2018

Polyphinite

A NEW METHOD OF COMPOSITION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY COMPOSER (LECTURE MANUSCRIPT)

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*Hello! Welcome to my DMA lecture recital. Before we begin, I would like to thank my performers, Anthony Conroy and Leonor Javier, for dedicating their Friday evening and plenty of late nights in Dr. Lamb's studio to help bring this music to life for you tonight. I would also like to thank my primary instructor, Dr. Marvin Lamb, for helping me through this process as I designed this method, wrote the rules, and at times struggled to bring my ideas to fruition. I would also like to thank Dr. Karathanasis as my secondary instructor. His comments throughout the past two years of developing Polyphinite have been very valuable and at times helped settle disagreements between Dr. Lamb and myself over how best to proceed with the project. Thanks also, to my committee members: Dr. Jeff Swinkin, Dr. Michael lee, and Dr. Judith Pender for agreeing not only to serve on my committee for three years, but help launch me into my career as an academic and composer. I'm not entirely certain why they said yes, but hopefully at the end of all this they end up having had as much fun as I've had. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues here at the University of Oklahoma for listening to me talk…. **A lot** about this project since I began work on it in 2016.*

I. Polyphinite, in simplest terms, is a new method I am developing for the writing of music in the twenty-first century as an extension to conventional contrapuntal methodologies.
   a. The Name: One could theoretically use the methods I will describe tonight to write "Infinite Polyphony", so I settled on the name 'Polyphinite' as a means of combining these two ideas into one succinct word.
   b. Why a new method?
      i. There are many existing methods for composition
         1. Twelve-Tone
            a. developed by Arnold Schoenberg
               i. Second Viennese School
               ii. Berg
               iii. Webern
            b. Continued by composers today such as Charles Wuorinen
               i. Simple Composition, 1979
               ii. Updated in 1994
         2. Counterpoint
            a. written extensively about by Fux hundreds of years ago
               i. "Gradus Ad Parnassum"
               ii. Translated by Alfred Mann in 1965
            b. and more recently by Kent Kennan in his book, "Counterpoint". In the preface to his book on counterpoint, Kennan says the following:
            c. *Kennan, p. vii third paragraph*
         3. Polyphinite
            a. Acts as an extension to counterpoint, not an outright replacement
            b. Encourages the use of serial technique as a means of creating music

c. With Polyphinite, I seek not to replace counterpoint as a tool, but to give a new perspective on the subject and take counterpoint to the Nth degree.

II. Background: What Lead me to Polyphinite?

a. Recommendation by Dr. Lamb to write a work for solo instrument in a serial manner.
b. Quickly settled on using the 014 PC-set, as many composers have in the past hundred-plus years.
    i. For those that do not know what I mean when I talk about Pitch-Class sets, the 014 set is essentially C-C#-E, which may be transposed, inverted, retrograded, or even transformed with a compound method using any combination of these operations. These methodologies of serial composition are adopted heavily in the writing of this project.
c. Struggled to finalize the instrument to write for.
d. Settled on Cello.
e. Conceived as the first solo work in what I was initially conceiving as a set of unaccompanied works for varied instrumentation.

Now, I present the first piece of the Polyphinite puzzle: Polyphinite No. 1 for solo cello.

----------PLAY POLYPHINITE No. 1 (Solo Cello)----------

*Thank You, Anthony! You are a wonderful friend and colleague for asking me on **multiple** occasions if you get to play that. Just remember, you signed up for it.*

f. This initial solo work, though perfectly fine on its' own, felt as though it might be missing something.
    i. What methods might a composer use in tackling this problem?
        1. Leave it alone. – Too Boring
        2. Extend the work. – I liked having a piece that was exactly five minutes, so my pride got in the way of this one.
        3. Add more layers. – This was the obvious solution.
    ii. I decided to make it harder on myself and combined the first and third options. What if the cello solo were also part of a duet?

So… I added Flute.

g. Reasons for adding flute:
    i. Flutists tend to like new music
    ii. Good compliment to the cello
    iii. My history with writing flute music made it an obvious choice
h. The resultant work had both a strong cello solo, and a strong duet for flute and cello. Both of these pieces had unique characteristics and sonic qualities.
i. What if the flute were also a solo?
j. I revised the flute part to make it more soloistic, adding favorites of mine such as an "S.O.S." signal, jet whistle, and a few others I enjoy using when writing for flute.

k. After revising the first half of the work to accommodate the solo flute idea, I realized that large sections of the cello part needed changing to accommodate this.
l. This, of course, lead to needing to alter the flute part further, which resulted in further having to edit the cello, and so on until I finally had my goal.

Here is the second piece of the Polyphinite puzzle, Polyphinite No. 2 for solo flute.

----------PLAY POLYPHINITE No. 2 (Solo Flute)----------

Thank You, Leonor! You have just been awesome to work with these past months. She actually responded to my inquiry with the phrase: That sounds awesome! When's the performance? – Hopefully she is that enthusiastic about new music after this is all set and done.

