Non-Directed Time

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree in Music
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Abstract

*Non-Directed Time* is a sixteen-minute composition for mixed septet and soundtracks. Its two movements are entitled *Brainwash* and *Introduction*. The piece aims to challenge listeners’ perception of passing time through gradual transformations between timeless, non-directional musical textures to moments of textural clarity and directionality. The musical material in my composition repeats at both large-scale and micro-scale levels, developing an alternative musical time structure and a sense of familiarity. Thus, changes in repeating material affect the experience of this time structure, in which time seems to expand and contract. Because these changes are gradual and their goals are unpredictable, listeners may feel suspended in time—until a sudden realization reveals the transformational process to them. The sense of waiting and temporal suspension, due to the transformational process, embodies the philosophical concept of “pure becoming.”

Keywords

Twenty-first-century music, Composition, Chamber Ensemble, Electroacoustic music, Time, Pure Becoming, Repetition, Non-directionality, Directionality
Summary for lay audience

*Non-Directed Time* is a sixteen-minute piece for alto flute/piccolo, bass clarinet, electric guitar, piano/keyboard, violin, viola, contrabass, and soundtracks. Its two movements are entitled *Brainwash* and *Introduction*. The piece challenges listeners’ perception of passing time through gradual transformations between ambiguity and clarity. The musical material in my composition repeats at both large-scale and small-scale, developing a sense of familiarity. Thus, changes in repeating material affect the experience of passing time, in which time seems to expand and contract. Because these changes are gradual and their goals are unpredictable, listeners may feel suspended in time—until a sudden realization reveals the transformational process to them. The sense of waiting and temporal suspension, due to the transformational process, embodies the philosophical concept of “pure becoming.”
I want to thank my supervisors, Dr. Paul Frehner and Dr. Jonathan De Souza, for guiding me through my ideas and encouraging me while writing my thesis, and everyone who supported and encouraged me during the writing of my piece, including Dr. Omar Daniel, Dr. Jay Hodgson, Dr. Bryn Harrison, Dr. Kevin Mooney, Dr. Ashkan Fakhr Tabatabaie, Cadu Verdan, Matthew Lee Knowles, Mohammad Sahebzamani, Forest Muran, Ian Indiano, Neda Samavati, Armin Sanayei, Jack Thorpe, Christine Resendes, and the Contemporary Music Studio at the Don Wright Faculty of Music.

Special thanks to my parents and family for their genuine support.

I began writing this compositional thesis during the beginning stages of Iran’s revolution in September 2022. These events had a significant impact on this composition.
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Non-Directed Time

for chamber ensemble and electronics

Danial Derakhshan

2023

Duration: approx. 16'
**Instrumentation:**

Alto Flute/piccolo
Bass clarinet
Electric guitar
  Requires one speaker, amplifier, and volume pedal.
Piano/keyboard
  Requires an 88-key MIDI controller keyboard.

Soundtrack (Fixed media)
  Requires two stereo speakers and an audio interface.
  The five soundtrack files for both movements.
  Click-track audio for the conductor.
  Another performer to play the soundtracks.

Violin
Viola
Double bass

**Duration:**

First movement, *Brainwash*: 9’
Second movement, *Introduction*: 7’

**Performance notes:**

The score is transposed.
All the trills written for the instruments are a semitone above.
The natural harmonics are notated as the sounding pitch (as shown in figure).

![Figure showing written and sounding pitches](image)

Woodwind performers may breathe imperceptibly during long durations.
Performers should avoid metric accents.
During the second movement, long note durations should be played *sostenuto*.

The repeating figures should be performed with their specified rhythmic duration, as shown in figure below:
The slashed repeated figures in the score (shown in the figure below) display the continuation of an earlier repeated figure.

Soundtracks:
During the performance of the first movement, the conductor should sync the score and Soundtrack 1 and Soundtrack 2 via a click-track audio file. The click-track starts with an empty 4/4 bar. Soundtrack 2 (Narrator) should be played at 6’08” in the first movement. Soundtrack 1 is 9 minutes and 30 seconds. The extra 30 seconds play at the end of Brainwash while the ensemble stops playing.

List of tracks:
- Soundtrack 1
- Soundtrack 2, narrator
- Soundtrack 3, birds
- Soundtrack 4, additive birds
- Soundtrack 5, alien birds
- Click-track for the first movement

Soundtracks’ amplitude:
- Soundtrack 1 should not be louder than the ensemble playing forte.
- Soundtrack 2 in the first movement should be louder than the ensemble.
- Soundtracks 3-5 are background elements and are quieter than Soundtrack 1.
Lyric from Soundtrack 2 was narrated and written by Danial Derakhshan.

“I was dreaming,
And I knew it anyways,
But I kept on dreaming,
For it is my reality always.”

How to setup the audio:

The audio interface connects to a computer.
The two speakers connect to the interface’s output.
The keyboard’s MIDI output connects to the MIDI input of the interface.
A headphone/earphone connects to the interface, which plays the click-track for the conductor.

**Piano/keyboard:**
The MIDI keyboard triggers three synthesized samples from a DAW.
The composer’s sample recommendation in Logic Pro version 10.7.7:
- Sound library/Synthesizer/Classics/80s FM Piano (0 dB volume).
- Instrument plug-in/Alchemy/Soundscapes/ Blowholes From Mars (with -9 dB volume).
- Instrument plug-in/Alchemy/Sound Effects/ Dreams Illuminated (with -20 dB volume).
The MIDI keyboard’s amplitude shall be as loud as playing *forte* on the piano.

**Electric guitar:**
The speaker should be placed close to the performer.
The guitarist should perform with nails and fingers.
The amplifier’s gain should be high enough for sustained durations.
Using reverb and compressor effects are encouraged.
The guitar’s full volume (volume pedal fully up) should roughly equal the pianist playing *forte* on the piano.

Approximate dynamic marks are performed with the volume pedal as following:

- **pianissimo** = 1/4 (almost fully down)
- **piano** = 2/4 (halfway)
- **mezzo forte** = 3/4
- **forte** = 4/4 (pedal fully up).

**Staging:**

The graph below illustrates the suggested positioning of instruments on stage. The six instruments in front of the piano are arranged in a particular order, in mixed trios facing the conductor. The stereo speakers are positioned behind the piano, left and right, so the electronic sounds merge with the ensemble, creating an interlaced combination of timbres.
null
(I was dreaming, and I knew it anyway, but I keep on dreaming, for it is my only dream)
The piano’s tempo gradually slows down, to approx. \( j = 30 \) at the end of the movement.
Repeat till the end

The piano's tempo gradually slows down

Performers stop playing when the poem narration ends.

(I was dreaming, and I knew it anyways, but I kept on dreaming, for it is my reality always)
Expressive, calm, as if strolling in a garden.

j = 66

INTRODUCTION

Alto Flute

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Electric Guitar

Keyboard

Violin

Viola

Double Bass

Soundtrack 3, birds

p

pp

pp

pp

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