

An interview between Robert Strizich and Cem Duruöz

In this interview, Cem Duruöz and the composer discuss the new piece in particular its harmonic and rhythmic structure, and the design of the tape part.



C.D.: Before we talk about the design of the music, I am very curious about the name. Would you please describe how you created it?

R.S.: Well, I always tend to wait until the last minute to find a name! In this case, I basically took the name from the character of the middle section of the piece, which has a kind of "blues" atmosphere with its emphasis on "bent" notes, vibrato and portamento. The movement uses these idiomatic effects -- which are common in jazz and various types of popular guitar playing -- extensively. Its slow tempo and somewhat melancholy quality also contribute to this "blues" atmosphere, I think. The piece moves in and out of this mood, therefore the name somehow just spontaneously occurred to me!

C.D.: I think it is a great name..

R.S.: I thought so too. The style of the name reminds me a little bit of the type of names that one saw on jazz albums in 1970's.

C.D.: I remember this Miles Davis album...

R.S.: Yes, "Kind of Blue." Incidentally, I do have a jazz background; I forget if I ever told you that I used to play jazz guitar a very long time ago. I never really try to draw on that background consciously in my compositions, but it is there somewhere as part of my general musical sensibility...

C.D.: A while ago when you were in the process of composing the piece, you were exploring various rhythmic design concepts. One of them was to create small rhythmic figures

randomly and then combine them. What is the structure in this final version? Is it the same approach?

R.S.: Yes, it is basically the same approach. One technique I often work with in my music is using the so-called "Fibonacci series" to determine rhythms in certain ways. I have experimented with creating sets of durations based on the Fibonacci series, and then having the computer choose from these sets by means of some quasi-random or statistical method. This is what I did in the first movement. It begins with slower durational values, picks up activity in the middle, and then subsides towards the end. What I am doing there is having the computer choose first from the longer durations in the series, then move to the shorter durations, and back again.

C.D.: I see. What is then the specific reason for the minor change you recently made in one of the rhythms in the first movement?

R.S.: Having the computer choose the rhythms and pitches -- according to some specific algorithm -- is actually the first step. Then I must transcribe the "raw" computer version so that the results will be sensibly playable by a human performer. Sometimes, in the initial version of the transcription, the rhythms which emerge are overly complicated; if so, I modify them intuitively, either to make them more sensible to play or more musical...

C.D.: How about the harmony? Would you please talk about the harmonic structure as well?

R.S.: Well, it varies from movement to movement. The most controlled harmonic design is in the slow movement -- that is, the third movement. In this movement, the ostinato note (a B harmonic...) is a central pitch. Then there is one set of pitches in the lower register that is used as an introduction to each one of the solo gestures, and there is a complementary set of pitches that is used in the solo statements. In the introductory and solo statements, the ostinato note is avoided, so that the total chromatic is present in the sum of all three regions -- the solo statements in the upper register, the ostinato in the middle, and the introductory pitches in the bass. In the middle section of the movement (in which both the solo guitar and tape employ only harmonics), there is a continuous turnover of all pitches of the total chromatic excepting the B that was previously used for the ostinato -- that is, eleven pitches. Here I have the computer choose randomly from the eleven pitches, but any one pitch cannot be chosen again until the remaining ten have been heard (a procedure with some similarities to classical "row" technique...). In the second movement, I also employ a similar method: there are ostinato notes (this time in the bass register), and all the upper voices avoid the pitch used for the ostinato. Finally, you probably noticed that at the end of each one of the sub-sections in the second movement (and also the beginning of the fourth...), the pitches are "frozen" into a static harmony; that was my way of creating a sort of "cadence." A sense of cadential conclusion is provided by this sudden stasis in the harmony.

C.D.: Do you have any suggestions about the fingering?

R.S.: In editing the work, I went through it carefully and thought about playability. Especially in the first movement (which is the most complex and which features only the solo guitar...), I put in numerous fingerings; but in subsequent movements, when there is more than one possibility for fingering a given passage, I leave the final decision up to you, the performer. Did you think that fingering might be a problem in any of the movements?

C.D.: No but I want to make sure that I take into account any preferences that you might have before deciding on the fingering. Especially your thoughts about the use of open strings...

R.S.: If I have a preference, I try to mark it in. For example, in the third movement I indicated a specific position for each "bent" note, since I wanted the sound of that particular pitch on that particular string. How does the piece look to you from the stand point of playability? Aside from the ensemble issues, is there anything unreasonable to play?

C.D.: I don't think so.

R.S.: I would think the hocketing between the tape and live guitar could be difficult in the second and fourth movements. If so, a possible solution might be for the performer to use headphones with a "click track" in performance. I personally think it would be nice to avoid that solution; but I have seen this done in some performances of music for solo instruments and tape.

C.D.: Sure it is worth seeing how it works, but first I would like to play without it. I remember when I and my cousin Zafer Özgen were in Turkey about 10 years ago, we did a two guitar piece by Joe Nickerson, an American composer who lived in Switzerland at the time. Each guitar part had quintuplets, septuplets with missing notes, superimposed with those in the other guitar part. This was so hard but we did it. We did it like it should be. In a way this second movement is a bit easier, since the rhythm in the tape part is constant. The challenge is to make the hocketing correctly.

R.S.: Yes you are right.



C.D.: Finally would you talk about the tape part a little bit? I know that the tape part consists of synthesized guitar sounds. In the score I can see multiple tape parts, such as R1, L1, C and so on. What is the relationship between these tape parts?

R.S.: I was thinking of panning the sounds, and using multiple speakers to do so. Thus, the letters C, L, and R in the score refer to "center," "left," and "right" respectively. I put in the numbers like L1, L2, and so on, to designate the relative degree of panning from the central point.

C.D.: Can it be possible to play the piece in the case of performances in halls equipped with only two speakers?

R.S.: Yes, I think so; the various tape parts could be mixed down to two-channel stereo. But I definitely want the placement of the sounds in the stereo spectrum to be an important aspect of the work.

C.D.: Thank you very much for this great piece, and I am looking forward to the first performance!