

Theatre of Attractions

I - Time's Music Box

II - L'heure dorée

III - Marionnette (marotte)

The title of this work was suggested by the Russian Proletkult theatre form. In it, plot is secondary, the heart of the form relying more on "defamiliarizing the familiar". Sergei Eisenstein was an early proponent of Proletkult theatre, and its essence is best summed up by Eisenstein himself:

A gesture turns into gymnastics, rage is expressed through a somersault, ... lyricism by a run along a tightrope. The grotesque of this style permitted leaps from one type of expression to another, as well as unexpected intertwinings of the two expressions.

In **Theatre of Attractions** musical figures are allowed to orbit one another, providing the means whereby they may collide or merge to form lyrical or starkly aggressive new forms. All three movements follow without a break.

The first part of the work (**Time's Music Box**) is circular. Irregular woodblock hits wander rhythmically through the texture suggesting the sound of an old, faulty camera gate. As this leads to more complex instrumental layerings an episodic form emerges. The central section develops outwards and gives rise to a rhythmically uneven ostinato pattern and another more stable pattern (higher in tessitura). These are expanded and developed on subsequent appearances. After expansions and developments, leading to various passionate and violent outbursts, the first part ends with the return of the opening material; Time's Music Box has been opened, has eventually wound down and is now shut.

The second part (**L'heure dorée**) begins in nocturnal mood where certain musical objects (mostly piano and vibraphone chords) are anchored, stationary and referential, while others are allowed to drift and organically develop. The alto flute has an important melodic role here and is one of the drifting elements in this section. After a slow build-up and tumultuous climax there is a return to more calm textures, where the piano and vibraphone chords dissipate into held string chords.

The final part, **Marionnette (marotte)**, is a manic, 'half-rondo'. Virtuosity, velocity and extreme instrumental colours (piccolo, E♭ clarinet, and an Acme toy horn) are dominant here. Throughout the movement textures become more rapid and chaotic, time becomes more lurching and irregular, finally resulting in a rapid collapse. The work ends with the bell-like chords of piano and vibraphone from the second movement alongside short, violent interruptions from the rest of the ensemble. The puppet inferences of the movement title refers to a view of society that is carefree on the surface, but stupid, manipulable and automaton-like beneath, a viewpoint portrayed in an early Eisenstein production titled **Wise Man**.

Theatre of Attractions was commissioned by the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec and is dedicated to the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal and to Véronique Lacroix.