

## Nausea

After discovering Jean-Paul Sartre's 1938 novel *Nausea*, I developed the aim of capturing in music my interpretation of what the author had attempted to communicate to me. Specifically, in a scene in which the protagonist takes an innocuous tram journey and a feeling of existential terror ensues as a simple leather seat takes on the character of something alien with very severe implications for existence. It was this feeling of unsettlement, as of something being not quite right that I wanted to translate into music.

The first thing I heard when considering how such a feeling may sound was something familiar and easy one's ears slowly fading out and being replaced with something more sinister, which is a rather theatrical act that probably owes much to film music (perhaps an appropriation could be the sound design of a film such as *Apocalypse Now*, in which Walter Murch offsets images with not-necessarily-related non-diegetic sound (Link 2007, p. 75)). A means of achieving what I had in mind effectively proved difficult to find, however, as a workshop of an early draft of the piece proved. I first looked to the music of Paul Patterson, whose pieces contain wildly imaginative examples of notation methods developed specifically to meet a specific need. During a workshop, I was introduced to the piece *Games* for solo organ, and the level of detail in its graphic notation, particularly in the 'flow chart' page, led me to the realisation that there was much more detail that I could add to my own score. The result of this forms the first page of my piece. For the next, as I transitioned into traditionally notated material, I immediately ran into the same problem and discovered that I would need yet another form of notation. Here Patterson's scores helped me to identify what it was that I wanted to achieve, but

since it was time-space notation that I needed, I looked further afield. I was Morton Feldman's *Projections* which were most helpful, particularly the second of the set. I adopted a grid form, and used time-space notation in order to get me to where I needed to be.

Turning to instrumental matters, I again had a sound in mind, and turned to contemporary music to find out how I might achieve this. I found an extensive catalogue in extended string technique in Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*. From this I was able to develop a scheme for string writing in my opening section. This serves as gateway to the notated material, which begins on page three of the score. From here on out, my aim was to experiment with different ways of achieving my overall aim for the piece. In section C, I began with a four bar theme and worked on morphing its shape and proportions, in a type of 'melodic plasticity'. The effect this technique has on the brain fascinated me, and as the theme is repeated with only minor melodic and harmonic variation I felt that it started to become less and less familiar. Whilst composing this section, I started to lose a sense of an absolute and found myself faced with questions about what exactly it was that I was applying my morphing technique to, perhaps in the vein of many a twentieth century composer. I was able to make full sense of Roger Scruton's (2009) description of the musical experience as 'not a succession of sounds, but a movement between tones, governed by causality that resides in the musical line' (p. 5), as opposed to a theme or phrase or passage being a kind of Platonic form.

The remainder of the piece is an exploration of something I hit up on during my first year of study, whereby structure comes about through rapid juxtaposition as opposed to development. The beginning of the section interrupts the previous, and from here on I employed what is perhaps best termed as a 'stream of consciousness'

approach to writing, the closest comparison I could draw to this being the manner in which Virginia Woolf relays plot in her 1931 novel *The Waves*. Here I found I was able to achieve my aim of unsettlement through the sheer volume of material that I added to my palette, using quotation where I felt that it fit and introducing new material without consideration for development of preceding material. My only requirements for a juxtaposition were that there be an overlap between the last note of the preparation material and the first note of the new and that it be different in character enough from that which came before it so as to be definitively perceived as something unrelated. The result is a chain-like structure, in which there are no gaps but only the most minimal of commonality between links.

As a result of the wide variety of material and technique present in this piece, the sensible question I had to ask myself was whether I had simply forgone the difficult task of properly developing material in favour of something which is ultimately less gruelling. Reflecting on this, however, I came to the conclusion that had I set out with a different goal, it would have been difficult to justify my creation, but since I had the strange and perplexing world of existentialism in mind, it was important for me that the form of the piece be without an easily perceivable basis, and that coherence be stifled in order to cultivate a reasonable sense of ambiguity. Its uneasy and groundless nature serve this ideal. Since analysing Michael Nyman's String Quartet No. 1, built on three pre-existing sources (John Bull's *Walsingham Variations*, Arnold Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 and Alex North's 'Unchained Melody'), and been subsequently introduced to the study of postmodernism, music which treats the contributions of the entirety of music history and thought as equally viable sources of inspiration, as well disregarding barriers between 'high' and 'low'

styles (Kramer 2002, p. 16), has been of great interest to me. Writing this piece was a great pleasure, and I hope to continue investigating the potential of these methods.

## **Bibliography**

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