

Michael Herzing

Composition Recital

Overture

Peril

- I. Peril's Theme
- II. Peril's Lament

Qibli

- I. Qibli's Theme
- II. Moon's Theme
- III. As the Sand Loves the Moon

Gallery Theme (From *In Situ*)

Support Musicians

Rock Ensemble
Zeke Meyer, Guitar
Jacob Hoekwater, Guitar
Graham Butler, Bass
John Hagan, Drums and Chimes

String Quartet
Rocco Greco, Violin
Nathaniel Eulentrop, Violin
George Graefen, Viola
Graham DeHaan, Cello

Michael Herzing, Piano
Matthew Oliver, Vibraphone

Overture

Most of the pieces you will hear in this recital are inspired by characters and plots from Tui T. Sutherland's book series, *Wing of Fire*. I discovered this series in high school, and ever since then I have found it to be of a quality much higher than a normal children's book series. *Wings of Fire* is set in the mythical continent of Pyrrhia, inhabited by several different races of dragons. Pyrrhia (derived from the Greek word 'Pyrrhic', meaning 'won at too great a cost') is constantly filled with war and strife, as the various races and their Queens fight for power. The series deals with the cost of war, destiny, belief, and power.

Peril

Peril is a dragon of the sky, ruled by the sadistic Queen Scarlet. Peril has the extremely rare condition of being born with 'firescales,' and as the name implies, anything she touches (paper, trees, other dragons) burns, often fatally. Because of this danger, any dragon born with firescales is supposed to be killed at birth, but after Peril's mother abandoned her, Queen Scarlet took Peril in, and raised Peril to kill dragons in her arena for her amusement. After Queen Scarlet was dethroned, her successor exiled Peril, leaving Peril on her own to figure out how to interact with other dragons. The other dragons, however, aren't too keen on interacting with Peril, as not only do her firescales make her dangerous, but her time in Queen Scarlet's arena has also made her notorious across Pyrrhia, branding her a mass murderer. Peril is a contradictory ball of anger, insecurity, guilt, doubt, and fear. She fears other's dragon's judgement, but also desires closeness. She hates Scarlet for the years of abuse and manipulation, but also can't help but want to please her. These two tracks represent Peril's dichotomy: her anger and her sadness. Her fire and her isolation.

In the first piece, you can hear many fast chromatic passages accompanied by tom toms, which I used to represent the kind of primal danger that Peril's firescales give her. The verse's melody has a dark, jaded twist to it, full of malcontented half steps and bends. This represents Peril's cynicism; "Dragons won't accept me no matter what I'll do."

In the second piece, this cynical sentiment has flipped on its head, twisted into an operatic lament. The chromatic motion that once described Peril's angst now describes her grief. The piece starts with a guitar solo- Peril is on her own and now the front of prickly anger has no need to continue, and her true emotions begin to emerge. This set of pieces is inspired by hard rock groups like Queen and Judas Priest, while also being inspired by classic operas like Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.

Qibli

Qibli is a dragon of the sand, ruled by his friend Queen Thorn. Qibli is brilliant and kind. He always thinks of ways to help other dragons and is absolutely sure that he knows what's best. He sees abilities and resources others have and jealously imagines all the good he could do with those resources. But much to his chagrin, he has little resources of his own. This leads to him pursuing power in order to help others, which can often lead to him hurting those he tries to help. Despite this fatal flaw, he is kind and sincere. His mind is an active storm of thoughts and ideas, never still for more than a moment.

This piece changes focus almost as often as Qibli's mind does. Frantic at times, laid back at others. I decided to use a jazz string quartet as I feel it portrays Qibli's intelligence - intricate and complicated but also with an instinctual groove. The main theme you hear is characterized by the minor 2nd sound that has been closely associated with characters and events occurring in a desert. Sometimes the minor 2nd appears as a playful tone, representing Qibli's goofy nature. Other times, the minor 2nd has an aggressive tilt, representing Qibli's power lust. This piece is inspired by the music of Turtle Island String Quartet.

Moon is a dragon of the night. She has the powers of mindreading and prophecy; abilities that her mother calls a curse. Her mindreading barrages her with the thoughts and feelings of others, and her clairvoyance is often more alarming than helpful. Qibli is not a mindreader and does at first not see the strain that these abilities bring their wielder. Instead, Qibli sees Moon; the quiet, mysterious dragon who seems to understand people in a way he wishes he could.

This piece starts by emphasizing the mystery of a prophetic dragon. The emphasized tritone interval is, while not intimidating, unreadable and enigmatic. The piece then shifts to a more serene, elegant tone. The main theme has a lilting, back and forth motion, placed over flowing chords, to represent how Qibli sees Moon. This piece is inspired by Chopin's Nocturnes.

Qibli brings peace to Moon. It helps her to know that there is someone fighting with her to make the world a better place, and he makes her laugh when things seem too bleak. Moon, similarly, calms Qibli's agitated mind, making him want to be the best version of himself. So, as the sand loves the moon for cooling its blistering heat, so Qibli loves Moon.

This last piece in the set is to represent the love of the two characters. The main theme, a variation of the back-and-forth motif of the previous piece, plays over smooth, beautiful 7th chords. Audiences can hear the peace they bring to one another as their themes meet, like relief from a burden. Qibli's minor 2nd theme returns, but instead of the tonic to minor 2nd motion we had previously, the half step takes place on the major 7th to tonic, fitting neatly within the major 7th chords the melody is set over. This piece is inspired by Debussy's *Claire de Lune*.

"And he remembered this, too: the way Moon collapsed against him in giggles... exactly as she was doing now... Inside the dome of his wings, her talons took his, and she leaned against him, a mystery of cool scales and strong muscles and beating heart. He bent his head toward him, letting hope wash over him."

Tui T Sutherland, *Darkness of Dragons*, pages 236-237.

Gallery Theme

This piece was written for the award winning short film, *In Situ*. The director, Lauren Garrison describes the piece...

"This piece is gentle and soft yet has slight melancholic undertones to it. It captures the feeling of longing for better things in this lifetime and the joy that is yet to come.

To me, the meaning of the piece has evolved over time along with the completion of the film itself. Listening to Michael's score kept me going during some of the most challenging parts of the filmmaking process, as well as even some rough times in my life. Now, it symbolizes God's faithfulness and fulfillment of His promises.

I still like to go back and listen to it on its own every now and then. As you listen to this piece, I encourage you to imagine walking through a gallery of your own life and where God might be leading you."

The smear of planing piano chords gives a sense of an almost cathedral-like space. It is large and echoey, yet not empty, all set over serene, yet enigmatic, parallel fourth chords in the strings. The chimes add to that church-like sensation, giving bell-like points of rhythm in an otherwise free-flowing piece.