

bone vestiges program note

Each section of bone vestiges oscillates around a central pitch center. The aggregate of these centers comprise a series or row that emerges in the foreground of the work in the form of long held notes. Around the (unstated) central pitch of each section an upper and a lower note are equidistantly expressed. For example if the center is C the major third Bb/D is stated; the interval representing both the aggregate of its parts — the major third — as well as it's individual constituents — the major second.

Allied to this symmetrical unfolding of pitch elements is a similar rhythmic unfolding. For example, if we take the downbeat of the first measure as “home” each unfolding dyad is placed the same number of pulse units away from “home” as the pitches are placed in half steps away from their own (unstated) center. So, if the work is unfolding in eighth notes the Bb/D dyad would occur three (eighth) beats into the work.

The only flaw with this system is the “wedge” shape that is built into it. I decided to intervene to break this up enough to be musically and expressively interesting by a simple extension of the system outlined in the preceding paragraph. Instead of having the dyads rhythmically move around a common starting point, I created a short rhythmic fragment onto which I mapped, in random order, the dyads. The rhythmic structure of the work unfolds through each initial dyadic statement serving as its own “ground zero.” The resultant music is tightly structured, yet also incorporates a human rhythmic element which lends the music a visceral forward propulsion.

Additionally, each section of the work is structured in sets of subsections with regard to the number of rhythmic cycles a dyad is to remain silent before restatement. Using this method I was able to control the flow of density of the pitches. For example, if the first large section were comprised of five subsections and I wanted the textural density to increase toward the end of the large section, I would structure each subsection in a descending order with a greater number of “rest” cycles at the beginning thus increasing the density of the texture towards the end of the large section. So, taking the major third example: if I structured the first large section with this cyclic ordering 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, the dyad would not repeat until 15 eighth notes in the first subsection (5 times 3), but this would decrease to 12 in the next and 9 in the next and so on. Associated with this “density cycling” is a cellular cycling or displacement of small groupings of dyads. As the work cycles through its seven sections, so too on the microstructural level the seven dyadic groups cycle through from beginning to end.

In addition to the two structural features already outlined, I decided on two macrostructural strategies for the work as well. The opening of the work presents two ideas: isolated martellato eighth notes and long, quiet sustained notes. Of the latter I used three sets based on larger dotted quarter values of one, three, and five and these initially are heard as a slowly unfolding fragmented line. So the two elements, to use a Paul Klee analog, are line and point. These points though, are chords, and the line is a single line. So my strategy with these elements was to have the single line “morph” into chordal points and the chordal points “morph” into single lines as the piece progresses. This necessitated gradually separating the dyads into single notes through displacement. This rhythmic displacement also has a macrostructural element. As the work unfolds I wanted the eighth note pulse to shift to a dotted sixteenth, or, in simpler terms to have a compound subdivision of three gradually move to a duple subdivision of four.

The final structural strategy of the work is the one that initially gave rise to useful work on the piece and that is the notion of registrally associated timbral change, or registral “filters” or “envelopes.” As the work unfolds the tessitura gradually climbs higher, until a restatement of the opening materials occurs some six octaves higher at the close of the work.