

***Slide Stride* by Mark-Anthony Turnage**
Analysis by David Mitchell

Slide Stride by Mark-Anthony Turnage is dedicated to Richard Rodney Bennett who is an English composer and jazz pianist. Knowledge of Bennett's career as a composer and performer is important to understand the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic devices that Turnage uses in this piece. Each one of these devices reflects Bennett's style as an eclectic composer and performer. *Slide Stride* is essentially an encapsulation of Bennett's compositional and performance style.

Richard Rodney Bennett is an accomplished jazz pianist. He is also a prolific composer. The following incipit is a news release for a concert that will take place on 23 November 2009.

Bennett, a native Briton and longtime New Yorker, studied at the Royal Academy of Music and with Pierre Boulez in Paris during the late 1950s. He acquired an early reputation through his substantial vocal and instrumental scores, notably operas (*The Ledge*, *The Mines*), which made effective use of a progressive, expressionistic style. Also an accomplished jazz pianist, Bennett is equally at ease with all 20th-century musical styles, with a prolific output including avant-garde, jazz and large-scale, lush film scores (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Nicholas and Alexandra*).¹

Bennett wrote serial music in the 1950's and has more recent turned to tonal music. Turnage reflects this aspect of Bennett's career in *Slide Stride* by using diatonic materials in a way that sounds atonal. A good example of this occurs in the opening measures of the piano part. The first measure of the piano part contains all seven pitches for diatonic collection DIA-3, the key of Eb major. The next measure contains most of the pitches in the key of E major, DIA+4. The next measure contains all of the pitches from the key of Db major, DIA-5. Turnage uses these diatonic collections as chord clusters. They occur in such rapid succession that is hard to tell that they are actually diatonic. The use of diatonic

¹ Rachele Roe and Christopher Slavik, "MusicNow Presents Dramatic and Jazzy Music by Turnage and Bennett on Monday, November 23," *New Release, Chicago Symphony Orchestra*, 21 October 2009

clusters in quick succession sounds similar to atonal serial music. This is a clever way to encapsulate the tonal and atonal musical eclecticism of Bennett's compositional style.

Diatonic collections are also present in the string parts. An example of this occurs in the first thirteen measures of this piece. The strings contain notes that are from the keys of A major and the parallel key, A minor. These parallel collections overlap each other in the first 13 measures. This creates a tonally ambiguous harmonic and melodic texture because nearly all twelve tones are present with the exception of notes D# and Bb. This is similar to the rapid succession of diatonic collections in the piano part, except in this case the collections overlap each other. The use of diatonic material and atonal harmonic structures is consistent with Bennett's eclectic compositional style.

The rhythm in this piece reflects Bennett's background as a jazz pianist. An example of this can be found in the opening measures of *Slide Stride*. The piano enters with a bass chord pattern that is found in various permutations throughout this piece. This bass chord pattern is characteristic of stride jazz piano accompaniment figuration. According to an article by James Lincoln Collier in *Oxford Music Online*, "Stride involves the alternation of chords and single notes (or octaves) in the left hand and the rapid, pianistic figures typical of ragtime in the right. Early stride was, in fact, ragtime imbued with a more improvisatory feel and the new, looser rhythms of jazz; it was sophisticated and thick-textured music."² Large leaps in a single note bass line and thick chords are characteristic of stride jazz style. This texture can be found throughout this piece. Turnage uses stride figuration, but he obscures its jazz origins by making the rhythm less regular than traditional stride music.

Turnage effectively uses contrast in texture and style to create balance. For example, the first part of this piece is dominated by the stride style and power of the piano. Turnage balances this power by allowing the strings to temporarily dominate. He does not try to overpower the piano. He simply allows the strings to do stuff that the piano cannot do, namely

² James Lincoln Collier. "Jazz." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2001. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>. (Accessed 15 November 2009).

glissandos. The glissandos in the strings contrast with the strident texture of the piano. They temporarily break the forward momentum of the piece and create a contrasting section. This is an effective way to create balance between the strings and piano while creating contrasts in texture within the piece itself.

Slide Stride is an effective piece that incorporates stylistic features of jazz rhythm without blatantly using jazz harmonies. Turnage uses diatonic collections without turning to tonal harmonies or progressions. He balances this piece with texture and contrast between the piano and strings. This is a fitting tribute to Bennett's stylistic trajectory and a good example of structure through repetition and contrast.