



SNAKE CHARMER (2009)

Randall Standridge (b. 1976)
CMP Plan

Analysis

Broad Description: A programmatic piece that invokes the air of exotic mystery surrounding the art of snake charming

Type/Genre: Programmatic

Background Information:

- Randall Standridge is a band director in northeast Arkansas who composes frequently for young and advanced bands.
- Mr. Standridge has enjoyed much success in the last few years with the popularity of his works. To date, *Snake Charmer* is one of the strongest pieces he has written.
- According to the program notes, the piece begins with the image of the charmer setting up his performance area in the streets, opening the lid, and letting the serpent appear. Then, the snake begins its swaying, dangerous dance until, exhausted, it returns to the dark safety of its basket.
- *Snake Charmer* provides an opportunity for students to learn about absolute music versus programmatic music.
- Mr. Standridge utilizes a double harmonic major scale, also known as the Arabic or Byzantine scale. This is an example of a synthetic scale in which accidentals are used to alter a scale to produce a non-diatonic collection of pitches.

Unique Considerations:

- The composer's use of a synthetic scale creates many challenges to the performer in retaining accidentals throughout each measure
- Optional flute, oboe, and horn solos
- Finger cymbals and bongos
- Trombone and timpani glissandi
- Two endings from which to choose: a "down" ending or a "surprise attack" ending

Elements of Music

Form: *Snake Charmer* begins like a processional march. Broadly, it consists of four sections, alternating between slow and fast sections, ending with a slow coda. *See attached comprehensive analysis chart.*

Melody: The melody of *Snake Charmer* is what defines the work through the composer's simple, but effective, manipulation of the double harmonic major scale. Mr. Standridge employs strict economy in all other elements of the work to allow the melody to be the primary focus. This synthetic scale consists of the top four notes from two harmonic minor scales, resulting in four minor seconds and two augmented seconds:



The melody is primarily scalar with conjunct motion which gives it a smooth flow similar to the movements of a snake. Mr. Standridge takes the original scalar melody from the slow section and

artfully transforms it into the fast section. Much of the motives in *Snake Charmer* are derivative of one another. The articulations and dynamics strengthen the melody accordingly.

Harmony: The harmony is very simple and straight-forward throughout allowing the composer to focus on manipulation of the melody to create the primary interest. The great majority of the piece consists of alternation between the tonic chord (G) and lowered supertonic (Ab) which creates a mysterious Phrygian sound. The composer occasionally employs the dominant chord toward the ends of phrases. The majority of the piece is in an altered G tonality with the last section modulating up a fourth to an altered C tonality which dramatically increases the overall excitement to the end of the work.

Rhythm: The slower sections consist of scalar lines that pause on longer note values at the end of each sub-phrase. In the faster sections, Mr. Standridge utilizes simple rhythmic combinations of quarter and eighth notes to propel the melody. Longer note values (quarters and half notes) typically occur on the strong beats of 1 and 3, which creates a clear metric accent and the sensation of being on a “camel ride.” The accompaniment parts clearly reinforce this metric accent as well through the following rhythm:



Lastly, the composer uses two marcato eighth notes on a unison pitch to depict the snake striking quickly.

Texture: *Snake Charmer* is primarily homophonic with a very transparent presentation of the melody. There are three exceptions to this homophony: 1. A somewhat canonic statement of the melody in mm. 33-38 (perhaps suggesting two snakes?), 2. A call and response between solo oboe and horn in mm. 89-95, and 3. The juxtaposition of two themes simultaneously when the piece modulates to the altered C tonality in mm. 125-132.

Timbre: The composer introduces many distinctive percussive sounds within the first four measures, including tambourine, bongos, finger cymbals and maracas, which immediately creates an air of exotic mystery. The use of solo flute and oboe in different sections also reinforces the middle-eastern sound of the piece. Finally, the trombone/timpani glissandi create a singular effect that sounds simultaneously like slithering snakes and a dream-like state.

Dynamics: The dynamic structure of *Snake Charmer* closely mirrors the changes in density of the texture. When the texture is thin, the dynamic is generally marked soft, and when the texture is thick, the dynamic is generally loud. The composer consistently employs fast crescendos (typically within two beats) from piano to forte on half step intervals to portray the unpredictable swaying and fast strike of a snake.



Heart Statement: The use of a synthetic scale with specific articulation patterns creates an air of exotic mystery in a programmatic piece that depicts the swaying and writhing of snakes captivated by a charmer.

How to introduce the piece: (first rehearsal/experience)

Prepare a full set of parts with the title and composer removed and/or replaced with a generic title such as “mystery piece” or “untitled.” Tell students that they will be reading a programmatic work today. What does programmatic mean? Maybe we can figure it out by thinking about the purpose of a concert program? Begin reading the piece and follow up with questions about the programmatic aspects and any technical challenges (accidentals, awkward intervals, and related fingerings). Distribute the scale sheet also with the title removed to help with learning the required scales. Learn scale #1 for measures 1-95 and scale #2 in a subsequent rehearsal for measures 96-end.

