

The Ballets of



John Craton

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Biography

American composer John Craton was born in 1953 in Anniston, Alabama, and began his career on the violin at the age of 10. He began piano at age 14 and made his first attempts at composing at age 11. Craton studied violin under the late concert violinist Robert Louis Barron and John Maltese; piano under Louis Culver and Ouida Susie Francis; and music theory and composition under Gerald Moore and Henry Fusner. He received his B.A. from Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, and his M.A. from Indiana University, Bloomington.

Craton's music has been performed by such artists and ensembles as Sebastiaan de Gribber, Ferdinand Binnendijk, Ljubomir Velickovic, Gertrud Weyhofen, Eva van den Dool, Christiaan Saris, Sinella Aghasi, The Townsend Opera Players, Central West Ballet, Het CONSORT, Het Orkest van het Oosten, Filarmonica Mandolini Alba Sapporo, the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, and the Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra. His works comprise a highly diverse register of compositions and include operas, ballets, orchestral works, concertos, chamber music, and song cycles. His style tends toward polyphonic harmony and has been compared favorably to the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst. A number of his works currently is available in print from Wolfhead Music.

January 2018

The Ballets

Dans les ténèbres (Into the Darkness)

A trilogy of ballets (*La Boîte à musique*, *Le grenier*, and *Le Cimetière*), each with a gothic theme and continuous storyline. Premiered separately, they are designed either to stand alone as short ballets or to be presented together collectively in one evening's performance.

La Boîte à musique (The Music Box)



Synopsis

Scene: Grandmother's attic

Two sisters enter the attic of their grandmother's house for the first time. The attic is strewn with typical paraphernalia — boxes, shelves, trunks, a dress-form mannequin, a hobby horse, etc. Their wide-eyed amazement reveals that this is their first

visit to the attic. Dancing about the room, they interact with various discoveries including dancing with the dress-form mannequin. They soon discover a large trunk and inspect its contents. Finding a tam-o-shanter, one sister dons it and dances a Scottish dance. The other pulls out a feather boa and dances a ragtime. (The two girls may dance singly or may be joined by other dancers who appear in their imagination.) Soon they discover a strange music box and retrieve it from the trunk. Opening it, it plays a melancholy waltz. Suddenly two young specters appear and dance stiffly to the waltz. The sisters watch in both fascination and fear. The couple disappear when the music box is closed. The girls wonder at what they have seen. Sister 1 wants to put the box back in the trunk as she is very frightened, but the other wants to play it again to watch the spectral couple dance. Sister 2 eventually snatches the box from her sister's hands, and they tussle over it for a few moments before Sister 2 secures it. She places the box on a table and opens it. The spectral couple reappear, but this time they are accompanied by a host of other wraiths. The music grows slower and slower as the box winds down, and when the music stops the dancers all freeze. Sister 1 is still very frightened by the scene, but Sister 2 is curious and winds the box. But now it plays a macabre tango, which is clearly sinister. The spectral girl soon comes over to draw Sister 1 into the dance, but she breaks free. Now both sisters are frightened and try to close the box, but the lid will not budge. The spectral girl again takes hold of Sister 1, and she is compelled to enter the dance. The tango becomes more and more frenetic and frightening, and Sister 1 repeatedly tries to break free but cannot. Sister 2 tries again to close the box but is unable to do so. All she can do is watch as the dancers whirl about, Sister 1 being pushed to and fro by the wraiths. She dances madly until at last she collapses at her sister's feet. Simultaneously Sister 2 snaps shut the box lid, the music comes to an abrupt halt, and the stage is darkened except for a spotlight on the two sisters (all other dancers exit the stage in the dark). Sister 2 attempts to rouse her fallen sister but soon concludes that she is dead.

