

Rhythm as Motion Discovered

In this paper Javier Alvarez describes his philosophy on music and the method he uses to derive his pieces. He begins with a discussion of traditional musical theory and how his thoughts diverge from it. He continues by more formally defining the techniques and terms he uses to elaborate his own theory. Finally he concludes by linking work he has composed to the analysis given in the paper.

To Alvarez the method employed for developing a piece is critical to the types of productions the artist is capable of. He likens the process to that of making Origami or the production of language. These analogies are meant to illustrate that the production of music should be dynamic in the sense that the structure of the piece as it is being built suggests new directions to continue that may not have been possible to foresee at the beginning.

A main point of departure from traditional musical theory is his emphasis on rhythm as a primary design aspect as opposed to a side effect of organizing pitch in a symmetrical or balance way. He argues that although, on paper, the music may appear balanced humans are bound by perception that is influenced by, memory, comparison and premonition, which have much more influence on how the music is heard than the way it looks on paper. To progress he suggests other musical primitives should be emphasized, such as pulse, repetition and rhythmic objects.

He provides several definitions of the terms he sees them and as they relate to his music. First he defines rhythm or the rhythmic palette as the collection of all uniquely identifiable musical gestures that can be discerned by a listener upon hearing the sound again, which he calls rhythmic objects. A pulse is the next level of abstraction and is made through the repetition of rhythmic objects such that they are perceived to be equally spaced in time.

Characterísticas was Alvarez's first piece in which he tried to build larger musical structures using repetition. He did this by pairing instruments with a corresponding rhythmic object and moving them from periodic to aperiodic gestures. He combined this with a "collision" between harmonic and inharmonic sounds to produce a strobe like effect where the underlying repetition, while providing one type of movement, became the reference frame to a larger motion. He continues by describing Temazcal, a non digital work, in which he prepared two to three second rhythmic objects, on tape, in a Latin American Folk music style, where a performer would listen to the segments and respond with their own improvisations. This is particularly important to Alvarez because it involves active listening on the part of the performer. His final example is a discussion of Papalotl, which is another piece that tries to incorporate the ideas covered in the paper, by shifting from periodic and aperiodic pulses to create an auditory illusion.

The ability to adapt one's music during the process of composition is vital to Alvarez's musical philosophy. This is at least partly why rhythm is so important because it allows for the dynamic creation of movement that is

accessible to humans because of our cognitive properties. Due to his belief that good music is derived from the ability to adapt as it is being heard and created it is unsurprising that another strong theme of the paper is the endorsement of electroacoustic and computer aided production, since it allows for real time feedback to the sounds, compositions and ideas one is putting together.