

Fantasia Upon a Pulse

for string quartet

Mark Gotham
2019

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For string quartet
Mark Gotham, 2019
c.7 minutes

A note on the piece

Purcell's *Fantasia Upon One Note* has captured the imagination of many subsequent composers, even acting as a specific inspiration and model for pieces by Sally Beamish, Elliot Carter, and Oliver Knussen among others. The most striking feature of Purcell's work is second-to-lowest part which plays the eponymous 'one note' – a middle C – repeated every bar throughout.

Fantasia Upon a Pulse is based on a transcription of the first phrase of Purcell's *Fantasia* into the rhythms. The skeleton of the new work comprises the pitches of Purcell's original harmonies set in a proportional relationship according to the harmonic ratios involved. For instance, the major chord in root position gives the proportion 4:5:6 – a relatively simply proportion. As Purcell's harmonies become more complex, so too do the new rhythmic relationships.

Fantasia Upon a Pulse grows out of that core structure, redistributing elements, and adding 'free' parts based on the same structural principles. You could think of this piece as a kind of extreme close-up: a new look at a well-known object, revealing an uneven surface belied by the more familiar view from a distance.

A note to the performers

- The slow tactus of c.45 bpm is constant throughout (as indicated in the score). Changes between simple and compound metres are included to clarify the primary metrical identity of each section and reduce the use of triplets.
- Double barlines mark moments when the chord and rhythmic structure change.
- Hairpin ('Schubert') accents indicate the primary background attacks of the proportional durations. These should all be brought out. Legato accents are used for more local implications of the same metrical information, usually the first of a group of two or four crossing the overall metre. For instance, the first note in bars 13 and 14 of the Violin I part should be metrically weak. You may like to think of this in terms of baroque bowing. Downbows in b.10 illustrate this idea.
- In the glissando-with-slur gesture, the rate of change in pitch should gradually increase as the glissando ascends (and decrease as it descends); in playing terms, this equates to a roughly constant motion of the hand up and down the string. This glissando should be continuous; to that effect, bracketed pitches given within the glissando – on downbeats, for instance – are only approximate and included to help regulate the change of change. The same applies to tremolo glissando (VC, b.79), and the rate of tremolo should also match in that case (i.e. higher = faster).
- The leaping (usually arpeggiated) parts constitute the main melodic material and should be brought out. These are sometimes identified by a 'hauptstimme'.
- Above all, try to forget the maths and enjoy all the funky cross rhythms!

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'Incipit': Andante, ♩ = 90

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello

con sord.
pp lontano

8 Fantasia: Slow, ♩ = 45

(con sord.)
pp flaut.

(con sord.)
p flaut.

senza sord.
f *p flaut.*

f *p sim.*

f *p*

f l.v.

mp flaut.

11

sim.

sim.

f *p*

f *p*

f *p*

f l.v.

mp flaut.

14

3 *p flaut.* 5 *poco* 3 5

f *p flaut.* *f* *poco* 3 5

f *mp* 5 5 5 5 *f* *mp* 5 5 5 5 *f* *mp* 5

f l.v. arco

17

senza sord. (*p flaut.*) 3 3

f *p* 3 *f* *mp* 3 3

fp 3 *f* *p* *f* *p* 3 3

f *p flaut.* 3 *p flaut.* 3 3

19

senza sord. **A** 3 *f* *p flaut.* *f* *p* *f* *p* 3

f *mp* 4 5 *f* *p* 5

fp 5 *fp* 5

f *p* 4 3 5 *f l.v.* *p*

Mechanical (← ♩. = ♩ →)

21

f p f p ³ *f p* — ³

f p — ⁴ ⁵ ⁵

fp

f l.v. *p* — *f* *pp* ³ ³

p subito
Slow gliss. (see note*)

pp
pizz.

p subito
pizz. *mechano*

Leisurely (← ♩. = ♩ →)

24

arco
ppp

arco

fp ⁵ ⁵ *sim.*

mp

mf

f *arco* *p*

26

⁵ ⁵ ⁵ ⁵ ⁵

⁴ ⁴ ⁵ ⁴

⁺ ⁺ ⁺ ⁺ ⁺

pizz. *arco*

f *p*

29

fp

f

mf

f *p* *f* *p*

f *p* *f* *p*

f *p*

pizz. arco pizz.

