

Dreams are among the most peculiar aspects of the human mind. Many have sought to understand, interpret and explain our dreams through psychiatry, philosophy and religion. Although I do not feel an authority on the matter of dreams I did feel a strong interest in exploring dream imagery, that of my own dreams, as well as the dream-like images of poetry.

In my search for ideas and concepts for the material for this piece I read several books and articles by Sigmund Freud and his student Carl Jung. It was among Jung's writings that I found a kindred spirit that I felt I could draw upon for ideas. In his book *On the Nature of Dreams* I found a passage that I realized would be a great idea to present as the opening of this cycle:

“Even though dreams refer to a definite attitude of consciousness and a definite psychic situation, their roots lie deep in the unfathomably dark recesses of the conscious mind. For want of a more descriptive term we call this unknown background the unconscious. We do not know its nature in and for itself, but we observe certain effects from whose qualities we venture certain conclusions in regard to the nature of the unconscious psyche, they provide the bulk of the material for its investigation.”¹

This text provided the basis for the music of the Prologue, as well as a catapult to push the piece through an investigation of imagery.

As I was collecting poems I decided to include some instrumental interludes of representations of reoccurring dreams that I have had. The first of these dreams, *Bare Woods*, is one that I have had on a regular basis since childhood. The basic premise is that of a person walking through a thick wooded area and keeps being startled by strange sounds. Eventually it is realized that he has stumbled across a very hungry and angry bear. A chase ensues and eventually the man comes out of the wooded area with the bear

¹ Jung, Carl G. *Dreams*. 73

hot on his heels, and suddenly he falls off of a cliff, only to wake suddenly a split second before hitting the approaching earth:

Example 1: *II – Bare Woods*, mm. 43-45

suggested rhythm - ad lib wildly

cont. ends suddenly - all at once

cont. ends suddenly all at once

cont. ends suddenly all at once

fff wildly fall from top of range

fff wildly fall from top of range

fff wildly fall from top of range

The second dream, *The Disbelief of Suspension*, is a very peculiar, and very difficult dream to describe in terms that make sense. There is more of a feeling that can be attached to it more than any picture. It begins with a point of nothing, and slowly grows into an immense entity of empty space, which implies that there is more substance to it than there is, it is nothingness, but an immense nothingness.

The third dream, *Dance of Awkwards*, is one of great character and comedy. It is that of a ball of dancing three-legged animals. This would provide a most awkward form of dance:

Example 2: *VI – Dance of Awkwards*, mm. 1-7

mf pp

mf pp

mf pp

mf pp

mf pp

mf pp

The fourth and final dream, *Cacophony of Momentary Thoughts*, has two realizations, one in a dream-state and one while awake. The waking version is the moment while attempting to sleep, or wake up, when a mass of ideas of many varying types comes rushing through the mind, causing the inability to sort them in any logical fashion. The dream version is a more pictorial representation of the event. The ideas here are physical and are rushing around inside of an empty head. The difference is that in the dream version the ideas slowly melt into expressing the same idea, even if it doesn't ever quite line up with itself:

Example 3: *VIII – Cacophony of Momentary Thoughts*, p. 6

The image shows a musical score for 'Cacophony of Momentary Thoughts' on page 6. It consists of five staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a melody. The second staff is a treble clef with a melody. The third staff is a bass clef with a melody. The fourth staff is a treble clef with a melody. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a melody. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ff' (fortissimo). There are also some annotations in small text, such as 'da...' above the first staff and 'ff' above the second staff. The score is enclosed in a large bracket on the left side.

These dreams are sprinkled among five songs using the poems of Emily Dickinson. Each poem has some concept of dreaming, sleeping, waking or some combination of these ideas. I felt this poetry had a lot of depth and character and was a challenge, as well as a delight, to set. In setting this text I decided to focus less on the literal interpretations of the poems, and more on the general feeling, mood or demeanor the poems put me in. I did this for two reasons. First, I feel that poetry is often a most personal experience and should be expressed as such. Second, Dickinson's poems in

particular are of such depth and complexity that it is difficult to delineate a single interpretation to grasp onto, nor should we try.

The first poem, *Sleep is Supposed to Be*, created very clear ideas. I felt as though a struggle between a waking state longing for an elusive dream state. I used this feeling of longing musically by using a more floating texture with the accompaniment.

The second poem, *A long – long sleep – A famous – Sleep*, was not as clear-cut as the first poem. I latched onto to the feeling of this poem, and decided that the singer should be almost alone, only to be accompanied by sounds, in particular the wind chimes, to represent the floating, unstructured world of dreams.

