Electric Counterpoint

Steve Reich

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- Born in New York in 1936
- Studied Philosophy at university, then later went on to the Juillard School of Music and Mills College studying composition.
- Composed *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out* in 1965 and 1966.
- Typically wrote music that was repetitive, yet featured complex rhythms.
- In the 1970s, he studied different types of world music, which influenced his later work, e.g. *Clapping Music* was influenced by African drumming in Ghana.

How Minimalism Developed

- Expressionism led to Serialism, which then led to Minimalism, as some composers felt restricted by Serialism.
- The detailed scores written in the style of Serialism were replaced by alternative approaches such as:
  - Scores with no/little detail
  - Text-based scores (i.e. written directions)
  - Graphic scores (staff notation replaced by pictures/symbols)
- Minimalism became popular in the 1960s.

Features of Minimalism

- Drones
- Repeated ostinato/loops (known as cells)
- Phasing
- Metamorphosis
- Layering
- Note addition/ Note Subtraction
- Static/ non-functional harmony

Minimalism

Minimalist Composers
Philip Glass
Terry Riley
La Monte Young

Electric Counterpoint

- Written in 1987, in America
- The solo part was written for Pat Metheny
- The 3rd movement in a series of three pieces for solo performers with pre-recorded multi-track tapes (*Vermont Counterpoint* and *New York Counterpoint*)

Key Musical Elements

- Uses multi-tracking to feature several different melodies by one performer
- Use of repetition of cells/ motifs
- Canons
- Note addition (NB: There is no note subtraction!)
- Layering
- Features a resultant melody
- Static/ diatonic harmony
- Rhythmic displacement
- Gradual building of texture

Instrumentation

- Total of 10 guitars
  - 1 live guitar
  - 2 bass guitars- Panned across the stereo field
  - 7 (electric) guitars
- Bass guitars and electric guitars are pre-recorded, all by one performer.

Structure and Melody

- In two main sections, with a coda (binary form).
  - Section A- In E minor, with parts being gradually added
  - Section B- Modulates to C minor, which then changes back to E minor. Shifts in key and metre occur more frequently. At the end, guitars 5-7 and the bass guitars fade out.
  - Coda- Only the 4-part canon is playing, with the resultant melody being played by the live guitar. The piece continues to shift keys until it ends in E minor with an E^5 chord played by all 5 parts.
- Angular melodies that interlock with each other
- Uses a single cell (motif) in an ostinato
- A resultant melody is played by the live guitar
- Canonic
- Based on triads
- Uses note addition

Texture

- Polyphonic/contrapuntal
- Texture builds gradually, in the following order:

  Guitar 1 – Live Guitar – Guitar 2 – Guitar 3 – Guitar 4 – Bass Guitars 1&2 – Guitar 5 – Guitar 6 – Guitar 7
- Layered
- Uses panning in the bass guitars
- All parts play for most of the piece
- Guitars 5-7 play strummed chords
- Texture thins out towards the end, where guitars 5-7 and bass guitars drop out

Harmony and Tonality

- Starts in E minor, with frequent alternation between Cm and Em in Section B
- Modal (Aeolian mode) due to a lack of D#s
- Ends on an E^5 chord
- Some tonal ambiguity (until bar 33)
- Diatonic

Rhythm, Metre and Tempo

- Labelled ‘Fast’
- Starts in 3/2 time, but changes frequently between 3/2 and 12/8 time in Section B
- Polymetre
- Uses rhythmic counterpoint
- Features rhythmic displacement
- Syncopated
- Uses cross rhythms/ polyrhythms
- Live guitar plays a quaver motif, bass guitars play a quaver motif, guitars 5-7 and the live guitar play longer strummed chords