

Music at Emory



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**2019
2020**

Metaphöny

**Connor Cochran, composition
Senior Honors Recital**

Erika Tazawa, accompanist

Saturday, March 21, 2020, 5:00 p.m.

Emerson Concert Hall
Schwartz Center for Performing Arts

**This concert contains mature content.*

music.emory.edu

Program

Birth Sky

- I. *Sun in Libra*
- III. *Moon in Libra*
- V. *Venus in Libra*

Erika Tazawa, piano

Fucksody

Anna Ree, soprano; Sophia Beaurard, alto;
Nic Bogan, tenor; Connor Cochran, bass

Freddy, Jason, and Michael Have a Race

Teresa Pan, percussion and laptop samples

&&&

Erika Tazawa, piano

—Intermission—

A Priori

fixed stereo audio

Beading

Judy Oh, violin; Chris Fenger, cello

Carmina Catulli

- I. *nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle*
- II. *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*
- III. *Aufilena, bonae semper laudantur amicae*
- IV. *quis hoc potest videre, quis potest pati*

Anna Ree, soprano; Sophia Beaurard, alto; Nic Bogan, tenor;
Connor Cochran, bass; Erika Tazawa, piano

Metaphöny

I came up with the title “metaphony” by combining “meta” (meaning something self-referential, or that comments on its genre or form) and “-phon,” which is a syllable associated with sound. As a happy accident, it also contains the word “phony,” meaning fake or artificial, which is exactly the impression of the concert I was commenting on when writing this music.

In fact, metaphony is already an English word. It has two definitions: an instance where the pronunciation of a vowel is affected by another vowel; and a synonym for “umlaut.” So, for an extra layer of meta commentary and humor, I added the umlaut to my program title.

The general concept I considered while writing this music was the classical music concert as a ritual. I wanted to interrogate the assumptions we make about the concert experience and content. Why are concerts formal-dress events? Why do so many classical programs feature mostly dead white European men, who worked in an idiom that is now outdated? There was a time when the classical concert was a part of popular culture. Why have we allowed it to slip out of that zeitgeist? Furthermore, what can we do to change it? The pieces in my program and the visual presentation of this concert simultaneously point out these issues, and experiment with potential answers.

Birth Sky

Birth Sky is a 12-movement piece I wrote in summer 2018, with each piece inspired by one of the positions of the planets on my astrological birth chart. In this recital I have only included the first, third, and fifth pieces, which make up the “Libra Triptych”—the Sun, Moon, and planet Venus, which were all in the house of Libra when I was born.

I do not believe in astrology—but I am amused by how frequently I identify with statements people make about Libras. Aside from its premise, *Birth Sky* is the least obviously humorous piece on this program—all of the humor is hidden in pitch set choice and thematic manipulation and development, and may in fact be only obvious to me.

The three pieces are tied together by several common themes. The “Libra Theme” is an adaptation of the *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* melody. I shifted it into a minor key and added chordoids (chromatic pitch collections not fitting the requirements of the labels “major” or “minor chords”) made up of set (015), which is the relation of the first three notes in the minor melody. The descending theme in *Moon in Libra* and *Venus in Libra* is a development of this “Libra” theme.

Fucksody

This piece, to me, is the most basic and immediate way to subvert the audience's expectations of the concert experience. It is a tonal, consonant SATB piece devoid of overly complex rhythms or challenging harmonic progressions, where the lyrics are a string of profanity. This takes an idea, introduced (to me) in Soldier, Komar, and Melamid's 1997 *The Most Unwanted Song*, to its logical conclusion—turning profanity (which by turn can be shocking, immature, insensitive, blasé, inappropriate, taboo, and banal) into art, introducing it and the reactions to it to more conscious scrutiny and analysis.

In doing so, I ask several implicit questions. We all use these words offstage; we even use them on different stages. Why is there a taboo about them on the concert stage? Furthermore, will the world come tumbling down if we break that taboo? Once the questions are raised, I believe the answers will be obvious and intuitive.

This piece had to be cut down due to time constraints, but the world needs to know: in one draft it ended with a fugue on the word "motherfucker."

Freddy, Jason, and Michael Have a Race

This piece was born of my love for both horror media and avant-garde music. The two, in fact, seem to have an unexpected relation to each other. Whenever I share avant-garde music that I appreciate with friends, the near-invariable reaction is that it sounds like the score to a horror movie. It occurred to me that one of the few places avant-garde music appears in mainstream pop culture is in film and video game soundtracks. I decided to write something that took the relationship the other way: an avant-garde piece that specifically uses sonic references to famous horror movies.

