

Arash MAJD

Continuum: Cause and Effect
for
Ensemble
2022

*Written for Brightworks newmusic and Lyris Quartet
with a generous support of Ursula Krummel Commission
and Hear Now Festival*

Duration: ca. 13':30"

Los Angeles, U.S.A.

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Program Notes:

Continuum: Cause and Effect is from a series of works that employ forward motion and continuity of sound to create structure. In this piece, the title refers to the relationship between a sonic cause and effect. The cause is the technique of vertical snaps, which are sharp, very short attacks of a stack of notes, and the effect is the horizontal sonorities that follow. While the tense relationship between these two elements early in the piece creates momentum and forward movement, the subsequent absence of their relationship in the middle of the piece creates an atmosphere full of space and silence.

In the first movement, horizontal sonorities are the effect of vertical snaps. The relationship between these two sonic elements contributes to the growth of the first movement, and I enhance this development with a new percussion instrument, the thunder tube, and new performance techniques.

The second movement turns away from using vertical snaps and attempts to dissolve all vertical sonorities. The motivic relationship between all instruments in the ensemble makes it challenging for vertical sonorities to disappear. In other words, the attempt to dissolve the sonorities fails, which, in turn, supports the growth of the second movement. A larger thunder tube with a broad and bass-like sound appears in this movement to support the horizontal sonorities.

The absence of a relationship between vertical and horizontal sonorities forms the third movement and allows for the creation of a forest atmosphere with singing birds, and soft breezes. In essence, this movement is a moment of silence and space. I introduce another new instrument here, the slate call, to create sounds of exotic birds and woodpeckers.

In the fourth movement, the relationship between vertical snaps and horizontal sonorities returns. There is no tension between vertical snaps and horizontal sonorities as there is in the first two movements. The interdependence of the sonic cause and effect supports the forward motion and continuity of sound in this movement.

Continuum: Cause and Effect is a post-pitch composition. It was my attempt to employ the relationship between vertical snaps and horizontal sonorities to support the creation and development of a composition in the absence of pitch.

In the process of composing this piece, I have realized the benefit of beginning a composition with a road map that establishes a global plan. Though such a map can anticipate when the music must be soft, loud, fast, or slow, a map, ultimately, builds itself from the information it describes. In other words, in some moments, I must release control of the process of composition and let the music flow and write itself instead of forcing certain arrangements and trying to control every sound. This approach will have a dramatic effect on the expansion and development of my music, as I allow it to unfold, change, and progress organically over time.