JABBERWOCKY

A mini-opera for male voice & Pierrot ensemble

Music by: David Cutler (2005)

Text by: Lewis Carroll (1872)

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A mini-opera for male voice & Pierrot ensemble

Commissioned by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble

Premiered on August 5, 2005

City Theatre

Pittsburgh, PA

Movements

ca. 22 Minutes

JABBERWOCKY

Instrumentation

- **BARITONE VOCALIST** (doubles **Tambourine**; uses **Megaphone** & **Microphone**)
- **FLUTE** (doubles **Piccolo;** offstage **Crotales**, lower octave)
- **BASS CLARINET** (doubles **Bb Clarinet;** offstage **Crotales**, higher octave)
- **PERCUSSION** (see below)
- **PIANO** (uses **Metal Key** inside piano)
- **VIOLIN** (doubles offstage **Tam Tam**)
- **CELLO**

Percussion List

PLAYED BY PERCUSSIONIST:
- **Kick Drum** (kick)
- **Concert Tom 15"** (tom)
- **Timbale 14"** (timb.)
- **Field Drum** (field)
- **2 Bongos** (bong.)
- **Bass Drum Concert** (b. dr.)
- **Hi-Hat** (h.h.)
- **China Cymbal 20"** (Chin. cym.)
- **Ride Cymbal 22", Dark** (cym)
- **Splash Cymbal** (splash)
- **Chinese Opera Gong** (gong)
- **Brake Drum** (br. dr.)
- **Glockenspiel** (glock.)
- **Wood Block LP Jam Block Red** (w. bl.)
- **Mounted Tambourine** (tamb.)
- **Hand Held Tambourine** (tamb.)
- **Plastic Bag** (bag)
- **Ratchet**
- **Seed Pods**
- **Berra-bio***
- **Marble in Aluminum Bowl**
- **Automobile Bulb Horn** (horn)

*Tiny string drum with a loop in the far end of the string, through which one end of a rod is passed.

CONCERT SCORE

JABBERWOCKY

POEM BY LEWIS CARROLL

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought-
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
Ofrabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

jAbberwockeese dictioNAry

brillig: late afternoon, the time you start *broiling* things for dinner.

slithy: smooth and active.

tove: something like a badger, something like a lizard, and something like a corkscrew, these animals have smooth white hair, long hind legs, and short horns like a stag. They live chiefly on cheese.

gyre: 1. to spin round and round like a gyroscope. 2. To scratch like a dog.

gimble: to screw out holes in anything, as with a gimlet.

wabe: 1. the grass plot around a sundail. 2. the sunny side of a hill from being soaked by the rain.

mimsy: flimsy and miserable.

borogrove: an extinct species of parrot, with an upturned beak and feathers sticking out all around, sort of like a live mop. They nest under sundials, and live on veal.

mome: grave, solemn.

rath: 1. a sort of green pig 2. a land turtle.

outgrabe: outgribing is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle.

frumious: furious and fuming.

vorpal: although this word has worked its way into the world of fantasy, Lewis Carroll once explained that he had no idea where it came from or what it meant.

manxome: although this word is never defined, presumably it has something to do with the Isle of Man.

tum-tum: at the time this was written, tum-tum was a common onomatopoetic word used to describe the strumming of a guitar or other stringed instrument.

uffish: a state of mind when the voice is gruffish, the manner roughish, and the temper huffish.

whiffling: blowing unsteadily in short puffs; hence, variable and evasive.

burble: 1. to bubble. 2. to perplex, muddle or confuse. 3. the turbulence that develops when air is not flowing smoothly around an object.

gallumph: to march on exhultantly with irregular bounding movements.

beamish: in use since the early sixteenth century, beamish is a regional variant of beaming; radiant.

chortle: a blend of chuckle and snort.

Performance Notes

While **Jabberwocky** was written as a stand-alone musical composition, its subject matter and presentation lend itself to theatrical presentations. The premier performances (given on August 5 and 6, 2005 by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble) exploited these possibilities, with lighting, staging, set design, costumes, and video projections. In the near future, I hope to see a production that incorporates dancers.

The video projections consisted of over thirty cartoon slides and animations designed by **Aaron Kablack**. While all of the images are black and white (with one exception), the style of drawing is quite different for each movement, mirroring the divergent musical eclecticism. Digital copies of these slides are available for a modest fee.

Besides the story, the most notable aspect of Lewis Carroll's poem Jabberwocky is the use of made-up words. This language suggested to me a sort of fantastical other-worldliness. I wanted to reflect this not only by using an extraordinary variety of musical languages and genres, but also by having a vocalist who produces many types of sounds. The vocal part entails singing, speaking, *sprech-stimme* (speak-singing), special effects, whistling, beat box, using a microphone and megaphone, and other techniques. While the notation expresses the rhythms and basic ideas of the vocalist, this part should be viewed as a roadmap, with a good deal of leeway for personal interpretation. Notation for non-sung sections often provides rhythm and suggested contour as opposed to absolute pitches.

