MUSICAL COMPOSITION, <u>ICARUS, LANDING</u>, WITH DOCUMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

<u>Icarus, landing</u> is a fifteen-minute work for mixed chamber ensemble including flute/piccolo, oboe, clarinet, violin, cello, double bass, piano, and percussion. The work is written in one continuous movement, though it is subdivided into an introduction and three main subsections, each approximately five minutes long. While each instrument has a challenging, soloistic part, the piano part is used to denote change within the sections and to introduce the opening material of the piece.

The programmatic content of <u>Icarus, landing</u> is based on the experience of my father's illness and death from cancer in 1999, and on the similar experiences of several of my friends. The three sections of the piece correspond to the time before these deaths took place, the time of emerging disease and mental degeneration, and the experience of a sudden and unexpected death and the shock and panic that it engendered. Throughout the work there are timbral markers, sounds which have extra-musical associations which convey meaning to the listener in a more concrete sense than more abstract, "pure" music.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Conception of the piece

In January of 1999, while I was beginning to formulate ideas for my thesis, Owen Underhill asked me to write a piece for the Vancouver New Music Ensemble. The timing of this request unfortunately coincided with my father's death from cancer, and I agreed to write the piece without giving any thought to its content or character. Later, when I began thinking about my thesis, I realized that it must include my experience of my father's illness in some way. While considering the form of the piece during the summer of 1999, I happened to listen to an old Jane Siberry album that I hadn't heard for about ten years. Hearing this music brought back a flood of recollections of my life at that time (late adolescence), especially of the sudden death of my boyfriend's mother, and how that affected his life and mine. Listening to this music was a catalyst; it suggested to me a framework for my thesis composition, which in a more broad context deals with nostalgia for time long past, and how events beyond human control can alter our lives. Although the piece is not intended to be a narrative account of the events surrounding these deaths, it does deal with the emotions that they engendered.

1.2 Title

The title, Icarus, landing, refers to the Greek myth in which Icarus's father made him wings so that he could fly. Icarus flew too close to the sun; his wings melted, and he fell into the sea and died.

To me, Icarus represents the euphoria of flight, the illusion of immortality held by youth, the inherent danger in having a parent who believes that his child can do anything, and the tragedy of realization of mortality. The "landing" of Icarus represents maturity through loss: the loss of a parent, and the loss of the illusion of immortality. Icarus is no longer able to fly; he is bound to earth in his own mortality. The metaphor of descent, both into the past (reverie), and into despair, madness, and illness, is also integral to this work.

1.3 Brief overview of orchestration and form

The mixed chamber ensemble is a mainstay of twentieth-century contemporary art music. Scored for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and singer, Schoenberg's <u>Pierrot Lunaire</u>, written in 1912, was the seminal work in this genre. Many ensembles devoted to new music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are based on this concept of a heterogenous ensemble of soloists. Located in Vancouver, the Helikon ensemble, Standing Wave, and the Vancouver New Music Ensemble are all permutations of the "Pierrot Ensemble;" internationally, such groups as Ensemble Intercontemporain, 2E2M, the Nash Ensemble, and the now-defunct Fires of London (originally named the Pierrot Players) are similar in instrumentation.

<u>Icarus, landing</u> is scored for flute/piccolo, oboe, clarinet, violin, cello, double bass, piano, and percussion. This heterogenous group offers a multitude of timbral and orchestrational possibilities. Most importantly, it is an ensemble of soloists. Each instrument takes on a soloistic role at times, displaying virtuosity and distinct characterization. Sometimes these roles are metaphorical. The piccolo is used for its bird-like sound, the extended range and timbres of the clarinet to represent madness and mental degeneration, and lyrical quality of the oboe for its similarity to the human voice. I also use several subgroups of the ensemble specifically for their extra-musical associations. The oboe and strings together represent chorale-style "early music".

I use various combinations of these instruments to denote different sections of the piece. <u>Icarus, landing</u> is comprised of three main sections. The work begins with a dream-like and somewhat nostalgic atmosphere (representing the time before these deaths occurred.) This first section uses all of the instruments as one large ensemble; the musical materials used for each instrument are relatively similar. In the second section of the piece, the atmosphere of nostalgia and reminiscence is transformed into a more somber mood, which gradually disintegrates into disturbed disorder (analogous to the onset of disease.)

During this part of the work, the flute, clarinet, oboe, and strings have their own distinct musical material. As this section progresses, the piano and percussion join in with their own material. Gradually, the various streams of music are transformed until all of the instruments have loud, fast, dissonant, disturbed music at the end of this section and into the final section of the piece.

In this last section, (which mirrors the emotional turmoil that my friend felt when he heard that his mother had died), there is a sense of barely controlled panic, as well as confusion and fury. The mood here is unrelenting, and remains unresolved at the end of the piece.

