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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

SIXTEEN SOUND BITES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL SATISFACTION OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

MUSIC

by

CHARLES WEAVER WILMOTH

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE:

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2010

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University of California, San Diego

2010

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

SIXTEEN SOUND BITES

by

CHARLES WEAVER WILMOTH

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO, 2010

PROFESSOR ROGER REYNOLDS, CHAIR

This paper in an investigation of *Sixteen Sound Bites,* a 40-minute piece in sixteen parts that was completed in late 2008. The paper explores the relationship of the piece to other contemporary classical music, as well as its relationship to politics and the media. The paper concludes with a comparison of *Sixteen Sound Bites* to pieces the composer has written since 2008, focusing specifically on *Palinoscopy* (2009) for singing guitarist.

In 2007, I began composing *Sixteen Sound Bites*, a 40-minute collection of sixteen movements for various groupings of ten instruments. In the same year I began working with Professor Harvey Sollberger on the ways collections of smaller movements (such as Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*) achieve overall unity, with the goal of arriving at overaching ideas about aesthetics and formal structure that might help unify the growing collection of pieces I was writing.

This dissertation is somewhat unusual in UCSD's music composition program, in that the defense is occurring almost two years after the piece was written and recorded in 2008. I began writing this essay in early 2009 but wrote the majority of it in 2010, two years after composing the piece. The perspective I have gained as a result of having some distance from the music has been valuable, particularly in that I am able to compare the *Sound Bites* to pieces I have written since then, but it has also been difficult, in that I have had to try to remember what I was thinking when composing the piece two years ago. As will become clear in the last section of this paper, in which I compare *Sixteen Sound Bites* to a later piece, the aesthetic positions I had when composing the *Sound Bites* have since changed. This is particularly true regarding the issues of whether the music should be generous, and whether it should be interesting.

My use of terms like "generous" or "interesting" here is admittedly vague, and of course the importance of these qualities will vary from listener to listener, or from context to context.

Generosity, to me, has something to do with the quantity of materials available to take in. As a child I walked through a large room in a greenhouse that was designed to simulate the ecosystem of a rain forest. It strikes me now that there was

no parallel room designed to simulate the ecosystem of a desert. Such a room would be strange for a greenhouse to have, obviously, but I also suspect that most visitors would not want to visit it, since there would be so *few* things to actually observe. As an aesthetic experience, the greenhouse environment is generous; the desert environment is not.

As an adult, I find the desert very interesting, just as I find Alvin Lucier's music ungenerous but interesting, so there is not a perfect correlation between the two terms. But the paucity of variegated musical elements in *Sixteen Sound Bites* is not designed to be a sensuous exploration of limited musical materials, and I think one very obvious way to make an aesthetic experience more interesting is to variegate it.

Much of *Sixteen Sound Bites* is neither generous nor conventionally interesting. There are many reasons why this is the case, from the political ideas that shape the work to the idea that, paradoxically, there may be something interesting about *not being interesting*—that there can be something intriguing, in a meta-musical way, about listening to a passage that repeats similar iterations over and over, purely to see how many times the composer will repeat them (and to consider *why* he or she might do that). As we shall see, my ideas on these issues have changed: they are still important to me, but I have different positions about how to pursue them.

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I compose classical music, but my sensibilities have been shaped primarily by rock music and by my experiences, as a white American from a "red" state, with religion and politics. I have always been attracted to music that is defiant and that is oblivious to its potential shortcomings; rock music, religious leaders and demagogic politicians all often have these features. I aim to make music that, metaphorically, has

"tunnel vision." This approach stands in contrast to that of most composers in the academy.

Sixty years ago, total serialism asserted, in a way, that music could encompass everything, or, at least, *anything*—it was a music in which any pitch, octave transposition, rhythm or level of amplitude could reasonably follow from any other, depending upon the organization of the piece. A short note played high on the piano at a fortissimo dynamic might easily be followed by a long note in the low register at a pianissimo dynamic, which might be followed by a loud cluster in the middle register. Most music guides the listener from moment to moment with a series of culturally instilled cues that limit the ranges of local possibility. Total serialism attempted to replace these cultural cues with an entirely different, and much less audible, system of local-level cues that made it much more difficult for the listener to guess what sound might come next.[1]

There were still a number of obscured sight lines, such as the limits of the instruments the composer chose and the limitations of the Western notational system. A less obvious, but more important, limiting factor was that certain kinds of musical ideas could *only* be realized by using cultural cues to guide the music from moment to moment. But, to generalize, the effect of total serialism was to create a wide scope for local-level musical interaction so that it might be possible (or even expected) for musical characteristics such as pitch, register, and volume to vary quite widely from moment to moment.

