

Contestant: Noah Brode

Title: *Cataclysm*

*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)*

In a nutshell, this piece sounds like modern film score music. Large, rustic chords that combine into homophony alongside light, ethereal strings with melodic hocket in the rest of the orchestra. I must assume this was intentional, as the point of the piece was to *convey* something. There were a lot of cool ideas heard in here. For example, I interpreted the jumping between 5/4, 9/8, and 7/8 to simulate the confusion amongst chaos a population would struggle with under a meteor attack. I liked the fading away that happened multiple times but to different ends; the first time we resolve to C Mixolydian, as though there is a sliver of hope for rebuild, signified with the one natural note in the minor scale, but the final chord is a far more confused enharmonic Am7(omit 3) at the end of a split 5th arpeggiation of G minor. Times like these are where your piece really shines and I can, once again, only assume you intended these effects to be placed as story elements.

All this being said, there were certainly spots I felt confused by. So much of this is written as if a fantasy landscape was intended, or at least this is the effect I get. Fantasy scores (especially film scores) are rather notorious at times for loving a chord perhaps a little too much. The prolonged G alt. #5 scale you use for a significant portion of the first down section takes me away from investment in your story, as the flourishes remind me more of an open landscape, and not so much a war-torn one. Similarly, the ending of the exposition with the gradually lengthening G major chord sucks the momentum straight out of the piece for me. It's hard to

tell if it's intended to be a grand moment or a pensive one, as the orchestration clashes with the idea. As it's a build to your first "agitato" section, I would assume or expect a slight bit more finality to the idea. As it stands I feel slightly confused going into the first cataclysm, when I want to be crushed emotionally.

This is personally where I feel the piece needs the most attention, and this is *essential* to story telling of any kind, be it through music or literature or visual art. The precise control of drama is quite honestly more important than anything music theory or orchestrational knowledge can assist with. The length of each cataclysm section is so short and the rest periods are so relatively long that it feels backwards, to an extent. I really do like the idea of ridding the concept of "effective transition", a dated term that used to prove some sort of technical mastery. Technical mastery means nothing if you can't do anything with it, and I can sense you really wanted to go somewhere with breaking the norm. But if I had no context to your work, these rather unbalanced sections would have me question what type of work it is, probably to the work's detriment. The direction I've taken with these competitions is more challenging composers to be as direct in their emotional communications as possible, and it remains slightly ambiguous in your piece.

Overall, a combination of great ideas but a slightly heavy-handed presentation.

+24/40

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

I'll get through the recording and the score quality so we can get to the interesting stuff. The recording was a MIDI rendition of an orchestral piece. It's obviously going to miss a lot of the nuances of an orchestra. **+8/15** The score quality could also be improved, mostly in terms of dynamic and octave markings. Your octave markings and gradual dynamic changes intercept with notes. As a tip, you generally don't need to have lines for gradual dynamic changes. I was

also a bit confused with your putting of dynamic markings where there are no notes, like at rehearsal C. This happens a few times and it always puzzles me. There are a few strange rhythmic quirks (like why instead of a quarter + dotted half, do you oftentimes have quarter + quarter + TIE + half?) and spacing issues between staves, but it looks decent enough to be able to read past a cursory glance. **+8/15.**

The orchestration in this piece is a bizarre combination of postmodern minimalism and modernist combative style. Many, *many* things are held, vamped, or played as minimalist suggestions, which is a good style for the eeriness I believe you want to portray, except for the fact the tones you use within intersect at somewhat odd points. In mm. 31-32, the C minor diad (exclude the viola) in the strings is double rooted, then switches to a double mediant in two different voices. The voice leading makes things like this sounds a little odd, but this is most likely due to the range between instruments. The opening's sounds was an interesting one, what with many of the typically essential voices left out (low strings, high winds), but it proved effective for the most part. **+10/15**

*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)*

Much of your discussion deals with exposition. This is all fine and good, until the imbalance between the emotional potential of music and the blank canvas of words causes real dissonance. I would have wished for more explanation, perhaps even isolated cases, to show that the world was really different. Not a novel, obviously, but something more for a reader to be able to hear the music without knowing it existed. This connection is slightly missing for me. Some nice chord explanations for used but for what it's worth they could have had more

impact. I don't know what those chords *mean*, despite you describing what they represent, and the writing component is more there to attach something to it that wasn't there before. **+9/15**

TOTAL: 59/100