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UMI
A FRAGMENT OF ANGELS

by

KIEREN RICHARD MACMILLAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF MUSIC

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Houston, Texas

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ABSTRACT

A Fragment Of Angels

by

Kieren Richard MacMillan

This work, commissioned and premiered by Kimberly Gratland, draws its text from the third stanza of an epic poem by Gregory Loselle, entitled “Seven Meditations Upon Angels”. The piece is essentially in the form of the Baroque ritornello aria, with sections of instrumental music alternating with sections of accompanied singing. The overall harmonic structure and all of the musical material is organically derived from the principal motive — first presented in the opening gesture of the woodwinds — and the constantly evolving nature of the restatements and redevelopments reflect the shifting moods and numerous references which is an essential characteristic of Loselle’s poetry.
Crass trumpets might delight them,
And cymbals' crash — but song
Is the active work of angels. Glad
Hallelujahs, hosannas and pop ballads,
With the assorted torch song picked up
Second hand by piano-dwellers —
Those angels in ivory and taut wire —
From composers overheard at the keyboard,
Or on occasional forays into bars.
(Who knows, now we speculate,
What mystery dispelled sits hidden
On the neighboring stool, behind a gin
And tonic — we assume they favor
Clear liquors — quelled?)
Or else the blare
Of military music — they are made to march —
To which they listen from a distance, forbidden
Perhaps to secret themselves in the ranks
Of a parade.
And speaking of music — no hands
Are more finely fit to bows and valves,
No fingertips press more discretely down
On strings, no lips pucker better to the brass
Circle of a horn’s orifice, for who better for an art
Without text than a form without substance?

And if they sing, perhaps they also dance —
And pick rude fights with tough saints —
Perhaps over the moral sense, perhaps
About the admissibility of spectral evidence
In the debate on witchcraft still raging
In celestial courts, mumbled among the fallen
Faithful of ages past, or over the cognitive dance
Continued in lapses of space and time — perhaps
They dance quadrilles and stately minuets,
Perhaps they waltz or tango, crossing floors
In perfect measure, not misstepping, tripping
Or unsure (an angel’s grace to know
The next step, always!) of what comes next —
Never fearful of inertia, of the gravity
They inhabit, the distance they compass.

So allow their dance, allow the image
To consume our sense: they nod gravely
In time to music thrumming in from balconies
Above, eyes down, absorbed in action, willing
Into life the rigid geometries of pattern:
Steps turn and pass, informing with their glory
The simple sequences.
    They tap their feet,
They clap, they join hands, leap and land
Noiselessly in light and heat, silently —
As pairs of angels part and meet, part
And meet, as reeling squads of angels
Part and meet.
And if we could hear
The choirs in long-held pedal notes, the strains
Of hidden bands, the cries of singers in the skies,
If we could only hear — though we cannot.
Perhaps we only hear them as we die.

— from “Seven Meditations Upon Angels” by Gregory Loselle
(used by permission)

NOTE: italics indicate text not included by composer
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trum - pets might delight them. And cymbals crash, and cymbals crash.
but song... but song... is the active work of
into a jazzy feel \( \text{[} \dot{\text{d}} = \text{ca. 88} \text{]} \)

quasi-"temp" (snare & susp. cym)

bal-tads... With the as-so-ried torch song... picked up Second hand... by... piano-dwellers...

into a jazzy feel \( \text{[} \dot{\text{d}} = \text{ca. 88} \text{]} \)
those angels in ivy and dust,  picked up From composers' overheard at the keyboard,
severe; martial \( \mathcal{j} = \text{ca. } 126 \)

"Or else the blare of military music, military music, the"
blare of military music, to which they listen from a distance, for...
relaxing slightly   tempo primo \( \dot{\text{j}} = \text{ca. 112} \)

*bid-den Per-haps to sec-re their-selves... in the ranks of a par-a-de.*
singing

And speaking of music...
to tambourine

No finger-tips press more discreetly down On strings.

pppp
move discreetly down, no lips paint better to the
recitativo

brass Gr - de - of a horn's or - i - fice. for who bet - ter for an

recitativo
mus - ic - thrum-ming in, thrum-ming in from bal - co ries A - bove, eyes
228 poco marcato

Steps turn and pass, turn and pass, in-forming with their glory. The
They tap their feet. They

They
clap they join hands, leap and land—As pairs of angels
of angels
 PART and meet, part and meet, part and meet
 And
immense, but not heavy [\(\mathfrak{f} \approx \text{ca. 80}\)]
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perc

poco a poco cresc.

bass

poco a poco cresc.

perc

(poco cresc.)

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

long - held ped - al notes, the strains Of hid - den

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.

poco a poco cresc.
bands, the cries of singers in the skies,
If we could only hear—though we cannot. Perhaps we only hear them as we...
quasi tempo primo \( \text{\textit{[j \approx ca. 72]}} \)

1. Each player should fade away independently of other players, but roughly synchronized to players in the same section.

2. Observe the repeat if necessary; however, the double bass and harp should be silent before reaching the repeat.

3. The bass drum should not begin to fade until all other instruments are silent.