

Twittering Machine #3 – Redux - The Doomsday Machine

For Orchestra

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1 Introduktion

Twittering Machine #3 is the third composition I have composed which is inspired by Paul Klee's painting *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (Twittering Machine). The composition was completed in 2017 and was rearranged in 2018 for a slightly smaller orchestra (thus the added title "redux"). The piece was chosen in a call for works by a committee of representatives from Jönköping Sinfonia in conjunction with Kungliga Musikaliska Akademien (Swedish Royal Accademy) och Svensk Musik for a performance by the Jönköping Sinfonietta 27 April, 2018.

Twittering Machine #3 is inspired by Paul Klee's *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* from 1922. The painting has been described as a visual representation of the mechanics of sound and I wanted to recreate what it might sound like. The painting was declared "degenerate art" by Hitler in 1933. It now resides at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The painting is on MoMA's homepage described as,

Upon closer inspection, however, an uneasy sensation of looming menace begins to manifest itself. Composed of a wiry, nervous line, these creatures bear a resemblance to birds only in their beaks and feathered silhouettes; they appear closer to deformations of nature. The hand crank conjures up the idea that this "machine" is a music box, where the birds function as bait to lure victims to the pit over which the machine hovers. We can imagine the fiendish cacophony made by the shrieking birds, their legs drawn thin and taut as they strain against the machine to which they are fused.

(MoMA 1999)

2 Background

The Three Twittering Machines, a short overview:

I have written three compositions based on the Klee painting *Die Zwitscher-Maschine*. The three “Machines” are varied in some aspects, such as, harmony, melodies and instrumentation but are very similar in form. It is as if the machine is cranked up and sounding slightly different several years apart. Conceptually the sound may vary slightly because the mechanics has deteriorated or maybe have been repaired or because of mechanical errors. In the third twittering machine I was imagining a giant doomsday bird machine being cranked up creating a cacophony of sound. The first two twittering machines are free in tempo at sections, but the third twittering machine is strict in tempo like a military machine.

Twittering Machine #1 was composed in 2004 as a quartet for violin, guitar, contrabass and piano and was premiered by the ensemble reSurge at Fylkingen, Stockholm, February 20, 2004 by Lisa Ullén: piano, Lars Bröndum: guitar, Jonna Sandell: violin, Ulf Åkerhielm: contrabass. It was also recorded at SAMI recording studio 2014

The following is from a review of Twittering Machine #1 is by musicologist Stephen Ellis,

The piece is a knockout--jittery violin (the perfect instrument to reproduce the trembling of Klee's birds, for their bodies could be frayed violin strings!), desperate soft hammering, menacing double bass as if from the depths (which are eluded to by the fiery pit under the mechanical birds and which will consume everything once that unstable crank it turned and the birds' bodies fall into it), and so on. Nicely done as musical metaphor and intriguing even divorced from the visual connection (Ellis 2012)

Twittering Machine #2 was written for, and premiered by The Moscow Quartet, October 25, 2014 in Moscow, Russia, at the Moskovskiy Dom Kompozitorov. It was performed by Alexander Tsygankov, domra, Valery Zazhigin, balalajka och Larisa Gotlib (piano) and Inna Shevchenko (gusli). The Twittering Machine #2 also has been arranged for flute, marimba, harpsichord & piano.

Twittering Machine #3 was written for a call for works by FST in 2017. It was chosen by a committee in a call for works in 2018 for performance by the Jönköping Sinfonietta in Jönköping Presentationsdag, April 27, 2018. The event is organized by the Jönköping Sinfonietta and FST - Föreningen Svenska Tonsättare (The Swedish Composer's Union).

Twittering Machine #3 is subtitled “Doomsday Machine” and is dedicated to Alfred Hitchcock as a reference to his classic movie *Birds* (1963). The composition is similar to the movie - a menacing and foreboding piece. There is also a subtle reference to Donald Trump's uncontrolled Tweets that very likely could cause the doomsday. It is scored for Flute, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet in Bb, Bass Clarinet, Contrabassoon, Horn in F 1, Horn in F 2, Trumpet in C 1, Trumpet in C 2, Trombone 1, Tuba, Piano, violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Contrabass.

Musical influences and inspiration for this work can be found in Oliver Messiaen's bird calls found in pieces like *Chronochromie* (1960) for orchestra and György Ligeti's cluster techniques in works such as *Athmospheres* (1961) and *Chamber Concerto Music for 13 Instruments* (1969/70). I also use indeterminate ideas pioneered by John Cage and Pierre Boulez.

3 Idea, method and analysis

When I compose I often use allegories, such as objects, words or concepts as the basis for the artistic idea in my compositions. These ideas or concepts are interpreted differently but based on form and content, both at macro and micro level. Sometimes it can be notated with precision, following strict systems and in other cases it may be improvisations. I often also work with interaction between acoustic and electronic instruments and my music explores the boundary between notated music and improvisation.

In this piece I have employed methods that are based on compositional methods such as tone clusters, cyclical processes, ostinatos and indeterminacy, but also traditional form elements and variation techniques. In the piece I have used methods of aleatory (chance) combined with strict notated passages. For example, in repeated figures the players freely change the order of notes continuously, and accentuate notes in free irregular patterns and in groups without initial note sets the pitches are indefinite pitches (e.g. violin m. 44). Wind instruments may insert rests on repeated patterns if needed. The pitch structures are based on clusters of varying size and density. The clusters are presented both linearly (e.g. mm. 1 in the strings) and vertically (e.g. mm. 19 in the piano). Above the clustered harmonies, fragmented bird like melodies are spun (mm. 12-13). The melodies reoccur and are varied throughout the piece.

The form is made from three elements. The first element is based on fast moving and fluid ostinatos, bird trills sometimes embellished by fragmented melodies (ms 1-17),



Figure 1 Fluid ostinatos

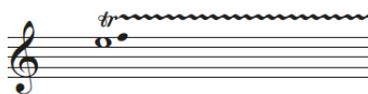


Figure 2 Bird trills



Figure 3 Fragmented bird melodies

The second element is based on static syncopated block chords (e.g. mm. 18-26).

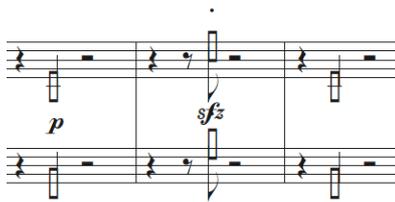


Figure 4 Syncopated clustered block chords

The fluid sections and the block chord sections are connected with solo scalar runs.



Figure 5 A solo scale run

The third element is based on arpeggios of indefinite pitch (e.g. ms 44-55) accompanying bird melodies. This is duplicated throughout the orchestra.



Figure 6 Arpeggios of indeterminate pitch and bird melodies

The arpeggios are gradually “taken over” by the fluid ostinatos in ms 52. The piece is closed by a scalar run that leads into the return of the static cluster section.

The form can be divided in a A-B-A-C-B form.

A (ms 1-17) **B** (ms 18-26) **A**¹ (27-42) **C** (43-55) **B**² (56-63)

4 Conclusion and development

Twittering Machine #3 is a development of previous versions and has in this version been transformed from a delicate chamber piece version to a brutal orchestral variant. The piece employs methods that are based on methods of tone clusters and indeterminacy but also employs traditional form elements and variation techniques. The piece is a continuously developing compositional idea and it will probably be followed by more variants. The next one that is planned is an electroacoustic version for analog synthesizers.

5 References

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