

Preface

Barbeque Man Unleashed: The Greatest Professional Wrestling Work of All Time

Work- (1) Fake. (2) Pretend to make something look real. (3) Wrestle.

-John Abercrombie's *Guide to Wrestling Terminology*¹

Work (verb)- To deceive or manipulate an audience.

- Wikipedia, "Glossary of Professional Wrestling Terms"²

Introduction

My first appreciation for classical music as a child was through professional wrestling. Seeing my favorite wrestlers make grand entrances accompanied to the sounds of an orchestra, I was convinced they composed the music. I began to take my dad's camcorder and record myself playing piano pieces. My performances could not begin until I gave an interview to the camera, mimicking the diction wrestlers gave in theirs. The piece was my opponent, the piano my wrestling ring. "Ya know something, Mean Gene, for too long *Minuet in G* has stood in the way of what's right, and it's time for some payback!" Music, for me, was a wild, exaggerated home for escapism, ultimately leading to the reinstatement of justice until my teacher assigned a new piece. I wrote *Barbeque Man Unleashed: The Greatest Professional Wrestling Work of All Time* in attempt to reconnect with that home.

My dissertation research centers on entrance music in professional wrestling. Designed to elicit an immediate response from the audience, entrance music acts as the first component in revealing the wrestler's role, traditionally hero or villain, *babyface* or

¹ Kluck, Ted. *Headlocks and Dropkicks*. Denver: Praeger, 2009.

² "Glossary of Professional Wrestling Terms." *Wikipedia*. Web. Accessed 22, February 2013.

heel. Barbeque Man Unleashed depicts the fictitious rivalry between North Carolinian professional wrestlers Barbeque Man, Jr. (babyface) and Baron Banks Gentry (heel). Their contrasting entrance themes form the basis of the musical development in the piece. The score is divided into two sections, or wrestling matches, and reflects changes in wrestling storylines I witnessed growing up, progressing from family-friendly morality plays as a child to more adult oriented and racy content during the so-called WWF 'Attitude Era' of my teenage years (1988-1999).

The score for *Barbeque Man Unleashed* is not for live performance but rather a representation of a digital composition. It was originally intended that a piano soloist could perform the piece live with electronics, cabaret style. This score attempts to preserve some version of the envisioned live performance I had in mind and which I hope to complete at a later date. In particular, the following sections lend themselves immediately to performance by a piano soloist:

Part 1: mm. 84-109

Part 2: mm. 13-64, 118-207, 226-306.

The music was written as a through-composed score to be shown with a video, "*Barbeque Man Unleashed: Symphonic Ballet With Action Figures*," created by Gray Swartzel, Samir Arora, and me. Both were presented in Scheaffer Theater, Duke University, on March 3, 2013. The present score does not include all of the music used in the video, but is rather something like a suite. The time line refers to the location in the video. The video with my music may be found at the following URL:

<https://vimeo.com/60915697>

Synopsis of the Action

Part One.

It is a dark time for the International Wrestling Federation (IWF), as the villainous Baron Banks Gentry has defeated longtime fan favorite 'Barbeque Man' Ervie Moontower with a devastating move known as The Foreclosure. 'Barbeque Man' dies from his injuries, while his wife, Barbeque Ma'am, dies from shock. Their only child, Montezuma, witnesses the horror from the crowd. With no prior wrestling experience and armed with only his late father's entrance music, Montezuma challenges Gentry to a match for the following night at Monday Night Ruckus.

They make their entrances. After a tense faceoff, Gentry produces an inheritance notification and slaps Montezuma. They enter a slapping frenzy, and eventually Montezuma slams Gentry's head ten times into the turnbuckle. Dazed and seeing birds, Gentry pretends to beg forgiveness. Out of nowhere, Gentry's personal financial consultant, Vanderbilt Jenkins, flies into the ring and slaps Montezuma. With the referee distracted with Jenkins, Gentry hits Montezuma in the head with a steel chair. Montezuma collapses, and Gentry pins him to the referees' count of three. The audience is stunned as a victorious Gentry walks out with Jenkins, the championship belt draped over his shoulder. Montezuma is seriously injured and placed on a stretcher. The scene fades to black.

Montezuma has some tough years after the deaths of his parents and subsequent loss to Baron Banks Gentry. Suffering from mental illness and substance abuse, he visits

his parents' graves every night of Wrestlefest, begging forgiveness, looking for a sign. One night, a voice calls out: it's The Legend. The Legend offers to train him as a wrestler if he promises to get clean. Agreeing, they travel to the world's toughest wrestling locations. Soon entering the ring again, Montezuma becomes known as Barbeque Man, Jr., winning the adoration of wrestling fans all over the world, despite a losing record. One winter, BBQ Man, Jr. unexpectedly wins a 30-man Battle Royale and is given the opportunity to challenge Gentry for the IWF Heavyweight Championship at Wrestlefest 30.

