

Alexis Agrafiotis

deus thinan for chamber orchestra (2004)

Q: What is the background history of the work?

A: The conductor Daniel Inbal asked me to compose something for the Mozartfest 2004 which should have some connection to Mozart and more specially to his 41st Symphony, which is to be performed during the same evening.

Q: What is the origin of the title of the piece?

A: Deus is abbreviated from Mozart's first name, Amadeus, in order to evoke the image of the composers god-like-status. Mozart represents the pinnacle of compositional technique (with different styles [German, French, Italian...] and techniques), which is why I like the notion of a deity that is all embracing and universally venerated. He is the composer who has a universal significance irregardless of time or place.

Q: Thinan, pronounced as "think", is an old German word and means stretching.

A: My first thought was to stretch the music in length. The structure of the piece is that of the fugue-theme derived from the



Each note of the theme corresponds to one section in "deus thinan". The first whole note is extended to 40 whole notes thus creating a section of 16 5-half-bars. The smallest note, a sixteenth note, 40 times extended, creates a section of one 5-half-bar. The notes of the theme correspond to principal notes of each section.

Q: Are there quotations?

A: There are some of them which at the beginning are clearly audible but gradually their recognition diminish. From the third quotation they are not at all audible and serve strictly as composing source. Essentially, the first four notes of the fugue-theme are basic structural material from bar 17 (with continuously changing shape), until the end of the piece.

Q: What should effect the quotation?

A: Each quotation is inevitable humorous, because it evokes a recognisable tune much as in Schnittke's "Moz-Art à la Haydn", or the quotations found in Bernd Alois Zimmermann's "Dialoge", whereas there is a time philosophical aim. My intention was to show, through the quotation, a clear initial relation to Mozart. That being said, it was not my principal aim to use a quotation for a humorous purpose, for this could easily loose its impact and become banal; however, I always kept the element of synthesis of Mozart's music in mind, especially the perfect integration of harmony and counterpoint. Each time, when Mozart works with counterpoint, it is part of a simple harmony that resolves into a uniform rhythmical structure (see bar 402 in the finale of the symphony). In other words, each contrapunctual line is reflected harmonically and is never over worked, as it is sometimes with Bach and Beethoven.

Q: How could this compositional form be applied to the free tonal music of today?

A: It is difficult. Each section of "deus thinan" has a principal note as its foundation. The note, split up in a sound surface (Klangfläche) replaces so to speak the harmony. The note is then played in a complex and contrapunctual manner. At the end of various sections and in the instrumentation, I tried to retrieve the counterpoint and reform it to the sound surface (Klangfläche). In this way, an interrelation of tension and release ensues., thus crating a unity in the piece.

Q: What is the meaning of the structural term "Fraktal" in the context of the work?

A: The term "Fractal"= fractal, is derived from mathematics, whereby a structure can be separated until infinity maintaining the analogies of length in the separations. In this manner a so-called major stretch has the same structure as a minor and vice versa. I tried this in the sixteen bars from bar 72 onwards with the motif (bar 5 of the fugue-theme):



The motive consists of three quarter notes and a rest, each with the same length (in total 4 quarter notes). The total length is in each instrument different e.g. in the violoncello 4 bars (4 times 5 half notes, bars 72-75), and in the violins one half note (bar 84).

Q: What is the structure of the fugue?

A: It is a four part double fugue. As in Mozart's last fugue at the coda of the finale, the theme (1st theme) begins a similar with its counter point (2nd theme). There is a difference between dux and comes, as in the real response of the classical fugue. The interludes consist of material from former parts of the composition. It is a double fugue because the 2nd theme has its own exposition (bar 108). The last exposition, again with the 1st theme, but slightly altered, comes 8 times. Each time it is transposed a half note down, which corresponds morphologically to the last 8 eighth notes of the fugue theme. At the fifth entrance begins a cluster with a sixteenth movement in the strings. The extend of the cluster diminishes until the end to transform in the initial movement of the beginning.

Q: Has the composition a circular character?

A: Yes. If the last bar were to be cut, the piece could begin seamlessly from the beginning, like a perpetual motion machine.

Question and answer:

Alexis Agrafiotis Berlin, may 20th 2004