While total serialism is no longer a particularly popular musical strategy in modern classical music, its influence is still powerfully felt. Classical composers in the

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[1]This is not to say that total serialism existed in a cultural vacuum, only that progressions of *small* ideas in the music were not *audibly* guided by any musical tradition.

U.S. are mostly now creatures of the academy, and their music, in my opinion, often sounds like it: respectful, dialogical, quick to consider an opposing view. That is, much classical music today sounds as though it wants to engage with a wide variety of possibilities, as if anything might sound "possible" at the most local level of the music. Most of my favorite music engages with the world at large, whereas much modern classical music sounds to me as if it is too concerned with its *internal* dialogue to hear a world in which most of the loudest talking is done by people or groups that have *no real interest* in dialogue. In short, I think most classical music is talking to itself.

As a composer who has himself spent many years in the academy, my music cannot help but to sometimes participate in this internal dialogue. But what I (mostly) want is a music that is unreasonable, that does not listen, and that (to go a step further) actively impedes reasoned debate. I want a music that is monomaniacal, implacable. I want to make music that engages—even in a critical or negative way— with a world I see as fundamentally imbalanced and unfair, and in which we are constantly bombarded by messages that are repetitive and false.

In *Sixteen Sound Bites*, these goals were manifested in two key ways: narrowing the field of vision on the one hand, and exploding it on the other. On a local level, I wanted most of *Sixteen Sound Bites* to focus on a small field of possibility. From the very beginning, I wanted to *rule out* possibilities rather than *admitting* them. So, for example, in the beginning of the first movement, all seven instruments (except the percussion, which plays only once per beat) play quasi-arpeggiations in which the beat is divided into six parts. Also, all the musicians play very loudly, without dynamic variation. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1: BEGINNING OF MOVEMENT 1 FROM *SIXTEEN SOUND BITES*

For the first several minutes, these conditions limit the scope of the movement. Because of these limitations, the movement is not dialogical: the listener is not asked to participate in a conversation, but rather is challenged to figure out what is going on. This challenge is difficult to meet because of the density of the texture and because changes to the material come slowly and subtly, sometimes so subtly that it is hard for the listener to tell whether the changes she thinks she heard actually happened.

The third movement, for string trio, also features a small field of musical possibility. First, the movement is defined by a strong pulse, which limits its potential for rhythmic variation. Second, the three players quickly converge around repeating figures that begin every beat; the form of the repeating passage takes shape gradually. (See Figure 2.)

Until an abrupt grand pause, the notation of each beat after measure 12 is an exact repetition of the one that came before it, so the range of musical change is very

FIGURE 2: CONVERGENCE IN MOVEMENT 3

limited. The three instruments play different divisions of the beat (the violin plays triplets, the viola plays sixteenth notes and the cello plays quintuplets), so some musical change may be audible as the players struggle to be consistent with each other. Also, when I listen to this movement, I experience some change on a psychological level: I feel as though I'm hearing slight changes that, even if they are audible, were not directly intended.

At a local level, then, *Sixteen Sound Bites* is shaped by what it restricts. At a global level, however, the piece is shaped by what it permits. I thought here of an argument as presented by the intelligent design theorist/"theorist" William Dembski:

Premise 1: E has occurred.
Premise 2: E is specified.
Premise 3: If E is due to chance, then E has small probability.
Premise 4: Specified events of small probability do not occur by chance.
Premise 5: E is not due to regularity.
Premise 6: E is due either to a regularity, chance or design.
Conclusion: E is due to design.

Dembski then assures the reader that "The validity of the preceding argument becomes clear once we recast it in symbolic form."[2]

So here it is in symbolic form, in which, Dembski notes, "E is a fixed event, and... in Premise 4, X is a bound variable ranging over events."

Premise 1: oc(E)
Premise 2: sp(E)
Premise 3: ch(E) → SP(E)
Premise 4: ∀ X[oc(X) & sp(X) & SP(X) → ch(X)]
Premise 5: ~reg(E)
Premise 6: reg(E) v ch(E) v des(E)
Conclusion: des(E).

oc(E) means "E has occurred." sp(E) means "E is specified." ch(E) means "E is due to chance." SP(E) means "E has small probability." reg(E) means "E is due to a regularity." des(E) means "E is due to design."

