MUSIC FROM ELSEWHERE: ORCHESTRA

BY

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Claude Baker, Chairman of the Research Committee
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Aaron Travers
Music from elsewhere: orchestra (2012)

Joshua Groffman
Program Note

This work is the fifth and largest in a series of pieces with the title Music from elsewhere. The phrase comes from a passage in Margaret Atwood’s novel The Robber Bride and evokes, for me, a sense of dichotomy between two types of music: one that is fully present, audible, and familiar to us, and another which is more mysterious, emerging into our perception only in fits and starts - the "music from elsewhere." The idea of this dichotomy appealed to me because it seemed to capture a facet of the experience of daily life, namely, that if prosaic and familiar concerns largely shape our existence, they are occasionally interrupted by a sense that something larger and more fundamental is at work behind the scenes. Music from elsewhere attempts to capture that sense of an ineffable, larger something.

In the present work, the "music from elsewhere" evolves over the course of the work’s fifteen minutes, starting from thick, murky chords in the low winds and strings to high, bright ones in the flutes and violins, finally encompassing the entire ensemble at the climax. Alternating with these chords, which are rhythmically loose and lacking a clear sense of pulse, is another type of music that is sharply rhythmic, often heard as thumping attacks in the basses and percussion.

The use of driving, dance-like rhythms embodies another important element in my composition. Once, while talking with another composer, it was pointed out to me that virtually every piece of mine featured passages of rhythmic vitality. In some works, this rhythmic element formed the central principle of the piece; in others, it popped up only briefly, as if unsure of its welcome but determined to make an appearance. I’d noticed my life-long interest in the complexities of rhythm, of course, but the idea that some part of me found a way to insert this dance-like music in every piece, regardless of what else occurred, intrigued me. I decided to make this, too, an element of the Music from elsewhere cycle.

Thus, the dichotomy that is at the heart of the pieces is created in this particular composition by a contrast between thick chords and clear, driving rhythms, one emerging from and being subsumed by the other in succession throughout. The work is organized into four large sections of approximately equal length. The first features the working out of those low, murky chords and the first appearance of the rhythm music. In the second, the rhythmic profile changes rapidly, bouncing between the different instruments of the orchestra. After a local climax that is noisy and chaotic, the energy dies away, clearing space for the long build to the apex of the work. This build-up forms the third section and features the two types of music at once: those high, bright chords at the top of the ensemble, while the rhythm music pulses underneath. At the dramatic center of the piece, the two musics finally merge; the "music from elsewhere" takes on a rhythmic element at last in a series of hammering chords for the entire ensemble. These hammering chords continue to reassert themselves in the fourth section, but in shorter and shorter outbursts. Never beaten, they simply vanish as the murky texture from the beginning re-emerges. Thus, the work is a circle; the music does not die away or end, but continues, elsewhere, out of our hearing but always present.

Joshua Groffman
Music from elsewhere: orchestra

Joshua Groffman (b. 1984)

Duration: 15’. Score in C.

Instrumentation
3 Flutes,
3, doubling Piccolo
3 Oboes
3 Clarinets in B♭,
2, doubling Clarinet in E♭, 3, doubling Bass Clarinet
3 Bassoons
3, doubling Contrabassoon
4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
2 Tenor Trombones
Bass Trombone
Tuba

Percussion (3 players)
Player 1:
Xylophone (sounds B♮)
Vibraphone (shared with player 3)
Chimes (shared with player 2)
Bass drum
Player 2:
Glockenspiel (sounds 15°)
Chimes (shared with player 1)
Finger cymbals
Bell tree
Large tam-tam
Small and medium woodblocks
Small and medium shakers
Player 3:
Gong, two octaves (sounds 15°)
Vibraphone (shared with player 1)
Marimba
Glockenspiel
Large and medium triangles
Timpani (4)
Harp
Piano

Strings
Basses require C extensions.

All instruments sounding at the octave or double octave notated at written pitch.

