Oh Mensch - Microtonal music for 2 guitars

Detailed program notes

Motets for two guitars (after Machaut)

Arthur Kampela, 2011

Motets for 2 guitars (after Machaut) originated as a commission from the American Guitar Duo comprised of Laura Oltman and Michael Newman. It was premiered by them on the occasion of the 800 hundredth Anniversary of Reims Cathedral a place much associated with the composer Guillaume de Machaut. At its beginning, besides having the guitarists seating far from each other obeying a kind of 'antiphonal disposition' (as when 2 choirs were at different sides of a church during the very time of Machaut), the music has an in-built percussive character that is suddenly interrupted by "bell-like" sounds plucked by the left hand on the strings located between the tuning pegs and the nut. They symbolize the church-bells announcing the religious services.
An isorhythmic Motet from the master is heard albeit distorted, only to be
questioned by all sorts of sonic "debris..." This strategy becomes a conduit for communicating with past musical entities, my particular way of dialoguing with the "dead" master creating a 'spiritual connection over the ages' - where both of our musical "tongues" interact. As if the mere continuum of sonic materials of different origins (mine and Machaut's), superseded the need of a specific style, and an open dialog of 'sonic debris' is inaugurated. Machaut and I are just "talking, cursing, dialogging, being" in the transient and transparent cocoon of this anomalous sonic reality. At the end of the piece both composers (and guitarists) are "in peace" with each other - as if we were acquitted and understanding of our differences and beings - and although we realize our 'unbridgeable gap', we also insist on a form of dialog and communication - maybe a distant echo, a faint 'YES,' between foreign musical languages/landscapes...

Tritune

Larry Polansky, 2013

Tritune is in three sections, played continuously. Section 1 and 3 are in different tunings, all based on the harmonic series of primes up to the 23rd partial (Section 1 on C, Section 3 on the 11th harmonic of that C). In Section 2, the guitars gradually retune while they play.

Three different related compositional ideas are use. Section 1 is a (strange) rhythmicana, using only open strings and natural harmonics. Section 2 uses a contracting time span divided into three parts (independently for the two performers): retuning the guitar, improvising, and playing a single guitar lick (but always at a new tempo). In Section 3, a two-part hocket-like phrase, with each guitar of a different length, repeats (and thus shifts). In the manner of one of my "non-coincident" canons, resulting simultaneities are cancelled out of the resulting line.

No time (at all)

Brian Ferneyhough, 2004

These five studies were for two guitars were composed at the request of Magnus Andersson and Mats Scheidegger and incorporate short segments of Les Froisements des Ailes de Gabriel for guitar and chamber ensemble (2003)as well as original connecting material.
Since the source score contains an important part for an ensemble guitarist whose instrument is tuned a quarter tone lower than that of the soloist, I set out to present elements of both parts in a more equal and, frequently, more obviously volatile relationship. To this end many segments are represented in an order very different from that of their original context and, not infrequently, new material has been interpolated in one or both parts.
In order to underline the microtonal harmonic aspect of the music, the fourth movement is identical to the second, but with the parts interchanged (thus subtly modifying their intervallic relationship).
No time (at all) is warmly dedicated to Geoffrey Morris, Mats Scheidegger and Magnus Andersson.

Alcohol and Algebra

Christopher Trapani, 2015

The words of the title share Arabic roots, having wound their way into Western culture through an encounter with Islamic civilization. Roughly the same could be said about the guitar, the fretted ud that spread through Andalucia to Europe and the New World.

Alcohol and Algebra invokes many of the far-flung stylistic associations of this now ubiquitous instrument, conjuring up the dreamy slides of the Mississippi Delta, as well as the portamento ud improvisations of Munir Bashir. Later passages recall the intricate geometrical interplay of Alhambra tiles, here transposed to a network of polyrhythms and metric modulations.

Alcohol and Algebra was premiered by the guitar duo Oh Mensch at the Der Sommer in Stuttgart Festival on 14 June, 2015 at the Theaterhaus in Stuttgart, Germany.

Catalysis (a): Şafak and Bahtiyar

Turgut Ercetin, 2015

Catalysis (/kəˈtælɪsɪs/): 1. Dissolution, destruction, ruin. 2. The causing or accelerating of a chemical change by the addition of a catalyst. Catalysis cycle is a series of duets, each of which are composed for identical instruments. The focus of the discourse in these series lies on the acoustic peculiarities of the instrument pairs, of which specific acoustic relationships are devised to formulate means of structuration. Accordingly, the primary goal of this cycle is to explore the perceptual output pertaining to the physical relations
as such, and index their auditory peculiarities for future studies. Being the first of the series, Catalysis (a), is composed for two guitars. In order to realize the task mentioned above, a digital wave-guide model is designed. Consisting of digital filter and delay line
networks, this model displays peculiar acoustic activities such as absorption, damping,
compression and expansion ratios per unit-time as transfer function parameters. Consequently, the mathematical design of each filter constitutes an integral part of this study, for their parameters are used to compute the partial decay rates pertaining to various plucking locations. The unit radiuses of the plotted poles that are inferred mathematically from the transfer functions are used to compute these decay rates, which are conceived in this piece as the key activities to sample formal entities. The discourse in Catalysis (a) uses this data to formulate the acoustic activity variance pertaining to each string composition, and the way in which they interact with the whole acoustic mechanism.
Means of formulation as such is used to constitute a multilayered formal network, through which a variety of sonic-temporal relationships constitute the polyphonic microstructures in the composition.

Catalysis (a) is dedicated to Brian Ferneyhough with gratitude for his precious friendship.
May, 2015
Istanbul