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Frank Ticheli: An American Dream

Zoe Zeniodi
University of Miami, zzeniodi@gmail.com

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

FRANK TICHELI: AN AMERICAN DREAM

by

Zoe Zeniodi

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

FRANK TICHELI: AN AMERICAN DREAM

Zoe Zeniodi

Approved:

Thomas Sleeper, M.M.
Professor of Instrumental
Performance

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Gary Green, M.M.
Professor and Chair of
Instrumental Performance

Paul Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Music Theory and
Composition

Alan Johnson, M.M.
Assistant Professor and Program
Director of Opera Theater
The purpose of this study is to present various insights into Frank Ticheli’s song cycle, *An American Dream*. Frank Ticheli is an American composer, born in 1958, mainly known for his music for concert band and wind ensemble. He has also composed various orchestral pieces, which are very important. This essay provides a general overview of all his orchestral oeuvre until 2010.

It then focuses on the genesis and creation of his orchestral song cycle *An American Dream*. Deep study of the score and preparation for performance and recording were used to give insights into this work, which is subtitled: *A Symphony of Songs for Soprano and Orchestra*. Direct communication with Frank Ticheli proved most helpful. The essay also refers to performance issues and assessment of the work for performance with various types of orchestras.

Part of this essay is the inclusion of the recording of *An American Dream*, which took place in November 2009, at the Gusman Hall, University of Miami, Frost Symphony Orchestra, Zoe Zeniodi, conductor. Leilah Dione Ezra is the soprano on the recording.
Dedicated to Ida Rosenkranz-Margaritis
I thank my mentor, Thomas Sleeper, for all.

Junko
Jake
Wei-Wei
Dimitris
Tina
Totis
My families and friends in Greece, England, and the USA
The FSO
Alan Johnson
Paul Wilson
Gary Green
Paul Griffith
Frank Ticheli
Leilah Dione Ezra
Jim, Betty, JP and Sara James

Thank you all.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Frank Ticheli was born in 1958 and joined the faculty of the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music in 1991, where he is Professor of Composition. From 1991 to 1998, Ticheli was Composer in Residence of the Pacific Symphony. Ticheli’s music has been described by the *Los Angeles Times* as being “at once novel and familiar, exciting and serious, optimistic and thoughtful.”¹ The *South Florida Sun Sentinel* describes it as “powerful, deeply felt...crafted with imagination, flair and melodic warmth.”² A third source, the *Orange County Register*, describes Ticheli’s music as “immediately accessible but layered with delicate textures of meaning, like fine lace draped over a beautiful face.”³

Frank Ticheli’s orchestral works have received considerable recognition in the U.S. and Europe. Orchestral performances have come from the Philadelphia Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Dallas Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, the radio orchestras of Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Saarbruecken, and Austria, and the orchestras of Austin, Bridgeport, Charlotte, Colorado, Haddonfield, Harrisburg, Hong

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² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
Kong, Jacksonville, Lansing, Long Island, Louisville, Lubbock, Memphis, Nashville, Omaha, Phoenix, Portland, Richmond, San Antonio, San Jose, among others.\textsuperscript{4}

Ticheli is the winner of the 2006 NBA/William D. Revelli Memorial Composition Prize for his Symphony No. 2. Other awards for his music include two from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Walter Beeler Memorial Prize, and First Prize awards in the Texas Sesquicentennial Orchestral Composition Competition, Britten-on-the-Bay Choral Composition Contest, and Virginia CBDNA Symposium for New Band Music.

Frank Ticheli received his doctoral and master degrees in composition from The University of Michigan, and his Bachelor of Music in composition from Southern Methodist University. His works are published by Manhattan Beach, Hinshaw, Encore, and Southern Music, and are recorded on the labels of Albany, Centaur, Chandos, Clarion, GIA, Klavier, Koch International, and Mark Records.\textsuperscript{5}

Ticheli is one of the most prolific contemporary composers for concert band and many of his works have become standards in the repertoire. Still, there are only two scholarly papers written about him and his work. The first one is a study of the importance of his contribution to the contemporary world of band writing.\textsuperscript{6} The second

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.

one examines three of his compositions, and it mainly focuses on analyzing melody, form, rhythm and orchestration.\(^7\)

As stated above, many of his orchestral works have received performances in the United States and abroad, but, apart from some concert reviews, no other scholarly work of substance has ever been written on Ticheli’s orchestral output. He has composed a total of fourteen works for symphony orchestra, one of which will be premiered in April 2010. Also, three of them are works for soloist and orchestra and one is shared between the two genres, as it is a symphony that includes a soloist in its last movement.

Among the compositions for symphony orchestra and soloist, Ticheli has composed the song cycle *An American Dream*, the fifth and final work he composed for the Pacific Symphony Orchestra during his seven-year tenure as the orchestra’s Composer in Residence. The composer subtitled the piece *A Symphony of Songs for Soprano and Orchestra* and it is his longest composition to date, lasting a total of thirty-eight minutes. Based on texts by Philip Littell, the work’s seven songs address the conscious and unconscious sea of anxiety during the winding down of twentieth-century America. The anxiety is symbolized through the world of dreams. The night, which passes, is not literally a night, but a lifetime’s night. In the end, the work reveals itself as a heart-felt expression of hope. *An American Dream* was commissioned by Pacific Symphony Orchestra’s Music Director, Carl St. Clair, and received its premiere performance by them with soprano soloist Camellia Johnson on April 15, 1998. It has since received five more performances by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the

Haddonfield (NJ) Symphony, the Chicago Youth Symphony, the Quad City Symphony, and finally by the Frost Symphony Orchestra, with the author conducting the performance, on November 21, 2009. The work is dedicated to the composer’s daughter, Hannah.8

Apart from the composer’s program notes and the reviews that followed some of the performances, there is no document written on this song cycle and there has not been released any official sound recording.

In the current essay, I present an overview of all his available orchestral compositions, providing details of timing, instrumentation, and mentioning elements that present clearly his personal way of composition. These elements include the use of orchestration and instrumentation, his choice of thematic and rhythmic material, designs of structure, coloring, and finally the composer’s personal thoughts and reasons for writing those pieces.

Ticheli’s handling of the text of a song cycle, his personal way of word painting and the structure he uses to form a song cycle, are elements that interest me most, as well as understanding his unique compositional language. For these reasons, I investigate the genesis of the piece through communications with the composer. Through analytical procedures, I present a detailed overview of An American Dream and I address conducting-related issues and other issues related to the preparation for performance and recording, thus making the paper a useful guide to conductors who might later want to proceed to more performances.

8 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM MATERIAL,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi (zzeniodi@gmail.com) 8 October 2009
Finally, with this essay, I include the performance and recording of the work, which took place during November 2009 and January 2010 in the Gusman Concert Hall of the University of Miami, with the Frost Symphony Orchestra, Leilah Dione Ezra, soprano, and the writer of this essay, conductor. As I have a strong personal interest in the genre of song cycle, both in its earliest form and in the ways it developed through and within the orchestral sound and context, I am currently working towards the official release of the above-mentioned piece in an effort to place it rightly among the repertoire.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Scores

The composer himself and Manhattan Beach Music, which handles most of his compositions, have both kindly supplied me with Ticheli’s orchestral scores. For the part of the essay that deals with the overview of his compositions, the above-mentioned scores for symphony orchestra, and solo instruments and symphony orchestra, have been examined in order to help highlight his unique compositional style. As I prepared, rehearsed and conducted the song cycle *An American Dream*, both in a live performance setting and also in recording, I spent a long time studying in detail and depth the score of *An American Dream*. All this preparation and study, along with conclusions that were drawn at the end of the whole process and after the concert and recording procedures, are used to provide insights into *An American Dream*.

The Interview

Original sets of questions were sent to the composer of *An American Dream*, Frank Ticheli, and these, along with his replies, are attached at the end of this doctoral essay as appendix B. Ticheli’s interview gives an important insight to the creation and first performance of the work. Part of the interview, and the information that it provides,

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9 Bob Margolis, mbmband@aol.com, “On Ticheli’s music,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 25 October 2009.
is discussed in the fifth chapter of the current essay. The interview is also used to gather more specific information on textural, structural, and word-depiction issues in the songs.

**Recordings**

While there are many compact disc recordings of Ticheli’s music for band, currently there are only three commercially released sound recordings of some of his orchestral music. The former recordings were used as a reference for the general characterization of his compositional thought and personal style. The latter were used to illuminate issues of his orchestral writing, choices of color and orchestration, and compositional patterns. Along with those, the unreleased recordings of some of his works, with which the composer provided me, were used to help with the general overview of his complete orchestral output. Finally, the unreleased compact disc recording of the premiere of *An American Dream* was fundamental in the identification of some of the initial concepts on which Frank Ticheli and the Music Director of Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Carl St. Clair, worked closely, and how these led to the premiere of the work.

**Reviews**

Reviews from the press are mentioned mainly as a description of some of Ticheli’s music through the ears of the reviewers. They become a body of reference, which could help with conclusions towards the importance and impact this composer’s work has in the contemporary world of classical music.  

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Scholarly Literature

As mentioned earlier on, there are no scholarly works on Frank Ticheli’s music, apart from two. The D.M.A essay of John A. Darling, Ohio State University, 2001, and the D.M.A essay of Linda R. Moorhouse, University of Washington, 2006, were read and provided material for personal thought on Ticheli’s compositional style, as well as on possible similarities and differences between his compositional styles for concert band and symphony orchestra. John A. Darling’s thesis includes a section focused on Ticheli’s composition Postcard, written originally for wind ensemble and later transcribed for symphony orchestra, a piece overviewed here in the fourth chapter of this essay, but Darling’s essay mainly focuses on a harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic analysis. This is not my chosen way to work on Frank Ticheli’s repertoire in this essay, so it was only used as a reference to ideas of orchestration and uses of texture in the original form of this piece of music. Unfortunately, there is no other volume, book, thesis, or even article written specifically on Frank Ticheli’s orchestral compositions.

Summary

It is my hope that the sources available to me, along with my own study and various interviews with people related to An American Dream and Ticheli’s music in general, will address musical issues that might lead to a deeper understanding of An American Dream for preparation and performance and will provide insights into musicians’ understanding of Ticheli’s oeuvre.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

I have decided to give an overview solely of Frank Ticheli’s orchestral repertoire, and to specifically focus on his song cycle *An American Dream*. His works for concert band are numerous and have already become a major part of the band repertoire, so it would practically be impossible to mention and view all of them, and at the same time to analytically focus on one specific work. I feel that the study of his orchestral works will give a clearer understanding of his stylistic elements and will connect all his work, from its origins to the present time. Also, his works for symphony orchestra and soloist will demonstrate the ways in which Ticheli handles and treats the element of a soloist within a work. I believe that it is essential, if a proper analytical work is desired, to study in depth all the oeuvre of a composer. But, because here my intention is to focus on issues related to the conducting aspects and the performance of a specific work musically related to but not one of Ticheli’s band works, I feel that the analysis of his music for concert band, in this particular case, will not offer a deeper insight to what the current essay is aiming to accomplish.

Mr. Ticheli has provided me with scores of his orchestral works, either by sending to me the ones he handles personally or through facilitating my contact with Manhattan Beach Music. The work on all orchestral scores has been very important for the comprehension of Ticheli’s compositional style. Also, Ticheli agreed to be interviewed
by me.\textsuperscript{11} My direct communication with him has been vital for the real conclusions that can be drawn through first-hand contact with the creator of this piece.

The essay is structured according to the following outline:

1) Introduction, biographical and general background information
2) Review of related literature
3) Method
4) An overview of Ticheli’s orchestral oeuvre
5) Genesis of \textit{An American Dream}
6) Insights into \textit{An American Dream}
7) Performance related issues and assessment of the work for performance by orchestras of different levels.
8) Conclusions

Bibliography

Appendices

The first chapter provides the reader with essential information on Frank Ticheli and also gives basic background information for the creation and first performance of the work \textit{An American Dream}. The second chapter gives information on all accessible literature to me during the study of the work \textit{An American Dream}, as well as during the time of writing this thesis. The third chapter explains the method I chose to work on this particular work. The fourth chapter gives an overall view of all compositions by Frank Ticheli for symphony orchestra and for soloist and symphony orchestra. Historical

\textsuperscript{11} Frank Ticheli, ticheli@ref.usc.edu, “From Zoe Zeniodi on An American Dream,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 30 August 2009.
information on each piece is supplied. Program notes by the composer, where available, are also provided. Description of elements such as structure, use of instrumentation, orchestration, and lengths are provided. This chapter acts as a guide to the reader who would like to know more about Frank Ticheli’s orchestral output.

The fifth chapter of the essay concentrates solely on the song cycle *An American Dream*. This chapter strongly focuses on the genesis of the piece. The interview and comments by Frank Ticheli are utilized to their maximum. It includes information on the writing of the piece and its preparation for the premiere performance. At the end, reviews are also included.

The sixth chapter of this essay gives a general structural overview of the piece and supplies the reader with details on orchestration, usage of instruments, the composer’s efforts and decisions on word-painting and general depiction of the text, usage of his own typical cells of sound, treatment of the vocal line, melodic and rhythmic choices, and other elements that “create” a song cycle.

The seventh chapter of the work discusses issues related to the preparation for performance of the piece. The results of score study and recent experiences in rehearsal are used to summarize and resolve issues that might need attention. It also provides the writer’s thoughts on correctly programming the work and it includes the writer’s assessment on levels of difficulty for orchestras of various skill. This chapter will act as a guide for conductors who plan future performances of *An American Dream*.

The last chapter summarizes the investigation of Ticheli’s *An American Dream*. It discusses the importance of this work in the contemporary classical music of America, and the reasons for which it should be considered for additional performances.
I hope that my research, study, performance, and recording of Frank Ticheli’s *An American Dream*, provide the reader with a deeper insight into a contemporary song cycle and give sufficient information to musicians who would like to prepare the piece for presentation, or to simply understand and feel closer to the music of Frank Ticheli.
CHAPTER 4

AN OVERVIEW OF FRANK TICHELI'S ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Frank Ticheli is a composer mostly known for his works for band and wind ensemble. Lately, his orchestral oeuvre is receiving a greater number of performances than in past years. In this chapter, an overview of all his orchestral works is given. There is no proper documentation of Ticheli’s orchestral repertoire, apart from information given in the composer’s website.12 No other essay or article or book has ever been written on this composer’s orchestral repertoire. The writer of this essay feels it is quite essential to give information and details in an organized manner, thus providing a more complete guide to this specific repertoire in a chronological order and, in this way, exploring similarities and differences among works, and finally facilitating a deeper understanding of Ticheli’s compositional style and choices.

