

Dustin Gledhill, piano

Monday, May 1, 2023, 3:30 PM
Recital Hall | Staller Center for the Arts

Shattered Lines / Points of Horizon (2009)

Matthew Barnson (b. 1979)

Pièces de Clavecin, Livre IV, 25e ordre:

François Couperin (1668-1733)

La Visionnaire

Pièces de Clavecin, Livre III, 14e ordre:

Le Rossignol en amour

Images, Première Série

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

I. Reflet dans l'eau

II. Hommage à Rameau

III. Movement

Nouvelles suites de pièces de Clavecin: Suite in A Minor

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

I. Allemande

II. Courante

III. Sarabande

IV. Les Trois Mains

V. Fanfarinette

VI. La Triomphante

VII. Gavotte avec six doubles

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree.



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Program Notes

In the “composer’s note” of his score “Shattered Lines/Points of Horizon,” Matthew Barnson writes: “Much of my recent music is organized around a single musical plane: a flickering, regularly pulsating line, usually on the note “e.” For me, this has been a useful formal conceit, a malleable symbol and dramaturgical device. I used it first in my short song, Snow to depict the suffocating dread of being buried by winter and then again in my Violin Sonata No.1 to create an atmosphere of obsessive grief – it panics a Morse code message... In these works, I treat the line as an axis and center of gravity; gestures emerge and orbit but are inevitably drawn back to the core.

I continued to explore musical axis by considering Baroque ornamentation: trills, mordents, turns, port de voix, and appoggiaturas in all their national varieties. I began Shattered Lines/Points of Horizon as an abstract fantasy on French Baroque ornamentation, but the work evolved into what a listener might hear as a series of six or seven large-scale, highly elaborated ornaments – super-mordents. I treat the various “e”s of the piano as seven highly ornamented planes: each “plane” is a series of notes pulsing regularly or irregularly depending on the individual range.

The work begins at the highest “e,” descends and shortly grazes the lowest “e,” and settles at the “e” below middle “c.” The first planes unfold by gradually elaborated ornamentation, as the pianist descends ornamentation of the lower planes becomes gruff and brutal – the climax of the work is a kind of liquefaction to the simplest half-step trill. As the final planes unfold, ornamentation solidifies into structure: melody and harmony. As the work proceeds, a chord progression diagonally ascends and intersects these horizontal planes. Unlike the pulsing of the horizontal planes, this chord progression slowly and irregularly accelerates its ascent, begins again, ascends and then hovers slowly at the top of the piano before it gradually descends to the pulverizing climax of the work. At the end, the chords appear anew, juxtaposed against one another, now fixed and static as the last planes and ornaments disintegrate. I wrote this work for Dustin Gledhill, who I admired so much growing up and who has since become a friend. The impetus for the work came out of several conversations about Couperin’s keyboard works...”

“La Visionaire,” from the opening movement of Couperin’s twenty-fifth Ordre (1730), represents perhaps the most technically advanced book of *Pièces de Clavecin*. Some of the “Couperin” conversations with Matthew Barnson were based on this ordre. It is a two-part character movement with a processional-like opening, followed by a brisk, improvisatory section ending in E-flat Major. Couperin instructs the performer to play the following movement first when performing the ordre as a set since the tonality is C/c. “Le Rossignol en Amour,” from the fourteenth Ordre (1722), contains a reprise wherein Couperin instructs the performer to “*augmentes par gradations imperceptibles*” (increase by imperceptible gradations). This passage (mm. 23, 19-20) centers around the pitch “e” beginning with a *pincé simple* (Couperin’s mordent) and employs a compositional technique like the “furious climax” section in Barnson as described above (See the example below).

We discover that some composers from the Baroque era are very specific about how their ornaments are to be played, while others are inconsistent and allow for more flexibility. We know from François Couperin’s texts that he was meticulous about ornamentation and did not want the performer to add or subtract from what was written. In his *L’art de toucher le clavecin*, he writes “Just as there is a great distance between grammar and rhetorical delivery, there is also an infinitely great distance between musical notation and artistic performance.”

