

The Doctrine Of Affections (2004 rev.2012)

During the Baroque period, a musical theory arose called The doctrine of Affections (Affektenlehre). It prescribed certain musical methods and figures for suggesting or portraying individual emotions which were supposed to directly affect the audience during performance. The idea of four specific aria types laid out in the doctrine, namely the aria di portamento, the aria parlante, the aria d'imitazione and aria d'Agilita are used in this work. These sections generally adhere to the standard forms for such types. For example, in the Baroque aria d'imitazione, coloratura and echo effects were encouraged, often involving the portrayal of natural phenomena (storms, bird calls or the hunt). These traits were somewhat freely adapted in this octet; the coloratura in my aria d'imitazione is given to the bassoon however, whilst echo and imitative effects are generally woven into the texture.

The arias in the octet are introduced and connected by 'chorus' movements; as in Classical Greek theatre, they comment on the action, move it forward and bind the whole together. These are the only movements which develop across the piece. The arias on the other hand remain, generally, within one affect and are self-contained:

Chorus 1 (fanfara)

<brief pause>

Aria di Portamento

<brief pause>

Chorus 2 (frammenti di fanfara)

Aria di Parlante

Pignos - solo clarinet.

<long pause>

Aria d'Imitazione

Aria d'Agilita

Chorus 3

The resulting work seeks to project a form of abstract theatre, a covert drama played out within a theatre of automata. Musical situations may hint at the majestic, sometimes comic, exasperated or even threatening. At certain points, a player's physical actions may only be surmised as to context and meaning. Whilst there are specific dramatic subtexts at certain points in the work, they remain hidden to allow the listener wider scope to form their own personal dramaturgy.

The Doctrine Of Affections was commissioned by the Britten Sinfonia and is dedicated to them.

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