Description of instrumentation, approximate performance time, structural details and insights into each piece, as well as instructions by the composer, are provided. Also, reviews of performances are mentioned and cited.13


Ticheli kindly provided me with the scores and program notes for most of his orchestral pieces, and he also answered specific questions regarding information on those.¹⁴

For description of instrumentation, the standard form used in all books and scores, will be used. The standard form is as such; 2222/4331/Timp+2/strings. This translates to: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons/four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba/timpani plus two percussionists/strings.

Frank Ticheli has composed in total fourteen works for orchestra or for soloist(s) and orchestra. In chronological order of publication, these are:

*Images of a Storm*, 1983

*Concerto for trumpet and orchestra*, 1990

*Playing with Fire*, 1992

*Pacific Fanfare*, 1995

*Postcard*, 1995

*On Time’s Stream*, 1995

*Radiant Voices*, 1995

*An American Dream*, 1998

*Symphony No.1*, 2001

*Blue Shades*, 2002

*Shooting stars*, 2004

*An American Elegy*, 2008

*Angels in the Architecture*, 2009

*Concerto for clarinet and orchestra*, 2010

¹⁴ Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “From ZZ,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 17 January 2010
*Images of a Storm* is a piece that lasts ten minutes. The orchestral score and parts are available from the composer.⁵ The instrumentation of the piece is the typical for symphony orchestra, where the composer has added the so-called auxiliary instruments and he is also asking for an alto saxophone. As in other works of his, he is also calling for a harp. The instrumentation of *Images of a Storm* is: 3333+al.sax/4331/timp+3/hp/strings. *Images of a Storm* is Ticheli’s first composition for orchestra and it was composed in 1983. He considers this piece a pre-opus work, because he was very young when he wrote it and his style has changed dramatically since. Strangely, and in his own words: “Its language is by far the least tonal of any of my orchestra pieces, making it an interesting anomaly.”¹⁶ The specific piece has not been commercially recorded. It received the following prizes: Texas Sesquicentennial Orchestra Composition Contest, and the Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. It has received performances, in chronological order, by: The University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra, Gustav Meier, conductor (Feb. 1984), The Austin Symphony Orchestra, Sung Kwak, conductor (Sept. 1986), The American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Paul Dunkel conductor (Dec. 1989).

After the Carnegie Hall performance, New York, in December 1989, Bernard Holland of the New York Times wrote: “Lean and muscular are the adjectives for this

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¹⁶ Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On images of a storm.” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 24 January 2010.
one-movement piece, and above all, active, in motion. *Images of a Storm* has a dark energy that does not keep the listener waiting.”

The next piece Frank Ticheli composed was a concerto for trumpet and orchestra. It was composed in 1990 for Armando Ghitalla, who used to be the principal trumpet player with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. It lasts 16 minutes and the score is available from the composer. Its instrumentation is: 2222/2210/Timp+1/strings. Instead of overviewing or trying to analyze the piece, I am providing the program notes given to me by the composer:

My Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra was composed for the distinguished American trumpeter and pedagogue, Armando Ghitalla (1925-2001). The concerto celebrates Ghitalla’s virtuosity and lyrical sound. I first heard his playing on old Boston Symphony recordings made during his tenure as their principal trumpeter. Years later, after his retirement from the BSO and appointment to the faculty at the University of Michigan (where I was a student), I was fortunate enough to become well acquainted with the man, his gourmet cooking, and his splendid musicianship. My concerto was inspired not only by his musical gifts, but also his personal charm and wit. The first movement is a wild fanfare whose main theme is based on the pitches A and G (Mr. Ghitalla’s initials) forming the interval of a ninth. The dialogue between the soloist and orchestra gradually heats up, and by the end of the movement the two forces are in extreme opposition. The second movement, in contrast, is a peaceful song. It develops a simple, lyrical theme framing a prayer-like middle section. The final coda is a meditation on the notes A and G. The third movement is a driving rondo (A B A C A) with the C section recalling the fanfare idea from the first movement. A critical mass is achieved—a pressure cooker of excitement—exploding one last time into the final climax. The concerto was completed in January of 1990 and received its premiere performance on February 8, 1990 in San Antonio, Texas by the Winters Chamber Orchestra with Mr. Ghitalla as soloist.

Other performances of Ticheli’s Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra, include:

Memphis Symphony Orchestra, soloist Russell Devuyst (February 1991), Louisville

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18 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “From ZZ,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 17 January 2010.

The above work has not been commercially recorded but there is a recording of the 2002 performance that very kindly Mr. Ticheli provided me with. Studying the score and listening to this recording was an initial step in learning how Frank Ticheli treats the part of a solo instrument within a bigger orchestral structure. It is very obvious that the composer treats both orchestra and soloist as equal partners. He keeps both mediums in a constant dialogue, apart from the places where he gives the soloist a cadenza or cadenza-like iterations.

Mike Greenberg, of the San Antonio Express wrote: “…explodes with energy…The craftsmanship is first-rate, from the beautiful fit of the counterpoint to the expertly deployed orchestration. Yet this work is not classical in its bones; it’s much more free-wheeling, raucous, open-ended—American. The overflow crowd in Ruth Taylor Concert Hall responded with whoops and an extended ovation.”

The next work for orchestra by Frank Ticheli was composed two years later, in 1992. It shares itself, in the composer’s catalogue of works, between the orchestral pieces and the pieces for soloist and orchestra. Its nature is of a quite different fashion, as it is a piece for a seven-piece jazz band and orchestra and it is called Playing with Fire. The


work was composed for the Jim Cullum jazz band and the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra. It lasts approximately twenty-five minutes and it was composed as a celebration of the traditional jazz music Ticheli heard so often while growing up near New Orleans. After completing the work, Ticheli felt that the traditional jazz elements and influences dominate the work, not letting his own personal voice really come through.\textsuperscript{21} The first movement is titled \textit{Ray Bauduc}, and it is a tribute to this drummer who enjoyed striking his drumsticks on the bass g-string while the bassist improvised in g minor. The second movement is a lyrical, simple elegant blues and spiritual, entitled \textit{Shades of Blue}, and the third movement is called \textit{Polyphonies and Riffs}. In the composer’s description it is another pressure cooker of excitement, just like the third movement of the trumpet concerto.\textsuperscript{22}

The seven-piece jazz band includes: clarinet, cornet, trombone, piano, drums, string bass and banjo/guitar.\textsuperscript{23} The instrumentation for the orchestra is: 3222/4331/Timp+1/strings. As it includes many improvisatory passages for the jazz band, its timing could fluctuate a bit. Even though Frank Ticheli composed all the orchestral parts, it is commonly identified as a piece by Frank Ticheli and Jim Cullum.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22} Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On Playing with Fire,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 24 January 2010. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “Few things,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 27 March 2010. 
\end{flushright}
At its premiere, the piece had a phenomenal success and I am providing the reader with both reviews that were published immediately after.\textsuperscript{24} Mike Greenberg of the San Antonio Expess wrote: “Conventional wisdom has it that a symphony orchestra can swing about as well as a chicken can fly. Well, the chickens soared last night when the San Antonio Symphony under Christopher Wilkens teamed with the Jim Cullum Jazz Band in a new concerto by Ticheli and Cullum.” Diana Windeler states: “The piece is hot. Throughout the three movements, there was an almost palpable sense of ‘jamming’ between the two ensembles with enormous mutual respect. It was a swinging interplay that brought intermittent shouts and applause from a wildly appreciative audience…”\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Playing with Fire}, over the past eighteen years, has received many performances by the Jim Cullum Band and various orchestras throughout the United States of America.

The next four compositions were all published in 1995 when Frank Ticheli was already a composer-in-residence with the Pacific Symphony.

\textit{Radiant Voices} was published in 1995, but its composition had started in May 1992. The work was premiered in February 1993, by the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair, in the orchestra’s home, Segerstrom Hall of the Orange County Center for the Performing Arts. It has also been conducted by Carl St. Clair, with the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra, the Nashville Symphony and the Philadelphia Orchestra, among others. \textit{Radiant voices} is subtitled \textit{A Fantasy for Orchestra}, it lasts twenty minutes and it is scored:

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
3322/4331/Timp+3/hp/strings. The piece was commissioned by Carl St. Clair and the Pacific Symphony during Ticheli’s residency with them. Its composition started in May 1992, a week after the outbreak of Los Angeles riots. Frank Ticheli felt the need to compose a dramatic fantasy that would be powerful and optimistic, in this way creating a work that uses music as a medium of hope and joy amidst the turmoil.26

I am, at this point, citing part of the program notes adapted by Frank Ticheli for the Koch International Classics compact disc which also includes Corigliano’s Piano Concerto and Ticheli’s Postcard.27 In these, he is describing the main thematic material used throughout Radiant Voices.

Almost every note in the piece is derived from a simple five-note idea (B flat-C-F-E-G). These five notes constantly change in order, direction, register, speed and color, but without ever losing their identity completely. They serve as a musical thread holding together an otherwise disparate series of rapidly changing events. Sometimes these events are intimate, sometimes majestic, sometimes playful or even jazzy, but they all share the motive in some shape of form. Visually, one might compare this situation to that of a traveler in an automobile traversing a landscape marked by rapidly changing scenery.28

The reviews were especially warm, mentioning the piece as “…a stunning work…” and “…resounding success in several respects…”. They also refer to Ticheli as showing “…exemplary command of the orchestral medium…” and “…striking a balance between

26 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “From ZZ,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 17 January 2010.


28 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On Pacific fanfare 2,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 24 January 2010.
Postcard was originally composed for band. This is again a six-minute optimistic work by this composer. Its instrumentation is: 3222/4331/Timp + 3/strings and the percussion section includes various types of cymbals and drums, a vibraphone, a xylophone, a vibraslap, a slapstick and wood blocks. The program notes provided by the composer are quite clear and descriptive, thus leading me to find it appropriate to use them directly here:

Postcard was originally composed for H. Robert Reynolds in memory of his mother, Ethel Virginia Curry. He requested that I compose not an elegy commemorating his mother's death, but a short, feisty piece celebrating her life. In response, I composed my brief Postcard for wind band in the summer of 1991 as a musical reflection of her character--vivacious, whimsical, and succinct. I created the orchestral version of Postcard two years later for Carl St.Clair and the Pacific Symphony Orchestra, who gave the premiere performance at Segerstrom Hall on February 3, 1994. The piece is cast in a three-part form, and is filled with little musical games, which pay tribute to the Reynolds family. Its main theme is a melodic palindrome, honoring a long-standing tradition in the Reynolds family of giving their children palindromic names such as Hannah and Harrah. As the work progresses, the symmetry is obscured by elongating or cutting off the theme's tail. The middle section is based five notes derived from the dedicatee's name, Ethel: E (E natural) T (te in the solfeggio system, B flat) H (in the German system, B natural) E (E flat this time) L (la in the solfeggio system, A natural). This five-note motive is developed considerably, first appearing in an aggressive, angular context, and then evolving into a fast, lyrical melody. In the end, Postcard is nothing more than a gregarious tribute to a dear friend, honoring the life of his equally gregarious mother.30


Pacific Fanfare is six minutes long, scored for woodwinds, brass and percussion only. Frank Ticheli wrote it during a summer residency at Yaddo in 1994 and then offered it as a gift to his close friend Carl St. Clair and the Pacific Symphony. He includes this piece in his works for orchestra and concert band.

Its instrumentation is: 3223/5531/Timp+2/ (no strings). The orchestral winds and percussion are separated into onstage and offstage sections. Onstage, the brass and percussion sections are separated into two antiphonal choirs, with the woodwinds and timpani situated in the middle. Offstage, peripheral solo trumpet and horn project sounds from behind the audience. Its instrumentation makes it possible for various types of groups, like a band or a wind ensemble. It is available from Manhattan Beach Music, the main handler of Frank Ticheli’s music, apart from the composer himself.

In its compositional structure, there are two main themes going across the whole piece, one based on wide melodic leaps, the other based on a rapid repeated-note figure. They interrelate and dialogue with each other as the piece becomes grander towards its end. Ticheli, in his program notes, gives very specific details on the set-up and its possibilities, on thematic and harmonic material, and finally, on rehearsal techniques.31

The piece is a tribute to the great Venetian composer, Giovanni Gabrieli, whose use of antiphonal choirs brilliantly utilized the space of the San Marco cathedral in Venice. Its first performance was with the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair and received a great review by Daniel Cariaga of the Los Angeles Times.32

31 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On Pacific fanfare 2,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 24 January 2010.

On Time’s Stream premiere performance by the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair, conductor, in 1995, received the following review by Scott Duncan, Orange County Register:

On Time’s Stream is the most assured work yet from the orchestra’s 37-year old composer, who seems to grow with every composition. Ticheli exerts a fastidious control of his musical materials… Ticheli’s work is luminously clear, yet never simple; accessible but never bound by programmatic meanings. The PSO can be glad the composer has re-upped for another two-year appointment.

When I asked for more details on the piece, I received the following reply: “On Time’s Stream was cannibalized by Symphony No.1…” Obviously, it is a piece worth to be reworked and expanded to a larger form. It is still available from the composer, it lasts seventeen minutes and its instrumentation is: 3322/4331/Timp+3/pno/strings.

In chronological order, Ticheli’s An American Dream follows. In-depth information on the piece, its genesis, its structure, the way Ticheli uses compositional devices for word-painting, and all other details on this work, will be provided in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the current thesis. Here, I have decided to only mention the length and instrumentation of the piece, so that it can rightly be placed in the current overview of his orchestral music, in chronological order.

An American Dream was composed in 1998 for the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair, and it is the last piece Frank Ticheli wrote as a composer-in-residence there. It lasts approximately thirty-eight minutes and it is scored for soprano and an orchestra of: 3233/4331/Timp+3/hp/pno/strings.