Dembski's main point is technically correct—his argument is, strictly speaking, *logically* valid, in that the conclusion follows from the premises. However, the logical validity of the argument has nothing to do with whether the argument is persuasive, which would depend upon one's acceptance or rejection of its often-dubious premises.

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[2]All quotes from Dembski and Mark Perakh may be found in Perakh 2001.

Furthermore, the symbols contribute nothing to our understanding. They seem to exist only to make Dembski appear authoritative by presenting his argument in a way that is not, at least at first glance, easy to understand. Mathematician Mark Perakh calls this technique "mathematism," by which he means attempting to make bad arguments more convincing by applying a veneer of scholarliness. Dembski's argument is not supposed to persuade you in the usual way. Instead, he is using a flurry of symbols to convince the non-specialist reader to trust him.

What Dembski does here is not an accident or an isolated incident. It seems to be specifically done to make it impossible to evaluate competing claims about certain issues. He and others have flooded the market with arguments that are inconvenient to refute and that appear scholarly and complex. The media have not been helpful in filtering them, so in the end there appear to be two science communities. Both publish complicated arguments and members of both have PhDs, so choosing which to believe can be a cultural or political choice rather than one rooted in the scientific process. This strategy is used not only by intelligent design theorists, but by global-warming deniers (oil companies have been employing this strategy for decades) and others.

I did not want to provide the listener with a clear path through *Sixteen Sound Bites.* In some cases I wanted the sounds to be organized so densely that it was difficult to fully grasp the effect they created; in some cases I wanted there to be repeated patterns that seemed to be almost trivial, as if I were flooding the intellectual culture with platitudes or falsehoods. (This was a tricky proposition, since I also had to balance that goal against my own taste. I do not want the reader to think that I did not care what the materials were, or in what order they appeared, only that they were

intentionally difficult for the listener to prioritize. So I suppose what I was looking for was *stylized* triviality, not *actual* triviality.)

Sixteen Sound Bites is thus organized so that the first several movements all feature busy, dense textures and appear in quick succession, with only the briefest of pauses between them. One might think of these first several movements as a burst of information that comes so densely and quickly because it is *trying* to confuse the listener. The listener is presented with more than he or she can process. Like Dembski's intelligent design formulation, the beginning of *Sixteen Sound Bites* is not meant to convince the listener through the use of dialogue and logic, but with a blizzard of data.

This pattern changes with the sixth movement, which is decidedly less frantic than most portions of the first five. The flute and clarinet both play very loudly throughout, but these parts form a quasi-ostinato that, despite its loudness, is not intended to be at the forefront of the listener's mind. Instead, the movement feels to me as though it were a piano solo during which the flute and clarinet blare obliviously in the background. (See Figure 3.)

This sixth movement, which still features some loud playing but which is not as dense or fast-moving as the movements before it, sets the stage for the next several movements in the collection. The seventh movement ends with a repetitive viola-cello duet that at first seems incidental but eventually takes over the movement. Although this is far from the first repetitive element in *Sixteen Sound Bites*, it is notable for how little actually *happens.* Other than a scratching sound on the violin

FIGURE 3: REPRESENTATIVE TEXTURE FROM MOVEMENT 6

that gradually creeps in, and some rather arbitrary-sounding changes in the dynamic level and number of beats for each viola note, the movement remains static for about two minutes, fixating on materials that are not especially interesting. (See Figure 4.)

When composing, I thought of an improvisation workshop led by Bhob Rainey that I attended at UCSD in 2005. Rainey had improvisers create a piece that had three sections. In the middle one, the improvisers were to play in a manner that sounded "incidental." Rainey's point was that, in trying to approach each moment of an improvisation with a high level of engagement, players tended to neglect the improvisation's overall shape.
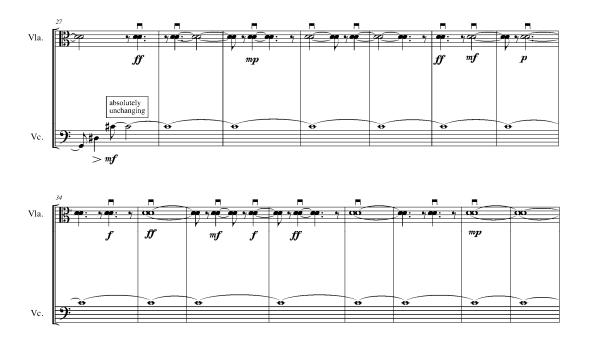
FIGURE 4: EXCERPT FROM END OF MOVEMENT 7

