

Apparitions

Tone Poems After Banský

Joel Kirk

c. 13 minutes

Program Note:

This piece was kindly commissioned for the Bowling Green State University Concert Band as part of a series of commissions inspired by street art from around the world. As a British composer, I was asked to write a piece inspired by renowned and notorious British artist, Banksy.

Initial discussion between myself and the ensemble resulted in a proposed structure of four to five miniatures, with each miniature being inspired by a different Banksy work. As such, I was presented with two enormous dilemmas: (1) which works to choose and why, and (2) how to portray them musically without writing an overly clichéd and/or explicitly political piece that, even if appropriate for current times, may nonetheless date horribly. After much thought, I chose to pursue a different route; the four movements of the piece are inspired by facets of Banksy's work as a totality. This felt like a more sincere and respectful way of portraying the complexity and sensitivity of his output:

I: Visions - Banksy's work springs up unexpectedly in public places, often on walls of prominent buildings in city/town centers. Having encountered Banksy's works in situ several times, they strike me as vision-like in character; socio-political revelations that suddenly inspire a visceral existential dilemma. Banksy's preference for black, white, and grays overlayed with vibrant color gives his work a somewhat paranormal, uncanny feel. As such, 'Visions' present us with a psychedelic, ghostly musical landscape of contemplation.

II: Anticipation - Banksy's works are highly anticipated by both the public and art worlds alike. His identity is still unknown, and there is still no pattern as to when/where his next work will appear, nor the subject matter it will reflect upon. Discourse around his work stimulates intrigue, excitement, and strong emotional responses from his audiences. Immediately following the opening, 'Anticipation' offers an excitable, expressive contrast to the ethereality of 'Visions.'

III: Chorale - Banksy's work often critiques global injustice through visceral, often-candid portrayals of those afflicted. As the emotional centerpiece of 'Apparitions,' 'Chorale' reflects upon the mournful quality of Banksy's work.

IV: Moving figures; dancing - from children playing to balloons floating away, Banksy's work is rarely still, often portraying the actions and gestures of human beings. The final movement captures the energetic, often satirically playful nature of Banksy's work – catchy riffs and funky rhythmic patterns are juxtaposed against striking dissonances and fiendish technical playing. The piece nonetheless ends hopefully, in search of a better world.

My sincerest thanks go to Matthew Paul Dockendorf and the Bowling Green State University Concert Band for their hard work in bringing the piece to life. Thanks also go to Kenneth Wayne Thompson and Piyawat Louilarprassert for their kind advocacy in the early stages of the project, for which I am deeply grateful.

- Joel Kirk, 24/09/2025