33 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On Pacific fanfare 2,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 24 January 2010.
After the composition and premiere performance of *An American Dream*, Ticheli, in 1999, composed the work *Blue Shades*. It was published in 2000 and its instrumentation is: 3232+al. sax./4331/Timp + 3/strings. It is handled by Manhattan Beach Music and lasts eleven minutes. As the title reflects, there are elements of ‘blues’ music in this piece, hence the use of an alto saxophone in its instrumentation. Even so, Ticheli does not consider this piece a “blues” piece. Its thematic material does not include any twelve-bar blues progression and, except for few isolated sections indicated in the score, the eighth note is not swung. The piece was originally written for concert band for a consortium of thirty ensembles from throughout the United States, and one of the main reasons for its composition was the composer’s experiment and wish to write a piece in a “jazz” style, including his own compositional elements and fully created in his unique composition style. He was driven to that path, after the initial feelings he had had with the composition and performance of his earlier piece *Playing with Fire*. Since its composition, *Blue Shades* has received numerous performances by orchestras such as the Lansing Symphony, the Omaha Symphony and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

The piece that followed next, written in 2001, is Ticheli’s *Symphony No.1*. The work was commissioned by the University of Miami School of Music, and received its premiere performance on the closing night of *Festival Miami*, on October 25, 2001, by conductor Thomas Sleeper and the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra. Its scoring is: 3322/4331/Timp+3/strings and the last movement includes the voice of a

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tenor or a baritone, as stated in the score. Ticheli’s *Symphony No. 1* lasts thirty minutes and has four movements:

1. *Of Youth*
2. *Of Wisdom*
3. *Profanation*
4. *Prayer*

The program notes written and sent to me by the composer are quite large in size and I have decided not to provide them here but overview them and state the main points that create and describe the basic elements and mood of the symphony. According to Frank Ticheli, *Symphony No. 1* represents a journey of a soul – from innocence, to introspection, to darkness, and finally to enlightenment.35

The first movement of the symphony is characterized by a youthful energy, through the use of bells, clear textures and bright harmonies. It represents vivid aural images of a spring morning and, in general, an expression of hope. Thematic material moves quickly throughout the movement, creating a sense of a childlike impatience and motion.

The second movement, even if tightly joined to the first through similar melodic and harmonic elements, is acting like the first movement’s alter ego. The bright passages become somber and lyrical, thus creating a sense of introspection. Instruments like the clarinet and bassoon get beautiful solo lines, and after many modulations the piece achieves a long space and time of calmness. Near its end, themes from the first

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35 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “From ZZ,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 17 January 2010.
movement keep sounding but are only used as recollections in vague ways, placing the listener into a fleeting state of dreams.

The third movement of the symphony is the one representing a crisis of faith. Like other composers in the past, Ticheli uses the key of D minor for exploring “dark” elements in this movement. In this way, the composer also pays tribute to Mozart, who has strongly been associated with this key, when trying to symbolize struggle (e.g., famous segments in Don Giovanni or Requiem in D minor).

The last movement of the symphony is the setting of an original poem by Frank Ticheli, which is provided at the end of this paragraph. The poem has a strong dramatic flow and it is used to bring together all the previous elements that appear in this symphony. Ticheli is using words and word painting extensively in this movement. The actual poem uses images that were musically depicted earlier on. As Ticheli mentions in his program notes, this movement from its very beginning searches in vain for resolution. He wanders in various tonal areas to achieve this effect, and after some time it stabilizes itself in the area of B minor. Resignation and vulnerability are explored in this key, with the use of earlier thematic material, and soon the music brightens up again, in this way moving to resolution and transcendence. The original poem of Frank Ticheli is inserted here:

**Movement IV: Prayer**

*I want to hear the sounds of hope—*  
*Of big church bells and distant horns,*  
*Sounds that wash away the wars*  
*And arouse the human heart.*  
*A sure harmony gliding over a sea of stillness.*

*I want to play the sounds of peace—*  
*Of sighing winds and rustling leaves,*
Sounds that silence troubled thoughts
And calm the spirit’s raging storms.
A song of serenity from high atop an ancient hill.

But my harp is stilled by voices—
Children, hungry, crying out.
Their dreams, windswept,
My house of wisdom, a web of sorrow.

I only know that I am longing...

And then... I catch a glimpse—
An ancient tree... an open gaze,
Some eternal euphony
That dances upon the light.
And for one fleeting moment, I know...

I am the sound of hope,
The instrument of peace,
The song within the Song.

The premiere of the symphony in Gusman Hall, University of Miami, received excellent reviews. Lawrence A. Johnson wrote: “Ticheli’s symphony is a powerful, deeply felt work, crafted with imagination, flair and melodic warmth… Ticheli’s symphony is a very impressive work, and Friday night’s performance was an unalloyed triumph. The 43-year old composer fairly bounded onstage in excitement to share in the sustained ovation.”36 James Roos from the Miami Herald stated: “Frank Ticheli’s First Symphony put a rousing period to Festival Miami… Brilliantly effective in four close-knit movements, it echoes lonely Copland in its brisk striding from the brassy optimism of youth, through contemplation and loss of innocence to prayer.”37 Symphony No.1 is recorded and released by Albany Records.


37 Ibid.
The next piece Frank Ticheli composed was again a commission from the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair, for the occasion of the opening concert of their 25th anniversary season, on October 8 and 9, 2003. The piece is called *Shooting Stars* and it is one of Ticheli’s shortest compositions, lasting four and a half minutes. In Ticheli’s words: “It is offered as a symbol of my enduring friendship with conductor Carl St. Clair, and as a gesture of thanks for the seven years I enjoyed as the Pacific Symphony's Composer in Residence.”

Originally, St. Clair requested a short fanfare for the occasion. But as Ticheli had, years before, created the *Pacific Fanfare*, he now decided to compose a piece that evoked an ecstatic dance of a breathless and bright quality. For this reason, Ticheli is using throughout the composition “white-note” clusters, suggesting bright light. He also, in matters of articulation, uses *staccato* chords for the low brass and strings, and in general, the whole piece is based on a series of short, fleeting events, finishing explosively. The title *Shooting Stars* came after the completion of the piece. Its instrumentation asks for: 3232/4331/Timp+3/pno/strings and it is available from Manhattan Beach Music.

*An American Elegy* is the next piece in this overview. It was actually composed long before it came out in its orchestral version in 2008. *An American Elegy* was commissioned by the Columbine Commissioning Fund, a special project sponsored by the Alpha Iota Chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi at the University of Colorado on behalf of the Columbine High School Band. It was composed in memory of those who lost their lives at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, and to honor the survivors, and it received

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38 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “From ZZ,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 17 January 2010.
its premiere performance, a year later, by the Columbine High School Band on April 23, 2000 and the composer himself, conducting. The orchestral version was commissioned by the Patel Conservatory Tampa Bay Youth Orchestra. It lasts eleven minutes, its orchestration is: 2222/4331/Timp+2/strings and, again, it is available from Manhattan Beach Music. The initial composition material, which forms the first eight bars of the piece, came to Frank Ticheli fully formed in a dream. In his program notes, he mentions: “Virtually every element of the work was discovered within the span of about two weeks. The remainder of my time was spent refining, developing, and orchestrating.”

In the same program notes, the composer, in great detail, describes the structural and harmonic form of the piece, gives clear performance notes, and also gives directions for placing players in the orchestra and outside, as the piece includes an off-stage solo for a trumpet player. The above details will not be used for this overview of his orchestral works, as they would form an analysis of a different kind. One aspect of the piece, though, has to be mentioned. When Ticheli found out that the Columbine High School did not have a “school song” he composed an Alma Mater for them. In An American Elegy he actually quotes himself by using this same Alma Mater as one of its climactic points.

Angels in the Architecture was commissioned by Kingsway International, and received its premiere performance at the Sydney Opera House on July 6, 2008, performed by a massed band of young musicians from the countries of Australia and the United States, Matthew George, conductor. Its orchestral version received its premiere by the USC Thornton Symphony on November 13, 2008, Donald Crockett, conductor. Angels in the Architecture was commissioned by Kingsway International, and received its premiere performance at the Sydney Opera House on July 6, 2008, performed by a massed band of young musicians from the countries of Australia and the United States, Matthew George, conductor. Its orchestral version received its premiere by the USC Thornton Symphony on November 13, 2008, Donald Crockett, conductor. Angels in the Architecture was commissioned by Kingsway International, and received its premiere performance at the Sydney Opera House on July 6, 2008, performed by a massed band of young musicians from the countries of Australia and the United States, Matthew George, conductor. Its orchestral version received its premiere by the USC Thornton Symphony on November 13, 2008, Donald Crockett, conductor. 

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39 Ibid.
*in the Architecture* is a fourteen-minute piece and its instrumentation calls for:

3332/4331/Timp+4/celesta, organ (optional)/soprano/strings. In the preface of the full score, he mentions that in the place of a soprano, a boy soprano could be used. He gives instructions on stage placement and also of vocal style to be used. Ticheli’s instrumentation for the percussion section is a bit more demanding compared to his previous orchestral output. He asks for the mainstream percussive instruments (e.g., various types of drums and cymbals), he also asks for somewhat less common percussive instruments (e.g., ratchet, slapstick) and, finally, he calls for tuned whirlies and crystal wineglasses. Crystal wineglasses have been used in the percussion section for centuries, but they are not easy to tune and handle. Tuned whirlies are “…simply flexible, corrugated tubes or hoses with an average diameter of approximately one to two inches, and – once cut – a length of approximately three to four feet.”

Frank Ticheli gives long and clear instructions on how to tune and play both the crystal wineglasses and the whirlies. He finds them essential for the color and mood creation of the piece, but he is not strictly demanding where as regards their pitch, and he clearly explains the reasoning behind it. As Ticheli’s program notes are very informative, here again, I am providing those unaltered:

*Angels in the Architecture* unfolds as a dramatic conflict between the two extremes of human existence—one divine, the other evil. The work’s title is inspired by the Sydney Opera House itself, with its halo-shaped acoustical ornaments hanging directly above the performance stage. I was also inspired by the following quote by 20th-century Catholic mystic and writer, Thomas Merton: "The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair is due to the fact that it was built by someone capable of believing that an angel might come and sit on it."

*Angels in the Architecture* begins with a single voice singing a 19th-century Shaker song:

40 Ibid.
I am an angel of Light
I have soared from above
I am cloth’d with Mother’s love.
I have come, I have come,
To protect my chosen band
And lead them to the promised land.

This “angel” (represented by the singer) frames the work, surrounding it with a protective wall of light and establishing the divine. Other representations of light—played by instruments rather than sung—include an ancient Hebrew song of peace ("Hevenu Shalom Aleichem"), and the well-known 16th-century Genevan Psalter, “Old Hundredth”. These three borrowed songs, despite their differing religious origins, are meant to transcend any one religion, representing the more universal human ideals of peace, hope, and love. An original chorale, appearing twice in the work, represents my own personal expression of these aspirations. In opposition, turbulent, fast-paced music appears as a symbol of darkness, death, and spiritual doubt. Twice during the musical drama, these shadows sneak in almost unnoticeably, slowly obscuring, and eventually obliterating the light altogether. The darkness prevails for long stretches of time, but the light eventually returns, inextinguishable, more powerful than before. The alternation of these opposing forces creates, in effect, a kind of five-part rondo form (light—darkness—light—darkness—light). Just as Charles Ives did more than a century ago, Angels in the Architecture poses the unanswered question of existence. It ends as it began: the angel reappears with the same comforting words. But deep below, a final shadow reappears—distantly, ominously.”

The composer gives a clear formal and harmonic analysis for his work and also pays specific attention to problems that might occur, like mute effects for the trombones and jet-whistle effects for the flutes. The score uses standard notation, and there are only a few places where a conductor might have to find ways to rehearse the piece effectively. Places like these are: the opening bars, where the voice is used in recitativo style and the measures are not supposed to be conducted, or the end of the work, where all the instrumentalists, apart from the solo voice, tuba, timpani and celesta, are called to hum actual pitches instead of playing their instruments.41

41 Frank Ticheli, Angels in the Architecture, (California: Frank Ticheli, 2008), 1-3, 68-70.
The most recent piece Ticheli has written has not been given a premiere performance at the time of writing this thesis. No reviews are available but Mr. Ticheli, very kindly again, sent me the score and all his instructions. Ticheli’s *Concerto for clarinet and orchestra* was sent to me as a pdf attachment to an email dated January 27, 2010. The *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* was commissioned by the clarinetist Håkan Rosengren, and will receive its premiere performance by him and the Lithuania National Orchestra, Robert Sverenikas, conductor, on April 17, 2010. The American premiere will take place at Round Top on July 10, 2010 with the same soloist and the Texas Festival Orchestra, JoAnn Falletta, conductor. The piece lasts twenty-one minutes and its instrumentation is: solo clarinet and 3222/2231/0+3/pno/strings. Here again, as in his latest pieces, Frank Ticheli explores more interesting percussive sounds in his orchestrations, asking for a flexatone, bongos, a vibraslap and a very large slapstick, among others.

The concerto’s three movements are composed as tributes to three twentieth-century American icons, George Gershwin, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, and bear their first names (George, Aaron, Lenny) respectively as main titles in each movement. The first movement of the concerto includes two direct quotes from Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, but apart from those, the rest of the compositional material is completely original, based though on rhythmic material of a jazz influence. The second movement, *Aaron*, does not quote Copland’s music at all, but it is actually an adaptation of the sixth song from the work mainly discussed in this essay, *An American Dream*.

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42 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On clarinet concerto,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 27 January 2010.
Ticheli writes: “this movement is an adaptation of my earlier work, as it seemed not only suitable to me, but even pre-destined for the clarinet.”  

He decided to use the previous material because it has a gentle, song-like quality that is normally heard in Copland’s slow movements. The third movement, Lenny, has a passionate, enthusiastic, jazzy feeling to it. At some point, it takes off in double-time and dances its way to the end. The score and parts are handled by Manhattan Beach Music. 

As an epilogue to this chapter, I will mention that in February 2010, I was one of the main speakers in the National CODA (College Orchestras’ Directors’ Association) conference, where I verbally presented a short overview of Ticheli’s orchestral repertoire. I was surprised to find out that no member of the audience had at the time any idea of this composer’s orchestral work, knowing him mainly as a band composer. The audience was very excited to be offered information on these works and really interested in exploring more of this repertoire. Through this experience I believe that an organized current overview of Frank Ticheli’s orchestral output is helpful to all types of readers, and quite essential in a historical way for America’s contemporary music-making.