Terrified at what has transpired, she runs to the exit, takes a last look at the scene of her fallen sister, bites her fingers, and flees in terror. The stage darkens. A short musical interlude portrays the passage of time. The lights soon rise, but only to a dim view. The original waltz theme revises, and the spectral couple dance again as before. They are joined shortly by the ghost of Sister 1. The spectral girl welcomes her to their world and brings her to the spectral boy. As Sister 1 and the spectral boy dance, the spectral girl showers Sister 1 with petals.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Flute, oboe, clarinet, harp, piano/celeste, strings, percussion

Length: Approximately 20 minutes

Premiere: 9 May 2009, Kat's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/boite.htm

Le Grenier (The Attic)



Synopsis

Scene: Grandmother's attic

Time: Approximately 20 years after *La Boîte à musique*

Since the tragic events surrounding the young girl's death years

before, the attic has been sealed off. Consequently, it has become heavily dust-laden and filled with spiders, cobwebs, and mice. The daughter of the surviving sister and her family are spending the summer in the old family house. The daughter, a young goth girl, bored by long days in the house alone, decides one day to investigate this heretofore unexplored region of the house. Upon entering the attic, she is mystified by the state of affairs there and wonders why so many wonderful things (toys, dolls, books, etc.) have been left to gather dust. She encounters some mice and spiders in the attic, but being "goth," these do not really bother her — she is far more enthralled by the wondrous objects in the attic than she is frightened by its minuscule inhabitants. What attracts her attention most is a large rag doll sitting idly in an old rocking chair. She plays with and later tries dancing with the inanimate doll. But while dancing, her attention is drawn to a shelf of books because one large book in particular seems to have a light emanating from it. The girl puts the limp doll on the floor, takes down the book, and, placing it also on the floor, opens the cover. A very bright light emerges from inside the book. She gazes at the contents of the book for a few moments, then dances out the instructions (a magical incantation). At that the rag doll slowly comes to life, and the girl is thrilled with the result, having now a "live" playmate to end her boredom and loneliness. Now they dance together, and to the young girl's amazement and — initially — her delight, the doll goes round the room animating other dolls and toys. She animates a hobby-horse and a jack in the box, then brings to life a much more sinister-looking doll that had been unobserved by the young girl. This doll begins a haunting, demonic dance that results in bringing out groups of undead: skeletons and zombies. As the attic fills with these more malignant characters, the girl becomes more and more frightened. Eventually the girl's dead aunt appears and beckons her to join them in a diabolic dance. As the aunt beckons, the girl becomes more and more agitated and attempts to escape. She throws things at the apparitions (a pillow, a ball), but these

have no effect. She reaches down for another item to throw, and as her arm goes back she notices all the ghouls shying away in fear. She discovers that she has picked up an old crucifix, and so she holds it boldly in front of the spirits who continue to cower as she walks backward toward the stairs. Before reaching the stairs, however, she stumbles and drops the crucifix, and a ghoul hastily throws a cloth over it. The ghouls then approach the girl, and after the aunt helps her to her feet the others gather round her and append strings to her shoulders, arms, and legs. As they part they reveal that she too has become a doll, and the ballet concludes with the dolls dancing in the attic to the amusement of all the others.

Technical Data

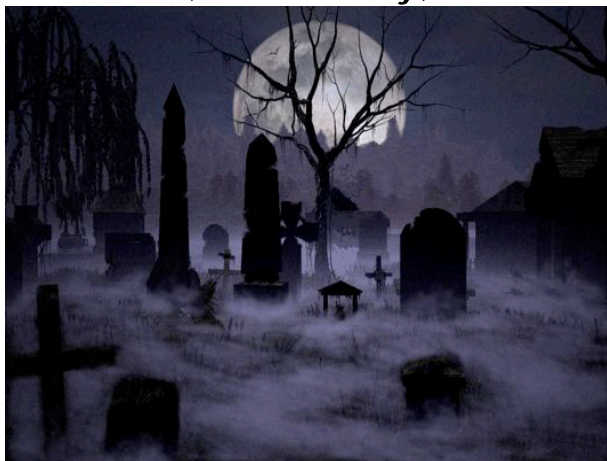
Instrumentation: strings, string quartet, piano/organ/harpsichord, percussion

Length: Approximately 20 minutes

Premiere: 18 May 2013, Kat's Performing Arts. Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/grenier.htm

Le Cimetière (The Cemetery)



Synopsis

Scene: A cemetery (rear stage left) with an empty field (center stage, stage right)

Time: An afternoon a few years after *Le Grenier*.