This was a revelation for me, not because overall shapeliness is at the top of my list of concerns, but because it helped me get comfortable creating musical moments that are not conventionally interesting. This led me to take opportunities that I previously might have bypassed. My goal for the middle of *Sixteen Sound Bites* was to transition from the tightly concentrated first five movements into a group of movements that tried less hard to be gripping and that often sounded as though the music was proceeding on autopilot.

Experientially, the seventh movement is where I wanted this transition to become clear, but the sixth movement also plays a role, because its materials are repeated in other movements. The eighth is essentially a repetition of the sixth, with some rather minor changes near the end, and the eleventh movement is a variation of both movements six and eight. These repetitions of very similar materials in two

different movements are a stylized insult to the listener's intelligence—there is nothing the listener could not have "understood" the first time, and no traditional formal reason why a repeat would have been necessary.

The ninth and tenth movements are more conventional with regard to their relationships to the overall form of the *Sound Bites*, but I included them between the eighth and eleventh because I felt that the repetitions of the sixth, eighth and eleventh movements needed to be set up properly. Placing the three of them right next to each other would have been similar to telling a series of jokes that were in fact only a series of punchlines.

The ninth and tenth movements give the impression that the strange glitch that resulted from repetitions of essentially the same movement has been fixed. The ninth movement is small and playful, and the tenth movement appears to elaborate on the ideas of the ninth. The tenth movement's sharp juxtapositions and use of full instrumental resources suggest that the *Sound Bites* have moved on, and that the similarity between movements six and eight was a singular occurrence, not to be repeated. So I wanted the appearance of the eleventh movement to be somewhat exasperating. Or, more specifically, I wanted the appearance of the eleventh movement to be exasperating in a stylized way.

There is gallows humor, or perhaps (depending on one's perspective) sadism, in having slight variations of the same movement appear three times in the context of a work that is an endurance test in any case. I wanted to enter into a state of stylized antagonism with the listener, to test the listener's patience in a stylized way. (I use the word "stylized" here because my goal was not really to antagonize anyone, but to

reach the sort of listener who finds the type of provocation that might be associated with antagonism interesting.)

The twelfth movement begins with roughly the same materials as the sixth, eighth and eleventh, but with some changes. First, the flute and clarinet do not launch directly into their quasi-ostinato (the movement begins with a "head-fake" before launching into what appears to be yet another variation on the earlier movements— see Figure 5). Second, after the quasi-ostinato and the piano do enter, they're quickly surrounded by swarms of other instruments, which buzz in the background at first, gradually becoming louder until they overwhelm the material repeated from earlier movements. The movement ends with overlapping long tones that clear away the earlier materials, resulting in a blank slate.

I wanted to enhance this *tabula rasa* quality with the thirteenth movement, which features eight musicians playing cowbells. When I teach ear training classes, it is sometimes useful to help students to remove a harmonic context from their heads before moving on to a new one. The way I usually do that is to bang away at atonal clusters for a few seconds. This might be an annoying thing to do, but it helps students stay alert and primes them to hear something new. By having eight musicians bang on cowbells, I was hoping to accomplish the same thing.

In general, the last three movements are similar to the first five in terms of their assertiveness and decisiveness. The only exception is the end of the last movement, in which the flutist is instructed to be "dumb and happy." Again, there is a connection to Rainey's comment about music that sounds "incidental." After several movements that sound (or intended to sound) as if I were very much in control, I

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FIGURE 5: "HEAD-FAKE" AT BEGINNING OF MOVEMENT 12

wanted to end *Sixteen Sound Bites* with a passage that sounded as if I had

relinquished control again—as if I had taken my hands off the wheel.

    I want my music to be machine-like, but again, I want it to be critical. There

certainly is precedent for modern classical music that sounds machine-like; my music

is hardly unique in that regard. For example, minimalism has always seemed to me to

be engaging with the role of technology in our lives. The performers often *sound*

robotic, and composers' use of process in much early minimalism parallels the

creation of a machine, in which an inventor makes something which is then left to run on its own.

