

Nocturnes of the Inferno (1977)

Jere Hutcheson

“Legend has it that following a visit to Paris’s famed Notre Dame Cathedral, the composer experienced an apparition in which gargoyles scurried about the entrails of a gigantic cross-shaped grand piano. All the time Quasimodo, Victor Hugo’s famous Hunchback, furiously clanged the church bells in an attempt to coax the creatures back up to their perches atop the building.

I recall that I listened to some recordings of bird song before formulating my ideas for the nocturnes. I don’t believe that I actually used any of the bird songs literally. I was simply looking for some impetus; evidently the recordings had a subliminal effect on my thinking.

By the time of *Nocturnes*, the Verdehr Trio was gaining a significant reputation and was touring more and more often. They performed the entire work on several occasions, but it was the middle movement, *In a Dream*, that they played numerous times over quite a few years spanning 1977 until 1992. I applied for and received a grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts to fund a recording of *Nocturnes*. (The master tape was made, I believe, in 1979; it was lost, eventually found, and the recording [Crystal S 644] was finally issued in 1983.)”

—Jere Hutcheson

Nocturnes of the Inferno is the second work composed by Hutcheson expressly for the Verdehrs. The first work, *Rondo Brillante* (1972) is jocular in spirit and neoclassical in form. The *Nocturnes* explore an altogether different world of sound.

In the Halloween-piece tradition of *Night on Bald Mountain*, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, and *Totentanz*, Hutcheson’s *Nocturnes* evoke colorful, if not bizarre, images. The score is full of wonderful squeaks and eerie echoes. Haunting cries and murmurs and frenzied night creatures are to be found. Perhaps the tremolos, harmonics, and slipping pitches are the infernal utterances of nocturnal birds, bats, and insects. This diabolical realm also has its sense of humor; at times the music explodes with rollicking and grotesque fun-making.

Henry Roth in his column *Disc-Coverly*, July 15, 1988, wrote: “Hutcheson has no qualms about seeking out outré sound combinations and tonal textures. It [the *Nocturnes*] is a work of quixotic instrumental usage and good humor that is at times grotesque. Happily, though, the composer does not seem to approach his task with the grim search for experimentation found in so many avant-garde efforts, and his humor is essentially good-natured. Irrespective of how offbeat the effect, the composer avoids resorting to those instrumental clichés that have become part and parcel of the majority of avant-garde compositions. Best of all, the *Nocturnes* are provocative and entertaining.”

The world premiere of *Nocturnes of the Inferno* was on October 23, 1977 at the Kresge Art Gallery, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

Jere Hutcheson (born 1938, Marietta, Georgia) studied composition with Frances Buxton at Stetson University, Helen Gunderson at Louisiana State University, H. Owen Reed at Michigan State University, and Gunther Schuller and Ernst Krenek at the Berkshire Music Center, Tanglewood Massachusetts. His earliest inspiration to become a composer came in his early teen years from his piano teacher, Harry Bolza.

He has received composition fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, and the Vermont Composers Conference. He has been accorded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Michigan Council for the Arts, and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music. In 1976, the National Music Teachers Association honored him with the citation Distinguished Composer of the Year.

In addition to a large output for the band and wind ensemble, Hutcheson has written extensively for orchestra, chorus, voice, chamber ensembles, and piano. His works have been performed throughout the United States and Canada, as well as in Europe, Asia, and Australia. He has received performances by the symphony orchestras of St. Louis, Detroit, and Lansing, the Edward Tarr Brass Ensemble, the Norman Luboff Choir, the Duo Contemporain of the Netherlands, DuoDenum of Denmark, and many of the finest university wind ensembles and concert choirs in the United States. Hutcheson's instrumental compositions are published by C. Alan Publications, G. Schirmer, Subito Music, American Composers Edition, and Dorn Publications. His choral works are published through Walton and Subito Music.

Hutcheson's teaching career at Michigan State University spanned fifty-one years, from 1965 until 2016. He chaired the composition area from 1975 until 1992. He stated on more than one occasion that MSU was a land of opportunity for anyone with ideas and dreams. He recognized that the great institution provided an environment in which he could grow in his scholarship, in his teaching skills, and most especially, in his passion—composition. He recognized the value of a composer's being able to work side-by-side with conductors, performers, theorists, musicologists, as well as other composers.

Hutcheson co-authored the text *Musical Form and Analysis* with Glenn Spring in 2013. His earlier texts include *Music for the High School Chorus*, co-authored with James Niblock (1967) and *Musical Form and Analysis: A Programmed Course* in two volumes.

The Jere Hutcheson Archive in the library at Michigan State holds Hutcheson's complete compositional output (scores and recordings), as well as many early drafts, notes on compositional processes, and correspondence.

Additional information is available at www.jerehutcheson.com.