The younger sister of Goth Girl (from *Le Grenier*), now a teenager, pays a visit to the cemetery where her sister is buried. (From the headstone we learn that the older sister's name is Jeslyn Dumont.) Next to the cemetery is a field of wildflowers (dancing children). Younger sister is carrying a basket into which she intends to gather wildflowers and assemble them to place on Jeslyn's grave. Each child/flower holds an actual flower as they dance, and one by one they give them to the sister as she collects her bouquet. Once the bouquet is completed, the sister proceeds to place them next to Jeslyn's headstone. Because it is a beautiful, warm afternoon, she then lies down next to Jeslyn's grave and falls asleep. Time passes, and the sun sets. After sunset the Spirits of the Innocents (children who had died in a local epidemic a century earlier) come out to look at the living girl lying on the ground. These are not malevolent spirits, but are merely curious. When they exit, the town clock can be heard striking midnight. At this the sister awakens and realizes that she has slept far longer than she had intended. But before she can be on her way, other spirits begin to come forth from their graves and dance around her, blocking her escape. These include characters appearing or referenced in the first ballet: a dead Scot (whose tam-o-shanter was discovered in the trunk), a dead Flapper (whose boa likewise was from the trunk), and the Spectral Couple, along with the deceased Aunt. Other spirits also join in, and they are clearly malevolent. Finally the Grandmother appears as a witch, and it becomes apparent that she was behind all the events of the first two ballets, being the evil which no one expected. As she attempts to orchestrate the abduction of the younger sister into the otherworldly coven, suddenly Jeslyn comes forward and defiantly stands between the sister and Grandmother. Grandmother tries to cast Jeslyn aside with her powers, but Jeslyn remains steadfast. Jeslyn raises her hands,

palms facing the menacing crowd, and mysteriously pushes them all away so that they all withdraw reluctantly and return to their tombs, thus saving the younger sister. The two sisters now stand and stare at each other momentarily, then Jeslyn puts out her hands palms up and younger sister gracefully places her hands on the upturned palms. They look into each other's eyes, conveying the love that they share as sisters, then Jeslyn slowly backs away and returns to her tomb. Younger sister looks after her for a brief moment before finally turning to go back to the land of the living. All is well. The evil has been conquered by no less than love itself.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Strings, flute, oboe/oboe d'amour, clarinet/bass clarinet, bassoon, harp, piano/harpsichord/organ, percussion

Length: approximately 27 minutes

Premiere: 2 June 2018, Kat's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph..

Website: www.craton.net/music/cimetiere.htm



Les chats du Bagarreau

(The Cats of Bagarreau)



Synopsis

Les chats du Bagarreau has no actual storyline. Instead we have here merely a gathering of *chats voyous* (rogue/delinquent cats) in the village of Bagarreau (a play on the word *bagarre*, which means "fight" or "brawl," but toying with the Old French form, *bagarot*). The action consists primarily of short vignettes of the various characters. The cats are led by gangleader *Tom la bombe* (Tom the Bomb), and the other principals are *Charlotte la chasseuse*, *Clairette la curieuse*, *Lucinde la ludique*, *Pénélope la persane*, *Adèle l'acrobate*, and *Véronique la vaniteuse*. Véronique is the last to be introduced, and perhaps it is jealousy over her that leads to a fight between rival cat gangs. In the course of the ensuing melee Tom is killed. (It should be noted that Tom's costume sports a large number 9 on his chest.) His lifeless body is brought forward, then the cats remove the number 9 to reveal a number 8, and Tom is alive again, having used only one of his nine lives. The ballet then

concludes as it began with Tom leading his little band of rogue cats through the village streets.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Full orchestra

Length: Approximately 28 minutes

Premiere: 24 May 2014, Kat's Performing Arts. Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/cats.htm



