

Program notes to selected works

Variations on chords: Distances for Symphony Orchestra (2003)

Variations on Chords: Distances was composed in 2003.

The title reflects concisely the core of the piece, which uses the two opening chords, instead of a theme in standard variations, as the initial source and point of departure for a series of variations. Those chords comprise the entire opening section of the piece and serve as the point of arrival at the end (in a retrograde mode and with different orchestration). The chords are not the only element subjected to different transformations – the distances in between them play a particular role, confronting or joining the chords, or emphasizing a distance between particular registers, groups of instruments or instrumental solos and their respective timbres, dynamics, and attacks. The overall dynamics incorporate *crescendos* and *diminuendos*, which produce almost constantly changing dynamic intensity. Surprisingly, by the middle of the piece, transformations of the chord sequences create independent images that are very different from the source. Among them are the *string chorale* in a very high register and an *anti-chorale*, which first appeared in the brass section. The rest of the score is an interaction between these two antipodes, interrupted by the unchangeable *church bell-like tolling*, traveling throughout the score independently from the variation cycle, leaving as a trail its fragments. The string chorale starts and stops at the ‘frozen point’, a chord that marks a repeated motion through the chorale which moves forwards and backwards.

Night music for fourteen players (2001)

Night Music is a piece for sinfonietta ensemble, inspired by the mysteriously increasing moon, which gradually reveals the hidden life of creatures, objects and events that cannot be seen in daylight. Sections of the piece can be compared with phases of the arriving moon, starting at a new moon with its darkness, and turning into a full moon with its brightness. Several sections of the piece simultaneously combine aleatoric elements for one group of instruments with written-out music for another group. Solo chimes interrupt the music, and are associated in the composer’s mind with the sudden strike of a clock in the middle of the night, scaring out the night creatures. Arriving at a full moon is realized in the piece through the closing culmination, employing two tritones as a basis for the final chord. Have a Good Night Music!

Chant for Soprano and six instruments (2001)

Chant was written at the Dartington Summer School for voice and ensemble of six instruments. The vocal part has no text and is interwoven with instrumental texture. The structure of the piece can be seen as a three-section form based on two “chants.” The first chant forms the basis of the opening section and reappears as a refrain to the second chant in the middle section before gradually taking over from the second chant in the final section. The final section arrives at the initial pitch of the piece – F sharp, creating the impression of a cyclic ritual.

Song not Sung for String Quartet (2001)

The title of the composition reflects the main idea of a discontinuous melody (*song*), appearing in the middle and at the very end of the piece unexpectedly, as an intimate

unspoken monologue. The melody itself is an archetypal tune, which could be found in several folk traditions. Although it is not a quotation, but an original tune, it recalls certain associations with improvised folk song, slowly unfolding from the starting tone to the next closest pitches, alternating in the process the mode and the mood. Although the overall composition consists of a chain of short sections, the narrative character of the piece joins them into the whole form, or ‘*story*’ of the search for an identity.

Fantasy-Toccata for Violin and Piano (2003)

Fantasy-Toccata for Violin and Piano was composed for Oleh Krysa and Tatiana Tchekina and receives its world premiere at the present concert. The piece is a vigorous interplay between two contrasting main themes and two instruments, acting as a couple of dancers on stage, dancing independently, synchronously, and solo, revealing their characters. The exchange of short tunes between the instruments was inspired by traditional Russian hand-made patchwork, where small patches of different fabric create a larger mosaic-like cloth, enriched by a vast color palette.

Refrains & Ritornellos for nine players (2004)

Refrains & Ritornellos for nine players was composed in 2003-4. The piece is inspired by Eastern European folk music and rhythms. It is constructed on the principles of repetition and variation. This is achieved by selectively adding or subtracting an extra bit or note to rhythmic patterns and musical cells. The choice of the instruments was made around the number three: 3 instruments in 3 groups (3 woodwinds, 3 brass and 3 strings), divided by register into smaller groups of 2 higher plus 1 low instrument in each group (oboe and clarinet in E-flat plus bassoon; etc.), thus creating a total of 6 higher instruments and 3 low. The two groups of *refrains* in this piece consist of either returning melodic cells with characteristic interval of minor and major seconds or varied minor and major triads, while *ritornellos* are short repeated sections.

