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Acoustic Composition 17

Continuoso Cycles and Continuum (2015/18)

(Inflections of Antiquity)

Six Movements for String Quartet

(Rearranged: May 2020)

The opening movement of this score was originally composed in 2015 for *Gli Archi del Cherubino* in a version for string orchestra and harpsichord. *The Ensemble of St Luke's* proofread a literal arrangement for string quartet during 2016 and conversations evolved to where an extended multiple-movement work was commissioned. The first movement was extensively recomposed in 2017/18 during realisation of this piece and the score was rearranged in May 2020 when two movements were removed. The remaining collection is a more coherent journey without them ...

Continuoso Cycles and Continuum is a set of six movements inflecting elements of antique compositional form: Medieval Mass, Renaissance and Baroque Suites. The music is written in a modal language with contemporary references to retrospective soundworlds, looking forwards into (or is it 'backwards from?') the twenty-first century via textural fabrics weaved from the cycling pitch-patterns of mid 20th century modernism, contrapuntal gradual process synonymous with post-modern minimalism and pseudo-modulations within tonal stasis reminiscent of post-minimalist simplicity. Avoiding literal emulation, the inconsistencies of polystylism and the dreaded pastiche: a contemporised formal scheme 'smudging' the structural lines of the past and respectfully blending elements of 'each and all' into an evolving concept one refers to as *modal sfumato*¹ ...

This reductive, retrospective and minimal music of relative simplicity opens with a sequence of consonant chords that expand at each iteration (trichord – tetrachord – pentachord – hexachord) to introduce the first six pitches of the cycle of fourths: [C] – F – B^b – E^b – A^b – D^b.

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

The first movement is written in A^b Major/F minor, but the expanding pitch content initially avoids the 'defining-third' to subliminally modulate through F, B^b and E^b on its way. Alternating phrase resolutions add 'dialectic lilt' of the passing modes as the chord-type expands and blurs the sense of a 'home-tone'. 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.

The motion to (and prominence of) the (Copland-like) A^b home-tone in the latter stages of the first movement seemed forgivable within the context of the piece as a whole, but the final resolution of the first movement to C Phrygian mode (3rd mode of A^b) and the quasi whole-tone modulation to B^b Dorian mode (2nd mode of A^b) to start the second movement is far more representative of the subtle amorphic possibilities and subliminally modulating pitch-schemes available through the blending of modal sfumato.

The second movement is reminiscent of the slow movements within Albinoni's *Sinfonia 'a quattro'*, where time seems to stop, a few bars last an eternity and the world hangs on a chord. The only real difference here is in the spelling of the chords. Clear comparisons to Vivaldi's *L'estro Armonico* (Inspiration of Harmony) Op.3 should also be stated.

The title is a light-hearted play on words, having fun with the rhythms of word-sound. The opening performance instruction in the score contains a passing reference to a certain young wizard, which is a little odd, as I was 'never really a fan' ...

Contact:

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