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43 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “Extra questions,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 26 March 2010.
CHAPTER 5

AN AMERICAN DREAM: THE GENESIS

Frank Ticheli was Composer in Residence with the Pacific Symphony from 1991 to 1998. During his residency, he composed, among other pieces, the following for the specific orchestra: Radiant Voices, Postcard, Pacific Fanfare, On Time’s Stream, and An American Dream. After the end of his residency, he received more commissions by the Pacific Symphony and its music director, Carl St. Clair, but these pieces were not part of the original contract for his residency. To date, the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair continue working closely with Ticheli, programming works by him, the most recent being a performance of Blue Shades on March 18-20, 2010.\textsuperscript{44}

The last piece Frank Ticheli wrote for the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair, during his residency, was the song cycle An American Dream, subtitled by the composer A Symphony of Songs for Soprano and Orchestra. The piece received its premiere performance in the orchestra’s homeplace, Segerstrom Concert Hall for the Performing Arts, Orange County, on April 15 and 16, 1998. The soprano was Camellia Johnson and the texts for the song cycle were created by the writer and poet Philip Littell.

In order to acquire correct and substantive information on the creation of this work, I decided to interview Frank Ticheli. The set of questions were sent to him via electronic mail and they are included complete in Appendix B of this essay. The content

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of this chapter is based exclusively on the recent interview between Frank Ticheli and myself.

Frank Ticheli received information on the commission for a song cycle at least two years before its completion and premiere. This would be the last work written as part of his residency. When I questioned Mr. Ticheli on his feelings at the time, and the effect that the end of the collaboration had on this specific work, he replied that he just knew he wanted to create something “ambitious” and memorable, as he wanted to finish his residency on a “high note.” Creating a song cycle that lasts thirty-eight minutes is certainly not an easy task. Compared to many song cycles written for the medium of voice and orchestra, it is one of the longest in the repertoire, with most song cycles normally lasting up to thirty minutes.

He had been acquainted with the poet Philip Littell through a colleague of his, Stephen Hartke, distinguished Professor of Composition at the Thornton School of Music, USC, who had previously collaborated with Littell for the creation of the work Sons of Noah, written in 1996. According to Ticheli, the texts for An American Dream were created for this specific work and during its writing time. The title An American Dream was chosen by Philip Littell, and Frank Ticheli gives an insight into this in his interview: “The singer represents a sleeper (America) getting through a tough night (the century’s night).”

The texts are written with a female character in mind. Ticheli knew Camellia Johnson and wanted to compose specifically for her voice. The song cycle has a very demanding vocal range for the singer, an issue that will be discussed in the next two
chapters of this thesis. Ticheli knew Ms. Johnson’s “dynamic, vocal, and stylistic range” and he accordingly tailored the work for her.

Philip Littell created the texts for *An American Dream* in the order that they appear in the song-cycle, apart from one. The sixth song of the cycle, which bears the title *See?...*, was the last to be created. According to Ticheli, Mr. Littell strongly resisted this text and Mr. Ticheli feels that there is even hesitancy in the poem itself. Ticheli, however, felt that this was a very essential part of the song cycle and was very happy to insert it after all the other songs were composed. When I asked Mr. Ticheli about his collaboration with the poet, he replied: “Philip and I collaborated, negotiated, fought, pleaded, and finally, hugged each other. We worked together in a very intense and sometimes painful, mostly joyous way.”

He explains in his interview how this collaboration worked also in sense of actual handling of the texts between them. He mentions how Littell kept writing until Ticheli was happy with the result, and, when asked about Littell’s influence on the texts after they were already turned into songs, Ticheli replied: “He added the word "sister" to the end of poem 3, which caused me serious problems. But it's partly my fault. I wanted to end song 3 with a repeat of the words, "you want to fight?," followed by a BOOM. Philip said, "I have a better idea," and added the word, "sister".”

The composition of *An American Dream* began in June 1997 and the first four songs were completed before September 1, 1997, a date that marks the birth of Ticheli’s daughter, Hannah. He then continued the compositional process in October and finished the whole song cycle by mid-November 1997. After the initial sketches, he created a piano-vocal score, which was also used by Camellia Johnson during her learning of the
work. The orchestration of the piece was finished in March 1998, and the full score bears a dedication to the composer’s daughter.

My first question to Frank Ticheli, which will also be handled later on in this essay, was on the subtitle of the piece. After the main title, *An American Dream*, Frank Ticheli writes *A Symphony of Songs for Soprano and Orchestra*. This is a very intriguing subtitle to a song cycle as it brings up questions of form and structure in their most basic elements. So, I asked Mr. Ticheli if he considers this work a song cycle or a symphony. He replied that *An American Dream* is both. If investigated under the “light” of a text-driven work, then it is certainly a song cycle, as it is strongly narrative and there is a story that follows through. Ticheli here used a comparison to Schubert’s *Winterreise*. At the same time, and through the melodic material and specific motives used throughout, it is obvious that a symphony-like structure is created.

Before the completion of the orchestration of the work, Frank Ticheli rehearsed privately with Camellia Johnson in Indiana. As the song cycle is very demanding in many layers, Ticheli mentions that actually, the only slight problem he faced during those early rehearsals was one of a rhythmic nature on Ms. Johnson’s part. But, as it was really early on, when they met for the final rehearsals with orchestra and the premiere, the whole vocal part was very solid and actually Carl St. Clair was very good in helping the singer with some of the entrances.

*An American Dream* received the usual three orchestral rehearsals plus a dress rehearsal before the performance. According to Ticheli’s recalling, the rehearsals “flowed beautifully” and he describes the Pacific Symphony as an orchestra of amazing players with a world-class conductor, which led easily and quickly to the birth of the piece.
During the rehearsals he worked closely with Carl St. Clair. He states that they always work well together, very efficiently, and with mutual respect. From a more personal point of view, he says: “We've known each other for so long, we have an almost symbiotic relationship. We each know what the other is thinking much of the time. And yet we can still surprise each other too.”

After the premiere, very few things were altered in the score, mainly some dynamic issues and adjustments in the first song of the song cycle. When asked about the feelings after the premiere, Frank Ticheli said: “Philip and I were both elated. Carl, too, loved it…and ended up doing it again with the Detroit Symphony two seasons later.”

Frank Ticheli, apart from this song cycle, has composed two works that include voice. His *Symphony No.1* calls for a tenor or baritone in its last movement, where the text is an original poem by the composer himself. One of his latest works, *Angels in the Architecture*, also includes a soprano or a boy-soprano throughout. I asked Ticheli if he considers or has any future plans on collaborating again with a writer and creating another large-scale song cycle and he replied he would. He then gave me information on his upcoming composition, a commission of a large-scale work by the Pacific Chorale, a work for orchestra and chorus, based on secular texts by his colleague and friend David St. John. The work will be premiered in 2012 by the Pacific Symphony and the 160-member Pacific Chorale, John Alexander, conductor. Frank Ticheli and David St. John have collaborated already four times in the past in a course developed at USC by Frank Ticheli, called *Writer and Composer*. It seems a very interesting course on the creation of vocal music, as it involves graduate students from the composition department, the vocal
department and the creative writing department, which leads to a three-way collaboration among them. Ticheli’s last phrase on the description of the course was: “It’s heaven!”

At this point, I am including reviews from various performances of the song cycle

*An American Dream*:45

..a magnificent expression of our time… The Detroit Symphony’s eastern U.S. premiere of Ticheli’s new song-cycle is an object lesson in what an infusion of new blood should do for any arts organization. DSO patrons… responded to Ticheli’s touching, unsettling Dream with a ripping ovation. In a compellingly eclectic style that ranges from mournful offstage trumpet reminiscent of Mahler to the sturdy vocal bearing of Britten, Ticheli has framed and heightened Littell’s spare language, giving it a credible resonance of city and soul…classical music seemed as full of promise as the new century at hand.

Lawrence B. Johnson, Detroit News

the work is, not unexpectedly given Ticheli’s previous orchestral pieces, attractive and accessible. But it has an edge, and it is not…in the least glib or shallow. Littell’s words are poetry of simplicity and depth, feeling and intuition, and Ticheli sets them in a masterly way. The finale resonates with new-found awe and optimism.

Daniel Cariaga, Los Angeles Times

This highly accessible 1998 work portrays the anxieties and hopes of late 20th century America through a woman’s dreams, insomnia and awakening. Ticheli, professor of composition at the University of Southern California, uses tonality and atonality, an array of orchestral colors and lyric passages leavened by ominous, dissonant harmonies to bring out the sensibilities of the country at the end of the century. Zeniodi drew maximum tension from the opening sequences, bringing the quiet dreamlike section to a great climax. The orchestra played brilliantly. Dramatic runs in the strings over mysterious harmonies in wind and brass came off flawlessly. The jazzy third song was energetic and well phrased.

David Fleshler, South Florida Classical Review, November 22, 2009

CHAPTER 6

AN AMERICAN DREAM: INSIGHTS

*An American Dream* is the only song cycle created by Frank Ticheli, and it is his longest work, lasting approximately thirty-eight to forty minutes. It bears the subtitle *A Symphony of Songs for Soprano and Orchestra*. In this chapter, my aim is to examine elements of the work and give insights into it. I am not going to use a formal analytical method, such as a harmonic analysis, as this is not what the particular work is calling for. It has been created as a song cycle and carries within it material and elements that give it a symphony-like structure. All the above will be clearly explained.

As a big part of my life has been spent on very specific and intense work on vocal accompaniment, and mainly in the repertoire of song, which is based and heavily influenced by poetic texts, I feel that the approach of viewing the song cycle through the word depiction and striving for exploration of word painting by the composer, as it is a text-driven composition, is the immediate and most appropriate one. At the same time, various other elements, such as melodic material and cells that run throughout the cycle, choices of coloring through instrumentation, devices used to create specific effects, tempi, structural points and sections within each song, use of the vocal line and its interrelation to other instruments, will all be explored.

I will initially give a general structural overview of the song cycle in its entirety and then I will examine each song separately, to finally conclude with thoughts on Ticheli’s treatment of text and music created for it. The complete poetic texts are inserted
at the end of this thesis as Appendix A. I feel it is very important for them to exist and be presented on their own as a whole set, because they are narrative within themselves and they – like most poetic texts – have a life of their own. Having said this, as I move through each song separately, each time the single poem for the relevant song will be provided. I also find it essential to be able to use the texts separately, as each one presents different qualities and issues that have to be examined. In this way, it will also be easier and quicker for the reader to understand the whole process of the examination, as the texts will be readily available.

Apart from that, in my view of the specific texts, each poem stands as a complete work on its own, an element that should be respected and honored, by giving each poem, and consequently each song, its space and time within the frame of the larger picture of the song cycle. At the end conclusions will be drawn on how Frank Ticheli creates at the same time a song cycle and a symphony of songs. Musical examples will be used throughout to highlight and visibly explain my approach.

*An American Dream* is written for a soprano soloist and an orchestra, which consists of the following: 3233/4331/timp+3/hp/pno/strings. The instrumentation for the percussion section is provided in full detail, especially because the percussion section is asking for many – and sometimes not so standard - instruments, which are, in this case, used for orchestral coloring. The rest of the instrumentation is quite normal, with Ticheli using the standard form of a large orchestra plus the auxiliary instruments. In this work of his, Ticheli makes effective use of harp and piano in this song cycle.
Percussion 1: Vibraphone, Hi-hat, small and medium Suspended Cymbal, medium Triangle, large Slapstick, 4 Tom toms, small dry Bass Drum (or Pedal Bass Drum), small Rain Stick

Percussion 2: Glockenspiel, Crotales (lower octave only), medium Suspended Cymbal, small Triangle, Tambourine, Vibraslap, 2 Woodblocks (small and large), Tam Tam (very large)

Percussion 3: Marimba, Snare Drum, small thin Suspended Cymbal, medium Chinese Cymbal, Maracas (two pairs held in each hand), Ratchet, large Bass Drum

The titles of the songs of *An American Dream* are:

I. *Outside, on the other side of the window*...

II. *Outside the trees are still*...

III. *Outside in the night, a woman cried out*...

IV. *Leaves burning*...

V. *No moon in the sky*...

VI. *See?*...

VII. *Outside, all along the rim of the world’s horizon*...

In the song cycle, Frank Ticheli asks for the second song to be “attacca” followed by the third song. He also asks for the last three songs to move continuously without a break. In my personal view of structure, this creates larger sections within the seven songs, thus almost transforming the work into four different movements, which could easily be compared to the structure of a typical four-movement symphonic form. At the same time the piece is definitely composed under the structure of a song cycle. The author of this
thesis knows that the symphony-like structure is her personal viewing of the work and is
not trying in any way to convince the reader to accept the thought.

At this point, I will provide the reader with the original program notes Frank
Ticheli wrote. They were very useful as an initial step in understanding his musical
choices and they also describe, in a more personal view, what Frank Ticheli feels this
song cycle is about:¹

…the work’s seven songs address the conscious and unconscious sea of anxiety
during the winding down of twentieth-century America. The anxiety is
symbolized through the world of dreams. The night which passes, is not literally
a night, but a lifetime’s night. In the end, the work reveals itself as a heart-felt
expression of hope. Songs 1, 2, and 4, deal with the sleeper’s unconscious
thoughts—the world of dreams. The musical setting for each of these three songs
is in some form or another, symmetrical. Song #1 is built entirely on an eight-
note symmetrical scale; song #2 uses chords, which are symmetrical from top to
bottom; song #4 is a palindrome (sounds the same played forwards or backwards).
The aim of these various symmetries is to depict the image of a mirror—a portrait
of the inner self, seen during each dream. The other four songs (nos. 3, 5, 6, and
7) deal more with the sleeper’s conscious thoughts, and are set in more traditional
tonal structures. Although these songs provide a dramatic contrast to the other
three, they are united by the use of a four-note motto (e, g, d, b), which runs
through the entire song cycle.

In my interview with Ticheli, when I asked further questions on the choice of
symmetrical and non-symmetrical material for each song, he made one more comment on
the songs that are set in more traditional tonal structures: “They use the asymmetry of
tonality.”²

¹ Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM MATERIAL,” e-mail to
Zoe Zeniodi, zzeniodi@gmail.com, 8 October 2009

² Frank Ticheli, interview by author, electronic mail, March 26, 2010.
I.  *Outside, on the other side of the window...*

Outside,
On the other side
Of the window,
It does blow.

And below the house,
Underneath the house,
It does breathe;
The ground, it moves.

