed in this quartet.

Total duration: 4 min. 30 sec.

*The Master's Stroke* is a 90-minute opera for seven main characters, SATB chorus, and chamber orchestra. The excerpt presented here is from Act I Scene I, and is scored for piano, cello, clarinet, violin and percussion. Composition commenced in earnest in January of 1999, and the score was completed in mid-April of that same year.

Total duration: 10 min.
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*Merry Christmas Stephen Leacock* was presented in Vancouver by Current Sound Opera(ations) in December 1997 with a grant from the Hamber Foundation. Many thanks to Leslie and Rosalind Beale-Dala for their talent and efforts.

*Concertino*, for two pianos and percussion, was commissioned by The Hammerhead Consort, and funding for the composition was provided by a grant from the Manitoba Arts Council. The piece had its premiere on June 21st, 1997 in Edmonton. Swedish Radio Imports released a CD recording of *Concertino* in February of 1999 as part of a larger Hammerhead Consort recording.

*My String Quartet #1* was given a public presentation at the University of British Columbia School of Music by the Arditti Quartet on March 19, 1998.

The Vancouver Opera Guild provided the funding for me to compose the excerpt from *The Master's Stroke* by way of their Career Development Grant in 1995. The Martha Lou Henley Foundation funded Michael Cavanagh in his development of the libretto. Vancouver New Music performed the excerpt as part of a fully-staged production on May 6th, 1999 at Vancouver's Christ Church Cathedral.

Neil Weisensel, May 10, 1999
My dear young friend, you're entirely wrong.

How can you call me young?

Adaptation: Dwayne Beaver
Libretto: Pamela Post
Merry Christmas Stephen Leacock
(based on a Stephen Leacock short story)

Time
Leacock
Christmas

Music: Neil Weisensel
Draft 2 Nov. 21/98

Music: Neil Weisensel
Draft 2 Nov. 21/98
How can you be sure I'm wrong?

Well, your face

How can you tell what I'm thinking?
said it out loud. You said Christmas was all played out and


done with. What makes you think that?

I've been sitting here for
hours, trying to think of something to write for a Christmas story.

but ideas just don't come. Not in these awful days.
30
T. A Christmas story?
L. Yes, all the Christmas stuff is all done in Oc.

35
T. Dear me, not un-
L. to - ber, you know

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45

T. ancient Egypt seeing them get out their

L.

Chr.

45

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

48

T. Christmas things, all cut in hieroglyphics.

L.

Chr.

48

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

pizz.
Mesopotamia was all a muddle in Christmas planning.

a millennium ahead. In Babylonia they...
baked their Christmas baubles in clay
a solar eclipse before the day.

In Abyssinia, why they...
My dear boy, there has always been Christmas, of a sort. What is it that is wrong with your Christmas?
The beauty, the romance, the joy... the spirit is gone. It's been cruelly

starved, crushed, killed. By what? By evil greed and commerce, and the

horror of this war... This war... "to end all wars".
78 Gently $\frac{d}{2} = 72$

L.

81

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vcs.

85

post-card of the Christ-mas es of old.

A hom-ey

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vcs.

90

house nest-led in the ever-greens and snow.
Puffs of smoke spelling "Welcome" in the moonlit winter.

A home of safety, and there they are in love.

side, the little children in their safe
sweetness of slippers and night clothes.

Father

Christmas is coming this night!
A fine figure he cuts with his

costume of red and white.

O Time,

the children clinging to this Christmas promise
With the

awesome trust that only comes in childhood.
124
L. I can see all this, feel all this as though it were yesterday.

Vln. 2

Vc.

127
L. Give me back that simpler time, give me back the singing.

Vln. 2

Vc.

130
L. and the laughter. No, Time, not to me. Give it back to the

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vc.

134
L. children through me. Do this, and I'll believe in Christmas, Yes, and in Father Christmas himself.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vc.
141

T.

L.

Chr.

141

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1.

Vc. 2

149

T.

L.

Chr.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

He's afraid to come in.

Why doesn't he come in?
He's afraid to come in.

Why doesn't he come in?

frightened, and he won't come in unless you ask him to.
162 \( \frac{d}{=68} \)

T.

L.

Chr.

May I come in?

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

165

T.

L.

Chr.

room is too dark

Turn up the

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

\( \text{pizz.} \)
Draft 2 Nov. 21/98

177

dark has frightened him these past three years.

182

Are there landmines here?

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He's afraid. He was blown up by a landmine in No Man's Land.
Land between the trenches at Christmas time in nineteen fourteen. It broke his nerve.
May I put my toys on that machine gun? It will help to keep them dry.
They shot at him with a ma-
chine gun in the streets of Wars-
aw.
T: Since then, he thinks he sees them every

L:

Chr:

Vln. 1:

Vln. 2:

Vla:

Vc. 1:

Vc. 2:

T:

L:

Chr:

Vln. 1:

Vln. 2:

Vla:

Vc. 1:

Vc. 2:
It's all right, Father Christmas. There is no ma-

ch in gun here, there are no land mines here. This is but the
home of a poor writer.

A writer? A writer?

Net quite.

You are Hans Christian Anderson, perhaps.

But a great writer, I
232

T.
L.
Chr.
do not doubt. The world owes much to its great books. I carry

232

Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla
Vc. 1
Vc. 2

235

T.
L.
Chr.
some of the greatest with me at all times. When we are

235

Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla
Vc. 1
Vc. 2

-28-
238

T.

L.

