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Notes

Suite for Suzanne is not program music in a rigid sense but rather a sequence of five movements each of whose title, mood and pulse is informed by specific words or events in the novel.

I Together

After taking a good deep breath of Southern Alabama air, this movement suggests the swirling scenes of summertime play among Scout, Jem and Dill with Boo Radley looming, albeit, unseen.

II Scuppernongs

Plucking an occasional camellia, getting a squirt of hot milk from Miss Maudie Atkinson's cow on a summer day, helping ourselves to someone's scuppernongs was part of our ethical culture....

I was intrigued and tickled by this word, *scuppernongs*. I soon read in Webster's: *a cultivated muscadine with yellowish green plum-flavored fruits.*

I heard a scherzo imagining these fruit bush/trees as witnesses to Scout's childhood yet oblivious in their preoccupation as scuppernongs. Dormant and leafless in winter, then bursting with vernal sap and flaming green buds, they would grow decadent and silly with fruit by late summer.

I still haven't seen or tasted a scuppernong but I enjoyed thinking that they resembled the untidy mulberry trees bordering the apple orchard in which I played as a child.

III Only children weep

After the jury unjustly convicts Tom Robinson, Jem asks his father:

How could they do it, how could they?

Atticus responds:

I don't know, but they did it. They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it--seems that only children weep.

I am sure I was not the first reader who wept when reaching this juncture in the book. One is overcome with a profound grief for humanity and then emotion rips from an even greater depth upon recognizing the redemption present in these innocent children and their intrinsic morality.

IV A new kind of clown

The great AIDS activist Larry Kramer always asks: *WHERE IS THE OUTRAGE?*

I wanted to honor the energy of Dill's outrage with its every angle and quirk.

I think I'll be a clown when I get grown, said Dill.

Yes sir, a clown, he said. There ain't one thing in this world I can do about folks except laugh, so I'm gonna join the circus and laugh my head off.

You got it backwards, Dill, said Jem. Clowns are sad, it's folks that laugh at them.

Well I'm gonna be a new kind of clown. I'm gonna stand in the middle of the ring and laugh at the folks. Just looka yonder, he pointed, Every one of 'em oughta be ridin' broomsticks.

V From the mud to the stars

The band played the national anthem, and we heard the audience rise. Then the bass drum sounded. Mrs. Merrivether, stationed behind her lectern beside the band, said: 'Maycomb County Ad Astra Per Aspera.' The bass drum boomed again. 'That means,' said Mrs. Merrivether, translating for the rustic elements, 'from the mud to the stars.' She added, unnecessarily, it seemed to me, 'A pageant.'

Harper Lee uses this farcical school pageant to reinstate a sense of harmony after the numbing injustice of Tom Robinson's sentencing and murder. The hilarious juxtaposition of idealistic Mrs. Merrivether with earthy Scout affords some space for the reader to step back and see the larger picture. Despite the failings of humanity the comedy encourages a sort of unconditional universal embrace while a sense of wonder lingers in the air.

--Martin Hennessey