

Chapter 4 Reading Response

Unsurprisingly (due to how formative CCRMA has been in my computer music education), Paul Lansky's *Homebrew* also revolutionized the way I thought about the genre. *Night Traffic* (the second track on that album) makes heavy use of the comb filter described on pp. 188 – 189 of *Artful Design* on the sound of approaching and departing cars on a highway. Whenever I get the inevitable question "Wait, so are you majoring in making beats?" the first piece I always exhibit as an example of computer music is *Night Traffic*. The piece perfectly embodies what I view to be the most important line (Principle 4.5) of *Artful Design*: "Design things with a computer that would not be possible without!" *Night Traffic* takes an almost ubiquitous human experience and transforms it into an aesthetic statement about the beauty of everyday sounds, the ability for music to transport us to a familiar yet fantastical location, and the power of computers as an instrument to induce emotion. Coming from a tonal music background, the chord structure of *Night Traffic* really appeals to me (and the friends to whom I show the piece), and I definitely went through a comb filter phase during my found-sounds project in 220B. However, in the three years since I've taken that class, I have consumed a lot of non-tonal music, and though I don't know that I am prepared, I am greatly interested in crafting a narrative that doesn't follow my usual tonal instincts.

I hope to draw upon some ideas in this chapter in conjunction with the usual tenets of songwriting in order to craft a non-tonal narrative. I write a lot of jazz piano trio music, and while this is certainly more tonal, the structural ideas are fairly similar. First, I want my narrative to have a beginning, middle, and end (much like the THX Deep Note described on page 176). As principle 4.2 states, interesting sound is motion over time. This suggests crafting an arc for my narrative first. I've always been enamored with the idea of the unraveling of stability into a

complete and total disaster, especially when there are hints of normalcy peppered within a degenerate scene. One example of this lies in the plot line of the musical *Miss Saigon*. Based on Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, *Miss Saigon* follows the tragic story of an inevitably doomed relationship between a Vietnamese peasant girl (Kim) and an American marine (Chris) during the Vietnam war.



The two star-crossed lovers meet at the brothel in which Kim is forced to work and eventually fall in love. They get married against the wishes of Kim's dead parents, who arranged her marriage to her cousin Thuy. Chris is forced to leave Vietnam without Kim after the Americans are defeated. Three years later, Thuy becomes a higher-up in the Communist government and attempts to force Kim into marriage, and she ends up killing him after he threatens her son (with Chris from 3 years prior) with a knife. I will refrain from spoiling the last half of the story, but already there is so much motion, and emotion, in the simple synopsis I have written above. If, as in principle 4.2, interesting sound is motion over time, then this motion

doesn't have to be in relation to the usual parameters we expect, such as timbre, frequency, and rhythm. As Ge states on page 168, we must find interesting, nuanced ways to control sound parameters over time in order to create a sense of motion. This is particularly salient for the upcoming sound narrative. Telling a story, like the devastating plot of *Miss Saigon*, the familiar human experience of *Night Traffic*, and even the satisfying journey of the THX Deep Note, requires a strong sense of where you are, where you've been, and where you are trying to go.