

February 2009

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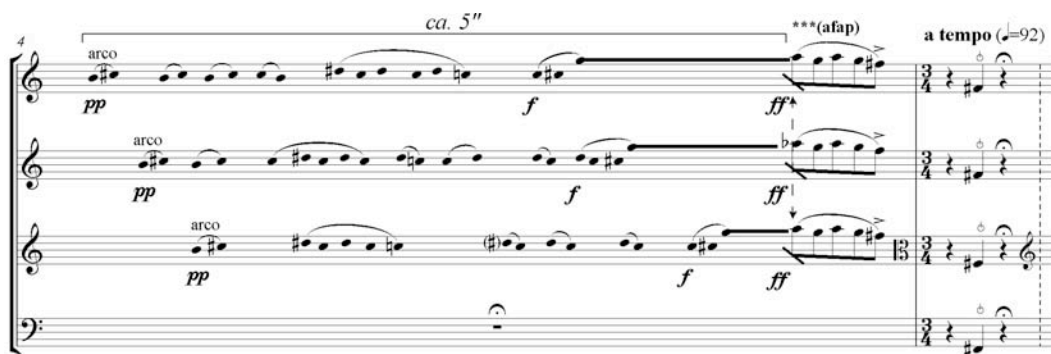
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Featured Work: Jason McChristian, *From Four Papers*



From Four Papers consists of four movements, each “inspired” by a prolific scientist. The scientists I chose, Stephen Jay Gould, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Charles Darwin, and Carl Sagan are unique in their ability to convey the wonders of science to the general public and have had a profound effect on my own appreciation of science. I have chosen fragments from the writings of each of these “scientific ambassadors”, hoping to capture, in just a few words, the general attitude of the given movement.

The first movement, “...and with a bang...”, utilizes a modern compositional device known as aleatoricism. In its most extreme form aleatoric music, also known as *chance music*, allows the performers to improvise freely without any restraint imposed by a composer. Most aleatoric compositions, however, do have much of the music written-out with certain aspects, such as rhythm or order of pitch, determined at will by the performers. In this movement, I used aleatory technique to help portray the development of a single-celled organism growing into a more complex form.



An example of aleatory from movement 1. Here the violins and viola play groups of two or more pitches, with the players entering one after the other. This type of passage is heard throughout the movement.

The second movement, “...along cunning trajectories...”, features a theme that is distributed between the violins and viola. The theme uses ascending and descending gestures to create a wave-like contour, occasionally shaken by trills. There is little harmonic development in this short movement, although the theme shifts between E-flat Lydian and G Ionian.

The third movement, “...by short and sure, though slow steps...”, is in a passacaglia form, with the seventeen-note theme being heard throughout the entire movement. The stability provided by the repeated theme allowed me freedom to continually develop the other material in a near through-composed manner. The many styles present in this movement lend themselves to the use of extended techniques, such as quasi-guitara strumming, (*cont. on pg 2*)

pitch bends, and playing at the frog of the bow. One section in particular contains the passacaglia theme in all four parts, however, it is played in a different manner and overlaps at different rhythmic values.

A section from the passacaglia where the players each carry a variation of the theme in stretto.

For the final movement, "...a rare kind of exhilaration...", I created a number of different themes, some lyrical, and some with a rustic character. These are well defined by their respective accompaniment, never straying too far from the stone they are cast in. After the climax in D Lydian, with some chromatic inflections, the themes are restated and blended together in a sort of flash-back as the music winds down. The use of double and triple-stops, as well as the quick shifts between arco and pizzicato, reflect the rustic and joyous nature of this movement.

- o Complete program notes, score samples, and recordings samples for *From Four Papers* can be found on the Melos Music website at: www.melosmusic.com
- o From Four Papers, along with other original compositions by Jason McChristian will be performed at Jason's senior recital in February. For more info please view the upcoming performances section of the newsletter.

