Micah J. Hood - Selected Musical Works from 2011-2013

Micah Hood

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Micah J. Hood – Selected Musical Works from 2011 – 2013

By

Micah Hood

Bachelor of Music in Music Performance,
Texas Tech University, 2009

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2014
Micah J. Hood – Selected Musical Works from 2011 – 2013

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript is a collection of musical compositions written by Micah Hood while a graduate student at the University of New Mexico. Each musical work fulfills a composition portfolio requirement as stated in the 2012 – 2013 Music Theory/Composition Student Handbook: a piece with large orchestration, a piece featuring the voice, a piece featuring electronics, and a collaborative piece. Hood's composition portfolio contains original visual art, synopses and musical scores.

The pieces featured in the portfolio are Hood's *Concerto for Trombone, String Orchestra, Percussion, and Piano: Movement I - Introduction, Ostinato and Fugue*, *Kyrie* for mixed choir and organ, *Two Improvisations* with Christian Pincock, *Depravity – Estancia* in collaboration with Ursula Coyote and Rodney Gurule, and *Deep Calls to Deep* for two pianos.
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I. **Concerto**
for Trombone, String Orchestra, Piano and Percussion

I. Introduction, Ostinato and Fugue

M. J. Hood (2013)
Synopsis

Concerto for Trombone, String Orchestra, Piano and Percussion has a variety of inspiration and a great deal of detail. The work is separated into three movements:

I. Introduction, Ostinato, and Fugue
II. Antiphon and Meditation
III. Vivo

Each movement has its own harmonic and melodic character based on three historical chants found in the Latin liturgy; Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. For the purposes of this portfolio, I will only write about the features found in the first movement of the concerto.

Ensemble

The accompanying ensemble is comprised of a full string orchestra, metallic percussion, timpani and piano. Percussionists are required to use the loudest possible combination of anvils, break drums and roto-toms. The pianist, at times, is required to play chromatic clusters at a loud dynamic. In order to keep these louder sounding instruments playing at the written dynamic, I deemed it necessary to expand the personnel of the string orchestra. I suggest the following number of musicians for each section:

- 25 Violin I
- 20 Violin II
- 20 Violas
- 16 Cellos
- 10 Basses

Having a string orchestra with these numbers will also greatly improve the overall effect of the col legno battuto as well as the sul ponticello and sul tasto techniques. Having sixteen cellos and ten basses would also improve the sound of their sectional chromatic clusters.

The Minor Third

The entire first movement is based off of the first antiphonal chant of the Good Friday Mass:

```
\text{\textit{Antiphon}}:
\begin{align*}
\text{stitrént} \quad \text{réges térrae,} \quad \text{et principes convenént:} \\
\text{in uni, adversus Dóminum, et adversus Christum ó-jus.}
\end{align*}
\text{\textit{Liber Usualis}, 1961. (pg. 834)}
```

"Kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed one."

The rising and falling minor third is a thematic feature of the Good Friday chant, which the first movement relies upon. The strings' opening material of the first movement is based purely on the minor third, which gives a background to the solo chant fragments in Violin 1 and Viola. The trombone completes the quotation of the Good Friday chant in its entrance from mm 8 – 9. From there, the minor third is manifested within the various permutations of the melody throughout the ostinato section. I then create a fugue subject in measure 88 out of previous minor third motives heard in the ostinato section.
Performance Notes:

This composition employs many specific extended techniques through the use of unorthodox notation. In the score, you will find written reminders summarizing what each notation marking means when it is employed, or means by which to play the extended technique – such as “use hand to hit strings”, etc. This legend aids the conductor and performer on the specific commands of the music with descriptions of unorthodox notation and a description of the sound that results from the extended techniques. The legend is organized in score order. From there, each instance of unorthodox notation will be explained for that specific instrument.

Piano

The pianist will need a heavy chain for this composition. The chain should be in-hand and ready before the downbeat of the first measure for dramatic effect.

