Dr Ian Percy

Website Context and Research www.ianpercy.me.uk

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:

Mictlan Trial 8

fourth theme with multiphonics



Trials five and six (figure G: bars 120-158) presented an opportunity for a combined rhythm and timbre (flags and arrows). This section is underpinned by an accumulating line of concrete loops, which increase in length, dynamic and texture upon each repetition.

The musician initially plays non-pitched breath (audible attacks) in unison with tape, but in counterpoint to the loop and joins in with the accumulative process.

Shakuhachi-type articulations were used to emulate the sound of arrows in the sixth trial. As shown in the following examples, the musician vocalises the attacks on an ostinato fundamental, whilst allowing harmonic overtones to resonate in multiphonic sympathy.



tay - a - ta-too pa-tak - a - til - a - ta-too pa-tak - a - til - a - ta-too pa-tak - a - til - a - ta-too



pa-tak-a-tay-a-ta-too pa-tak-a-tay-a-ta-too pa-tak-a-til-a-ta-too pa-tak-a-til-a-ta-too pa-tak-a-til-a-ta-too

Rhythmic and dynamic intensity increases upon each repetition of this material as the piece maintains impetus towards an acoustic crescendo consistently driven by the dynamic contours and developing lines of concrete loops.

Repetitions fade and shade into the soundworld as the mood of the sonic landscape blends into aggressive sustained resonances and the ascent towards loud dynamics, screaming trills and multiphonics to begin (and eventually reach) the ultimate sustained crescendo (Figure J).

The victorious descent towards the Cave of the Dead following the sustained crescendo at (Figure J - K) offered the chance to dissipate the sonic textures and shape the live part into a more lyrical setting.

A solo soliloquy of the opening multiphonics seemed the only way to close the piece and complete the narrative – the soul has earned eternal rest ...

Translation of Narrative to Form:

The following list offers a brief outline of how fairly literal aural translation of the narrative and replicated chronology for each trial provided clear connectives and fluid transitions throughout realisation of the eventual form. The suggested textures proved equally influential over both acoustic and acousmatic soundworlds and helped to shape a truly symbiotic electroacoustic interaction between the combined mediums:

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:

For further information and resources contact the composer at: contact@ianpercy.me.uk