

BTR

Section A (*Composers*)

1. You have been asked to examine two scores [Jean Barraqué's *Concerto for clarinet* and Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra "en forme de pas de trois"*], both of which contain an important part for a solo instrument but which otherwise are sharply contrasted. Please outline what you perceive to be the role of these instruments in the formal dynamic of their respective compositions.
2. Discuss the larger issues of language, semantic embedding and virtuoso identity construal in the Zimmermann concerto. Examine the possibility/plausibility of post-modern aesthetic criteria in this light.
3. The Barraqué piece is in many respects a problem-strewn artifact of late Modernist self-critique. As such, its typically refractive proposal of a 'self without qualities' might perhaps seem no longer pertinent to our experience. Please speculate on the issue of imperfection and the utopic as essential components of expression in such a language. How does the 'incompleteness' of such a project cross-reference with the juxtaposition of fragments typical of the Zimmermann worldview?

Question 1: ROLE OF SOLOISTS

From their very names, both pieces explicitly deal with the tradition of the Concerto as a long-established form in Western music (in all its different manifestations from the Baroque to the 19th century). This relationship may range from dialogue to fight with tradition, as we shall see. In any case, in both pieces, the soloist can hardly be seen as in the “virtuoso” role typical of concertos from earlier periods. The display of technical virtuosity *per se* and the distinction of the single individual against the otherwise relatively anonymous mass of musicians – the orchestra – are removed from both pieces by various, sometimes contrasting, strategies. One common strategy is the establishment of *hierarchies of soloists* (individual instruments or groups). This contributes to the loss of focus on the one “main” soloist, and I will explain later how such principle is applied to each piece. Another general feature to be mentioned, this time contrasting between the two pieces, is the theatrical characterization of the main soloist in Zimmermann (multifaceted, almost “schizophrenic”) as opposed to the relatively dim and hesitant characterization of the soloist in Barraqué. I will examine the two pieces separately in the following paragraphs.

Jean Barraqué’s Concerto: The first thing that calls our attention is the existence of two soloists, as indicated by the composer in the score (clarinet, solo 1; vibraphone, solo 2). This already points to a deviation from the “one-individual” model typical of traditional concertos, although the double concerto by itself is not a new idea. The second thing that makes clearer this *hesitating* character of both soloists is their entries in the overall piece. The clarinet takes some five minutes to have its first apparition, and when it does so, it plays no more than short, apparently incomplete attempts to delineate a musical phrase, as if it were “warming up” (see p. 14 of score). The vibraphone, in its turn, appears only about two-thirds through the piece (at around 20’00 min in the recording, in a piece about 30’00 min long). In other words, the two main soloists are pretty much absent in the first third of the piece. The clarinet, responsible for the largest

number of solo contributions (especially after p. 28), is often fragmented and structured in bursts of melodic activity in direct solo-tutti contrasts.

This fragmented and hesitating characteristic of the solos are counterbalanced by a careful organization of the ensemble in timbral groups throughout the piece, and the frequent presentation of small portions of the ensembles as temporary soloists. In fact, one of the pillars of Barraqué's concerto is the calculated presentation of instrumental groups, beginning the piece with instrumental trios grouped by timbre from the same family, and gradually regrouping the ensemble into the "string-woodwind-brass" trios that actually are called for in the front page of the score ("six instrumental trios"). For example, the first two pages are organized as a string trio (violin, viola, cello); the next group to come in is the plucked string trio (harpsichord, harp and guitar); the two groups (all "strings") build textures together for a while, with many occasions for short soloistic passages for some of them (for example, see the condensed "solo-tutti" alternation with the harpsichord as temporary soloist on pp. 5-6). After the first uncertain interventions of the clarinet solo, the woodwinds take over the dominant role in the ensemble (pp. 16-28). Brasses are delayed in their dominant apparition until p. 48; and it is only after p. 66 that the "string-woodwind-brass" instrumental trios as planned in the front page finally appear as such. Thus I perceive a specific *hierarchy of soloists* as one of the main structural formal devices of this piece. Clarinet and vibraphone fill the role of "main" soloists, but significantly dividing the attention with an assorted collection of other solo "timbres" that organize the texture from the very beginning of the composition. In conclusion, the hesitating and fragmented character of the soloist interventions has a strong relationship with the concepts of *incompleteness* and of *continual and fragmented of development*, that were part of the compositional thinking of Barraqué, the latter derived from his personal synthesis of Debussy and Beethoven, the former coming from this major aesthetic enterprise connected with the novel *Death of Virgil* by Hermann Broch. [I hope I will be able to enter in

more details of this in the last question.]