The Dartmoor Pixies



Synopsis

As evening falls, pixies gather and dance a Circle Dance collectively near stage left. When the dance is concluded they assume the "dead swan position" in a circle, representing a fairy ring on the grass. The night becomes darker, and a Will-o'-the-Wisp dances onstage (beginning stage right) followed by two small children. The children have become lost in the woods, and having seen the light from the Will-o'-the-Wisp, they follow it as it gradually leads them inside the fairy ring. Once

inside the ring the pixies slowly rise and reveal themselves to the children who are initially frightened but are comforted by the pixies' care. Soon the pixies commence various tasks as the children watch: To aid their human neighbours, the pixies churn butter, thresh wheat and, when concluded, sweep the area clean in a spritely Broom Dance. As they then begin relaxing from their labours, a Wolf steals onto the stage with the obvious intent of eating the children. But the Wolf's designs are thwarted when the pixies espy him, and they chase him away. As the children now are visibly frightened by all that they have experienced in this enchanted evening, the Slumber Fairy comes forward and sprinkles slumber dust on them so that they can enjoy a night's rest. As night progresses, the pixies resume their fairy ring, and when dawn breaks and the children awake, all they see is the fairy ring on the ground. Delighted with the dawn, they now know their way home and depart happily hand-in-hand. After the children leave the pixies reprise much of the Circle Dance to congratulate themselves on a night well spent.

Instrumentation: Strings, harp, and percussion, bagpipes (with G-D drones)

Total length: approximately 26 minutes

Premiere: 4 June 2016, Kat's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/dartmoor.htm



Emilia



Synopsis

Scene: A ballet studio

Time: Circa 1910

A piano ballet that begins with a group of young ballet students arriving for the start of class. General hubbub ensues until Madame arrives — a very hard and dour instructor who obviously is a strict disciplinarian — at which everyone comes into line as Madame begins the daily exercises by pounding her large staff on the floor. The class goes through a standard routine of exercises (*pliés, tendus, ronds de jambe, fondus*, etc.), but throughout Emilia has difficulty keeping up and makes many mistakes. Madame has no patience with those who cannot perform to perfection. She expresses great displeasure with Emilia throughout, leading the other students in the class to laugh at and ridicule the struggling student. Madame tries to get Emilia to keep up by pounding her heavy staff on the floor, but Emilia simply cannot master the routines. In frustration, Madame sends Emilia to the corner where she cowers and can only watch as the *prima ballerina* (and obvious teacher's favorite) comes forward to rehearse a portion of her *pas seul* that she is to dance in an upcoming recital. After the rehearsal of part of the *pas seul*, Madame dismisses class, and she and the students file out, turning off the lights as they exit.

Unnoticed by the other students, Emilia has been left behind in the corner, and after everyone leaves and the studio is locked she comes out from where she was sitting. She picks out a phonograph disc, winds the Victrola, and proceeds to practice on her own in the darkened studio. She practices diligently, though still making the occasional misstep, until, exhausted, she lies on the floor and goes to sleep.

The following morning the other students arrive and turn on the lights. Emilia awakes, and the other students laugh at her for having become locked in the studio the night before. Madame then arrives, looks disgustedly at Emilia, then proceeds to start

the rehearsal of the *pas seul* as all the others watch attentively. Shortly into the dance, the *prima ballerina* stumbles and turns her ankle very badly. It becomes obvious that she will not be able to dance in the upcoming recital, so the other girls look at one another to decide who will take her place. But since the *pas seul* is so demanding, none of the girls is able. Finally Emilia steps forward to the laughter of all the others. Despite the ridicule, she motions for the pianist to begin, and she proceeds to dance the entire *pas seul* flawlessly. Both Madame and the other students are dutifully impressed, and the ballet concludes with their congratulating Emilia on her newfound virtuosity.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Piano

Length: Approximately 23 minutes

Premiere: Not yet performed

Website: www.crafton.net/music/emilia.htm



The Huluppu Tree (from *Inanna*)



Synopsis

"The Huluppu Tree" is a ballet sequence from the opera *Inanna*. After singing a touching aria to her huluppu tree, Inanna retires for the evening. During the night three sinister creatures (a serpent, an Anzu bird, and the Dark Lilith) take up residence in Inanna's prized tree. The music for the ballet features a part for solo violin with orchestra.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Full orchestra with solo violin

Length: Approximately 7 minutes

Premiere: 23 August 2008, Central West Ballet, René Daveluy, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/HT_ballet.htm



Labyrinth (A pas seul)

Synopsis

A short *pas seul* composed for ballerina Bailey Goode to represent a trip through the mind in which one finds, initially, only uncertainty and illusion but with final resolution.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Strings and percussion

