

Ethan Braun

what we call progress

for 33 piano trios (32 digital, 1 real)

Note on the Composition

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

what we call progress is for 33 piano trios (32 digital and 1 real). I specify this because the more typical phrases—“for piano trio and electronics” or “fixed-media” or the like—do not give due diligence to the nature of the electronics involved in this case given their particular relationship to the live trio. This relationship of digital to real should be understood as an illusory relationship: the trios mirror each other. Indeed it’s a trio in a hall of endless mirrors. So where’s the real music? Where’s the mirror music? If a mirror reveals something of its onlooker, what would the analog here be? Original, real music that looks itself up and down, handsomely itself up?

The only sample in the electronics not a piano, violin, or cello, is a synthesized sound from which all the work’s material is derived. This is the first thing heard in the work, so is that the real music? Or, given the depth of processing, and what this material developed into, is it a distant reflection?

what we call progress asks what musical progress is. It wonders if transforming a source sound or material into music constitutes something progressive; it thinks aloud as to whether or not live performers can keep up with digital ones; it

Performance Notes

Amplification

The live trio must be amplified and run through a small amount of reverb for the purpose of blending with the electronics. This facilitates the effect of illusion as to who’s playing what and when.

Articulation

The violin performing *pizzicato* throughout, always situated quite high on the instrument, should help form an iciness in the sound. The piano’s higher register should emphasize this iciness through a generally sharp articulation, while the Cello and piano’s left hand should add body to the sound. Given the largely unison playing throughout, the ensemble should think of itself in each movement like a long, winding melody that slowly explores itself. Each melody has a slightly different character, but all share a robustness and directness.

The piano should employ as little pedal as possible, but the cello should generally feel that they hold their pitch into the next beat, facilitating an l.v. however possible.

Click Track

A click track will be provided to facilitate ensemble playing. This can be disseminated to the players through a small headphone amp set on stage behind the pianist in the center. Long cables are recommended to accommodate for large distances between the performers, and it is also necessary that the headphones be black ear buds so as to be inconspicuous.

Electronics

The electronics take the form of a simple .wav file. The audio has been mixed down into stereo, but stems are available for finer control if needed. In certain cases the live ensemble and electronics should be sent through the same reverb (as light as possible) to effect their occupying as similar a space as possible.

Staging

The trio should be positioned as far upstage as possible. The piano in the center, violin stage left and cello stage right. The piano should be turned such that the pianist's face is visible to the audience. Butterflies should be used to diffuse lighting over the faces of each of the performers. Aside from the lighting on the faces of the performers, the hall should be in complete darkness, obscuring the speakers from view.

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I. Forward

♩ = 60

Expressive, as though trying to remember what a melody was.

A

Violin

Electronics Intro 25 Click begins pizz. throughout 4

Cello

Electronics Intro 25 Click begins arco *f* generally loud, not harsh, but purposeful, intense 4

Piano

Electronics Intro 25 Click begins *f* generally loud, not harsh, but purposeful, intense 4

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

32

what we call progress

42 **B**

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

50

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

GLITCH (non tutti unison)

8va

57

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

6

what we call progress

C

Vn. w/pno rh unison again

Vc. w/pno lh unison again

Pno.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

D

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

what we call progress

77

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

E

82

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

87

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

what we call progress

F

93

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

100

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

104

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

attacca

l'istesso tempo: expressive, hopeful, brash II. Backward

113 Click begins m. 117 **G** pizz. throughout

Vn. **5**

Vc. Click begins m. 117 **f** pizz. throughout

Pno. Click begins m. 117 **f**

120

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

what we call progress

10

H

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

132 **I**

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

loco
8vb

This system contains measures 132, 133, and 134. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). Measure 132 is marked with a box containing the letter 'I'. The music consists of eighth-note triplets in all parts. The piano part includes a 'loco 8vb' marking under the first triplet of measure 132.

135

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

This system contains measures 135, 136, and 137. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature has two flats. The music continues with eighth-note triplets in all parts.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

144

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

147

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

J

Theme appears in Electronics

150

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

what we call progress

Vn. *155*

Vc. *3*

Pno. *155*

This system contains measures 155 through 159. The Violin (Vn.) part is in treble clef, starting at measure 155. The Viola (Vc.) part is in bass clef, starting at measure 155. The Piano (Pno.) part consists of two staves, both in treble and bass clefs, starting at measure 155. All parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplet markings (the number '3') above or below the notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Vn. *160*

Vc. *3* *attacca*

Pno. *160*

This system contains measures 160 through 164. The Violin (Vn.) part is in treble clef, starting at measure 160. The Viola (Vc.) part is in bass clef, starting at measure 160. The Piano (Pno.) part consists of two staves, both in treble and bass clefs, starting at measure 160. The Violin and Piano parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplet markings (the number '3') above or below the notes. The Viola part has a similar pattern but includes an *attacca* marking at the end of measure 164. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

III. Forward

♩ = 60

K

Suddenly Silent, as though disappeared

pizz. throughout

168

Vn. **4**

Vc. **4**

Pno. **4**

f with resolve: this time it'll be right!

176

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

180

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

This system contains measures 180 through 183. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Viola parts consist of eighth-note triplets. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with triplets in both the right and left hands. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

L

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

184

This system contains measures 184 through 187. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Viola parts continue with eighth-note triplets. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with triplets in both the right and left hands. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

188

This system contains measures 188 through 191. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Viola parts continue with eighth-note triplets. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with triplets in both the right and left hands. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

192

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

M

203

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.