All across the sky
The clouds are moving.
Moves the moon.  Peeping,
Moves a star.

And the sleeper
In his bed also moves;
He moves
And travels far,

Cast upon the ever moving waters turning of a
Creeping wrinkling shivering naked sea,
Cast ashore upon an Oceanid’s island,
Herself cast up volcanically.

Wake the cast away
Or the long ago will
Take him, cast aside,
Back to itself

And toss him back into the blackened water
Where the tides and where the currents and the winds squirm
Against the spin of that drunk the earth
On her crazy path across the hell of heaven.  Go!

All night moving,
He is floating, sinking, diving, drifting, bottom-feeding, surfacing,
The strongest swimmer...Fish him out:
He drowned

Following this, I insert the composer’s short program notes on the first song of *An American Dream.*
The song is in two parts, the first establishing a mysterious, nocturnal setting, the second stormy, at times violent, depicting the dream. All aspects of the dream music—the harmonies, rhythms, dynamics, melodic gestures—are blurred. Underneath the singer, dark sonorities roil and clash against one another as a depiction of the turbulent ebb and flow of the sea.

**Overall structure**

The opening song of the cycle lasts approximately eight to eight and a half minutes and it consists of 146 measures. The song is divided in two main parts. Part A goes to measure 41 and Part B starts at measure 42 with the following text “Cast upon the ever moving waters.” The composer clearly marks the two different parts by the use of double-bar lines. However, he inserts double-bar lines once more in the song—a fact that could mislead one into thinking that the song is in three parts. This happens in measure 54 with the entrance of a large orchestral interlude. The double-bar line here is inserted only because there is a change in the tempo marking and because Ticheli intended to “paint the image of a swimmer being tossed by a stormy sea. It was necessary to break the narrative for that purpose.”

I will now continue with part A of the first song.

**Part A (measures 1-41)**

**Structure and use of tempi**

The first section lasts forty-one measures. The marking by the composer is “Mysterious”. This is a slow section, moving mostly steadily, apart from some minor fluctuations in the tempo which are created in order to suit and describe the text: “the ground, it moves…” (e.g., fig. 1, measures 19-20, accelerando followed by ritenuto and return to the original tempo, figure 2, measures 21-22). Figure 1 is provided as page 46 of the current paper, and figure 2 as page 47.

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3 Frank Ticheli, interview by author, electronic mail, March 26, 2010.
Figure 1. Measures 18-20, Song 1, *Outside, on the other side of the window*...

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
Figure 2. Measures 21-24, Song 1, *Outside on the other side of the window*...

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
These fluctuations are intended to give a slight motion within the section and change the sense of stillness created by the composer. Structurally, as they are placed in the middle of part A and they lead to a return to the initial quiet tempo, they also act as an architectural arch.

**Use of dynamics**

The dynamic level of part A ranges from *pppp* to *f*, but in general it remains on the side of *pp* or *p*. All this softness creates a wonderful, nocturnal image, implying darkness and stillness. The composer makes excellent and effective use of crescendos and diminuendos in the whole of the song. He hardly leaves a line without a dynamic change to it. The pattern he uses, even in the shortest of iterations, is one of a ‘swell,’ in this way creating movement and intensity within each cell. It is given to the trombones, measures 18-20, in fig. 1, p. 46, also to the bass drum, when it joins with the same figure. It can also be seen in fig.2, p. 47, in measure 21 with a similar line given to the clarinet, or in measures 23 and 24, where the ‘swell’ is given to the woodwind section over two bars. Another way in which Ticheli creates the sense of a ‘swell’ is by the use of repeated notes getting faster at those specific points (e.g., trumpet in measure 19, fig.1, p. 46 and clarinet in measure 21, fig.2, p. 47). In the rest of part A, and when movement is not implied, the lines remain soft, apart from some solo lines given *mp*, *mf* or *f* to instruments that take over the previous statement of the singer and continue it.

**Treatment of voice and instruments**

The above statement leads to a discussion of the treatment of the interrelation between the instruments and the voice. Every time the voice enters, it is cued by a small sudden cell given to either the percussion section (measures 4, 12 and 18), to the piano
(measures 12, 24 and 36) or to the harp (measure 18). Some of those can be seen in fig. 1, p. 46 (measures 18-20), fig. 2, p. 47 (measures 21-24) and fig. 3, p. 51 (measures 1-4). All of the above are used as part of the coloring within the large layers already created, but are quite important, as they mark entrances and differences in the text. Similarly, and on the issue of interrelation, Ticheli in this first part always gives solo melodic lines to some instruments when the voice finishes a phrase of the poem. An example can be seen in fig. 2, p. 47, measure 21, where the flute line is doubled by the harp and finishes off the previous statement of the voice.

As an outcome of all the above, it is very obvious that Ticheli’s use of orchestration and dynamics acts as a creation of mood. He frequently uses tremolo in the strings, repeated stemmed notes that become faster in the woodwinds, harmonics, repetition of pitches in random order and rhythms, and various other coloring effects. As most of these figures overlap, they create a blurry effect, which is exactly what he has mentioned in his program notes.

*Individual vocal treatment*

The voice starts with long lines in the low register. As the song evolves, the voice also starts reaching higher parts of its register. In the middle of part A, where the poem asks for movement, and anxiety is implied with the following words: “…the ground…it moves…” (fig. 1, p. 46), the voice is given shorter phrases and is marked *poco agitato*. After that, and as the song moves back to a quieter feeling, the voice is now in the middle to high parts of the register, singing long legato lines marked *espressivo* and *dolce*. Part A finishes with a slow downward movement of the melodic line, in all instruments, ending in a long fermata which leads to part B of the song.
Melodic material

Frank Ticheli, right at the beginning of the cycle, introduces one of the most important melodic materials, which will be also heard at the very end of the last song, thus joining it all up and creating the form of a cycle. This original material is based on an octatonic scale. This specific little cell is frequently heard in part A of the song and it is also used as a coda to it. It can be seen in the piano and clarinets, in figure 3, page 51.
Figure 3. Measures 1-4, Song 1, *Outside, on the other side of the window*...

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
Part B (measures 42 – 143)

Overall structure

The second part starts in measure 42 and goes to the end of the song. The text that starts this section is: “Cast upon the ever moving waters…” By clear changes in thematic material and use of double-bar lines, the second part of the song has the following structure:

a: measures 42-53
b: measures 54-69
a’: measures 70-78
b’: measures 79-132
c: measures 133-146

Treatment of thematic material, vocal elements, dynamics

and orchestration usage within each section

Section a

Ticheli gives a faster tempo marking and the vocalist is asked to sing ‘quasi recitativo’. Short sudden cells, including trills or arpeggiated forms, are played by various groups of the orchestra, some marked with the word ‘aggressive’ over them. The general feeling, stated by tremolos in the strings, and by more abrupt dynamic changes and stronger use of crescendos and diminuendos, is one of an unquiet nature. Similarly, the vocal line is now given short phrases of a breathless nature, and is jumping up and down through bigger intervals, such as intervals of a ninth. Strong accents are given on specific words, breaking the flow of the previously connected line. All of the above can be clearly
seen in figure 4. At its end, the soprano stays on a fermata leading to a glissando upwards, marked ‘dramatic.’ This leads to section b.

Figure 4, measures 46-49, Song 1, *Outside, on the other side of the window*...

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
Section b

The tempo marking given by Ticheli is: *Subito Allegro*. This section consists entirely of a long orchestral interlude. With the end of the previous vocal phrase on the word “volcanically,” the timpani and toms in crescendo introduce this interlude. The dynamic levels fully change, now being **fff**. Angry, *staccato*, arpeggiated triplets state the mood of this section. Within this loud and broad structure, Ticheli keeps using the same pattern of crescendos and diminuendos within different sections of the orchestra, given to repeated chords.

Section a’

Suddenly, cells recalling the material of section a reappear. Frank Ticheli, in measure 70, writes “slightly slower.” The dynamic levels drop to a single **forte** and the composer clears the palette by dropping most instruments and leaving the voice in dialogue with single, short cells played by few of the orchestral instruments. The voice sings: “Wake, wake, wake the castaway…” This is a short section, used mainly as a transition to section b’. Similarly to section a, the voice leads into the next section by the use of a fermata.

Section b’

Starting in measure 79, the voice now is in the high part of its register. Accompanied by or in dialogue with the orchestra, it starts building up in intensity and dynamic, to the big arrival point at the word: ‘Go!’ This brings in the exact same material of the orchestral interlude at the beginning of section b (fig.5, page 55). The voice stops.
Figure 5, measures 104-107, Song 1, *Outside, on the other side of the window*...

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
The same ‘aggressive’ triplets are heard, and the same form of the earlier interlude is kept until the point where the composer brings in muted horns to introduce again the voice for one of the last phrases of the poem. This happens in measure 119 and the voice is given the last loud big leaps. Softer tremolos in both woodwind and string sections, always with the initial ‘swell’ of a crescendo and diminuendo within, accompanied by a ritenuto, calm down the energy of this section. A luftpause is used by the composer to bring in section c, which acts as a coda to the whole song.

Section c

The end of the song introduces dynamic levels dropped to piano or pianissimo, a return to the initial tempo of the song. Strings are muted to completely change the orchestral color, and the initial opening octatonic material is restated. The voice calms down and sings phrases that clearly mark the end of the song, with a sensation of resignation. Short single notes, low register, almost not sung but spoken. It all dissolves to a place recalling the beginning, in this way, creating again the symmetrical structure intended. Coloring effects like pizzicato, or a tremolo in the bass drum, marked “distant thunder”, again with the initial ‘swell’, are the final comments by Frank Ticheli (fig.6, page 57).
Figure 6, measures 139-146, Song 1, *Outside, on the other side of the window*...

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
II. Outside, the trees are still...

Outside
The trees are still.
A frost
Is on the ground.

The fields,
The wooded hills,
Time-stopped,
Without a sound.

White world,
Clear night.
Bright!
Bright!

Hard frozen
Is the stream.
Ice lies
Upon the lake

The stranger
In the dream
Lies inside,
Wide awake.

The composer’s program notes on the second song of the cycle:

The poem’s icy nocturnal world is reflected in an almost motionless musical setting. Every chord used in this eerie setting is symmetrical, suggesting the mirror images of trees reflected off the ice.

The second song of the cycle is again divided into two parts (Part A, measures 1-19, and Part B, measures 20-45). A grand pause marks this division. Here again, with this division into two parts, and with his clever usage of harmonic and melodic elements, Frank Ticheli achieves symmetry.
Part A

Ticheli uses harmonics for the strings and the harp. This gives an intense color of distance, stillness and coldness, which beautifully suits the words: “Outside the trees are still, a frost…” Long sustained dissonances based on intervals of a second or a ninth create the symmetrical figures he needs for this song. It is a song of absolute stillness, as very little movement takes place, and when it does, it is treated in very gentle ways. In measure 17, where the composer writes an unmeasured bar, lasting approximately ten seconds (fig. 7, p. 61), all instruments taking part are asked to play freely. Regarding the interpretation of this measure, there will be further discussion in the next chapter. The cue to stopping this “dreamlike” – as the composer calls it – section is given by the entrance of the voice on the words: “Time stopped.” At this point, there is a complete break in the song, where all music stops and the singer sings her lowest pitches in the whole cycle, on the words: “without a sound,” unaccompanied. The grand pause is placed to mark the division to the second part.

Part B

The song resumes, in an extremely slow tempo, where, again, the flutes and the harp play intervals of a second. With the entrance of the voice on the words “White world, clear night,” all strings, muted, enter on harmonics, either “arco” sustained, or pizzicato. This creates certainly a sense of clarity, which is implied by the words.

In measure 29, the string section plays symmetrical chords from top to bottom based on quintal harmony. These chords are given to each string group with a ppp start and finish, and a crescendo/diminuendo in-between. This serves as a reminder of the initial swell in the dynamics of the first song. The entrances of each group must be hardly
heard, and each one very quietly takes over the previous chord. The above cells continue
the previous sense of stillness, but, because of their nature and the pitches, the sound
effect is also one of coldness and harshness. The vocal line throughout sings short
phrases that come as separate thoughts: “Hard, frozen, is the stream…” in the form of a
response to the sounds created by the orchestra. The song finishes with an
unaccompanied line for the soprano, which delicately elides into the third song, joining
both songs into an “attacca” as instructed by Frank Ticheli.
Figure 7, measures 15-17, Song 2, *Outside, the trees are still...* Frank Ticheli,

*An American Dream*
Outside in the night, a woman cried out...

Outside in the night, a woman cried out.

It made me stick my head out the window and shout:
Beating up a woman is no man’s right!
You want to fight?...

Do you really want to fight?

I am angry.

Do you want to know how angry I am?

How I wake with anger,
And I sleep with it,
And eat it?

How I darken daylight
And the air goes yellow
And the rains come,

How the winds wear down the mountains
And the twisters scour the plains?

How my heart sings at disaster,
Longs for love and war and pain...

In the bowl of a volcano
I can breathe that air down there.

Ask me why I sit so still.
It’ll curl your long straight hair.

Sister.

Ticheli’s program notes on the third song of _An American Dream_:

The sleeper is suddenly awakened to the harsh reality of the night. Urban reality and domestic violence are underscored here in an angry gospel-blues style. The music builds to an angry climax, a pressure cooker of violent energy, left unresolved.

In the interview I conducted with Ticheli, I asked him for information on the musical style of this specific song. He describes it in his program notes as a gospel-blues
style piece. I wanted to know how this song connects to the one before and the one after, as it is the first song in the cycle that deals with consciousness. And I also asked about his choice of the gospel-like style. His reply was: “I tried to capture the sounds of the street: blues, rock. But the music also forced a kind of gospel quality on me. I had no control over it. But it fits perfectly: a gospel on anger told by a woman.”

The third song of the song-cycle comes “attacca” from the previous one. It opens up with a large orchestral prelude in which Ticheli very cleverly uses diminution in the rhythmic cells and places many accents in the weak part of the bar. In this way he achieves the effect of acceleration in the meter. The sound starts growing through continuous entrances of instruments, and it arrives to a section marked “explosive” by the composer (fig. 8). The rhythm used in this song is a notated jazz rhythm, and jazz-like melodic lines are given to various instruments throughout the song.