1.4 History of this piece in relation to my prior output

During the past four years I have experimented with several styles of music in my compositions. I have focused, in turn, on timbral shifts and microtonal inflections within an extremely limited pitch framework (Velcro Lizards), colouration and heterophony in melodic lines (Bird in the Tangled Sky and Blood, Rain, Violets) and modal harmony suggesting folk music and early music (Blue Sun and Shade.) In this piece I have utilized all of these techniques to create a new work with a broader emotional and intellectual scope.

The emotional form of this piece - unresolved and disturbed in character - is unlike any I have written before. All of my previous compositions have ended with resolution of some kind. The different emotional content of this piece dictates that the musical form will also be new.

II. COMPOSITIONAL MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Form

Icarus, landing is about sixteen minutes long, scored for flute/piccolo, oboe, clarinet, violin, violoncello, double bass, piano, and percussion (one player.) Although the piece is in one continuous movement, it is subdivided into three main sections, each with several subsections.

The formal structure of the piece is additive; as the texture gets denser, the range gets wider. This is true for registral range, dynamic levels, and variety of material being presented simultaneously. Although all instruments have soloistic passages in the piece, it is the piano that introduces the opening material of the piece and is the harbinger of change within the sections.

The main formal sections of the piece are as follows: a short introduction (ca. 30 seconds), section A (5-6 minutes), section B (5-6 minutes), and section C (3-4 minutes). Section A consists of four subsections. The method of construction and development of this section as a whole loosely resembles a sonata form exposition. The opening material is introduced by the piano, then taken up systematically by each other instrument. There is a modulation of pitch centres from D-flat to A-natural part way through this section (m.46). Following this modulation is new material, the second thematic area, and finally closing material, also on A-natural. Section B consists of five subsections: first chorale, piano interruption,second chorale, chorale development, and B - C transition. Section C is something of a recapitulation of section A, though with a very different character. The germinal musical material of section A is reworked in section C. The orchestration is much more dense, with heterophonic treatment of the material by multiple instruments rather than single melodic lines.

Example 1: Formal overview of Icarus, landing

Introduction
introduces main melodic and harmonic material

A
exposition
first development section
second development section
closing material

B
first chorale (modal harmony, simple)
piano interruption (uses fifths from first chorale)
second chorale (start of rhythmic disunity)
chorale development (increasing dissonance, rhythmic complexity)
B - C transition

C
recapitulates material from section A in more complex style
high level of surface rhythmic activity

2.1.1 Introduction

The piece begins with a quiet, plucked-string melody on the piano. This material is derived from a piano gesture at the end of the Jane Siberry song, "The Sky is so Blue," which was the catalyst for the work. Much of the material for the entire piece is derived from this melody. The colouristic difference between ordinary piano timbre and the plucked-string sonority sets this music apart as an introduction to section A.

Example 2 (opening of section A, piano, plucked-strings, m.1-3)

Numerous possibilities for development are suggested by this opening. The harmonic and melodic possibilities among these are: use of the perfect fifth (found particularly in section B of the piece), the major and minor third, pseudo-diatonic D-flat based harmony, A-major harmony, and whole-tone harmony. The dotted rhythmic figure will be developed extensively in section A; the repeated-note figure will be developed in sections B and C (see Example 3.) Note the varied rhythmic subdivisions (groups of sixteenths as opposed to triplet eighths), and the rhythmic deceleration at this microcosmic level. Repeated note figurations at various speeds and beat subdivisions will be developed extensively in section C (see Example 4.)

Example 3 (development of repeated-note figurations in violin and cello, section B, m.149-150)

Example 4 (development of repeated-note figurations in piccolo, section C, m.170)

Example 5 (development of repeated-note figurations in piano, section C, m.179-180)

2.1.2 Section A

exposition	5-25	all instruments except oboe, bass
first development	26-45	oboe solo first, full ensemble
second development	46-65	full ensemble
closing section	66-75	full ensemble, bass solo at end

Section A of the piece is the most conventional in that the opening piano gesture is introduced and developed using traditional methods such as repetition, fragmenting, and recombining of the main motivic cells, and variation of texture and timbre. During the "development" there is oscillation between D-flat and A-natural as pitch centres, eventually ending on A.

Example 6 (oscillation between D-flat and A-natural as pitch centres; violin, cello, double bass, m.32-34)

D-flat_____A_____D-flat_____

Example 7 (A-natural as pitch centre; strings and piano, m.46-47)

Section A is itself divisible into four parts: the exposition, m.5-25, the first development section, m.26-45, the second development section, m.46-65, and the closing section, m.66-75. The exposition of section A, m.5-25, methodically introduces variants of the original material in each instrument, one at a time. The piano (on-key playing rather than plucked strings) at m.5-7 is followed by glockenspiel (m.8-10), piccolo (m.10-12), clarinet (m.12-13), violin (m.14-16), and cello (m.16-21). In terms of timbre, the order of introduction of instruments is heard as more percussive and brittle, progressing to less percussive, more mellow, and richer in harmonic partials. The attack of the piano and the glockenspiel is more percussive than that of the woodwinds; the noise (air and inharmonic partials) component of the piccolo timbre and the lack of even partials in the clarinet make each of their timbres less rich in harmonic partials than those of the stringed instruments. After the introduction of the various instruments, there is a rhythmic decrescendo at m.22-25 which is an expansion of the previous one in the introduction at m.2-4.

