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<center>An Analysis of Michael Torke's *Being, Part 1*</center>

Michael Torke's 2019 work *Being*, composed for a 24-member chamber ensemble, stands out for its unchanging tempo of 126 beats per minute over a period of 43 minutes. This analysis concerns itself with Part 1 of *Being* — spanning roughly four-and-a-half minutes — although many of the techniques discussed here may be found in the other eight parts.

Born in 1961, Michael Torke is known for composing music with pop and minimalist music influence,[1] and *Being* is no exception. According to an interview with Torke, his discovery of melodic progressive house music, a subgenre of electronic dance music, was the impetus for composing this work.[2] One may observe several features of melodic progressive house music in *Being*, including rhythmic syncopations, diatonic chord progressions, and most importantly, the adding and removing of musical layers as a way of creating musical interest.[3] These features have also been a mainstay of Torke's previous compositions, including works such as *Adjustable Wrench*.[4] In *Being*, Torke used the gestural language of melodic progressive house music as a framework for the postminimalist techniques[5] he had been developing for decades.

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[1] See Chute, "Torke, Michael." *Grove Music Online.*

[2] Torke said he embraced "a branch of EDM, (Electronic Dance Music), called Melodic Progressive — I knew nothing about it, studied it, and then tried to absorb it, imposing my own structural and stylistic concerns on it." (See Amacher, "EDM mixes with classical music on Michael Torke's 'Being'").

[3] From Price 2010, p. 406: "A track will contain contrasts and moments of greater intensity, typically through the gradual build up of layers and louder dynamics."

[4] See Roeder 2003.

[5] Bernard 2003 characterizes Torke as a composer "whose development in no way coincided with that of the original minimalists but who seems to have latched onto the style, and perhaps as well to some of the technical devices superficial construed, as a vehicle to getting somewhere else" (p. 118); in other words, a postminimalist composer.

Every pitch in *Being, Part 1* belongs to the four-flat diatonic collection. The harmonic structure is mainly comprised of eight-measure chord progressions — a common harmonic device in melodic progressive house music.[6] There are three of these chord progressions throughout this work, which I will refer to as CP1, CP2, and CP3 (Figure 1). Since most of the chords employ triadic harmony, I have labeled each chord using roman numerals, though it may be argued whether a tonal analysis is appropriate in the context of this music as it tends to have an elusive pitch center. It is also worth nothing that these chord progressions are often embellished with additional pitches, as well as rhythmic displacements of a sixteenth-note; I have attempted to reduce the chord progressions to their most essential form.

Figure 1. CP1, CP2, and CP3.

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[6] According to Price 2010, "the basis of musical structure in house music is the insistent use of repetition, with phrasing often occurring in eight-measure sections" (p. 406).

A notable difference between the three chord progressions is their harmonic rhythm. CP1 is grouped as 4+2+2 measures, CP2 is grouped as 2+4+2 measures, and CP3 is grouped as 3+2+3 measures displaced by one measure. This creates internal variety in a piece that is entirely structured in groupings of eight measures. CP3 is particularly disorienting, as most popular music avoids phrase groupings of odd numbers such as three.

For the first 192 measures of the piece, each chord progression is presented for 64 measures, or eight total repetitions. The first time that CP2 is presented, its first chord is replaced by the last chord of CP1. Likewise, during the first presentation of CP3, its first chord is replaced by the last chord of CP2. This technique may be called harmonic dovetailing, with the dovetailed harmony serving to create a smooth transition from one chord progression to the next.

All the melodic material in this work is comprised of three melodic themes, which I refer to as Theme A, Theme B, and Theme C (Figure 2). Each theme is exactly sixteen measures long, spanning the duration of two eight-bar chord progressions. They all have a two-part structure which may be classified as a parallel period, with mm. 9-12 in each example sharing the exact same rhythm (and often similar notes) as mm. 1-4, before diverging rhythmically in mm. 13-16.

Figure 2. Themes A, B, and C.

