

Turning by Derek Bermel
Analysis by David Mitchell

Turn, a change of the direction of a movement or a change in orientation, and it is often also used in a metaphorical sense, contrary to straight. Turning is a piece that is constantly changing directions on many different levels. Derek Bermel changes the form, tonality, texture, meter, tempo, cultural influences, dynamics and ornamentation through this six movement theme and variations. But he manages to keep continuity throughout by returning to the opening thematic material which is based on the hymn *Jesus Loves Me*. Derek Bermel maintains continuity by making a complete thematic circle by finishing the coda with a complete returning of the theme. This is typical of theme and variations and it helps the feel finished. Also in the first movement he prepares many of changes that follow by introducing ideas that are elaborated in the following movements.

The form of the piece is hybrid of theme and variations, multimovement work, and sonata. Theme and variation element is evident by the constantly returning hymn theme that is elaborated and developed rhythmically and harmonically. But unlike a theme and variations, Derek gives each variation its own movement number and name. This is similar to a multimovement work. In order to counter the feeling of a multimovement work each new section is not marked with a double barline and begins without hesitation. Although each section is not marked *attaca*. The section flow into one another because there is no obvious cadential moment that separates each movement. The sonata element is based on the fact that he ends the piece with a coda. Another interesting element is that the measure numbers do not start over at measure one with each new movement. This is more evidence of theme and variations and not a multi-movement format.

The tonality is very interesting. The first movement starts in straight forward B major. But Derek quickly introduces a turn by adding a echo of the theme in G minor pentatonic. This gives the first movement a polytonal flavor. Gminor penatatonic is primarily white keys and B major is primarily black keys. The second page is twelve tone. Measure fifty is back to polytonality. The second movement, nightmares and chickens is twelve tone. The third movement is G minor pentatonic return of the theme with major seventh harmonization. He brings the top melody down an octave at the end of the third movement to produce sequndal harmony. The fourth movement begins in G minor pentatonic and return to some sequndal harmony at measure 166. Measure 169 is a return to polytonality with G minor pentatonic in the right hand and B major in the left hands. Measure 169 is also a change in texture with the addition of a second treble clef.

The meter changes throughout this piece. Derek starts in the traditional hymn meter of 4/4, but he quickly moves away from that to a variety of meters including no meter and no bar lines. No meter and no barlines is first introduced in the first movement in measure 56 and returns again in the second movement at measure 67. The third movement begins with no meter and no barlines. The fourth movement is mostly in 4/4 and the fifth movement is in 2/2. The sixth movement starts out with no meter and no barlines and is in 4/4 by measure 320. The first and sixth movements are meterically mirror images of one another. The fact that this piece starts and ends in 4/4 and moves through several meters to no meter and back again, makes it meterically a complete circle. This is a meterical completion of the turning metaphor.

Culturally, There is American hymn tradition, ragtime, asian, eastern elements, and western twelve-tone influence. The fifth movement is obviously ragtime piano. The middle of the second movement is pointilistic twelve-tone that is reminiscent of Webern. The second movement seems to elaborate on the Webern theme. The third movement is influenced by the music of Ghana.

Dynamically, there are calm and meditative moments contrasted by moments of excitement and energy. The dynamic range of the first movement is pianissimo to fortissimo. Over the entire six movement work, the most extreme dynamic markings are ppp and fff. He does a nice job of shifting moods and contrasting dynamics throughout the entire work. It definitely holds your attention. There is a lot here that we can use as composers.

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