Announcements:

- We've added an interactive online discussion forum to our website. The forum is a place where you can make posts regarding Melos Music, read and write about contemporary concert music, view what others have to say, or direct comments, questions, or conversation topics to any of the five Melos Music composers. You can find links to the Forum on our "contact" and "about" pages.
- For our customers convenience, the Melos Music website now has a functioning shopping cart feature and a streamlined and easy to use ordering system. We now accept paypal and credit card payments through paypal.
- Jason McChristian, Mark DeSimone, and Patrick Chan will each be presenting solo composition recitals this coming spring. These recitals will feature multiple works for various instrumental combinations and promise to be exciting demonstrations of the talented composers represented by of Melos Music. More information regarding these recitals may be found in the upcoming performance section of this newsletter or on the Melos Music website. Be sure to come and support these talented young artists.
- *A Zarzuela & Other Lost Works*, for Wind Ensemble By Jason Thorpe Buchanan, will receive its world premiere at Ota Kumin Hall Apuriko in Tokyo, Japan at 7:00pm on June 11 2009. The performance will be given by the Tad Wind Symphony, one of the top performing ensembles in Japan, under the direction of Takayoshi "Tad" Suzuki. The performance will be recorded for professional release on Soundseek Japan records.

Individual Articles and News:

Chin Ting (Patrick) Chan

Since this is my first real posting, I'd like to start by introducing myself. I was born in Guangzhou and raised in Hong Kong. I did not begin studying music until I was twelve, when I picked up the violin quite reluctantly, and began to participate in the school orchestra. Remembering all those crazy fingerings, never understanding the conductor, following the guys sitting in front of me; it was more difficult than anything in this world. So, what would you expect a twelve-year-old would do?

Like others of my generation, I listened to pop music with my then expensive mp3 player while riding the bus, out studying, eating lunch, etc. I even thought it was wonderful to have some soft "classical music" in the "background" (!!!) while I was doing something else. As I grew up, I slowly realized that there is something in music that needs my attention. I started to play piano madly and passed the ABRSM grade 8 exam in less than two years. I never thought it was an achievement; (my mum did...) however, this determination of mind marked the beginning of my musical career.

Now, when people ask me to write tons of pop songs and become rich and famous and whatnot, (now is the time of the year when I get these questions because I am currently on vacation in Hong Kong seeing friends and relatives) I often don't know what to say! The easy answer for most non-musicians is that I compose "classical music". Well... let me get it right. I compose music that needs attention – music that needs to be listened to. (I am not saying that pop music does not need attention) I do not want my music to be played in a restaurant while people are enjoying their meals; I do not want people to treat my music as soft background music, like the twelve-year-old ME!

Studying music is the best choice I have ever made. It has opened my ears to a previously unknown world of sound. Finally, it is not hard to understand and appreciate "classical music"; all it takes is your attention. Like all art, music is about communication. It is hard to speak to your heart if you never respond. Let us open our ears, and I am sure you'll find that all five of us here at Melos have something to say to you.



Jason Thorpe Buchanan with Soprano Nicole Yazolino and Pianist Carolyn Villavicencio Grossmann after the recent world premiere of Jason's *Six Shelley Songs* in Las Vegas, NV.

Jason Thorpe Buchanan

Kārttikeya (Study No. 1) // Having never written for solo piano, in December I began working on a piece initially conceived as one movement in a small set of works for solo piano. These works would serve as studies, for myself to develop aesthetics and explore new methods of generating material, as well as for the performer; perhaps as a departure from other works in the literature. After a trip to the Asian art museum in San Francisco, I was reminded of my interest in Indian culture and their systems of organization in music. I had already begun to sketch pitch material based on a 12-tone row, so I began to research their use of rhythmic cycles called *desi-talas*. Each of the 120 ancient *talas* have specific cultural, spiritual and emotional associations and are used for specific events and situations.

While visiting the museum and reading some Hindu mythology, I became intrigued by the idea of writing a series of character pieces based on Hindu deities. With this in mind, after some research I came across the story of *Kārttikeya*, a Hindu god of war and the eldest son of Shiva and Parvati. In mid-December I set out to write the first of this series utilizing several *talas* chosen for their close associations with this deity. *Kārttikeya* is usually depicted with six faces and twelve arms, and was born with the sole purpose of defeating the asura (demon) *Taraka*, thus restoring order to the universe.