Winter Music for seventeen players (2005)

This piece was inspired by the only haiku known by Kajiwara Hashin (1864-?), quite famous outside Japan, but not well known in his home country. The full haiku in English translation is quoted below:

No sky, no earth - but still, snowflakes fall

Six for Six for 6 players (2004-5), 3 movements are in progress

Six for Six is a cycle of pieces, which consists at least four different ensembles in different movements: a duo, a trio, a quintet with solo E-flat clarinet, and a *pierrot* ensemble in the outer movements. The larger organization is based around the number 6: there are six movements and six instruments; in some of the movements the number of instruments is less than six, but the number of sections in the form “adds” up to six to fill in the gap. This work is more a collection of different pieces than a cycle unified by one single idea, and in theory, each movement can be performed separately.

Still Images of the Restless Mind for chamber orchestra (2006)

Still Images of the Restless Mind is a reflection on an emotional state of mind when the most important personal images, preserved in the memory, come to the rescue of the

disturbed mind. These images have settled in the mind from the early childhood on, and the mind does not recall them in its every day life, overwhelmed by the excessive information that it has to perceive every day. But suddenly, when the limit of how many things the mind can absorb is exceeded, these images appear and seem to be disconnected with the moment when they appear, but only on the surface. On a deeper level, they have a peculiar associative connection, which has to be understood in order for the mind to settle back to its normal state.

Escape for Piano with optional electronics (2001)

Escape was composed in 2001. It is based on a combination and mixture of special techniques, such as playing inside the piano and on the keyboard simultaneously. One of the main effects used throughout the piece is the *glissando on the overtone series*, which is literally an “*escape*” from the music played on the keyboard, to an illusory “*world of harmony*”, symbolized by a natural harmonics. The main feature of the piece is its original sonorities, created by combination of elements of whole-tone and chromatic scales and low notes, sustained with the pedal. The pedal has an important function in the piece; it divides sections of the form into phrases and at the same time joins together different harmonies to the whole sonority complex.

Confession for Solo Violin (2001)

The dedication to J.S. Bach is a tribute to the greatest composer-polyphonist whose music is a basis and “starting point” for any professional performer and composer. The core of the whole piece is a gradual exploration of the first note “D” to a twelve-tone scale through sliding *glissandi*. This idea was inspired by Bach’s chromatic style in his preludes and fugues. As many composers dedicating their music to Bach used his monogram, it became a tradition. In *Confession* the monogram can be heard subsequently three times, but only once in the right order (BACH). The most important relation to Bach’s music is an attempt to bring into contemporary music the high spiritual level of baroque music.

Aftertouch for piano (2005)

The word *aftertouch* is a term used to describe the response of a key on electronic MIDI-keyboards to pressure. On an electronic keyboard with *aftertouch*, a performer can change the amplitude of the pitch after the attack by varying the pressure with which one holds the key. While this feature is not an option on a classical acoustic piano, where the sound of the pressed key simply fades out after the attack, the richness and variety of the piano timbre is far more superior and individual on every single instrument.

Exploring the sensitivity of the piano keys to the different types of pressure (including the silent pressure of the keys with the sustained pedal held) is my interpretation of the term *aftertouch*, if one can apply it to the acoustic piano. On the other hand, this title implies the composer’s intent to make the listener pay attention to the life and death of each sound with regard to the variety in attacks and decays. This variety and timbral richness of the instrument, along with the resonances of short and sustained sounds, which produce quite different effects, were the main inspiration for this piece.

Black Echo for piano (2006)

This piece was inspired by the lute ayre of John Dowland (1563-1626) “Flow my tears,” and in particular by the opening vocal phrase, consisting of two descending tetrachords. The tetrachords are not quoted exactly; they are free of modal/tonal implications and act rather as a distant “echo” of Dowland’s song. The tetrachords are harmonically altered to create and dismantle symmetric and asymmetric harmonic complexes, reflected by the resonance of the low black-key cluster, silently depressed throughout the piece. The right and middle pedals reinforce the allusive echoing of the tetrachords, which serve not only as a reference, but also as constructive material for the entire piece.

