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Margo Schulter ha compartit un enllaç.
23 agost

Tradition and Innovation in _Graus d'en Gargantua_
Neo-Manneristic archicembalo music in the 21st century

Recently I posted an original piece called _Graus d'en Gargantua_ or "Steps of Gargantua," inspired by Nicola Vicentino and his colleagues and successors:

<http://www.calweb.net/~mschulter/Gargantua1.mp3>

As the composer of this piece, which of course is not the most objective position to be in, but a good one to explain my intent, I'd like to explore how "originality" is often a fusion of tradition and subtle innovation. In fact, in many world musical traditions likely including early European music and its modern offshoots, "originality" often means internalizing traditional patterns to the point where one can make them one's own, and so cultivate one's own voice and style within a mostly established framework.

It's well to reflect that originality is a relative thing. As John of Salisbury in the 12th century credited Bernard of Chartres with saying: "We stand on the shoulders of giants." Or as the great peace activist and feminist Barbara Deming put it: "We are all part of one another."

As consummate musician and scholar Daniel Wolf has written, composing in "neomedieval" or here neo-Manneristic styles is a kind of alternate history. One takes a given historic style as a point of departure, and may do anything from cultivating one's voice within the overall conventions of that style to daring radically transformative things, or seeking a "fusion" between two or more historical styles.

Claudio Monteverdi wrote to defend the wonders wrought by a mixture of superb contrapuntal technique and radically transformative uses of declamatory textures and dissonances in his Fourth and Fifth Books of Madrigals (1603, 1605) by declaring that "I do not compose my works at haphazard." He was specifically answering his critic Giovanni Maria Artusi, and more generally asserting that Zarlino's rules of counterpoint (1558 and later) did not define the only basis for beautiful music.

Today, a composer like myself exploring the realm of archicembalo music might need at times to correct a different misconception: "I do not compose my pieces merely as rote exercises." It is possible to build on the sound foundation of 16th-century modality and counterpoint as amazingly expanded by Vicentino and his followers and successors, while adding new and original elements -- or, perhaps, elements that are "original rediscoveries." Two decades of experience in the tuning community have taught me early and often that a "new" idea often turns out to be a rediscovery. The writings of modern theorist Jonathan Wild sketch out the range of possibilities for neo-Manneristic archicembalo music which the few surviving compositions from around 1555-1620 can only suggest.

Let's look at something from my _Gargantua_ piece which is not a 16th-century commonplace, and indeed would generally require an archicembalo or the like (by which I mean a meantone keyboard with more than 19 notes per octave). I say "would generally require" because it could be done on a 19-note instrument like Guillaume Costeley's (1570) tuned in 19-ed2 or the almost identical 1/3-comma meantone addressed by Francisco Salinas (1577).

