

Post Tonal Theory
Final Paper Assignment

Analysis of “Eraser” by Ricky Davis

Prequel:

Prior to this piece’s creation, I had been composing on the guitar for the guitar. This composition, however, was the first that I wrote on piano for guitar. When I realized this piece on the guitar, there were a few musical aspects that I modified due to the physical limitations of the guitar. Other small modifications were made because I felt that the guitar version was asking for a different and particular make-up-(i.e. more sustained notes and different methods of voice leading). Ultimately, I am trying to say that the score for this piece is not entirely accurate, for it was recorded with a midi piano. I changed the notation in many of the most significant areas for the sake of this analysis; however, it is still not completely accurate.

Analysis:

This analysis will be divided into two sections: form and harmony. As another disclaimer, please be aware that the descriptions of these elements are descriptive of this particular composition. Of course, I have other compositions which operate under different structures and exhibit different patterns of interest. However, I felt that an analysis of just one composition would really enable me to explore my creative process- at a particular point in my life- in more depth. The chart that I attached is a more holistic reflection of my interests- it includes many characteristics of “Eraser” but also draws from some of my other pieces. It’s also worth mentioning that there are many characteristics that are shared between practically every song I write.

The form of this piece is A-B-A-B1-C-D. Often times, the form will be set in correspondence with the presence of the percussion that I may/ may not use. This is a rather

large aspect of my music- there are sections that do not utilize any percussive techniques on the body of the guitar, and there are other sections that utilize these techniques (more or less). Both "A" sections and "C" do not use percussion, while "B" and "D" do in the majority of their playtime. Both "A's" are practically identical in substance, and last for approximately 26 seconds each. "B" and "B1" are almost identical; however, "B1" has a few variations. Section "C" is 35 seconds long. Section "D" is about 1 minute and 12 seconds. One further observation I have made to this form on a macro level regards the different levels of dynamism, respective to each section. In both of the "A's" the musical material is somewhat repetitive. "B" and "B1" has mostly developing material. "C" is somewhat repetitive in form, and "D" is very much developing in its form. "D" does exhibit a few very short repeated phrases, however.

There is practically always some form of harmony, or counterpoint, in "Eraser." The guitar version utilizes slightly more complex methods of voice-leading in some areas than the piano version does, particularly in the B sections. Generally speaking though, both versions make use of 2-voice counterpoint most frequently. In this method, the more melodic and also higher-pitched voice speaks on its own with almost no embellishment. The lower voice, which changes less frequently than the higher voice (maybe once or twice every measure, depending on the section) is typically embellished with parallel voices above it. Most commonly, I will place a perfect 5th and an octave above this low voice to create what I call a "1-5-1" voicing. Because this intervallic relationship is maintained from one chord to the next, it is parallel. The next most common parallel voicing I use in this piece is the "1-5" (Perfect fifth), then "1-3-1."

There are a few instances of other lower parallel voicings, but these are by far the most prevalent in the piece.

In terms of modality, most of the music in this piece is gravitating around C dorian. While the note, “c,” does not always feel like tonic, it feels like tonic *most* of the time. The “A” sections make use of 2 different modes- C dorian (75%) and A dorian (25%). The “B” sections pretty much stick to C dorian completely. “C” and “D” are more modally dynamic, however, as they make use of approximately 10 different modes. Modes that have a closer relation to C dorian, in terms of # of sharps/ flats, are used more frequently than modes that have a more distant relation to it. In terms of sonority, lydian, dorian, and mixolydian seem to show up most often in these last sections. Finally, I have noticed that all modal modulations are direct- they do not morph into each other in a gradual manner, as in traditional Classical style.

When I learned the piano version on the guitar, I created an open tuning to compliment the composition. I recorded the piano version via MIDI, and then sought out the six most frequently used pitches in their respective registers. Then I designated each open string on the guitar to these pitches. I am mentioning all this to illustrate one further concept of the harmony of this song (guitar version). Because the open strings on a guitar do not need to be fretted in order to be played, they are sustained more often than fretted notes. Thus, the six pitches that I designated to each of the strings- C G C F Bb Eb (from lowest pitched to highest) tend to harmonize the melody more often than they had in the original piano version. To me, this has a huge effect on the music- the guitar sounds more like a harp in the sense that more notes ring into each other. In addition, these harmony notes have a special technical emphasis to them- they are sometimes played through the use of natural harmonics. Even without the harmonic

technique, they have a fuller pallet of overtones riding on them, supplying a richer sound than fretted notes can. Finally, I will point out that the intervallic relationship of this tuning is: Root- 5- Root- 4- b7- b3. This is a minor 7th add 11 chord. This chord becomes the dominating sonority of the piece when realized on the guitar because of the fact that these notes are heard more often and are emphasized in a special way.