

Musical Masque Program Notes

Musical Masque (for the Seasons) is a musical work set to the text of a James Whitcomb Riley poem entitled "Masque of the Seasons." The piece is meant to reflect the imagery of the Whitcomb Riley poem. The poem is set in a kitchen with children popping popcorn. As they do so, the Fairy Queen of the Seasons appears and asks the children which season they like best of all. Hence, the first music that you hear is meant to be a musical rendering of popcorn popping. The sound of string pizzicatos and short notes from the trombone and marimba speed up as the popcorn cooks. This music leads us into the first stanza of the poem about Winter.

Winter begins with the actual rhythm of the opening line of the poem about Winter heard in the initial entrance of the Violin, accompanied by the sound of shivering in the marimba tremolo. The sounds of shivering can also be heard in the ponticello string writing. The solo cello represents old man winter in its mournful melody first heard arco and later finishing the work as a pizzicato line. There is a middle section of this movement that embraces old man winter and is meant to represent children playing in the snow. This major-key melody, first heard in the trombone, is accompanied by sleigh bells and is passed to all of the instruments of the ensemble during this celebration of a winter snow. The work eventually returns to the cold and the minor-key representation of winter with the cello pizzicato solo and the musical imagery of a cold winter day.

Spring is the next season referenced in the poem and begins very quietly and slowly. This movement of the work is meant to reflect the beauty and peacefulness of a spring morning in Indiana. The first violin plays a very sensuous, lyrical line throughout. Many sounds of a Spring morning can be heard including the chirping of birds in the bells. The light sound of the wind chime is meant to be the quiet rustling of leaves in a Spring breeze.

Summer is perhaps the most entertaining movement of the piece. James Whitcomb Riley's stanza about Summer references the sound of drums and the Circus and these effects become evident very quickly in this Summer music. The first thing the listener hears in this movement is the sound of drums. It is meant to be the distant drum cadence of an approaching Circus parade. The music simulates the music that one would hear at a circus. The trombone glissandi represent the music for a clown act at the Big Top. The fast sixteenth notes in the first violin are music for a juggler in this three-ring carnival. The disruptive drum set music represents the sound of a percussionist echoing the antics of a clown act. There are even humorous references to John Phillip Sousa marches in this playful musical rendering of Summer. This music fades at the end of the movement representing the Circus parade's departure, but not without a lagging clown bringing up the rear of the show heard in the final trombone glissandi.

Fall is a movement reflecting the harvest activities of an Indiana farm community in the late 19th Century when James Whitcomb Riley lived. The movement begins with a Harvest Hymn of Gratitude for a good growing season. This hymn is followed by the musical sound of leaves beginning to fall, which leads us into a barn dance celebrating

the harvest moon. This dance music grows in intensity as the evening progresses, and the music finally winds down, ending with a short, but reverent final rendering of the humble Harvest Hymn.

The poem concludes with the Fairy Queen mentioning to the children in the kitchen that she brought them all four seasons, because each child likes a different season; and so the music quickly concludes this work with the return of the sound of the popcorn popping in the kitchen as all is well with the world and mother nature.

The premiere of this work occurred on March 18, 2007 and was performed by the Peaceful Valley Chamber Players, Muriel Mikelsons, Music Director.