Length: Approximately 3½ minutes

Premiere: Not yet performed

Website: www.craton.net/music/labyrinth.htm



Mother Goose



Synopsis

After being read bedtime stories by her mother, a young girl goes to sleep and dreams about encounters with various personages she heard about in Mother's stories. After a series of these encounters, all characters reappear in her bedroom and signal to one another the importance of being quiet so that the young girl may sleep.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Full orchestra

Length: Approximately 29 minutes

Premiere: 3 June 2017, Kat's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/mothergoose.htm



Nefertiti



Synopsis

Scene: Nefertiti's bedchamber

Nefertiti enters her bedchamber accompanied by handmaids. They engage in a short dance before Nefertiti seats herself on her throne and awaits the entrance of her six royal daughters and their handmaids, all of whom will enjoy an evening of entertainment. Prior to the arrival of the children, the fan-bearers enter and dance before positioning themselves round Nefertiti and fanning her. Next come the perfumers who dance before applying perfumes to her majesty. The nursemaids and children enter next, dancing together briefly before sitting round Nefertiti's throne. The company is then served confections by the royal confectioners and servers, who exit when done. At last Nefertiti calls for the entrance of the musicians and entertainers. They dance collectively, then a mime-dancer performs a solo for the assembled guests.

Following the mime is a Danga (an ancient Egyptian clown) who performs a humorous skit. After the entertainers are done, the Slumber-Bird enters and makes the children sleepy. As the children begin yawning, the nursemaids bring them one by one to Nefertiti to receive her evening blessing before they depart for bed. When all children and nursemaids have exited, Nefertiti rises and dances a solo before reclining on her bed. Her fan-bearers position themselves round her and fan her as she drifts off to sleep.

The work is dedicated to Amelia Bacic-Tulevski in recognition of her inspiration for pursuing an ancient storyline.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Piccolo, flute, alto flute, soprano recorder, alto recorder, tenor recorder, oboe, oboe d'amore, bass oboe, English horn, bassoon, contrabassoon, bagpipes (with C₇ drone), tenor horn, natural trumpet (in C), harp, sitar, percussion

Length: Approximately 27 minutes

Premiere: Not yet performed

Website: www.craton.net/music/nefertiti.htm



Pierrot & Pierrette

Synopsis

Scene: A park

NOTE: This work is also known as “Le mime solitaire” and consists of choreography that is suitable for dancing by an all-female troupe in which no male dancers are available. The music is the same for both versions. It was the “Mime solitaire” choreography that was premiered in 2010.



Pierrot & Pierrette begins with a traditional Harlequinade that acts as a sort of play within a play, as it is a comedy being performed in a 19th-century European park. It incorporates all the standard farcical elements of a classic Harlequinade. The Harlequinade over, the "audience" exits and the sun goes down. A lamplighter enters to light the park lamp. The moon appears in the sky, large and round, and the lamplighter briefly dances

to the moon. Pierrot then wanders lovesick onto the stage and watches the other performers wend their way home. He sees Pierrette, whom he secretly loves, but she is leaving arm in arm with Harlequin. With no one to go home to, he lies down on the bench to sleep. The *Fée rêveuse* (Dream Fairy) enters along with a number of Fireflies. They circle round Pierrot until the *Fée rêveuse* sends him to sleep and gives him a pleasant dream. In the dream sequence, Pierrot sits up and sees Pierrette coming to him. The two then have a long *pas de deux* until Harlequin and his Entourage invade even his dream. Isabel (Pierrette's older guardian sister) also enters the dream to separate Pierrette from her two suitors. Isabel sends Harlequin away and then takes Pierrette's hand and leads her offstage. (N.B. Isabel is secretly in love with Harlequin, so her action of always thwarting Harlequin's advances toward Pierrette are both to protect her sister and also to try to win him for herself.) At the dream's conclusion Pierrot awakes, stretches, and then sees Pierrette sitting in the cradle of the moon. Pierrot takes up his mandolin and begins serenading Pierrette, endeavoring to win her affection. Soon, however, Harlequin and his Entourage enter to make light of Pierrot's intentions. Boldly, Pierrot plucks a rose and dramatically presents it to Pierrette. Just as she reaches out to take it Harlequin wields his wand and makes Pierrette and the moon disappear. Pierrot searches frantically for her but cannot find her. Harlequin then mockingly points to the sky where a full moon has now appeared. Pierrot tries to reach out and take it but cannot. Mockingly, the Entourage brings out a ladder for him. Pierrot climbs the ladder, but just as he reaches the moon it eclipses. He descends the ladder empty handed and very distraught. Tauntingly, Harlequin then brings Pierrette out from the shrubbery and dances with her to indicate his victory over Pierrot. At this Pierrot is very distraught and sits on the bench, quietly weeping. However, Isabel comes out once again and breaks up the dancing couple, signalling "No, no, no!" to Pierrette. Finally Harlequin fully notices Isabel in her own right, shrugs, and realizing he won't win Pierrette tonight, dances with Isabel instead. The two dance offstage.

