A Portfolio of Original Compositions and an Analysis of Joseph Schwantner’s *Distant Runes and Incantations*

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Abstract

This dissertation comprises two parts. The first is an analysis of the orchestral work *Distant Runes and Incantations* composed by Joseph Schwantner in 1983. This paper explores the pitch-class formations of the piece that contribute to Schwantner’s distinctive style and is attributed to his exclusive use of particular set-classes. It argues that the majority of pitch materials in the piece are based on six prominent introductory motives which are made of the subsets of the hexatonic collection (set-class 6-20) as well as the diatonic set-class [027], an important sonority of Schwantner’s recent works. Despite chromaticism associated with this well-known hexatonic set-class [6-20], a favorite of Schoenberg, Webern and Babbitt, Schwantner manages to forge a unique sound attributed to the subsequent amalgamations and interactions of hexatonic, triadic, and diatonic materials, an important feature of Schwantner’s later works to date.

Hexatonic and diatonic elements serve as the basis for synthesizing various sorts of motivic materials and interval chains throughout the piece. Hexatonic set-classes [014] and [015] as well as interval classes 1 and 4, the core of the hexatonic collection, along with triad, diatonic set-class, and diatonic collection play crucial roles in constructing varied and developed motivic materials, as well as transformed and mutated motivic materials. In these motives the tonal quality of triad and diatonic materials together with ic4 intermingle with the rather chromatic quality of the hexatonic subsets [014] and [015] along with ic1 to generate the unique sound in Schwantner’s work. The coherence and consistency of his distinctive harmonic vocabulary are accomplished by the unification of materials through complementary relationships, pitch-class invariance, and his use of ic4 and ic1 to govern the large-scale background structure and motivic transposition. All in all, *Distant Runes and Incantations* demonstrates Schwantner’s refined use of the hexatonic collection to create a genuinely distinctive harmonic language.

The second part of my dissertation comprises a substantial body of original compositions in various genres including orchestral, chamber, vocal, and solo instrumental works, as well as an electro-acoustic work. Influenced by Schwantner’s works, various post-tonal techniques are utilized including lyrical atonal elements, centricity, the economical utilization of various set-classes and referential collections, as well as the Tai Chi Compositional System. Some of the works blend chromatic, pandiatonic elements and Chinese colour together in an attempt to generate my own unique sound.
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