I have saved the colour of the oboe for the start of the development of section A, at m.26; it is used as a timbral marker denoting a formal subdivision. As the development progresses, the original rhythmic figures are at times fragmented into smaller and smaller parts (m.28 B-flat clarinet, for instance.) They are also distorted further from the original piano part by use of grace notes (ie. m.31 piano) and more complex subdivisions of pulse, superimposed upon one another (violin and cello, m.32.) The first subsection of the development ends with a rhythmic crescendo at m.37-45. All the pitches from the introduction of the piece (found in the piano, m.1-6) are superimposed at the end of this section (A, D-flat, E, F, G, G-sharp.)

At m.46-47, the start of the second development section, there is a clear break in the texture. These measures are the focal point of the rhythmic crescendo, before the more "whimsical" part of the development begins. They also serve to foreshadow the string chorale in section B, which is signalled by the use of the Perfect fifth, the three strings as a subgroup, and the pitches D, A, and E.

A temporary return to a higher tessitura recollects the dream-like opening in the piano (compare m.1-3 to m.48.) Notice that the same (triadic) pitch structures are used. The whimsicality of this section is created by a high level of surface rhythmic activity which uses many grace-notes and very short

rhythmic values, though the underlying pulse, moving at a much slower rate, remains quite clear.

Example 8 (piano, m.1-3)

**Example 9 (ensemble, m.48)**

The closing (recapitulatory) material of the A section is comprised of m. 66-75. The piano (left hand) presents the introductory material on A

rather than on D-flat; the function of this material is recapitulatory. The right hand piano part at m. 66-67 uses very high-register perfect fifths which are not synchronized with the rest of the music. Both the fifths and the unsynchronized quality of the dyads foreshadow section B. (See m. 76-78, cello and double bass; m.99, piano; m.107-109, strings.)

Example 10 (cello and bass, m.76-78)

Example 11 (piano, m.99)

Example 12 (strings, m.107-109)

♩=54

The A section ends with a thinning of instrumentation to only the piano and double bass at m. 71. The double bass solo (m. 72 - 75) completes the transition into section B.

The goal of the transition is, of course, to prepare the listener for change, yet the section B material must sound completely new as the mood and texture of the music changes at m.76. The double bass solo prepares this change in several ways. There is a rhythmic decrescendo and accompanying ritardando at m.74 - 75; there is a registral descent in the solo so that it moves into the range used in the string parts at the opening of section B. This lower register, coupled with the slower surface rhythm, sounds more sombre than the flightier, more whimsical music of the previous section. Most importantly, the particular sound of espressivo playing on double bass is a new timbre that has not been heard before in the piece.

The moment of transition into section B is marked by the first use of the Indian temple bells This sound is a timbral marker of transformation and ritual (see Timbral markers, 2.4.1).

2.1.3 Section B

first chorale	**76 - 98**	**vc, db, oboe**
piano interruption	**99 - 106**	**piano, cl, perc**
second chorale	**107 - 110**	**vln, vc, db**
chorale development	**111 - 156**	**vln, vc, db, picc, cl**
B - C transition	**157 - 170**	**vln, vc, db, picc, cl, pno, perc**

Section B of <u>Icarus, Landing</u> is comprised of measures 76 - 170. This section may itself be subdivided into five smaller parts (see the diagram above.) The first two subsections are discrete entities while the third section ("second chorale") segues into the "chorale development" area of section B (m. 111 - 156) with the entrance of the piccolo at m.111. The clarinet begins at m.120. The B - C transition section, again a smooth transition, begins at m. 157 where the piano re-enters the piece with the almost unnoticeable scraping of the lower strings.

Example 13 (oboe, cello, and bass, m.76-81)

The second subsection is an interruption of the chorale by the piano. Here, the material of the piano resembles that of the chorale, though it is much faster; the use of grace-note chords also makes the piano material sound, like a harmonized version of the initial motive.

Example 14 (piano, m.99-101)

      As the chorale continues (chorale development section), its texture is thickened by use of all three string instruments. The oboe is silent, but the clarinet and piccolo are introduced. Each instrument has its own material. The clarinet has a descending scalar melody, and the piccolo has short, discrete, fast-moving phrases. As I mentioned earlier, this section of the piece deals with illness and death. The music of the clarinet portrays gradually increasing mental illness, while that of the piccolo represents the mounting fear of a person approaching physical death while still mentally healthy.

