

Music for flute, by Chris Dench

(1981-1989)

Caught breath of Time 1981 Flute/alto flute

Vier Darmstädter Aphorismen

- Venezia, 1986 flute
- Piccolo fragment from "Dark Neumes", 1988
- A.R.T.A.U.D. 1988 bass flute
- Gelb: Violett, 1987 alto flute

Dé/ployé, 1987 piccolo

Sulle Scale della Fenice, 1986 flute

Closing Lemma, 1986-9 flute

The image shows a musical score for flute, oriented vertically. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is divided into several sections, each with its own dynamic and performance markings. The markings include:

- Top section:** *poco mf/p* (piano, mezzo-forte, piano) with a dynamic wedge.
- Middle section:** *mf* (mezzo-forte) with a dynamic wedge.
- Bottom section:** *f ff* (forte, fortissimo) with a dynamic wedge, and *molto* (moderato) with a tempo marking.

The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs. There are also performance instructions like *4:5 f*, *17:10 f*, *6:5 f*, and *3:1 = 2 f* which likely refer to specific measures or time signatures. The score is enclosed in a rectangular box.

Kathleen Gallagher, flutes
Mandeville Recital Hall, UCSD
8pm, October 23, 2008

The composer speaks...

One of the difficulties of being somewhat marginal as a composer has been a shortage of opportunities to work extendedly with world class performers and obtain a really thorough knowledge of instrumental potentials - this all changed when I fleetingly met Laura Chislett in Venice, late '85. We got to know one another at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in '86; I provided her with a brief etude to play on that occasion, *Venezia*, written in 2 days, and this effort already shows a greater concern with the range of playing modes of the flute than my earlier *Caught Breath of Time*. Over the next six years, working closely with Laura I have developed a deep fascination with the flute, its archetypal and erotic associations, and its capacity for articulating the most sophisticated melodic imaginings. *Venezia* was followed in '88 by the piccolo fragment, excerpted from my large ensemble work *Dark Neumes*, and *A*R*T*A*U*D* for bass flute, which I wrote (again at Darmstadt) as a spirit-lifter for my old friend Pierre-Yves Artaud. Finally I realized that these three little pieces belonged, loosely, together, and I assembled them into my set of *Vier Darmstädter Aphorismen*, writing *Gelb: Violett* (utilizing the word "Darmstadt" to generate the musical material) in Berlin. Named after a phrase of the Bauhaus colorist Johannes Itten, "Yellow:Violet = bright knowledge:dark piety", this aphorism draws together the two main components of my compositional affect. Yellow, for me, is more than merely a color: like Scriabin, I feel it as a "quality" and this is by no means my last musical work drawing on "yellowness".

Immediately after *Venezia* I began *Sulle Scale della Fenice*, but Laura and I moved to Italy and, given the difficulties I was encountering with that latter work, I elected to write another piece entirely, *Dé/ployé* for piccolo. The title refers to the way that, on a formal level, its two halves exhibit the same musical gestures, but in the first section they are "compactified" so as to present the material polyphonically (as in a Bach cello suite) while the second half is unraveled, an unbroken thread of melancholy... Tuscany working its magic on me, doubtless. The piece was a birthday present for Roberto Fabbriani, which explains both the choice of instrument, and the use of his as the "generating name" of the music.

Sulle Scale della Fenice was to have been an extended version of *Venezia*, but in the intervening six months between the pieces, my musical language changed so drastically that there was no way the older piece could contribute to the newer. The work is based, in pitch, architectural and rhythmical detail, on the name "Laura Chislett". Throughout the time that I was writing the three (seven?) pieces discussed so far, I was also tinkering with yet a "fourth" solo flute work, one that was more ambitious still. This ambition was less to do with the scale of the work, than the elusive and precarious character of the music. Like *Sulle Scale della Fenice*, I began this last work in '86, but whereas *Sulle Scale della Fenice* finally got finished in Berlin in '89, *Closing Lemma* loitered for fully two more years before I was content with its detail. The title can be understood on many levels - it was intended to be my last such solo piece, and is derived from the closing flourish of my *Afterimages* for 21 instruments.

Prior to *Venezia* my works were more successful when dealing with large ensembles and grand gestures. The notable exceptions to this are my piano works and the flute piece *Caught Breath of Time*, which I wrote for the American flute-player Nancy Ruffer, long resident in Britain. The title is a short quotation from Robert Holdstock's superb novel "Earthwind", and its structure, of a gradual descent into amnesia, was suggested by the novel's plot-line. I was attracted to Holdstock's work by its rejection of the facile: a sculptor-hewn cragginess imbues his writing with impressive power and depth, which such recent books as "Lavondyss" have built on to great effect. While *Caught Breath of Time* lacks the dimensions of my new flute pieces, its combination of warmth and naivety has a charm I cannot but acknowledge.

Chris Dench, 1993

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