Take out the piece:

1. Mystery Piece
2. Composed in 2009
3. Uses tetrachords from two harmonic minor scales
4. Uses a synthetic scale
5. A programmatic composition
6. Slur 2-tongue 2 articulations in fast melody
7. Has an optional ending
8. Sounds like [insert pop reference]

Terms/Concepts:

Harmonic Minor	Tetrachord
Metric Accent	Agogic Accent
To, from, at	Synthetic Scale
Conjunct/disjunct	Contour
Augmented Second	Minor Second
Double Harmonic Major Scale	Aleatoric

Outcomes and Strategies

Skill Outcome: Students will apply the concepts of metric accent and “to, from, at” to create effective phrasing.

Skill Strategies:

- *Watch the Conductor:* Students will identify various articulations by looking at the visual gestures of the conductor only. The conductor will demonstrate legato/slurred, staccato, accent, marcato, and tenuto gestures. Play the scale sheet while changing the articulation to match the conductor’s visual style.
- *To, From, At:* All music is going to, from, or at somewhere. Music must never be static. It is our responsibility as musicians to create interesting musical shapes at all times. Read students a favorite passage from *Casals and the Art of Interpretation* in which he likens phrases to musical rainbows. Play the melody at measure 13 at the exact same dynamic level of mf/mp. Play again using the natural contour of the line to create musical shapes/directions. Now add the device of using a tenuto on the first note of each slur grouping for additional expressivity.
- *Types of Accents:* There are different types of accents that composers and musicians can use in music, such as metric accents (according to time signature), agogic accents (according to phrasing), marked accents (articulations), and marked non-accents (ghost notes in jazz). What is the purpose of accents in music? (to create musical shape/direction, to draw attention to some notes more than others, etc.) Do all accents have the same weight or shape to the sound?

- *Accompaniment Support:* Just as the melodic voices must create direction to each musical phrase, so must the accompaniment voices. Apply the concept of metric accents: what is the natural/implied accent of the bass line in measures 49 forward?
- *Don't be in a Rush:* Musicians often compact short rhythmic figures and rush when playing crescendos. Using a metronome, explore this tendency in measures 68-87. Discuss how playing with restraint in tempo actually creates more musical interest through delaying the expectation.

Assessments:

- *Reference Sheet:* Students will record new terms and definitions on a lined reference sheet that is kept in their music folder. The teacher will check these on occasion for thoroughness and understanding.
- *SmartMusic Recording:* Students will complete two SmartMusic assignments to check for appropriate development of technical skills and musical phrasing. SmartMusic automatically grades the technical components of their performance, and the teacher will listen to every excerpt recording to evaluate and provide feedback on the expressive elements.

Knowledge Outcome: Students will identify the composer's use of a synthetic scale, and utilize this understanding to compose their own.

Knowledge Strategies:

- *Learn and Identify the scales:* Using the scale sheet provided by the publisher, students will learn to play the two synthetic scales upon which the piece is based. Students will identify the intervals used to create the scale and discuss (with a neighbor) any similarities to other scale types that they already know. (harmonic minor) Have students play the C harmonic minor and G harmonic minor scales to further identify the composer's use of the top tetrachords from each key to create the synthetic scale used in *Snake Charmer*.
- *Alternative Media:* The use of synthetic scales in music is similar to the use of alternative media and techniques in different arts, such as visual, theatre, and dance, to produce a unique piece of art. Students will explore the following examples:
 - Recycled materials in visual art
 - Puppets in *Avenue Q* or mechanical animals in *Lion King*
 - Pointillism in painting
- *Composer:* Using one of the synthetic scales from *Snake Charmer*, students will compose a new melody of approximately four measures in length.
- *Pop Reference:* Students will listen to popular music and identify the similar use of synthetic scales in the following pieces: If Only Tonight by the Cure, Kashmir by Led Zepplin, Come Out and Play by the Offspring, and/or Pump it! by the Black-Eyed Peas.

Assessments:

- *Exit Slip:* After a few weeks of learning the piece and the related synthetic scale, the teacher will administer a short (ten questions or fewer) exit slip to check for student understanding thus far.
- *New Scale:* Students will create their own synthetic scale and identify the intervals required to play it. Using their own synthetic scale, students will write another short, original melody.

Affective Outcome: Students will understand how programmatic music can simultaneously expand and limit the emotional intent of the composer.