To diversify the musical language of the piece, I built a Max patch. Within it, the percussionist can trigger pre-recorded and synthesized samples they would be unable to play otherwise. They are also directed to speak, shout, growl, and whisper at various points in the piece.

This was my first time writing for percussion, and I learned a lot working with Teresa Pan on the special techniques of percussion instruments and the kinds of affordances a composer is required to make in order to make a percussion piece playable.

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&&& (pronounced "Three Ampersands") is the third in a series of aleatoric pieces (following ??? and !!!). Like its predecessors, it is made up of short phrases to be played on the keys, body, and strings of the piano and spoken lines for the pianist, which they may play in nearly any order they like.

Much of my program focuses its satire on more traditional classical music, but this piece plays with the techniques and aesthetics of more avant-garde new classical music. Many of the new classical music pieces I have

encountered seem to focus on having acoustic instruments make noises they were not designed to make, or using objects not typically considered “musical” as instruments. In this piece, I combine these two techniques, having the pianist interact with the piano not only with their fingers, but also a guitar pick, pencil, and some heavy object (a brick).

Feel free to laugh if you find something funny. If it is not funny, do not laugh.

A Priori

This piece was the first I wrote for composition lessons at Emory, in fall 2018. It is a sound collage using sampled noises I found comforting (including a synthesized voice saying soothing things, elevator music, and a small bell), combined and altered using filters and production techniques in order to create a disturbing effect. It is intended to be performed in complete darkness, to underline the disquieting nature of the panning synthesized voice and chaotic way the arhythmic and irregular music is likely to reverberate in the space.

As the introduction to the second half of the program, this piece helps return the audience to the headspace they inhabited before they had a break to use the restroom and check their phone.

Beading

In composing *Beading*, I focused on a curious sonic side effect of harsh dissonance: when two notes separated by a half step—or a quarter step, or even an eighth—sound at the same time, the interaction of their sound waves creates an additional third sound. I have heard it described as “fluttering” or “beating,” but to me the clearest way to describe it is through a visual and tactile analogy: that of a string of beads, and the way they feel running along one’s fingers.

This piece may seem to have nothing to do with the commentary present in the rest of my program. Consider, however, that when a concert is structured around a central theme, the audience will likely expect every piece on the program to relate to that theme in some way. The most efficient way to subvert this expectation is to include a piece that has *nothing to do* with my central theme—although by doing so, I end up relating it to the theme (subverting the expectations of the concert) by virtue of its context, anyway.

Carmina Catulli

Inspired by Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, this piece sets several texts by notoriously vulgar Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus. It utilizes an SATB-adjacent vocal quartet and highlights some of Catullus’s most scathing and shocking witticisms. I personally do not agree with the things he says, but the performative transgressiveness of his work interested me.

I set 11 poems in four songs, with subjects ranging from infidelity to politics to masculinity. The first song spans seven poems, which Catullus wrote in order to bash his lover (under the pseudonym “Lesbia,” which was a reference to the fact that she was from the aisle of Lesbos, not to what we would expect today). He wrote these poems, as far as I can tell, after discovering Lesbia cheating on him. The later poems in the sequence are notably shorter than the earlier ones. This gave me the impression that his true rage petered out, even as he continued writing vindictively. I reflected this progression by having the vocal melody initially rapidly flowing, to the point of nearly tripping over itself. Over the course of the song, the rhythmic intensity subsides, until finally coming to rest on one long sustained note.

For the second song, I set perhaps the poet’s most infamous poem which, due to its obscenity, was not fully translated into English until the 1980s. In it, Catullus establishes the insult he feels at the words of two of his friends; he makes several disturbing threats, though they are likely somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Their insult? They called him a bottom. In ancient Rome, men being in gay relationships was normalized and even lauded—so long as the man in question was believed to “wear the pants” in the relationship. The threats and insults Catullus penned were his way of asserting his masculinity, which is reflected in the vocal line: the singer ends several phrases with a shout.

The third song is softer, more lyrical. I believe Catullus was writing from a place of genuine hurt and sadness. He believes he has been cheated by not “receiving” Aufilena’s virginity (a sense of entitlement disturbing to a contemporary audience). Without cosigning this idea, I wanted to stay tonally true to it with longer, slower phrases and a more traditional harmonic language than I typically use.

I took a different tactic with the fourth song—I was uncertain whether the text was tongue-in-cheek or brutally mocking, so I decided to use the music to soften the exact, literal statements made in the text. The poem is an unrelenting string of excessively brutal insults aimed at a public figure. Thus, I made the music bouncy and playful, in an attempt to lighten the tone to satire.

—Programs notes by Connor Cochran.



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