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MUSI4540

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Composition 1

My primary goal with this composition was to integrate several simultaneous, independent rhythmic elements using RTcmix. I specifically sought to create three separate sonic layers: a drone that would evolve over the course of the piece, a set of sparsely occurring rhythmic elements, and a more traditional looping rhythm involving several drum sounds. As far as the aesthetic of the composition is concerned, I was inspired by one of the example assignments to create a composition that sounds vaguely like a prayer chant, but with a western funk drum beat over it.

I implemented each of the three layers in a different manner. I played the drone using the filter sweep instrument which takes an envelope and a set of frequency cutoffs and automates the filter over the specified duration. The drone itself I created by using an Audacity plugin called Paulstretch to stretch the shared sound of a vocal “ahhh” to 1000% its original duration and took a minute long slice of the resulting file. The sparsely occurring rhythmic parts (tibetan bell and “whack” sound) were automated using a some conditional logic with a simple for loop and the modulo operator, which calculates the remainder after dividing two integers. I set the bell and whack to play using the reverbit instrument at overlapping intervals starting a few seconds into the composition, and automated the reverb to diminish over time.

The implementation of the drum sounds was somewhat more complex than the other two parts. I decided to create a drum beat that mirrors one I recently endeavored to learn on the drum kit. I broke down the beat into 16th notes and created an array of size 24 (the length of the initial beat in 16th notes) for each drum. I then inserted 1s in the indices in which the given drum voice should play and 0s in all other indices. The arrays are then traversed using a tempo increment variable that I created; each array is checked for a 0 or 1 at each 16th note “step” and either queued to play or not. I used random numbers to alter the amplitude of the shaker to provide dynamics, and automated subtle changes in the amplitude of each drum sound over time. I had initially intended to have a fourth voice, representing snare ghost notes, but I felt the result made the composition sound overly busy.

The result is roughly 30% more ominous, less ambient, and less funky than I had hoped. However, I think the composition is short and varied enough that it never feels monotonous or oppressive. I have no idea what kind of radio show would want this as an intro, other than one that wouldn’t be on air for too long.