MILLER, TYLER MAXWELL, M.M. Winds of Change (2013) Directed by Dr. Alejandro Rutty. 55pp.

Winds of Change attempts to build upon the recent tradition of monophonic compositional practice by combining techniques directed at setting a central musical line to maintain interest and create textural clarity. These techniques are primarily inspired by the works of George Crumb and Tan Dun. Winds of Change also includes found and built percussion instruments, which are employed to create a unique timbral sound environment. The combination of these two elements is intended to create a monophonic work that is both expressively clear and unique. Chapter I concerns the basic purpose of the thesis and accompanying document. Chapter II focuses on specific techniques and compositional processes used in Winds of Change.

### WINDS OF CHANGE

by

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Approved by	
Committee Chair	 

### APPROVAL PAGE

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. COMPOSITIONAL TECHNQIUES	2
Conclusions	11
REFERENCES	12
APPENDIX A. INSTRUMENT CONSTRUCTION	13
APPENDIX B. SCORE OF WINDS OF CHANGE	17

#### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

With the musical composition *Winds of Change* I have attempted to build upon the recent tradition of monophonic compositional practice through the combination of my personal stylistic understanding of monophonic texture with the implementation of found and built percussion instruments. Monophonic texture is herein defined as the setting of a central prominent line, combined with a background texture that serves to support that line.

There is precedent within recent monophonic practice toward experimentation with found percussion, non-traditional use of common percussion instruments, and percussion-like textures in non-percussion works. These techniques serve as an alternative means to set apart a central idea from the rest of a work. Chapter II references the works of George Crumb and Tan Dun regarding their monophonic techniques and serves to highlight the salient points of their influence on *Winds of Change*.

#### CHAPTER II

#### COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES

Winds of Change was constructed as a work characterized by the setting of a central line. Specifically, this setting was created through the use of compositional techniques designed to maintain interest, and create textural clarity. Examining the compositional practices of George Crumb and Tan Dun in light of their influence on Winds of Change will help elucidate the manner in which the central monophonic line of the work was set.

Robert Moevs describes a compelling aspect of George Crumb's monophonic style as he demonstrates how Crumb creates a background texture in his works through the manipulation of timbral, spatial, registral, and temporal elements. Moevs describes how Crumb handles these aspects through the terms "repercussion" and "echo."

If the sound is explosive with instant repeat, the effect is of a repercussion or ricochet; if quieter with somewhat more delayed repeat, it becomes an echo. This device determines the use of two pianos throughout and can extend to mallet percussion instruments. The echo device is pervasive in Crumb's compositions, replacing polyphony, and sometimes is codified in their titles, as the Eleven Echoes of Autumn (Echoes I) 1965. <sup>1</sup>

The technique is thus used to highlight the central monophonic line of a work. This is achieved through the creation or removal of timbral, registral, and temporal space

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Robert Moevs, Review of Records: Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III), *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 1976), 294-295.

between the monophonic center, and the background texture of a work. Further, Moevs points to the isolation or repetition of figures in the background texture itself as the means by which this space is created.

Heterogeneous borrowings, superpositions, sometimes rudimentary transcriptions [...] sounds, motives, phrases, passages, procedures, entire structures fail to break this persisting unity, but rather point up the sense of constriction produced by tightly circumscribed use of primary material, an assemblage of spooky effects and symbols chosen to evoke a particular mood, and a compositional method reduced essentially to their simple concatenation.<sup>1</sup>

Stated another way, these individual gestures do not constitute the central monophonic line but rather work in tandem to frame and clarify, as oppose to form, a unified whole.

These techniques are important in regards to *Winds of Change* due to their perceived effectiveness in creating textural clarity and definition regarding the setting of a central monophonic line.

Similarly, *Winds of Change* is concerned from the outset with creating a sound world within which the central idea is placed. The sound world is presented first and is given the time to develop before the central line enters. The first two pages of the score show this sound world is constructed exclusively in the percussion lines. This supportive texture is created through the use of slate gongs and a bowed cymbal on timpano. This combination of two distinct sounds, which are rich in unique timbral characteristics, serves to define the sound world of the piece immediately (see Figure 1).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid., 302

