

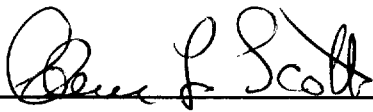
Realitivity: A Collection of Musical Compositions

An Honors Thesis

by

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Thesis Abstract

The tape enclosed is a collection of selected musical works from Paul Ester's senior composition recital entitled Reality. Accompanying the tape are fairly descriptive program notes about each of the pieces included, touching on matters of technical and aesthetic import. Compositions on this tape are (respectively):

- 1) Awakening: an electronic composition designed in C-sound.
- 2) Endar's Moon: an electronic composition composed through manipulation of acoustic and electronic sound samples.
- 3) Bassoon Quintet: a work for five bassoons, in five movements
- 4) Reality: a composition for saxophone and electronic sounds, featuring classical saxophone improvisation by composer.

Reality

Project Synopsis

The works on this tape were all composed by Paul W. Ester and performed as part of his senior composition recital in February of 1998. All but Endar's Moon were later collected on a portion of the compact disk entitled Reality, from which most of these recordings were taken. The following synopsis provides some information about each piece, including rational, formal, technological, and philosophical elements.

Awakening: This composition was created strictly within a computer environment called C-sound. C-sound is a computer programming language based on C that is designed to allow a programmer to synthesize sounds "from scratch" and organize them in time, all from commands within a text editor. All of the sounds in this piece were designed, modified, and rendered in C-sound with the exception of the acoustic human sources (the heartbeat and breathing). The imagery of the piece is rather dark, suggesting an awakening from a nightmare into another nightmare. For fun (or to take your mind off of this), try to listen for the Bach fugue playing in the distance in the middle of the piece, just after "the awakening".

Endar's Moon: The primary technological processes in Endar's Moon involve the manipulation of acoustic sound samples through reverberation,

changes in speed, application of certain waveform elements to other waveforms, averaging of two samples spectra (otherwise known as mutation), and various other forms of modification. Much of the work in this case was done utilizing a piece of software called SoundHack. Most sound sources come from saxophone sounds, vocal sounds, and one particularly cooperative cricket. I think that the imagery conjured up through this composition is of a cosmic nature. If you agree, I hope you can forget that no sound travels through the depths of space.

Bassoon Quintet: As its name suggests (by the way, this piece premiered as Five Thingies for Five Oons on the previously mentioned composition recital), this work is a strictly acoustic composition for five bassoons, one of them a booming contrabassoon. In five short movements, the bassoon quintet touches on a number of different styles. The first of these serves as a sort of introduction, beginning with an ostinato two note motive overlaid by dense moving textures. Primarily, the movement builds to a climax on these ideas alone, and sets up the second movement with an unresolved texture chord at pianissimo.

Movement two is almost all an exploration of parallel motion. In somewhat of a ternary form, the movement begins at a full volume *maestoso*, stating the first theme over a deep grumbling drone. As the motive is developed, the droning instruments modify slightly to maintain interest and create more complex textures with the ever-increasing

dissonance displayed by the theme-playing instruments. In section B, parallelism continues to be utilized as the main vehicle for development, but here the feel of the piece becomes softer . . . warmer, and a new motive is introduced. Gradually, through the use of arching chromatic passages (again in parallel against each other) and an equally gradual crescendo, section A is returned to for a huge "double-f" ending.

The third movement is the shortest and least serious. In short (which is all the movement is anyhow), this portion is a cute little joke played on the second bassoonist, who can't seem to keep up with the simple little two note pattern that the other players seem to be improvising on. As a listener might be able to notice, the use of long passages of silence in this movement requires immense rhythmic concentration by the performers in order to ensure the most possible accuracy of note placement.

Movement four is analogous to a slow movement found in many of the traditional symphonies. The melodic line for this portion of the quintet is long and lush, accompanied by thick but soothing extended chord textures. The succession of chords is meant to progress somewhat unexpectedly, where each texture suggests a certain chord to resolve to, but is actually followed by a texture that is more unusual, yet more pleasing to hear, than that which was suggested. The style of writing seems to model the style found in Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings. This movement also ends with perhaps the longest note you will ever hear held by a single wind instrument.

The fifth and last movement of the bassoon quintet is somewhat of a medley; elements from most of the prior movements can be heard throughout this one amidst some new material. The two note motive of the first (and third) movement starts off this one, but begins to take a turn for the "more exciting" before too long. Tempo increases, while the rhythmic and tonal complexity becomes more diffuse and dissonant. A section in 7/8 time signature adds new rhythmic excitement to the piece, and becomes the major portion of new material in this movement. After a little more experimentation with some parallelism and staccato rhythmic ostinato, the maestoso theme from the second movement returns to close the composition with a surprisingly clear cadence.

Reality: The "title track" for this collection of works features saxophone improvisation by the composer based on methods for classical saxophone improvisation by Dr. George Wolfe, professor of saxophone at Ball State University. A number of short motives are manipulated at key points during the composition, however, the way in which the motives are manipulated will never be the same in two performances of the piece. Accompaniment is electronic, but containing some elements acoustic in origin. Many of the techniques from pieces earlier on this tape are used in tandem to produce the sounds in this composition. Accurate timing of the drum samples was achieved through the use of a MIDI sequencer.