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Website Context and Research

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Mictlan

For amplified bass recorder, live digital effects and tape

Brief Elements of Analysis and Synopsis

The Acoustic Soul in Relation to Narrative:

The soul (musician) has four main methods of communication: multiphonic, trill, theme and melody. It has a split personality; two interlinked perceptions of consciousness coexisting and interacting.

The multiphonic represents a soul still conscious of human concerns, a symbol of emotional determination: capable of frustration, anger, aggression and violence.

The theme represents the considered thoughts of a more enlightened entity: a soul that is growing more self-aware.

Whilst engaged in the trials of Mictlan, souls could return to earth once a year where lavish festivals would be prepared.

The trials last four years, so the soul returns four times: the theme appears four times (figures A, B, F and J in the score) as do the opening multiphonics; twice live (introduction and conclusion) and twice on tape: bar 28 in duet with live multiphonic trills and figure D in solo.

As the trials increase in intensity, the theme grows more confident and assertive (more self aware) with each appearance. The multiphonics still represents an earthborn consciousness and these two characteristics of the soul as an acoustic object appear at times of structural importance throughout the form of the work, crossing between concrete and acoustic media. Their combination seemed the ideal way to present the fourth theme as the eighth trial (Figure J).

In the following example, one can clearly recognise the pitches of the theme from figures A, B and F, but now they also serve as fundamentals, overblown with adjusted fingerings and shaped through embouchure into aggressive multiphonics:

The Nine Trials of Mictlan

1. Cross a deep river (helped by a red dog spirit-guide) ...
 - 1i. A hesitant growth in intensity and texture; sense of focussed goal upon one event ...
2. Pass between clashing, high mountains ...
 - 2i. Large, slow-motion bass events blending into each other ...
3. Climb an obsidian mountain (Black glass-like volcanic rock) ...
 - 3i. Continuation of the 2nd trial; additional high-pitched events and ascending glissandi ...
4. Pass through icy winds that cut like a knife ...
 - 4i. Continuation and crescendo of the 2nd and 3rd trials; additional howling wind and accents
5. Pass through flapping flags ...
 - 5i. Wind fades – dramatic pause: Repeating rhythms (loops) growing in intensity and texture
6. Arrows shot at soul: Pierced by arrows ...
 - 6i. Breathy accents: aggressive articulation reminiscent of Shakuhachi techniques ...
7. Wild beasts eat human hearts ...
 - 7i. Primal, beast-type sounds, loud dynamics, violent overblown trills and crescendos ...
8. Narrow paths and passages between hard rocks ...
 - 8i. Continuation of the ascent to crescendo established during the previous trial, but with additional high pitched sustains, ascending glissandi and plodding bass resonances; sustained crescendo and descending glissandi during initial dissipation: A lyrical descent towards the Cave of the Dead ...
9. Darkness and Rest: The soul sleeps
 - 9i. Peaceful and conclusive – A poignant soliloquy

This list was used to map the initial form and compositional landmarks. It was referred to as a guide for shaping timbral colour whilst preparing the sound palette and served as an atmospheric mood-board when sculpting and realising the concrete parts. The final form of Mictlan, along with a brief synopsis for each section and trial is illustrated in the Mictlan Form Chart PDF.

Contact:

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