

Suite for Strings: Little March & Song By Robert Washburn

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Introduction

In this paper we aim to provide a detailed flow chart analysis and analytical study for "Suite For Strings" (Little March and Song) composed by Robert Washburn. It includes biographical information for Washburn and other pertinent cultural and/or historical background related to the piece. Being rooted to music as his primary skill, Washburn spent his career in the Air Force as well as in Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas as a player of played percussion and string bass and as a music faculty, respectively. The four movements of the "Suite for Strings", namely, Little March (moderate march tempo), Song (slowly), Scherzo (moderately fast). and Finale (moderately). In this paper we study the second and third movements, that is, Song and Scherzo, that lie sit between the Little March and the Finale.

Washburn's work utilizes a number of twentieth-century techniques, including the use of pandiatonicism, which uses the diatonic scale in a non-functional way. He understood the importance of performing the dynamics correctly as they yield to a great impact. Hence, he used the extensions of the crescendos and diminuendos. Analyzing the history of modes, this paper establishes that these originated in ancient Greece and the ancient Greek modes have been preserved



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throughout history to this day. Before and after the Middle Ages, all music was monophonic and polyphonic, respectively.

We highlight that in the early 20th century, composers and researchers rediscovered the modes and some of the folk songs used the modes of the Renaissance that composers had abandoned. Even the contemporary jazz and rock musicians have borrowed new ideas and materials in the 20th century works of classical music composers in interesting and innovative ways. Rock music, in some cases, has borrowed from jazz and classical music as well.

About the Composer



Robert Washburn (1928 - 2013) was a famous composer and native of Bouckville, New York. He received his bachelors degree in music education from the Crane School of Music at the State University of New York in 1949, after which he taught music at Whitesboro High School, in New York (Burkett, 2002). Washburn served in the Air Force at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas from 1950 to 1954, where he was an arranger for the Air Force Band and played percussion and string bass. During that time, Washburn studied music composition with the composer Normand Lockwood, a composition professor at Trinity



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University at San Antonio, Texas. When his military service came to an end in 1954, Washburn joined the music faculty at the Crane School of Music, where he received his masters degree while teaching music theory, composition, and string performance classes. In 1957, Washburn began his doctoral studies in music composition at the Eastman School of Music, where he was able to study with Howard Hanson, Bernard Rogers, and Alan Hovhaness (2002).

Washburn received a grant from the Ford Foundation (to participate in the Young Composers Project), the Rockefeller Foundation, the Juilliard Repertory Program, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Meet the Composer (Burkett, 2002). Washburn held a scholarship at the Bennington Composers Conference and was a fellow of the MacDowell Colony. Washburn spent 40 years in teaching and administration at the Crane School of Music until retirement from full-time service in 1995. He was named Dean Emeritus and Senior Fellow in Music at his retirement (2002).

The Composition

"Suite for Strings" (1960) was the first Robert Washburn's many published works (Littrell, 2005; Table 1). Washburn composed the piece while in residence in Elkhart, Indiana. He was completing a year-long residency under a grant from the Ford Foundation, and which was managed by the Music Education National Conference. The Ford Foundation grant positioned twelve young composers in schools in order to compose music for the community and their students, with Washburn composing this piece for advanced string players (Littrell, 2005).

"Suite for Strings" consists of four movements: Little March (moderate march tempo), Song (slowly), Scherzo

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(moderately fast), and Finale (moderately) (Littrell, 2005). The melodies of the piece are all original, not derived from folk materials, and the work was conceived for either full string orchestra or for string quartet. It can be compared to the works of British composers of the early twentieth century such as Holst and Vaughan Williams, among others (Littrell, 2005). This project is designed to discuss the second and third movements (Song and Scherzo), which sit between the Little March and the Finale.

The work utilizes a number of twentieth-century techniques, including the use of pandiatonicism, which uses the diatonic scale in a non-functional way. This technique utilizes placing diatonic notes in dissonant groups without standard chord progressions and/ or traditional resolutions. In addition, the entire work makes use of a modal background. When performed correctly, the dynamic contrasts of the piece have a great impact; for instance, Washburn's use of extensions of the crescendos and diminuendos. There is substantial independence in all the parts, and, with the exception of the basses, each voice has sectional solos.

