

Dominic Dousa, composer

STATEMENT OF ARTISTIC PHILOSOPHY

For many composers, the most obvious reason to write music is to express and communicate emotions. This is certainly an important element for me in my own work as a composer. I hope, however, that through my music I can communicate not only feelings, but also more generally the ideals and values that I hold dear. As an artistic endeavor that challenges the intellect and stimulates emotional sensitivity, composing music is a powerful and personal way to express one's thoughts and ideals.

Just as a poet or writer must become intimately acquainted with the structure, expressive meaning, and subtleties of his or her language to be an effective artist, so must a composer become familiar with the technical craft and expressive potential of music. When I was growing up, my primary experiences with music involved piano and violin lessons, participation in band, choral, orchestral, and jazz ensembles, as well as listening to popular music. During my college years, new worlds were opened to me with the new music scene in Boston and Harvard University, where I became more familiar with contemporary and avant-garde styles, and voraciously explored music of the 20th century through performing and independent study of scores. A year of study in Prague and concert-going in Europe further broadened my perspectives. All of these activities showed me the astoundingly wide array of styles, attitudes, and means of expression available as resources for composition and helped set the stage for my own creative path.

Some artists of various aesthetic persuasions whom I encountered during the course of my early musical development held strong views about what signifies progress in the art of composition. These views, however, varied considerably, and the lack of clearly prescribed stylistic norms expected of a contemporary composer left me, as an aspiring composer, uncertain as to how best to proceed in my metier. An anecdote that I heard from Dr. Milan Slavický, a noted contemporary European composer and my teacher in Prague, helped to bring this issue into perspective for me. He recounted the story of a notable European visual artist who, toward the beginning of his studies, tried out a wide range of styles. After this period of exploration, fairly early in his career he settled on a style that fit his expressive needs, and continued forging his path, firmly rooted in that one chosen style. Dr. Slavický recounted how vividly one could observe this exploration and ultimate choice of artistic path upon examining the artist's works chronologically. This story, together with Dr. Slavický's encouragement, provided me with a model of how to find one's voice as a composer in a musical world without one prevailing artistic path. It motivated me to seek out and consider the various styles and approaches to composition and then to choose those that best served my artistic intentions and convictions.

My own experiences with and consideration of different styles that I encountered in my academic studies and my own personal exploration of music ultimately led me to choose a musical style that was appropriate for my own expressive needs. This style is firmly rooted in the great Western musical tradition, yet is open to new ideas and ways of

expressing musically the tradition's foundational principles. It is marked by clear tonality and modality, well-balanced and well-structured form, and a melodic sense that is based upon a lyrical, vocal quality. In the context of this disciplined, rigorous treatment of the musical elements, the music is marked by visceral spirit and encompasses a wide range of mood and expression capable of conveying the many feelings encountered in one's day-to-day experiences. Its spirit is much indebted to the music of the great masters, as well as that of early- to mid-20th-century works by Janáček, Debussy, Ravel, Vaughan Williams, Copland, and Barber among many others. I have also been influenced by what I have encountered as a listener and performing musician in my day-to-day activities. Although time rarely permits the close study of a particular composer's entire oeuvre, I would list David Gillingham and Jody Nagel (my former teachers), Robert Beaser, David Maslanka, Eric Whitacre, Frank Ticheli, Morten Lauridsen, Eric Ewazen, Peter Ostroushko, Edgar Meyer, and Mark O'Connor as examples of present-day composers whose music has made an impression on me and in some way inspires me in my own work.

As a composer working within a cultural context marked by a dizzying variety of musical styles, I hope to create within this diverse mosaic a distinctive style that not only expresses my feelings, but also the ideas, values, and thoughts that I hold dear, and that will inspire listeners to consider them. I strive to write music that is, at its core, radiant, beautiful, optimistic, heartfelt, eloquent, and confident; that reflects a thoughtful, rational, sensitive, and contemplative mind; and that is marked by clarity and directness of expression, and a sense of flair when appropriate, in a natural musical voice fully in command of the techniques of its language — music that, whatever the audience, touches both the mind and the heart. There is something immensely satisfying in writing a piece of music that 'sounds right' — music that resonates with general audiences and to which they intuitively respond — and 'looks right' on the page — music whose logic and craft an educated musician can admire.

This approach to music composition is consistent with broader ideals that I hope to convey: consideration and valuing of the great legacy of one's traditions without being dogmatically bound to it, reliance on a healthy sense of intuition, and a spirit of humble openness to new perspectives — an approach that balances logic and intellectual rigor with sensitivity and a reflective spirit of what one experiences as a human being. As a teacher and musician at an institution of higher learning who has the opportunity to interact and work with highly specialized professionals, students, and general audiences, I believe I am ideally situated to express these ideals through my music.