

About "Toccatà for Orchestra"

"Toccatà for Orchestra" was commissioned by a consortium of orchestras including the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra, Alfred Savia, Music Director; the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Mario Venzago, Music Director; the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Joel Levine, Music Director; the Omaha Symphony, Thomas Wilkins, Music Director; and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, JoAnn Falletta, Music Director. The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra premiered the work in March of 2007.

This lively work is meant to be a miniature concerto for orchestra. From the string quartet before letter P to the lyrical flute and clarinet solos in the middle of the work to the fugue section that begins at letter P, every instrument in the orchestra has a solo moment somewhere in this piece.

"Toccatà for Orchestra" opens quietly with a rhythmic, low register xylophone solo. This quintal harmony and rhythm sets the stage for the opening theme. A former student and now composition colleague, Kevin James, had mentioned to me his discussion of toccatas with the organist at the main cathedral in Siena, Italy. He was told that in the 17th century, toccatas were typically improvisational preludes for church services often involving music that would sequence keys in fourths or fifths to see which notes on the organ might be malfunctioning, as they were unpredictable instruments at the time. This practice would inform the organist of which notes to avoid in the rest of the service. I decided to incorporate this musical idea into my toccata. The melodic pattern of fifths states all of the notes in the chromatic scale by measure 6, and goes on to be the basis for the B theme first heard at letter D in this work. The use of fifths is also dominant in the rhythmic accompaniment to the A theme first heard at letter B.

Another key component of this work is the rhythmic interjection of the 7/8 meter first heard at letter E. This rhythmic pattern later goes on to be the underlying rhythm of the accompanying ostinato to the lyrical flute solo from letter X to letter Bb. This toccata is meant to cover a large spectrum of sounds and moods within the orchestra. A good example of this is the light-hearted treatment of the B theme in the woodwinds and strings at letter H, which six measures later becomes more nobly stated by the sostenuto brass section, turning into a majestic moment for the entire orchestra at letter J.

Structurally this work can be divided into five major sections. The first section from measure one to letter H includes the introduction, A and B themes, and a miniature development of those themes. The music that begins at Letter H is meant to totally contrast the loud and rhythmic opening of this work. The more intimate music at letter H features the clarinet solo, which leads into a string quartet. This music takes us to the fugue section at letter P that begins quietly with the bassoons and culminates in a very loud multi-metered feature of the percussion section just before letter X. At letter X, we abruptly return to the music of letter H now heard in the solo flute with an ostinato accompaniment derived from the fugue theme. This music eventually returns us to a recapitulation of sorts beginning at letter Ee.

There are many definitions for toccata including a piece of music that shows the technical prowess of a soloist. In this case the soloist is the entire symphony orchestra. Another definition of toccata is "to touch." While this definition refers to touching a keyboard, I wrote this work hoping that the lyrical moments of this work will touch the listener and show off the beauty of the orchestra, along with demonstrating its technical abilities.

Orchestration for "Toccatà for Orchestra"

2 Flutes	4 Horns in F
1 Piccolo	3 Trumpets in C
2 Oboes	3 Trombones
2 Bb Clarinets	1 Tuba
1 Bb Bass Clarinet	1 Timpani
2 Bassoons	3 Percussion
Piano	Harp

String Section

Violin I	Violin II
Viola	Cello
	Bass