

TOCCATA FOR JOHN ROOS

introductory notes and composer's manifesto [written by Surendran Reddy in 2007]

over 10 years ago i came up with the term "clazz" to describe my musical style and my concept of composition and improvisation. it was originally not meant entirely seriously - i tend to be rather ironic - but partly a reaction to interviewers who always ask you to explain what kind of music you write. in some ways music can only be explained *in music*, for it is a language in its own right, or to paraphrase john lennon: "in its own write". in reality i abhor labels of all kinds and favour a world-view where one is rather open to other cultures and ways of life, which i hope to reflect in my music as well - an inclusive approach to use a sociological term rather than an exclusive, discriminatory one. in contradistinction to "nationalism" i prefer a more international perspective, or indeed a more universal one - for after all one can learn from everybody all over the world - particularly from a cultural point of view.

one of the advantages of the twentieth century is that artists moved away from a nationalistic attitude to a more open one where they were prepared to learn and respect the lives and cultures of people from other countries. messiaen is a good example of this, who brought ideas learned from the east into his work thereby influencing major modern composers such as boulez, stockhausen *inter alia*. in literature hesse is also comparable. in a country such as south africa with its own very special problems of racial inequality of the past, and unfortunately still in the present - despite vast improvements - i think this can teach us a valuable lesson.

although i am aware that the ideals of social justice and human dignity are by no means easy to achieve, i believe that rather than killing each other we should try to live together and enjoy our togetherness - and perhaps if we did not always consider ourselves as members of a race group, a religious community, a country, etc. - an idea propounded in huxley's "*island*" - and rather simply as human beings with a common humanity - might it not be easier to do this?

by the way i apologise for not using any capitals and little punctuation, but i prefer the style of writing invented by the poet e e cummings and also widely used in the internet - and i hope that nevertheless i still make some sense.

however we are not talking about literature but music, and particularly about my new "*toccata for john roos*" - a piece in my so-called "clazz" style. john has done a great deal for music and my piece is an acknowledgement of his work as a cultural ambassador. i have systematized a series of ten principles of my clazz style, which i present below. if they sound slightly arrogant and overly axiomatic i apologise for this as well. it's not meant in that way at all, but merely as a way of opening the minds and ears of interpreters and composers, more in a suggestive rather than a dictatorial sense and with my own peculiar brand of ironic humour! - and in addition

as a starting point for composition seminars which i have recently been engaged in presenting. so here they are:

the 10 principles of clazz:

1. i devised the term "clazz" to describe my musical style, compounding the words classical and jazz, which formerly in music history denoted styles that were kept quite distinct from each other, but in recent years have been moving closer together. in effect the term clazz encompasses for me a fusion of many different styles of music. my ears are open to all musics in the world.
2. surendran's law of harmony: every note can be harmonised by every other note.
3. surendran's law of rhythm: every note should be neither shorter nor longer than is necessary in its compositional context.
4. rather than a bar being of a predetermined length which is then filled with notes (in many cases either too few or too many) it should arise organically from the melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and aesthetic exigencies of the composition, does not have to remain constant and is therefore always of exactly the right length.
5. just as one can observe a landscape containing different elements from varying perspectives (above, below, right in the middle of it, etc.) and move around within this landscape, so can one conceptualise a musical composition, working not with images but with sound. in this way i conceive of compositions as *soundscape*s.
6. every compositional idea contains within it the potential for its own development. all that a composer has to do is realise this potential.
7. learn to cook!
8. start with perfection - and improve on it ...
9. surendran's "one man one note" law:
basically u have 3 possibilities (a trilogy in 4 parts - cf. douglas adams)
 - (i) finding the right time for the right note
 - (ii) finding the right time for the wrong note
 - (iii) finding the wrong time for the right note
 - (iv) ...
10. u can stand on the outside looking in to the music, or u can be on the inside looking out of it ...

now for a few practical notes on the interpretation of the piece and some of its notational idiosyncracies:

