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Into the Silence

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Rachel Beetz

Committee in charge:

Professor John Fonville, Chair
Professor Roger Reynolds
Professor Steven Schick

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University of California, San Diego

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Recordings on file at Mandeville Special Collections

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Into the Silence

by

Rachel Beetz

Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor John Fonville, Chair

This brief essay acted as program notes to a recital given May 8, 2012. It presents seven works of the contemporary flute oeuvre in the context of questioning reality. Throughout the recital, the listener goes through a journey of self-reflection of their own realities.

INTO THE SILENCE

In Toru Takemitsu's *Voice*, the flutist speaks fragments of text from Shuzo Takiguchi's *Handmade Proverbs to Joan Miro*. The flutist asks, "Who goes there?" and demands, "Speak, Transparency!" But to whom is the flutist talking? Could it be the audience, an unknown entity in the concert hall, or could it be to herself?

In addition, the piece hints at many meanings of *Voice*. At the simplest level, there is the speaking voice of the flutist, heard at the opening of the piece. Yet there is also the unheard voice, the presence to which the flutist responds. As the composer, Takemitsu's voice is heard in his pioneering use of contemporary flute technique. As the author of the poetic inspiration, Takiguchi's voice underlies the music.

There is also the musical voice of the flutist. The score is very open in its temporal notation, leaving the flutist to pace the phrases according to her own intuition. To me, *Voice* exposes the inner dialogue of the flutist not only musically, but also existentially, questioning not an external being, but herself vocally and musically.

- To the air within -

Richard Barrett drew upon two inspirations for his flute and percussion piece, *inward*, Paul Celan's poem, *Sprachgitter* and an ancient Egyptian ceremony called the opening of the mouth. Throughout the piece, the flutist whispers fragments of Celan's text:

The snow-bed under us both, the snow-bed.
 Crystal upon crystal,
 enmeshed deeply as time, we are falling.
 we are falling and lying down and falling.

And falling.
 We were. We are.
 We are one flesh with the night.
 In the passages, the passages.

Translated by Richard Barrett

The various materials of the percussionist's chimes: glass, metal, wood, bamboo evoke the snowy landscape from Celan's poem. The quiet dynamics and whispers of the flutist give an image of poetic secrecy.

inward is a part of Barrett's large work *Opening of the Mouth*. This ancient Egyptian ceremony was performed on the deceased during the process of mummification. Their mouths were opened so they could eat and drink in the afterlife. The chant-like quality of several sung text moments as well as the insistent coda hint at a ritualistic music.

Throughout *inward*, both parts contain microtonal inflections on the pitch G#, as if looking (listening) closer to this one pitch. The inflections of this note move toward a new, otherworldly musical language. The listener isn't only moving closer to G#, but falling to the afterlife.

- Images within -

Murail's alternate title for *Unanswered Questions* is "Tombeau de Dominique Troncin." (The published title does not reference Charles Ives' piece of a similar title.) Troncin was a young French composer who died from AIDS in 1994. He taught composition at the American University in Fontainebleau. Murail's

somber flute solo for Troncin musically asks life's questions on the brevity of his friend's life, of impending death, and life's many other unanswered questions. These questions become more apparent especially during times of sadness and struggle.

- Who goes there? -

A continuation of Reynolds' series of other solo pieces for piano, cello, and guitar, *imagE* is *evocative*, lyrical, symmetrical, and continuous. This contrasts with the "imAge" pieces that are *articulate*, sectional, and tend toward assertion and variety. The flute "imagE" is performed at a subdued, unsupported, hushed dynamic, with a sense of distance like that of memory. The lightness of the melodies in the outer sections evokes positive memories, yet the middle section is an erasure; the melody is now confined to blurred microtonal gestures. This is only an episode, for the bright memories return to their quiet exhilaration, creating a palindromic form. I've had the pleasure of working with Roger Reynolds directly on this work-in-progress.

- Relief of Lightness -

Ravine is dedicated to flutist Mario Caroli and his family who are from the Pezze di Greco at the foot of the Apulean Murge. The Italian word for chasm is 'grava,' which describes the Apulean Murge, a marble laden plain. The Italian word for the sand and gravel that makes the bed of the river is 'gravina.' Both of these words relate to the old English word ravine, which is a gorge, or canyon that has been eroded by water.

Gervasoni draws upon all of these meanings in his programmatic title for this flute solo. Throughout the work, there is a direct musical representation of water rushing, eroding, excavating, and abrading. Each section of the solo evokes a different landscape, as if hiking through the woods or perhaps the natural areas around Caroli's home. Some images Gervasoni describes include the calm sea, bursts of wind, and the breeze through olive trees. Each distinct section of the piece is interrupted with material from other sections, as if looking at the same landscape, but from different vantage points.

- Lost in an image -

At the opening of Saariaho's *Laconisme de l'aile*, the flutist recites the penultimate stanza from St. John Perse's poem *Oiseaux* :

Ignorant of their shadow, knowing of death only that
immortal part which is consumed in the distant clamour of
great waters, they pass and leave us and we are no longer the
same. They are space traversed by a single thought.

Translated by Robert Fitzgerald

Perse's poem *Oiseaux* is a thirteen-part description of George Braque's paintings of the same title. Several themes become apparent throughout the poem. Birds represent the seasons, cross-cultural myths, and war. They are an ever-mysterious compliment to humanity; they inspire us with their flight and song.

Saariaho's solo explores this relationship between birds and humanity. Throughout the piece, there are always two melodic lines distinguished either by register or technique. In addition, there are two tempo indications. The first is slow and very free; the flutist is encouraged to play with rubato, letting the melody flow

intuitively. The second tempo is faster with strict rhythmic content. The piece disappears with repeated ascending scales that evaporate into the ether of glissandi and whistle tones. The birds are leaving us, and we are forever changed.

- To the soul in the absence -

All'aure in una lontananza is the first flute solo contained in Sciarrino's *Opera per flauto*. He completed the piece while visiting some friends in Capri, where the weather had been particularly dreary during his visit. The title of the solo translates to "To the air in the distance." For Sciarrino, "music inhabits a threshold region like dreams, where something both exists and does not yet exist, and exists as something else as well." The main motive of this solo is a single pitch, that moves in and out of audibility with the flutist's breath. This sense of life is interrupted with bursts of wind and shrieks. The motive returns in the end, but a semitone lower. As Saariaho's birds came and left, changing us, so does Sciarrino's distant wind.

- Silencio -