Minimalism's engagement with technology has often seemed to me to be uncritical, however. For example, the machine in John Adams' piece *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* is sleek, glistening and reliable, and the piece has a bright, un-cynical quality that brings to mind a new bit of technological ephemera being introduced at the World's Fair.

I am not a Luddite, but I am not convinced that the last fifty years of technological development has, overall, been helpful. It has widened the gap between rich and poor, it has hurt local cultures, and (perhaps less importantly) it has divided our attention spans with constant interruptions that are probably of dubious overall utility but that are difficult to avoid because of their ubiquity. We develop dependencies on technology that may, in some cases, be little better than dependencies on drugs, and we increasingly depend on huge corporations such as Microsoft, Google and Yahoo! to get our "fixes."[3]

I want my music to reflect these negative qualities of technology—the times during which technology is used to flood our experience with messages we don't need (advertising, spam, political slogans), the times when technology otherwise prevents us from really seeing the outside world, the times when we become dependent on it, the times when it stops working and leaves us helpless.

The indication "dumb and happy" in the flute part at the end of the sixteenth movement provides a clue about one possible interpretation of the ending—one might

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[3] The computer I use to type this document *does* make formatting easy, but truly concentrating on it would be much simpler if I did not feel the need to check my email every five minutes. One of the characters in Kurt Vonnegut's dystopian short story "Harrison Bergeron" has a radio fitted in his ear that blares loud noises every twenty seconds, in order to keep him from having thoughts that are too complex. Whenever I sit in front of anything that has a screen, I think I know how that feels.

imagine someone pursuing a mindless, repetitive task. But the repetitions of this passage suggest another possibility: that of a machine that keeps running even though it is no longer fulfilling its intended function. One might think of the ending as being a CD skipping. The work ends abruptly, with the pianist slamming the lid of the piano back against its body, creating a violently percussive sound that leaves behind the reverberation of the piano strings. The "off" switch has been flicked; the machine stops moving.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

After I wrote *Sixteen Sound Bites*, I composed a seven-movement piece for a singing guitarist called *Palinoscopy*, which will be performed by Matthew Hough in New York. The text of *Palinoscopy* came from interviews of Sarah Palin following the 2008 presidential election.

Musically, it did not seem right for *Palinoscopy* to be as constricted as many of the *Sixteen Sound Bites*. I did not want my usual style to remove the character from Palin's highly original diction, and I was very concerned throughout that the music be responsive to her words. In one case, I attempted to copy the rhythms of her speech as precisely as I (and the Western notational system) could. And more broadly, Palin's words and speech patterns made it inappropriate to use as many regular rhythms as I did in the *Sound Bites*. I viewed my role in *Palinoscopy* as being similar to that of a film scorer or a dance accompanist. I still had a fair amount of freedom, but for the most part I was reacting to the possibilities offered by the text.

The problem of what to admit and what to reject has recently been central for me. For *Sixteen Sound Bites* I wanted to err on the side of rejection—to include too few materials rather than too many. For *Palinoscopy* I wanted to lean more to the side

of admission, in order to make myself as responsive as possible to Palin's oratory. I used a number of major chords, which appear rarely or never in *Sixteen Sound Bites*, and while I still employed many repetitions, I was more flexible with the way I used them.

Throughout this paper I have invoked the issue of stylization. I am interested in music that is exasperating, "uninteresting," and deliberately confusing. But in what sense? I do not literally want the audience to be bored, at least not throughout the entire experience, and I do not really want the audience to be exasperated (although I am sure some portion of the people who have heard my music have felt exasperated by it, and that does not keep me up nights).

In an interview I recently said that listening to Iannis Xenakis' music was like being shaken by the shoulders by a maniac. The interviewer (a poet who is not deeply familiar with contemporary classical music) responded that this sounded unpleasant. True, but films by David Lynch or novels by Oe or Dostoyevsky surely also sound unpleasant when they are described; nevertheless, they are still great works of art. We want to watch them or read them because, on some level, they are *not* unpleasant. We (or, at any rate, *I*) still want to watch them or read them because, somehow, we are attracted to them.

Since the completion of *Sixteen Sound Bites*, then, I have been wrestling with the problem of how best to stylize my own music. I want it to be obsessive, oblivious, single-minded—but *in what way*? When I composed *Sixteen Sound Bites*, I felt that my music could not be those things and also be generous, but now I am beginning to reconsider.

