
The Quest: an Audiomosaic

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ABSTRACT

The ballet *Pandora* was commissioned by Kurt Jooss, the modernist choreographer living in exile with his company, the Ballets Jooss. It was first performed in 1944. For the first movement, *The Quest*, Gerhard needed to create an ambience suggesting the bewildered meanderings of a crowd in search of something they could not identify. He achieves this by applying three techniques. The first is to create a number of ostinati of varying complexity which act as a series of 'tiles' in a mosaic, being varied and shifted around in a manner which constantly alters their relationships. The second technique is to use these tiles to create two 'Units', the first of which acts as an up-beat driving into the second, and the third is to allocate different 'tonalities' or 'modalities' to each tile. These tonalities or modalities, however, are only suggested: they are never fully established but constantly subverted. By creating conflicting areas of stability through the constant use of ostinati and simultaneously destabilising the relationships between them through constant shifts of register and timbre, combined with unstable tonalities Gerhard creates a kind of aural mosaic which in many respects anticipates a more expansive use in the *Symphony no. 1* and later works.

1. THE QUEST: AN AUDIOMOSAIC

The ballet *Pandora* was written for the Ballets Jooss (like Gerhard, exiles in Britain). It was first performed at the Cambridge Arts Theatre in January 1944 [1] and according to A. V. Coton it was preceded by 'two years' activity' [2]. The synopsis in the Cambridge Arts Theatre programme describes how,

The ballet shows Mankind, torn in the ever-recurring struggle between the material and spiritual forces represented in these two figures [Pandora and Psyche], [3]

although in 'Notes on Gerhard's *Pandora*', apparently written from memory, David Drew suggests that Gerhard had an alternative, private, scenario in mind in addition to that of Jooss. Whether or not that is so, drawing on the work of Julian White he goes on to suggest that *Pandora* contains several references to Spanish and Catalan traditional music, possibly as a gesture against Franco, who had singled out Catalan language and culture for suppression [4].

Gerhard worked on the score for several years, orchestrating it for theatre orchestra for subsequent Jooss productions in London and eventually producing the Suite for full orchestra in 1950 [5].

The movement selected for discussion here, *The Quest*, is the first movement. The overall form is simple: ternary. There is an initial A section, a brief, contrasting, B section, and a return to slightly varied A, with a short coda to conclude. From this the first 20 bars of the A section have been singled out for discussion in this paper and it is these to which, owing to the singularity of the structural processes applied in this passage, the description in the title, *Audiomosaic*, is applied. This singularity is Gerhard's response to the scenario, which describes the opening dance as an,

Ensemble of young men, young woman (sic), mothers, elder men. Search for unknown, aimless desires of younger groups; elder groups more quiet and stabile [stable]. Individual outbreaks and group movements alternating [6]

The constant shifting and seemingly aimless drifting is depicted in the musical structure. It is created through the juxtaposing and repetition of a series of musical 'tiles', each with its own distinctive features. The repetition is so pervasive that it is possible to describe this section as an aggregation of ostinati: except that they are varied so frequently that it then raises the question of when do ostinati cease to be ostinati, although, with a couple of exceptions, the variations are so basic that the original identity is always discernible.

Since a sense of harmonic motion is missing in this music the feeling of movement has to come from other sources, and the piece actually anticipates comments in an essay which Gerhard was to write in 1961,

Indeed it is mainly through Webern's work that we have been made aware of the high *Zusammenhang*-coefficient in other-than-tonal factors, such as metre (as soon as it ceases to be merely a scanning device), rhythm, span of events, Gestalt of eventuation, dynamics (as soon as they cease to be used as subservient to phrasing, and are employed to structural ends instead), and above all motion itself, in its own right, understood specifically in this sense of passage, process, continuity, shift from uniqueness of moment, *corso-ricorso*, and others that would make the list longer still [7].

There are passages in earlier works, such as *Cantata* and *Don Quixote* which contain intimations of this concept, but as far as I know, the A section of *The Quest* is the first major example of its realisation, and the application is justified here as a depiction of a dramatic situation. Gerhard's eventual expansion of the technique leads to the first movement of the *Symphony no. 1* and subsequent works.

PANDORA

I. The Quest Roberto Gerhard

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Figure 1: *Pandora*, 'The Quest', p.1, 'tiles'.

