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### **Acoustic Composition 20**

Just Look at All the Places We Call Home – Part Two

**Grime, Slime, Aethers & Oozes** (2003/20)

(Composing in Primary Colours)

Eight movements for flute, bass clarinet, contrabass and piano

This collection of short movements was originally conceived and sketched during 2003. The score was shelved in 2004 as a 'work in progress' until it was revised in 2011 and again in 2013. Even after revisions, the texture of the music felt too reductive with an episodic and juxtaposed form that never quite sounded complete, so the work (then titled *Acoustic Chakras*) was withdrawn in 2014. However, one could never quite let go of the music the score contained (hence the plural attempts at revisions) and in an apparent subconscious search for 'anything to distract oneself away from the intensities of orchestral composition' (the work one had actually planned to do), this score was given focussed attention during four months of revisions in late 2019/early 2020.

Revisions proved to be a difficult (but enjoyable) task ...

Although clearly contemporary in style, design and construct, the reductive extravagance (skeletal textures, virtuosic contours and Jazz-Classical hybridity) of the original music written for this 'most unusual' quartet had somehow always instinctively reminded the composer of two-dimensional Byzantine art (clear lines of definition without chiaroscuro or perspective) and how, when viewed in contemporary retrospect, there seems to be a blatant contradiction in the way reductive, almost monastic, visual iconography is often embellished in the extravagant opulence of gold leaf. The same contradiction exists when the image is painted in fresco, whereby monastically simplistic, stripped-down and 'laid-bare' religious symbolism adorns the walls and ceilings of lavishly ornamented churches.

One was determined to retain this instinctively perceived character ...

Given the age of the initial sketches, revisions felt a little like restoring an unfinished artefact to its intended glory, but with licence to create new material within the boundaries of the original work. The question remained: How true should one stay to the original? Every note and chord placed (and replaced) with the utmost care? The original character of the music (that invisible incorporeal essential) should not be lost or distorted, but the work **MUST** be improved ... and ... completed ...

Whilst planning the original sketches, the composer considered the relationship between spirituality and colour <sup>1</sup> and discovered how some theorists hypothesise light and sound share the same spectrum. They are both measured in wavelength and frequency; if we speed sound up it becomes light and vice versa. Whilst theoretically unproven, this concept seems to filter into many belief systems: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was God". This suggests that God was sound, yet within the Old Testament, the voice of God is consistently associated with glowing light.<sup>2</sup>

All light is White Light, but the human eye recognises a limited spectrum of distinguishable colours<sup>3</sup>: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet <sup>4</sup>. The wavelength and frequency intervals for each of these colours were converted to pitch frequencies and rounded to the nearest pitch in equal temperament to produce a collection of small pitch groups (pitch class cells) specific to each colour.

In earlier works, one would prepare (or rather define) the pitch palette and formal scheme in an abstract modernist manner (simply stating 'what is'), but years of experience have taught one to always 'compose' the pre-compositional plan. It is not enough just to predetermine the pitches to be used, but one should then consider how the meta-scheme unfolds in linear time and how the varying densities of texture and motion will affect the resulting form and balance. When composing MUSIC, the continuity, contrast and destination of the sonic journey is an essential element of the listening experience and should be of primary consideration. The plan is only a guide, at some point the music will start to tell the composer what IT wants to be, so pre-compositional planning should be revisited, have flexible elements of internal design and be allowed to evolve as the music emerges. Time has also taught one to compose 'anomalies' within any use of systematic process, but that is a story for another day ...

The juxtaposed form and episodic nature of the original internal components required attention, and so some movements were transposed to instil a greater sense of through-composition within the harmonic scheme. Elements of form were rearranged in reference to the compliment and contrast of their musical content instead of in subservience to systematic theory and formal process. Two movements were removed from this collection in consideration for the balance and pacing of the work as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Chakra is a Sanskrit word, meaning circle, cycle or wheel. In this context it refers to the cyclic nature of life-energy. Chakras are connected energy centres which channel life-energy (white light) or 'Chi' through the body. The seven main chakras are situated in the head and torso. Each is associated with a different area of spirituality, health and emotional wellbeing. Each is distinguished by its own colour: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet and each associated with a different element, sense and/or emotion.

<sup>2</sup> ... "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." ...

<sup>3</sup> The three primary colours are Red, Yellow and Blue, but many charts also include Green as a fourth primary colour.

<sup>4</sup> There are many variations on published charts available for mapping the spectrum of light colour. Most charts list seven distinct colours distinguishable to the human eye: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet, but there are many that also include Cyan as an eighth specific colour and some that do not list Indigo, but do list Cyan ...

The additional textures (motivic repetition, use of specific chord-types and self-similar phrase-rhythms) resulting from these revisions have helped the materials to interact more throughout the different movements. Inversion, retrograde, rotation and transposition of existing pitch and rhythm patterns allowed expansion of the pitch content and textural motion within the individual movements whilst remaining loyal to the original pitch organisation and inherent incorporeal character.

In summation, the short movements in this piece contain numerological references to the frequency of light and sound within their internal pitch organisation retained from the original planning and sketches. Following revisions, the primary character and 'essence' of the music has been retained, but the textures are no longer frustratingly bare to the ears of its composer and the pitch distribution has been weaved, cross-pollinated and interleaved into a more organic and linear continuous whole, far more representative of the many shades of colour produced as the bandwidths of light overlap, rather than the manufactured juxtaposition and strict pitch limitation contained within the original.

One should never put new wine in old wineskins, so the work has been reimagined during revisions inspired by a change in title and the extramusical narrative it implied. External narrative is an important tool for this composer, helping to establish cohesive formal structure and interaction with the emotive content and textural pacing of the score. The music is not programmatic. The music is, however, most certainly, 'unusual' ... and ... written for a 'most unusual' quartet.

Just Look at All the Places We Call Home

**Watching the Wind Blow** (2003/20)

Single movement for solo flute

This short movement for solo flute is an edited and slightly extended version of the flute part from the first movement of *Just Look at All the Places We Call Home – Part Two: Grime, Slime, Aethers and Oozes* (2003/20). This material started life as a solo sketch, but immediately inspired a multiple movement work for chamber ensemble. The music was one of the primary reasons for salvaging its parent score during 2019/20, so it seemed fitting to arrange the (now completed) part for solo performance once again.

There is an ancient primal character within the articulation and rhythms of this short score, an organic (almost monastic) simplicity to a main theme that is shrouded in, and surrounded by, the lavish contradiction of its virtuosic context.

**Contact:**

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