

TEN FRAGMENTS FOR OBOE, CLARINET AND BASSOON

Bits and pieces of an Arabic maqām

This work was commissioned by the Forum for Contemporary Music "Acoustic 7-11" for a festive concert devoted to contemporary Canadian and Israeli music. Its première took place under the auspices of the Canadian Embassy at Beit Ariella, Tel Aviv. The work is dedicated to the Hungarian composer György Kurtág whom the composer met in Budapest during the summer of 1984. In her words, the ten pieces for oboe, clarinet and bassoon reflect a renewed effort to examine the colour relationships between these three instruments and the variety of points at which contact is possible between them. The work is in the Arabic *Şaba-zamzama maqām*.

The *Şaba-zamzama* is one of the *maqāmāt* (Arabic scales) which exclude microtonality. It is considered to be one of the most plaintive and melancholy scales in Arabic music and is made up of a chain of tetrachords based on the *Şaba-zamzama* tetrachord (hence its name).



The structure of the Arabic scale is based to a large degree on melodic independence of juxtaposed tetrachords; see, for example, the note $D\flat$ at the end of the above scale where it appears as part of a tetrachord of an independent nature, yet at the same time belongs to the scale beginning with $D\sharp$. In Tsippi Fleischer's *Ten Fragments for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon*, the *Şaba-zamzama* scale is the source from which these fragmented figures are drawn.

1. Obligato

In this, the first piece, there is a clearly stated presentation of the scale central to the entire work. While the bassoon is ending the very first D, the oboe takes over and rises slowly and surely through all the notes of the scale; having completed the scale, it passes the melody to the clarinet. The movement ends with the tone $G\sharp$ which is an intruder in the scale. Thus, already in the first movement, attention is focused on the freedom of choice of notes and the naturalness with which this choice is made.

2. Chorale à la Aria (Arietta)

The chorale — an aria — dictates the movement's AABA form; this serves effortlessly as a framework for a somewhat wave-like progression and for a graceful melody in which the Oriental melodic lines flourish happily. This form also permits the aria to assume the shape of an *aria da capo*. The main melody in the first section of the chorale is to be found in the oboe part and is formulated out of the degrees of the scale. The countersubjects to this melody, although preserving the Oriental nature of the scale, are freer; many notes slip in in imitation or as parts of a sentence which are repeated in various thematic combinations.

3. Clarinet Solo

ad lib.



A change in atmosphere results in many other changes.

This solo is made up of various elements which are woven into a fabric of sound. The listener hears firm statements in the beginning and the fragments of an elegy subsequently. This is a bit of play-acting, to a certain extent resembling Jewish "soul music" accompanied by a restrained *crescendo*; the "act" is forged out of melodic cells generated from the notes of the scale and their elaboration. In addition, the different registers of the clarinet alternate with one another in quick succession.

4. Quasi Folk-dance

$\text{♩} = 140$



There are various clear indications that this movement is rooted in folk-dance. Rhythmic figures are not too complex to be dance-like; the form is the familiar ABA; the gestures, too, are folkloric, as it were — many jumps to the interval of a third or an ascending tritone. The movement is *unisono* for all three instruments which allows for a variety of sonorities and pitches.

Emphasis here is on the use of two tetrachords of the *Şaba-zamzama maqām* as well as the *Hijāzi* tetrachord; even though the movement ends on a D, it appears more likely to be based on a scale starting on B.

5. Bassoon Solo



A moving solo on the bassoon (*largo, soffacato*) enables the composer to examine the potential of the bassoon. The scale running through the whole work — the *Şaba-zamzama* — is used, this time with the starting-note E to which all manner of ornamental accidentals are added. Two registers of the bassoon are exploited for two different modes of expression. The middle-high register serves for lyrical and melodic statements whereas the low register is for rhythmic purposes and for more active, briefer melodies. The flageolet tones in the oboe evoke a vision of distant heavens, almost obscured from the anguish of the bassoon in the depths.

6. Oboe Solo



The oboe solo calls forth the Orientalism fundamental to this work; in this movement we are thus undeniably made aware of essays into microtonality — so characteristic of Arabic music. The note G with which the previous movement concludes, sounds on into this movement and is immediately transposed — by means of lip pressure on the oboe reed — to a higher and yet a higher G, to G# in a *glissando* and to the following notes and so on. Further on the performer changes the colour and pitch of the note by means of different fingering for the same note.

This movement provides the performer with considerable freedom. It is very lyrical, improvisatory, and may be played in various ways.

The notes pile up on one another and, for example, the concluding note C, except for a brief reminder, only appears right at the end of the movement, after the accumulative use of the rest of the notes excluding itself.

7. Clusters

Ob.
Cl.
(Bb)
Bsn.

$\text{♩} = 152$

mp

In this movement the harmonic-colourative potential of the scale is examined. The melody is made up of thematic stains of colour for the most. Once more the way in which the scale is used emphasizes the main tetrachords it contains (by means of chord-building). The technique of writing in clusters here is very different from that which is applied in works dating from the second half of the 20th century. In this movement the clusters are more homogenous, delicate and economical, and both their harmonic and colour effects are equally exploited.

8. Dialogues for Three

Ob.
Cl.
(Bb)
Bsn.

mf

f

mp

As indicated by the title — dialogues (talks for two) for three: thus the movement is devoted essentially to a discussion between two main elements, presented at the outset in the clarinet and oboe and developed immediately after by the bassoon, and so on.

In these dialogues the listener will no doubt hear echoes of previous movements — the opening in the clarinet brings to mind the previous movement as well as the clarinet part in the first movement. In the oboe, figurations from the second movement are discernible; generally this movement offers a thematic summary of the work. Different figures (different instruments) interchange roles. Melodies (scales and motifs from previous movements) pass from one instrument to another and the transition to the next movement is smooth and natural.

9. Fuga à la Chorale

mp $\text{♩} = 138$

This is not a fugue, of course: entries of voices presenting material as if in canon, make for the seemingly unending, polyphonic progression of a fugal chorale.

The melody returns to the original *Şaba-zamzama* scale. First and foremost the notes of this *maqām* are presented in the melody and only then do the rest of the notes slip in, filling out the frame to the 12 notes of the chromatic scale. Thus — both in the first exposition when the scale is ascending as well as in the second exposition with the scale descending.

At the end of the movement, notes which originated in the tetrachords of the *Şaba-zamzama* are presented, not in a simplistic fashion, but rather with a more comprehensive grasp of the key system of the work. The movement ends with a stressing of the note D.

10. Carnival

$\text{♩} = 160$

The concluding movement discards all obligations and pressures and roudily celebrates the holiday mood of carnival. And yet, the two-measure *ostinato* in the bassoon is completely relentless...

Obviously the scale still makes its presence felt, pulling the strings of the subjects, the melodies, the harmonies and the alternating focal points of the movement, but the essence of the movement lies in the carnival itself: the fun, humour, contrasts and enjoyment which lead to the optimistic conclusion of the work.

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