THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

BY

CHRIS RENK

Submitted to the faculty of the
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of the requirements for the degree,
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THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

FOR SINFONIETTA

CHRIS RENK

(2013, revised 2014)
Program Note

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW is inspired by the Art Deco aesthetic movement of the 1920s and 30s. This movement embraced a huge variety of styles and influences and affected everything from art, architecture and design, to engineering, advertising, fashion, jewelry and interior design.

To me, Art Deco evokes so many marvelous images: stonework in marble, granite, and limestone, spectacular metalwork of brushed aluminum or wrought iron, luminous opalescent and stained-glass works, and lofty skyscrapers with their lavish and gilded foyers.

Some of the aesthetic principles of the era include:
- a preference for geometric representations
- the influence of “Futurism” and a sense of optimism in the future in general
- embracing an increasingly “mechanized” worldview
- abandoning the old distinction between “high” and “utilitarian” art

Although all of these ideas have impacted the piece at some level, the two aspects of Art Deco aesthetics that I have tried to translate into concrete musical terms are geometry and optimism. These qualities can be seen most clearly in terms of my approach to rhythm, harmony, and gesture.

The geometric visual language of Art Deco is both abstract and extremely vibrant and evocative – full of energy and inflection. Its interlocking shapes of bright, colorful, and luminous materials inspired the music’s energetic rhythms, and striving ostinato lines. Specifically, the piece makes liberal use of techniques where contradictory rhythms are juxtaposed or superimposed onto each other, or against the basic pulse or prevailing meter – and in so doing, it creates energy and verve with intricate geometric precision.

Harmonically, the piece uses a warm, consonant pallet of scales and intervals, but rather than treating them traditionally (like functional harmonies), the piece uses them as geometric shapes. Its approach to voice leading (how one chord moves to the next) treats the harmonies as interlocking shapes, balanced but dynamic, each leading energetically to the next and each with its unique color. The tension and release of the progressions is generated by how strongly the harmonic color shifts from one chord to the next, and by the overall shape and gesture of the phrases.

Rising shapes and gestures are often used in music to convey positive emotions, and are used throughout this piece as melodies, chord progressions, ostinatos (continuous accompaniment), and as the basic shape of growth for its sections. This overall ascending quality, combined with propulsive rhythms, gives the piece a striving optimism and ultimately leads to a bold and heroic music, where bright, ecstatic textures shift across colorful chord progressions in grand, triumphant statements.

I see in Art Deco a sense of optimism in the future - a belief and value in the ideas of progress, civilization, society and technology. From the lofty statements of human accomplishment represented by New York’s Empire State Building and Chrysler Building, to the monumentally ambitious George Washington Bridge. The idea of optimism in the future and its expression in this style, I believe, is beautiful on its own terms – the idea is what is important, not what has actually happened since or what the future may hold. It is that idea of optimism, beauty and lightness of spirit that I have tried to express in this piece.
THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

Instrumentation

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in Bb
Bassoon
Horn in F
Trumpet in C
Trombone
Tuba
2 Percussion
Harp
Piano
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass

**Percussion 1:** Marimba; Xylophone; Large Bass Drum (shared w/Perc.2); Glockenspiel (shared w/Perc. 3)

**Percussion 2:** Vibraphone; 4 Tom-toms; Large Floor Tom, Large Bass Drum (all shared w/Perc.3)

**Percussion 3:** Tubular Bells; Crotales (F#4, A4, D5, E5); Glockenspiel (shared w/Perc. 1); Large Floor Tom, Small Bass Drum (all shared w/Perc. 2)

Duration: 11 min 15 sec

Score in C. Instruments that transpose at the octave or the double octave are notated at their written pitch rather than their sounding pitch.
Commissioned by the Indiana University New Music Ensemble,
David Dzubay, cnd.

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shadow the Harp