Affective Strategies:

- ***Absolute vs. Programmatic Music:*** Have students google absolute and programmatic music, and then discuss the characteristics of each as a class. Who were some of the composers that advocated for each type? What were some of their beliefs? Can you think of some modern day examples of programmatic music? (film soundtracks, newly published band/choral/orchestral music)
- ***Create the storyline:*** Brainstorm what might be occurring at specific moments in the piece, including the beginning, mm. 33-39, mm. 41-49, mm. 49-56, mm. 87-95, and mm. 96-106. How does this enhance or detract from your performance of the music? If the composer provided a storyline for each of these moments, how might that affect your performance of it?
- ***Litmus Test:*** Students will listen to recordings of various pieces and try to identify whether the piece is programmatic or not. Is it possible to do this? What defines a programmatic work? Is it the music alone, the composer's narrative description, or both?
- ***Book vs. Movie:*** The teacher will lead a discussion about the student's preferences between reading a book and seeing a movie of the same story. If possible, read a passage from a book and then view the corresponding moment in the movie. Do you typically prefer one or the other? What determines whether you like the book or movie more? How is this similar to the intent of programmatic music?
- ***Name the piece:*** Based upon multiple rehearsals of the piece, all students will create a name for the piece and submit it to the instructor. Students will vote for their favorite title.
- ***Alternate Title:*** At the concert, have the student whose title was selected as the class favorite explain how s/he conceived of his/her title and some of the programmatic elements.

Assessments:

- ***Written Reflection:*** In one paragraph of 6-10 sentences, students will discuss their personal position regarding absolute music versus programmatic music. Do they prefer one type more and if so, why? Or do they enjoy each of them for different reasons? The student should include the name of a piece (or two) that reflects this preference.
- ***Composing a Soundtrack:*** After performing the piece in concert, students will view the musical soundscape chapter of "The Lord of the Rings" extended DVD series (or similar) so that students can understand the process of composing a film score. How is this the same or different from a programmatic piece of music?

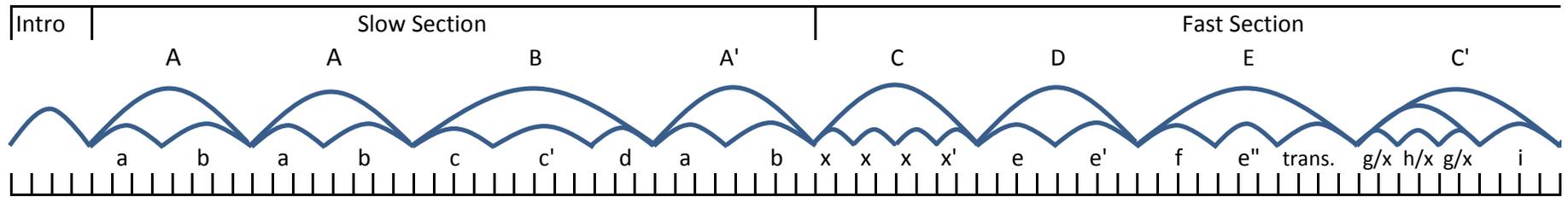
Musical Selection

Snake Charmer is a quintessential programmatic work for younger bands. Mr. Standridge demonstrates exceptional craft in his creation of motives that perfectly suit the intended storyline. Nearly all new publications include an elaborate, and sometimes exotic, description of the work, often leading us to believe that all new music is inherently programmatic. It is vital to identify high quality music that, although labeled as programmatic, is indeed constructed with musical integrity. The study of *Snake Charmer* affords students the opportunity to understand substantive motivic development, perform a variety of articulation patterns, develop technical competence in retaining difficult accidentals, and play music that has very natural contours.

SNAKE CHARMER

Randall Standridge

Analysis by Matt Temple



Measure:	1	5	13	21	33	41	49	57	68	74			
Texture:	Mono.	Homophony	Homophony	Homophony	Polyphony	Homophony	Homophony	Homophony	Homo.	Homo.			
Voices:	Perc	Flute Solo	WW w/horn	Trumpet Add Fl/Ob	Fl/Ob vs. A. Sax/ Euph/Bsn in canon	Tutti	Clarinet/Alto Sax	Fl/Ob./ Trumpets	Clarinet/ Alto Sax	Tenor Voices	Tutti		
Dynamic:	p	p	mf	mp	f p	mf	> p	f (as below)	mp	mp	< f	p	<< p
Style/ Articulation:	Legato	Cantabile	Cantabile	Cantabile	Cantabile	Marcato	Slur 2, tongue 2	Slur 2, tongue 2	Slur 2, tongue 2	Mixed	Slurred		
Noteworthy Observations:	Many singular percussion entrances/effects including finger cymbals, tambourine, maracas, and bongos					fast p < f effects every two bars, marked as x motive above, depicting a striking snake		e theme is clearly derived from opening a theme, starting with the recognizable ascending pentatonic pattern					
Descriptors:	Processional March, marked Slowly and Mysteriously "The Charmer setting up his performance area in the streets"					Fast, Serpentine							