32 **B** ← ♩ = ♩ →

Mechanical

pp subito

f 5

f 3

f 5

f 5

Slow gliss. (see note*)

pp arco

fp subito 5

f 3 3 3 3

37 **Leisurely**

mf cantabile 3

fp 5

fp 5

pp 5

pp

p subito 5

sim.

40

5 3 5

f

pp *fp* *fp* *fp*

4 3 4

5

fp *fp*

Slow gliss. (see note*)

pizz. *fp* arco

(*p*) *f* *p* 5 *f* *p*

44

C

3 3 3

fp 5

fp 4 *p*

4

p *mp*

5 5

5

fp

48

5 5

mp 4 *H*

mp *mf*

4 5

mp

4 4

(*p*) *fp*

52

4 4 4 4

pizz. p 3

p arco 3

p 5 arco 5

p mf 3 3

56

arco 6 pizz. 3 arco 3

pizz. 3 arco 5

pizz. 5 arco 5

arco 6 pizz. 6

arco 6 pizz. 6

arco 6 pizz. 6

arco 6 pizz. 6

58

arco f pp cresc.

f pp cresc.

p cresc.

p cresc.

f p f f p

f f 3 3

D Mechanical

60

mf *mf* *mp sub.* *mp sub.* *mp sub.* *mp sub.*

f p *f* *f p* *mf*

fp

II (open)

63

mp sub. *mp sub.* *f* *f* *f* *mf* *mf* *sim.* *mf*

f *f* *f*

fp *f*

67

f *f* *f*

70

Musical score for measures 70-72. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of four staves. Measure 70 features a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes, a middle staff with a 7-fingered scale, and a bass staff with a 5-fingered scale. Measure 71 includes dynamic markings *f*, *mf*, and *sim.* (sostenuto), along with a 7-fingered scale in the middle staff and a 5-fingered scale in the bass staff. Measure 72 shows a crescendo in the middle staff, a 6-fingered scale in the bass staff, and dynamic markings *mf* and *mf*.

73

Musical score for measures 73-76. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of four staves. Measure 73 features a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes, a middle staff with a 7-fingered scale, and a bass staff with a 6-fingered scale. Measure 74 includes dynamic markings *f* and *ff*, along with a 6-fingered scale in the middle staff and a 5-fingered scale in the bass staff. Measure 75 shows a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes, a middle staff with a 7-fingered scale, and a bass staff with a 6-fingered scale. Measure 76 includes dynamic markings *f*, *mf*, and *mf*, along with a 4-fingered scale in the middle staff and a 5-fingered scale in the bass staff.

77

Musical score for measures 77-80. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of four staves. Measure 77 features a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes, a middle staff with a 4-fingered scale, and a bass staff with a 4-fingered scale. Measure 78 includes dynamic markings *mf*, *f*, and *f*, along with a 3-fingered scale in the treble staff and a 4-fingered scale in the middle staff. Measure 79 shows a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes, a middle staff with a 4-fingered scale, and a bass staff with a 4-fingered scale. Measure 80 includes dynamic markings *mf*, *p*, *mp*, and *f*, along with a 3-fingered scale in the treble staff, a 4-fingered scale in the middle staff, and a 5-fingered scale in the bass staff.

80 pizz. arco **E** Gradually winding down from here

84

89

94

← J. = J. →

5

p

p

pizz.

mp

p

99

F ← J. = J. →

mp dim.

mp dim.

arco

mp dim.

pp

pp

pp

pp

104

5

3

5

5

3

5