

Berklee College of Music

# **The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar**

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Master of Music in Music Production, Technology, and Innovation

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## **Abstract**

This three-movement composition combines live-recorded instruments with digital synthesizers in a manner that reflects the individual sections of a symphonic orchestra. Additionally, the goal of this work is to defy any pre-existing genre, in a manner that draws on various influences to create something entirely unique. The combination of the live rhythm section and the synthesized orchestra allows for more creative sonic possibilities than a pure live recording. Musically, the work combines highly expressive improvisation with various amounts of atonality and quartal harmony. Stylistically, it pulls influence from jazz, contemporary classical, and hip-hop/neo-soul.

## **1. Introduction**

Through this composition, the ultimate goal is to enter the forefront of only recently charted musical territory – a style which synthesizes influences from multiple well-established genres. Additionally, the work is meant to be a deposition of the author's capabilities. This is especially in regards to composition, improvisation, and synthesis of multiple genres in a contemporary fashion. Also, in regards to sound design, mixing, and production.

In a broader sense, this composition is aiming to place the author within the musical sphere of high caliber composers/musicians/producers whom are currently combining these aforementioned genres to create new styles of music.

## 2. State-of-the-Art

All genres are built upon past influences that are synthesized to create them, such as hip hop from R&B/funk/rock<sup>1</sup>, and jazz from ragtime/African folk/classical. The style of music the author is attempting to perpetuate is an untitled genre that still has much to be explored. It is a new field of music that has only begun its existence roughly a decade ago, with composers such as Ambrose Akinmusire and Michael League combining elements of jazz, hip-hop and classical in their music. Optimistically, the author's intention is that this composition will further develop this newfound genre.

It is important to point out that there are many hip-hop songs that use jazz and classical influence<sup>2</sup>, and there are many jazz fusion songs that incorporate hip hop feel.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, it is well established that jazz and classical have been relative and influential on one another since the earliest days of jazz music,<sup>4</sup> and in recent years, there have also been orchestras making renditions of hip-hop music.<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates that combining these genres for the sake of creativity is not an entirely new concept. What *is* new about The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar, however, is that it aims to synthesize *all* of the aforementioned genres into a unique contemporary composition, which does not adhere to the stylistic boundaries of its influences. The synthesis of many musical genres is a movement that has already begun to tread some

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<sup>1</sup> Codrington, Raymond. "In the Beginning: Hip Hop's Early Influences." Oxford African American Studies Center. Oxford University Press, 2006, [https://blog.oup.com/2006/08/in\\_the\\_beginnin/](https://blog.oup.com/2006/08/in_the_beginnin/)

<sup>2</sup> Tribe Called Quest. "Jazz (We've Got)." Zomba Recording LLC, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Glasper. "FTB." The Blue Note Label Group, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Norman, Liesa Karen. "The Respective Influence of Jazz and Classical Music on Each Other, the Evolution of Third Stream and Fusion and the Effects Thereof into the 21st Century." UBC Thesis and Dissertations. University of British Columbia, January 1, 1970, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0099668>

<sup>5</sup> Madden, Darry. "Hip-Hop Meets Classical." Hip-Hop Meets Classical | Berklee College of Music. Berklee College of Music, January 18, 2013., <https://www.berklee.edu/news/hip-hop-meets-classical>

ground, but it is still relatively young and has much room to grow. It is the author's goal to join this movement in music while it is still in the developing stages.

Kurt Rosenwinkle, Snarky Puppy, and Ambrose Akinmusire are the artists/groups that have strongly influenced this composition. All of which have become increasingly complex in their arrangements through the use of large ensembles, the synthesis of multiple different genres, and the emphasis on virtuosity. Kurt Rosenwinkle's *Our Secret World*<sup>6</sup> demonstrates brilliant orchestration for big band that is highly progressive and modern. Rosenwinkle's virtuosity simultaneously identifies the state of masterful guitar playing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Snarky Puppy & Metropole Orkest's album *Sylva*<sup>7</sup> is also a high caliber example of virtuosic soloists, but its reason for inclusion is due to the brilliant orchestration for large jazz ensemble and full symphonic orchestra. Beyond that, *Sylva* demonstrates the fluid synthesis of jazz, hip hop, and classical in a highly energetic and digestible masterpiece of music. Ambrose Akinmusire's *Origami Harvest*<sup>8</sup> is a wildly creative example of the possibilities available to the composer when synthesizing so many different styles. It is also the album that is closest in emotional timbre to The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar. In this album, he utilizes string quartet, jazz rhythm section, synthesizers, spoken word, and highly experimental trumpet solos. All of these influences are the elements that comprise the overall artistic direction in which The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar is striving.

