

“Portrait of Tracy” by Jaco Pastorius is a very interesting and unique piece of solo bass literature, and brings attention to several questions when it comes to understanding this piece. The goal here is to break down and explain the essential elements that make this piece what it is and explore options for a group arrangements using this information. Once we understand what makes this piece work rhythmically and structurally there will be enough information to compare this piece to other arrangements and learn what makes the group arrangement work well in a group context versus a solo context.

When annotating the piece “Portrait of Tracy” by Jaco Pastorius, it is important to know how the rhythmic motif builds in complexity and develops throughout the piece. This is a key element to the structure of this piece as pieces of the rhythm are referenced in variation throughout. The piece begins in 4/4 then transitions to 5/4, then 6/4, and finishes with the original motif in 4/4. Each section has a different feel rhythmically and harmonically.

The first section begins in 4/4 with a rubato free-form feel as it uses several fermatas and lots of quarternote triplets and phrases that seemingly span a measure and a half stretching the normal feel of this time signature. This A-section eases the listener into the main theme of the piece that will be recalled at the end. Since each time signature change is also the beginning of each section it seems evident that it is important to understand the relationship between these changes and the structure of the melody. Within this it is also important to understand the relationship between the bass and melody at all times and how this develops rhythmically. This section will begin by looking at each measure and what is happening in the bass and melody and how this develops throughout. This is the information that will be able to be compared when looking at a group arrangement.

In the first 4/4 section the bass line lands on beats one and three of the first measure of the phrase then on beats two and three of the next measure including a pickup into the 3rd bar which then repeats the phrase. This phrase introduces the main theme of the piece and initiates

the free-form feel of the 4/4 section while the emphasis of one and three anchors the listener to the pulse even when the phrase stretches over more than one measure. Over beat one of the phrase there are three 8th notes starting on the & of one followed by a set of quarternote triplets on beat three landing with the bass note. This creates a call and response effect between the bass and melody highlighting the soloistic use of the instrument. In the second measure of this phrase the counterpoint begins with half note triplets in both the melody and bass. In this measure the melody starts on beat one and the bass responds on beat two repeating the offbeat feel of the first bar with the melody starting on the & of one but at a larger scale and tying into the second melody note. The measure finishes off with a half note on beat three indicating the strong beat and keeping the pulse through this interesting rhythmic tradeoff between the melody and the bass. After this motif repeats the piece begins its eight measure transition to the 5/4 section.

The transition section is broken up into three ideas. Two shorter two measure ideas that make one four measure phrase, and one continuous four measure phrase. The first two bars of the transition section start a new rhythmic idea before switching again in bars three and four leading to the four bar section to close out the eight bars of transition. The 4/4 feel is slightly stronger in the first couple of bars by having a chord in the melody for a dotted half note on beat one followed by two bass notes occurring on the & of two and on three continuing the 4/4 pulse by emphasizing these beats. The & of two pickup acts as an anticipation for the note on beat three making the piece feel more anchored to the time signature than in the previous sections. These measures also feature a quarter note pickup on beat four leading to beat one of the next measure further solidifying the feel before transitioning to the next to bars where the melody and bass interchange a bit more. In bars three and four of this transition it does a great job easing the listener into the more complex counterpoint that occurs between the melody and bass as the themes develop. This 8 measure section builds tension through complexity leading into the 5/4

section which takes this feel to its resolution in its mellow groove compared to the rest of the piece so far.

Compared to the first two bars, measures three and four have less space between the bass and melody. Beat one starts with a dotted quarter note followed by an 8th note tied to a note which acts as a pickup to the bass note in beat three. The bass note on beat three is followed by a quarter note pickup on beat four in the melody which ties into beat one of the next measure and only the bass note is rearticulated on beat one of the 4th bar in the transition section. The 4th bar of this section begins with a bass note on beat one with a pickup in the bass on the & of two to a halfnote chord on beat three. These two measures still clearly emphasize beats one and three and build a busier relationship between the melody and bassline leading to the four bar section that finishes off this transition.

In the four bar mini section the bass briefly moves into the treble clef and both bass and melody begin with a dotted quarter on beat one filled by an 8th note pickup into beat three which is also followed by two 8th notes in the bass acting as a pickup to the & of four tying into beat one of the next bar which is rearticulated by an added note to the chord. This brings back the slightly ambiguous feel in the time signature while still holding onto the strong beats. This repeats one time before tying into the first bar of the 5/4 section which is rearticulated by a bass note back in the bass clef.