The second movement, Song, uses 4/4 meter, a slow tempo, a theme and variations form (a theme and two variations). This movement consists of a lyrical melody. It is worth noting that the range of the melody is bigger than that of the first movement (it exceeds one octave). The main theme begins in the 1st violin, after which in the first variation the theme moves to the cello. Finally, in the second variation, the role of playing the theme switches between the 1st and 2nd violins and viola. While one voice plays the melody, the other instruments provide support in a pandiatonic harmonic environment during the theme and the 1st variation. In the 2nd variation, the inner voices continue using pandiatonic harmony mixed with counterpoint,

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supporting the melody with linear motion that pushes the line forward to the end of the piece. The texture in the theme and first variation is homophonic, and in the second variation, it becomes more polyphonic. The dynamics shift between pp, mp, p, and mf. The principal keys, or perhaps more accurately, modes, of this movement are G Mixolydian, A Lydian, F Ionian, and C Mixolydian.

The third movement, Scherzo, uses 6/8 meter, a moderately fast tempo, a symmetrical rondo form (A-B-A-C-A-D-A), and a homophonic texture. The dynamics shift between pp, p, mp, mf, and f. The composer uses the A section to push the dynamic intensity forward, first playing in mp, then mf, followed by f, with the other sections following in its wake. When the D theme appears from measures 65 through to measure 74, the dynamics drop to p, after which the A theme reappears, moving from pp to ff, rounding out a double-peaked dynamic form. The principal keys of this movement are G major, e minor, and C major. The A sections are in the key of G major, the B and D sections in the relative minor key (e minor), and the C section uses the key of C major, closely related to the key of G major. This movement consists of a vibrant melody, the first two instances of which are played pizzacato, after which it is played arco. This presentation of what is perhaps the most memorable melody of the piece, i.e., first pizzacato and then arco, may have been a deliberate choice by the composer to delay the intense joy of the melodic and harmonic shape of the theme. The A section returns every time with different accompaniment; the last A section becomes faster, is played arco, played at ff, and the theme is voiced in unison.

History of Modes

The understanding of the word mode in music has changed considerably over the last millennium and a half. A



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mode is a musical scale, a set of step-wise pitches that together form a sonic palette (Frantz, 2014; Robinson & Parrish, 2006). In Western music, the modes originated in ancient Greece. Although the ancient Greeks used a system of musical notation, and that the names of the ancient Greek modes have been preserved throughout history. musicologists do not have enough evidence to know for sure what the exact pitches of their scales were. The Byzantine notation, which overtook Greek notation around the fall of the Roman Empire around the 4th or 5th century C.E., still did not show exact pitches, but showed pitch differences and movements, which was useful to Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, in giving the pitches of the modes numbers (Robinson & Parrish, 2006). Ambrose defined the modes by the location of their semitones, resulting in what are referred to as the four Ambrosian modes. Pope Gregory in the late 6th century C.E. increased the number of modes by introducing a version of each mode where the central pitch was found in the middle of the scale rather than at the top and the very bottom. The four original modes, called authentic modes, and the four added modes, called plagal modes, were all used for chants, a form of sacred music used in the Catholic Church.

All music before the Middle Ages was monophonic, meaning music that is made of a single melody without chords or other melodies. During the Middle Ages, however, polyphony, or multiple melodies played or sung at once, was slowly developed. This led to the problem of two or more notes sounding at once. Of all the vertical intervals, the augmented fourth, or tritone (i.e., from F natural to B natural on the piano), was considered the most dissonant. As a result of this, dissonant was in fact called "the devil's interval", among other names (Robinson & Parrish, 2006). Church composers endeavored to avoid this combination, but the system of modes described by Gregory was

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problematic in that the Gregorian modes were essentially what we today know as the white keys on the piano (2006). The combination of F and B was invariably difficult to avoid for composers experimenting with writing more than one melody at a time, so a device called "musica ficta" was invented (2006). This was to change the B natural to B flat when needed in order to create a perfect fourth or fifth instead of a tritone. The Catholic Church made concessions to this practice over time, and composers began to make more modifications to the scales, eventually leading to the creation of the modes that we know today.

The modes as have been known for several hundred years now are called the Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Locrian modes, and are created on the piano by playing the white keys on the piano stepwise up or down one octave (Frantz, 2014; Robinson & Parrish, 2006). The C major scale is the Ionian mode. Playing the C major scale but beginning and ending on D will produce the Dorian mode. Starting and ending of E produces the Phrygian mode; F produces Lydian; G produces Mixolydian; A produces Aeolian (also known as the minor scale); and B produces the Locrian mode (Frantz, 2014; Robinson & Parrish, 2006). Composers have used all of the modes with the exception of the Locrian mode, because the interval - a fifth from its root is a diminished fifth, or tritone (B to F) (Robinson & Parrish, 2006). As more and more modifications were made during the Renaissance, the modes evolved to a state of great flexibility. Now it is possible to play each mode starting on each note on the piano (e.g., C Ionian, C Dorian, C Phrygian, etc.).