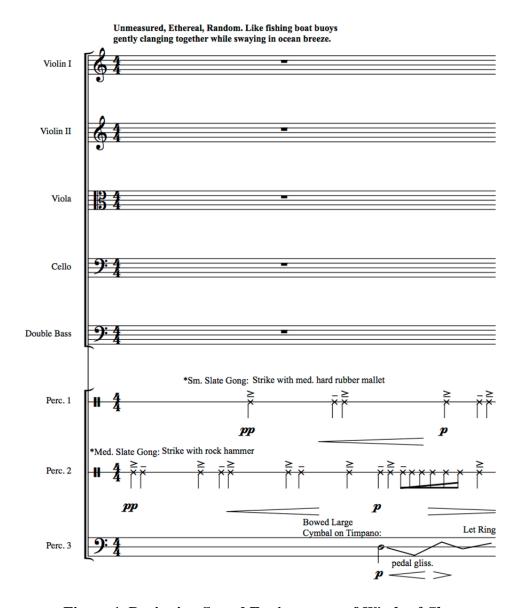


Figure 1. Beginning Sound Environment of Winds of Change.

After the sound world has been thoroughly exposed the central monophonic line enters in the cello at Rehearsal A. Simultaneous movement between the monophonic center, and the supportive background texture is purposefully avoided. The avoidance of concurrent movement between the parts is one of the defining characteristics of the way

the central idea is set in this instance. This is similar to the way Crumb employs the techniques of repercussion and echo, and the way textural clarity is created by avoidance of overlapping elements of the central monophonic line and supporting sound world.

Tan Dun's monophonic compositional style shares the characteristic adherence to textural clarity apparent in Crumb's works. Tan constructs elaborate sound environments within each of these works through innovative uses of percussion instruments. These sound environments are constructed primarily in regard to timbre and are designed to change through minute timbral alterations over the course of a work.

An example of Tan's manipulation of timbre is apparent in the score to the film Hero.<sup>2</sup> This film consists of a single story told three separate ways. While subtly different, these stories remain true to a single overarching plot line. Tan mirrors this narrative style timbrally. He attaches the timbre of a small wind chime to the character Flying Snow during the first version of the story at 0:18:25. A similar chime is used in conjunction with the metallic sounds of clashing swords, the sounds of these swords hitting water, and a heavy echo, in the second version of the story at 0:52:54. Yet another chime can be heard in the final version of the story at 1:13:03. Each version of the chime is characterized by a unique timbre. The subtle differences in timbre between these sections help to create an added sense of interest. They are not sufficiently different from one another as to prevent their contextualization as extensions of one another.

This technique is employed in *Winds of Change* through the shift from a bowed cymbal on timpano to a bowed nipple gong in the third percussion line. This effect is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Quentin Tarantino, *Hero*, Burbank, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment. DVD, 2004.

used to demarcate the three-section structure of the work. These sections are from the beginning to rehearsal letter D, rehearsal letter D to F, and rehearsal letter F through the end of the piece. The effect here is a shift between the brightly metallic sounds of the bowed cymbal in the first section, to the more resonant and clearly pitched sounds of the nipple gong. There is not a timbral development between these two elements, but a direction shift from one to the other. This reflects the influence of Tan's use of chimes in *Hero* by moving between timbres that are sufficiently similar to maintain overall contextual continuity, while simultaneously maintaining interest and variability in an otherwise monophonic texture.

On a local level there is interplay between the central line and background texture in terms of the shape of certain gestures. This principle is employed to add continuity to the work. An example of this interplay can be seen at rehearsal letter B where the percussion figures mimic the upward motion seen slightly before and after in the cello line. The technique of shifting the basic contour of the central line between various instruments as well as between the central line and background texture is employed throughout the work (see Figure 2).

Similarly, the three-note arch that first appears with the opening cello line at rehearsal letter A (see Figure 3), appears frequently in the work and is moved between parts and between different textures.

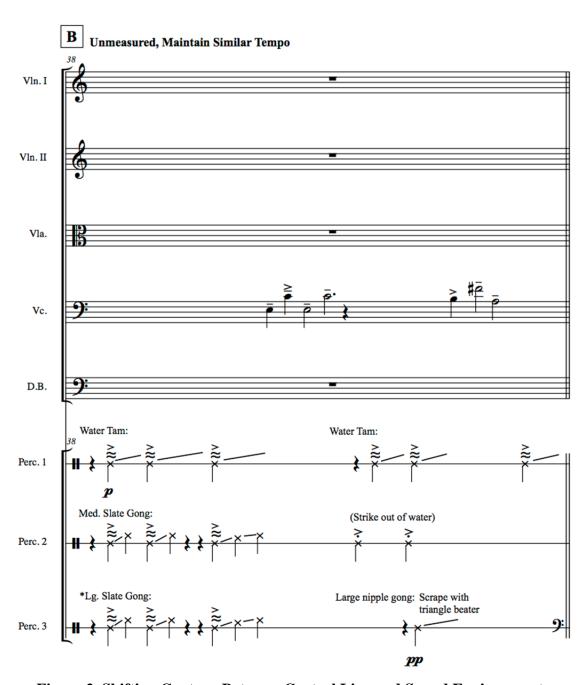


Figure 2. Shifting Contour Between Central Line and Sound Environment.



