

Carl Vine: *Percussion Concerto* (1987)

J. B. Smith: *Coping Strategy II: Redundant Accumulation* (2005)

Edmund J. Campion: *Losing Touch* (1994/1997)

Daniel Lentz: *You Can't See the Forest . . . Music* (1971)

NOTES

Percussion Concerto was commissioned by, and is dedicated to, Graeme Leak who gave its first performance at the University of Western Australia in September 1987. It was devised in two versions: one for soloist with tape accompaniment and the other accompanied by orchestra. Although the tape version "mimics" the orchestral accompaniment, no attempt was made to imitate orchestral tone colours, and it stands as a work in its own right.

The solo part is designed to highlight the virtuosic dexterity required for performance on multiple percussion instruments as well as to demonstrate most of the sonorities available to a solo percussionist. Since it was devised with tape accompaniment in mind, most of the rhythmic cues derive from the accompaniment. The challenge here was to make it seem as though the soloist is leading the accompaniment even though there is no way in the world this would be possible.

Coping Strategy II is written for solo marimba and fixed electronic sounds. Using the additive process of canon and multi-track recording technology, four distinct layers of musical lines are gradually assembled: bass accompaniment, melody, sustained chords and a single, continuous melismatic line. After the structure is fully realized the rhythmic voices are subjected to deconstructive processes and melded into the sustaining chords. In the end, metric punctuation evaporates into a cloud of harmony.

Losing Touch for amplified vibraphone and fixed electronic sounds was written while the composer was taking a computer music course at IRCAM in Paris in 1994. It was an expansion of what he had done before, crossing the fruits of improvisation and formalized composition.

He started by constructing sample-based orchestras made from recordings

and hybrids of the solo instrument. Then he invented a process for manipulating and writing the files that would generate the piece. This process led him to the creation of rhythmic, harmonic, and formal models. In *Losing Touch*, the model was of spatialized canons set on a fixed rhythmic grid.

He used rhythmic templates like cookie cutters, superimposing them on time-pointed polyphonic sequences to extract lines. This resulted in most of the pitches in a sequence being discarded, but the harmonic unfolding would remain. Each section of the piece was realized, tested, tweaked, re-made, and re-tested. Listening and verifying the results in simulation was part of the process. He was losing touch with traditional compositional techniques and training.

The architecture of *Losing Touch* enabled an eight voice canon to be collapsed into a single melodic line or expanded into a full polyphonic surround sound canon. The computer and the process dramatically influenced the outcome. Among many unexpected surprises, he found that time-scaling the canons turned them into short bursts of spatialized dust. In the end, he always went back as his own ideal listener, filtering the material for the last time.

The electronic (akin to the artificial) and the acoustic worlds don't naturally cohere. At the end of *Losing Touch*, the tape degenerates into a mechanical sequence that the musician cannot and does not care to follow. The fiction of cooperation is shattered as the human performer and the tape part lose touch with each other.

You Can't See the Forest . . . Music employs the composer's "cascading echo" technique with speaker-drinker who plays a wine glass that is tuned by drinking from it as the piece unfolds, reconstructing disassembled adages.

The piece consists of multiple cycles each of which are recorded and played back. In each cycle the players articulate small word particles (or phoneme) while simultaneously striking the wine-filled crystal glasses. Over the course of the performance the word particles combine to create common phrases and the gradually rising pitches produced by the glasses create microtonal melodic lines.

In its original 1971 version, live multi-tracking was accomplished by using an analog tape deck—recording the first cycle, rewinding, then recording subsequent passes while hearing all prior parts played back. The

technique came to be used in some of Lentz's largest creations, most notably *Orgasmass* (1997) for chamber ensemble based on the writings of e. e. cummings. In the Fall of 2005 I replaced the multi-track tape deck with a MAX/MSP computer patch. This has impacted the work in two ways: 1) interludes that were written to fill the voids left while the tape deck rewind will be eliminated (with the blessing of the composer) and 2) it will be possible for musicians who do not have access to multi-track recording equipment to perform the work.