Chr.

children, books comfort us, transport us.

238

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

242

T.

L.

Chr.

We visit worlds of beauty and worlds of im-

242

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

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And we see fairies and dragons and witches and castles. There are gingerbread cottages with
windows of sugar. White knights who ride on the clouds in the sky.

As we get older, books also teach us
all of mankind's cruelty and the fu-

li-ly of war. I don't think gen-
erals and pol-
ici-
ans
read them any more, even though once they were children.

I used to think the pen to be mightier than the sword.

© 1997 Neil Weisensel
I'm not so sure anymore. Look! "The House That Jack

Built" a marvellous deep thing sir. And here's "David Copperfield". Dickens
spins a yarn like no one since. Words to be savoured. Books for my children. Thoughts to be treasured. I have them all.
"Jane Eyre" and Chaucer; his "Canterbury Tales", and tales of whales, here's Moby Dick and all those Russian tomes so thick. Aesop's
fab - les, and The Brothers Grimm. These are the stor - ies when lit - tile

head's "The Babes in the Woods", the
children love that one. Will you take it sir? A poor present, but a

present still. Not so long ago, I gave them in thousands. None seem to want them now.
Why is it so? Has the world abandoned its babes its babes lost wandering in the

All the world is wandering in the woods.
Come good Christmas you must cheer up. Here, sit in the chair. You see?

Comfy one, while we stir the fire. You see?
320
T.

He's sunk. His spirit is broken.

L.

Chr.

320
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc. 1
Vc. 2

323
T.

Will you not help?

L.

Chr.

323
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc. 1
Vc. 2

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(spoken): All of us can, every one of us.

Have you, perhaps, schnapps?

Aye, schnapps. A good glass of it to drink your health.
might warm my heart again

if it is one

He was used to schnapps
say that in ancient Babylon!

Here. Let me pour it for him.

Marvelous.
A pleasant room. What better to have a wind without, and a brave fire within.

One. The sweetest boy in the world.

Ah, children in the house.
I'll bet he is. They all are! The number I've seen, and each and every one, the sweetest child in all the
The very sweetest of all,

bet you say, eh?

They all do.
But hold on!

horse... it's broken. That won't do.
Time, reach me that bit of string. That's right.

Here, hold out your fingers across the knot. Now,
a bit of beeswax. What? No beeswax?

Still, it will stand up now.
448

T.  

L.  

Chr.  

448  

Vln. 1  

Vln. 2  

Vla.  

Vc. 1  

Vc. 2  

450  

T.  

L.  

Chr.  

450  

Vln 1  

Vln. 2  

Vla.  

Vc. 1  

Vc. 2  

No, no, it's nothing. It's guns... I hear them.

only a car passing.

Hear that? Voices crying!
Not voices.

Not voices.

Not voices.

children's voices!

ff
on only the night.

I hear my children's voices everywhere!
see them as I wander the night.

Torn and

dying in the trenches,

Draft 2 Nov. 21/98
Ah!

beaten into the ground!

They

Ah

come to me in every wind. I hear them
It's not crying from the hospital.

I hear them, I see them, The night wind. Not voices.
Time, give me back my children.

They do not die in vain.

Time, give me back my children.
489
T. You see, his heart is breaking. Won't you help him if you can?

L. I'm only too

489
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc. 1
Vc. 2

492
T. This. Listen.

L. I'm glad to help, but what can I do?

492
Vln. 1 solo
dolce ed espressivo

Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc. 1
Vc. 2
You must not let the children know of the horror that racks the world to-day.

Keep them safe. Keep it from them.
Some day he will know his children have not died in vain. That grown

Men may be moved by the crying of orphans to put down their arms.
and finally learn the lesson taught to them by babes, that the price of war is too great.

From these un-holy times, I pray, may
T. spare them the stuff of nightmares. They'll grow up and know

L.

Chs.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

T. soon enough. But not yet. Give them back their Merry

L.

Chs.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

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527

T.

"Christmas until there be Peace on Earth."

L.

Chr.

(perc.)

527

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

530

T.

"Ah!

L.

Chr.

530

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

"These awful times."

"They are lost and wandering in the woods."

"Where are my children?"
Give them back their Christmas.
What can I do?
Let there be

Peace on Earth.
What can I do?

Give me back my children.
They're lost and wandering.
T.
Peace on Earth.

L.
How can I change them?

Chr.
in the woods. Please God, let there be Peace!

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

T.
Peace. Let there be Peace on Earth.

L.

Chr.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

-68-
gin. I will mend this broken horse.
Music: Neil Weisneth

An opérette comedy in two acts

The Master's Stroke

Libretto: Michael Cavagner
Man rounds them up to tug on their teats.

Is this what you want with beau - by?

Now that you mean - ton it.
My hair
ex-commu-nic-a-ted
I'll have you dis-barred, dis-men-beard,
I'll have you thrown out.
You'd know a bit that.

Harassment is your middle name.
You know, you've been here
May be a little
Just like it
Try to

Hard
"Sugar Bill,"

your daughter seems to have misplaced her sense of humor.
The Master's Stroke: Act I Scene I
The Master's Stroke: Act 1 Scene I
You shall be sus-pen-ded from

He's deep in a bun ker now!

On my!
You shall be suspended from the p

Your earnings shall be forfeited this ve

Day!

I won't tell you what I'll pull out of this

The Master's Stroke: Act I Scene 1
from the field A from the field G

Your as can chant that came so

from his bag of fool us in all night sham