- (i) i find it difficult to define dynamics and expression marks categorically, so these should be considered rather as suggestions. even the tempo is variable, as long as it's not *much* slower - or quicker ;-) - than my original indication. i use a system of proportional tempi where all tempi are related, partly owing to the complex relationship between the various changing time-signatures - hence the 71.25 bar (bar 35). of course this could be rounded off to the nearest whole number. the same applies to bars 122 to 130 with their more frequent changes. i apologise for the decimal points but all tempi are in exact proportional ratio to each other. this is an element of the architectonic design of the piece; however i am aware that when an interpreter inflects musically, rubato and freedom of expression come into play - and please feel free to use both!
- (ii) the bracketed 11/16 grouping in bar 3 is an indication of a simultaneous contra-rhythm in the left hand which continues for a while, and indeed the entire piece contains many examples not only of frequently changing time-signatures (see my "laws" 3 and 4) but also of simultaneous polyrhythmic metres. the beaming of note groups over the bar-line sometimes reflects this procedure, which i prefer to lutoslawski's technique of using 2 time-signatures simultaneously and dislocated dotted bar-lines, a system that makes the reading of the music, in my opinion, even more complicated.
- (iii) i have used a "macaronic" system of notating expression combining four different languages, (as t s eliot does in *the wasteland*), the usual italian expected in music, as well as english, german and french, as the mood dictated, and indeed the mood of the respective musical passage seemed to require, owing to the fact that there are subtle differences in feeling between a word in one language and its translation in another. i hope this does not over-complicate matters - but just a small cautionary note: the "fast" in bar 98 is meant more in the german sense of "almost" rather than in the english. however ...
- (iv) the brackets in bar 27 indicate that the notes can't physically be played, (without a third arm!) but should be held by pedalling. i have omitted notating pedal indications and left this to the judgement of the interpreter according to appropriate harmonic exigencies.
- (v) the instructions as to which hand to use in bar 73ff are merely suggestions - please feel free to find a solution that works best for u (without the inconvenience of having extra limbs fitted surgically ... ;-))

(vi) i find the range of 6 dynamic possibilities - pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff - available in musical notation hopelessly inadequate, and have made an "almost but not quite" (douglas adams) pathetic attempt to expand it by using hitherto unused expressions such as *più mf* (bar 94) and *meno ff* (bar 155), which, i am fully aware, is not strictly grammatical from an italian point of view. nevertheless one gains a few more calibrations in the spectrum of possible dynamics: pp, *più pp*, *meno p*, p, *più p*, *meno mp*, mp, *più mp*, *meno mf*, mf, *più mf*, *meno f*, f, *più f*, *meno ff*, ff, *più ff*, and so on - at least 17 as opposed to only 6 gradations. of course, every sensitive interpreter knows that there are literally thousands of subtle inflections of dynamics and of tone and that the musical score is merely a kind of map to a landscape / "soundscape" which one has to *read between the lines* in order to achieve its reality in sound.

(vii) a short note on the *mbaqanga* section which starts in bar 132 and continues until the coda in bar 151: *mbaqanga* is a uniquely south african musical phenomenon which was popularised on the world music scene when paul simon recorded his *graceland* album and earlier with musicals like *ipi tombi*. it is a pithy blend of western harmony, usually four chords based on a I - IV - Ic - V progression or variations of this, with spicy african rhythms tending to eschew almost completely an emphasis of the first beat or indeed any of the main beats in the bar - resulting in a highly off-beat, syncopated rhythmic feel - precisely the opposite of, for instance, the rhythmic concept behind a march. this inspires a parallel dance movement where the raising of the feet into the air is more significant than the pounding of them into the ground - exactly the opposite indeed of what many non-initiates conceive of as "african". it results in a lightness and rhythmic sprightliness that is irresistible in its effusive appeal and avoidance of anything four-square, military and compelled.

typical of traditional african music as well are time-signatures using 12 as the numerator - a bar of 12 beats has the advantage that it can be grouped in 2s, 3s, 4s, 6s and so on. this is why i prefer writing in 12/16 and not committing myself to either 6/8 or 3/4 for instance, as a certain rhythmic ambivalence where both time-signatures are simultaneously possible - such as in those optical illusions where one sees at the same time both a face and a vase - is essential to the concept of traditional african music.

(viii) i have used crosses (x) such as in bar 132 in order to denote the jazz concept of ghost notes - notes which are basically there for rhythmic effect but hardly there in sound. indeed they can be replaced by virtually any other tone. the idea of the "kicked note" borrowed from electric bass technique (see bar 23) is related to this.

i wish u all the best, enjoy the piece and GOOD LUCK!