Performance notes:

General notes
Beat markers. To more clearly indicate where in a measure a crescendo, decrescendo, or other performance indication (such as a trill) extends, small dashes above the bar delineate individual beats, thus:

In the given example, the crescendo extends to the second beat of measure two, reaching forte at that moment.

Ord. “Ord.” indicates a resumption of normal playing technique following any alteration, including toneless playing and overblowing (flutes - see separate note), playing inside the body of piano (see separate note), bow position (tasto, pizzicato), scratch tone and “much pressure,” col legno, and molto and non vibrato (see next note).

Vibrato. All instruments should play with normal vibrato unless the markings n.v. (non vibrato) or m.v. (molto vibrato) are used. Molto vibrato playing should result in a very wide, slow vibrato. “Ord.” indicates a resumption of normal vibrato.

Trills and tremolos. Trills (rapid alteration between two notes a step apart) and tremolos (rapid alteration between two notes greater than a step apart) are notated in the same fashion:

When two auxiliary notes are indicated, thus:

the player should alternate rapidly between all three pitches. Care should be taken to move at random between the three pitches, avoiding a pattern of repeating the same three-note sequence.

(continues next page)
Foot tapping. At several points throughout the score, the orchestra members are asked to tap their feet lightly on the stage. The rhythms and dynamics of the foot tapping are indicated in tutti section staves in the score, thus:

When a tremolo is indicated, the players should tap rapidly and without synchronisation, in the manner common when acknowledging the conductor before the start of a program. A single (non-tremolo) note indicates a single, unison attack.

"T". Several passages are marked "T" to indicate that although the resultant sound of the instrumental technique called for (pizzicato harmonics in the strings, marimba and xylophone played with mallet handles, etc.) will in reality be quite soft, maximum energy should be used to play the passage.

Flutes

Toneless playing, in which air is blown into the instrument but no pitch is produced, is indicated by an open circle (far left). A fully pitched, normal tone is indicated with a filled-in circle (center). A diamond (far right) indicates overblowing, in which upper partials of the given pitch(es) emerge. The line between the various symbols indicates a seamless transition between these modes of playing.

Percussion, harp, and piano

Ringing. Unless otherwise indicated, the timpani, harp, piano, and all percussion instruments should always be allowed to ring until the sound dissipates, without damping, and in the case of the vibraphone, chimes, and piano, through the use of the pedal.

Harp harmonics sound 8vn.

Piano effects. Several modes of playing inside the piano are called for. The direction "brush strings with fingertips" calls for a smooth glissando with the fingers across the strings, in the manner of harp glissando, generally proceeding from low strings to high:

In instances where a plate strut impedes a continuous glissando across the register indicated, the pianist should endeavor to create as smooth a glissando as possible by using both hands, one on either side of the strut.

The sign "+" indicates the pianist should dampen the strings of the given pitches inside the piano very tightly, between the pinboard and dampers, so that most of the pitch is replaced with the percussive sound of the hammer, mimicking the sound of the string pizzicato:

Strings

Diamond notehheads. Strings should play all open diamond-shaped notehheads in the manner of normal natural harmonics; some do not correspond to harmonic modes, and the resultant sound will have an indefinite and unstable pitch.

Knocking. At several points throughout the score, the strings are asked to knock lightly with the knuckles of the right hand on the front of their instruments, in the center of the area to the right of the tailpiece.

When a tremolo is indicated, the tapping should be rapid and without synchronization, resulting in a dense, chaotic texture. A single (non-tremolo) note indicates a single, unison attack.

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Music from elsewhere: orchestra

Dark, mysterious, $d = 88$

Score in C

Joshua Groffman
accel.
Scherzando, $\frac{3}{4} = 96$
(rit.)

Quietly grooving, $\frac{4}{4} = 80$

(Fl.)

(Tpt.)

(Tuba, bassoon, timpani)

(Timp.)

(Hp)

(Pos.)

(Vc.)

(Va.)

(Vc.)

(Vl.)

(Bc)

(Tpt./fl.)