III. Developing the Project
a. I initially wanted to attempt to write for a larger *Pierrot Ensemble* in this style, after observing the success of the Flute and Cello experiment. Utilizing percussion also came to mind as a way of adding a great deal of color to the work.
b. I quickly realized that it would be best to limit the ensemble since I was unsure of what it was I was doing at the time.
c. I settled on using just the Flute, Violin, Clarinet, and Cello from the traditional Pierrot Ensemble instrumentation, leaving out voice and piano from the original instrumentation of Schoenberg's acclaimed "Pierrot Lunaire"
d. The resulting 14 works would become the first Polyphinite Collection.
e. As you can see from this score sample, I make use of ***SCORE SAMPLES IN POWERPOINT*** (must last until the :25 mark)

In writing this project, I ended up with a set of rules to be followed when writing in the Polyphinite style, aptly named: The Rules for Polyphinite. Original, right?

IV. Rules for Polyphinite
a. Polyphinite works should be composed for a minimum of two parts, up to the maximum instrumentation of a given traditional instrumental ensemble, band or orchestra.
b. Each part must have an equal amount of time passage from beginning to end.
    i. That is to say, you cannot have a 5 minute cello solo under a three minute flute solo that starts two minutes late, or ends two minutes early.
c. Composers should seek balance between contrapuntal gestures and timbral/textural interactions found in the ensemble iterations, and the individuality of solo gestures.

The greatest iteration of this endeavor (that which includes all members of the ensemble) should be written with each solo in mind, with the following principles in mind while revising previously written parts:

d. The strongest iterations should be the solos and the largest ensemble iteration (Polyphinite X).
    i. The focus should be on creating a strong set of solos, and focusing on the largest ensemble.

ii. While not ideal, the "middle" ensembles should be thought of as lower priority in this method.
    1. It is possible that some 'middle' iterations might be weaker than the others.
    2. As an example, the weakest member of this Polyphinite Collection is the duet for Flute, and Violin.
        a. Range similarities in parts written
        b. Didn't use enough of the low-end in the violin to accommodate.

e. All elements of music, such as pitch, rhythm, dynamics, tempos, and manifestations of these such as meter do not change for the individual parts, whether being realized as a solo, duet, trio, quartet, or greater iteration.
f. Electronic elements (such as a fixed media track) may be included, but must follow the same rules as instrumental solo works given above.

The following is only the first of the 6 given duets, Polyphinite No. 5 (D[1+2])

----------PLAY POLYPHINITE No. 5 (Flute and Cello)----------

I was going to present the entirety of Polyphinite during this recital, but Dr. Lamb advised me that forcing an hour and 20 minutes of Polyphinite on my audience wouldn't go well. After this conversation, I decided that doing a selection of works from Polyphinite works well up to three selections back-to-back. This way, you get two solos and a larger subset of Polyphinite as a small suite of related works. This ensures variance and allows for differentiation in programming should anybody take a Polyphinite collection on tour.

V. Revisions: Where is improvement needed?
    a. In this first attempt, I did not yet realize that the use of extended technique actually makes such an endeavor easier.
        i. Extended techniques add a wider variety of sounds that can be used both alone and in conjunction to create interesting moments that break away from the standards of the rest of the work.
        ii. Additionally, certain extended techniques create a higher level of interest to a listener, which would allow for better enjoyment of a piece.
        iii. In future iterations of this, I would encourage the use of extended technique to create further variance within each work.
    b. Expressions and tempo alterations can be used to allow minor variances in interpretation that would allow for better coordination of the multiple parts while still staying true to the ideas of Polyphinite. (samples in powerpoint)
        i. Accel. – Rit. Over Rit. – Accel. Over same space
        ii. Rubato section of sparse textures
        iii. *Softly* has variability in interpretation.
    c. It sounds mechanical at times. This is likely something that resulted from my focus being split between writing the piece itself, and attempting to create a ruleset for the Polyphinite method. However, to avoid this one might write the piece without meter

in mind, and use meter only as a framing device for the performers after the work is written.

i. Future iterations of Polyphinite will likely use multiple metered music as a means of creating more distinct solo works.
    1. Perhaps a 6/8 + 2/4 in the flute might be written over a relatively simple 4/4 cello line. ***SCORE SAMPLE IN POWERPOINT***

ii. Metric modulation, as used extensively by Elliot Carter.
    1. Such as this excerpt from his second string quartet. ***SCORE Excerpt IN POWERPOINT***

iii. Though this could easily be simulated using hemiola or hypermeter.

VI. Conclusions
- a. This method is in the early stages of development.
- b. The potential for this method of composition
- c. Positive Effects on my music since writing Polyphinite.

VII. Questions

[47 minutes] [2018]

References

Kent Kennan, “Counterpoint” third ed.

Reginald Smith Brindle, “Serial Composition”

Bryan R. Simms, “Twentieth Century Music”