

Linda Lanier-Keosaian
316 Prospect Avenue, #5A
Hackensack, New Jersey 07601
lanierkeosaian@optonline.net

Eight Etudes and a Fantasy for Woodwind Quartet
Etude IV

In 1949, Elliott Carter was teaching a course in orchestration at Columbia University. Frustrated by his students' lack of imagination in their writing for winds, he began writing exercises on the board to illustrate the possibilities. The results of those exercises eventually became *Eight Etudes and a Fantasy*. What must have been a blow to the self-esteem and reputation of anyone who happened to have been in that un-happy class, is surely a gain for all music-lovers, particularly fans of Elliott Carter's music. The whole piece demonstrates the capacities and extreme techniques in some cases, of the various instruments, flute, oboe, clarinet in Bb, and bassoon. In the hands of fine players, it is a treat for the listener.

Etude IV is described thus by David Schiff:

The only material is a rising half-step always heard in a rhythm of two adjacent eighths followed by a rest. The strict rules of the game produce a variety of configurations, as different doublings, spacings, and contrapuntal relations appear. The players must respond to their changing role in the texture: sometimes they are contributing to a chromatic line, sometimes they link other instruments; elsewhere, as at the cross-rhythm ostinato at bar 78, each is an independent element.

(Schiff, p. 98)

The most important word used here by Mr. Schiff is 'game.' In the program for the concert at Merkin Hall, Christian Carey also uses the word 'game,' calling this movement "A game of dovetailing ascending semitones." (Merkin Concert Hall Program, November 23, 2008)

Written in 3/4, it is anything but a waltz, but that meter might indicate a dance on the wild side. Because of the Schiff quote, I will begin at the ending, Bar 78. In order to show how Carter uses rhythm, I will refer to numbers 1 through 6, rather than 1 - 2 - 3, so that the eighth-note

subdivisions have a number. Beginning on beat 2 (number 3), the clarinet plays F# -G eleven times, each separated by an eighth rest. On 5 of that same measure 78, the flute begins playing D - Eb, five times, each separated by two and a half beats (or 5). The oboe begins on number 2 of bar 79, playing its pattern of B - C six times, each separated by one and one-half beats (or 3). The bassoon begins on 3 of bar 79 with D# - E which it plays four times, each separated by 3 full beats (or 6). This is worked out so carefully that *each of the instruments plays its last pattern on the second beat (3rd subdivision) of bar 83*, followed by a full quarter rest. These repeated patterns act as a kind of ostinato which serves to bring the whole race to its end. Then all play G# - A in unison on the first beat of bar 84 which begins the rhythmic reprise. Bars 84 - 85 - 86 correspond rhythmically to Bars 1 - 2 - 3. These bars are also played in unison, but with pitches that are different from the beginning. In bar 84, the instruments play unison G# - A, in bar 85 A# - B and E# - F#, and the reprise ends with a unison E natural - F natural in bar 86. This is followed by three and a half bars of *chase*, a tiny coda. The last bar has all instruments playing the same pitches, D# - E, but at different times. The clarinet and bassoon play their last pattern in unison and are the last to finish, on beat 4. All of this is played at top speed. Very exciting. Members of the New York Wind Quintet gave a stunning performance of the whole piece at Merkin Concert Hall on Sunday, November 23, 2008, with Elliott Carter in the audience.

Now that I have worked over the ending, I will go back to the beginning, which starts out with all instruments playing in unison. The meter is 3/4, Vivace, Quarter note = 168. In the first three measures, which act as a kind of introduction, all instruments play unison on beat one of the first bar, unison on one and five-six of the second bar, then unison on two-three of the third bar, followed by an eighth rest and a quarter rest. In bar 4, they trade beats and subdivisions, with all six