Featherweight (2001)

FEATHER-WEIGHT was composed for *London Contemporary Dance School at the Place* performances. The title of the piece reflects choreographer’s (Elisabetta d’Aloia) idea of the balance between ‘light’ and ‘heavy’, which helps to define the weight of objects, people, places, relationships...

The visual row operates with images and objects from our childhood, such as ‘light’ beach balls, which in the middle section become ‘heavy’ as stones. And as ‘light’ balls turn to ‘heavy stones’, growing up we meet unexpectable challenges of adult life, get older with our child’s dreams and hopes lost...

The musical idea corresponds to choreography in the following way: to deliver the idea of child’s dreams I returned to my own music composed a few years ago to make a contrast with present (middle section). Thus, first and last sections are based on few last bars of second movement of *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. The compositional idea is to start playback the piece from the last note adding every next phrase from the previous bar and overlapping these material with transposed last single note. As a result we always hear this last note (F sharp for violin) because musical development of each phrase permanently leads us from and to this note. The idea of musical construction is based on the psychology of memories, on a process of reconstructing the images of past.

The electro-acoustic score was created in *Logic Audio Gold*. During the performance vibraphone, suspended cymbal and Alto Saxophone are performed by live musicians provided with click track in their headphones (created in *Logic*), high amplification for vibraphone and lower amplification for Saxophone as well as reverberation.

As the musical idea is about past, present and future, in the first section used Violin and Piano with no special effects as a kind of ‘tape playbacks in a wrong direction’ plus bowed vibraphone in live, which ‘pick up and extend’ notes played by Violin. The middle section is mostly electro-acoustic with Alto Saxophone solo in live. The final section returns to initial material when suddenly percussive sound from the middle section interrupts the music...

Soma for tape (2001)

The title of the piece is taken from ancient Indian mythology where *soma* is a sacred intoxicating drink used in Vedic ritual, as well as the divinity of this drink and later on of the Moon. In addition, this is a morphological root of the word *somatic*, etc.

The main feature of the piece is the use of recognisable sounds and their transformation. These sounds consist of instrumental sounds (bowed cymbal, bass drum, orchestra string glissando, piano repetitions, bowed vibraphone and wind chimes), sounds of environment (aeroplane, noise, crowd, scream) and few spoken words ('*this is me*').

In the process of development of the piece these sounds are repeated in certain context and transformed (using computer programs *Sound Hack* and plug-ins/filters of *Logic Audio Gold*). With instrumental sounds my aim was to use the computer software as a sort of 'extended techniques' to achieve an effect of gradual unfolding and transformation of still recognisable sound. The noise of a crowd is treated as musical texture as the words are 'smashed' to emphasise certain phonemes and vowels in continuous moving sound mass.

The main idea of the composition was to make a journey from initial recognisable sounds through their transformations to different levels of external and internal worlds and their co-existence.

Panic. Melancholy for tape (2001-2)

Panic

Panic stands on the border between "serious" electro-acoustic music and its exaggeration. It reflects the way of living in today's metropolis with its rush hours, lack of time and noise pollution, its everyday stress and loneliness. The result – panic.

The initial material of *Panic* is the filtered beginning of my *Night Music* for large ensemble. The first two bars repeat throughout the piece, each time transformed through different filters and plug-ins, disappearing in the end, leaving pulsating sine waves as a shadow. The main sources of the piece are graphic patterns used as filters for the *Metasynth* software, transforming graphic images into sound objects and filters.

Melancholy

The title reflects the mood of the piece; it is a lyric composition based on the pre-recorded voice of Judith Caplan (U.K., soprano). The voice samples were transformed in different ways. Certain partials of words were extracted to create new spoken letters and vowels, as well as rich textures (or "fields") of voices.

The two sung notes, *E* and *D-sharp*, are repeated throughout the piece. These are the "central interval" of *Melancholy* (the Major seventh), unstable by itself, but not dissonant. The interchange of these two notes creates a balancing effect, associated with a children's "seesaw".

Cecilia's giorno for tape (2004)

Cecilia's giorno for tape was composed in 2004 in the Eastman Computer Music Center in 2004. There were two reasons to give this title for the piece:

1. all sounds were transformed in the program *Cecilia*;
2. it was composed during one day ("giorno" means "day" in Italian).