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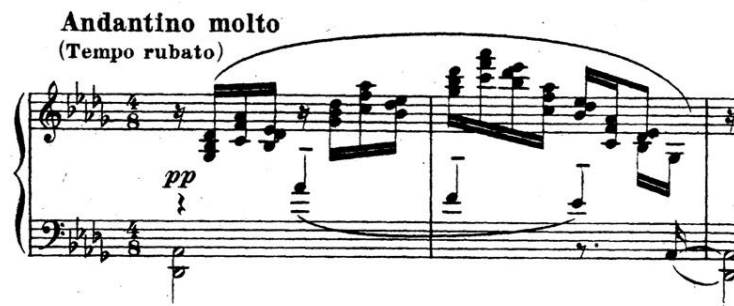
Couperin indicated every ornament in the “double” of the Nightingale, leaving no room for alterations by the performer.

“Le Rossignol en Amour,” mm. 23, 19-20.



The second half of the program presents Debussy’s *Image: Première Serie* and Rameau’s A minor suite from *Nouvelle Suite de Pièces de Clavecin*. Like the composers on the first half of the program, Debussy makes a connection to Rameau by referencing the Sarabande. In Debussy’s *Images, Première Serie*, there are three movements: “Reflets dans l’eau,” “Hommage à Rameau,” and “Movement.” Composed between 1901-1905, Debussy wrote to his publisher Durand, dismissing the first version of “Reflets,” saying he decided to write another version “based on different ideas and in accordance with the most recent discoveries of harmonic chemistry.” For example, the first motif in the left hand, mm. 1-2, is derived from the overtone series produced by the fundamental in beat 1 of m. 1, D-flat and A-flat (see the example below). These ideas are sprinkled throughout all three movements of the set.

“Reflets dans l’eau,” mm. 1-2



“Hommage à Rameau’s” tempo marking Lent et Grave is subtitled with the instructions “dans le style d’une Sarabande mais sans rigueur.” Although Sarabands from the eighteenth century (especially those from France) are typically slow and stately in character, their origin story is far from it. There is a debate amongst scholars as to the birthplace of the Sarabande (Spain or Mesoamerica), but we do have accounts from travelers and poems existing from the late sixteenth century. There is a 1579 reference to the *zarabanda* in Fray Diego Duràn’s *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, who described the dance as “so brisk and saucy it would seem to have been copied from that sarabande which our own people dance with such wriggling and faces and lewd grimaces that it could easily be taken for a dance of the improper women and shameless men.” Spanish *zarabandes* were typically danced with castanets and in groups. They were “passionate and erotic.” If caught participating in this wild dance, the Inquisition gave twenty lashings and expulsion for women, and six years on

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the galleys for men. In the 1630's the Sarabande acquired a more consistent rhythmic feature (see the example below)



While not immediately accessible, Debussy's "Hommage á Rameau" contains some clear rhythmic traits of the French Sarabande. At first glance, the rhythm (indicated above) may present itself as slightly opaque, but it becomes easier to realize when the first four-bar phrase is played at a faster tempo, augmenting the note values of the example above. Debussy displays other similarities to Rameau's "Sarabande" like the larger harmonic structure and sequence of the first section. The opening melodic material in G-sharp minor repeats at the dominant, followed by a short sequence beginning in D major, descending by perfect fifths.

Rameau's A minor suite contains seven movements, including a Gavotte and six doubles. Three of the movements are in A major and the remainder in minor. The suite derives from his second book of harpsichord pieces from 1726-1727, titled *Nouvelle Pièces de Clavecin*. Rameau stated in his "Remarques" of the 1726-27 book that the Allemande, Sarabande and the simple of the Gavotte should be slower than the rest of the pieces, (which should be played "sprightly"). This is especially helpful since some of the dances in the suite, specifically the Courante, contain elements of both the French and the Italian style – the latter usually to be played at faster tempi. Although Rameau was less particular than Couperin about the execution of his ornaments, he maintained strong ideas through his many writings, theoretical and otherwise.

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