The scenario suggests that much movement in the opening dance is 'aimless'. We can all think of passages of music which fit this description, but rarely in Gerhard, and not here. Instead Gerhard establishes a sense of disorientation by using his tiles to juxtapose a variety of disparate 'tonal' elements: tonality against modality against quartal harmony against compound chords against ambiguity. In fact, without resort to chromaticism he nevertheless avoids any form of clearly

defined tonal identity. Additional resources brought into play to create motion are not only pulse, rhythm and melody but dynamics, changes of register and changes of texture. The result is that since everything is constantly being changed everything contributes to a *'sense of passage, process, continuity, shift from uniqueness of moment...'* etc.

In order to understand how this happens it is necessary to delve deeper. There are two main blocks of tiles, Unit X and Unit Y, each two bars long (Figure 1).

Unit X (red) consists of three tiles and the more complex Unit Y (Blue) of five. The various tiles can be seen isolated in colour within the score in Figure 1 [*]. In Figures 2 and 3 the tiles of Units X and Y are extracted and displayed as individual motifs (Figure 2: Unit X)

Figure 2a: Tile X1

Figure 2b: Tile X2

Figure 2c: Tile X3

Tile X1 is itself a composite of X1a and X1b. This is the only appearance of X1b (Figure 3).

Figure 3a: Tile X1a

Piano

12/8

p

cresc.

ff

Ped. *8va*

Figure 3b: Tile X1b

Unit Y, with five tiles, is more elaborate, and the tiles themselves vary in complexity from the simple pulsating pedal of Y1 to a complete melody harmonised with compound chords (Y2, Figure 4: Unit Y).

Contrabass & cellos

12/8

fp

Figure 4a: Tile Y1

Piano

12/8

sff

sff

Figure 4b: Tile Y2

Hns 1&2 (actual pitch).

12/8

sff

con sord.

fp

Vn 1 & 2 div.

Figure 4c: Tile Y3

Clarinet (actual pitch)

12/8

f

etc.

Figure 4d: Tile Y4

Fl., ob. & tr. (actual pitch).

12/8

p

f

Bn. & b. cl.

Hns. & trom. (actual pitch).

p

f

Figure 4e: Tile Y5

Any attempt to trace the way in which each of these tiles moves through the texture of the piece would produce an essay of bewildering and futile complexity and to attempt to describe the

shifting patterns created by the tiles would reduce the piece to a series of meaningless cyphers. To simplify the process, therefore, the routes of only three of the most significant elements will be traced through the coloured table, (Table 1) which plots the movements of the tiles through the

Table 1

Units Bars	X 1-2	Y 3-4	X 5-6	Y 7-8	X 9-10	Y 11-12	X 13-14
Tile		x3 B♭/A♭	y3 B♭/E♭		x3 B♭/A♭	y3 B♭/E♭	
Tone/chords							
Tile			y5 D/E♭		y5a D/e♭ (7)		
Tone/chords							
Tile			y2 D/e♭	x2a B♭/G♭	x2a D/E♭	y3b E♭/A♭/D	y3a A♭/A/D
Tone/chords							
Tile	x2 B mod?	y4 D/e♭	x2a B Phr.	y4a Dim7 A	x2a B Phr.		x2b B♭ Phr.
Tone/chords							
Tile	x1 B/C/F		x1a		x1a	y2b D/A?	x1a F-B
Tone/chords							
Tile	B(+ F)	y1 F	x4 F	y1 F	x4 F	y1a F	x4 F
Tone/chords							

Ti To	Y 15-16	X 17-18	Y 19-20	X 21-22	X 23	X 24	X 25	X 26	X 27	X 28	X 29	X 30
Ti To	y3d A♭/E♭		x3a G#/F#		x3 B♭/A♭	x3a G#/F#	x3b B♭/A♭		x3a G#/F#	x3a G#/F#	x3c E F#	Chrom scale
Ti To	y2c B Phr.	x2d G# Phr.		y3a G/F#					x2e e		x2e e	
Ti To	y5a A♭	y3g E♭/A♭		x2d x2a B Phr.	x2a B Phr.	x2c G# Phr.	x2a B Phr.	x2c G# Phr.	x2a B Phr.			
Ti To	y1d F-B	x1b F-B (=C♭)	y2d G	x2a B Phr.	x1a B →	x1a F B →	x1a F B →	x1a F B →	x1a F B →	x1f F-B-E♭-	x1a B	F
Ti To	y1b F	x4a(2?) F Phr.	F Phr...	x1a B x4b G	G Phr.	x4 F	x4d E♭	x4 F	x4d E♭	x4b-c F-E♭		x4e D ♭ ---

Table 1: Mosaic threads

texture of the mosaic, and even this is inadequate, since it omits the more subtle musical shadings of the various tiles. It is possible, however, at least to trace the way the selected tiles progress through the mosaic [+].

