



Pomona College Department of Music
Senior Recital

Lyman Hall
April 4, 2014 at 8 PM

Alma Zook, oboe
Zach Schwartz, violin
Alice Chung, cello
William Appleton, piano

4-3-2-1 and Back (2014)

William Appleton
b. 1991

Part 1: Piano, Cello, Oboe, Violin

Part 2: Piano, Cello, Oboe

Part 3: Violin, Piano

Part 4: Cello

Part 5: Oboe

Part 6: Violin, Piano

Part 7: Cello, Oboe, Violin

Part 8: Piano, Cello, Oboe, Violin



In the sensitive acoustic environment of Lyman Hall, your neighbors can hear you! Please be considerate of the audience and performers and silence your telephone ringers, beepers, and alarm watches. Recording devices and cameras may not be used during the performance. It is customary to hold all applause until the end of a piece or set of pieces. Audience members arriving late will be seated during a suitable break in the program.

PROGRAM NOTES

This piece is ultimately about the unification of form, content, and process. In tandem, it de-emphasizes emotional interpretations by emphasizing its own construction—through conspicuous structural devices, process-driven composition, and repetition on different levels. When the emphasis of the work is placed on its own construction, then the perceptibility of its construction to the listener becomes of central importance. This piece deals with the perceptibility of time passing on different levels simultaneously, and explores the differing levels of perceptibility that arise as a result.

The main structural device for the entire work is the abstract number sequence 4-3-2-1-1-2-3-4. It is self-evident in construction and alludes to very little if anything. It pervades the work at all levels, from the overall structure of the work, down to the local musical content. The Main Motive for the entire work is derived from the sequence in terms of durations and intervals:



The number sequence itself is of course a result of a simple additive process, which plays itself out in the form and content.

The overall form consists of eight Parts, which are played without pause (for a total of 60 minutes). The length and speed of each Part is proportionate to its place in the number sequence:

	<u>Length in Minutes</u>	<u>Beats per Minute</u>
<u>Part 1</u>	12	120
<u>Part 2</u>	9	90
<u>Part 3</u>	6	60
<u>Part 4</u>	3	30
<u>Part 5</u>	3	30
<u>Part 6</u>	6	60
<u>Part 7</u>	9	90
<u>Part 8</u>	12	120

The number of players in each Part corresponds to the sequence as well. The tonal center of each Part corresponds to the pitches of the Main Motive (Part 1 has a tonal center of B, Part 2 is F#, etc.). Additionally, each Part is divided into 8 sections, whose lengths are proportional. In terms of musical material, each Part is an arch form, and all 8 Parts form an arch as well. The result is a fractal system where the same idea is expressed on multiple levels.

Over the course of the work, there are three different types of motives that demarcate different groupings of time. The first and most conspicuous is the “Alarm Clock Motive”, which is a unison fortissimo statement of the Main Motive. It comes in after 4 minutes, then 3 minutes after that, then 2 minutes after, etc. It appears at these regularized intervals regardless of which Part we are in (since the tempos of all the Parts are convenient multiples of the minute, and all Parts are played without pause, it is easy to calculate the exact beat where any “Alarm Clock” should appear). When it appears, it is always at the same absolute tempo, with the original pitches.

The second demarcating style of motive is the “Head Motive.” Each Part has its own “Head Motive”, which appears eight times in a Part, announcing the beginning of the eight sections of whichever Part we are in:

Part 1

Part 8

Part 2

Part 7

Part 3

Violin

Piano

Part 6

Violin

Piano

Part 4

Cello

Part 5

Oboe

The third type of demarcating motive is the “Ending Motive”. Each Part ends with a statement of the Main Motive, however it is transposed to the tonal center of the Part, and its speed depends on the speed of the movement (in contrast to the absolute speed of the “Alarm Clock Motive”).

In terms of local musical content, nearly all of the material is in some way derived from the number sequence, either in terms of interval relationships, or rhythms. Since both the overall form and the local content are derived from the same process-based sequence, form and content become expressions of the same idea but on different time scales. Here, the form is not a generally autonomous structure on which to hang music, as it can sometimes appear in traditional musical forms. Instead, the form and the content are concretely related since they are both in fact statements the same abstract idea (as opposed to the inexact relationship of content and form in a Sonata form for instance). When there are multiple iterations of the same idea happening concurrently and clearly, then the degree to which they can be perceived in total over time becomes a chief source of interest in the experience of the work.

Clearly the primary concern of the work is to emphasize its structure—the way it was put together. The emotional or transcendent effects the work could possibly induce as a result of how it is put together, while not excluded from its creation, are not of central concern. This emphasis on structure has certain effects on the musical material itself. First, there is essentially no gestural writing—no splashes of sound. Every note is important in a system such as this and cannot afford to be lost in a blur of quick notes. Second, the music is relatively reductive and un-ornamented so as to emphasize the structure (it is easier to see an object as that specific object if it is not adorned with superfluous material that can distract). Third, repetition of material emphasizes the overall structure. It solidifies an aural (and hence ephemeral) idea through restatements of the same idea. After the idea has been reinforced, repetition reduces the amount of attention one has to pay to the localized event as it repeats. One is thus better able to situate the local moment in the scope of a larger context when one is not fully engrossed in the local moment. Fourth, predictability of the music plays a similar role to repetition in that knowing what is coming next leaves the listener free to better experience and consider the perceptibility of the structure on multiple levels.

The lengthy discussion of structure begs the question, ‘Why put so much emphasis on structure?’ Regardless of a creator’s intention, the construction and resultant structure of a piece of art is only the only aspect of the work that exists outside of subjective experience. Any interpretation or meaning derived from the work varies drastically depending on who is experiencing the work. The construction of the work is the only constant (even if its construction is merely a decision not to make specific decisions,

or to improvise, etc.—these are still part of the work’s construction). Much art obfuscates its fundamental nature by becoming invested primarily in the emotional or psychological aspects of the work. The music presented here does not downplay its construction but emphasizes it in an insistently ‘heavy-handed’ way.

Emotional interpretations are based on transient and mutable signs. Sounds carry emotional information through their associations, but the sounds themselves do not carry emotional information inherently. This music seeks to be seen in a broader context than can be afforded by a system of aural and emotive symbols. In the same way that localized musical events are folded into the larger context of this whole piece, the entire work itself looks for a less immediate context.

The structure of the work is also emphasized because of the distancing nature of the processes used. Process, in the sense of a set of rules that generates content, ultimately has the effect of reducing the presence of the creator, with all of his biographical tendencies. Additionally, process partly removes issues of continuity (of what comes next in the music) by autonomously dictating the flow of events. The setting up of tight structural processes forces the composer to remove himself from decisions of a work’s creation and give control to the indifferent process (e.g. “Alarm Clocks” indiscriminately interrupt the flow of music, sections sometimes seem to end abruptly, etc.). The process removes a certain amount of judgment and taste from the construction of the work. It distances the specific human hand and psychological motivations for choices. Composers such as Boulez, Cage, Reich, and Glass have all explored this line of thinking.

Reducing the emphasis placed on the biographical and psychological motivations for composition forces the viewer to see the work in a broader, less specific context than that of an individual creator and his specific circumstances. The work seems to have more import to me this way. Work such as this helps remove some of the ego of creation and presentation, and explicitly acknowledges the fact that we are dependent on and are at the mercy of broad and impersonal forces in our lives at all times (whether societal or natural).

– W A

I would like to thank Professor Flaherty for his invaluable help in realizing this project, and the music department for its support. Additionally, I am truly grateful to the performers for their dedication and commitment to such a long project.



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