Figure 8, measures 20-23, Song 3, *Outside in the night, a woman cried out...* Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*

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4 Frank Ticheli, interview by author, electronic mail, March 26, 2010.
The voice enters in a higher range than the previous song, and it remains in a constant dialogue with the orchestra. Ticheli uses canonic forms, rapid-note passages and loud dynamics, and the song rolls without any break or the possibility of a break. The anger Ticheli mentions in his program notes is depicted by loud and fast singing passages, mainly formed by offbeat accents and rhythms (fig. 9, p. 64). Towards the end, the composer creates the same feeling he started the song with, by accelerating the whole process to the end. He then leads the strings to a fermata, which, after the tension created by the whole energy of the song, and because of the pitch, acts like an electric shock. The singer finishes the song with the word: “sister!” in spoken voice, using a long initial consonant, followed by a huge “hit” in triple forte by the timpani, the bass drum, and a very low piano cluster (fig. 10, p. 65). The whole song is extremely contrasting to the previous, in matters of tonality, musical style, dynamics, rhythmic structure, and orchestration. This is probably Ticheli’s way of making his intention very clear: a song dealing with consciousness instead of sub-consciousness.

Figure 9, measures 84-87, Song 3, *Outside in the night, a woman cried out...*
Figure 10, measures 144-146, Song 3, *Outside in the night, a woman cried out...* Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
IV. *Leaves burning*...
Leaves burning,
And a church.
Every year
A burning season.
Leaves falling.
Smoke rising.
Sometimes
There is no reason
But the fire.

Program notes on the song “*Leaves burning*...” by Frank Ticheli

Upon returning to sleep, she is now haunted by her darkest, most horrifying dream of all. The song is a strict palindrome, ending exactly as it began, reflecting the cyclical nature of violent acts.

*Leaves burning*... lasts approximately three minutes. The tempo marking by the composer is: “haunting.” This song comes as a huge contrast to the previous one. Ticheli very clearly in this way again marks his intention of a song that deals with the subconscious, through a dream. It opens with repeated chords for the violins and the violas, while the celli play a single offbeat note. The image the composer wants to create is one of a beating heart. The song is divided into two parts, perfectly mirroring each other. The only difference between the two parts is the text. When I asked Mr. Ticheli why he chose this specific form for this song, he replied: “Violent acts solve nothing, carry us nowhere. Violence creates more violence, a vicious cycle. We end up where we began.” Based on the above answer, this song obviously is the outcome of the previous state described in the third song. A feeling of dangerous stillness is created by the repetition of the same cell over and over again, in an obsessive manner. The chords start *niente*, they grow in volume, they come back to *al niente*, recalling the essence of the
initial swell, and then, suddenly, they stop. Long rests lie in between. When the voice enters, it is in a very low part of a soprano’s register – a fact that also creates a huge contrast to what has happened before. The vocal line in this song is mainly unaccompanied. The phrases are slow, moving through the intervals in an almost motionless way. Similarly to the orchestral part of the song, each little phrase of the singer starts softly, grows in volume and then becomes soft again. Ticheli makes beautiful use of word painting here with the inclusion of small statements heard from some of the instruments of the orchestra (e.g., making the consonant “ch” from the word “church” start the rain stick, measures 9-10). The horn plays stopped notes, which sound distant and dreamy. The song finishes very quietly, letting the listener remain with a feeling of unresolved silence. The first page of the song, (measures 1-17), is provided as figure 11, on page 68.
Figure 11, measures 1-17, Song 4, *Leaves burning...* Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
Before moving on to the last three songs, where the instruction of the composer is for all to be played \textit{attacca}, I am including Ticheli’s answer to my question on this instruction: “I wanted the dramatic pacing to increase in intensity, to move towards light without cessation.”\textsuperscript{5}

\textit{V. No moon in the sky}

No moon in the sky  
In bed she does lie  
And so do I  

My night thoughts have wakened me  
Sleep has forsaken me  
I want to cry  

The sleeper next to me...  
And children within me...  
Will I have any?  
Will I have many?  

I am enwombed  
The moon is entombed  
Morning is nigh  

All are abed  
In this hour of dread  
For here we must lie  

Sleepless I seemed  
But, sleeping, I dreamed  
The moon left the sky  
Without a goodby  

Eyes open I stare  
This stare is my prayer  
Let wrong come right  
And let there be light  
Inside me

\textsuperscript{5} Frank Ticheli, \texttt{ticheli@rsf.usc.edu}, “Few things,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi, \texttt{zzeniodi@gmail.com}, 27 March 2010.
Ticheli’s program notes for the fifth song read as follows.

The final three songs are performed without a pause. In this song, it is still dark outside (although morning’s light is imminent). Poignant appoggiaturas sound in a dark f-sharp minor setting. The sleeper is wide-awake, feeling wounded and weary. Her desperate prayer for light is left unanswered at the end of the song.

This is a very beautiful, lyrical song. It is composed as a unit even if, structurally, with the use of an intense section in its middle, it forms the shape of an arch. The appoggiaturas mentioned by Ticheli and shown in figure 12, page 71, indeed create the sense of a possibility of light, a distant sound in the darkness. All the orchestral lines move quietly in stepwise motion. The voice is given a beautiful melodic line that runs throughout the whole song, sometimes repeated as an answer by solo instruments. The initial instruction, at measure 9, by the composer is: “With sad resignation” (fig.12, p. 71). Ticheli keeps a steady pacing which, in my view, implies the inevitability of sadness.
Figure 12, measures 1-9, Song 5, *No moon in the sky*... Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*. 
A change in the emotional state created comes in measure 38, where the strings are given tremolos in their high part of the registers. This brings the entrance of the voice: “All are abed…” As the text continues, the sound of the strings becomes more intense, and then it is joined by piano, trombone, and bassoon to lead to the climactic point of the song, which is: “For here we must lie!” Most of the orchestra joins at this point, while the soprano is singing with anguish, in a high register of her voice and ff. This particular phrase’s double entendre, the verb ‘to lie,’ is intensified by accents and marcato instructions throughout (fig.13, page 73). After this point, the song calms down and returns to the first melodic material, used as a base for the singer’s prayer: “Let wrong come right, and let there be light”. The final words of the poem: “inside me” are sung on a single pitch, which is also what Frank Ticheli gives to the rest of the orchestra, in this way leading to the start of the sixth song.
Figure 13, Measures 45-48, Song 5, *No moon in the sky*... Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream.*
VI. See?...

See? Like love the light is.
I don’t know what else it is.
Love inside me. Like a thought, around the thought, like breath..
But inside the breath, and, more than breath, a nourishment, like singing,
It’s like singing light is, and it is the longing to sing...
It’s the silence…it’s expecting…and it is a listening...
Just around the corner, just ahead and just behind me,
Whether I’m lost, or hiding from the light, I know the light will find me.
Here it is, my mother, close enough to kiss and kissing!
And it is the child grown up and gone away I’m always missing.
Inside me, is me, just me, busy judging and forgiving...
Light is laughing at me, all I am is light and…I am living.

Here I include Frank Ticheli’s program notes on the sixth song:

A distant trumpet sounds. A quiet note hangs above in the strings. The singer
begins to see a glimmer of light—not a public, outer light, but a private inner light.
Accompanied by the piano, she sings her hope-filled aria. The music breathes as
she exclaims, “I am living.”

The sixth song of *An American Dream* starts with a beautiful melody sounded by
an off-stage trumpet. I asked the composer about his choice of placing an off-stage
instrument in the song-cycle. His reply was: “I wanted something otherworldly, magical,
celestial, to represent the answer to her prayer for light.”6 This reply brought me to one
more question, which was: How can an off-stage trumpet create the above?
Mr. Ticheli continued the communication by stating: “It's removed. You can hear it but
not see it. It sounds celestial to my ears, at least in the hall where it was premiered with
its cavernous back-stage area. But backstage trumpet always sounds ethereal to me.
Spiritual.”7

Structurally, the song is not divided into sharply different sections but rather,

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6 Frank Ticheli, interview by author, electronic mail, March 26, 2010.
7 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “Extra questions,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi,
zzeniodi@gmail.com, 26 March 2010.
Ticheli separates it in shorter units every few measures by creating beautiful phrases that come to a ritenuto. Every time this happens, a new phrase begins using the next verses of the poem. The general feeling of the song is one of hope and intimacy. For this reason the whole song is always quiet and the melodic movement is minimal, especially in the orchestral writing. There are no accents or other elements that could interrupt the flow of the song.

At the beginning, the melodic line created by the off-stage trumpet is a long one, which brings the movement to the entrance of the voice. Here, Frank Ticheli uses small intervals for both orchestra and voice, probably as a statement of the light’s first appearance. At this point, he also quotes himself by using a short part of his work *Radiant Voices* (figure 14, page 76). Self-quoting happens in other parts of the work *An American Dream*. I asked Frank Ticheli about this issue, as it interested me and I needed to know if there was any special meaning behind it. His reply was:  

> This work, being the last of my commissions as composer in residence, served to summarize my entire residency. Just as Strauss quoted himself in his final works, I too wanted to do the same, touching on works I had composed for the Pacific Symphony, but in a way that doesn't interfere with the drama at hand. The quotes just come and go fleetingly, barely leaving a trail.

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8 Frank Ticheli, interview by author, electronic mail, March 26, 2010.
The song proceeds steadily, including one more off-stage trumpet section. In measure 42 (figure 15, page 78), Ticheli drops the orchestra completely, letting the singer sing part of the text in a *dolce* manner, accompanied only by the piano, where other instruments join
only to create a dialogue with the voice. It is a very beautiful moment of creating a
different type of texture, by using the technique of piano accompaniment, which almost
transforms the song into a traditional “song” form, recalling chamber music instead of an
orchestral song cycle. *Rubato* is called for by both the instrumentalists and the singer in
this song. The general orchestration of the song is simple and quite “empty,” in this way
creating a space for the meaning of the words to come out vividly. Finally, and after the
darkness of all previous songs, this one finishes in a positive C major section and the
words: “I am living!” A brief fermata in the low strings joins the sixth and the last song.

Before continuing with some insights into the last song of *An American Dream*, I
would like to mention that the song “See?...” has also recently been transformed into the
second movement of Frank Ticheli’s latest work, *Concerto for clarinet and orchestra*. As
he stated in his interview, he likes this song very much and he felt it was ‘screaming’ to
become the second movement of the concerto, which is titled *Aaron*. He says, “There is
an open-aired, simple, heart-on-sleeve lyricism that reminds me of Copland’s slow
movements.”9

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9 Frank Ticheli, ticheli@rsf.usc.edu, “On other chapters,” e-mail to Zoe Zeniodi,
zzeniodi@gmail.com, 27 March 2010.
Figure 15, Measures 42-49, Song 6, See?...Frank Ticheli, An American Dream
VII. *Outside, all along the rim of the world’s horizon...*

Outside,
All along the rim
Of the world’s horizon,
It glows:

A show
Of richness;
And brightness
Follows!

Low,
The light strikes out,
Slashing the
Shadows,

Touched,
The tree-tops,
Gold,
The windows...

Houses,
Towers,
All
On fire...

Dream,
A promise...
Bad dreams...
Liars!

Hot
The air as
Breath:
Aspires

An eagle
(Ours?)
Rising
Higher.

The eye of the eagle
Looks down on the land.
Tiny the world:
It fits in God’s hand.
A lengthy orchestral sunrise signals the completion of the long night. The sleeper awakens to the hope of morning’s light. The music celebrates the day. The dark six-note cluster which began the entire work returns at the end, now in the bright world of F# Major.

The last song of the song cycle *An American Dream* starts with a long orchestral section. This section lasts a total of forty measures and it is marked 132 per quarter note. In measure 9 (fig. 16, page 81) the composer writes: “accelerando to m. 40; should be unnoticeable.” This is an issue that will receive further discussion in the chapter that includes performance related issues on this piece. The orchestral interlude starts with slow note values, accelerating as it moves on, including more and more entrances of instruments. The main intervals used by Ticheli in a melodic fashion are again intervals of a second, continuing the flow from the previous song. The final tempo that Ticheli asks to be achieved in measure 40 is 152 per quarter note. The accumulation of energetic fervor culminates with the voice entrance. The rest of the song remains in one fast section until measure 139 where a type of coda is given to lead it to the end.
Figure 16, measures 7-12, Song 7, *Outside, all along the rim of the world’s horizon...*

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
There are quite a few places in the score where Ticheli uses double barlines. These are used only to mark a change in the key, most of the time going back and forth between D major and F major, but they do not interrupt the flow or the thematic material of the song.

The song is a fast, bright one. It consists of repeated note values of quarter, eighth or sixteenth notes. This continuity creates the urgency towards light, as Mr. Ticheli describes in his program notes. Throughout the song, all the melodic lines interchange between instruments, and all of the sections of the orchestra are in a constant dialogue.

There are quite a few places where the composer changes the meter (4/4, 3/4, 5/4, 7/8) which have to be given some extra attention. One of the difficult issues in the song is the handling of the rhythm for the vocal line, as it sometimes goes against the rest of the orchestra. Little accents and the initial swell in dynamics, introduced at the beginning of the song cycle, but now in a faster fashion, are in strong use here, creating beautiful bright colors. It feels as though there is nothing that can stop the victory of light. Frank Ticheli is well known for his “positive” music writing. For the end of the song, by augmentation of the rhythmical values and a written ritenuto, the music slows down, the sensation of stillness and peace is once more created, and the singer can now sing her last words: “The eye of an eagle…in God’s hand.” The opening song-cycle material (fig. 17, page 83) is heard again by the clarinets and the vibes, and the song finishes quietly with the melodic material in value augmentation over what Frank Ticheli describes as the “bright world of F# major.”
Figure 17, measures 147-152, Song 7, *Outside, all along the rim of the world’s horizon...*

Frank Ticheli, *An American Dream*
Conclusions

As seen from the general overview of the work *An American Dream*, Frank Ticheli has composed a piece which uses extensively both the orchestral and vocal mediums. It is a long work, which proves to be a well-formed song cycle, and at the same time, includes elements of a symphonic form. The orchestra, throughout, offers a very well balanced base, strong and sensitive at the same time, to support and highlight the demanding ways in which Ticheli has set Philip Littel’s poetic texts. Simultaneously, the orchestra is never used solely as a pure accompaniment to the vocal line, but it, through solid form and rich instrumental textures, acts in a symphonic way, making the instrumental part of the piece equally important to the vocal one. His melodic material, the beautiful lines given to the voice and the instruments, the effects he creates with the correct and intelligent use of orchestration, and the depth with which he takes care of the poetry, are all elements that make this work important.

