

Propagations
By Jason Freeman
Analysis by David Mitchell

According to American Heritage Dictionary, the definition of propagation is “the process of spreading to a larger area or greater number, dissemination.” In *Propagations* for solo bass clarinet, Jason Freeman disseminates his opening melodic idea to all areas of the musical spectrum. This piece starts with a very simple two-measure motive that gradually spreads to a larger melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and dynamic area. Despite the ever-increasing boundaries of this piece, a sense of continuity is maintained through referential collections and an ostinato bass line.

The beginning of this piece has a sense of harmonic continuity because all of the notes in measures 1-34 are from diatonic collection DIA-3. In fact, practically the entire piece is based upon various diatonic collections. For example, measures 35-40 contain notes from DIA-2 and DIA-4. Measures 41-94 contain notes that are primarily from DIA-4. Measures 95-106 contain notes from referential collections DIA-3 and DIA-5.

The middle of this piece contains more diatonic, octatonic, and referential collections than the beginning. As the piece progresses, these collections change at an ever-increasing harmonic rhythm. This increasing harmonic rhythm creates a growing sense of harmonic ambiguity in the middle of the piece. It destabilizes the tonality of this piece and propels it forward. For example, Measures 97-102 are the most harmonically ambiguous measures. They contain referential collection Oct.1 in measures 97-99 and all twelve tones of the chromatic scale in measures 100-102. Measures 107-115 contain notes that fit into diatonic collections DIA-4, DIA-5, DIA0, DIA-3, and DIA-5; therefore,

it is clear that the number of referential collections and the harmonic rhythm of the piece have increased. As this piece progresses, there is a “propagation” of harmonic referential collections.

Melodically, this piece starts with a simple two-measure ostinato pattern. In the first part of this piece, the tonic is G-Phrygian in referential collection DIA-3. This figure is soon joined by a second melodic motive that outlines a descending Bb major arpeggio in measures 5-6. A third motive outlines an ascending Ab major arpeggio in measure 14. More and more melodic notes are gradually added to these three motives as the piece progresses.

The ostinato notes against the melodic notes in the beginning of the piece create a two-part contrapuntal texture. Multiphonics are introduced in measure 41. The multiphonics, melodic notes, and ostinato figure create a three-part texture in measures 41-83; therefore, the piece grows motivically, contrapuntally, and texturally as it progresses.

The rhythmic diversity of this piece is constantly expanding as well. The rhythm starts with simple dotted half notes and quarters. Eighth notes are added in measure 5. On page two, sixteenth notes and dotted quarters are added. Triplets enter at the bottom of page three, and sextuplets at the top of the last page. The piece grows rhythmically through the addition of smaller and smaller note values.

The time signature begins with a very simple 4/4. By page two, there are 8/8, 7/8, 9/8, 6/8, and 7/4 time signatures. Page four contains 5/4, 3/4, and 13/8 time signatures. There is “propagation” in the category of time signatures too.

Dynamically, the piece starts with pianissimo and forte dynamic markings exclusively. The diversity of dynamic markings increases on page two with the addition of mezzopiano. Mezzoforte is introduced on page three. Fortissimo occurs on page four. This gradual expansion of dynamic markings is another example of how Jason Freeman uses the idea of propagation in this piece.

This piece sounds like a strictly idiomatic composition. It is actually a piece that is highly organized around the central idea of propagation. Propagation is applied to the musical categories of melody, rhythm, harmony and dynamics. This piece is a good example of the capabilities of bass clarinet. Although, I’m not sure that this speaks to me on a deeper level.

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