Example 4: *III – A long – long sleep – A famous – Sleep*, mm. 12-15

The musical score for Example 4 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 12 with a *mf* dynamic. The lyrics are: "was ev-er i-dle-ness like this up-on a bank of stone to". The middle staff is for "3 gongs, softest mallets" and the bottom staff is for "bass chimes" and "ten. chimes". The accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *pp*. Performance instructions include "L.V." (Left Voice) and "B.D. w/ softest mallet".

The singer is *molto rubato* in this song and the two percussionists accompanying her are given the instruction to follow her, and all entrances are approximate. So there is a general sense of ebb and flow and nothing is anchored in any way.

The third poem, *We Dream*, is, on the surface, a much more positive mood, relative to other Dickinson poems. But I did feel and undertone of that restless darkness. I used this musically by simply shifting the mood and textures as we approached a seemingly darker moment in the poem, as well as supplying the texture with a hint of heaviness from the beginning:

Example 5: *V – We Dream*, mm. 1-7

Musical score for Example 5, measures 1-7. The score is written for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 69. The dynamics range from *f* (forte) to *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *p* (piano). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The fourth poem, *Dreams are the Subtle Dower*, was very quiet and simple to me. It is almost thankful, a thought of gratitude for these things we call dreams. As though it was a passing thought. I used sparing, disconnected accompaniment with the vocal line so that it gave another sense of a floating, ungrounded environment:

Example 6: *VII – Dreams are the Subtle Dower*, mm 8-10

Musical score for Example 6, measures 8-10. The score is written for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 69. The dynamics range from *mp* (mezzo-piano) to *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The lyrics are: "That flings us past out of the public eye".

I chose to use another moment of spoken text to give it another connection to the prologue. I chose this passage of Fernando Pessoa, from *The Book of Disquiet*, because I felt it gave a momentary closure to the piece, and yet left it open to further investigation, as I intended the music to do as well.

“I have to choose what I detest – either dreaming, which my intelligence hates, or action, which my sensibility loathes; either action, for which I wasn’t born, or dreaming, for which no one was born.

Detesting both, I choose neither; but since I must on occasion either dream or act, I mix the two things together.”²

Dream Cycle is intended to give a simple and brief look into the dream world and serve as a starting point of investigation into the regions of our own minds that we cannot yet control or understand.

² Pessoa, Fernando. *The Book of Disquiet*. 13

Dream Cycle

For soprano and Nonet

By James Sproul

This paper is presented in partial fulfillment of the Master in Music in Composition
Degree.

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Song I:

Sleep is Supposed To Be

Sleep is supposed to be
By souls of sanity
The shutting of the eye.

Sleep is the station grand
Down which, on either hand
The hosts of witness stand!

Morn is supposed to be
By people of degree
The breaking of the Day.

Morning has not occurred!

That shall Aurora be –
East of Eternity –
One with the banner gay –
One in the red array –
*That is the break of Day!*³

Song II:

**A long – long Sleep – A famous –
Sleep**

A long – long Sleep – A famous – Sleep –
That makes no show for Morn –
By Stretch of Limb – or stir of Lid –
An independent One –

Was ever idleness like This?
Upon a Bank of Stone
To bask the Centuries away –
Nor once look up – for Noon?⁴

Song III:

We Dream

We dream – it is good we are dreaming –
It would hurt us – were we awake –
But since it is playing – kill us,

³ Johnson, Thomas H. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. 12

⁴ Johnson. 326

And we are playing – shriek –

What harm? Men die – externally –
It is a truth – of Blood –
But we – are dying in Drama –
And Drama – is never dead –

Cautious – We jar each other –
And either – open the eyes –
Les the Phantasm – prove the Mistake –
And the livid Surprise

Cool us to Shafts of Granite –
With just an Age – and Name –
And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian –
It's prudent – to dream –⁵

Song IV:

Dreams Are The Subtle Dower

Dreams are the subtle Dower
That makes us rich an Hour –
Then fling us poor
Out of the purple Door
Into the Precinct raw
Possessed before –⁶

Song V:

**Dreams – are well – but Waking's
Better**

Dreams – are well – but Waking's better,
If One wake at Morn –
If One wake at Midnight – better –
Dreaming – of the dawn –

Sweeter – the Surmising Robins –
Never gladdened Tree –
Than a Solid Dawn – confronting –
Leading to no Day⁷

⁵ Johnson. 259-260

⁶ Johnson. 592

⁷ Johnson. 216

Bibliography

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Jung, Carl G. *Dreams*. Barnes & Noble books. New York. 1974. p. 73

Pessoa, Fernando. *The Book of Disquiet*. Penguin Books. New York. 2001. p. 13