The three themes are extremely similar with respect to their surface features; they all include sixteenth notes with frequent syncopation. The themes are constructed from similar rhythmic and melodic gestures, examples of which are shown in Figure 3.

Gesture 1	Gesture 2	Gesture 3
Theme A, m. 1	Theme A, m. 3	Theme A, m. 4
Theme B, m. 34	Theme B, m. 36 (inverted)	
Theme C, m. 100	Theme C, m. 101	Theme C, m. 99

Figure 3. Examples of three melodic gestures common to two or more themes.

Torke designed the melodies to work in counterpoint with one another. Figure 4 shows Themes A and B played simultaneously, which occurs at Reh. 3. For the first three measures of the example, Theme B only plays during the rests in Theme A. After the third measure, the themes occasionally occupy the same rhythmic space, showing that the contrapuntal process is

not perfectly systematic. The main point is that the themes have different rhythmic profiles that complement each other.

Figure 4. Counterpoint between Theme A and Theme B (Reh. 3).

Throughout the movement, Torke develops each theme by keeping the rhythm the same and changing some of the pitches. For example, compare the pitches of Theme A in Reh. 1 to the pitches of Theme A in Reh. 5 (Figure 5). The rhythm has remained exactly the same, but there are thirteen different pitches, shown in red. In this example, all the changed pitches are within a diatonic third of the original pitch, which is usually the case throughout this piece.

Figure 5. Themes A₁ (m. 1) and A₂ (Reh. 5). Changed notes shown in red.

For this analysis, I will refer to the first presentation of this theme as A_1, and subsequent presentations in which there are changed pitches as A_2, A_3, A_4, etc. The same is true of Themes B and C. It is important to clarify that a higher index number does not indicate a greater quantity of altered pitches relative to A_1: in fact, some later presentations of Theme A are closer to the original than earlier presentations.

One may ask: how did the composer decide which pitches to change, and what to change them to? There is no systematic process, but I identified two general reasons for changing the pitches: 1) to support a new harmony, and 2) to support a new countermelody. To demonstrate, Figure 6 shows the first two measures of Reh. 5, in which A_2 is presented with CP2 as the underlying harmony. Here, the first two notes have been changed from G and C to B-flat and D-flat — both chord tones — in order to fit the harmony. It is not always the case that melody notes are changed to chord tones; on occasion, it appears that the composer changes notes to add new and more colorful pitches to the existing harmony.

Figure 6: Theme A_2 with first chord of CP2 (Reh. 5).

Figure 7 also shows the beginning Reh. 5, this time displaying Theme B_2, which serves as a countermelody to Theme A_2. (The red notes in Themes A_2 and B_2 are the pitches which have been altered compared to A_1 and B_1.) In the fourth measure, the altered pitch in both parts has been changed from F to E-flat, maintaining the vertical interval of a perfect octave. This example shows that creating certain intervallic relationships between contrapuntal voices seems to be an important consideration for Torke.

Figure 7. Theme A₂ and B₂ (Reh. 5). Changed notes compared to A₁ and B₁ shown in red.

Another way in which the themes are developed is through the use of rhythmic augmentation. Each of the three themes appears exactly once in augmentation throughout this movement. Figure 8 shows the three augmented themes as they appear in the piece. In each of these examples, the rhythmic values have been doubled so that they are eighth notes instead of sixteenth notes. While the augmented form of Theme A is an exact doubling of note durations with no pitch alterations, the augmented forms of Themes B and C have two differences from the original melody. The first is that certain notes are sustained for a longer duration, often at the ends of phrases. The second is that, unlike the original themes, the second half of each theme is an exact repetition of the first half. (However, since the original themes are parallel periods, the listener initially perceives the exact repetition in the second half as the beginning of a consequent phrase.)

Figure 8. Themes A, B, and C in augmentation (Reh. 12, 4, and 8 respectively).

