valencia & 19th dissolving¹

a compositional note

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Abstract: A brief presentation of concepts latent in the composition valencia & 19th dissolving, as well as an exploration of the context surrounding its creation. The compositional note is followed by the work’s score.

Keywords: Acoustic Composition, Composer’s Note, Chamber Ensemble, Musical Score

There is an inevitable chasm between the aspirations of a musical work and its circumstance of creation. In the case of valencia & 19th dissolving, it was this tension that became its genesis. I composed the work during June of 2014, at a time when I had recently completed my Master’s degree and found myself working for a friend selling his t-shirts on the street in San Francisco at the eponymous corner address. Each Saturday and Sunday morning, I would bike the three miles from my room in a house of musicians to the closest Oakland BART (metro) stop, take the train under the San Francisco Bay and arise in the contentiously chic, rapidly gentrified Mission neighborhood. From there, I cycled to the artist Amos Goldbaum rented’s garage, where I would load up a three-wheel road-weary Go-4 Interceptor (a decommissioned parking patroller, or meter-maid car) with boxes of shirts and display mannequins. I would strap the wares on to the vehicle’s back with bungee

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cords and drive the mile to my vending corner over San Francisco’s hills hoping to avoid the sound of merchandise rolling off the back tumbling into the cars behind. Then, I would spend the days reading and composing this piece, occasionally interrupted by a customer or a houseless eccentric who wanted to chat and share a drink.

I was reading Richard Power’s novel *The Gold Bug Variations*, which concerns itself with evolutionary mutation and the lives of those enveloped in information, whether librarian, geneticist, or data programmer. Bach’s nominal musical cryptogram is cast as a symbol of data’s transcendent possibilities (in intriguing contrast to how, in William Vollmann’s *Europe Central*, an equally ambitious novel of 20th-century extremes, Shostakovich’s D-S-C-H becomes a symbol of the individual’s fallible yet persistent ego in the face of totalitarianism’s dehumanizing scope). The work’s overriding theme, before which the humble reader has no choice but to submit or to abandon the novel, is the ambiguous and disturbing epiphany that DNA’s very method of genesis and continuing evolution – mutation – is also the way in which ourselves as organism are struck down. Cancer is a reordering of information, and old age is the accumulation of microcellular distortions on a macrocellular level. Time begets change and allows life to evolve in complexity, and it carries within it our expiration dates; DNA is life and life precedes and succeeds us – the very mechanism that brought us about ensures we will not survive. As Gaston Bachelard writes (1964, p. 184), “Immensity is within ourselves . . . As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense.”

So what does this have to do with my composition? These are the conditions of its creation. When not composing at my street corner, I would sometimes drink iced coffee and work on the music by Oakland’s Lake Merritt. I limited myself to four pitch classes and thought about how life and death, beauty and chaos, community and greed arise from the same elements. I relished how, in the middle of a beautiful and vibrant but self-obsessed and smug city, I could disappear into the abstract. To travel is to confront this same paradox. Travel allows time for introspection and consideration of one’s self – how do I appear to strangers from different cultures? – and the possibility for transcendent experience; it also means visa applications and airport security lines and vague irritation with the complexities of currency exchange rates. And thus, this work was read in Brazil as part of the wonderful SiMN 2014 festival; for that, I would like to thank Ensemble Móbile, Felipe de Almeida Ribeiro, and Márcio Steuernagel.

REFERENCES

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2014
Flute
Bass Clarinet
Tenor Saxophone
Vibraphone
Bass Drum
Piano

Transposed Score
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Relaxed, \( \dot{\mathfrak{f}} = 72 \)

Flute

Bass Clarinet in B♭

Tenor Saxophone

Vibraphone

Relaxed, \( \dot{\mathfrak{f}} = 72 \)

Piano

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Fast ($\dot{\phi} = 124$)

- Fl.:
  - $f > p$
  - $f > p$
  - $pp$
  - $ff$

- B. Cl.:
  - Sustain pedal down until mm. 88

- Ten. Sax.:
  - Sustain pedal down until mm. 88

- Pno.:

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Fast ($\dot{\phi} = 124$)

- Fl.:
  - $3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3$

- B. Cl.:
  - $3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3$

- Ten. Sax.:
  - $3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3$

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\begin{align*}
&\textbf{Fl.} \\
&\textbf{B. Cl.} \\
&\textbf{Ten. Sax.} \\
&\textbf{Vib.} \\
&\textbf{Pno.}
\end{align*}
\]
A tempo, $\frac{124}{124} \frac{j}{j} = 72$

Fl.

B. Cl.

Ten. Sax.

Vib.

Pno.

$\frac{127}{127}$

Fl.

Fl.

Vib.

Pno.