      During the course of the chorale development, the modal D minor in the string parts is distorted by increased chromaticism, and by use of timbral alterations. The clarinet melody becomes more angular and dissonant. The piccolo melody continues unaltered in terms of pitch content, but climbs higher and higher in register.

Example 15 (clarinet, m.121-123)

Example 16 (clarinet, m.157-159)

Example 17 (piccolo, m.112-115)

Example 18 (piccolo, m.163-166)

The B-C transition section starts at m.157 where the piano re-enters the piece with scraping of the low (coiled) strings. Towards the end of this section, the oboe enters with occasional multiphonics; the piccolo and clarinet also play multiphonics interspersed with regular notes.

The music at the start of section B is straightforward and uncomplicated in terms of pitch and surface rhythm. The three instruments, oboe, cello, and double bass, use the pitches of the dorian (on D) scale; in fact, the oboe is further limited, using only the pitches D, E, F, G, and A. The cello and double bass music is a slow chorale, mostly at the interval of the perfect twelfth. The oboe part is highly ornamented, though the underlying melody is quite simple: D - A - F - E - D. This material is derived from the opening piano material, in D-Dorian rather than in D-flat major.

Example 19 (oboe, m.78-80)

mp espressivo, lachrymose

The musical materials and choice of instruments impart a Baroque and religious tone to the piece, imbuing it with a sense of the past. By contrast, the piano interruption at m. 99 is much louder and more unpredictable. Though it, too, uses the P5 interval, the rhythms are disjunct and irregular. This music is an ominous interruption of the sad but calm music preceding it, like upsetting thoughts interrupting a tranquil reverie. (See Example 14, above.)

The second chorale section (m. 107 - 110) begins with all three stringed instruments playing quiet, simple, chorale-like music. Although the three play similar rhythms, they are disunified, as though each one was playing at a slightly different tempo (see Example 12, above). This disunity signals the increasing tension in the music.

During the chorale development (m. 111 - 156), the piccolo and the clarinet each have their own material separate from that of the strings. Distinct methods of development are used for the different materials.

The music of the piccolo is stylized, resembling bird-song . At the start of the development (see Example 17, above), the low register of the piccolo is used at a relatively quiet dynamic level (piano to mezzo-piano.) A variety of rhythmic durations are used, which give the music a fluid, improvisatory quality. Unlike the music of the strings, the piccolo music is written in short, discrete phrases with rests between each phrase. As the development progresses, I employ increasingly higher register of the piccolo, louder dynamics, and smaller and smaller rhythmic values (see Example 18, above.) The effect of these gradual changes is that the mood of the music turns from calm and placid to increasingly distressed and finally panicked, as if the bird finds that it is trapped and can't escape. This bird is itself a metaphor for a person with a healthy mind/soul trapped in a dying body.

The metaphor of the clarinet's music is one of deteriorating mental health. The first entry of the clarinet at m.120 (see Example 15, above) is a descending scalar melody. By m.126 - 128, fragments of this melody are used in a disorderly and disturbed way. It is not possible for the listener to predict the course of the line. The dynamic levels change dramatically without warning. The multiple repetitions at m.127 are almost like a broken record; the phrase culminating at m.130 - 131 is an uncontrolled outburst.

Example 20 (clarinet, m.126-131)
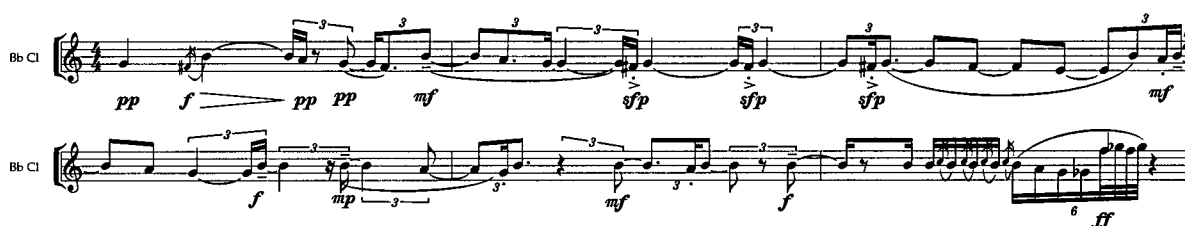
The clarinet phrases from m. 132 -143 are increasingly disturbed. After a short rest, an expressionless, droning section begins at m.144. This section increases speed, register, and level of dissonance very gradually to m. 161 where it is at top speed and highest register. The music of the clarinet continues in this agitated state, using only the highest register, fast and loud notes, colour trills, and multiphonics, into section C of the piece. (ex. ca. m. 161)

All three stringed instruments use the chorale music for their starting material. The three instruments are rhythmically independent, unlike the first two statements of the chorale. The phrases overlap, rather than starting and ending together. Consequently, the crescendos and decrescendos do not occur together, though the three instruments have similar dynamic ranges to work within while playing the basic chorale material. (See Example 21.)