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<sup>6</sup> Kurt Rosenwinkle. "Our Secret World." Wommusic, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Snarky Puppy & Metropole Orkest. "Sylva." Impulse ! A Division of Universal Music France, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Akinmusire, Ambrose. "Origami Harvest." Ambrose Akinmusire. Accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.ambroseakinmusire.com/origami-harvest>

### **3. Description**

As previously mentioned, there are three movements to this composition. Each movement is designed to support the concerto's emotional and timbral contour as a whole. The intention of the first movement, titled "No Sé Ahora," is to be dense, atonal, and driving. The second, "Remorse," airy, spiritual, and resolving; and the third, "Work in Front," heavy, dark, and mesmerizing. As a whole, the intended emotional aspects of the concerto are to be hypnotic, intense, and virtuosic. The tools that have been used to bring this project to life were specifically chosen to support these qualities.

The rhythm section parts for all three movements were recorded in live studio sessions; two in the Ann Kreis Scoring Stage, and one in Jazztone Studios. Ideally, they would have all been recorded in the same space, but it did not turn out that way. Regardless, the intention to record the rhythm section live, before any of the computerized sounds were added, was to ensure that the human aspect of the music would shine through. This turned out to be a very successful endeavor.

The orchestral MIDI parts for all three movements were synthesized in the composer's home studio, via VST plugins such as Serum, FM8, and Massive. They are referred to as "orchestral" MIDI parts because each individual sound is designed to reflect a singular role within a symphonic orchestra. However, these MIDI sounds are not intended to recreate their acoustic counterparts, but rather to accentuate the role that their acoustic counterparts play, while expanding the sound palette. For example, the Serum patch being used for the Violin One part is not designed to sound like a violin, but rather to have a unique sound that can fulfill the role of a first violinist.

The musical content of this composition is wholeheartedly original, utilizing rich harmonic ideas in a fairly repetitive manner. There is a strong emphasis on soloist improvisation, but there is also equally strong emphasis on the development of simple and repetitive melodies. It is arguable that the main theme of the concerto is taking one melodic idea for each movement, and developing/expanding upon that idea via the supporting synthesized MIDI orchestra. In combination with the straight-eighth-note, quasi-neo-soul feel provided by the rhythm section, this will make the concerto more digestible to the average listener. And of course, these aspects combined with the high level of improvisation and orchestration is what gives the composition its appeal. Thus, it is the synthesis of multiple different musical elements, multiple different genres, and creative orchestration and virtuosity that will make *The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar* unique.



#### 4. Innovative Aspects

Here is the definition of innovation: *a new idea, method or device; the introduction of something new.*<sup>9</sup> With respect to this definition, the author does not feel as though there is anything genuinely “new” within this composition. Improvisation, virtuosity, and 12-tone diatonic harmony have been around for at least a thousand years.<sup>10</sup> Atonality has been around for approximately one-hundred-and-fifty years<sup>11</sup>, and the combination of computerized and analog sounds have been around for almost half a century. Lawrence Wood is not the first person to use atonality or quartal harmony, and he is not the first person to combine real and MIDI instruments. Yet, with all that being said, has the reader ever heard a composition that sounds like this one?<sup>12</sup> The point being, none of the individual aspects of this concerto are truly “innovative” by definition, but the artistic expression and intention of the author is what yields a unique and innovative product.

Contrastingly, music does not need to be innovative. This notion is preposterous, as all art is built upon the works of past artists, which can be traced backwards beyond a millennium. Secondly, innovation is an overused term, which typically implies that something new and beneficial is occurring. Finding substantial, quantitative evidence that any artwork is either of these things, would be a difficult and potentially fruitless endeavor. With that being said, music can certainly affect people’s emotions, but a person’s emotional response to music is not

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<sup>9</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “innovation.” Accessed June 22, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/innovation#hl>

<sup>10</sup> Mathiesen, Thomas J. *Apollo's Lyre: Greek Music and Music Theory In Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, <https://catalog.berklee.edu:2592/2027/heb.05556>. EPUB.

<sup>11</sup> Davis, James A. "Philosophical Positivism and American Atonal Music Theory." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 3 (1995): 501-22. Accessed June 22, 2020. doi:10.2307/2710038, <https://catalog.berklee.edu:2109/stable/2710038?seq=1#metadata>

<sup>12</sup> If so, please write to [lawrencewood82@gmail.com](mailto:lawrencewood82@gmail.com) to enlighten the author.

typically due to the song's innovativeness. An author's artistic intention, and the listener's emotional response, are fundamentally the only two factors that should be considered when analyzing any artwork.

## **5. New Skills Acquired**

Areas of experience acquired during the completion of this project include mixing, sound design, producing, engineering, and bandleading in a studio setting. Some of these things were newer than others, some were more difficult than others, but growth was made in all of these areas throughout this process. As a composer, bandleader, and performer, all of these skills will be greatly useful as the author's career advances.

