

A discussion of  
***In the style of Arvo Pärt***

By Jason Gray

In this piece, I use Arvo Pärt's technique of rotation with pitches. However, I also explored this idea of rotation with rhythm. Let's begin there. The prime form of the rhythm consists of seven attacks, each increasing by a single rhythmic unit in succession (EXAMPLE 1). This series of durations (1-2-3-4-5-6-7) appears seven times in the claves, with each presentation beginning with the next number in the sequence. What was omitted at the beginning of the sequence is added to the end of the pattern (2-3-4-5-6-7-1, etc.) so that the series *rotates* through itself (M.6). The first attack is the shortest and therefore the most memorable for the listener. Each time this one-sixteenth value returns, it is accented so the listener can keep track of its place in each rotation. Also, the decrescendo in the prime form is maintained throughout; the longer durations of the series are always softer and the shorter durations are always louder. Once this rotation is complete, a retrograde of the prime form appears in measure 27 as a segue into the second section of the piece [EXAMPLE 2]. To my surprise, the retrograde was not the same as the seventh rotation of the pattern (M.24, Xylophone).

The second process is a rotation of a seven-note pitch set which resembles Db-Lydian mode. This set first appears in its prime form in M.3 in the first xylophone part. Skipping the marimba entrance in M.5 for a moment, the set appears again in M.7. The second note of the set is omitted and added to the end which creates the first rotation of the set [EXAMPLE 3]. What is actually being rotated is only the last six pitches of the set, as the Db remains the first pitch each time. Again, this may help the listener to perceive the process that is unfolding. The marimba entrance in M.5 introduces the diatonic inversion of the prime form in the alto voice beginning with Db. This inversion of the set is always present in the marimba and is rotated in the same way as the prime form.

Each of these melodies are joined by tintinabuli voices. In M.3 the prime form is joined by a 1<sup>st</sup>-inferior T-voice and a 2<sup>nd</sup>-inferior T-voice [EXAMPLE 4], while in M. 5 the inversion form is joined by 1<sup>st</sup>-superior and 2<sup>nd</sup>-

superior t-voices [EXAMPLE 5]. The Lydian nature of the prime form of the set is obscured by the triads that I selected throughout the first half of the piece which vary among Ab-major, Db-major, Eb-major, and Bb-minor. This entire process ends in M.26 with the seventh rotation of the prime form. The retrograde form of the rhythmic series leads into the second section where the xylophone and the marimba take on the responsibility of both rotational processes.

Now in D-Lydian, the tonality originally intended for the pitch set, the rotation of the set begins again with the prime form with D in the alto voice of the 1<sup>st</sup> xylophone and the inversion form beginning with D in the bass of the marimba part (M.28). The prime form is joined by 1<sup>st</sup>-superior and 1<sup>st</sup>-inferior T-voices [EXAMPLE 6] and the inversion form is joined by 1<sup>st</sup>-superior and 2<sup>nd</sup>-superior T-voices [EXAMPLE 7]. At the same time, the rotation of rhythmic series 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 begins again in the xylophone part while the marimba begins a new rotation of the retrograde of the series 7-6-5-4-3-2-1 [EXAMPLE 8]. It only now occurs to me that I should have indicated a decrescendo in the prime form of the series (Xylo.) and a crescendo in the retrograde so that the dynamics behavior of the series (short=loud, long=soft) remains intact (not to mention that it would be a great effect and help the listener to understand what is happening).

During all this, the claves are simply counting off each subsequent rotation by durationally even groups of seven quarters, then six, then five... etc. In this second half of the piece, the finger cymbals and the bass drum begin to wander away from simply marking new beginnings to playing more liberally and at surprising moments. It is in these "unplanned" more intuitive entrances of the cymbals and bass drum that help to keep the music fresh and prevent the unfolding of the system from becoming boring and tedious.

It may be fair to say that even the most experienced and well prepared ear may likely not perceive the underlying structures and systems in this piece upon its first hearing. As I began to explore the possibilities of composing using of Pärt's techniques, I did not realize how quickly one systematic idea can spin into several processes. I may have too much going on in this piece to expect a listener to pick up on it on the first

hearing. Some processes are very clearly noticeable while others are not. I found that leaving space between events provides the listener the time necessary to parse these different process streams. The result is a piece that is certainly slower and more steady-paced than my usual music writing. This was a very fun piece to write and I hope that I will write one or two more movements to complete it as a larger work.