'SATCHITANANDA'

Meditation and Dance around the Still Point, in the form of a Raga Performance for Piano Solo

by

PROFESSOR N W NOWOTNY

Austrian State Teaching Diplomas in English and School Music, MagPhil (Vienna), PhD (Rhodes) LRSM, LTCL



GRAHAMSTOWN RHODES UNIVERSITY 1989

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Inaugural Lecture/Recital
Delivered at Rhodes University
on Wednesday 23 August 1989

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GRAHAMSTOWN RHODES UNIVERSITY 1989 Mr Vice-Chancellor, Mr Vice-Principal, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

Before I launch into the explanation of my composition SATCHITANANDA which we shall hear later on in my own Sequencer recording, I want to give you a glimpse into the New Look Rhodes Music Department.

Our Music Department has an honourable tradition that goes back some sixty years and it is apt to remember at this point my predecessors in the Chair: Prof Friedrich Hartmann, Prof Georg Gruber who can truly be called the father of the South African choral tradition, and my immediate predecessor Prof Rupert Mayr whom I regard as the finest musicologist in the country. Together with the many devoted staff members they have established the good reputation of the Department and initiated philosophies of music education which we still build on.

One sphere in which Prof Mayr especially pointed to the future was the realm of ethnomusicology. Not only did he equip our Departmental library with titles as diverse as "The Togaku Style of Japanese Court Music" and "Christmas Music from Baroque Mexico" but he also arranged, together with Mr Andrew Tracey, the First South African Symposium on Ethnomusicology in 1980. This has become an almost annual event and has taken place three times at Rhodes, twice at the University of Natal and once at UCT and at the University of Venda. Together with these undertakings went the training of future ethnomusicologists of which I mention only two, namely Dr Deirdre Hansen who now heads the Department of Ethnomusicology at the UCT College of Music, and

Dr Dave Dargie, who is invited as guest lecturer to many campuses and reintroduces African music in church services all over the country.

My vision goes beyond the inclusion of African Music: I advocate the study of music as a world phenomenon, or the multicutural approach to music - as it has come to be called.

William Anderson, the Director of the Center for the Study of World Musics at the Kent State University, Ohio, wrote in his paper for the First National Music Educators' Conference in Durban in 1985:

"Educational programmes at all levels must develop world viewpoints; not to do so puts us out of touch with the age in which we live". 3

There was a time when Music Departments concentrated solely on one tradition, namely the Western classical tradition, a view which by implication made students regard other forms of musical expression as inferior.

Music is <u>not</u> an international language! The world as a whole, and South Africa in particular, contains a great number of musical languages which have to be studied in order to be understood and appreciated. "We must realise that there are a number of different but equally logical ways for contructing Music".4

The multicultural approach centres, in William Anderson's words,

"around organizing educational experiences for students which encourage and develop understanding and sensitivity to peoples from a broad spectrum of ethnic backgrounds".

I have often said that we can understand other people only when we understand and appreciate their music. Music is indeed a "very important vehicle through which peoples can learn to communicate with each other, understand each other, and develop mutual respect for each other". 6

We want to teach our students not only to become bi-musical or tri-musical, but poly-musical. This can be done if we place the emphasis on a conceptual approach to music education, focussing our attention on the basic musical concepts, namely melody, rhythm, harmony/texture, timbre, dynamics and form, and look for similarities and differences among these elements in the various traditions studied.

In order to put this into practice, we not only continue the ethnomusicological content of the History of Music course, but have re-organised this course by introducing a new component which we call Music Studies. This part-course is shared by all staff members and exposes the students to experiences in a wide field from 20th-century classical music, to Indian music, Jazz, and the lecturers' particular fields of interest.

A further, and very important part of our multicultural approach is realised by inviting Visiting Lecturers to the Department. We are a small Department in a small town and do not have experts in all musics at our disposal. Therefore, we invited Mr Deepak Ram for one month in 1988 to lecture on Indian music.

