

Correspondences

Patrick:

The following passage from Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" aptly describes the feelings that your "Moby Dick" sonata evoked within me:

"There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potter's Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulism's, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberous in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness."

I was absolutely intrigued and mesmerized by this composition. The fourth movement especially was innovative and captivating. The string effects to simulate and mimic the hauntingly beautiful sounds of whales which they produce inside their blow-holes was fascinating and apropos to this composition, and not a prop or gimmick.

You have captured Bartok's ability to exploit the piano and the Double Bass as percussion instruments, using their resonances as well as the xylophonic hardness of the piano in its accompanying role to produce exciting new sonorities and driving rhythms, uniquely evident in both compositions. I also noticed that you are maintaining formal schemes along with intensively worked counterpoint, all of this while still maintaining a creative and refreshing diatonic harmony. Lynn Peters' performance is outstanding and convincing.

All the best,
Larry

Larry:

Far too long this muse of e-mail has lain dormant. Go to Lemur Music online. The under artist go to "P". You will find Lynn Peter's "2003: A Bass Odyssey". Click, there is your review! I just discovered it tonight. At first I wondered where the review came from. As I read, I fondly remembered your words. Lynn must have sent your letter to me to Lemur Music. Interestingly, neither the composer, nor you the reviewer are listed. It makes it a mystery just whom the composer is that this unknown chap is writing about. I like mystery. Do you have this complete CD? If not, I'll mail you one.

Lynn Peters wrote to me later:

"Sally wants you to send Larry Binns a copy of the "Composer's Sonata". She wants your other work to be reviewed by him since most other reviewers were concentrating on the performers and not the composer. Sally says that when she plays a contemporary work she wants to convey and communicate what the composer intended".

Confession. This year my string quartet will be played at NCSA by faculty. In May, my piano sonata for four hands gets a premiere in Chicago to be broadcast on a Chicago public radio station. I should be feeling the peak of a composer's life. In fact, I feel a drain, a decided lack of spirit. I'm 54; the long haul has taken a toll. Around me is the vestige of a decided decline in interest in classical music. The same artists perform at Lincoln Center, repackaged for one more season, very little inspired music making. Universities are computer music driven. While I am thankful for computers and a user of Finale, it has replaced core technique.

The normal arrogance of youthful creativity has shifted away from the craft, settling for short term music values easily trumped by samples, preset factory loops and sequences. C major now belongs to a processor. The average age for concert goers for classical music is 50. My own Mannes graduate daughter listens to her father's music with a kind of dismissal. I included her on the Merkin concert last May. The audience was a veritable Who's Who in classical music, including this year's Pulitzer prize winner, Paul Moravec. She played on stage with me, her father's music. If at her age I had the same opportunity, it would have been life altering. Classical music is scrambling for crumbs. In 20 years I predict little will remain but a museum of ghosts.

We dreamed big dreams in our youth. Music was the greatest adventure ahead. Stravinsky was alive, Bernstein inspiring a nation. Pop orchestras had orchestrators, as did MGM that required A-list musicians. Now we stand on the cultural corner with hands out begging for refined listeners, and the masses pass by with Walkman permanently positioned for the ear's abuse.

I want to retire from NYC, but can't. There is no place to go. Here in Harlem, I, Patrick Byers, composer, remain among the excluded, the immigrants, drug dealers and the social misfits. This ghetto will never have a tree with a swing in the yard, no evening walks to greet neighbors, no small church to carol with at Christmas, and no one to bring by some chicken soup on a cold winter's night.

This confession to you is for the gift made to me of your friendship. Should anything come of all my labors that make you reflect regrets of what you should have done in your own life, cast them away from you. My price was too high. You placed your candle on a lamp stand; I burnt it too fast before it could be placed. You acted on faith in pure heart. I hear it in your music. It is what pleases my ear and soul listening to you both.

Thus, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. It is an ancient legacy.
patrick