In addition to choosing *talas* with characteristics to evoke the image of *Kārttikeya*, there are several structural elements that specifically use the number twelve. This work utilizes the 12-tone (cont. pg. 4)

system, with a total of 12 permutations of the row. After writing the initial sketch with 12 recurring motivic gestures, I graphed them into 12 regions. Then, I revised the sketch so that without departing from relatively strict serialism, the entrances of these 12 recurring gestures would occur symmetrically throughout the work. With these studies, I look forward to my increased knowledge of Indian music and its utilization in my own works.

Daniel Foley

One of my recent and more exciting projects has been a commission for a set of art songs for solo voice and marimba. In writing these songs, I've had to face limitations as to what I could write for each instrument and for the ensemble. I've had tendencies in some of my past compositions to really demand the maximum from both the performer and the listener, filling every moment with thick counterpoint, complex rhythms, or technically challenging material. However, when I think about the composers whom I truly admire, especially Beethoven and Copland, I discover that I am moved by their works not because they try to do as much as possible in any given moment or because they turn the complexity knob up to 11; rather, I'm drawn to their works because they have something truly genuine and beautiful to say and they express their message in a way that is simple, direct, and uncluttered. Copland's famed Parisian teacher, Nadia Boulanger, told him to write as many notes as he wanted, but to only keep those which were absolutely necessary.

While I was working on the aforementioned song cycle, I received an e-mail from the marimba player I was working with regarding one particular piece. In writing this particular marimba part, I had followed my old tendencies to do as much as I could contrapuntally, texturally, and rhythmically. Due to the technical limitations of the instrument, the result was a part which was nearly impossible to execute accurately, much less musically.

So, I went back to the sketch pad. I had already written as many notes as I wanted; now it was time to keep only those which were absolutely necessary. As I slashed away at unnecessary notes and reworked lines and harmonies, something wonderful

happened. The music became less and less cluttered and the genuine message of the music began to shine through.

Although limitations can be frustrating for any artist, they can give us the opportunity to focus on what is important and to shed the extra clutter we've piled on top of our original message. Limitations give us the chance to say "no!" to our own tendencies of saying as much as possible and they invite us to say only that which is necessary.

Mark DeSimone

My thesis composition is a concert in four movements for piano, vibraphone and cello. Movement three is based on a 24-pitch tone-row derived from the Fibonacci Sequence. The Fibonacci Sequence is based on a recursive mathematical formula:

$$f_x = f_{(x-1)} + f_{(x-2)}$$

f represents the term's numerical value, and x represents the term's position in the sequence. The first 12 values of the sequence are therefore 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144.

I use these values to represent the pitch class on the 12-tone chromatic scale. However, to keep the values of the sequence below 12, the math function "Modulus" must be used. This function divides a number X by a divisor Y and generates the remainder, called the modulus. X represents the Fibonacci number we're working with. For example we'll use the Fibonacci number 21. Y is the number of pitches in our scale, 12 in this case. So, for example, $21 \div 12 = 1$ Remainder 9. The Modulus is therefore 9, which is the pitch A in conventional pitch-class theory. So that's the pitch class we use to represent that particular Fibonacci number.

In going through this process for all the Fibonacci numbers, I serendipitously found that there is a repeating pattern of 24 values, which is very useful when used in composition of music. The end result is a cyclic pattern of pitches that uses D-flat and A-flat most often, giving the whole sequence a sense of tonality. After all of this number crunching, decided it would be fitting to give the most theory heavy movement the lightest character of the concerto. This works well because the inverse of the tone-row outlines the blues scale, which is used as a playful second theme.