The three selected are X2, since it runs like a thread through the whole movement, X3, because it is the most prominent and the most dramatic, and Y2, the tile which dominates Unit Y. Between them these three tiles demonstrate the use of the several constituents listed by Gerhard in his discussion of Webern.

X2 is, ostensibly, the simplest of the three - a rocking rhythm in compound time on the notes A-B (Figure 2b). Given the prominence of the note B in X1 the A on the up-beat bestows a feeling of a modal flat seventh. When X2 is converted to X2a on its second appearance (Figure 5) the A-C-B pattern begins to suggest the Phrygian mode so frequently found in Spanish traditional music - but since these three notes are the only ones to appear it remains no more than an ambiguous suggestion.



Figure 5: Tile X2a

Tile X2 and its variant X2a are confined primarily to the tenor range of the viola initially. The first change of pitch occurs in bar 13, where the tile is transposed up a minor ninth to a B♭ 'modality' on piano and second violin. From here it slips one tone lower to a G# modality in the viola's alto register. As the mosaic begins to fragment at bar 21 X2a is restored to its original pitch, mainly on viola.

The defining characteristics of this tile are not just pitch and rhythm, but also dynamics - especially the *crescendo* pushing the music on to the final *sf*, which associates this tile with X3, the distinguishing feature of which is the crescendo as a motivic constituent. X3 consists simply of an initial dissonance (B \flat 'enhanced' by a B natural on the horns) swinging down, crescendo, through a ninth to an A \flat /A natural, *sff*. The entire *raison d'être* for the tile is just that: *f crescendo* and the associated articulation of a slur looping down to the abrupt *sforzando* which triggers Unit Y. With the exception of the pedal F which supports the piece X3 is the tile which receives the least modification throughout, being transposed first of all by one tone down to G \sharp , and then further to F \sharp . It always appears in the same tessitura of the flute and first clarinet. In the final bars of Section A X2a and X3 are by far the most prominent tiles.

The third tile, Y2, is considerably more complex than either X2 or X3. Its most notable constituent is the Spanish song *Antón Pirulero*, a children's singing game. It appears first on piano, supported by the harp. The melody is harmonised in a clearly defined D major: but with added E \flat and B \flat to provide a complementary chord of E \flat minor [**]. This compound harmony is spread throughout Unit Y, occurring again in various forms in Y3, Y4 and Y5 (see ex.4). Unlike X2 and X3, Y2 is constantly varied. The first appearance in D major begins on A, the dominant of D. The second version, still on piano and using the same harmonies but with a thinner texture, begins on F \sharp , the mediant, and with a G \sharp added. The third playing is again focused on A, but in octaves on horns in their bass register, with the harmony arpeggiated on the harp. Subsequent appearances are on first and second violins in the high register (possibly B Phrygian) and bass woodwind and strings in what may be Lydian on G.

These variations of melody, modality and instrumentation, as applied to the different tiles hold no particular significance in themselves, they are routine devices. What is significant is the manner in which, despite these changes and the way in which Gerhard varies their relationships with the surrounding tiles, they retain such a clearly defined identity that they still function as ostinati while creating a series of ambiguously shifting configurations.

By scanning the table vertically it is possible to see how Gerhard juxtaposes different 'keys'. The incomplete Phrygian mode in X2 has already been observed, as has the combination of D major and aspects of E \flat in the whole of Unit Y. What has not been discussed is Gerhard's use of pedal notes and drones. Until bar 19 (and at dotted crotchet = 63 each bar takes more than four seconds) there is always a pedal F underpinning (or undermining) everything: and through the action of the timpani in X1a this pedal F in effect has a dominant of a diminished fifth - B. A second consideration is the fact that this pedal F bears little or no relationship to the 'modalities' above it: in fact it conflicts with several of them: D major and E \flat minor, for example.

