

Some notes on the music for flute and guitar

Although the choice of material to be included on this disc was mandated completely by pragmatic constraints (the instrumentation of my collaborators on the recording, Jesse Langen and Shanna Gutiérrez), this CD nevertheless represents a sort of microcosm of several compositional concerns which have been a constant in my work over the last fifteen years: the relation of old and new music (and by extension, style); extended vocabularies of timbral gestures employed as structural scaffolding; and what I call “temporal projection,” or the way in which the music reveals itself to us through time.

The kinship of these pieces became apparent was only after hearing what had been written separately - each for a different concert or project - brought together in one recital: While the two Palestrina-related pieces are those most obviously associated with the first category, the “surreal” *corpse fragments* also bring the issue of style into play as they conjure glimpses of typical guitar figures that quickly become distorted or refuse to behave as expected (not to mention MOBILE 2010). These fragments, the mobiles and particularly *aegilns* make gesture and the discovery of a new grammar of timbres a chief concern. The self-referential *corpse fragments* and even more obviously, the mobiles question what form is or can become (to echo Heraclitus, “never the same twice”).

mobile 2012, mobile 2010, Janus

These three pieces are the latest entries in an ongoing series of works, begun in 2003, in which I write a new mobile each year. The two simple rules for the project are: each piece should have a different instrumentation and each piece should manifest a different kind of mobility (i.e. indeterminacy or “openness”).

mobile 2012, for solo flute, explores the problem of forking paths: that is, the performer must constantly choose between two musical ways forward. She may begin with any musical phrase (there are 16 in total), but this must be followed by one of two possible continuities. This leads to an interesting “short-circuiting” of the system of choosing that causes material to be repeated in an unpredictable manner. Musically, the surface explores a wide range of very specific multiple sonorities - a very understated kind of virtuosity, but fiendishly difficult nonetheless.

mobile 2010, for solo guitar, asks the performer to begin with any of the work’s eight small phrases. Each phrase focuses on very specifically defined timbral and gestural ideas and each has a transitional measure at its close. This transitional measure is the opening idea of some other phrase. In this way, once the first die is cast, so to speak, the form is no longer quite as open – the player has a way through the labyrinth for that performance. There is one glitch in the system, however: some phrases share the same beginning.

Janus (mobile 2011), for flute and guitar, approaches the theme of indeterminacy by presenting two very distinct musical pathways in the form of two relatively independent and virtuosic “solos.” Here, the task of each performer is to hold the course (i.e. the independent character of her or his own part) in the face of interaction cues that constantly force him or her back into a chamber music situation (i.e. listening and reacting to their partner).

The mobiles are performed twice in the CD program, providing an opportunity to hear how the different kinds of mobility may shape a performance.

Stabat Mater

27 sonorities

These pieces are more inextricably linked than might first appear. In 1997, I was organizing musical materials for an orchestral piece, *aSpectres*, which employs several vertical sounds from Palestrina's *Stabat Mater* as its basic harmonic material. In the orchestra work, each sonority is excerpted out of its original contrapuntal context in Palestrina and treated as a stable object. As complementary work, I decided to transcribe Palestrina's 8-voice composition for guitar (though a straightforward account, the transcription is itself a brutal act of "verticalization"). In an attempt to discover new contexts for the sounds, I created the *27 sonorities* for guitar. It is a kind of fantasia for guitar, even adopting the openness associated with 16th-century rhythmic notation in keyboard and lute preludes.

corpse fragments

In 1998, a work called *Esquisite corps* was commissioned by the Art Institute of Chicago for instrumental trio (bass clarinet, mandolin and guitar). Seeking to explore musically some ideas related to painterly surrealism, each of the three collaborating composers, Amnon Wolman, Peter Edwards and myself, contributed one instrumental part.

Afterwards, Jesse Langen (who premiered the guitar part of the original *Exquisite corpse* and to whom these *fragments* are dedicated) continued to encourage me to make a new, solo version of, or at least some music related to, the *Esquisite corps* guitar part. After several attempts, I finally returned to the music in March 2003 and completed these *corpse fragments* several months later (unfortunately during a time - not so different from today - when non-musical corpse fragments often made the news).

Modified to further explore the sonic, textural and timbral potential of the solo instrument, as well as to examine the jarring effect of the juxtapositions in the original work, only six little pieces remain (each lasting about one minute). In them, we are confronted with disembodied music - only a kind of residue is left. These new pieces strike me, not as fractured bits, but as a glaring unity in terms of the immediate sonic repercussions of certain types of carefully measured physical action on the guitar. For this reason, the *corpse fragments* may be played in any order, but they should be separated on the program by other music.

aegjlns

In this work the guitar is "split" in two: the lower half in equal temperament, the upper, one-quarter tone lower. Here, specific harmonic/timbral events sculpted into the form of discrete gestures for the guitar define each musical idea (symbolized by 7 the letters in the title). The music is a kind of chaconne-mobile (though notated, this time, in a completely fixed manner). As the music gradually cycles through different orderings of the chaconne's elements (the mobility aspect), the two "component guitars" enter into a dialogue as they are forced to adapt the chaconne harmonies to the their own reality.