## **6. Challenges Faced**

Initially, The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar was supposed to be recorded entirely live until COVID-19 occurred, so the change to utilize MIDI sounds was a slight setback. This turned out to be an advantage, however, as the addition of the MIDI instruments has proved to expand the sound palette further than initially envisioned. The biggest challenges were due to lack of experience. This is especially in regards to production, sound design, and mixing. A more specific challenge was the actual combining of the computerized sounds with the real instruments. Getting a blend that weaves the two together fluidly proved quite difficult, but accomplished to the best of the author's abilities.

## **7. Future Ramifications**

In congruence with the Concerto, the composer intends to launch two separate artist personas: 'Lawrence Wood' and 'Chordboy.' This is due to the diversity of styles in the author's compositions. The music released by Lawrence Wood will be primarily jazz-based, and largely within the analog domain. The music released by Chordboy will be primarily neo-soul based, and largely within the digital domain. The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar, however, qualifies for both of these personas, and thus will be released under both artist profiles.

The plan is to release this composition on all streaming platforms in the last week of August. A promotional video will be released a few weeks in advance. In addition, two separate EPs will be released earlier in the summer. These will be released under both artist profiles individually, to build a larger audience and catalog for both personas. Furthermore, two additional, completely separate full-length LPs will come out late 2020/early 21, in order to continue retaining and increasing audience attention.

## **8. Conclusions**

Creating this three-movement composition was a nine-month journey that yielded a tremendous amount of growth for the author. Having started this project with practically zero-knowledge of recording, mixing, producing, and sound design; and having learned so much about these areas along the way, feels like quite the accomplishment in retrospect.

The Chordboy Concerto for Guitar synthesizes influences in a wholly unique manner to create an innovative musical artwork. Because of that, and that alone, Lawrence Wood/Chordboy is genuinely proud to be sharing this art with the rest of the world, and is determined to share it with the widest audience possible.

## **Appendix**

### **Deliverables**

- Final copies of the conductor's scores for all three movements (PDF)
- Final bounces for all three completed movements (.wav)
- Pictures/videos that demonstrate the project's development (.jpeg/.mp4)
- PowerPoint to aid the CE presentation (.ppt)
- Final thesis written document (PDF)

### **Resources**

- Five (5) musicians
- Two (2) head engineers
- One (1) photographer
- One (1) mastering engineer
- AKSS studio time for recording sessions #1 and #3
- JazzTone studio time for recording session #2
- Microphones, music stands, cables, printers, cameras, DAW, etc.

# Budget

ITEM	PROPOSED	REAL	ATCUAL (RUNNING)		SUBTOTALS	NOTES
			INITIAL	FINAL		
						*All costs begin accumulation on Dec. 15 2019
<b>MATERIALS (disposables)</b>						
Hard Drives	\$300	\$0	\$0	\$0		
Memory cards (x2)	\$75	\$0	\$0	\$0		
					\$0	
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>						
<b>HARDWARE</b>						
MICS	\$8,400	\$200	\$200	\$200		2 microphones purchased
CONSOLE	\$1,000	\$150	\$150	\$150		1 interface purchased
COMPUTER	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$0	\$0		
CAMERA (rent)	\$108	\$0	\$0	\$0		
<b>SOFTWARE</b>						
PROTOOLS	\$600	\$600	\$0	\$0		
					\$350	
<b>PERSONNEL</b>						
MUSICIANS (30 players x \$50 x 36hrs)	\$54,000	\$4,000	\$0	\$0		5 players x 16 studio hours x \$50 per hour
HEAD ENGINEER (\$75 x 60hrs)	\$4,500	\$2,400	\$0	\$0		2 engineers x 16 studio hours x \$75 per hour
ASSISTANT ENGINEERS (3 x \$25 x 36)	\$2,700	\$0	\$0	\$0		
CAMERAMEN (\$25 x 48hrs)	\$1,200	\$125	\$0	\$0		1 crew x 5 studio hours x \$25 per hour
MASTERING ENGINEER	\$1,000	\$500	\$500	\$500		
					\$500	
<b>STUDIO</b>						
BERKLEE (\$150 x 14 events)	\$2,100	\$300	\$0	\$0		2 sessions, \$150 per session
JAZZTONE (\$150 x 6 events)	\$900	\$150	\$0	\$0		1 session, \$150 per session
					\$0	
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>						
MEALS	\$120	\$0	\$0	\$0		
TRANSPORTATION	\$60	\$20	\$20	\$20		
					\$20	
<b>OVERHEAD</b>						
RENT (\$1000 per month)	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000		\$1000 X 6 months
PHONE (\$100 per month)	\$600	\$600	\$600	\$600		\$100 x 6 months
BASIC NECESITIES (\$300 per month)	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800		\$300 x 6 months
					\$8,400	
<b>FEES</b>						
YOUR FEE (COMPOSER/PRODUCER/CONDUCTOR)	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$0	\$0		
					\$0	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$99,963</b>	<b>\$31,345</b>	<b>\$9,270</b>	<b>\$9,270</b>		

Figure 1 - Budget

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