Figure 3. Opening Arch Figure at Rehearsal Letter A.

One notable example of this figure occurs after rehearsal letter G. In this instance, the Cello line retains the function of the "central line," while the other string parts mirror it's three-note gestures. This can be seen in the first and second violins in measures 138–141, and again in the second violin in measures 146–149 (see Figure 4).

There is a tendency throughout the work to construct gestures by combining instruments from the percussion section and the string quintet (see Figure 5). These gestures serve to add continuity and interest to the background texture. They also form a bridge between the string quintet and the percussion section. This bridge is crucial in the realization of the work due to the tendency to conflate entire string quintet with the central line itself. This is due primarily to the shared timbre within the string quintet, and

the fact that the central line largely resides in the cello part throughout the work.

Constructing gestures between the percussion and string lines as they function in the background texture serves to diminish the impact of this tendency on the overall effectiveness of the work.



Figure 4. Reappearance of Arch Figure at Rehearsal Letter G.



Figure 5. Shared Gesture Between Percussion and Strings

Another element, which adds continuity to the work, is the figuration of the bowed cymbal on timpano found in Percussion 3. This figure instructs the performer to begin bowing with the pedal set to a pitch in the center of the drums' range. The performer then executes a gliss upwards, followed by a fall to a pitch below the center of

the instruments range and a second gliss upwards. This figure was specifically used for the timbre and tone quality produced by this specific series of glissandi.

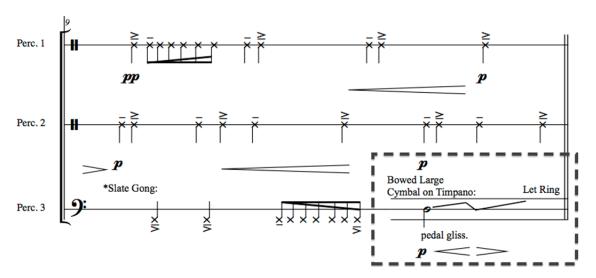


Figure 6. Bowed Cymbal on Timpano Figuration.

### **Conclusions**

The techniques discussed above are employed in *Winds of Change* with the unifying purpose of textural clarity. They are intended to create an evocative sound environment that supports the central line of the work. The piece is further defined by its use of built and found percussion. *Winds of Change* is best understood, then, as a combination of monophonic compositional technique, textural clarity, found and built percussion, and my personal aesthetic principles. Taken together these elements are intended to stretch a single central line throughout the work, while maintaining clarity and interest throughout.

### **REFERENCES**

- Hung, Eric, "Tan Dun Through the Lens of Western Media (Part II)," Notes, Vol. 68, No. 3, March 2012, 659–666.
- Moevs, Robert, Review of Records: Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III), The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 1976).
- Tarantino, Quentin, Hero, Burbank, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment. DVD, 2004.
- Tarantino, Quentin, *Hero Defined*, Burbank, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment. DVD, 2004.

#### APPENDIX A

#### INSTRUMENT CONSTRUCTION

The instruments used in this work range from those found in common practice, such as the string quintet, to unique instruments constructed and found with the specific intent of being used in this piece.

The stones used in the original performance were made of granite, selected specifically for its sound quality and resonance. Likewise, they were chosen to be of similar size and spherical shape roughly that of a baseball. Any similarly sized granite stones should suffice in a performance of this work.

The gongs called for in the work were constructed from common roofing slate.

Any similar slate roofing tiles should work in the construction of these gongs for a performance.

Three types of slate, quarried by the Camara Slate Products Company, and Hilltop Slate, Inc., were used to construct the gongs used in the original performance. These three types of slate are *Camara Unfading Mottled Green and Purple Slate*, *Hilltop Slate*Vermont Purple, and Hilltop Vermont Grey. Two tile thicknesses, 3/8 and 1/4 inch, were used. These specific thicknesses have the best combination of durability and resonance.

