5-2015

Breaking; Mending- A New Piece for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra

Jonathan Andrew Smith

BREAKING; MENDING - A NEW PIECE FOR OBOE AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Jonathan Andrew Smith

Breaking; Mending- A New Piece for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra

By

J. Andrew Smith

This thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the CSU Honors College for Honors in the degree of

Bachelor of Music

in

Music Education

College of the Arts, Schwob School of Music

Columbus State University

3 April 2015

Thesis Advisor _____ Date 5/8/15

Dr. Matthew McCabe

Committee Member _____ Date 5/11/15

Dr. Kristen Hansen

Committee Member _____ Date 5/8/15

Dr. Susan Tomkiewicz

Honors College Dean _____ Date 5/8/15

Dr. Cindy Ticknor

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

BREAKING; MENDING- A NEW PIECE FOR OBOE AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE HONORS COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF MUSIC WITH HONORS

SCHWOB SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND THE HONORS COLLEGE

BY

JONATHAN ANDREW SMITH

COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

2015

BREAKING; MENDING- A NEW PIECE FOR OBOE AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

By

Jonathan Andrew Smith

Committee Chair:

Dr. Matthew McCabe

Committee Members:

Dr. Cindy Ticknor
Dr. Susan Tomkiewicz
Dr. Kristen Hansen

Signature Page Approved:

Dr. Matthew McCabe
Committee Chair
Columbus State University
May 2015

ABSTRACT

Breaking; Mending- A New Piece for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra is an original composition for oboe and chamber orchestra that explores the role of narrative and historical reference and quotation in contemporary music. In *Breaking; Mending,* J.S. Bach's Double Concerto for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra is quoted, manipulated and transformed into a new piece of music driven by a central, all-encompassing narrative. The piece was written for and performed by Dr. Susan Tomkiewicz and an orchestra consisting primarily of members of the CSU Honors College.

INDEX WORDS: Bach, Oboe, Contemporary Music, Musical Narrative

To Matthew McCabe, Susan H. Tomkiewicz, and Kristen Hansen

This thesis is dedicated to three of my greatest mentors at Columbus State University, who lent me incredible support in the composition, rehearsal, and performance of the piece and writing of the subsequent analysis. They also provided me with incredible guidance throughout my four years as an undergraduate student, and their influence, ideas, and teachings shaped me into the composer, scholar, and musician that I am today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Breaking; Mending- A New Piece for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra

By

J. Andrew Smith

This thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the CSU Honors College for Honors in the degree of

Bachelor of Music

in

Music Education

College of the Arts, Schwob School of Music

Columbus State University

3 April 2015

Thesis Advisor _____ Date _____

Dr. Matthew McCabe

Committee Member_____ Date _____

Dr. Kristen Hansen

Committee Member_____ Date _____

Dr. Susan Tomkiewicz

Honors College Dean _____ Date _____

Dr. Cindy Ticknor

In 1829, the composer Felix Mendelssohn mounted a performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Matthaus-Passion, effectively re-introducing Bach's music to the public. Franz Liszt referred to Mendelssohn himself as "Bach reborn". This work, *Breaking; Mending*, continues in this tradition, utilizing theoretical and musical transformations of motives and progressions from Bach's BWV 1060 to drive a complex and multifaceted narrative built around the relationship of Baroque and Contemporary music. Bach's piece proved to be an exciting framework for an original narrative, using the oboist as a kind of protagonist interacting with the orchestra.

The idea of a composition as a musical narrative is not a new one; even in the early eighteenth century, Antonio Vivaldi wrote his series of concerti entitled *The Four Seasons*, which were musical depictions of the different seasons as depicted in a series of sonnets the composer wrote to accompany the pieces. (Britannica 1) Modern musical thought is built upon this notion of narrative, or story, in music. As Heinrich Schenker states in the third volume of his seminal theory treatise, *Free Composition* "In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new. Thus we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events." (Maus 4)

Breaking; Mending is also built around this idea of the narrative. The piece, through its exploration of Baroque idioms and motifs, tells the story of the oboist

struggling against an often antagonistic orchestra. At the beginning of the piece, the orchestra limits the expressive power of the soloist; the oboist is relegated to having a strictly imitative role. As the orchestra plays, so the oboe follows obediently. Beginning at letter A, however, the oboist begins to vary the figures of the melody dictated by the orchestra, as is shown in Figure 1.