This passage occurs at around 0:31-0:41 in the recording:

```
1...2...3...4...| 1...2...3...4...| 1.....
E4-------E4----F4----------------------E^4
C#4-------C#4---Db4-----------C4-----Bb3---------C^4
r.............Ab3-----------F3-----------------G^3
A3--------A3----Db3-----------------------------C^3
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Here we start with Zarlino's harmonic division of the fifth on A3, that is, with the fifth divided 4:5:6 into a 5-4 major third below and 6:5 minor third above, here at a rounded 0-388-697 cents. Then we progress to another harmonic division -- on Db3, with the bass descending by an augmented fifth (A3-Db3), and the highest voice ascending by a regular diatonic semitone (E4-F4) so that these voices expand from a fifth to a near-pure major tenth of Db3-Ab3-Db4-F4 (~2:3:4:5).

In 1/4-comma meantone, the leap in the bass of A3-Db3 would be precisely 25:16 (772.6 cents); here the slightly lesser tempering of the fifths at around 3/13-comma sets this interval at 775.8 cents, almost identical to 36:23 (775.6 cents). Even the downward leap of a regular minor sixth (at or near 8:5) is unusual in standard 16th-century technique, and the downward augmented fifth likewise -- although Vicentino takes the views that truly versatile singers can and should handle such intervals with aplomb, and Giaches de Wert, for example, uses melodic intervals of this kind for expressive purposes.

The next step in the progression is familiar: moving from the concordant Db3-Ab3-Db4-F4 to a 7-6 suspension where C4 -- the more tense and poignant major seventh above the bass -- resolves to a major sixth of the penultimate cadential sonority Db3-F3-Bb3-F4. This is for Zarlino an arithmetic division, e.g. string lengths 10:8:6:4, with equal differences between string lengths. Here the major third Db3-F3 seeks expansion to the fifth; and the major sixth Db3-Bb3 to the octave.

Note that, so far, all this could be played on a 19-note meantone instrument - unlike the final resolution itself, from Db3-F3-Bb3-F4 to C^3-G^3-C^4-E^4 (~2:3:4:5), with Cam Taylor's ^ symbol showing a note raised by a meantone enharmonic diesis, here around 36.3 cents. Thus the bass moves from A3 at the beginning of the passage to C^3 at the end, the downward distance of a "proximate minor sixth" as Vicentino might call it (a diesis larger than a regular minor sixth at or close to 5:4), i.e. middle or neutral sixth, here 854.3 cents (close to 18:11, 852.6 cents). Interestingly, the highest voice begins at E4 and concludes a diesis higher, at E^4.

Another element of this enharmonic cadence, an innovation of Vicentino as far as we know, is the use compressed chromatic semitone steps (minor semitones at around 2/5 tone) as a variation on a familiar diatonic progression. Here the resolution is remissive, with steps descending by a semitone (Db3-C^3, Db4-C^4, F4-E^4)) or ascending by a tone (F3-G^3). However, the usual major semitone steps (e.g. F3-E3) of around 3/5-tone, here often 114.8 cents, are compressed to narrow chromatic semitones at around 2/5-tone or 78.5 cents. The step of a tone at F3-G^3 is conversely expanded by a diesis to around 6/5-tone, or 230.9 cents, a virtually just 8:7 (231.2 cents).

Note that while one could play the entire passage on a 19-tone instrument in 1/3-comma meantone or 19-ed2, this would lose the distinction between the chromatic semitone (~2/5-tone) and diesis (~1/5-tone), both of which map to a thirdtone step at around 63 cents. This is a different musical terrain than that of "fifthtone music" at or near 1/4-comma.

The 16th-century term _musica reservata_, although originally used for vocal music with the element of an affective text, may apply to archicembalo music in two senses. Then, or now, its manneristic progressions and artful distortions of a familiar yet still recognizable framework may appeal especially to audiences attuned to these refinements.

In the 21st century, we may add a second sense: people not so familiar with the norms and conventions of usual 16th-century styles may not recognize how these styles are at once evoked and altered by new melodic and sometimes also vertical elements -- whose full appreciation is "reserved" for those who, paradoxically, may most value the usual as well as the unusual.

Having said that, I would add that the goal I seek in a composition like this, however imperfectly realized, is _tarab_ -- a fine Arabic word meaning in a musical context wonder, beauty, or even ecstasy. I would especially like to thank my friend Faras Almeer for heightening my appreciation of this concept in maqam music and elsewhere.

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Tu, Antonie Bauélée, Cam Taylor i 5 persones més · 8 comentaris

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Ian Shanahan "Id like to explore how "originality" is often a fusion of tradition and subtle innovation."

Innovation in the best composers is often not so subtle, even if building on tradition. Example: Olivier Messiaen, whose innovations encompass harmony, melod... Mostra'n més...

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm

Ian Shanahan ctd.

"Let's look at something from my _Gargantua_ piece which is not a 16th-century commonplace, and indeed would generally require an archicembalo or the like (by which I mean a meantone keyboard with more than 19 notes per octave). I say "would gene... Mostra'n més...

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm

Kalle Aho https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvG-P4FknoU

YOUTUBE.COM
Forget Originality: All Ideas Are Remixes - Faris Yakob

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm

Ian Shanahan ha respost · 3 respostes

Ffred Tronge Talk of the tension between originality and lineage reminds me of this marvellous thing: http://hispanlit.cwriting.qc.cuny.edu/.../Borges-Pierre...

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm · 2

Ffred Tronge ha respost · 8 respostes

Margo Schulter Please let me briefly offer a correction and touch on a few rather obvious points.

The correct term I should have used, common for example in astronomy, is not "original rediscovery" but "independent rediscovery." This is what happens when two or more... Mostra'n més...

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm · Editat · 5

Ian Shanahan ha respost · 1 resposta

Claudi Meneghin Great post, Margo, many thanks 😍 with a big deal of theoretical value added. For those drifting in the end of some cacophonic dead-end derivations of 20th century western music, in addition to a careful study of your post, some readings from one of the books by Milan Kundera, "Testaments Betrayed", could be advised too... (plus, on another level, some basic instructions about manners, not even excluding the traditional point of view, in spite of its obvious limitations 😉)
PS Will you allow me to add this post (without the attached comments 😉) to the republication of "Graus d'en Gargantua" at the xenharmonic blog ?

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm · Editat · 4

Ian Shanahan ha respost · 5 respostes

Margo Schulter Claudi Meneghin, of course you have my permission to quote this post or anything I've written here. I must just add that I see many possible directions for music, and especially for music exploring alternative intonation systems. As I recall Erv Wilson may have said, there are "fertile fields in all directions." And that metaphor would be appreciate, since Erv designed a 22-note metallophone instrument and its JI tuning system named Evangelina in honor of the great Mexican agronomist Evangelina Villegas Moreno; in 2004, I had the opportunity while in Los Angeles of seeing this beautiful instrument.

M'agrada · Responde · 8 setm

Ian Shanahan ha respost · 1 resposta

Todd Harrop I hadn't realized you had written this longer text on 23 August, but just tonight I was listening to your piece many times and trying to chart out the last cadence. It's quite shocking, e.g. the melodic upward motion balanced by the downward harmonic r... Mostra'n més...

M'agrada · Responde · 6 setm · 3

Escriu un comentari...

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