Chain Drop and Scrape

First: In measure 1, the pianist should drop a heavy chain – preferably grade 70-80 – inside the piano and away from the hammers while the dampener pedal is pressed. The chain should spread across the sound board as much as possible, covering most of the piano strings. It is not a problem that the chain hits the support beams of the piano, as long as there is a resulting percussive hit with

Second: Using both hands, the pianist should scrape the chain across the strings in approximation to where the shapes are shown on the staff in mm 2-4. The shapes indicate the area of what pitches are to be scraped. To create dynamic contrast, the pianist must press on the chain harder for louder volume or softer for softer volume. The dampener pedal should remain pressed through these scrapes. After the scraping section is complete, leave the chain on the strings.

Lower Scrape

The pianist should lightly scrape the chain across the lower strings of the piano with the dampener pedal pressed.

Clusters are often employed in this composition as a way to add textural depth to the percussion section. The following are the different types of clusters found within the piece:

Chromatic Cluster

The pianist should play a chromatic cluster within the range specified by the notehead's vertical length. The chromatic clusters should be dissonant and percussively attacked.

Two-Arm Chromatic Cluster

The pianist should play a large chromatic cluster with both forearms covering the range of the vertical length of the notehead. The attack should be percussive and not arpeggiated.

Hand-Attacked Chromatic Cluster

The pianist should reach into the piano and, with a slapping motion, hit the strings of the piano within the range shown by the vertical height of the noteheads.

Freely-Arpeggiated Chromatic Cluster

The pianist should freely arpeggiate up and down chromatically within the confines of the vertical height of the noteheads.
Resonating Chamber Hit

- The pianist should hit the resonating plate inside the piano while the dampener pedal is pressed. This should create a loud, low ‘boom’ sound that should continue to resonate.

Staccatissimo Overtones

- The pianist lightly places their left hand on top of the strings near the hammers that strike the notes. This should create short, percussive overtones that continue resonate with the dampener pedal down. The pianist will have to experiment with how hard or soft to press the string for the best overtone results. Pressing on the string too hard will result in a dead attack, and pressing too lightly with cause the written pitch to become too present and overpower the percussive attacks.

- The pianist will place their right hand within range of the chromatic cluster’s notes and near the hammers. The same amount of pressure should be applied as in the previous excerpt to create a good balance between percussive attacks, actual pitch, and overtones.

Vibes

Large Chromatic Cluster

- The player should use two pieces of wood or material of harder surface – one for each row of notes on the keyboard – that are cut to fit within the vertical range of the clusters. The attacks should be harsh and loud with tone. Too much pressure will deaden the sound, which is unwanted. The dampener pedal should be continually pressed down through this passage.

Strings

It is advised that all string players have two bows present with them for the performance of this composition – a cheaper bow and the performer's usual bow. The markings *col legno batt.* are used extensively and at louder dynamics – if not the loudest dynamics possible. It is in the best interest of the performer to use a cheaper bow for the first movement to avoid damage to expensive equipment.

Section Cluster

- String players are to choose notes within the vertical range of the chromatic cluster to play. The performers may employ a double-stop if it is within the range of the cluster. These clusters should have many tones represented, including microtones. Each cluster should be attacked percussively and should have a grotesque character.

Microtonal Tremolo

- Occasionally, the strings are asked to perform moving microtonal tremolos. To do this, a player music first establish the tone according to the written pitch and its given accidental (in the example, Violin 1 has E-natural, Violin 2 has C-natural, Viola has C-natural, Cello has Ab and Eb, Contrabass has Ab.). When the tone is established, the player must pay attention to where the arrows point.

- If an arrow only points down, a player can only travel down to approximately 50 cents below the established pitch, then continue back up to the established pitch, and so on until the duration of the note is complete.

- If an arrow only points up, a player can travel only up to approximately 50 cents above the established pitch, then continue back down to the established pitch, and so on until the duration of the note is complete.

- If there is both an up and a down arrow, a player can travel up approximately 50 cents above the established pitch and down approximately 50 cents below the established pitch, continuing this movement until the duration of the note is complete.

