

## Dr Ian Percy

Website Content and Research

[www.ianpercy.me.uk](http://www.ianpercy.me.uk)

### **Continuoso Cycles and Continuum** (2015/18)

(Inflections of Antiquity)

Six movements for string quartet

(Rearranged: May 2020)

### **Modal Sfumato**

1. Influenced by a retrospective repertoire and in reference to antique form and structure, this piece was always intended to be a modal composition.
2. The initial trichord is an  $F_{sus^4}$  ( $F - B^b - C$ ), which is neither Major nor minor.
3. The  $F_{sus^4}$  chord is built from **interval classes 2 and 5** and spells out the first three steps of the **cycle of fourths**:  $C - F - B^b$
4. The chord was extended to include the tone below ( $E^b$ ) and spell an  $F^7_{sus^4}$  chord ( $E^b - F - B^b - C$ ).
5. The  $F^7_{sus^4}$  contains the first four steps of the cycle of fourths:  $C - F - B^b - E^b$
6. The chord was further extended to include the next step on the cycle of fourths:  $C - F - B^b - E^b - A^b$
7. This additional note finally defines the primary chord as a minor chord, it is an  $F_{min}^{11}$  (no 9<sup>th</sup>) chord:  $F - A^b - C - E^b - B^b$ , but voiced:  $E^b - F - B^b - C - A^b$ .
8. This chord could also be named as an  $E^{b6/9}_{sus^4}$ , or an  $E^{b13}_{sus^4}$  (no 7<sup>th</sup>).
9. The extended chord now contains all the accidentals of an  $E^b$  Major/C minor scale ( $B^b - E^b - A^b$ ) and the first five steps of the cycle of fourths ( $C - F - B^b - E^b - A^b$ ).
10. The vertical chord spelling, pitch motion and structure was conceived through specific linear and vertical use of interval classes 2 and 5 (Major 2<sup>nd</sup>/minor 7<sup>th</sup> and Perfect fourth/Perfect fifth).
11. We therefore seem to be exploring F Dorian (2<sup>nd</sup> mode of  $E^b$ ). Dorian is the only mode that inverts to duplicate; it is a modal palindrome.

12. The introduction of the pitch of D<sup>b</sup> is now pivotal, if one were to introduce a D<sup>b</sup>; the tonality would (pseudo) modulate to A<sup>b</sup> Major/F minor ... What if we use a D natural?
13. Although the first movement is written in A<sup>b</sup> Major/F minor, the expanding pitch content initially avoids the 'defining-third' to subliminally modulate through F, B<sup>b</sup> and E<sup>b</sup> on its way.
14. Alternating phrase resolutions add 'dialectic lilt' of the passing modes as the chord-type expands and blurs the sense of a 'home-tone'.
15. Chords built upon the perfect-fourth interval shaped modal phrases and ambiguous consonant harmony that seemed sympathetic to the reference repertoire yet remained authentic to a contemporary palette.
16. The final resolution of the first movement to C Phrygian mode (3<sup>rd</sup> mode of A<sup>b</sup>) and the quasi whole-tone modulation to B<sup>b</sup> Dorian mode (2<sup>nd</sup> mode of A<sup>b</sup>) to start the second movement is representative of the subtle amorphic possibilities for subliminally modulating pitch-schemes in the blending of modal sfumato<sup>1</sup>.

### **Other forms of musical sfumato:**

1. Pitch sfumato: modulations on a single pivot pitch through which to navigate twelve-tone schemes.
2. Metric sfumato: Pulse modulation (Metric modulation) ...
3. Timbral sfumato: Aural phenomenon such as Contrapuntal Microtonal Glissandi, Shepherd's Tones and Heterodyning Frequencies.
4. Textural sfumato: the textural shading from the idiomatic nature of one instrument to another ...
5. Any 'and all' of the above ...

### **Contact:**

For further information and resources contact the composer at: [contact@ianpercy.me.uk](mailto:contact@ianpercy.me.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Sfumato: Technique used by Leonardo Da Vinci for softening the transition between colours: Imperceptible transitions between colours and tones ...