Take the third movement from the *Sound Bites*, for example—there are some jerky repetitions, and then the three instruments settle into established patterns. They essentially stay there until the movement is over. Not much actually *happens*; there are very few different musical events. Or let us take, for example, the ending of the seventh movement from the *Sound Bites*, which I describe in some detail above. This ending is extremely repetitive and, on the surface, not very interesting; it is simply the same minor ninth interval iterated for a relatively long time with different durations and levels of loudness.

In a sense, there is no real context for this kind of repetition (or at least this is how I think about it), in that the repetitions aren't surrounded by bits of material that are obviously generous or conventionally interesting. In the case of *Sixteen Sound Bites*, an absence of context is precisely the point—sound bites themselves, and all the arbitrary juxtapositions of television, are characterized by a deadening absence of context.

My most recent pieces still have the jagged rhythms and obsessive repetitions that my music has had for the past several years, but I want the effect to be richer and more unpredictable. If I do something deliberately "uninteresting" now, I want to provide a context for it. Now when I use the kinds of jagged repetitions I used before, I try to vary them more richly, using (for example) grace notes and a more freewheeling approach to pitch. If I want to create a section that sounds static, or obstinate, I can make it exceptionally so by making that obstinacy surprising, and I can create that sense of surprise by having it follow a section that is *not* so static, or obstinate. (I can create awareness of "x" by contrasting it with a preceding "not x.")

In other words, I want to dimensionalize the aesthetic I have already developed by being less single-minded in my approach. This might seem to involve a retreat into more conventional territory, but I actually think this change can allow my music to become more radical, by heightening the intensity of the music's most monomaniacally repetitive elements and by giving the listener clearer reasons to pay attention to what I'm doing.

APPENDIX: BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF EACH SOUND BITE

1. The first movement has two levels. On one level, it is typical of much of my music: it features lots of repetition and jarring sectional changes. On another level, however, I wanted the first several minutes to resemble an optical illusion—the quasi-arpeggiations throughout are so quick, and the changes to them so subtle, that it is difficult to tell what has changed. At the same time, there is so much activity that it is hard to tell whether anything has changed at all. The listener therefore wonders whether the changes she "heard" are actually present in the music.

2. The second movement features a rock bass drum (or a tom) thumping regularly throughout, which would seem to be an unlikely accompaniment for violin, clarinet, and temple blocks, all of which seem too weak to keep up with it. I wanted the violin and clarinet to fight against the bass drum, both against its rhythmic regularity and against its timbral girth.

3. The third movement aims to create a different sort of "optical illusion" than the first. Here, three string instruments play figures that quickly converge into repeating patterns that last until the end of the movement. The repetitions and the differing rhythmic orientations of each instrument hopefully create the *impression* that changes are occurring even though there are none written in the score.

4. Formally, the fourth movement similar to the movie *Psycho,* where the plot of the first third of the movie—in which a secretary steals money from her boss and then leaves town—turns out to be a red herring, as the secretary's story turns out to be mostly irrelevant. The flute-clarinet duet at the beginning is soon overwhelmed by a seemingly unrelated idea in which four instruments become fixated on their own quasi-arpeggiated worlds.

5. In the fifth movement, the first for all ten instruments, one group of instruments (at the beginning of the movement, it's the second clarinet, second percussion and second violin) struggles to emerge from beneath the crushing weight of loud downbeats (performed by many instruments, but most notably the piano and first percussion). In rehearsal, I told the struggling trio to play crescendos as if they were fighting against some external force holding them down. So the trio's opening dynamic of mezzo-piano should not suggest that they play with a lack of intensity. Instead, it as if they play with the same intensity throughout, but move closer to the listener as they make their way through their phrases.

6. 8. and 11. The most important feature of these three movements is that they do not listen. The flute and clarinet play together but are oblivious to the percussion and piano, and the percussion and piano are (mostly) oblivious to all the other instruments. These movements are non-dialogical; everyone talks and no one hears.

7. As with the fourth movement, the seventh establishes a musical world that is soon revealed not to be the key part of the "plot." Also similar to the fourth movement, the musical material that becomes dominant (in this case, a duet in which the viola repeats the same doublestop over a cello drone) is very repetitive. There is a young

Irish composer named Andrew Hamilton who writes extremely long and humorously repetitive pieces, and upon hearing one of his works, a friend once remarked that his first impression about how long the piece was. After the first few minutes, however, my friend gradually became more interested in the music—not in the materials themselves, which were about the same as the ones he heard while becoming angry, but in Hamilton's audacity at repeating them for such a long time. That is similar to what I was trying to do here, albeit on a much smaller scale.