- Players may waver the pitch as slow or fast as they’d like. As a string section, there should be a vast variety of speeds that blend together into one homogenous texture.
Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra

I. Introduction, Ostinato, and Fugue

Grave

M. J. Hood (2013)

Trombone

Piano

Timpani

Vibraphone

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Violoncellos

Double Basses

Deliberately drop chain on the strings inside piano away from hammers, and drag chain down the strings in approximation to the shapes shown.

Mute strings with R.H.

Slowly scrape across the lower strings

Tempo Block

20''

12''

Tam-Tam

Accessory (Tam-tam, Wind Chimes, Etc.)

Temple Block

16'' China

Roto-toms

Low

Solo

Solo

Solo

Solo

Solo

Solo

Solo

Solo

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Moderato with Much Violence

Tr.

Pn.

Ti.

Vi.

P1.

P2.

P3.

P4.

V1.

V2.

Va.

Vc.

Ba.
hit resonating chamber with palm of hand
place left hand on top of the strings, near the harmonies of the right hand's noting from mm 66-85

slightly dampen each note with hand as you attack

strike with stick

med mallet

low sample block

col legno tratto

Col legno tratto

Col legno tratto

Col legno tratto

Col legno tratto

Col legno tratto

Col legno tratto
col legno batt.

leggiero

mf

f

poco

hit strings
w/ hand
inside piano

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bell edge
w. brushes

mute strings with R.H.

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Grave

solo
al legno
molto legato

P3
P4.
V1.
V2.
Va.
Vc.
Ba.
n.  

continuing to arpeggiate upwards and downwards chromatically through the duration of mm 143-145 in the L.H.

slowly place R.H. on strings near hammers where the L.H.’s notes strike w/ both arms

release R.H.

(as soft as possible)

P3.

(by all other players on the same note)

V1.

V2.

Vc.

Ba.

Vi.

P2.

P1.

Pn.

Tr.
II. Kyrie
for Mixed Choir and Organ
M. J. Hood (2013)
Synopsis

*Kyrie* was composed with two intentions:

1) It is intended to be a work that, though derived from traditional Latin Mass liturgy, can easily be adapted for use in any professional choir's repertoire.

2) It is intended to be part of a bigger liturgical work – a simple Requiem Mass – explicitly meant to be performed during Christian worship.

This setting of the *Kyrie* began as an experiment to see what else I could do with a simple chord progression I used in the second movement of my *Concerto for Trombone, String Orchestra and Percussion*. Expanding the range of the particular progression vertically among the choral voices drastically changed the effect of the original progression.

The choir is to sing with no vibrato and a pure tone like that of a pseudo-Renaissance style.

The organ is used in several ways in this piece. The pedal is used as a voice *colle parte* with the bass voice. This is done so the repeated Eb2 in the bass voice will be full no matter what range capabilities the basses have. The organ also acts as a evolving textural entity. The organist is to use and remove stops in accordance to the choir's dynamics – like that of church organ or Baroque organ aesthetics. The marking “flutes + fifths” implies that the organist uses basic flutes and diapason as the fundamental basis for accompanying the choir. If the choir is particularly large in size, it may be necessary to broaden the initial sound of the organ to match the choir's size and dynamic output, thereof.
Kyrie
for Mixed Choir and Organ
M. J. Hood (2013)

Slowly (in a 2 feel)
all voices straight-tone throughout (no vib.)

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Alto 1

Alto 2

Tenor

Bass

flutes + fifths

Organ

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fade in from silence (softly pronounce "K")

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Ky.

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e le i son

Chris le e lei son

Chris le e lei son

Chris le e lei son

Chris le e lei son

Chris le e lei son
solo
fade in from silence (softly pronounce "K")
III. Two Improvisations

M. J. Hood and Christian Pincock (2012)
Synopsis

*Two Improvisations* is a fixed media recording produced in 2012 by recording experiments in electro-acoustic improvisation. The piece was done in collaboration with trombonist, composer and improviser, Christian Pincock.

