Hanging by a Thread

James M. Stephenson

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for solo trumpet, tuba and wind ensemble

[2014]

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Duration: approx. 16.5 minutes

Instrumentation [ONE PER PART]:

Piccolo, Flutes 1-2, Bb Clarinets 1-3 (1st part - 2 players), Bass Clarinet, Sop. Sax., Alto Sax. 1-2, Tenor Sax, Baritone Sax Horns 1-2, Bb Trumpets 1-2 (dbl. on flugels), Trombones 1-2, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba Harp (w/ optional amplification), Timpani, Percussion, Contrabass

solo trumpet (Bb, tpt., flugel and picc.) and solo tuba

Percussion:

Mallets:
Vibraphone, Glockenspiel, Xylophone, Marimba
Triangle, B.D., Bell Tree, S.D., Wood Block, Guiro, Tambourine, Vibra-Slap, Claves, Congas, 2 coins (quarters), Cattle Bell, Slap-Sticks
Sus. Cymb., China Cymbal, Cymb. a2, Finger Cymbals

Notes from the composer:

"Hanging by a Thread" - the title - was inspired by a poster for the Sydney International Brass Festival, which featured a female acrobat dangerously hanging upside-down, from a single thread of material, while playing a trumpet! (Further inspection might reveal that she is actually lying on a wood floor, but no matter.) In any case, the title is also apropos for what it often feels like to be a soloist performing a new work. There is no frame of reference, no precedent - it’s all up to you. Given all of this, I feel the title suggested by Steve Rosse was appropriate.

The movement titles - Fragile; Liquid; Perishable; Potentially Hazardous - refer to the inside joke I always have with myself when I go to the post office to ship my music to various parts of the world. Although I know the clerk very well, she is still required to always ask: "Does this package contain anything fragile, liquid, perishable, or potentially hazardous?" I often joke with her, especially with regard to the last part of the question: "Well, that depends on what people think of my music!"

And so this piece was born...

The first movement is composed as potentially a stand-alone piece on its own. Both in terms of its length (roughly 7 minutes), and its broad appeal across many weighing points - melodically and harmonically "in-the-box", and perhaps the easiest solo parts of the 4 movements - it could easily be extracted as a complete work of its own accord. The 2nd movement is a juxtaposition of baroque and jazz styling - hence the subtitle "Jam-Bourrée". It is quite short - almost an interlude - but a fun frisic through poly-tonal ambiguity in standard form. The 3rd movement a 2nd interlude - allows for soloist melodic interplay, with flugelhorn sonorities used to match the rotund tuba sound. The finale, being the most virtuosic of the 4 movements, allows for a stirring finish to the work. We finally resolve into D Major, having used D Minor, G minor, and A Major previously.

The concerto was commissioned by brothers Michael and Paul Mergen, who both serve in the United States "President’s Own" Marine Band. This is a very unique fact in and of itself, and I am honored to write for such talented and upstanding individuals. The work is also co-commissioned by Rex Richardson and Steve Rosse for the Sydney International Brass Festival, also the location of the premiere, which was conducted by Stephen Williams. I am very grateful to Roland Szentpali, who replaced Steve Rosse as soloist on the premiere in Sydney.

Jim Stephenson
2014
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I. Fragile: Allegretto - simple 2 ($d = \text{ca. 69}$)

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II. Liquid: Jam-Bourrée ($\mathcal{f} = c. 132$)
Hanging by a Thread

Pic.
Fl. 1
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
B. Cl.
S. Sx.
A. Sax. 1-2
Tenor Sax.
Bar. Sax.
Sola Tuba
Hn. 1
Hn. 2
B. Tpt. 1
B. Tpt. 2
B. Tbn.
Euph.
Tuba
Hp.
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
D. B.
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a tempo Alla breve - conducted