Another tile which is always present is Y3. In Figure 4 it appears as a high-pitched drone of E \flat -B \flat on upper strings, after which it is constantly present in both Units: it penetrates Unit X in bar 5 on second violins as E \flat -G \flat - destabilising the already tenuous suggestion of Phrygian on B (Figure 6). In Table 1 it can be traced through the texture since it has been allocated a shade of turquoise.

Thus, throughout the passage Gerhard is applying two pedals: the F bass pedal is constant - but with an unstable dominant, while the inner and upper pedals vary in register, instrumentation and tonal areas (from E \flat -B \flat to D-E \flat -A \flat). Both undermine the suggested 'modalities' of the more prominent tiles - which are only hinted at in any case.

Figure 6 is a musical score for four instruments: Ww. br. (Woodwind, brass), Vn. 2 (Violin 2), Va. (Viola), and Cb. vc. (Cello/viola). The score is in 12/8 time and consists of three measures. The Ww. br. part has a long rest followed by a few notes in the third measure. The Vn. 2 part starts with a long rest, then plays a series of notes in the second and third measures, with a *cresc.* marking. The Va. part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes throughout, with a *pp* marking in the first measure and *cresc.* in the second. The Cb. vc. part has a long rest, then plays a few notes in the second and third measures, with a *pp* marking in the first measure and *f* and *sfz* markings in the second and third measures respectively.

Figure 6

There is also a second possible interpretation of the harmonisation of tile Y2: so far it has been analysed as a compound of D major and E \flat : it could also possibly be quartal harmonies, as Figure 7 demonstrates: but even if this interpretation is accepted Gerhard once again subverts accepted practice with his mixture of F#s and F naturals and E \flat s and E naturals.

Figure 7 is a musical score for Piano and Cb. vc. (Cello/viola). The score is in 12/8 time and consists of three measures. The Piano part has a long rest, then plays a series of chords in the second and third measures, with a *sfz* marking in the second measure. The Cb. vc. part has a long rest, then plays a series of notes in the second and third measures, with a *sfz* marking in the second measure.

Figure 7

The hypothesis at the beginning of this paper was that Gerhard created a piece in tune with the dramatic requirements of Jooss's scenario through the creation and manipulation of the tiles as described above. As usual with Gerhard, the facts are more complex than those apparent on a first examination: given his history as a student of Schoenberg it might be expected that he would resort to serialism to create an aura of instability. Instead he applied traditional methods of pitch organisation - diatonic and modal 'tonalities'. By using ambiguous tonalities and modalities, however, as in the possible Phrygian modality of X2, or by setting up conflicting tonalities, as in the D major/E \flat tonalities of Unit Y and by undermining these with an alien pedal F natural Gerhard has created a confusing tonal ambience which is enhanced by the constantly shifting patterns created by the tiles: more kaleidoscope than mosaic.

2. REFERENCES

- [1] Cambridge Arts Theatre programmes, week beginning 24th January, 1944.
- [2] COTON, A.V. 1946. *The New Ballet: Kurt Jooss and his Work*, London, p. 64.
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] DREW, D. 1993. 'Notes on Gerhard's *Pandora*' in *Tempo*, New Series, No. 184: 14.
- [5] Ibid, p. 14.
- [6] From copies of the scenario provided by Deutsches Tanzarchiv, Cologne, July, 2009. Author's {} and editor's {} parentheses.

[7] GERHARD, R. 'Webern: The Path to the New Music', in BOWEN, M. (ed.), 2000. *Gerhard on music. Selected writings*, Aldershot, Ashgate, p. 146

[*] For the sake of simplicity certain ancillary 'tiles' (e.g. the harp in bars 3 and 4) and some components have been omitted.

[+] Key for Table 1: tile = 'tile' as in Figures 2 and 3; Tone = tonality, a designation adopted largely because of the ambiguities of Gerhard's harmonies/modalities; register and tessitura are represented by the level of the rows, thus the bottom row is contrabass level, the top row is high string/flute register. This cannot be totally satisfactory because of various overlaps; colours represent the two Units: Units X is predominantly blue, Unit Y is red. The exception is tile y3, which, after its initial appearance, runs through both Units.

[**] There is some support for this interpretation in Gerhard's own analysis of Stravinsky's *Three Japanese Lyrics* in Gerhard, R. 'Twelve-note Technique in Stravinsky (1957)' Bowen, M. (ed.), *Gerhard on Music*, (Aldershot 2000) p. 149 (original in *The Score*, No 20, 1957 pp.38-43).