The modes have not changed for many hundreds of years, although their use has increased or lessened depending on the era. The church modes were largely



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abandoned during the Baroque and Classical periods of music, with some traditional or folk music beginning to use the church modes in the 18th and 19th centuries. Composers and researchers then rediscovered the modes in the early 20th century, with some astonished to find that some folk or traditional songs used the modes of the Renaissance that composers had abandoned so long ago (Robinson & Parrish, 2006). Composers such as the English composer Ralph Vaughn Williams based his entire compositions on church modes. In the 20th century, composers using the modes began to use them in new ways, applying them in nonfunctional harmonic settings; using the so-called white keys of the piano in non-functional harmony is related to the use of modes, and is called pantonality (2006). Composers like Igor Stravinsky and others developed techniques suited for using the modes and using pantonality in a number of interesting ways. The composer of the "Suite for Strings," Robert Washburn, also made use of these techniques and materials.

As jazz music became more and more sophisticated, jazz musicians began to search for new ideas and materials in the works of 20th century classical music composers. The trumpeter and composer Miles Davis created a form of modal improvisation that used, among others, a great amount of the Dorian mode. Contemporary jazz and classical composers continued to use modes in interesting and innovative ways. Rock music, in some cases, has borrowed from jazz and classical music as well, using Dorian or other church modes. Although the history of the modes is long, it is amazing that they continue to be used even to this day, more than 2,000 years after the ancient Greeks invented them.



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Mode Introduction



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Mode Introduction





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Mode Introduction (C)



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Mode Introduction (C)



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Mode Introduction (C)



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Table 1

Basic Formal Plan

II Song		
Theme G Mixolydian	mm. 1-12	
	mm. 13-20	А
Lydian		
1 st Variation	mm. 21-36	F
Ionian		
2 nd Variation	mm. 37-52	
C Mixolydian		

✤ III Scherzo

	A Section Major	mm. 1-16	G
	B Section	mm. 17-24	e
minor			
	A Section	mm. 25-32	G
Major			
c	C Section	mm. 33-48	С
Major			

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A Section Major	mm. 49-64	G
D Section minor	mm. 65-74	e
A Section	mm. 75-93 (End)	G

Major

Educator's Score Notes

II Song

Theme (mm.1-20)

Begins with 4 measures of introduction, including G and F chords. The melody begins on the pitch of D. Oscillating between F sharp and F natural gives the section ambiguity, as it keeps changing from the G major scale to G Mixolydian. The 1st violin plays the main theme (mm. 5-20).

1st Variation (mm. 21-36)

The first variation begins in F Ionian, which is a whole step down. The cello gets the theme, and the theme is slightly different and organic (growing subtly but noticeably). When the melody steps down to F, the other voices take on the role of providing harmonic support as the cello plays the melody. This variation includes a plagal motion beginning in measure 32.

2nd Variation

The 1st and 2nd violins get the melody, and the viola participates in presenting a small portion in the melody. The melody is a perfect fifth higher than the first variation, and a perfect fourth higher from the main theme. The melody is pushing forward to the end of the movement. There is a

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plagal motion at the end, which serves to maintain the perfect fifth relation to C.

III Scherzo

"A"

The first A section, in the key of G major, consists of a double period (mm. 1-16). The first period consists of the first and second violins only playing the theme. When the period repeats, all the voices except the basses join, playing the same rhythms and thickening the line with harmonically supportive pitch material. This comes to a close with a perfect authentic cadence at measure 16. The two periods are played entirely in pizzacato. The first period is played at mf, while the second period is played at mp.

"В"

The B section consists of one parallel period (mm. 17-24). The melody is played in the first violin while the other voices again offer harmonic support, this time in the key of e minor, the relative minor of G major. In a slight contrast to the first two A sections, the B section is played in pizzacato with the striking exception of the first violins, which play arco.

"A"

The A section returns at measure 25. All the voices play this time, with the bass entering for the first time in the movement. During this presentation of the A theme, the cello and bass play unison. All the strings play pizzacato in this section. All the voices play f until measure 31, at which a crescendo is affected, after which at the last measure an

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imperfect authentic cadence is played. The entire A section is a parallel period, again in G major.