**Background**
For months, Christian and I experimented with how to integrate trombone, digital synthesizers, effects pedals, and two laptops successfully. Eventually, we found a workflow that created full, orchestral atmospheres. *Two Improvisations* presents two of the earliest successful electro-acoustic improvisation experiments. This piece also captures the essence and creativity of what Christian and I strived to achieve in creating a rich, orchestral environment with just a few pieces of equipment.

**Process**
Christian used his setup in MaxMSP that he does for his usual solo electro-acoustic improvisations. With his MaxMSP setup, Christian can use pre-recorded samples and record samples via audio line or mic and manipulate those recordings in real time. The musical material from the trombone and digital synthesizers would be recorded and manipulated into new musical ideas or textures. While improvising over these changes, the cycle would continue, transitioning to new textures and ideas smoothly. The idea was to create a cohesive work that transitions different musical ideas smoothly.

My setup included a trombone, Yamaha Silent Brass System, laptop, M-Audio Axiom 24-key MIDI controller, digital synthesizers (Native Instruments Reaktor, Logic instruments) digital effects (from Logic or Ableton Live 8), and various guitar FX pedals. All of these elements would be channeled through an audio interface that would connect to Christian's audio interface in stereo. At any point in time, Christian could sample any of my improvised material and create textures with them. All of these elements would be recorded on a master track in Christian's MaxMSP setup and rendered 'as is' with little to no mastering of the track.
IV. Depravity – Estancia

M. J. Hood (2013)

In Collaboration with Ursula Coyote and Rodney Gurule
Synopsis

*Depravity* is the title for a series of collaborative photo-musical installations featuring the ghost town environments of New Mexico. This project was done in collaboration with photographer Ursula Coyote (pictured left), sound engineer Rodney Gurule (pictured right-down), and myself. The installation has three parts: photographs, sound foley, and digital sequencing. This specific installation featured in this portfolio is entitled *Depravity – Estancia* because the site-of-interests were found in Estancia, New Mexico.

**Process**

1) Photographs are taken at the places-of-interest and edited by Ursula.
2) At the same site, Rodney and I foley the natural sounds of the environment.
3) Using the vector-based MIDI program GeoSonix, I program a photograph to have the ability to manipulate MIDI parameters, then export the information in real time to a Digital Audio Workstation.
4) Using Logic Pro 9’s environment mode, I import the live MIDI information from GeoSonix into a sampler patch I created, which channels the information, occasionally randomizing the note input and triggering the recorded foley samples of the ghost town's sound environment.

**Effect**

The photograph exports musical information via a cursor that scans the photograph in real time, translating color and hue from pixels into MIDI information – such as pitch, velocity, modulation, etc. Overall, the cursor scans most, if not all, of the picture’s color parameters, which creates a tangible, musical form. *Depravity* relies on this automated, vector-driven cursor to act semi-autonomously. The cursor slowly scans, chooses, and filters the various elements of the photograph on its own. The different areas of the photograph can contain staggeringly contrasting color/hue properties, which, as a result of the cursor exploring these areas, activates different sample combinations. Musically, the different combinations of samples create – sometimes stark – contrasts in sound textures.

The cursor on the photograph in GeoSonix’s 'Full Screen Mode':
How the cursor translates color and hue into a MIDI language:

When the cursor moves about the photograph, it "looks" for color and hue information and relays that information to a Digital Audio Workstation (Logic) via a digital MIDI output. The hue and color of the photograph that the trigger interprets into MIDI information controls the samples in Logic based on the chromatic scale - C-1 being the lowest note triggered with a range of 4.5 octaves that can be triggered. The pitches are interpreted based on the darkness or lightness of the pixels (0-255 or 10-500 values) or the different shades of hue in each pixel (0-255 values). In effect, the shape and composition of a photograph will render different sonic results because of these differences in color and hue.

The Logic patch will randomize the information given to it by GeoSonix and filter out any duplicate signals so the same sample will not be layered on top of itself polyphonically. The patch also randomizes values in velocity pressure ranging from 23 (soft)-127 (loudest). The chord memorizer in the Logic patch is programmed to trigger combinations of certain samples that were previously heard.

