

Program Notes for 'Narcissus auf Bali'

'Narcissus auf Bali' was originally a ballet commission (1997) from the Vancouver choreographer Lee Su-Feh of Battery Opera (The work went on to win the Choregraphiques Internationales of Paris in 1999) and was generously supported by Canada Council and the BC Cultural Fund. The title is a post-modern twist on the classical, grandiose names 'Ariadne auf Naxos' or 'Iphigenia auf Tauris'. Only here, the work roughly follows the narrative of the Greek myth 'Narcissus and Echo', deep into the jungles of Bali.

In 2008, I rewrote/remixed the piece as a Double Concerto for Vibes, Marimba and CPU, the oriental timbres of the vibes and marimba complimenting the sampled gamelan orchestral sounds throughout the piece. <In truth, the real reason for reworking the music was embedded in its' original structure –a long Elgar / Holst / Vaughn-Williams/ Britten, (English), pan diatonic, slow climax.>

The piece has many layers that are constantly referencing one another as well as articulating the structure:

1. From the Greek myth, the Greek concept of Air, Fire, Earth, Water becomes the natural aural background for the piece.
2. The myths' allegory of the transmutation from living things to the inanimate which is further stretched from natures' sublime harmony evolving into, or in conflict with, urban, industrial noise. This transmutation also characterizes the music morphing into various styles.
3. The choreographer is reading the myth in Chinese.
4. The works' Gamelan vortex increasingly appropriates all things oriental (Godzilla, Tibetan monks, Martial-Art movies, Chinese fish markets, Peking Opera, Noh Drama etc.) which are then pitted against all things western and/or pop.
5. Paralleling Narcissus and Echo's relationship, there is a modern day picnic in the woods involving a self-absorbed male and his overly compliant, robotic girlfriend.

Formally, the music also steals the concept of 'Echo' in resembling a double-reverse palindrome (no, not the high dive!). The pitch and harmonic structures are based on the choreographers' favorite Balinese ditty rendered here in Bb (the tonic), that was further transformed into a 24 note pitch-set (P., I., RI.) The works' verticality is subdivided into 49 sections. each section based on a 'contrary scale' (higher then lower from the tonic) moving away to the fifth then returning to the tonic, then to the octave then returning again to the tonic. The tempo of each section is based on the movements' sample transposition from the tonic, while the lengths of the sections are constantly expanding and contracting (accordion-like) from 2 measures to 96 measures long (2,3,4,6,8,12 etc). Further underlying the spirit of Echo, the surface of the score is laced with reverse echoes and exact, dieing (yet transfiguring) repetitions.