The thinner tiles resonate better, while the thicker tiles possess a higher durability. The pitch of each piece of slate is difficult to judge by the apparent size or thickness of each tile due to the large degree of variability in the material.

The slate gongs are constructed by drilling holes in slate roofing tile. These holes allow for the slate tiles to be strung and hang freely. The holes should be equally spaced, between one and two inches, from the edges of the slate so the tile will hang evenly.

A 1/8-inch titanium drill bit was used in combination with a standard consumer grade Black and Decker drill to create these holes. There was some tendency for the slate to cleave, or flake, during drilling. Increasing drill speed while decreasing drill pressure proved successful in preventing the tiles from breaking during this process.

The slate gongs produce a range of different tones depending on where they are struck, the implement used to strike them, and the unique characteristics of each individual piece of slate. A soft (as opposed to hard) rock hammer is used in conjunction with medium-hard rubber mallets to strike the slate in this piece. This allows for a metallic and louder sound when struck with the rock hammer, and a softer, duller sound when struck with the rubber mallets.

The slate itself is quite durable, though it does tend to flake during performance. Further, a great deal of sound can be created without the use of a large amount of force. The gongs should be struck gently at the outset of rehearsal. Increased force can then be employed as familiarity with the material increases.

# Slate gong construction pictures:



Figure A-1. Drill used during the construction of the slate gongs

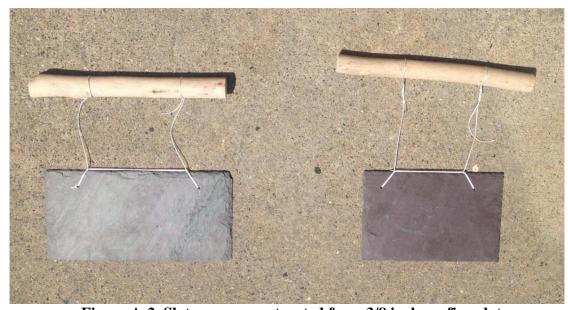


Figure A-2. Slate gongs constructed from 3/8 inch roofing slate



Figure A-3. Slate gongs constructed from 1/4 inch roofing slate

### Contact information for slate companies:

Camara Slate Products
"Quarriers and Fabricators of Natural Vermont Slate Products"
PO Box 8, 963 S. Main St.,
Fair Haven, VT 05743

Phone: 802-265-3200 www.camaraslate.com

Hilltop Slate Inc. PO Box 201, Route 22A Middle Granville, NY 12849

Phone: (518) 642-2270 www.hilltopslate.com

### APPENDIX B

### SCORE OF WINDS OF CHANGE

Duration: 14 min

### Instrumentation

### String Quintet and Percussion

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

**Double Bass** 

### 3 Percussion Parts:

### Perc. 1:

Dumbek

Water Tam

Small Nipple Gong Spinning Plate Gong

### Perc. 2:

Djembe

Medium Nipple Gong Large Nipple Gong

### Perc. 3:

Djembe

Large Cymbal

Timpani

Bass or Cello Bow

Sus. Cymbal

Triangle Beater

### Shared:

Slate Gongs (At least three: low, med., high)

Soft Rock Hammer

2 Five-Gallon Buckets

Large Water Container

Stones

#### Percussion Notes:

#### Stones

The stones used in the original performance were made of granite, selected specifically for sound quality and resonance. Likewise, they were chosen to be of a similar size and spherical shape, roughly that of a baseball. Any similarly sized pairs of granite stones should suffice in a performance of this work.

### Slate Gongs

- 1) <u>Types:</u> Winds of Change calls for 3 slate gongs. These can be constructed from standard 3/8 inch roofing slate. Please see separate instructions for detailed information on how to construct these gongs.
- 2) <u>Mallets and other beaters:</u> The piece calls for two primary types of beaters: med. Rubber mallets, and a soft rock hammer.
  - a. Where a soft rock hammer is unavailable, an ordinary carpenters hammer will suffice, though it should be used in a more delicate fashion to avoid breaking the slate.
- 3) <u>Strike Gongs Over Water:</u> Whenever possible the slate gongs should be struck over a large container of water, such as a five-gallon construction bucket. This serves to increase the resonance of the gong.
- 4) <u>Slate Gongs in Water:</u> Two different methods of playing the slate gongs in water are employed in this piece.
  - a. ≈ Instructs the performer to strike the gong while partially submerged in water. When this symbol is not employed and the performer is instructed to play a "water slate gong," or "water tam," the player should strike the instrument before lower it into the water.

Score Tyler Miller

