The Stairway Suite

Joe Wolfe

Theme and Variations for Orchestra and Big Band
upon an air by Plant & Page
The Stairway Suite

Joe Wolfe

Theme and Variations for Orchestra and Big Band \textit{ad lib}
upon an air by Plant & Page

Instrumentation

Orchestra

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in Bb
2 Bassoons
2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in Bb
2 Trombones
1 Bass trombone or Tuba
4 Timpani (one player)
Strings

Bigband movement

2 Alto Saxophones in Eb
2 Tenor Saxophones in Bb
3 Trumpets in Bb
2 Trombones
1 Bass trombone
Continuo
Bass
Drums

Performance variations: The section for bigband (section 3) may be omitted in the absence of saxophones. This requires deleting all but the first chord in the last two bars in the 5:4 movement. (The third section may also be performed by a bigband without orchestra.) The choir is required only for two short sections. The choral section in the C major movement may be omitted if no choir is available, and the coda may be performed by orchestra without choir or saxophones.

The Stairway Suite

Allegro Moderato

Joe Wolfe

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B♭

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in B♭

Trombone

Tuba

Timpani

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Tba.
Timp.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Db.

naturale inside
outside
Tempo facile de swing

Joe Wolfe

Alto Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone

Trumpet in B

Trombone

Double Bass

Continuo

Drum Set

Tempo facile de swing

snare only

Tutti ad lib.
Repeat ad lib, rit to new tempo

Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen

Joe Wolfe
Tempo de Habanera

Joe Wolfe

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B♭

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in B♭

Trombone

Tuba

Timpani

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass
Ich singe ein Recitativ um dies Stück mit dem anderen

Recit
There's a lady who's sign on the wall, all that glis ters is sure, and she's buying a stair way to have two

There's a lady who's sign on the wall, but she wants to be sure 'cause you know some-times words have two

There's a sign on the wall, but she wants to be sure 'cause you buy ing a stair way to have two

Heaven! There's a lady who's sign on the wall, but she wants to be sure 'cause you buy ing a stair way to have two
When she gets there she knows if the stores are all closed with a word she can get what she wants.

If the stores are all closed with a word she can get what she wants.

When she gets there she knows if the stores are all closed with a word she can get what she wants.

If the stores are all closed with a word she can get what she wants.
Ooh and it makes us wonder and she's buying a stair way to heaven. There's a

you? Do you? if so, then it makes us wonder and she's buying a stair way to heaven. There's a

you? Do you? if so, it makes us wonder and she's buying a stair way to heaven. There's a

bah bah bah bah ooh it makes us wonder and she's by the stairs to heaven. There's a

There's
Our shadows tall - er than our soul there walks a la - dy we all know

Choir

Our shadows tall - er than our soul there walks a la - dy we all know

Vln.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlc.

Dr.
The Led Zeppelin song “Stairway to Heaven” is regarded as a rock classic by many critics. Its notoriety is assured by the thousands of would-be guitarists who can play the first dozen bars badly: it is to the guitar what “Chopsticks” is to the piano. In 1989 and 1990, on the ABC’s “The Money or the Gun”, each featured musician or group was obliged to perform a version of “Stairway”. For 25 programmes the tune was presented in a wide range of styles, from country to operatic, but there was no orchestral version. “Version 26” was commissioned in January 1991 by the UNSW Orchestra. The result is a set of orchestral variations, each in the style of a famous composer.

1. The first movement gives the introduction to the violas and flutes, then the two principal themes of ‘Stairway’ (oboe and clarinet, then cellos) appear in an orchestration borrowed from Schubert’s 8th Symphony (the ‘Unfinished’). This movement establishes the rules of the game: the pieces of the jigsaw have to be fitted together, but none may be bent so far as to be unrecognizable.

2. In the second movement, an augmented fourth and an extra beat per bar give the ‘Stairway’ themes a resemblance to Holst’s ‘Mars’ from ‘The Planets’.

3. Here the straight quavers of rock are replaced by the triplet rhythm of swing, and the orchestration is that of a Glen Miller big band.

4. The ‘Stairway’ themes can, with a few small changes, be used as canon fodder. Mahler used the canon ‘Frère Jacques’ as an infamous bass solo in his first symphony - what would it sound like if he had chosen ‘Stairway’?

5. And if the smugglers in Bizet’s ‘Carmen’ had been climbing a Stairway? The fifth movement explores this possibility.

6. Ludwig cannot be left out. The ‘Stairway’ theme - in a major key - appears first in the cellos and basses, then is shared around among the strings and wind like the ‘Freunde’ air in Beethoven’s ninth.

7. The finale starts with just a string trio, then adds a bassoon, then the string orchestra, some pyrotechnics for solo violin, then winds, then big band; and so on until the whole of the large score is covered with notes. The final solo typifies the gravity of the work.

About the composer. Joe Wolfe has mainly written music for jazz and fusion groups, including incidental music for plays and films. This was his first orchestral work. His next work for the UNSW Orchestra was "Sydney Sketches" - a set of tone poems, each of which is based in different Sydney location at a different time of day. His other orchestral works include "Circle of Fourths", using that unusual chord as its harmonic basis and a jazz-influenced Trumpet Concerto. These may be found at www.phys.unsw.edu.au/~jw/Joe.html. Joe is also a Professor of Physics at UNSW.