The piece is intended to begin with only the pianist and percussionist on stage, and the introduction should ideally be unconducted. Approximate durations of events are shown in the score, but players should feel free to take a certain amount of liberty with their interpretation of the introductory material. The offstage crotale parts require that performers play random pitches within given range at will. Before the vocal part begins in m. 5, the singer should sneak in from offstage, with a megaphone pointed directly towards the audience.

For the second movement, the piccolo, bass clarinet, violin, and cello should be placed either offstage and out-of-sight to the audience, or at various places around the hall. If the performers are offstage, the clarinetist and violinist should be on one side, while the cello and flute are on the other, creating a stereo effect (if possible). The performers should have plenty of time taking their places on stage between m. 54-63. One possible interpretation would be to have them stomp in time onto the stage from m. 54-58.

In m. 165, the whispered "Jabberwock" can be emphasized by having all players sharply turn their heads on beat 2, whispering on beat 3, and snapping back into a normal position on beat 4.

The bass clarinetist should stand or half-stand at m. 320 for the "death cadenza." In between phrases, the performer is asked to breathe audibly, resembling a dying monster gasping for breath in between furious and desperate statements. About halfway through the cadenza, it is very effective for the vocalist to join in the heavy breathing, alternating with the clarinetist. Towards the end, the player collapses into the chair.

During the sixth movement, I envision that an entire village is celebrating. To support this, one possibility is to have every available voice sing along with the vocalist in unison or octaves from m. 356-360 (until the word "boy"). The tambourine used by the vocalist should be as visually interesting as possible.

In the final movement, the flute, clarinet, violin, and cello players, and finally the vocalist, exit the stage as marked. The piece ends with just the pianist and percussionist on stage, just as it began.

David Cutler Biography

David Cutler is a multi-dimensional composer who listens voraciously to a colossal range of musical styles. His enormously eclectic output reflects this large musical world, with a vocabulary that ranges from beautiful, lyrical, tonal realms to unusual sounds, dissonant clashes, and bizarre juxtapositions. Though many of his compositions refer to the sounds that surround him, they are far from simple imitations. Instead, these works are *impressions* of the music he hears, or commentary on them. In other words, they are indications of what happens to the music after it is processed by Cutler's unconventional and deeply philosophical mind. For example, his offbeat, post-modern quintet **Vango Tan Gogh** is a far cry from a traditional tango, but it does attempt to capture the passion found in this intense Argentinean dance style while touching upon elements of jazz, country and western, heavy metal, and classical.   A piano trio entitled **Trunk Music**, combines the sorrow of a chanson by Renaissance composer Josquin de Prez (1440-1521) with the joy of an original Irish reel. He has a setting of Tchaikovsky's **Violin Concerto** for violin and *avant garde* jazz ensemble, in which the band literally destroys the music and upstages the soloist, and a fast 11/8 **Kopanitza** round dance in which the ensemble breaks into song in Bulgarian while the pianist plays a Cuban *montuno* pattern. **Kartoon Music for the Kriminally Insane and Socially Delinquent** reflects on the extremely violent yet delightfully quirky moments of Loony Tunes, while the orchestral *tour de force* **Under the Big Top** sets the scene for one of the most imaginative, extreme, and hypothetical circuses ever produced (certainly in Cutler's own mind). Cutler is not afraid to use humor in his music, but other works are intensely serious, such as **Chestnut Branches in the Court**, a choral cycle dealing with the Holocaust. All of his music attempts to connect with the people who listen, though much of it pushes musical and performance boundaries, aiming to challenge as well as delight the audience.

Cutler's concert compositions, which have thrilled audiences throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, have been commissioned and performed by ensembles and artists such as the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Classical Orchestra of Milan, Repertory Symphony Orchestra, LAVIE Singers, Korean Chamber Ensemble, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, harpist Jung, saxophonists Joe Lulloff and Jim Houlik, and pianist David Allen Wehr. His jazz compositions and arrangements have been presented by Nancy Wilson, Joe Henderson, Benny Golson, Kenny Wheeler, the Airmen of Note Air Force Big Band, Eastman Studio Orchestra, University of Miami Concert Jazz Band, many college jazz ensembles. His works have often interfaced music with dance, film, actors, and the visual arts.

In addition to composing and arranging, Cutler is active as a pianist, conductor, writer, and educator. His style of jazz piano playing is as wide ranging as his compositions, spanning such styles as stride and bebop to elements far beyond the traditional jazz vocabulary. As a classical pianist he has focused his efforts on the music of contemporary and American composers. Always an advocate of new music, he has conducted many large and chamber ensembles, including over 20 premiers. In 2002, he became a contributing author to **Jazz Styles**, eighth edition, the top selling jazz history textbook in the country, published by Prentice-Hall, and he is presently working on an orchestration text for the same publisher.

Cutler began playing jazz and classical piano at the age of 6. He studied piano at the University of Miami (BM), composition at the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna, Austria, jazz arranging and composition at the Eastman School of Music (MM), and composition at Indiana University (DM). He was chair of the composition program at the Brevard Summer Music Festival (2000-2004), and currently serves on the faculty of Duquesne University, where he teaches musicianship, composition, and jazz.