Bernd Alois Zimmermann's Concerto for cello *en forme de pas de trois*: Although the cello solo, in Zimmermann's concerto, is slightly closer in its dialogue with the concerto tradition than was the clarinet in Barraqué's, we can also find here a deviation from the model of virtuoso. In an article about the importance of the violoncello in his music, Zimmermann explained how he always rejected the idea of virtuoso writing for the sake of showing off the technical capabilities of a performer. In discussing another of his major works for cello (the Cello Sonata, composed a few years before the Concerto), he emphasized his belief in that every complexity of writing (and correlated difficulty of playing) must come from intrinsic necessities of the compositional process itself; his Cello Sonata was considered unplayable for a few years, until Siegfried Palm came to find the technical means to play it. So this is all to say that the technical difficulties found in the cello concerto are not intended to demonstrate how good a performer is, but rather they are tightly connected to Zimmermann's specific compositional processes.

In any case, the cello does appear as the main figure in many important moments of the work. The distinctive theatrical and gestural characterization of some cello passages may help to illustrate how Zimmermann incorporates this expressive dimension into his work: the first entrance of the cello solo comes right after a dense microtonal cloud of strings that serves as introduction of the work. The cello solo suddenly comes in in a very simplistic *quasi-parlando* figure that contrasts with the seriousness of the previous texture. It is the theatrical expression of the individual voice against the "tutti". In the second movement, literary characters are more explicitly represented by cello melodies (The Fair, Don Quixotte and The Sentimental), with changing moods in quick succession (what suggests the word "schizophrenic" that we used earlier).

On the other hand, although the cello is generally well characterized as a soloist

in relationship to the ensemble, Zimmermann also defines sub-groups of soloistic importance that gain prominence in many passages of the work. This is especially the case of the *concertino* instruments (Zimmermann's definition): the mandolin, the electric guitar and bass, the dulcimer, the harp and the musical glasses. These instruments really take on important parts throughout the piece (see fifth movement as an extreme example; the entire movement is like a big cadence of all these instruments plus the cello). Zimmermann often alternates his pre-calculated, serial writing with freely-composed passages, and this also becomes clear through a close comparison of soloistic passages (for example, the entire first entrance of the cello in the first movement is likely to be a freely-composed section, as opposed to the second movement's theatrical melodies, which are serial). The fourth movement is perhaps one of the more traditional in the relationship solo-tutti, at least on the surface: both the cello solo and the orchestral tutti share the same rhythmic material, but they are put out of phase in relation to each other. The entire movement is the conflict between these discordant pulses, which is finally resolved by the end when the cello finally "fits in" the tutti.

In conclusion, the role of the cello solo with the overall form of the concerto is determined by a) theatrical characterizations (often coupled with stylistic pluralism, as I will explain more in the next answer); b) serial composition co-existing with "improvised" composition; c) timbral (soloistic) hierarchies, with the cello solo dividing the attention with the *concertino*; and d) technical difficulties bound to compositional necessities, not to performer's empty virtuosity.

Question 2: ZIMMERMANN

Zimmermann's musical language can be understood with help of a closer look into his own career. Being a generation older than Boulez and Stockhausen,

Zimmermann had already a pretty much defined style when he got in touch with the post-war Darmstadt serialism. Although he incorporated serialism into his own language, he remained somehow independent of the more dogmatic approaches. The heterogeneity of his approach and his refusal of pure technical speculation in favor of keeping his ties with historical styles and expressive devices contributed to his isolation from the mainstream avant-garde. He worked a lot with radio broadcast and music for film and radio, thus keeping contact with a diversity of musical styles, all of which he wanted to bring together in his music according to his philosophy of simultaneity of past, present and future. Dahlhaus sums up Zimmermann's concept of "sphericity of time" as being fundamentally tied to his "stylistic pluralism": both ideas are intimately related, in that the view that past, present and future touch each other circularly, possibly being superimposed in simultaneous layers, connects directly with the idea of superimposing of bringing together snapshots of different eras (styles) within the "present" of a single composition. Quotations become "signifiers" of their entire culture and time (the part taken for the whole), and the bits of Beethoven, Schubert, Bach, jazz, blues in most of Zimmermann's works represent exactly this simultaneity of different eras, the attempt of an "annulation" of time and style in favor of "pluralism" and "spheric time".

