

Darkness:

Commissioned by the Frankfurt Alte Oper, Impuls Romantik Lieder Festival.

The commission called for setting a poem from the Romantic era with a musical language of our times.

The poem I chose was Darkness by Lord Byron from 1816 which describes in a nightmarish fantasy manner the decay of humanity with the absence of light. To me the poem exerts several conflicts; On one hand the context is extremely existential, apocalyptic and horrifying yet the language used is lush, rich and highly pastoral. It has 86 lines yet only 5 very long sentences which keeps the reader breathless at times. On one hand, it's written like a page turner making the reader want to continue, while on the other it barely leaves any place to rest/ breath.

It has a natural rhythmic flow yet constant instability. The horrific descriptions almost resemble a presentation of the biblical apocalyptic prophets.

In my work I have been trying to implement all of the above into the compositional construction of the piece. I have been trying to create a feel of timelessness by the use of textural systems that involve complex patterns and gives constant forward drive yet with overall unstable or irregular structure. At times the same systems that are based on mathematical figures and shapes can also create a very subtle and even emotional expressions when played slow.

As suggested by the nature of the project I also used structural ideas learned from early vocal works of the Baroque and the romantic eras. Especially an image of treating the relationship between the accompaniment and the solo like a wave supporting a boat, as if the piano is lifting the voice up and down the melodies giving the gestures a rounded shape.

In addition, as a way of contrast the voice line has very little range yet much expressions and gestures. For example I have been using many vocal ornaments inspired by Baroque and Jewish cantorial singing. In addition to decorating and enriching the vocal parts, their airy qualities and abruptness help promote the forward motion drive that is felt by the text.

To boot the meaning of the text I also considered it from the time and space categories. There has been treatment of ascending and descending lines in the sentences constantly morphing between many words over little space and vice versa. This in order to form a strong conviction and sense of direction and simultaneously maintain the realm of timelessness.

Another contrast in the music is between the apocalyptic and chaotic aspects of the text and its void/ death like qualities of stasis and stillness which I have been trying to merge and have one grow out of the other in the music. I wanted to blur the lines between intuition and order bringing out the animalistic aspects of the story teller by using textures that are so complex that it almost feel like an erupted improvisational outburst yet structured and concentrated.