

**Contestant: Ken320**

**Title: *The Emissary***

*1. Submit a piece that **properly depicts the end of the world** in any context. This piece should **progress like a story**, of sorts, not just simply the event that causes the world to perish. The relation to the source material should be clear in your music in one way or another. Since it is difficult to convey things through sound, **your job is simply to convince the judges that you've thought about how to make it work.** (/40)*

This piece is practically more written as a soundscape than anything immediately taken in the classical genre. This isn't a bad thing, but that means contrast is going to be your biggest friend while writing. I read the contestant's notes after listening to the piece, so suffice it to say, much of the piece was hearing a chord drone with the occasional flourish. I was not expecting such an affect to persist for so long. Much of it reminded me of the composer Richard Vreeland (stage name "Disasterpeace"), with the sustain being consistently interrupted by a recurring figure. However, to me it sounded like a lot of building context without going anywhere very quickly. Remember, your story should be as close to evident as possible without having to read anything.

I was disappointed to hear the beginning of the second movement start in a similar vein. I understand it's the introduction of the actual events of Bing finding the troupe and the instrument, but without the context, it sounds like a homogenous two pieces that are far too connected at one end. I personally listen to sound effects with as little semantic meaning as possible, so perhaps some of the intended enjoyment of those sounds relative to the story were lost on me.

I love the fast section; its buoyancy and extreme contrast alerted to me that something different was happening and that it was not necessarily evil. It piqued my interest and there was plenty of contrast within itself as well, which is always welcome. I feel like more of that same design philosophy could have been implanted with the rest of the piece so that the

contrasts were really construed as a harsher juxtaposition. George Crumb's *Star Child* (mvt. 2) is, I think, a great example of this. **+29/40**

*2. The more technically based compositional aspects are judged here. These aspects include **score quality (/15), audio file quality (/15), and orchestration (/15).***

Audio file is a bit of an anomaly. The sound effect patches were generally quite nice and cohesive (they overall blended quite well) but the regular instrument sounds were such a juxtaposition of quality that it quite frankly took me out of that atmosphere, worse than if the whole piece had been like that. Slightly better than. MIDI rendering, but everything seems accurate as far as I can tell. I'm particularly impressed by the dynamics you use, despite the piece being so quiet for a lot of the time. Subtle changes really helped with creating the world and story. **+9/15**

The score is generally fine. Nothing really intersects and everything is spaced out alright. My big issue with it is how small everything is. I can't zoom in without the notes getting pixilated and not doing that would be extremely hard for a conductor to hear the chords before they are played during a run-through (I printed the page out and tested it). I would like to say for clarification that this was primarily a problem with the second movement, rather than the first. The condensed score also had this problem, so I'm not sure why the Prologue looks so much better. **10/15**

Orchestration is really quite well done. Things cross in contrary motion and double stops are (for the most part) possible. The use of standalone sixteenth notes in the beginning is slightly unnecessary, but I can see the effect that was intended. Some of the autonomous wind chorale passages were a bit strange, though; in particular the first movement at m. 19 features motivic counterpoint that seems to be more of a gimmick than actual vertical cross relations. It should also be noted that your instrument is labeled as Synth in the beginning, but piano on every subsequent page, which implies a sound/patch change through the piece I'm sure you were not intending.

4th measure of A, I'm not sure why you have the two quarters tied together, especially when it's followed by a half. If you want them pulsed, you must put a legato marking underneath/on top of it. Shift in rhythm at 109 is slightly jarring, and for only one measure? Something that I found particularly troubling was the notation of the synth instruments in the beginning. Some of it is fine, but it's overall a pretty nonstandard way of notating those things in the modern era. Much of it uses lines and specific words within a graphical design and I feel it would have worked a little better here.

Overall, you do a very good job at keeping things within the limitations of the instruments can creating a nice context within those frameworks. **+14/15**

*3. Submit a writing component explaining the context in which the world is being destroyed and explaining how your instrumentation **and** compositional sections depict your writing. This should include what techniques you used to demonstrate certain aspects of each, keys, styles, or anything else you feel is prudent. (/15)*

While an interesting story that provides context, the writing sample submitted does not delve into any of the formal elements required by the section. Certainly it mentions instrumentation slightly, what with the various string instruments Xiou Bing and the troupe carried on with, but nothing is mentioned in regards to key, form, chords, etc. This makes it hard to connect anything you have your actual music too, as I read the notes after listening and grading the piece, so I wasn't influenced by the composer's intent before experiencing what he had to say first.

That being said the story that you present is quite interesting, one I'm definitely unfamiliar with. It surely provides context to the piece at the very least and juxtaposes the concept of sound with the concept of light in a way quite cleverly executed.

Overall, I simply wish I had gotten more of an answer key to the piece that was submitted. The grammar is fine, though a bit too peppered with short, artistic sentences, and easily creates a vast scene to imagine, at least on its own. **+7/15**

**TOTAL: 69/100**