Upcoming performances:

- *Five Bagatelles for Horn & Marimba*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
Beam Music Center at UNLV, Las Vegas, NV - February 4, 7:30pm
- Senior Composition Recital - Jason McChristian
San Jose State Concert Hall, San Jose, CA - February 13, 7:30pm
- *Six Shelley Songs*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Cincinnati, OH - February 27, 8:30pm
- *Vis machina*, by Jason McChristian
SJSU Symphony Orchestra
SJSU Concert Hall, San Jose, CA - March 11, 7:00pm
- *Songs of Moonlight & Shadows (for Sop, A. Fl, Vcl, Pno & Perc.)*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
Beam Music Center at UNLV, Las Vegas, NV - March 11, 6:00pm
- *Kārttikeya (Study No. 1) for solo piano*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
Cristina Valdes, pianist, guest artist recital - March 11, 8:00pm
- *Songs of Moonlight & Shadows*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
NEON Music Festival (Nevada Encounters of New Music)
Beam Music Center at UNLV, Las Vegas, NV - April 8-11, TBA
- Concerto for the Young Adventurer, by Mark DeSimone
Harlan Otter - piano, Cole Tutino - cello, Lane Sanders - vibraphone
Listening Hour, San Jose State Concert Hall, San Jose, CA - April 28, 12:30pm
- *Vāsava (Lord of the Spheres) for Brass Ensemble*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
UNLV Brass Ensemble Concert, Las Vegas, NV - May 1st, 7:30pm
- Graduate Composition Recital - Mark DeSimone
San Jose State Concert Hall, San Jose, CA - May 2, 7:30pm
- Senior Composition Recital - Chin Ting (Patrick) Chan
San Jose State Concert Hall, San Jose, CA - TBA spring 2009
- *The Rhodora*, by Jason McChristian
Voice and Piano
(and)
Selections from *Songs of Man*, by Daniel Foley
Voice and Marimba
Crista Harrington - Soprano, Sharon Brook - Piano, Greg Mesa - Marimba
San Jose State Concert Hall, San Jose, CA - TBA spring 2009
- *A Zarzuela & Other Lost Works for Wind Ensemble*, by Jason Thorpe Buchanan
Tad Wind Symphony, Takayoshi "Tad" Suzuki - Director
Tokyo, Japan - June 11, 7:00pm

Recently Completed Works:

For more information on each of the works mentioned, please visit each of the composers individual pages or our catalogue on our website, <http://www.melosmusic.com>

Jason McChristian

Vis machina
for Orchestra

To the Modern Man
for SATB Choir

The Botanical Garden
for SATB Choir

(cont. pg.6)

Chin Ting (Patrick) Chan2nd through 6th movements from: *Suite for Solo Cello*2nd and 3rd movements from: *Symphonic Movements*
for Orchestra*Caprice*

for String Quartet

*Trio for Violin, Clarinet and Marimba**Transfiguration*

for viola and harp

Duo for Two Flutists
Jason Thorpe Buchanan*Vāsava*

for Brass Ensemble

Kārttikeya (Study No. 1)

for Solo Piano

Songs of Moonlight and Shadows

for Soprano, Alto Flute, Cello, Percussion, and Piano

Five Bagatelles

for Horn and Marimba

Daniel Foley*Woodwind Quintet 1*Various Movements from *Songs of Man*

for Voice and Marimba

Mark DeSimone2^{ed} through 4th movements from *Concerto for the Young Adventurer*
for piano, cello, and vibraphoneAn excerpt from Patrick's recently completed
Transfiguration for viola and harpA recent photo of
Daniel (or "Dan")
Foley (left) and
Jason Thorpe
Buchanan (right) in
the Berkeley Hills.

Thanks for viewing our newsletter, showing interest, and supporting a new generation of composers. It's an exciting time for us here at Melos Music, with three terminal recitals and our first international performance with a professional ensemble in Tokyo, Japan. For many of us here it's a time of new options and new possibilities; a time of unforeseen futures and great potentials. The coming months and years promise to be a time of great growth and learning for all of us so be sure to check in every once in a while and stay updated. We encourage you to check our website, <http://www.melosmusic.com> regularly for updates and to check out audio, video, and image samples of our ever growing catalogue and invite you to any and all of our fine upcoming performances. Your support means a great deal to us. Thanks, and enjoy the music.

Sincerely,
Daniel Foley, Editor
Melos Musicwww.melosmusic.com