Why would Torke repeat the first half of Themes B and C rather than presenting the

entire themes in augmentation? I believe it has to do with the relationship of the augmented

melody to the underlying harmony and accompanying countermelodies (which are not

rhythmically augmented). If one splits the 32-measure augmented melody into two identical

16-measure segments, one can repeat the same 16-measure countermelody with minimal pitch alterations. The relationship of the melody to the harmony also remains the same for both 16-measure segments. Since the underlying chord progression for the augmented form of Theme A also has doubled rhythmic durations (as shown in Figure 9), the relationship of the melody to the harmony is the same as mm. 1-16 — just twice as long.

Figure 9 shows a formal diagram of the entire movement, indicating which instrumental combination is playing which melodic theme at any given time. The melodic themes always appear in one of three instrumental combinations: 1) flute, oboe, and clarinet, 2) bass clarinet and two soprano saxophones, and 3) trumpet and first trombone.

Rehearsal #			1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
Measure #	1	9	17	25	33	41	49	57	65	73	81	89	97	105	113	121
Themes fl, ob, cl	A_1		A_1		B_1		B_1				A_2		C_1		C_1	
bcl, ssax1.2								A_1		B_2		B_3				B_4
tpt, tbn1									B in Augmentation							
Chord Progression	CP1	CP1	CP1	CP1	CP1	CP1	CP1	CP1	CP2*	CP2	CP2	CP2	CP2	CP2	CP2	CP2
Notes									*) First chord = last chord of CP1							

8		9		10		11		12		13		14		15	16	17	18	19
129	137	145	153	161	169	177	185	193	201	209	217	225	233	241	249	257	265	273
		B_5		A_3		A_4				C_5		A_1		A_1 (subtractive process)				
C_2		C_3				C_4		A_5		A_6								
C in Augmentation								A in Augmentation										
CP3*	CP3	CP3	CP3	CP3	CP3	CP3	CP3	CP1		CP1		CP1	CP1	CP1**	CP1**	CP1**	CP1**	CP1**
*) First chord = last chord of CP2														**) Second half of CP1 repeated twice				

Figure 9. Formal diagram of Being, *Part 1.*

Beginning in Reh. 15, the second half of CP1 is repeated to the end, never resolving to the F-minor triad which started the piece. The final four measures of A_1 also repeat to the end; Torke initiates a subtractive process, removing a few notes on each repetition until Reh. 19, by which point the melody has completely disappeared. This section may be distinguished as a coda, departing from the process which characterized the rest of the piece.

There are several notable observations one can make from this diagram. The first is that every 64 measures (except m. 257), the chord progression changes, and one of the melodic themes is presented in augmentation. Each of these moments serves as an important formal marker. The climactic moment occurs at Reh. 12-13, when CP1 is doubled in duration and Theme A_1 is presented in exact augmentation. It is also worth mentioning that the augmented melodies are always in counterpoint with their original versions: for example, at Reh. 4-5, B_2 and B_3 serve as countermelodies to B in Augmentation.

One may also observe that the first time a melodic theme appears, it is presented at least twice without any pitch alterations, helping the listener remember each theme before the pitches are altered in subsequent repetitions. This is true of Theme A_1 in mm. 1-32, Theme B_1 in mm. 33-63, and Theme C_1 in mm. 97-128. It is notable that Theme C is not introduced until Reh. 6, about a third of the way through the piece, creating subtle but much-needed contrast from Themes A and B. After Reh. 10, Theme B is no longer presented, allowing Theme C to serve as a countermelody to Theme A. Therefore, Torke is not only adding and removing layers on a local level, but also in the large-scale form. Reh. 14 is the only time we get a true recapitulation of previous material: the melody and chord progression are identical to the opening sixteen bars.

Above all, one can see through this formal diagram a rigorous economy of materials which characterizes much of Torke's work.[7] Although the primary formal elements of *Being, Part 1* are melody and harmony, a more exhaustive analysis may delve into the organization of rhythm and texture, which also play a prominent role.

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[7] Roeder 2003 notes the "subtlety and economy of materials" (p. 135) in Torke's *Adjustable Wrench*.

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