

More About **VOICES OF THE NIGHT: A NOCTURNAL FANTASY FOR ORCHESTRA**

In 1977, I wrote two compositions for orchestra that I shelved without even copying the parts. One was a companion piece to a concert band composition which I called **Expansions for Orchestra**, and the other one was named **Symphonic Essay**, a title I had borrowed from Samuel Barber's **Essay for Orchestra**, although it wasn't modeled on any his three pieces with that title.

Both compositions lay dormant until 2018, when I pulled them out of the drawer, tweaked them a little, and published them. I kept the original title for **Expansions**, but I didn't like the **Symphonic Essay** name and asked a few friends to listen to it and suggest titles.

The music has a dark, nocturnal quality, even in its fast section, and I thought something to do with night, like some variation on "nocturne," might be appropriate, so I mentioned that when asking for suggestions. One friend suggested "Nocturnal Fantasies," which I liked, and another said the music "certainly conveys the voices of the night." That phrase--though he hadn't intended it to be his title suggestion--grabbed me.

Then I started looking to see if someone had already used it. Sure enough, I found a poem by none other than Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, but no other music. So I lifted an epigraph for the score from the poem (below) and added the other suggestion I liked as a subtitle. The generic and uninspired **Symphonic Essay** had become **Voices of the Night - a Nocturnal Fantasy for Orchestra**.

As soon as I was finished with it, I decided that **Voices of the Night** would also make a good concert band composition, so I transcribed it for band, and both versions are available on Dacker Music.

In preparation for the release of its recording by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, I wrote program notes based on the epigraph:

*All forms of sorrow and delight,
All solemn Voices of the Night,
That can soothe thee, or affright...*

-- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

More descriptive of “affright” than “soothe,” **Voices of the Night** is in 3 parts:

1. *Andante con moto* - The opening section is rather slow and moody. The croaking of frogs and chirping of insects and other nocturnal creatures punctuates the gloom. Menacing shadows gradually grow and become more threatening.
2. *Allegro moderato* - After building to a nearly unbearable pitch of suspense, the tension breaks as ominous nocturnal fantasies appear out of the shadows and seem to dance to a lively but somewhat dark rhythmic section, which is built almost entirely on a single motif. After seemingly winding down, the dance suddenly rushes to a feverish climax, which dissipates as the shadows give way to a glimmer of light.
3. *Tempo I* - The ominous fantasies scatter, and approaching dawn at last brings a “soothing” epilogue, based on the opening music.

Voices of the Night is scored for 2 flutes/piccolo, 2 oboes/English Horn, 2 clarinets/bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, vibraphone, timpani, 3 percussion, and strings.

This composition was recorded by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted by David Watkin. It is available on the album **Legends & Light, Vol 2** from Navona Records. Please see the Discography section of my website for more information.