

## *Shimmer*, Elena Ruehr, 1994

Joy Perkinson, 9/10/08

I chose this piece because I had Professor Ruehr for 21M.301, and I wanted to see what she had written. I used a score while listening. Overall, I really, really enjoyed this piece. I would listen to *Shimmer* on an out-of-class basis, which isn't something I can say about most post-tonal music.

There's an ineffable beauty to the chords that she uses that immediately caught my attention. Perhaps it's that their range (from very high violin to a deep, full bass) makes the music feel like it fills up as much space as it can, making me feel as though I'm completely surrounded by the music.

The persistent eighth note rhythm that drives much of the piece serves to draw emphasis towards other aspects of the music, such as note changes and dynamics, that texture the piece. It also means that in the few places where Ruehr does change the rhythm, the contrast is so striking that the pace and texture of the musical world you're in while listening to this piece is deformed, drawing you with it. Specifically, when notes are held out and the piece becomes slow and legato, I get this feeling of being drawn out, like taffy. Maybe that's just a weird synesthesia effect again. Hard to tell.

*Shimmer* changes time signatures frequently, and uses accents and articulation on what would otherwise be weak beats, making the concept of a "measure" hard to hear. Instruments changing lines mid-measure adds to this effect. When the instruments finally line up in the last section of the piece (labeled section PP), using a new rhythm (much like "stop time" in jazz), it feels like the instruments have finally come together in a consensus of sorts. The instrumental lines join to deliver the final message of the piece.

In many ways, *Shimmer* reminded me of *Music for 18 Musicians* by Reich. Both pieces use large instrumental ranges, a steady rhythm, and chords that, to my ear, sound similar. Both pieces of music are completely absorbing.

One of the "lessons" I could take away from listening to *Shimmer* is the way that Ruehr uses many notes at once, without a tonal center, but manages to not make the sound clash. The chords sound natural. I often find that the post-tonal music I write clashes too much for my liking. I would love to learn how to make sounds this fluid and consonant within an atonal setting.

## *Echoi*, Lukas Foss, 1964

Joy Perkinson, 9/10/08

Wow. After listening to *Echoi*, I have such an overarching feeling of “wow” that it’s hard to know where to begin writing.

One thing that I can say is that the piece grew on me. When it started out, I thought it was going to sound too random for me to follow for the duration. The notes used in this piece are more rhythmic than melodic, hence timbre and relative dynamic range becomes much more important than harmonic structure in the classical sense of the term. As the piece went on, and my ears adjusted to the sound, I became intrigued by the sheer number of different effects used by the instruments as well as the complex markings on the score.

I think *Echoi* would have been hard to follow without the score. Near the end of the piece, when the tape recorder was playing in addition to all the instruments, it was difficult to follow even with the score. I can only imagine how hard it is to actually play this piece. There are many complex rhythms that need to be coordinated between instruments. A lot of them are fast. The percussionist has to jump rapidly between instruments, even within fast phrases. There are directions in the score such as “turn page for clarinet” because the clarinetist is far too busy to do so for himself.

A lot of the markings in this score started speaking to my personal compositional style as I was following along. My first real compositional experience was with my piano teacher, Jeff Payne, who performs with “Fear No Music” in Portland, OR. He would encourage me to try out wacky ideas in my compositions and see what happened. This resulted in a lot of unorthodox instructions for the ensemble performing my creations. “Drag rubber ball across gong” became one of my favorites. One of my compositions, which included sections called “Bouncy things” and “Things that go bump in the night,” had people dropping bouncy balls all over their instruments. I gave the pianist a bunch of rubber balls tied to a stick with string, and had him bounce them inside the piano with the pedal depressed. I told the violinist to play a squeaky bat for “Things that go bump in the night.” So once I saw how many cool effects and bizarre instructions Foss wrote into his score, I warmed up to the piece quite a bit. Foss thinks outside the box, and it’s a fun and occasionally humorous experience to look across his score.

In particular, I liked the percussionist’s use of anvil and garbage can lid. I liked Foss’s instruction, on the last page of the score, “Hit a random assortment of dull, pitchless, amusical sounds (wood of the piano, drum sides,

music stands, etc.)” with the footnote, “Do not ‘play’ on an instrument – illegitimate sounds only.” I liked the bent notes in the clarinet. I like the glissandi that sound like war sirens in *Echoi IV*. I especially liked the short semi-improvisational clarinet sections in *Echoi III*, in which relative pitches are insinuated, but the choices of what precise sounds to play is completely up to the clarinetist. There are so many instructions to look at that I am very glad that I chose to use a score during this listening.

I tried to listen for an overall shape to the piece, and ways to distinguish between the four sections. *Echoi I* sounded jumpy and playful. In *Echoi II*, I realized that the music was starting to scare me. I mentioned earlier that I’ve written a piece called “Things that go bump in the night.” *Echoi* is an excellent musical rendition of things going bump in the night, and part II in particular gave me the impression of being in a scary carnival “funhouse” after hours or a dusty attic full of shadows and echoes. *Echoi III* seemed quieter than the other sections, like something lurking, or the quiet before the storm. Then *Echoi IV* came in with a sense of driving, building momentum. Near the end, with the tape recorder playing and the siren-esque glissandi and amusical crashes from the percussion section, it sounded like being in a war zone. Then the music quieted, there were a few final thuds in the percussion section, and all the sound faded away into nothing.

Wow.