The rhythmic motif in this section is repeated until the end of the section moving into the 6/4 measure which is a transition to a new 5/4 section. The motif in this section is a constant tradeoff between the melody and the bass, however the notes are longer which gives it its laid back feel as each response comes shortly after the initial idea of each phrase overlapping as each new note is added to the idea.

It begins with a quarter note in the bass and 8th note in the melody on beat one. The melody continues the phrase with an 8th note tied to a half note starting on the & of one. The bass immediately responds on beat two with a dotted quarter note. The bass restarts the call

and response on the & of three with a quarter note followed by a half note on beat four in the melody that ties into beat one of the next bar making the 8th note response on the & of one very smooth. There is also a beat five quarter note in the melody underneath the tied note acting as the pickup to beat one and making it apparent that we are now in 5/4.

The 6/4 measure is the end of this eight bar chromatic phrase and has chords landing on beats one and three with 8th note pickups in beat six into the new 5/4 section. This 6/4 bar grabs the listeners attention as the previous rhythm that was heavily syncopated and repeated several times halts. The tied half note on beat three leading to the pickup in beat six creates anticipation for the next section since the measure itself feels almost like its own concluding phrase and disrupts the previous motif.

The next 5/4 section will lead us back into the 4/4 A-section which will conclude the piece. The last 5/4 section is similar to the A-section rhythmically with the off beat call and response feel. It begins with the bass and melody starting an 8th note apart from each other then landing together on the next strong beat. The difference is the 5/4 section begins with a quarter note in the bass on beat one followed by a quarter note on the & of one in the melody. This is compared to a half note in the bass followed by three 8th notes in the melody in the 4/4 section. The rhythm in the 5/4 section repeats for seven bars then has a ritardando in the 8th bar which also features a fermata on beat five with 16th note pickups into beat one of the next section in 4/4. The changes do a great job of building upon motifs and referencing things within the piece in various ways as well as building and releasing tensions via rhythmic flow or turbulence.

Now it is time to compare another arrangement and identify the elements that support its functionality as a group piece rather than a solo piece. The example that was chosen was arranged for a saxophone quartet by Thomas Haydock. In this arrangement each of the four saxophones take on the responsibility of one note of each of the chords and have similar contrapuntal relationships to each other compared to the original rhythms. Haydock begins the

arrangement in 6/4 and extends the introduction into a four bar section switching to the original time signature of 4/4 after the first measure. The introduction features a glissando version of the A-section theme in the three bars after the original introduction phrase. In the A-section Haydock changes the original rhythm of the three 8th notes to a quarternote triplet theme into straight 8th note triplets and ties an 8th note to the beginning of the first set of triplets and a quarternote to the second. This is a minor alteration to the original theme but it helps simplify it and it fits within the meter a bit smoother in my opinion which is very useful in a group especially without drums. This gives the group a stronger pulse to hold onto overall with only a subtle change.

The last four bars of the transition to the B-section were a four bar mini section in the original but this section holds some repeated material and a firm pulse compared to most of the motifs up to that point. Haydock decided to extend that section for an extra four bars making the transition twelve bars which matches his B-section which he also extended from eight to twelve bars. The rhythm also has a slight change holding onto a quarter note on beat three with nothing happening until the beat is finished further solidifying the feel of the 4/4 meter.

The B-section is the groove section of this piece and Haydock decided to use this as an opportunity for a solo section for the soprano sax while the others took care of the chords and bass. This section is also in 6/4 in Haydock's version compared to the original 5/4. Once the piece reaches the C-section Haydock keeps this as the original then transitions back into the modified version of the A-section to finish it off.

This arrangement does a great job of making strong beats obvious and extending phrases to allow for new ideas that work well for the instrumentation. Since Haydock extended the intro into a four bar section, if that is considered part of the A-section in this arrangement each section is twelve bars long. Making each section the same length makes the form stronger and less rubato which works better for a group rather than the soloist. Haydock uses subtle

rhythmic changes to the original motif maintaining the feel of the original while making it easier to hold onto.

Bibliography

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