

Musical Magic with the MoTab choir, Utah Symphony, and James Taylor

On Saturday September 7, 2013, I had the opportunity to attend an amazing performance in the LDS Conference Center in Salt Lake City. The performers included the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the Utah Symphony, and James Taylor. Between the three different performance groups, the music was moving, magical, and meaningful. I chose three pieces in particular that really “spoke” to me. *Fire and Rain*, *Water is Wide*, and *Shower the People*, by James Taylor.

The first song that I would like to talk about is a rendition of James Taylor's song *Fire and Rain* that was performed by James Taylor and the Utah Symphony. Everything about this song from the tempo, the rhythm, the melody, of this song was “adagio,” or slow, and also smooth and soothing. The lyrics are nostalgic, but the music, including the tone of James Taylor's voice, his guitar, and the instruments of the Symphony felt nostalgic as well. The meaning of this song is relaxing, “feel-good” music—even though there are some sad parts of this song. There are happy memories, and sad memories.

There were many instruments used to perform this song: James Taylor's guitar, his pianist on the piano, violins, cellos, and many other string instruments were used to make this song full of warmth. The rhythm of this song had parts where it was even, and other parts where it was syncopated. The most distinguishing syncopation, to me, was the plucking of the notes on Mr. Taylor's guitar.

The feeling that I got from this song was reminiscent of walking, maybe with a slight skip, down a quiet, secluded country road, or mountain trail; it is autumn and I am breathing in the crisp, cool air, the leaves are coloring and some are falling to the ground. The year is nearing its end, and I am thinking back on this year, and many years past with fondness, and also with sensitivity.

Water is Wide is more of a melancholy, “heart break” type song. The tempo of this song, like most of James Taylor's songs are slower. *Water is Wide*, however is even slower than *Fire and Rain* or it is “largo.” This song was also performed by both James Taylor and the Utah Symphony. This song was also smooth, with the use of the guitar, and the Symphony. The guitar, strings, and piano were all heard, but the most profound musical instrument that I could hear was a singular violin, which, although beautiful, sounded somber with its slow, smooth, low notes.

The rhythm, for the most part, was even throughout this entire song. There was not any percussion that I noticed, except for, as previously mentioned, the plucking of Mr. Taylor's guitar that stood out. The song as a whole sounded like a lullaby. Although it was performed for everyone to hear in the 22,000 seat Conference Center, it was also “quiet,” or soft.

Crescendo was prominent in *Water is Wide* as well. Where there were intense words, Mr. Taylor's voice gradually grew louder, and he also held those notes longer. I think that James Taylor did an incredible job of having the music, not just the lyrics, flow, and make us feel like we were traveling across a smooth, slow-flowing river in a row boat. I got the feeling though that the boat, meant for two, was only carrying one. This song also has that nostalgic feeling, where you are thinking back on the past, what your heart may have missed out on, and even though you have come to terms and moved on, your heart never fully healed.

The last song that I would like to cover is *Shower the People*. This song was performed by all three performance groups—James Taylor, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and the Utah Symphony. The tempo of this song is slightly faster than *Fire and Rain*, and much quicker than *Water is Wide*—maybe more “andante,” or even “andantino,” although it still starts out slow. Like many of James Taylor's songs, this one is upbeat, lighthearted, and hopeful. James Taylor seems to have a few different themes to his songs. They seem to be either traveling the path of life type songs, “heart break” songs, or hopeful, and uplifting for the future. This last genre of James Taylor music definitely applies to *Shower*

the People.

Shower the People is a lot more syncopated than the last two songs that I have described, and the percussion is a lot more prevalent. The rhythm of this song still flows, but it also invokes the urge to clap along, or tap your foot, or nod your head with the song as it is playing. The choir sang as back up musicians for James Taylor in this song, and I think that it really added to the effect that he was trying to create with the meaning of this song.

This song seems to be about family and friends and how important it is to make sure that they know that you love them, and care about them. I think that it is wonderful that the Choir sang along with James Taylor—it seemed to portray, as simple as this concept is, people. The arrangement of this song with the Choir seems to be showing that it is not only us as individuals that are in mind, and not just the immediate people in our lives, but those beyond that circle. This song seems to be trying to give us a broader view of love—that we need to open our hearts to others, and accept them as well as showing those that are close to us how much we love them now, because you never know what is going to happen in the future.

Each of the three songs mean something different, but were all created and performed beautifully for their own unique purpose, just as all the rest of the songs in the performance were. These three songs, however, *Fire and Rain*, *Water is Wide*, and *Shower the People* really stood out to me. The meanings, rhythm, flow, texture, tempo all spoke to me in different ways.

Fire and Rain is a slow, soothing, and nostalgic song that touches the soul with memories of times past, happy, or sad. This song uses strings, guitar, piano which seem to create the feeling of warmth in our hearts. *Water is Wide* is also a nostalgic type song, however this one was even slower than the first, and invokes more of a feeling of sadness, or longing. This song uses a slower, melancholy type rhythm with the use of a singular violin, an instrument that is full of emotion and in this case makes us sad, or at least it did this for me. *Shower the People* is a song that had a tempo that was a quicker pace than most of James Taylor's songs that were performed at the concert. *Shower the*

People is upbeat, and lighthearted, not only in lyrics, but in the rhythm of the music as well. This song, unlike most of the others at the concert was more syncopated, and the percussion, as far as I could tell, was much more prevalent in this song than in others. I am fortunate and grateful that I was able to attend such a magnificent and heart warming performance!