The basic template of the Logic Pro 9 environment and sampler patch:

Scope of Project
The purpose of the Depravity project is to spread a social awareness about several issues idiomatic to New Mexico. First, New Mexico boasts over four-hundred ghost towns, all with some kind of historical significance to the state. When researching these places, most are the property of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). These places, under BLM ownership, are usually free-to-roam and open to the public. However, most of these sites have been vandalized, looted, or are decaying rapidly via weathering and mismanagement. Through this project, our hope is to bring an artistic representation of the sites to the general public, which will, in turn, create an interest in these decaying sites. If the project continues in success, we plan to have formal historical talks and small concerts – including a showing of the Depravity installations – at the sites of these historical points-of-interests.

Materials and Setup
Items needed:
- Mac computer (preferably a high-quality, up-to-date mac laptop)
- Logic Pro with Depravity patch (including samples and environment [Note: Logic must be able to run 48k sample rate with 24-bit depth])
- GeoSonix with photographic score patch
- Digital Projector and appropriate cables
- Screen or Wall as a projection surface
- 5.1 Digital Surround System and appropriate cables (if surround isn't possible for the venue, change the master output channel in Logic from "Surround" to "Stereo". All the sample panning will remain relative from Surround to Stereo.)
- Chairs (setup as theater-style seating)

The photograph should be projected on a wall or screen directly from GeoSonix's 'Full Screen Mode' so the cursor can be seen scanning the photograph. Logic Pro will run in the background with the audio signals routed properly through the 5.1 Digital Surround System. Chairs are setup in the center of the 5.1 Digital Surround System, like a theater. The audience's eyes will be drawn to the photograph while listening to the textural results of the cursor's photographic exploration.
V. Deep Calls to Deep
for Two Pianos

M. J. Hood (2013)
Deep Calls to Deep is a piece for two pianos based on Psalm 42:

“Deep calls to deep
at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.
By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.
I say to God, my rock:
‘Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?’
As with a deadly wound in my bones,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me all the day long,
‘Where is your God?’
Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.” Psalm 42:7-11 (ESV)

The piece was inspired by two elements implied within the psalm:

1) The dichotomy and separation of God and man

2) Water

The Dichotomy

Two pianos are used to represent God and man. I do this because, in the biblical text, man was made in the image of God. Therefore, I thought it best to represent this imagery through the use of two of the same instrument. The two pianos function similarly to each other in this piece. Rather than two staves of tones, the pianists only have one staff of tones and a staff to represent how much sustain pedal to use. The pianists alternate both hands rhythmically – like that of a percussionist – in conjunction with dynamic markings to create linear motion.

Though the pianos are used similarly, Piano 2 represents God and Piano 1, man. The way that they parts are separated are by the use of the number five. Biblically, the number five is used in acts of God's grace. While Piano 1 may begin the piece, Piano 2 is transposed up a perfect fifth from Piano 1's tones, creating harmonious bitonal textures. While Piano 2 harmonically represents this dichotomy, it also represents it rhythmically. Piano 2 contains extended passages of music in an implied 5/16 feel from mm. 56 – 98 while Piano 1 continues in simple time signatures, further emphasizing the number five as a distinguishing feature that separates the two piano parts.

Water/Wave Motive

I employed a technique in this piece called 'gating' to give the effect of waves washing to and from a shoreside. 'Gating' is a common electronic music technique that – while a sampler or synthesizer is playing a steady rhythm – slowly lengthens and shortens the sustain and release of a signal while maintaining consistent time. In the case of Deep Calls to Deep, the gating is done through a combination of dynamic expression and the amount of sustain pedal. Sixteenth notes are used to denote consistent and unchanging time in the piece. While playing sixteenth notes may not create expressiveness in and of itself, the 'gating' effect adds breadth and expansiveness to the forward motion created by the sixteenths.

1 See Genesis 1:26 “...let us make man in our image...”
Deep Calls to Deep
for two pianos

M. J. Hood (2013)