

Steve Antosca

MANA

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CELLO AND COMPUTER

COMMISSIONED BY NANCY JO SNIDER

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AMERICAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM KATZEN ARTS CENTER

WASHINGTON, DC

MA ~ Program Notes by Nancy Jo Snider

Negative Space in design is a concept that has intrigued me for a long time. Prior to the death of both of my parents, this fascination was more an intellectual pursuit than an emotional and expressive one.

Initially, the impulse for creating MA was an attempt to apply the concept of negative space to music by exploring the idea of creating a rhythm of *les silences* and using intervals of time and pitch to hold the *ma**.

Now, particularly since the death of my mother, I realize that my interest was based on the fact that the puzzle of my psyche was missing a very important piece. This missing piece had a distinct shape that only became apparent to me when I found it shortly before my mother died.

It is also important to note, for reasons that will become apparent, that my mother represented “C-ness” to me. For this reason, I began to associate the Bach “Sarabande” from the 3rd Cello Suite (in C major) with her and have played it, as a way of connecting with her, almost daily since her dying began.

In beginning to cope with what we commonly refer to as loss, a different kind of meaning has emerged.

This found awareness is, to me, *ma*.

Collaborating with composer Steve Antosca on this has been a very special experience. In addition to being a composer of the first rank, Steve is also a person of extreme quality. The privilege of working closely with him and getting to know him better through this unique collaborative process has been rewarding and life changing. I am thankful to him beyond measure for his artistry and friendship.

The compositional approach is rooted in time and form with multiple layers of materials. These materials consist of live ‘cello, real-time computer processing, pre-recorded sounds (live ‘cello, voices), synthesized sounds and silence.

MA was created in honor of my mother and is dedicated to both of my parents.

*Ma is a Japanese word that means space, time, interval, pause, void...place; what is held within the borders...

MA ~ Program Notes by Steve Antosca

In October 2016 I met with cellist Nancy Jo Snider and was saddened to hear of the very recent death of her mother. Nancy raised the subject of commissioning me to compose a solo cello and computer composition as a memorial to her mother.

After a detailed discussion of the parameters for composing a new solo cello work which would embrace deep personal meaning for us both, I agreed.

The musical foundation for MA is the Bach C major Sarabande from the Third Cello Suite. Nancy performed this piece regularly for her mother and the memory of these moments is a profound source of connection.

In many of my electronic compositions I have created an “electronic landscape”. This structured multichannel soundtrack forms the shape and placement of the computer processed sonic material and pre-determines the structure of the acoustic instrument performance part. This process requires the live performer to adhere to the timeline of the soundtrack throughout the performance, which lends itself to the most rigid type of chamber music interaction.

The benefits, however, of this compositional style lie in a performance which generates a multiplicity of sounds within the performance venue. These include computer pre-processed audio, pre-determined spatialization of audio, the pure acoustic sound of the instrument, the real-time computer processed instrument sound and the blending of all of these sonic qualities within an acoustic environment. This multiplicity is used to generate a sonic environment of “immersion processing”, the massive saturation of the performance space with computer processed audio.

In composing MA, the source materials for the electronic landscape, with the exception of two brief vocal phrases, are excerpts from a recording of the Bach C major Sarabande, along with recordings of numerous extended techniques, by Nancy. From the computer manipulation of this organic material the electronic landscape for MA was shaped. In keeping with the spirit of the Japanese philosophy of *ma*, moments of silence are strategically placed throughout the piece. The placement and duration of these voids expand toward the central moment of MA when the cellist performs a personalized Sarabande without the accompanying electronic landscape. (Each performance of MA will integrate a unique Sarabande composed for the performer). The Sarabande is shaped by period rules which guide the composition of a Sarabande, and includes music material from the Bach C major score, just as the electronic landscape incorporates electronic materials from the recording. Following the solo Sarabande the electronics re-enter through the process of elision. Soon the electronics, the cello and the silences of the final section of MA are compressed to the degree that the electronic audio disappears, and the solo cello emerges as the final musical thought. In this final moment of MA, the solo cello mingles with compressed fragments of silence as the cello dies away.

MA was composed for and premiered by cellist Nancy Jo Snider at the American University Museum of the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, DC on September 14, 2017. The concert was part of the Museum’s CONNECTED: MUSIC IN THE MUSEUM concert series, INTERFERENCE *new music collective*, ensemble-in-residence.

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for Nancy Jo Snider

Steve Antosca
2017

The diagram illustrates the real-time processing of a cello performance. It is divided into three sections:

- Section 1 (0:00 - 1:10):** Features a cello part with dynamics from *pppp* to *ff*. A 20-second interval is marked from 0:50 to 1:10. RTP markers include 'celloVox1A', 'celloVox1B', and 'chord1'.
- Section 2 (1:10 - 2:00):** Starts with a 10-second silence period. The cello part includes a triplet and various dynamics. RTP markers 'R-T P #2' and 'R-T P #3' are present. The audio waveform is labeled 'fragments::SARABANDE1'.
- Section 3 (2:00 - 2:50):** Features a 10-second interval from 2:00 to 2:10 and a 15-second interval from 2:15 to 2:30. The cello part includes 'secco', 'punta d'arco', and 'irregular gliss.' markings. RTP marker 'R-T P #4' is shown.