"C"

The C section, in C major, is presented by the first and second violins. All the voices play arco, with the main theme being played by the first and second violins with the other voices supporting. In the second period (mm. 41-48), the viola and cello play the melody from measures 41 to 43, after which the first and second violins take over once more, presenting the melody while the other voices accompany them. This section is comprised of a double period, the first period comprising measures 33 to 40, and the second taking measures 41 to 48.

"A"

The A section returns, once again consisting of a double period lasting a total of 16 measures in the key of G major. This presentation of the A theme is constructed largely in canon. The first period, played solely by the violins, begins with the entrance of the theme at measure 49, while the second violins begin on the second beat, the dotted quarter note, of measure 49. This process happens once again at measure 53. The cello begins the theme again at measure 57, with a pickup at measure 56. After this, a canon in four voices is played: the first violins enter at measure 58; the second violins enter at the second beat of measure 61; at 62 the cello and bass enter in unison; and the viola enters on the second beat of measure 64, with the voices splitting to clarify the harmonic movement of the cadence.



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The D section spans from a shorter duration (mm. 65-74). The melody, which borrows from the B theme and is in a sense a B prime, is played by the viola. During this presentation of the melody, the first and second violins play harmonics. The cello plays an ostinato on E (the section is in E minor) while the first and second violins also play a high-registered ostinato. At measures 73 and 74, the bass joins the cello in unison, playing an extension of the phrase. This extension is used as a transition back to the A theme.

"A"

The A theme returns in measure 75. This section is again comprised of a double period. The first period is in pizzacato at a dynamic of p, while the second is in arco at a dynamic of f. The section ends with a perfect authentic cadence at measure 91, followed by a three-measure cadential extension on the tonic.

Table 2

About the Score

General Information

Duration: approximately 10 minutes

Publisher: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Date of Publication: 1960

Instrumentation

First Violin Second Violin Viola Cello Double Bass

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The Score



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لگتو<u>بر .. ۱۹ ۲۰ م</u> (لعرو (لساوس عشرج) محت h 假 i 2,601 10 Plegal motion i. FM olm FM arce C C lixolyden 0 =j 11111 11110 Poller. 110 9 mf ö dm CM dm? FM7 BbM em a m D am Ster með Chur, 100 5 10 (I) (W) Spar (the) 10 mp 14 ø 100 mp 23 em7 am? bm mp hm CN am bm hi MAP 큤 N 11 3 TP Jas Tre PP ÷ -49 曰 A. 7 -0 1 7 - 77 υ FMT CM BEM and 14 dm em FM em am CM plegal motion

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Tempo Meter Mood * 6/8 Meter 6/8 Form P. 5/8/ Melody W/1,	Herately Just 1 immetrical Rondo 3 C 48 VNIL (violui cello)	= 108-120 . (A-B-A-C-A-D-	
Meter 6 18 Form 7 33 Melody W/1,	NNTL, (viola, cello)	(A-B-A-C-A-D-	
Form 33 Melody WNT,	NNTL, (viola, Cello)		(Y -
Melody W/J	WNIL, (viola, Cello)	49 _ B _ bt	65 - (D)/ B' - 74
	Wibraut	UNL, UNIT, (Violo, Cello, Bass)	Vibrant
Harmony CMayer	or Gmoior	Gregor IAC	Cininer
Rhythm [11], M	· 10 / 1/1/1/	1,1,121.	j. 111, J.N.
Orchestration)	Group	Full Gray	Full Group
Dynamics			7
Stylistic Articulations \mathcal{MF} & Expressive Terms	f > dw	ich.	mp
	(All Group) arco	(All Grand) Ource	harmonic) (legadio) (Gib, Ba

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(گتوبر.. ۱۹ ۲۰ ۲۰ للعرو الساوس عش 19 to the 10 Pageter A symmetrical Rondra (A-13-A-C-A-D-A Moderately Jast 1= 108-120 5 D'À C (Anor O Konp) Flow chart for: Wash Dury, Suit for Strives, Scherzo (All Grand) [Homophon, C] (All Group) ふぜ、リーノ Full Group G Mager. \$ 6 13 75 JNN Stylistic Articulations & Expressive Terms Orchestration/ Texture Dynamics Harmony Rhythm Tempo Melody Meter Form **۹** ۱ 1

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