Part Two

At Wrestlefest 30, after making their respective entrances, BBQ Man, Jr. and Gentry have a tense faceoff. They battle over a series of wrestling holds until Gentry slams Jr. to the mat and then out of the ring. Gentry reveals a toilet from underneath the ring and sticks Jr.'s head in it repeatedly. Baron Banks slaps him several times and puts him in The Foreclosure, the dreaded modified sleeper hold.

While in The Foreclosure, Jr. dreams of a forest. He hears voices and sees an old musical birdhouse, his blanket from childhood, and a teddy bear. Regaining his strength, Jr.'s arm rises as he breaks out of The Foreclosure. He hulks up and becomes impervious to pain, dishing punishment to Gentry with a series of kicks, elbows, and leg drops. Climbing the top rope to deliver his father's patented Barbeque Man Elbow, Vanderbilt Jenkins jumps in to smash a steel chair into Jr.'s face. With Jr. dazed, Jenkins charges. Jr. ducks at the last minute, and Jenkins flies out of the ring and crashes into the Spanish broadcasting table.

Gentry snaps his fingers and a collection of evil henchmen enter the arena and circle the ring. Gentry and Jr. have a sword fight, with Jr. slicing off Gentry's tie. Two archers shoot arrows at Jr., followed by an evil Transformer with laser explosives. They miss. Mozart and Beethoven jump into the ring to attack Jr. and are quickly dismissed. Gentry and a chainsaw-wielding Richard Wagner corner Jr. Just when it seems Jr. has met his end, a Tyrannosaurus Rex ridden by Farooq, the great protector, eats Wagner. Jr. drops the distracted Gentry with a 'Barbeque Man Stunner.' Jr. climbs the top turnbuckle and successfully delivers the 'Barbeque Man Elbow,' pinning Gentry to the referee's count of three. We have a new champion.

Brief Example of Musical Development

Ever since seeing Grandmaster Flash give a musical demonstration of hip-hop record spinning in 2004, I have been fascinated by the idea of taking two distinct musical materials and overlapping and crosscutting them to create something new. My first attempt at this was a piece for two pianos, *Combine Records* (2005), in which I wrote two separate piano pieces and, using effects pedals, treated them as if operated by an imaginary turntable performer. In *Barbeque Man Unleashed*, contrasting entrance themes for the two wrestlers clash to result in overlapping key centers, rhythms, and tempos. Barbeque Man, Jr. (Montezuma Moontower) first enters to his late father's entrance music, a fast tempo 4/4 country rock theme in F.



Baron Banks Gentry's Theme is a 3/4 waltz in A.



Colliding in the ring in Part One, the prevailing tonality is associated with the wrestler in control of the match at any given time. If there is no clear wrestler in control, their themes overlap in jagged clashes. This can be seen most clearly in Part One beginning at measure 86, where Gentry's theme—roughly related to A major—is heard in the right hand, and in the left hand Barbeque Man's Father's theme is heard in fragments related to F, Eb and Ab. In m. 87, the hands flip and the RH plays the Barbeque Man (F-Eb-Ab music) and the LH descends using notes from Gentry's A major.



I establish the two themes of the two principals in Part One and for the most part the music mimics the action on the screen. At the end of Part One, Barbeque Man, Jr. enters to his own entrance music, a more angular B flat minor theme in 13/16 (Part One, mm 196).

Part Two is characterized by a more free-flowing, continuous musical form with greater independence from the choreographic action. Its musical figures derive from a combination of the entrance themes, but as seen through the prism of Arnold Schoenberg's *Klavierstück* Op. 19, No. 6. A few examples suffice to trace the connection (not so much in the order of appearance, but to outline the point).

The 3-note chords beginning Part Two (in the top two staves) correspond to the static chords opening Schoenberg's piece.

Similarly, the repeated opening piano figure beginning in m. 209 outlines a wedge shape derived from the pitches found in measure 8 of the Schoenberg.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The top system compares Schoenberg's op. 19, no. 6 (measures 8 and 9) with Swartzel's 'Barbeque Man Unleashed' (measures 209-210). Schoenberg's piece features a piano figure with a triplet of chords. Swartzel's piece features a piano figure with a similar rhythmic pattern. The bottom system shows the 'Wedge shape derived from m. 8' of Schoenberg's piece, which is an eight-note melodic theme. This theme is shown in its original form and its inversion.

I imagined Schoenberg's opus having a stranglehold on the first five minutes of the rematch, not so much to achieve postmodern irony, but because I liked the sound of Schoenberg's bells suspended into a kind of eternity.