Owing to his excellent training with the master flautist Chaurasia and his enormous knowledge of Indian music in general, he gave us a rare insight in this important field. This year we had Dr Dave Dargie for two weeks who not only lectured but also gave our students hands-on experience on the African

marimbas, with the help of the members of the Mayibuye Marimba Band from Grahamstown. This short course was brought to a close with the very impressive Bands Festival in the Great Hall, in which the Mayibuye Marimba Band, Andrew Tracey's Steel Band and my Jazz Band provided the music, and those of you who attended will surely not forget in a hurry.

This last project realised another feature of the multicultural approach, namely the active, practical, hands-on approach to learning, "since it is through performance that students often become most integrally involved in discovering how musics of various cultures are constructed". The Rhodes University Jazz Band, and other jazz ensembles, Andrew Tracey's Steel Band as well as smaller ensembles specialising in African music which he from time to time organises, give the interested student the opportunity to get practically involved with other musics, to understand them and to appreciate them. Although these ensembles are not part of the "official" curriculum they make a very important informal contribution to our multicultural approach.

All these activities have indeed confirmed that our world contains a number of highly distinctive and sophisticated musical traditions. Our "global village" makes it no longer possible to think in narrow localised terms about any subject. If we look at the field of music today, it is clear that a number of composers now reflect the multicultural dynamics of the world in which they live, and their compositions often represent a cross-fertilisation of different sonic traditions.

My own composition SATCHITANANDA, Meditation and Dance around the Still Point, in the form of a Raga Performance for piano solo, was inspired by the course in Indian music which Deepak Ram gave us last year.

Shortly after the course something incredible happened. In July 1976 (sic) I had experimented with a twelve-tone row, harmonised it according to the theory of chord-row composition, and from the resulting twelve chords I developed twelve octotonic scales and the characteristic chords on all the scale notes. (You find the twelve scales and their basic chord at the back of the Formal Outline handout.)

EXAMPLE 1

In 1976 I improvised with these scales and got acquainted with their melodic and harmonic particularities. I even wrote down a melody based on scale no.5. But nothing further came of it, and I forgot all about it. (Play melody).

EXAMPLE 2

Twelve years later, in August 1988, it struck me that in 1976 I had laid the theoretical ground work for a composition in the style of a Raga performance. The twelve octotonic scales were to act as twelve Ragas, and with the immediately preceding experience of Indian music the piece was finished in my mind. All I had to do was to sit down and write it. I even found that I could use the long forgotten melody that I had composed then, and it occurs in many shapes in the third part of the work.

At this point I must say a few words about the title of the piece. From two pages of possible titles I chose SATCHITANANDA because it expresses best the intentions of the piece.

SATCHITANANDA is a composite of three Sanskrit words: \underline{sat} , meaning existence or being, \underline{chit} , awareness and intellect, and \underline{ananda} , bliss.⁸

Among many references to SATCHTANANDA into which I cannot go here, Sri Aurobindo says in his "The Life Divine":

"that which has thrown itself out into forms is a triune Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, Sachchidananda, whose consciousness is in its nature a creative or rather a self-expressive Force capable of infinite variation in phenomenon and form of its self-conscious being and endlessly enjoying the delight of the variation. It follows that all things that exist are what they are as terms of that existence, terms of that conscious force, terms of that delight of being ..."

Further on he says: "Sachchidananda, it may be reasoned, is God, is a conscious Being who is the author of existence." 10

From this title it will be clear that I want my composition understood as a spiritual work, as a help to meditation, as a meditation in itself. The "Dance around the Still Point" is a dance around the silence in us, around the God in us ...

An Indian Raga performance is based on a Raga which is essentially a five-, six-, or seven-note scale with differing ascending and descending melodic formulas; one could therefore regard it as a basic melody. The performance normally consists of three sections: Alap, Jor Alap and Gat. In the Alap section the player improvises on the notes and the melodic formulas of the Raga in a rhythmically free style. He is accompanied only by the tamboura which

plays a drone usually consisting of the first and fifth note of the scale while the soloist (the flautist, sitar player or sarod player) examines and experiences the individual notes of the Raga one by one for their tonal and emotional content.

In the Jor Alap section the tabla player enters and provides rhythmic patterns, and the improvising soloist plays in a rhythmic style. In the last section (the Gat section) the soloist introduces a melody which he states many times, embellishing it, shortening it, improvising between the statements but always returning to it.

