
" Phrase & Fiction "
Alejandro Viñao
(1995)

Total duration: 20

The three movements of the quartet are based on the melismatic phrase which opens the piece. Each movement looks at this phrase from a different perspective.

In the 1st movement the melismatic/melodic nature of the phrase is explored. Melody develops through rhythm -as in most non European music- rather than by harmonic means. Here the computer part is integrated into the melodies played by the string instruments often resulting in the transformation of such phrases into new timbers and soundscapes, in a process that could be described as sound 'morphing'.

The 2nd movement is more static in nature focusing on the harmonic/timbral implications of the original phrase. I was interested in that 'grey' area where timbre and harmony may no longer be told apart.

In the 3rd movement the original phrase is again developed from the perspective of rhythm. Yet, unlike in the 1st movement, where rhythm is explored at the time signature/beat level, the 3rd movement deals with rhythm at the Tempo level. Tempo is presented as 'speed' or rather as simultaneous different speeds which are applied to the original phrase and to secondary phrases derived from it. The speeding up and slowing down of each different phrase or pattern have very short cycles so that they are continuously 'zooming in' or come back to the main tempo. As they come back to the main tempo all instruments are 'locked' - so to speak- back in sync, and it is this very process that interested me. The fundamental concept in this movement is based on the ideas found in Conlon Nancarrow's music. Yet, I tried to avoid the feeling that once every music part or instrument sets out at its own speed the composition progresses in an almost predictable fashion. Such 'determinism' does not permit or establish strong musical relationships between the drifting tempi. I have tried to solve this problem by making the different tempi move in and out of synch all the time before their predetermined cycle is completed. I created an illusion, I 'cheated' to make the cycles of the tempi coincide at points where they should not, hence the 'Fiction' part of the title. In the creation of such fiction the computer played a major role since -unlike the human player- it can perform irrational rhythmic values with complete accuracy.

Phrase & Fiction was commissioned by the Swedish Radio, Malmö. The computer part was created at the composer's private studio in London.

A.V.
