

Lecture-Recital: “An Analysis of Elliott Carter’s *Gra*”

Kenneth Long

As a performer of recent music, I have found it necessary to uncover the underlying formal/structural features as a basis for forming an interpretation of a given piece. Since no detailed analysis/performer’s guide to Elliott Carter’s 1993 work *Gra* (which means “game” in Polish) has appeared in print, I was eager to make discoveries which, hopefully, would serve to make others’ and my performances of this great work more engaging and exciting. Carter states in the opening of the score: “This clarinet piece, frequently changing and playful in character (yet based on the same material throughout), recalls to me my many visits with the composer (Witold Lutoslawski) in America and Poland.” In this lecture-recital, I will discuss what I conceive to be *Gra*’s same material – the all-triad [0,1,2,4,7,8] hexachord – which serves as the constant feature in this piece of ever-changing moods and characters. I will show how rhythmic gesture – including metric *diminuendi* – and modern clarinet techniques such as multiphonics and timbral variance serve structurally and motivically in the piece.

Gra’s form consists of three sections which are defined by Carter’s use of Character-Structures – or in his terms “musical characters”. These Character-Structures are motivic gestures typified by certain rhythmic, articulation, dynamic, or playing style content. In this piece, they are either *espressivo* or *scherzando* in nature. It is the growth of – and interplay between – these Character-Structures which define the three sections and give the piece “drama”. In this presentation, I will perform and discuss how these

opposing musical personae are created and explored in Carter's all-triad hexachord "game".

Selected Bibliography

- Bernard, Jonathan W., "Elliott Carter and the Modern Meaning of Time," *Musical Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 4, Winter 1995, p. 644-682.
- Caltabiano, Ronald, "Elliott Carter: Towards the Tenth Decade," *Tempo: A Quarterly Review of Modern Music*, no. 207, Dec. 1998, p. 1-8.
- Carter, Elliott, "Shop Talk by an American Composer," *Problems of Modern Music*, ed. Paul Lang (New York, 1960), p. 51-65.
- Garrison, Leonard L., "Elliott Carter's *Scrivo in Vento*, Part II: Performance Notes," *The Flutist Quarterly*, Fall, 1994.
- Schiff, David, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1983.
- Schiff, David, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, Second Edition, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Rosen, Charles, *The Musical Language of Elliott Carter*, Washington: Library of Congress, 1984.

Selected Discography

Gra

Bridge BCD (CD) (1994); *Elliott Carter: Eight Compositions (1943-1993)*; The Group for Contemporary Music: Charles Neidich (cl); with *Enchanted Preludes*; *Duo for Violin and Piano*; *Scrivo in Vento*; *Changes*; *Con Leggerezza Pensosa*; *Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi, Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*