I've always found wrestling matches to be inherently musical, specifically anticipating the referee's count to three. In many matches, the hero will slam the villain's head into the turnbuckle exactly ten times as the crowd counts along, slowing as the hits approach ten; this action is depicted in Part One, mm. 107-109. Many other wrestling rituals are depicted, including the faceoff, the villain breaking the rules and getting away with it, a wrestler crashing down upon the Spanish broadcasting table, the hero 'hulking up' after it seems all hope is lost, climbing the top turnbuckle, and third party wrestlers interrupting the action.

One musical idea explored in the piece is what I call a *metrical kaleidoscope*, in which musical materials in various time signatures are stacked on top of one another in

succession. Instead of rhythmic cacophony, the figures are designed so listeners can hear numerous interlocking time signatures, all of which depend on their focus. Listeners can hypothetically hear several time signatures morph at any given moment; repeated audition leads the listener to feel a different rhythmic focus each time. I hope to have achieved a feeling whereby the music is felt as rhythmic in the absence of regular pulse; if one were dancing to the music, no choreography would ever feel wrong. This practice is utilized in the ‘Hulking up’ scene, in which Barbeque Man, Jr. breaks out of a submission move, fighting back against Gentry (p. 59, mm. 359 through mm. 391). The following metrical kaleidoscope reiterates Barbeque Man Jr’s second entrance music, now more fully realized and in stacked time signatures of 13/16, 4/4, and 3/4. The bass ostinato is in 13/16, the choir and tambourines are in 4/4, and the bongos and bass drums slams are in 3/4 (not notated).³

³ The piano plays mostly in 13/16 but occasionally jumps through each of the other time signatures to further obscure a uniform beat.

Musical Reasons for Creating the Piece

I saw the idea of scoring a professional wrestling match as an incredible challenge. The slow pacing of a match often surprises first time viewers, as wrestling fans would feel cheated to see a main event match end in a few minutes. They want dramatic action over an extended period with many unexpected turns. When I first started writing this piece, I thought it would be interesting to create a slow, atmospheric piece with periodic loud hits to emulate the slams, something slightly similar in sound to Andriessen's *De Tijd*. However, after writing about five minutes of this initial music, I realized I was being artistically dishonest. I didn't want to create a meditation on wrestling but a spectacle, as a wrestling match is meant to be. Like much of the music I love, wrestling relies heavily on timing, but it's also not monochromatic. Wrestling matches can go from serious to comedic in an instant, playing with the emotions and failing if allowing the viewer to get too familiar and comfortable. Viewers are supposed to feel angry, surprised, sad, happy, disappointed, scared, and amused, and sometimes in no particular order. You can't categorize great wrestling matches by a singular sentiment. *Barbeque Man Unleashed* fuses together various musical styles, drawing on currents from high modernism (such as serialization of pitch and rhythm and collage); cartoon music (such as the highly ironic scores of Carl Stallings), Hollywood blockbusters, and Southern popular music (including several styles of country music and gospel). Though none of the borrowed tropes in this piece are immune from parody, they are all valued equally in terms of their emotional weight in telling the story.

In addition to musical reasons, I was also fascinated by what Henry Jenkins III has called “*a form of masculine melodrama which, like its nineteenth century precedents, lends its voice to the voiceless and champions the powerless*” (64).⁴ Ultimately, the joy of professional wrestling is based on watching highly skilled performers create unforgettable stories through semi-predetermined choreography. The same can be said for listening to music. Jenkins concludes:

[Wrestling] celebrates and encourages working-class resistance to economic injustice and political abuse. It recognizes and values the diversity of American society...In short, wrestling embodies the fundamental contradictions of the American populist tradition. The politics of WWF wrestling is punch-drunk and rambunctious, yet it builds upon authentic anger and frustrations we cannot ignore if we want to understand the state of contemporary American culture. Wrestling makes you want to shout, and perhaps we have had too much silence.”

Through the creation of a new match, *Barbeque Man Unleashed* is an attempt to form a soundtrack for the entire spectacle that made me love music in the first place.

Table I: List of the Virtual Instrument Libraries⁵

Symphobia 1 and 2	Pianoteq 4
True Strike Percussion 1	Superior Drummer 2.0
Omnisphere	Trilian
Stylus RMX	Apple Logic Loops
Prime Loops’ Dirty South Vocal Samples	Blastwave FX

⁴ Jenkins III, Henry. “Never Trust a Snake.” *Steel Chair to the Head*. Ed. Nicholas Sammond. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. This comment follows Jenkins’ exploration of the misogyny and racist elements presented in some of the storylines from the early 90s (pp. 52-64), comments with which I agree. I was aware in creating this score and study that there was a danger that I might serve as a vehicle to perpetuate these stereotypes. At the same time, the popularity of the WWF and its use of music in particular suggested a need for scholarly and artistic inquiry, which can be done without endorsing undesirable stereotypes.

⁵ Purchased by the author with full creative license (2012).