

*Articulations* by Richard Wilson

The dictionary instructs us that an articulated locomotive is one that has two or three connected sections. It is in this sense that I first mean the title of my work, for the piece falls into three sections that are played with only a brief pause between. (These pauses are "live" rather than "dead": not a time for coughers to cough, critics to scribble, or latecomers to be seated.) But other meanings should not be ruled out: "Making clear and distinct," "expressed, formulated or presented with clarity," or "having distinct areas organized into a coherent or meaningful whole" are, it seems to me, pertinent and laudable goals for a composer.

My piece necessarily illustrates yet a third meaning of articulation, which is the common musical use of the word to denote how notes are connected--whether legato or staccato, tenuto or pizzicato, glottal or smooth. Each musical instrument has its individual style of articulation. In a work for full orchestra, the many contrasts in attack and release are an important part of the musical substance if only because they form the very basis for timbral distinctions. It is also the case that phrasing, so important to musical expression, depends on paying the most careful attention to the various means of articulation.

The subtitles Unrest/Introspection/Quickening are intended to convey a sense of the character of each portion of the work as well as to imply a generalized psychological progression. The extended central movement, which culminates in an oboe solo, engages in an inward sorting out which, by simplification and reduction, strives to define primary musical aims. Through it, the fitful, unsettled opening is transformed to a closing that is confident and life-affirming.

Articulations is dedicated to Herbert Blomstedt and the San Francisco Symphony, who commissioned it and gave its first performances in May, 1989.

--RW