Time 2:50 10 seconds 3:00 3:05 3:08 3:10 10 seconds 3:20 13 seconds 3:33

Vc. ord. sul pont. ord. sul pont.

RT P *pp* *f* *ff* *fff* *p* *mf* *pp* *f* *ff* *fff*

Audio

Time 3:33 15 seconds 3:48 4 seconds 3:52 15 seconds 4:07 12 seconds 4:19

Vc. sul pont.

RT P *sfz* *ppp* **SILENCE#2** *pp* *p*

Audio chord2 fragments::SARABANDE2 ▲ R-T P #5

Time 4:19 11 seconds 4:30 4:35 4:40 4:47 18 seconds 5:05

Vc. sul pont. ord. sul pont.

RT P *p* *ff* *ff* *pp* *f*

Audio The Transmigration of a SOUL ▲ R-T P #6

Time 5:05 5:10 5:15 5:18 18 seconds 5:36 18 seconds 5:55

Vc. ord. sul pont. ord. ord.

RT P *p* *ff* *pp* *pp* *f* *ff* *pp*

Audio ▲ R-T P #7

Time 5:55 ← 5 seconds → 6:00 *quickly, smoothly*

Vc. *col legno battuto*

RT P *f p* 6 *f p* 6 *f*

Audio ▲ R-T P #8

Time 6:16 6:20

Vc. *f* 6 *p* *ff*

RT P ▲ R-T P #9

Audio

Time 6:20 ← 8 seconds → 6:28 ← 12 seconds → 6:40 6:50

Vc. *play notes in any order and at any transposition*
alternate freely between pizz. and snap pizz.

RT P **SILENCE#3** ▲ R-T P #10

Audio

Time 6:50 ← 18 seconds → 7:08 7:15 7:20 ← 11 seconds → 7:31

Vc. *secco*

RT P ▲ R-T P #11

Audio harm1 harm2 harm3

Time 7:31 ← 9 seconds → 7:41 *briskly, with intense energy* 7:45

Vc. *f* *ff* *pp* *mf* *f* *port.*

RT P ▲ R-T P #12

Audio

Time 7:45 ← 15 seconds → 8:00 8:02 8:06 ← 12 seconds → 8:18 ← 11 seconds → 8:29

Vc. *f* *ff* *pp* *p* *f* *p* *pizz. and snap pizz.* *n*

RT P ▲ R-T P #13

Audio

steady, driven rhythm
play notes in any order and at any transposition
alternate freely between pizz. and snap pizz.

Time 8:29 8:30 ← 10 seconds → 8:40 ← 3 seconds → 8:43 ← 5 seconds → 8:48 9:00 ← 6 seconds → 9:06

Vc. *p* *f* *ff* *p* *f* *p* *ff* *pp* *n*

RT P ▲ R-T P #14

Audio

SILENCE#4

Sarabande for NJS

COMPUTER AUDIO is SILENT until 12:48

9:06 20 seconds 9:26

ppp *f* *p* *fff* *p* *pp*

RT P ▲ R-T P #15

ord. *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *pp* *ff* *p* *f*

pizz., sul tasto arco pizz. l.v.

With more energy arco *p* *f* *f* *p* *f* *ff* *f* *p* *f* *p*

10:18

ff *f* *subito p* *f* *ff* *sfz*

11:17

sul pont.

Vc. *ord.* *fp* *pp* *ff* *p* *f* *p*

RT P ▲ R-T P #15

Vc. *p* *sfz* *sfz* *ord.* *ord.* *pp* *l.v.*

RT P

11:58

Vc. *ord.* *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *ff* *f* *p*

RT P ▲ R-T P #16

Vc. *f* *p* *f* *fp* *sfz*

RT P ▲ R-T P #17

12:44 12:48

START COMPUTER AUDIO, part 2

COMPUTER AUDIO returns

Time 12:48 13:01 13:07

13 seconds 6 seconds

Vc. ord. *f* *p* *f* *p* *sfz* *fp* *f*

RT P

Audio ▲ R-T P #18 SILENCE#5

Time 13:07 13:13 13:36 13:40

6 seconds 23 seconds

Vc. secco ord. *n* *p* *f* *ff* *pp*

RT P ▲ R-T P #19

Audio

Time 13:44 13:49 13:53

5 seconds *Slowly, contemplative*

Vc. *pp* *p* *p* *f* *ff*

RT P *l.v.*

Audio

Time 14:00 14:04 14:07 14:10 14:30

20 seconds

Vc. *f* *p* *f* *n*

RT P

Audio

Time 14:30 ← 16 seconds → 14:46 14:50 ← 13 seconds → 15:03

Vc. **SILENCE#6** *sul tasto, punta d'arco* *ppp* *ff* *p* *f* *pp*

RT P R-T P #20 ▲ *Perdendosi*

Audio

Time 15:03 ← 23 seconds → 15:26 ← 3 seconds → *Perdendosi free from time*

Vc. *f* *n* *ppp* *p* *f* *sub p* *pppp*

RT P ▲ R-T P #21

Audio AUDIO OUT

Time 2 seconds 1 seconds 3 seconds

Vc. *sul tasto, punta d'arco* *sul tasto, punta d'arco* *sul pont.* *ppp* *p* *pp* *ppp* *p* *pp* *ppp* *p* *n*

RT P ▲ R-T P #22

Audio