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Nausea

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NAUSEA

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for the degree of

Master of Music

with a

Major in Composition

by

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The popular novel *Nausea*, by Jean-Paul Sartre, tells the story of a fictional adventurer, Antoine Roquentin, and his struggle to understand the surrounding world. This novel illustrates the basics of Sartre’s existentialism. Sartre introduced the concept of “bad faith,” by which he meant the delusion that things in our lives must always be as they are. “Bad faith” and freedom are the core of Sartre’s message. Sartre shares the deep irony that we are “condemned to freedom” and implores us to understand responsibility in a more meaningful way. His philosophy forces us to own up to what we have made of ourselves. Unlike Nietzsche, Sartre did not believe in innate purpose or that people were, necessarily, at the whim of their backgrounds, culture, or environment. Sartre thought that whoever and wherever we were, the fundamental choices relating to our experience in life and identity rest solely upon our shoulders.

In *Nausea*, Roquentin begins to understand “the absurdity of the world” when he sees objects “as they are,” apart from the lens of our normal, human presumptions. For brief moments, Roquentin finds himself in disoriented and confused states, unable to remember the purposes of various objects. This work is a journey through, “nausea,” that strange state of affairs where we begin to dread our ineffable freedom. Seeing the “absurdity of the world,” we realize the terrifying “anguish” of our existence. Sartre’s focus on these frightening moments and words like “anguish”
or “condemned” are not only intended to show the strange and terrifying aspects of our lives. Rather, amid all the strangeness lies an endless palette of choices.

The first movement, “A Dredge Defined its Shadow,” comes from a quote by Roquentin as he meticulously documents his environment. The music depicts a series of details interrupted by stabilizing elements. The swirling sound of the flute and stochastic middle-ground represent the encroaching “nausea,” and the sharp interruptions by the percussion demonstrate our desire to break away from our disoriented state. The second movement, “Contingency and Delusion,” was inspired by a moment in the novel where Roquentin begins to understand the depth of his freedom. In his case, this is liberating. More often though, at least in Sartre’s estimation, people are overcome by their “bad faith.” Therefore, the ending of the second movement, echoing back to the works opening, symbolizes a return to the cycle of nausea until one can liberate oneself from the shackles of normality.
Instrumentation:

3 Flutes (Flute 1 also Piccolo, Flute 3 also Alto Flute)
3 Oboes
3 Clarinets (B♭ Cl. 1 also Piccolo E♭ Cl., B♭ Cl.3 also B♭ Bass Clarinet)
2 Bassoons
Contrabassoon
4 F Horns
3 C Trumpets
3 Trombones
Bass Trombone
Timpani
Percussion 1 – Finger Cymbal*, Woodblock, Tom-Toms, Bongo
Percussion 2 – Xylophone, Vibes, Snare
Percussion 3 – Glockenspiel, Chimes
Percussion 4 – Bass Drum, Mark Tree, Suspended Cymbal
Percussion 5 – Anvil, Tam-Tam, Suspended Cymbal
Strings**

*Finger Cymbal is hung and struck with a drumstick.
**Glissandi in Strings should be slow, over the given duration.

Duration: 8-9 minutes ca.
Transposed Score

Movements:

I. ‘A dredge defined its shadow’

II. ‘Contingency and delusion’