9. The ninth movement also contains non-interaction—the clarinet and violin act as a team, but the percussion plays in a separate pattern. This movement has been described to me as "cute," and it surely is more playful than and not as overtly aggressive as some of *Sixteen Sound Bites*' other movements. This is not a very precise analogy, but perhaps the movement is "cute" for about the same reasons that the beginnings of horror movies often feature adorable children or dolls. Their being adorable offsets the knowledge that what happens later in the movie will be not so adorable, and it does this in a particularly striking way.

10. The tenth movement uses both of the main musical elements from the ninth. One of my favorite moments in the ninth movement comes about a third of the way through, where the flute and first clarinet play a septuplet figure that they "hand off" to the second clarinet and second violin, like relay runners passing batons. In rehearsal, we worked hard at making this moment work, and the process was similar to what I imagine relay runners go through. I wanted there to be a striking juxtaposition between the sound of the first pair of players and the sound of the second pair, but I wanted this juxtaposition to exist only in the timbral qualities and spatial locations of the instruments, not in their playing styles.

One might think that, to achieve this result, the best thing would be for the first pair to play absolutely consistently until the "handoff," but this turns out to not be the case. As with relay running, a smooth, consistent-looking transition requires actions that are not absolutely consistent. For example, a runner seeking to pass a baton will have to take extra care—more than if she is simply running—to make sure her hands are at the right position. In this musical "handoff," it turned out that the first pair of instruments had to play a slight crescendo in the two beats before the "handoff" in order to make the moment seamless.

12. The twelfth movement uses many of the same materials as the sixth, eighth and eleventh, but here the original non-interactive texture is washed away by two other groups of instruments (violin, viola and cello and clarinet and violin). The movement ends with a shifting soundmass texture that I included for two reasons. First, it's enjoyable to listen to on a purely visceral level, and I like the harmonic movement in the soundmass texture. The focus on repetition within much of the rest of the *Sound Bites* made this type of harmonic movement a low priority elsewhere. And second, it either intensifies or washes away the absurdity of the previous fifteen or so minutes of the collection, in which very similar materials appear in four different movements. Whether this movement intensifies or washes away is probably a matter of perspective, and is not nearly as important as the fact that the end of this movement marks a dramatic change in the course of the collection as a whole.

13. The thirteenth movement, in which the eight non-percussionists play cowbell, may be the most iconic of the collection, and perhaps it is symbolic of the collection of a whole. With eight people playing the same rather limited instrument, the range of possibility in the movement is very small. The cowbell players are limited to two types of playing—loud banging and quiet tapping. No other details of the instrument are explored. The loudness, simplicity and timbral distinctiveness of the movement cleanse the listener's palate.

14. The fourteenth movement begins with a whining, glissando-heavy duet for flute and clarinet. Near the end of the movement, the first clarinet and first percussion enter with materials that are completely unrelated. This juxtaposition grew out of my interest in contemporary improvised music, which often features juxtapositions of unrelated materials, often passing by one another like travelers going opposite directions on an airport walkway.

15. I wanted this short movement for string trio to be small but tightly concentrated. It is characterized by an insistent viola doublestop and by a violin line that is so fast that it almost seems robotic; these two layers of the texture seem nearly oblivious to one another.

16. The final movement of *Sixteen Sound Bites* has three parts. The first explores jerky quasi-arpeggiations similar to those in the first of the sixteen movements. This texture is then supplanted by a second section, in which blaring, long, high notes in the flute and clarinets contrast with insistent repeating figures in the piano and first percussion. In this texture I wanted there to be an imbalance between what the listener might expect the flute and clarinets to play and what they actually do play. The first percussion shuffles amiably in the background, and one might expect the flute and clarinets to do the same, but they keep charging forward, undeterred. In the third section the shuffling percussion continues, but now the flute and clarinet join in, with the flute's part containing the notation "dumb and happy." I wanted both instruments to seem to be oblivious to the listener, to do little to keep the listener entertained; instead, they follow a routine, like an aging farmer pushing a wheelbarrow down a deeply grooved path.

WORK CITED

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