The coherent thematic material and the overall structure of the work, as well as the beautiful word painting Frank Ticheli achieves, can easily place the work among the major song cycles written in American contemporary music. It is a sensitive, rich and careful, in all its details and in its entirety, work. Frank Ticheli creates an environment where simultaneously music, poetry, voice and the sound of an orchestra, can richly flourish.
CHAPTER 7

PERFORMANCE RELATED ISSUES AND ASSESSMENT

*An American Dream* is a large-scale work that requires deep study and preparation for performance. In this chapter, I will mention some of the issues a conductor might come across and will have to deal with. These are issues of specific markings in the score that need attention, as well as issues of handling the balance between the voice and the orchestra. Finally, I will give my opinion on the assessment of this work for different types of orchestras, such as a college orchestra, a regional orchestra, or a professional orchestra.

**Appropriate Voice Choice**

The first issue that appears here, and a conductor might have to face, is the correct choice of the soprano. The vocal range of the piece is a very demanding one, in various aspects. The range needed to sing this piece covers more than two octaves. There are very few voices that can handle this range without hurting themselves. Apart from that, one of the main problems appearing here is not only the range, as in how wide it is, but also in which area of the voice it lies. None of the songs treats the voice in a similar way, thus making it difficult for the soprano to make the necessary transitions from song to song. The first song starts pretty low, then moves up to the higher part of the range, and at the end finishes again extremely low. It is normally quite hard for a light soprano to be able to sing notes in that low part of the voice, and certainly almost impossible to sing them after having sung in the high register. It would only be possible by using chest voice,
which I believe is not the intention of the composer. As another example, the third song of the cycle is very loud and demanding vocally, with big leaps and very intense, fast rhythms. The singer here might have to “fight” with the orchestra, as the orchestra is, most of the time, quite able to cover her. Immediately after this song, the fourth song comes, in a very different fashion, with extremely slow lines and in a very low register. The transition between these two songs is a very taxing one.

All of the above are mentioned to show that only a very dramatic and powerful soprano voice can handle this piece correctly. Apart from that, it is a long piece, lasting approximately forty minutes, where the soprano sings almost without any break. The correct casting of the soprano is extremely important for the successful performance of this song cycle.

Performance-related Issues in Each Song Separately

1. *Outside, on the other side of the window...*

In this song, a conductor will not have to face any balance issues between the voice and the orchestra, as, even when the voice is in its lower register, the general dynamic level of the orchestra is very soft. However, issues concerning the balance within the orchestra might appear. The opening of the song, by itself, can be quite problematic. Different groups of the orchestra (woodwinds and piano) are given same pitches. The conductor must give a very steady beat and rhythmic precision is essential. The initial tempo given by the conductor sets the rhythmic structure for the rest of the song. As the piano is a percussive instrument, tending to sound earlier than wind instruments, very careful listening by the players is required. Intonation issues in these passages must also be addressed. Throughout the first song, Ticheli uses the orchestral
coloring in very detailed and extensive ways, and makes intense use of crescendos and diminuendos. Most of these appear in different sections of the orchestra, some doubling each other, some overlapping. It is the conductor’s responsibility to sensitively guide the orchestra through the subtle dynamic details of the song. One must attend to the balance carefully, so that a beautiful sound quality can be maintained. Even in the loudest parts of the song, a correct pacing in the volume is necessary, so that the piece holds the structure intended by the composer.

II. Outside, the trees are still...

Two issues might appear in this second song of An American Dream. The first one is at measure 17. This is an unmeasured bar that Ticheli instructs to last for approximately ten seconds, while the instruments play freely, each one its individual line. The measure is set up by the French horn and the harp, which play on the last beat of measure 16. This measure asks for different instruments to enter at different parts of the measure. A plan has to be made by the conductor on cueing the right instruments in correct time within the measure, and especially the percussion section, where two of the three members play single notes and not continuous ones like the rest of the instruments involved in this measure. The sound effect of this measure holds an important quality for the whole song, and the conductor must attend to it. Also, he or she must give a clear downbeat for measure 18, as this is the moment that all music must stop at the same time (figure 7, measures 16-18, page 62, chapter 6).

The second possible issue in this song comes near the end. In measure 29, strings divisi in 3 are called to play sustained symmetrical chords, each lasting for two complete measures. First violins enter in measure 29, the violas enter in measure 30, the second
violins enter in measure 31 and then, celli make their entrance in measure 31. This musical setting repeats itself for sixteen measures. At the same time, the composer asks for every entrance to be **ppp**, then crescendo to **mp**, and then come back to **ppp**. The effect of continuity Ticheli wants to create by overlapping the chords and having one section enter when another is in the middle of the crescendo is only possible through an imperceptible entrance of each section and the correct timing of crescendos and diminuendos. Every section of the strings must properly pace proportion each crescendo and decrescendo. The difficulty of this is compound by the divisi in the strings. Close attention must be paid to rhythmic precision as a premature release or late entrance could leave an unwanted space between gestures.

***III. Outside in the night, a woman cried out***

The only possible issue, apart from rhythmic issues for the orchestra and the soprano, is the balance between the voice and the orchestra. In this song, the soprano sings in the high register, which makes her easy to hear. However, there are many sections in the piece where the dynamic is on the loud side, and where the whole orchestra, including the brass section, play in full volume. These parts could easily tire the soprano, as the voice could be pushed to its limits, especially as the song is long, demanding rhythmic precision from all, and singers always tend to overuse their high register in order to be heard over the orchestra.

***IV. Leaves burning***

This is a relatively easy song to prepare, as it is very simple for the orchestra. Still, attention must be given to the increase and decrease of volume for the strings, and especially to the balance between the high strings and the cellos, which are playing
offbeat. There must be an equal increase in the sound from all players, in order to achieve the atmosphere intended by Ticheli.

\textit{V. No moon in the sky...}

This song should not present major issues for any section of the orchestra or for the conductor. Some attention is needed for the opening phrases, both for rhythmic precision (correct value of the appoggiaturas, accents given on the first note of each of them) and for possible intonation difficulties among the woodwind section. Attention should be given to the sensitive and proper balance of the melodic lines and chords created by the woodwinds.

\textit{VI. See?...}

This song includes off-stage trumpet solo. Conducting an off-stage trumpet can be very easy with the help of a monitor. If this is not accessible, then the problem can easily be solved by a second conductor who would be able to watch somehow the main conductor. In case this is not possible either, then apart from some rehearsing, the solo trumpeter must make sure that the rhythm of the line is steady, and not do anything that could jeopardize the entrance of other instruments (e.g., French horn) which are in dialogue with the trumpet, or the entrance of the whole orchestra and their interplay with this solo line.

Another issue that has to be dealt with is the duet between piano and voice in measure 42 (figure 15, measures 42-49, page 79, chapter 6). The composer asks for \textit{poco rubato}, and actually, after discussing the matter with him, he requires quite a lot of \textit{rubato} and especially on the fourth beat of every bar. This is a detail that can easily be fixed with some rehearsing. The problem with the \textit{rubato’s} management can arise when
other instruments of the orchestra enter the phrase, e.g., the oboe a few bars later. A possible solution is to have a bigger and more extensive *rubato* at the beginning of this section, in order to create the mood Ticheli asks for, and, when the oboe enters, to keep a steadier pacing in the general rhythm. Another type of solution is for the three musicians (voice, piano and oboe) to rehearse alone and come to an agreement on how to treat this rhythmically freer section.

*VII. Outside, all along the rim of the world’s horizon...*

The last song of *An American Dream* presents an issue at its beginning. This was mentioned in chapter 6 of the current essay and can be seen in figure 16, measures 7-12, page 82, chapter 6. Frank Ticheli sets a metronomic mark at the beginning of the song (132 per quarter note) and then asks for an imperceptible accelerando to metronomic mark 152 per quarter note, forty bars later. Correct pacing of this accelerando is essential, to avoid the dangers of either arriving to the required tempo too soon or never arriving at it. One possible way to achieve this is for the conductor to ‘place’ invisible metronomic marks in specific measures of the score, in this way making sure that the whole orchestra is speeding up at a steady pace, until the final tempo is reached. Another minor issue that can appear in this song is the vocal line, which sometimes has to be sung in syncopated rhythm to the rest of the orchestra. There are times that the singer is accompanied in those rhythms by a section of the orchestra, but there are also times that the singer is alone. Extra work and rehearsal of those spots might be necessary.
Assessment of the Work for Programming and Performance by Orchestras of Different Levels.

The song-cycle *An American Dream* is a substantive and lengthy work, lasting approximately forty minutes. As it is longer than other song-cycles, it cannot really be programmed typically as a concerto for soloist and orchestra, which normally takes place as a second piece in a program. This could only be possible if the opening piece of a program is very short, and it should be paired then with a piece (for the second half of a program) that does not last too long. Apart from that, Frank Ticheli subtitles the piece *A Symphony of Songs for Soprano and Orchestra*, in this way possibly implying that this piece, when programmed for performance, could be heard in the second half, as normally a symphony is.

The song-cycle does not present serious technical difficulties for the orchestra, so it could easily be handled by a professional orchestra, when given the typical three rehearsals and a dress rehearsal. It can also be handled similarly by a good regional orchestra. A good college orchestra would probably need a larger number of rehearsals to secure a successful performance. The conductor should try to organize the rehearsals and their timing properly. In matters of instrumentation, correct planning of the order in which the songs will be rehearsed can be very useful as some of the songs use all the sections of the orchestra and some use fewer players. Organizing the rehearsal by grouping the songs from large to small regarding instrumentation will not tire the players and will make the rehearsals more effective.

When I conducted this work with the Frost Symphony Orchestra and Leilah Dione Ezra, soprano, at the Gusman Concert Hall of the University of Miami, in
November 2009, we prepared the work for performance and recording within twenty hours of rehearsals, while preparing other works, and these led to both successful performance and recording of it.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Frank Ticheli is a very important composer in the repertoire of contemporary band and wind ensemble music. The impact, the quality and the volume of his compositional output are all documented through numerous reviews and performances. Apart from his extensive repertoire for wind ensemble and concert band, Frank Ticheli has been writing works for orchestra since 1983. This essay presents an overview of those, in order to give an account of their basic elements, as there is no other complete catalogue that includes an annotated list of the orchestral works. In this manner, it is made possible for the reader to have a clear view of Ticheli’s orchestral oeuvre at the time of this writing.

In addition, I present a detailed study of his work *An American Dream*. It is a very substantive and important orchestral song cycle, worthy of numerous performances and deep study and focus. The orchestral song cycle genre is a very interesting musical form as it involves elements of both instrumental and vocal music, as well as poetry. Various composers have been prolific in this genre and have composed beautiful music for voice and orchestra, like Gustav Mahler, Hector Berlioz and Samuel Barber. Setting texts to music is a difficult task, because a composer must be able to comprehend the nuances produced by words, which in themselves have their own meaning and sound.
A composer must understand and respect individual word meaning and sound, and create a setting that can, if decided by the composer to work towards this direction, properly illuminate the intention of the poet. On a larger scale, creating a song cycle is a more difficult task. A song cycle is mostly based on a narrative given within the texts. However, there are times that poems not obviously relevant to each other will be set to music by composers. In both cases, a composer strives to find subtle connections among the texts, which might not be obvious to many. This requires a clear understanding of the poet’s personal language and, through effort, the ability to bring this language to life. Ticheli has succeeded in all of these aspects with his song cycle *An American Dream*.

Personally, poetry and music, and the interrelation of those, have been essential throughout my life. I have studied deeply the repertoire of both orchestral song cycles and song cycles for voice and piano. Each poet’s and composer’s personal language and traits, and the deep examination of those, are not only extremely interesting to me, but nearly vital. Through my intense study on this specific work by Frank Ticheli, I feel that *An American Dream* is a song cycle that, apart from being beautiful to listen to, deserves more and more performances, as it is very well composed. Frank Ticheli sets the poems by Phillip Littell in a most organic way, depicts emotions and psychological states in a very deep personal manner, shows off the capabilities of a strong and dramatic soprano voice, and finally, uses the colors that a symphony orchestra can create, in a very intense and magical way. There is nothing random or ill-conceived in the score of *An American Dream*. All elements presented have a strong purpose, which they successfully achieve. The collaboration between Phillip Littell, who is an important writer, experienced in writing texts to be set to music (e.g., Andre Previn’s *A street car named Desire*) and
Frank Ticheli, whose works are being performed internationally over the years, is an important one for the history of American music. This study aims to give clear insights into the work and to provide thoughts and ideas for further examination, study and possible future performances.

The recording of *An American Dream*, which is included in this thesis, is being prepared for commercial release. As there is no recording available of this piece, there is a need for a high-quality commercial recording. This recording, performed by the Frost Symphony Orchestra of the University of Miami, Leilah Dione Ezra, soprano, and Zoe Zeniodi, conductor, will meet this need and help to facilitate future performances.

The current thesis and the recording will hopefully smooth the path of the work *An American Dream* into the repertoire. It is a work that, through the words, the deep meanings these hold, and the beautiful music Frank Ticheli has created for them, deserves a long and successful life.
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APPENDIX A

AN AMERICAN DREAM

POETIC TEXTS BY PHILIP LITTELL

I.

Outside,
On the other side
Of the window,
It does blow.

And below the house,
Underneath the house,
It does breathe;
The ground, it moves.

All across the sky
The clouds are moving.
Moves the moon. Peeping,
Moves a star.

And the sleeper
In his bed also moves;
He moves
And travels far,

Cast upon the ever moving waters turning of a
Creeping wrinkling shivering naked sea,
Cast ashore upon an Oceanid’s island,
Herself cast up volcanically.

Wake the cast away
Or the long ago will
Take him, cast aside,
Back to itself

And toss him back into the blackened water
Where the tides and where the currents and the winds squirm
Against the spin of that drunk the earth
On her crazy path across the hell of heaven. Go!
All night moving,  
He is floating, sinking, diving, drifting, bottom-feeding, surfacing,  
The strongest swimmer...Fish him out:  
He drowned.

II.   Outside  
The trees are still.  
A frost  
Is on the ground.  
The fields,  
The wooded hills,  
Time-stopped,  
Without a sound.  

White world,  
Clear night.  
Bright!  
Bright!  