The Concerto en forme de pas de trois fits precisely within this framework, with the only remark that it deals not with direct quotations of existing pieces, but rather with "quotations" of existing, recognizable styles. The fact that the piece is at the same time a concerto and a ballet reinforces Zimmermann's pluralistic approach, by blurring the usual prejudice of "ballet music" as being of lesser quality than "concert music". In the same way, theatrical elements are included together with the ballet: different characters are defined in the front page, some of them recurrent in other of Zimmermann's works, such as La Fée (the fair) and Don Quixotte. The result is that Zimmermann's piece brings together this complex web of references (characters, dance movements, musical styles) that

are not merely external to the work, but are actually the basis of the work itself. The musical result is a language of strong contrasts, sometimes quite odd, such as the coda of the first movement (p. 34), when the cadenza is interrupted by a very rhythmic solo in an almost Piazzola-like cello line, something that at a first glance appears to be completely unrelated to the work as it presents itself up to that point, but that will find its justification later on, with stylistic quotations of jazz and blues in the other movements. We mentioned already the contrast, still in the first movement, of the “serious” introduction (dense microtonal cloud of strings) with the “*quasi-parlando*”, very salient cello entrance. In terms of virtuoso identity, it is almost theatrically pathetic to make the soloist enter in this grumbling way; and this coexists in the same work with extremely demanding, challenging passages for the same soloist [we mentioned already Zimmermann’s idea on virtuosism, and also how he expected that performers would always find the technical means to achieve the results demanded by a non-compromising compositional process].

A critique that is often made is that of the viability of the use of quotations in a musical composition. How much does the recognized style or quoted passage remove the expressive power of the work in question by throwing the listener into a foreign, unrooted world? This is one question that many composers have addressed, even before the 1960s, when quotations became fashionable. Charles Ives, Cage and more recently John Zorn have dealt with that problem; Luciano Berio (the best examples being his *Sinfonia*, incidentally from the same years of Zimmermann’s concerto), Pousseur (with his harmonic nets connecting historic styles), and even Stockhausen (*Hymnen*, *Telemusik*). Finally, specific and recognized influences on Zimmermann were Alban Berg, Paul Hindemith and Igor Stravinsky. Zimmermann’s solution to the problem of semantic diversity and stylistic multiplicity in one same work came from his belief in integration through the powers of an overarching compositional architecture, in which even the quotations would be tied to global structuring processes of pitch and rhythm, for

example. In the concerto, the pervading use of a dodecaphonic row, for example, would be one of the technical means to achieve such unity. Most of the more serial-type passages, as well as the freely-composed ones relate to each other through the recurrence of pitch relationships derived from this specific row. Poly-rhythmic layers such as the ones we can find in the initial microtonal texture relate to the poly-stylistic passages such as the simultaneous layers of “cool jazz” and serious “pas de trois” on pages 51-52.

Recent so-called post-modernist generations may use Zimmermann’s name to build an anti-vanguardist discourse based on the simple rejection of musical speculation in favor of a free return to a more easily acceptable traditional language, often tempered with quotations from earlier periods that appear to reconcile the desire of some composers to live in an era that is not ours. I believe that Zimmermann’s should not serve as the flag for such type of aesthetical enterprise, for in his work I find a much more interesting speculative approach concerning the possibility of musical connection of historic found objects *within a new language*, which is essentially different from unengaged flirting with a past as a way of avoiding the confrontation with the problem of writing music today. There is no common language today; if there will be such a thing once more in history, or whether this is really necessary, is a question that composers have to tackle in the 21st century, preferably by developing into multiple speculative branches instead of finding accommodation in a given niche of historically accepted sounds that don’t expose current compositional problems. Zimmermann (like Berio) may be an interesting bridge linking the speculative approach of modernist avant-guard and the historical concern of understanding music from a broader point of view, as a complex historical and cultural phenomenon.

Question 3: BARRAQUÉ

Jean Barraqué made it clear several times what were his main influences: Schubert, Debussy, Beethoven. Naturally, his own take of this tradition of Western music was shaped by his connection with Messiaen and the serialist movement of the 1950s, of which he was a member.