Example 21 (strings, m.116-119)

Aside from the long, slow-moving, dorian-mode chorale phrases, there are "distorted" or "diseased" phrases which are interjected with increasing frequency during the development. The first of these is found in the violin at m.128, and the second in the cello at m. 136 (see Examples 22 and 23 below.) Double stops, glissandi, repeated down-bows, dissonance akin to bitonality, and extremes of dynamic are used in these phrases. As the development of the string parts progresses, dissonant-sounding bowing effects such as heavy bow pressure and bowing sul ponticello are added (see Example 24.) Unlike the wind parts in this section of the piece, the string writing stays within the same register and speed for the duration of the chorale development.

Example 22 (violin, m. 128-130)

Example 23 (cello, m. 136-138)

Example 24 (strings, m.148-150)

2.1.4 Section C

Section C may be heard as a companion to section A. There are many parallels in their use of musical materials, instrumental roles, texture, pitch centres, register, and range. Unlike the B section, where the various instruments have distinctive musical materials, in A and C all of the instruments are given similar materials to develop. In section A, the musical material is introduced by the piano. Similarly, in section C the piano takes a leading role and the other instruments expand this material in a heterophonic setting: the repeated notes which were used frequently in section A are used obsessively in section C.

Over the duration of the piece, an arch form is described by the structural mirroring of these two sections. Section A begins with the pitches D-flat, F, A-flat, at a quiet dynamic level and high tessitura, gradually becoming louder and expanding downward in register. Conversely, section C starts very loudly, covering the entire possible pitch spectrum and registral range, and progressively contracts, becoming higher and quieter, to the end of the piece. As the registral contraction occurs, the number of pitches used is reduced until

only those of the D-flat major triad are left. Returning to D-flat as pitch centre gives additional structural definition to the arch form.

The piano begins the segue into section C at m. 157. While the distorted chorale continues above, scraping of the lowest (coiled) piano strings is heard, joined at m. 159 by quiet, low octave D-flats. The left hand plays the D-flats in the usual manner, while the right hand scrapes the strings with coins. (See Example 25, below.) These gestures repeat, gradually getting louder, until m. 170 where the triple-forte D-flat octaves in the left hand are joined with a high D-flat major triad in the right hand, signalling the beginning of section C proper, and the climax of the work as a whole (see Example 26, below.)

Example 25 (m. 157-159)

Example 26 (m.169 - 171)

As this D-flat sonority is reiterated in the registral extremes of the piano, the repeated notes which characterize section C begin in the piano's middle range. This middle stratum of the piano part creates a slow-moving melodic line which is heterophonically decorated by the other instruments (see Example 27.)

Example 27 (m. 178-180)

Gradually, the lines of varying pulse-streams climb to the highest register possible and become very quiet, though still fast and intense. The variety of timbres used is similarly constricted. The strings, which began the section using snap pizzicato and double-stops with heavy bow pressure progress first to ordinary bowing and then to quiet, sustained harmonics and high-register glissandi. The winds are constrained first to regular playing (as opposed to multiphonics) and then to key-clicking. Percussion is reduced from cymbal and flexatone to xylophone and finally to wooden windchime, and the piano's

repeated notes become quieter and queter until the pianist just taps on the keys without playing any notes. The piece then stops abruptly as the pianist slams down the lid of the keyboard, a rude but effective sound.

2.2 Harmony

Icarus, landing is written using certain focal pitches to delineate the large-scale structure. Tonal centres are defined in three ways: by use of the central pitch at important focal points, such as at the end of a phrase (in this way my use of tonal centres resembles that of medieval church modes), by use of the central pitch as the bass note of the texture, and by simple repetition of the pitch in various registers. These tonal centres of the piece are important to the form. They work in the following way: the introduction and section A are in D-flat, modulating to A as pitch centre at the end of the "development." Section B begins centered on D, although it becomes completely chromatic during the course of the section. Section C returns to D-flat as a tonal centre, however it is a much more dissonant section than the original D-flat section. The D-flat to A transition at the beginning of the piece is a large-scale development of the major third found in the germinal motive; the A to D transition develops the fifth. The final D to D-flat transition brings the piece back to where it started, albeit in a very transformed state.

