

A Teenage Dream Program Notes

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MC Maguire CPU

“A Teenage Dream” is a 28 min. piece for Piano and CPU (generously funded by the Canada Council), based on 4 songs by Katy Perry. Previously, I have written a piece around Gershwin songs, so I thought I’d try more popish artifacts as source material for classical stratagems. Accordingly, the cantus firmus material is excavated from “Teenage Dream (TD),” “Bon Appetit” (BA), “Dark Horse” (DH), and “Firework” (FW). After coding the themes, each song then conjured a free association extension. For instance, from BA, the 1- b2 progression and slightly Latin rhythm spawned all things Spanish, while from DH, the video and middle eastern scale emitted a middle eastern flavour.. For FW, because of the fireworks and the EDM/house/mechanical groove, I use more militaristic/patriotic /4th of July/American themes, while TD remains more neutral as it is basically the stew where the other themes boil.

Other pop sources used was the Migos’ rap from ‘Bon Appetit’ that I turned into a more languid William Shatneresque rendition. Plus, I make reference to the music video of the restaurant scene in BA and the dog in DH. The only other source material I used (albeit mangled) to contrast the pop elements, were bits of Tallis (for religiosity) and Wagner’s Rheingold opening passage plus a brief Rheinmaidens’ sojourn(to hammer home the Bb tonic, even though Rheingold’s in the Lydian mode?!)

The structure of the work consists of 4 large murals (quadriptych) each inside a Bergian forward/retrograde ordering, that formally connects/overlaps the movements. So eventually, in the 4 murals, objects on the left end up right and visa versa. This creates a kinda Groundhog Day of recapitulations not unlike the feeling of a dystopic rondo form.

The harmonic structure is based around a 4 chord progression, each a minor third apart. The harmonic rhythm accelerates over time until it’s an 8th note per modulation. This is all while an accompanying accelerating, rising 3rds bass part emphasizes the outline of a diminished 7th chord (4 ascending minor 3rds). Other harmonic approaches include the 4 solo piano sections which is sort of Bill Evans plays Schoenberg while in the central worship alter of each movement, is an extended explorations of pan-diatonic, Bachish, canonic-inversion improv.

Musical Influences at the time of writing this piece were recent soundtracks of Junkie XL and Hans Zimmer. Not just because of the superb integration of guitars, synths, and sound design into the orchestra, but also a kind of brutishly simple overall design (mostly because they have 6 weeks to do a movie). I also was listening to a lot of Amon Tobin, finding his complex layering of textures and colour uniquely intricate and masterfully constructed.

Finally, I genuinely admire Katy’s song writing team, producers and her voice and I started with the idea of doing something more celebratory. The outcome sounds more like a increasingly frenzied homage to Berlioz’ “A Witches’ Sabbath’, but that could be because of the accelerating harmonic rhythm/ contracting material that’s baked into the structure.