ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MOVE, FOR STRING QUARTET, PIANO, PERCUSSION AND ELECTRONICS

Geoffrey Alastair Sheil, Doctor of Musical Arts 2016

Dissertation directed by: Professor James Fry, Associate Professor, Music Theory and Composition

MOVE is a composition for string quartet, piano, percussion and electronics of approximately 15-16 minutes duration in three movements. The work incorporates electronic samples either synthesized electronically by the composer or recorded from acoustic instruments. The work aims to use electronic sounds as an expansion of the tonal palette of the chamber group (rather like an extended percussion setup) as opposed to a dominating sonic feature of the music. This is done by limiting the use of electronics to specific sections of the work, and by prioritizing blend and sonic coherence in the synthesized samples.

The work uses fixed electronics in such a way that allows for tempo variations in the music. Generally, a difficulty arises in that fixed “tape” parts don’t allow tempo variations; while truly “live” software algorithms sacrifice rhythmic accuracy. Sample pads, such as the Roland SPD-SX, provide an elegant solution. The latency of such a device is close enough to zero that individual samples can be triggered in
real time at a range of tempi. The percussion setup in this work (vibraphone and sample pad) allows one player to cover both parts, eliminating the need for an external musician to trigger the electronics.

Compositionally, momentum is used as a constructing principle. The first movement makes prominent use of ostinato and shifting meter. The second is a set of variations on a repeated harmonic pattern, with a polymetric middle section. The third is a type of passacaglia, wherein the bassline is not introduced right away, but becomes more significant later in the movement.

Given the importance of visual presentation in the Internet age, the final goal of the project was to shoot HD video of a studio performance of the work for publication online. The composer recorded audio and video in two separate sessions and edited the production using Logic X and Adobe Premiere Pro. The final video presentation can be seen at geoffsheil.com/move.
MOVE, FOR STRING QUARTET, PIANO, PERCUSSION AND ELECTRONICS

by

Geoffrey Alastair Sheil

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts 2016

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents
Score
Cover
Performance notes
Part I
Part II
Part III

i
1
1
2
3
21
32
Move

Geoff Sheil
Move

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c.15 minutes

String quartet
Piano
Vibraphone, electronics

Performance notes:

- Electronics are triggered by the percussionist (1 player).

- Any method of triggering may be used, but a sample pad works particularly well. A Roland SPD-SX was used for the premiere performance.

- The device should be set to a MONO configuration, such that the next sound cancels the remainder of the previous sound. This is important as it allows the same samples to work through a range of performance tempi.
Coolly $\frac{q}{4} = 68$

Part II

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Vibraphone

Piano

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Vib.

Pno.
Fluently $\frac{4}{4}$

Viola

Piano

$p$ lightly pedal each measure

espr., ad lib.
retake as needed

Part III
with rhythmic intensity (still pizz.)
fluently, pedal each measure lightly