Alone with Pierrot, Pierrette notices him on the bench and goes over to him to see why he is so sad. Pierrot looks up at her and hands her a large red heart. Pierrette takes the heart, looks first at it and then at Pierrot, and clutches the heart to her breast. She reaches out her hand to Pierrot. He takes her hand, rises, and the two lovers stand hand in hand and gaze at the moon.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Strings, piano/celeste

Length: Approximately 23 minutes

Premiere: 8 May 2010, Kat's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/pierrotballet.htm



La Soirée des animaux (The Animals' Soirée)



Synopsis

Scene: A zoo after closing

After the zoo closes to the public, the animals begin gathering one by one or in groups in anticipation of a soirée. The kingly lion is the last to arrive, and he directs that the festivities are to begin. The ballet concludes with a grand waltz of all the animals.

The work is dedicated to Boleyn Willis-Zeger, director of the Legacy Studios for the Performing Arts.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Full orchestra

Length: Approximately 31 minutes

Premiere: 6 June 2015, Kat's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/soiree.htm



The Tattered Slippers



Synopsis

The Tattered Slippers is a ballet based on the Grimm fairy tale "Twelve Dancing Princesses." The storyline follows the original tale for the most part, though it calls merely for the expulsion of the failed princes rather than for their beheadings.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Flute, oboe, clarinet, saxophone, strings, percussion

Length: Approximately 38 minutes

Premiere: 19 May 20-12, Kaf's Performing Arts, Kathy Thompson, chgph.

Website: www.craton.net/music/TS.htm



Through the Looking-Glass



Synopsis

Based on the story by Lewis Carroll, the ballet follows Alice on her chimeric journey through the looking-glass and back again. Alice is first seen in her parlor, playing with a kitten. She steps through the looking-glass into a land of wonder and immediately encounters the living clock and chess pieces. She finds the book *Jabberwocky*, and the tale is acted out before her. Following this segment, Alice proceeds to encounter the live flowers, the looking-glass insects, and a host of other fanciful characters from the book. After meeting Humpty Dumpty, the ballet takes a slightly different turn from the book as it is not possible to represent some of the extensive dialogue and poetic sections in dance. Instead an interlude is introduced in which the White King and White Queen dance a gavotte for Alice. Later, when she encounters the Red Knight, she is taken prisoner by him. She is then freed by the White Knight who points her in the direction she needs to go to complete her quest. Arriving at her destination, Alice finds all the cast assembled and is crowned queen. A Grand Valse is danced in celebration until the Red Queen comes forth to challenge Alice's legitimacy. The Red Queen eventually snatches the crown from Alice's head, making her rather angry. Alice begins shaking the Red Queen violently when the Red Queen turns into a kitten and Alice suddenly finds herself back in her parlor where her adventures began — it had all been a dream. The ballet concludes with Alice looking thoughtfully into the looking-glass.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: flutes/piccolo, oboe, clarinet/bass cl., bassoon/contrabassn.,
horns, trumpet, strings, percussion
Length: Approximately 31 minutes
Premiere: 7 May 2011, Kat's Performing Arts. Kathy Thompson, chgph.
Website: www.craton.net/music/TTLG.htm



Voyageur de temps (Time Traveller) un ballet électronique

Synopsis

A short electronic ballet consisting a three scenes depicting the adventures of a time traveller. The work calls for only one male and one female dancer.

Technical Data

Instrumentation: Electronic recording

Length: Approximately 9 minutes

Premiere: Written for Decadanse of France, but never performed

Website: www.craton.net/music/time.htm



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