beats covered, and now with new pitches. Bar 6 begins with a quarter and eighth rest, then again, all instruments in unison on the first notes heard, E - F. But on beats 4 - 5. In bars 7 - 13 every one of the six beats is covered with entries and exits. At bar 11, there is a kind of downward cascade with the flute and clarinet dropping out in bars 12 and 13. Bar 14 begins with a quarter rest and on beat 3 instruments return, first the bassoon, then clarinet and oboe, then flute. From the end of the introduction (first 3 bars) to bar 14 which begins with the quarter rest, are 10 bars. It seems that bar 14, beat 3 (my number) begins a new section in which all six beats of every measure is played, up until the quarter rest on one of bar 31, 17 bars. At bar 31, once again the instruments play in unison, B - C, but this time on beats 3-4, followed by a quarter rest. Then in 32, with eighth rests on one and four, the instruments play in unison, B - C (flute an octave higher) then C# - D, separated by an eighth rest. In bar 33 (after an eighth rest), again unison E - F is played, followed by an eighth rest and a quarter rest. This corresponds to bars 1 - 2 - 3 but with one less eighth-note beat in the rests. The unison figures in the beginning were separated first by two quarter rests, then by one quarter rest, and then by an eighth rest. Here, the first and second figures are separated by one quarter plus one eighth rest, then by one eighth rest, and then another eighth beat rest. This represents a diminution of the pause between the first and second, and the second and third unison figures.

Bar 34 begins with a unison on 1 - 2, then an eighth rest and the chase begins once again. It seems to me that bars 31 - 32 - 33, plus the additional first two beats of 34, act as a kind of reprise of the first three bars, and at the same time introduce the next section. The section which begins in bar 34 pauses briefly in bar 41 when clarinet and flute drop out for the bar. In bars 42 - 43, the instruments start off with C# - D and D# - D, but on different beats. Then on beats 5 - 6 of 43 they play simultaneously, but at different pitches. The next unison patterns with all instruments are in

bars 44 - 45 - 46, again, separated by rests to set them off from the texture of the main body of the work. The second section began in bar 34, this third section begins in bar 46, 12 bars later. In bar 53, on the second beat, the instruments play simultaneously, but different pitches, C, Db, D Natural, and Eb between them. Then in bar 56, the instruments play simultaneously, E-F, F#-G, G#-A, a short chromatic scale, followed by a quarter rest. This seems to indicate a change to a new section or part of a section. I am calling that just a “pause.” Then we are off on another merry romp which takes us to the rhythmic reprise in bars 84 - 85 - 86, 27 bars.

Each time the four instruments play in unison, the number of notes used is minimized, then others are reintroduced gradually, all while playing a game of tag! In bar 1, we began with E - F. Bar 2 added A# - B, then bar 3 changed to D - Eb only. In bar 4, we have D - Eb - F# - G, (no F natural) and finally in bar 5, we have B - C - D# - E - F# - G - Ab, but not the initial F natural. Then comes the unison E - F in bar 6, and in bars 7 and 8 are new pitches. In bar 44, the beginning of the third section, there are only three pitches, D#, E, F#. This comes after short chromatic scales in bar 42 and 43 (six pitches each).

The unisons act as a kind of “ear-cleaning.” In rhythm, the quarter and eighth rests (alone or combined with each other) act as traffic control, stopping the action to go in another direction, or just to catch one’s breath before restarting the race.

The piece seems baroque in concept, in that, once the action gets into full swing, there is almost perpetual motion to the very end, except for the calculated pauses and unisons which help give it structure. Even though the “two adjacent eighth notes in a rising half-step” constitutes the material for the whole movement, still the personality of each of the individual voices is maintained by the way instruments drop in and out at times. The meter of 3/4 never seems tyrannical because

of the cross-accents and game of tag and chase throughout.

The piece does not represent Carter's use of 'simultaneity' found in later works, but shows how creative he could be in using a common time signature, 3/4, and the idiosyncrasies of the instruments for which the piece was written. Even with such a small amount of material, the piece never seems static or uninteresting. In fact, it is quite the opposite!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bernard, Jonathan W., "Carter's Time," Program Book for *Carter's Century: Festival of Contemporary Music*, July 20 - July 24, 2008. Tanglewood Music Center.

Bernard, Jonathan W., "Elliott Carter and the Modern Meaning of Time, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), pp. 644 - 682, Oxford University Press.

Bernard, Jonathan W., "The Evolution of Elliott Carter's Rhythmic Practice," *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 26. No. 2 (Summer, 1988), pp. 164 - 203. Published by Perspectives of New Music.

Bernard, Jonathan W., : An Interview with Elliott Carter," *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), pp. 180 - 214. Published by Perspectives of New Music

Schiff, David, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, Second Edition. New York: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Eight Etudes and a Fantasy, Elliott Carter, Etude IV Associated Music Publishers, 1950.