Example 28: overview of harmonic motion in Icarus, landing

Section A   Section B   Section C

increasing dissonance - fully chromatic   less chromatic

D-flat ——— modulating ——— A // D ——————————————————— (D-flat) ———————D-flat

major third   perfect fifth
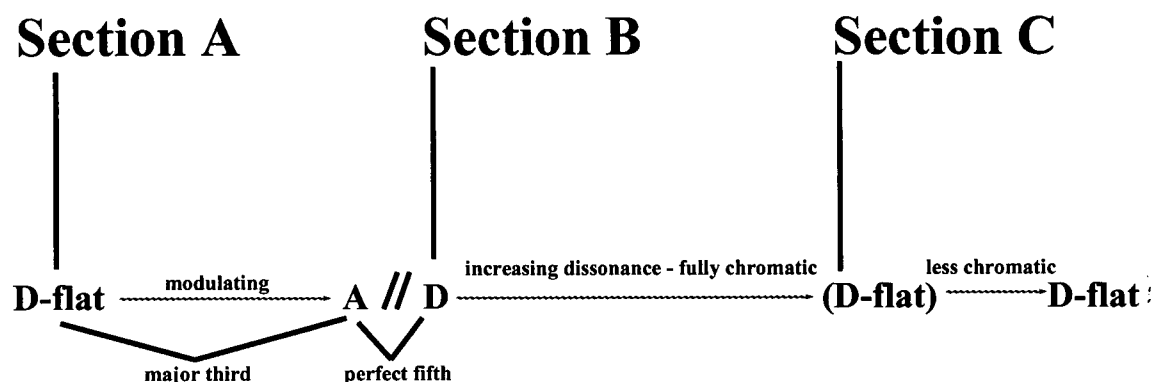
2.2.1 Harmony in the introduction and Section A

The opening section of the piece, representing nostalgia and time long past, uses a limited amount of pitches, found in three sub-groupings. These are (D-flat, F, A-flat), (F, G, D-flat), and (A, E, C-sharp, C). The first is associated with D-flat as tonal centre (resembling D-flat major), the second with whole-tone harmony, and the third with A as a tonal centre.

The C-sharp found in the third grouping is the enharmonic equivalent of D-flat; juxtaposing these tonally-centered groups with the whole-tone group allows for oscillation between D-flat and A as tonal centres. Despite the limited number of pitches used, there are many opportunities for mild dissonance between the subgroups (F/E), (A/A-flat, G), (C/C-sharp.) The slightly unsettled, yet relatively tonal and consonant harmonic language created here is analogous to the mood of nostalgic recollection.

As this section of the piece develops (approximately one-third of the way into section A), the pitches from these three melodic and harmonic groups are no longer used only as discrete entities. The pitches are recombined so that longer melodic lines can be formed. An additional, structurally-significant pitch, D-natural, is introduced about two-thirds of the way through section A. (D-natural is the clear tonal centre of the B section of the piece.) From this point on, there is no more fluctuation between A and D-flat as tonal centres (the D-flat pitch is now used only as C-sharp, as if it were a leading tone, rather than having an ambiguous function.) A is the main tonal centre, with D as the subsidiary one, and there is less use of whole-tone harmony. One more pitch, B-natural, has been added as well. It serves primarily as an additional chromatic colouration for the melodic lines. It is structurally significant because its addition means that all the notes of the A-major scale are now available; though I do not write functional, diatonic harmony, using these pitches strengthens A-natural as a tonal centre.

2.2.2 Harmony in Section B

The B section of the piece begins very clearly on D, using the pitches of the D natural minor scale. The cello and bass play the same melodic material a perfect twelfth apart. Since this section of the piece represents the

insidious onset of illness, I wanted it to begin in a very simple and pure way, both harmonically and rhythmically.

Ex. 29 (oboe, cello, double bass, m. 76-81)

Chromatic additions are then heard as "wrong notes" which can symbolize disease.

Example 30 (strings, m. 126-131)

Another method I used for making the chorale development particularly distorted (especially at the end of the B section) is stratification; numerous layers of material are piled on top of each other. Towards the end of this section, there are a number of different events occurring simultaneously. The piccolo, whose music in this section uses only white notes throughout (D-Dorian scale), is playing very fast, high, agitated melodic fragments, sounding a bit like a frightened, trapped bird. The music of the clarinet, which had begun in a modal D tonality, has had new pitches added one at a time until the complete set of twelve pitches were added. Its only tonal focus is an occasional high A/B-flat trill. The music of the three string instruments has progressed from D natural minor through polytonality to a point where they each have their own double-stop chords, (violin - B/F, G-flat/C; cello - G/D-flat, E-flat/A-flat; bass - D/A, B-flat/E) which together form a complete aggregate. The fourth layer is the piano part, which consists of low D-flat octaves with additional timbral distortion added to the sound by scraping of the lowest (coiled) piano strings.

2.2.3 Harmony in Section C

In the final (C) section of the piece, the harmonic materials are more straightforward. There are two main ideas here; one is the insistent D-flat major chord found at the extremes of register in the piano. A bright major chord sounds incongruous and menacing here. The effect that I am seeking is something similar to the feeling one might have upon hearing dreadful news and then walking outside and finding that it is beautiful and sunny out. It serves to make everything else more surreal and incomprehensible. The second idea is

melodically based; the relentless, chasing melody in the middle register of the piano is orchestrated and "harmonized" by the other instruments in a heterophonic manner. The heterophonic treatment of the melody often amounts to a "thickening" of the main note, sometimes using chromatic pitches adjacent to it to increase dissonance. (Please refer back to example 27, above.)