Hard frozen  
Is the stream.  
Ice lies  
Upon the lake.  
The stranger  
In the dream  
Lies inside,  
Wide awake.  

III.   Outside in the night, a woman cried out.  

It made me stick my head out the window and shout:  
Beating up a woman is no man’s right!  
You want to fight?...  

Do you really want to fight?  

I am angry.  

Do you want to know how angry I am?  

How I wake with anger,  
And I sleep with it,  
And eat it?  

How I darken daylight  
And the air goes yellow
And the rains come,

How the winds wear down the mountains
And the twisters scour the plains?

How my heart sings at disaster,
Longs for love and war and pain...

In the bowl of a volcano
I can breathe that air down there.

Ask me why I sit so still.
It’ll curl your long straight hair.

Sister.

IV. Leaves burning,
And a church.
Every year
 A burning season.
Leaves falling.
Smoke rising.
Sometimes
There is no reason
But the fire.

V. No moon in the sky
In bed she does lie
And so do I

My night thoughts have wakened me
Sleep has forsaken me
I want to cry

The sleeper next to me...
And children within me...
Will I have any?
Will I have many?

I am enwombed
The moon is entombed
Morning is nigh
All are abed
In this hour of dread
For here we must lie

Sleepless I seemed
But, sleeping, I dreamed
The moon left the sky
Without a goodbye

Eyes open I stare
This stare is my prayer
Let wrong come right
And let there be light
Inside me

VI. See? Like love the light is.
I don’t know what else it is.
Love inside me. Like a thought, around the thought, like breath..
But inside the breath, and, more than breath, a nourishment, like singing,
It’s like singing light is, and it is the longing to sing...
It’s the silence…it’s expecting…and it is a listening...
Just around the corner, just ahead and just behind me,
Whether I’m lost, or hiding from the light, I know the light will find me.
Here is is, my mother, close enough to kiss and kissing!
And it is the child grown up and gone away I’m always missing.
Inside me, is me, just me, busy judging and forgiving...
Light is laughing at me, all I am is light and...I am living.

VII. Outside,
All along the rim
Of the world’s horizon,
It glows:

A show
Of richness;
And brightness
Follows!

Low,
The light strikes out,
Slashing the
Shadows,

Touched,
The tree-tops,
Gold,
The windows...
Houses,
Towers,
All
On fire...

Dream,
A promise...
Bad dreams...
Liars!

Hot, the air as
Breath:
Aspires

An eagle
(Ours?)
Rising
Higher.

The eye of the eagle
Looks down on the land.
Tiny the world:
It fits in God’s hand.
APPENDIX B
FRANK TICHELI INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Participants:
Frank Ticheli, interviewee
Zoe Zeniodi, interviewer

Date: March 26, 2010
Time: 12:43 pm
Method: Electronic mail

Zeniodi: The work “An American Dream” is subtitled: A symphony of songs. Do you consider it a song cycle or very literally as subtitled a symphony of songs? If the later, how does this relate to your first symphony, which also includes voice in the last movement? Have you written a song-cycle or considered it before?

Ticheli: It's both. Textually, there is a clear narrative flowing through, as in many song cycles such as Schubert's Die Winterreise, etc. But there are also musical motives running through the entire cycle (see opening "of the window" in song 1), creating a symphonic-like structure.

Zeniodi: When exactly were you asked to write this piece?

Ticheli: It was the final commission project of my seven-year tenure as Composer in Residence, so I knew about it for at least a couple of years prior to the premiere.

Zeniodi: Was the request for this work by the Pacific Symphony and Carl St. Clair a part of your initial agreement on your residency there, or did it come as an idea on the way?

Ticheli: Yes, part of the residency.

Zeniodi: Did you know the poet, Philip Littell before your collaboration for this work? How did you come into contact with him?

Ticheli: He had worked with my colleague, Stephen Hartke, on a work entitled Sons of Noah. Stephen recommended him.
Zeniodi: Do you know if the texts (or part of them) for this particular piece were written before the time of your composition? Or were they created for this work at a simultaneous time?

Ticheli: Philip and I collaborated, negotiated, fought, pleaded, and finally, hugged each other. We worked together in a very intense and sometimes painful, sometimes joyous way.

Zeniodi: How did the title “An American Dream” was decided, by who and why? Was there any specific talk on this between you and the poet? And in a broader way, was there exchange of thoughts on the subject of the piece, what it represents and why?

Ticheli: Philip gave the name. The singer represents a sleeper (America) getting through a tough night (the century's night).

Zeniodi: Did you modify at all the original texts?

Ticheli: Yes. Philip kept writing until I was happy. The last poem to come was number 6, which he strongly resisted at first. You can almost read his hesitancy in the poem itself.

Zeniodi: The texts are written for a female character. Why did you choose the voice of a soprano for this work? Did you consider other possibilities?

Ticheli: That was my choice. I wanted to compose specifically for Camellia Johnson.

Zeniodi: How long exactly did it take you to finish the American Dream? Did you make any revisions? Do you have dated sketches of the work?

Ticheli: I began it in June, 1997, finishing the first four movements before my daughter's birth on September 1. Then resumed it in October, finishing the other three movements by mid-November. The orchestration was completed by March of 1998. The work is dedicated to my daughter.

Zeniodi: Were the texts given to you as in the order they appear in the American Dream? As seven songs separately?

Ticheli: In order, except that number 6 was later inserted, reluctantly by Philip. I, however, was very happy to have it. I felt number 6 was essential.

Zeniodi: What was the extent of your collaboration with Phillip Littell? Did he change any of the texts or had exchange of ideas, even on the musical setting, while or after you wrote the piece?
Ticheli: He added the word "sister" to the end of poem 3, which caused me serious problems. But it's partly my fault. I wanted to end song 3 with a repeat of the words, "you want to fight?", followed by a BOOM. Philip said, "I have a better idea", and added the word, "sister".

Zeniodi: Are the principal musical ideas of the American Dream text-driven? How do they relate to your previous writing at the time? In your program notes you mention the relationship of yourself and your music to dreams. How did these, at the time, affect this specific composition?

Ticheli: The dreams, nos. 1, 2, 4 are all set in symmetrical pitch structures (no. 1 uses octatonic scale, no. 2 has symmetrical vertical sonorities, no. 4 is a palindrome). The other poems use the asymmetry of tonality.

Zeniodi: The first, second and fourth songs of the American Dream are dealing with the unconscious part of the dreamer, in your own words for the program notes. You are using musical ‘mirroring’ structures, as an octatonic scale, symmetrical chords and a palindrome. How do you personally conceive the above-mentioned structures as structures creating stillness and the state of unconsciousness?

Ticheli: I used symmetry, mirroring techniques to suggest the idea of dreams being a mirror of the subconscious mind.

Zeniodi: The first song of the American Dream includes big orchestral interludes and sudden changes of dynamic and mood. What was the concept behind those and how did you use those for joining or separating sections of the song?

Ticheli: In part 2 of this song, I wanted to paint the image of a swimmer being tossed by a stormy sea. It was necessary to break the narrative for that purpose.

Zeniodi: You describe the third song of the cycle as a gospel. It is also the first song of ‘consciousness’ in the American Dream. Why did you choose to write in this musical style? How does this song connect the second and fourth song of the American Dream?

Ticheli: I tried to capture the sounds of the street: blues, rock. But the music also forced a kind of gospel quality on me. I had no control over it. But it fits perfectly: a gospel on anger told by a woman.

Zeniodi: The fourth song of the American Dream is a palindrome. This is a device used in other compositions of yours. Why is this form interesting to you and what particular meaning does it hold?
Ticheli: Violent acts solve nothing, carry us nowhere. Violence creates more violence, a vicious cycle. We end up where we began.

Zeniodi: The last three songs of the American Dream are ‘attacca’. In your program notes you describe those songs as a passing from darkness to light. How does the ‘attacca’ decision help or lead to this result?

Ticheli: I wanted the dramatic pacing to increase in intensity, to move towards light without cessation.

Zeniodi: Why does the sixth song of the American Dream include a solo trumpet off-stage?

Ticheli: I wanted something other-worldly, magical, celestial, to represent the answer to her prayer for light.

Zeniodi: The vocal range for the soprano is a quite taxing one. Why did you decide to use such an ‘extreme’ range and how do you feel this relates to the meaning of the work and the poetry?

Ticheli: I knew Camellia Johnson's dynamic, vocal, and stylistic range. I tailored the work to her.

Zeniodi: There are parts in the American Dream (eg. Sixth song, measures 9 and 10) quoting previous works of yours. Is there any significance to those quotes that you would care to share?

Ticheli: This work, being the last of my commissions as composer in residence, served to summarize my entire residency. Just as Strauss quoted himself in his final works, I too wanted to do the same, touching on works I had composed for the Pacific Symphony, but in a way that doesn't interfere with the drama at hand. The quotes just come and go fleetingly, barely leaving a trail.

Zeniodi: You have just finished your clarinet concerto and in the program notes you mention that the sixth song of the American Dream has become now the second movement of the clarinet concerto, which is titled Aaron (homage to Aaron Copland). How and why does this particular song now reappear in your compositional output and what is its exact connection to Aaron Copland?

Ticheli: There is an open-air, simple, heart-on-sleeve lyricism that reminds me of Copland's slow movements. It seemed to be screaming out for the clarinet, to me at least, and reminds me a bit of Copland's clarinet concerto.

Zeniodi: What was your reaction to the premiere of the American Dream? Were there details in the score that were reworked while the piece was being
rehearsed for its premiere or after?

Ticheli: Nothing was changed at all, except for a couple of dynamic adjustments in mvt. 1.

Zeniodi: Do you have knowledge of the reactions of both Mr Littell and Mr St Clair?

Ticheli: Philip and I were both elated. Carl, too, loved it...and ended up doing it again with the Detroit Symphony two seasons later.

Zeniodi: Was the piano vocal score made at similar time with the orchestral score? Did the soprano learn the part through the piano vocal score?

Ticheli: P/V came immediately after the sketch, and before the score, and yes, Camellia learned from the P/V.

Zeniodi: You knew that this would be the final composition during your residency with the Pacific Symphony Orchestra. Did this – and how – affect your relationship to your own composition? Did it influence parts of it?

Ticheli: I just knew I wanted to create something "ambitious", memorable. I wanted to end my residency on a high note.

Zeniodi: Do you remember how many rehearsals were given to the American Dream by the Pacific Symphony Orchestra? And what was your role during that time?

Ticheli: Just the usual three plus dress. My work received more time than I expected Carl to give it, but Carl knew what it required. My role was the same as always with Carl. We work well together, very efficiently, with great mutual respect. We've known each other for so long, we have an almost symbiotic relationship. We each know what the other is thinking much of the time. And yet we can still surprise each other too.

Zeniodi: If you attended the rehearsals, do you remember if the piece was rehearsed easily? Did it create musical issues with the orchestra you had not thought of?

Ticheli: Rehearsals flowed beautifully, as always with the PSO. The players are amazing, the conductor is world-class. The piece came to life easily and quickly.

Zeniodi: Do you remember how the collaboration between you and Camellia Johnson was? Did you work privately with her at all on the American Dream?
Ticheli: Rhythm was the key problem with Camellia, and during my initial rehearsals with her several months prior to the premiere (we met in Indiana to rehearse). But she assured me that she'd learn it, and learn it she did! When I saw her again several months later at the orchestra rehearsals, she was pretty solid. Carl was also VERY good at assisting her with her entrances in the concert.

Zeniodi: The American Dream, since 1998 has been performed six times. I personally believe that it is a work that should be performed many more times. Apart from being currently in a difficult era for contemporary compositions, and apart from the fact that all your music for band is hugely performed – which might (but not necessarily) associate your name with this genre rather than the repertoire for orchestra, do you know of reasons for limited performances? Could the difficult soprano part, which requires a specific type of voice, be one of those?

Ticheli: To be honest, I find that almost NO orchestral music written these days "has a life". There IS NO life for living orchestral composers except for those few at the top such as John Adams. It's sad, but very true. This is why so much of my orchestral music is also available in a version for concert band. But not An American Dream. That work MUST stay in the orchestral version. It wouldn't work for band. Too string reliant.

Zeniodi: Do you consider composing again a large-scale piece for voice and orchestra?

Ticheli: I would indeed. But my next large-scale commission is for chorus and orchestra, based on secular texts by colleague and friend David St. John. David is a great poet. (You should Google him!) The commission comes from the Pacific Chorale and will be premiered in 2012 in celebration of conductor John Alexander's 40th (or 45th?) season with the chorale. The Pacific Symphony will be the orchestra, and the 160-voice Pacific Chorale with serve as the chorus. David St. John and I have taught four times together in a course I developed, WRITER AND COMPOSER. The class consists of 8 graduate level composers and 8 graduate creative writing majors. They collaborate on three separate projects. A graduate vocal class meets at the same time, and so it's really a three-way collaboration between poets, composers, singers. It's heaven!
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM SIGNED BY TICHELI

FRANK TICHELI: AN AMERICAN DREAM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE:

The goal of this interview is to receive important information on the genesis, creation and first performance of Frank Ticheli’s “An American Dream”.

PROCEDURE:

The informed consent and the questionnaire will be attached to an email. On the same email, a word document with questions will be attached. The attached informed consent form has to be read before responding to the questions. Each participant acknowledges through his/her responses to the questionnaire (via email) that he/she has read and understood the informed consent form and further agrees to its terms. The responses will be used for Zoe Zeniodi’s doctoral thesis on the subject: “Frank Ticheli: An American Dream”. Through participation by responding to the questionnaire, each participant also agrees that his/her responses will be published in the essay.

RISKS:

No foreseeable risks or discomfort are anticipated for you by participating. Because this research is being conducted through email, security of your correspondence cannot be guaranteed.

BENEFITS:

Although, no benefits can be promised to you by participating in this study, the information gathered and distributed later is intended to give an insight to Frank Ticheli’s “An American Dream”.

ALTERNATIVES:

You have the alternative to not participate in this study. You may stop participating any time or you can skip any questions you do not want to answer. Nothing will happen to you as a result of halting participation.
OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:
The researcher will answer any questions you may have regarding the study and will give you a copy of the consent form after you have signed it. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Zoe Zeniodi at zzeniodi@gmail.com or at telephone number: 305-915 – 2968. Please print a copy of this consent document for your records.

Print name  Frank Ticheli  Date  3/27/10
Signature  