How do the concepts of “incompletion” and “utopy” emerge from that specific web of influences? As starting point, we can remember what Bill Hopkins wrote in one of his articles about Barraqué and Beethoven. Hopkins mentioned that Barraqué profoundly admired something like the “spirit of destruction” of Beethoven; in other words, the way that Beethoven “destructured” tonality in order to make it serve his own musical expressive needs. The question that many articles pose about Barraqué is then: did Barraqué “destroy” the serial idea in order to meet his own expressive requirements? Secondly, Barraqué mentions elsewhere in an interview that “our century [the 20th] imposes grandiloquence”. It is not hard to think why a composer would think this way after having seen his continent destroyed by the II World War and everything having to be rebuilt from scratch. Barraqué, however, reconciled the “rebuild from scratch” with an admiration for the past; he didn’t really want to wipe the past out. For him, Webern was not a model of rejection of past musical means, but rather some sort of open door to “liberate” the musical language into new domains, but still drawing from earlier masters.

So what is it that comes from Debussy and Beethoven that shapes Barraqué’s poetics? François Nicolas has an interesting text in which he puts Barraqué as the researcher of a new idea of *development* in the 20th century. Nicolas tries to establish a direct link of development in Beethoven and how this reaches Barraqué through Debussyan lenses. We can’t go into much detail of it in this answer, but it is worth mentioning four key arguments:

- a) In Beethoven, classical development was based in ONE single idea; in Barraqué, SEVERAL ideas would be subject to musical *development*.
- b) In Beethoven, the “musical being” to be developed was very clearly shaped, not only audibly but visually too: thematic figures could be easily identified by ear and by the eye at the score. These clear contours do not exist anymore in Barraqué: the ideas become more complex and less unified, both to the ear and the eyes (a simple glance at the score is not revealing anymore of the musical “object” in question).
- c) In Beethoven, development as a whole had a sense of continuity, of uniformity (in spite of its internal surprises, turns etc); In Barraqué, development itself becomes a discontinuous act. In Beethoven, development was continuous as a structure and broken, unstable on the sonic surface; in Debussy, on the contrary, the sonic surface is mostly smooth and continuous, but the underlying development of ideas is itself broken and discontinuous. Barraqué would be the connection of both discontinuities, the sonic surface and the structural one;
- d) Finally, development in Beethoven had a sense of ultimate goal, a kind of synthesis of the whole idea; not anymore in Barraqué, which attaches the idea of development to the perpetual evolution of “musical beings”; we can see how this continual flow is very much derived from Debussy.

So it was pretty much from Debussy that Barraqué got to the idea of Open Forms (he wrote an entire book on Debussy). Open forms, for him, had nothing to do with the aleatoric procedures of the sixties; open forms are in Barraqué the constant evolution of material that he saw in Debussy's *La Mer*. Finally, after he got contact with Hermann Broch's novel “*The Death of Virgil*”, the complete web of relations was made in his thinking: open forms and continual evolution from

Debussy; “destructive” forward movement from Beethoven; Death, failure and incompleteness as expressive metaphors to his concrete compositional work, from Broch’s novel. It is not by accident that he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to set “The Death of Virgil” to music. The “end” of any musical development could only be the equivalent of the Death of a musical idea; all ideas run inexorably towards Death, and incompleteness is a necessary component of all creative work (and of life); the grandiloquent proportions of Barraqué’s works are just another side of this same principle. The very project of putting The Death of Virgil into music was necessarily destined to imcompletion, due to its proportions. This represents the utopian side of Barraqué’s compositional thinking: the “*inachevement san cesse*” relates to the place not to be reached, the utopia of constant reinvention and creative intervention delaying the finality of Death.

Unfortunately I don’t have much more time left. I would conclude by pointing out how all these ideas go deep into Barraqué’s specific compositional techniques, such as the serial proliferation: by subverting the intervallic logic of traditional serialism, Barraque managed to achieve a always-changing palette of pitch structures that greatly enriched his harmonic vocabulary, if compared to contemporary serialists. The link with acknowledged influences from the past refers to the “self-critical modernism” within the serial school, and Barraque distinguished himself for having especially effective expressive moments within his serial structures (bursts of Romantic traits reshaped into 1950s avant-guard?)

In relation to Zimmermann stylistic pluralism, these are completely different aspects and concepts of musical time, I think. Barraque pushes toward the never-ending forward movement, which is fated to reach the end with Death. Zimmermann seems to me attached to his “circular” view of time, which in some sense would be never-ending as well, since every reference to a particular style or quotation is constantly bringing back a web of extraneous references, all of them always necessarily incomplete (acting as “signifiers” of other worlds as I

mentioned earlier). Barraque's incompleteness admits the error, the fault, the accident. Zimmermann, to me, seems to be much more concerned with a more perfect (almost religious) integration of different eras and time layers, in a sort of "reconciliation" of different cultures, closing themselves in an integrated musical whole.

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