Another technique I have used to harmonize the piano line is more of an echo effect, an orchestrated resonance and decay. If, for instance, the piano line moves swiftly from note to note, then settles on one main note for a period of time, the other instruments may take up the previous (moving) notes as an echo, gradually dying away or moving to the next main note.

Example 31 (m. 187-189)

2.3 Rhythm

The harmonic rhythm of the piece follows a ternary form of fast-slow-fast in sections A to C. The surface rhythm, on the other hand, increases through the duration of the piece. It is the B section which is the most varied rhythmically. Aside from containing the surface-rhythm crescendo, it also uses rhythmic distortion in a manner analogous to progression of disease. At the start of section B, the rhythms used in the cello and bass parts (see the example under the heading 2.1.3 Section B) are very simple, mainly quarter notes and half notes. The parts of these notes co-ordinate rhythmically with that of the oboe, though it has a more florid and rhythmically busy part. By the start of the chorale development subsection, each of the three string parts is rhythmically independent from the others (see Example 21, above), and the clarinet and piccolo parts are independent from these. Though the beat is frequently obscured in section C, its fast surface rhythm does not contain multiple tempi.

Icarus, Landing contains three main varieties of surface rhythm. The most straightforward of these is best described as varied subdivisions of the beat with a more or less clear pulse. I use this kind of surface rhythm in most of section A, and through the first two subsections of section B (up to m. 111).

Throughout section C, and in certain parts of section A, I use various subdivisions of the beat, but with the pulse more or less obscured by non-regular articulation of each beat. Notes may be tied over the beat in some or all of the instruments (see Example 32, below.)

Obscuration of the beat by instruments with similar timbres and using the same register and pitches produces a more blurred texture which can be used to create a rhythmic crescendo (see Example 33, below.)

Example 32 (m.181 - 183)

Example 33 (m.41 - 43)

In the chorale-development part of section B, I have created distinct rhythmic strata; the most complicated rhythmic activity (though not necessarily the fastest) is found between m.111 - 170. This is accomplished in part by using different registral areas, timbres, dynamics, and pitches. It is also helpful to use distinct rhythmic durations in each of the different strata to create the sense of different tempi in the various parts (see Example 34, below.) The clarinet and piccolo parts were written at different, faster tempi from the string parts, and then transcribed into the main tempo of the B section.

The string parts at m.126 - 128 are written with consistently longer rhythmic values than the piccolo, whose longest rhythm is a triplet eighth-note. The clarinet has somewhat more varied values, though these are mainly divisions of a triplet, which gives the clarinet part its own distinctive pulse. While the piccolo part frequently articulates the written downbeats in this section of the piece, the clarinet part almost never does so.

Example 34 (m.126 - 128)

2.4 Timbre and instrumentation

The instrumentation of the piece corresponds to the VNMS core ensemble: flute/piccolo, oboe, clarinet, violin, violoncello, double bass, piano, and percussion. The heterogeneity of the ensemble allows for many colouristically different subdivisions, and makes distinction between various co-existing strata of the piece easier to create.

The introduction and section A are led by the piano, though each of the instruments works with relatively similar material which is based on the piano's initial plucked-string gesture. For this reason, only melodic, keyboard percussion instruments (vibraphone and glockenspiel) are used.

By contrast, each instrument or sub-group in the B section of the work has its own very specific musical materials. The three stringed instruments form one sub-group whose original material is chorale-like in nature. The piccolo, oboe, and clarinet each have their own materials as

described above. The piano and percussion have similar functions in this section; they are primarily indicators of formal subdivisions. The percussion is used to mark the start of the B section. The piano is used first to interrupt the tranquility of the first part of the B section at m. 99, indicating the beginning of the move to more disturbed music. The return of the piano after a forty-six-measure hiatus heralds the transition into section C.

During the B - C transition and within section C, all of the instruments except percussion use extended playing techniques. The piccolo, oboe and clarinet are required to play loud multiphonics, the piano part calls for scraping of the low piano strings with a coin, and the string players must play with heavy bow pressure, molto sul ponticello, as well as using Bartok pizzicato at various times. All of these sounds are distortions of the regular timbres of the instruments, and are used to indicate despair and panic.

Various registral areas are also used to describe formal contour. The registral areas of the piece describe an arch form. The introduction and A section begin very high, using high piano notes, glockenspiel, and piccolo. As section A progresses, more of the lower register is used, though the total range covered is still quite circumscribed. During the B section, the range used is expanded both up and down so that by the start of section C, the full possible register is utilized. As section C continues, the tessitura of the piece becomes higher and higher until at the end of the work, once again only very high pitches are used, as in the introduction.

