

Triptyque: for trumpet, marimba, and guitar

A triptyque (or triptych) refers to an object composed of three parts, and can be found in virtually every art form. The visual arts have perhaps the most recognizable ones, appearing as three connected panels (often from the Middle Ages where it had a symbolic structure), or as separate panels with a common theme or narrative shared between them. Literature has its share of triptychs, Dante's *Divine Comedy* being one of the more famous.

The obvious manifestation of the definition can be found here as a trio of instruments: trumpet, marimba, and guitar, and in the structure of the composition: Tableau 1, Interlude, and Tableau 2. The instrumentation is a peculiar one, chosen for its timbral contrasts as much as for its potential sympathies, especially between the marimba and guitar. There exists a visual element to this composition, mainly in the suggested arrangement of the performers, with the marimba and guitar on the outside, and the trumpet in the center. This is significant for both the acoustics and the narrative of the music. The relationship between the instruments are well 'choreographed', and hence the titles tableau, which are used to suggest both the rhythmical qualities found in these movements, as well as to help create a scene within the larger narrative.

The ability to sustain pitches on the marimba and guitar is somewhat limited. In order to create the illusion of sustain they must rearticulate the pitches. But their material construction: wood, enables them to resonate strong overtones which allow for the creation of complex harmonies. I exploited this quality in the composition, and used them as a complementary pair throughout the movements. You can hear this at the very opening of the composition where the marimba/guitar duo punctuate beats against the more sustained and lyrical trumpet line. Other times a melodic figure will start in one instrument, pass through the trumpet, and end up on the other end. This process occurs quite frequently, and sometimes very rapidly, especially in the first and last movements. The interlude, or central movement, is an opportunity for the central musician, the trumpet, to move into the foreground. It is the least rhythmic of the three, and hence more contemplative. While focusing on its own independent development, its more ambient qualities also invite the listener to consider what has occurred before, and anticipate what will follow. It ends with the marimba/guitar duo fading out (with the marimba playing a tremolo while the guitarist percussively (!), but delicately, strikes his instrument). The second Tableau begins as a unison passage between the three instruments, but reversing the roles of the first movement: now the trumpet punctuates as the marimba and guitar unfold their melody. The trio is constantly being constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. The end of the movement brings all of the performers back to a unison line, and concludes on a motive that suggests circularity to the entire three movement work.

Thomas Schuttenhelm