

Exercise 6

In composing in the vein of Frederic Rzewski's work *The People United Will Never Be defeated!*, I have opted to compose three variations on the Japanese Pop song *Ue o Muite Arukou* ('I Look up as I Walk'). At a time when the Japanese were looked upon with caution in the aftermath of World War 2, the song reached the number one spot of the US Billboard Pop charts, remaining there for three weeks despite being made up entirely of lyrics that few listeners were actually able to understand. We must be cautionary in ascribing a piece of music special powers, but as a symbol the song could be seen to represent the sudden humanisation of alien groups of people upon realisation that they (we) share common interests. In this particular case the idea that this former enemy was able to produce such a catchy and pleasant song certainly seems to have had barrier-breaking power. It is this ideal of unity and familiarisation that I have chosen as the theme for my composition.

Rzewski's *The People* consists of thirty-six variations on an arrangement of the original song. I have chosen to work on a much smaller scale, with just three variations. After giving to some thought to how I might serve my chosen idea, I made the decision to present the variations in reverse order, such that number three, the most esoteric and distant from the original theme, comes first. In this way, as we progress, the music becomes more and more tonal as the avant-garde elements are removed, and, it could perhaps be possible for the casual listener to make sense of the products of these unfamiliar and unpleasant-sounding techniques as they trace my logical steps from the

completely alien variation three to the theme as fragments of familiar sounding harmony begin to appear.

In variation one, I have used the technique employed in the first variation of *The People* of octave displacement. I have considered the harmonic and melodic structure of the theme, but adjusted the register of each note. In Rzewski's vein, I have reorganised the note values to prevent any overlaps, meaning that harmony is entirely absent, although the melody is still recognisable. Here is the same melody presented in the theme and variation one:



Var. 1



(senza Ped.)

I was fascinated by the way Rzewski introduced elements of jazz throughout *The People*, and so I decided to explore the possibilities of such a technique in my second variation. The clearest addition is the direction to add swing to the rhythm from bar 23, which really helped me to understand how the jazz style might fit into the material that I had already prepared. I have also

adopted the techniques of turning chords into dominant sevenths and removing one or more of its notes to create rather airy chords:

Var. 2
 23 Light swing $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\sim}$

The image shows a musical score for Variation 2, measures 23-25. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo is 'Light swing' with a note value of $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\sim}$. The bass line features three A7 chords, each with a syncopated rhythm. The treble line has a light swing feel. The chords are labeled 'A7' in boxes below the bass line.

Slightly syncopated rhythms (see bass clef in example above), a tri-tone substitution (here A major and E flat major both share the notes C sharp and G natural, which are a tri-tone apart. In jazz harmony this fact makes it possible to pivot between these two chords):

Var. 2
 23 Light swing $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\sim}$

The image shows a musical score for Variation 2, measures 23-25. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo is 'Light swing' with a note value of $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\sim}$. The bass line features a tri-tone substitution between A7 and Eb7. The treble line has a light swing feel. The chords are labeled 'A7' in boxes below the bass line.

And some slight chromaticism:

26

The image shows a musical score for Variation 2, measures 26-28. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo is 'Light swing' with a note value of $\text{♩} = \text{♩}^{\sim}$. The bass line features a chromatic line. The treble line has a light swing feel. The chords are labeled 'A7' in boxes below the bass line.

For variation three I have introduced the '6-20' hexachord also used by Rzewski, which is made up of two augmented triads. Each hexachord has three notes in common with two other transpositions (of a possible four), and

Rzewski uses these overlaps to pivot between them. The progressions that result from this pivoting could be seen as ‘analogous to triads in the traditional system’ (Wason, 1988, p. 122).



In the above example, the chords in bars one and two are derived from the hexachord beginning on E flat (what Laura Melton dubs H^3):

Example 10. Forms of hexachord 6-20: H^0 , H^1 , H^2 , H^3



(Melton, 1997, p. 27)

I began by taking the theme, transposing it to E major in keeping with Rzewski's movement by fifths between movements, and then stripped the material down as far as I could whilst ensuring that the melody remained legible. I then used the remaining notes as roots for chords built using the hexachords (or, occasionally, moved the melody into the bass, as with the C sharp in bar 33). Using the aforementioned overlaps, I have pivoted between forms to make harmonising any note possible:

36

37

pp

In the above example, the E flat in bar 37 allows me to pivot between forms H^2 and H^3 , which is common to both.

Bibliography

Melton, L. (1997) *Frederic Rzewski's The People United Will Never Be Defeated! – An Analysis and Historical Perspective*. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree doctor of musical arts. Houston: Rice University.

Wason, R. W. (1988), 'Tonality and Atonality in Frederic Rzewski's Variations on "The People United Will Never Be Defeated!"', *Perspectives of New Music*, 26:1.