My piece is constructed in exactly the same way: in the Alap section the left hand of the pianist provides the "drone of eternity" as Wilfrid Mellers calls it, while the right hand explores the scale. The first three scales are used for this section: to use all twelve scales would have made the piece too long for Western ears. In the Jor Alap section the playing becomes more rhythmic and the left hand introduces the basic chords for the relevant scales in various rhythmic patterns. Scales four to twelve are used in this section. The section based on scale eight forms the first climax showing a decided jazz influence, while the immediately following section with scale nine is based on original India Paltas, i.e. exercises for the instrumentalist with typical figures and melodic turns. The section based on scale ten introduces for the first time part of the melody to be used in the Gat section, and sections eleven and twelve build up gradually to the first complete statement of the melody which is the beginning of the Gat section. This section uses all twelve scales, and the melody appears in different versions according to the scale being used. (Play examples of different forms of melody).

EXAMPLE 3

After many contrasting episodes the piece climaxes in the final part of the Gat section, when the melody occurs <u>fortissimo</u> in the highest range of the piano accompanied by an ostinato (a repeated rhythmic figure) in the lowest range of the instrument.

After this climax the music returns to the beginning of the piece, the Alap section. It gradually calms down and, with the tones of the re-introduced drone, vanishes into eternity.

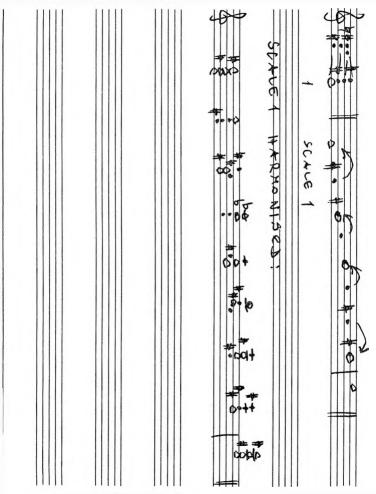
PERFORMANCE ON ROLAND SEQUENCER MC 500 Mark II
AND ROLAND DIGITAL PIANO RD-300. 27m 10.9s

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- W. Anderson, Our International Musical World: Implications for Music Education. In: C. Lucia (ed.), Proceedings of the First National Music Educators' Conference, University of Natal, Durban, 1986, p.25.
- 4 W. Anderson, op.cit., p.25.
- W. Anderson, Multicultural Approaches to Teaching Music: Implications for Contemporary South Africa. In: C. Lucia (ed.), Proceedings of the First National Music Educators' Conference, University of Natal, Durban, 1986, p.179.
- 6 W. Anderson, op.cit., p.182.
- 7 W. Anderson, op.cit, p.187.
- 8 S. Grof, Realms of the Human Unconscious, Souvenir Press, 1975, p.204.
- 9 Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India, 1970, p.92.
- Sri Aurobindo, op.cit., p.94.

SATCHITANANDA (FORMAL OUTLINE)

A L A P (Over a drone the notes of each scale are introduced one by one) Scale 1 2 3 $\underline{\text{J O R}}$ A $\underline{\text{A A P}}$ (Motives and phrases are formed, the principal melody for the Gat section is developed) 5 6 7 Jazz Influence 8 9 Paltas - "exercises" 10 First appearance of GAT melody 11 Melody developed 12 Melody further developed G A T (Section with a principal and a secondary melody) 1 Full statement of principal melody (in parallel fifths) Melody in high register 3 Melody with chords 4 Without melody Melody with ostinato 6 and 7 Slow: new, secondary melody, music ascends to highest register 8 Without melody 9 Principal melody slowly, pensively 10 Melody slowly, higher register Transition: accelerating to 11 Melody loudly in both hands (thirds) 12 Climax: Melody in highest register, Ostinato in lowest register followed by big deceleration ALAP Return to beginning of piece. Loudly at first ... vanishes. Duration: 27m 10.9s



SCALE 1 DEVELOPED SPON CHOPA! THE SEPTES TAKENONISOD:

EXAMPLE

PLGE 2

1976 NEWDY BASED ON SCALE 5:





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