

Full Notes on Composition: Five Movements in 6001

Five Movements in 6001 is a mixed medium composition/improvisation (?) involving the use of an electroacoustic tape as well as live acoustic instruments. "6001" is a moniker that my former music teacher Dr Gooi Tah Choe uses. The homage to him is most saliently manifested in the main material of the electroacoustic track - an audio clip of him saying a phrase which is quite funny and intriguing out of context.

One very important theme in the work would be the question of what exactly is composition? The electronics are fixed and function as pre-set compositional material. The acoustic instruments are indeterminate and function as a responsive form of composition, to which the ensemble responds and improvises according to the electronic stimuli. The score functions as a conduit between the two elements of pre-conception and indeterminacy, and is in some sense like an intermediary medium. Another major theme of the work would be this tension between electronic and acoustic sounds. Each movement is an exploration of their relationship through the use of distinct and unrelated musical processes, from dominance of electronic sounds in the first movement, to an equilibrium of acoustic and electronic sounds in the third movement, to a chaotic competition for dominance in the fifth movement.

In terms of the choice of instruments, I categorised it into three major instrument types, namely chordal instruments, monophonic instruments, and (unpitched) percussion instruments. These categories are created in order to categorise the major features of the process more clearly. The lack of specification of instruments is such that the performance can be replicated in future instances with other combinations of instruments, and also keeping in line with the concept of indeterminacy. It would also be interesting for me to see more possibilities and realisations on the electroacoustic track.

*(for the premiere performance, the instrumental combination is: Flute, Bass Trombone, Drumset, Piano, Prepared Piano. I wrote this for my ensemble what the FORTE.)

The electroacoustic track is sectioned into five movements. A "movement" refers not so much in a conventional sense but the broad texture types which are based on individual fragments of the audio clip. The first movement is an exploration of the whole phrase, i.e "but, does the chord sound like a sus". The phrase continues to be repeated and blurred over time through the changing EQ and reverbs. I imagine the first movement to be an exploration of a single note, with the instruments independently improvising on the note A. I imagine the electroacoustics overpowering the acoustic instruments in this section, with the acoustic instruments "blending in" with the sounds of the electronics. I envision a sound reminiscent of the sparseness of the works of Morton Feldman.

The electronics in the second movement are more pointillistic in nature, partly due to the short attack-like qualities of the word "but". The acoustic instruments are intended to sound more prominent than before, though not overpowering the electronics. The acoustic instruments take turns to improvise over one another, like a distorted photocopying process. Notated in the score are the cycles which the first player initiates, moving on once every (non-percussion) player has improvised. The rhythm section however will continue to improvise on the track, and together with the electronics and the other instruments three concurrent streams of "sound masses"

are created. The concept is strongly influenced by Edgard Varese's, who envisions musical composition as sonic manipulation.

The third movement explores the fragment "Does the chord". I sampled individual words of the phrase to create repeating iterations of notes. These words are stacked upon one another to create different combinations of chords. The acoustic instruments serve to reinforce the chordal sonorities with chords based on G major through presenting cycles of 16 attack points. These cycles are repeated for a pre-set number of times, and each cycle is varied through the different metrical emphasis. In short, the third section is like a quasi-minimalist exploration of chordal sonorities with a strong reference to the colotomic structures of Gamelan music.

The fourth movement explores the fragment "sounds like a sus". I developed this movement from Ludwig Göransson's approach to reversibility in his soundtrack from the movie TENET. Throughout the first three movements, there is a general "co-existence" between the acoustic instruments and the electronics. However, in order to provide "breathing space" for the performers and the listeners, I hope to divert attention towards the manipulation of forward and backward fragments.

At some point, it becomes difficult to distinguish "sounds like a sus" and its reverse iteration. The fifth movement is simply chaos. Inspired by the density of material in New Complexity composers such as Brian Ferneyhough and Michael Finnessy. The fifth movement can be viewed in four stages. The first stage revisits the idea of parallel streams of sounds masses, with two instruments per group. Three additional tune fragments (and their retrograded versions) are presented for the ensemble to improvise on. The second stage revisits the idea of cyclic improvisations, while the third stage becomes a very distorted and dense texture with bit-crushed electronics accompaniment. The piece concludes following a final iteration of the full phrase "But, does the chord sound like a sus", with the fading away of instruments.

This work is dedicated to Dr Gooi, whom I most fondly remember for his huge love of electroacoustic music and his witty sense of humour.