2.4.1 Timbral Markers

Throughout Icarus, Landing I have used what I call "timbral markers" to delineate the formal sections. These are new and distinctive timbres which have two significant functions. Aside from signalling important sections and subsections of the piece, they also have associative properties which change or foreshadow changes in the emotional content of the music.

The use of specific timbres to convey mood can be seen most clearly in the B section of the piece. Section B starts with the sonority of the string of Indian temple bells. These bells are used only three times in the entire piece, at m. 75, m. 105, and m. 110, these being the start of the B section, the end of the piano interruption, and the start of the low piccolo part. The sound of

the Indian temple bells is a very specific, delicate timbre that one associates with ritual. (In general, bells denote mysticism, ritual, and solemnity.) Their sonority also bears a striking resemblance to the sound of the bells used in a Roman Catholic church mass at the moment of transformation of the Eucharist. These various associations and the infrequent use of this timbre give it additional structural significance, thus it is an appropriate timbral marker for the ending of the "nostalgic" section of the piece and the start of the area dealing with disease and loss.

Other timbral markers used in the piece are the multiphonics in the piccolo, oboe and clarinet at m. 175, a sound of panic and despair; the high-register plucked piano strings of the introduction, a dream-like sound symbolizing the past and unreality; the sul tasto strings and chorale music at m.76 - 98 and m.107 - 110, which invoke solemnity and ritual; and the slam of the piano lid at the end of the piece, which symbolizes the shock of realization of mortality, the finality of death, and the impossibility of returning to the past.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND AESTHETIC STATEMENT

Icarus, landing is unified by the musical portrayal of an instantaneous recollection of numerous events, and a description of these events, which themselves took months to occur: a slow descent into mental illness, and the gradual process of physical illness.

Underlying these multiple descriptions are the ideas of time as malleable, and the past as recurrent, so that it is possible to evoke various levels of time simultaneously, not as abstract concepts, but as levels of time with specific events occurring in each one. The B section of Icarus, landing recreates the two events (mental and physical illness) along with a third stratum which is commentary on these processes. In the A and C sections the events occur as if they were in the present (without commentary), though the start and end of the piece indicate that they too are from the past.

"Every moment in time has the potential to be an entire universe." (Rodney Halko.)

At this point in the twenty-first century, the composer has a broad range of harmonic languages available for use, from modal simplicity to extreme chromaticism and dissonance. Rhythmic styles can be equally varied; there are a wide range of "extended techniques" to add to an already broad timbral palette. It is my belief that certain styles of music are more effective at conveying certain moods, and it is my current thinking that a composer should use whichever possibility best suits the needs of the piece, rather than limiting herself to a particular style. Juxtaposition of simplicity and complexity in the same piece can be particularly effective because of the higher degree of contrast one can achieve.

I believe that music has the power to convey emotion. (If I didn't believe this, I wouldn't compose.) My goal is to write music that is emotionally and intellectually engaging. I think it is necessary to use a variety of musical styles to do this. Writing this piece was technically and emotionally challenging for me. Attempting to recreate intense emotions has forced me to experiment with new writing styles, and increased my technical capabilities and scope of expressive power.

Icarus, landing

for chamber ensemble

by Jocelyn Morlock
(2000)

Icarus, landing

For chamber ensemble consisting of flute/piccolo, oboe, B-flat clarinet, violin, violoncello, double bass, piano, and percussion (one player). Percussion instruments used are glockenspiel, vibraphone, xylophone, string of Indian temple bells, large suspended cymbal, flexatone, and bamboo windchimes.

This piece was written for Owen Underhill and the Vancouver New Music Ensemble, with the generous assistance of the Canada Council.

Performance notes:

Accidentals last for the entire measure in which they occur.
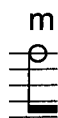
A note with a round head, and the letter "m" above it, stands for any available multiphonic.

Rather than using a symbol for scratch tone (heavy bow pressure), the words "scratch tone are written in the score. A return to ordinary bow pressure is marked "ord".

This wavy line is used occasionally in the clarinet part; it means "wider than normal vibrato".

Notes with x noteheads and tremolo in the piano part (mm. 224-228) refer to tapping on the keys, rather than playing the notes. Make the transition to tapping by playing as quietly as possible in the preceding bar. It is okay if some notes are played sporadically during the transition, so long as fast activity is maintained.

The xylophone part sounds one octave above where it is written. This piece assumes that the player has a xylophone with notes extending down to (written) F below middle C. Use hard mallets for the xylophone, and soft (yarn) mallets for the vibraphone. The vibraphone motor should always be turned off.

Icarus, landing

Jocelyn Morlock

♩ = 54

Picc

Ob

Bb Cl

Vln

Vc

Db

Pno

Glock

pluck strings with fingertips

p

ff slam pedal down loudly (strings will resonate) - keep pedal down unless otherwise indicated