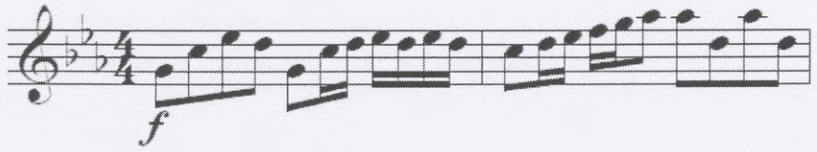


Figure 1

These variations begin subtly at first, imitating the performance practice of ornamentation common in the performance of Baroque music as is seen in figure 2a. (Roseman 1)

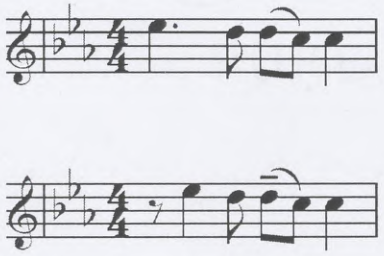


Figure 2a

However, as the piece progresses, the variations become more and more dramatically different, as the oboist becomes bolder and more rebellious. The orchestra's gestures become more energized, integrating accented figures, sixteenth notes, and sextuplets as the oboe's responses transform the orchestra's ideas more drastically (Figure 2b).

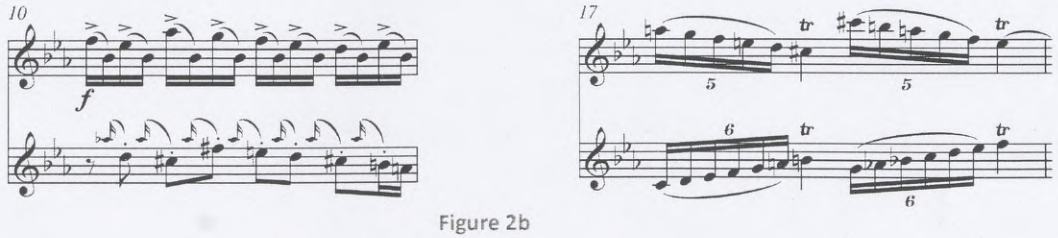


Figure 2b

The work becomes frantic, as the repeated bass line played by the cello, harpsichord, and bass becomes less rooted in the common time meter and more jagged and syncopated. (Figure 3) Finally, the orchestra itself descends into frantic and violent chaos as the harpsichord plays dense and harsh cluster chords while the members of the orchestra erupt into aleatoric, unmetered music. (Figure 4)

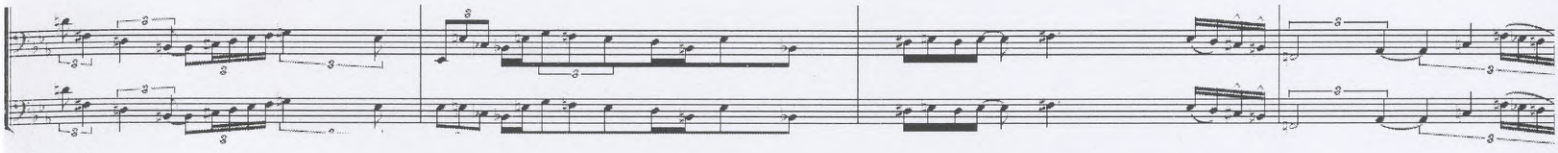


Figure 3

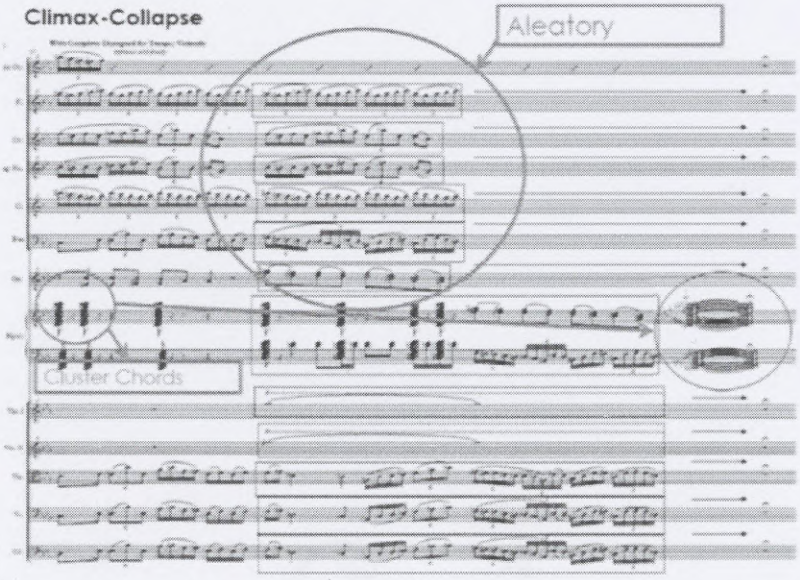


Figure 4

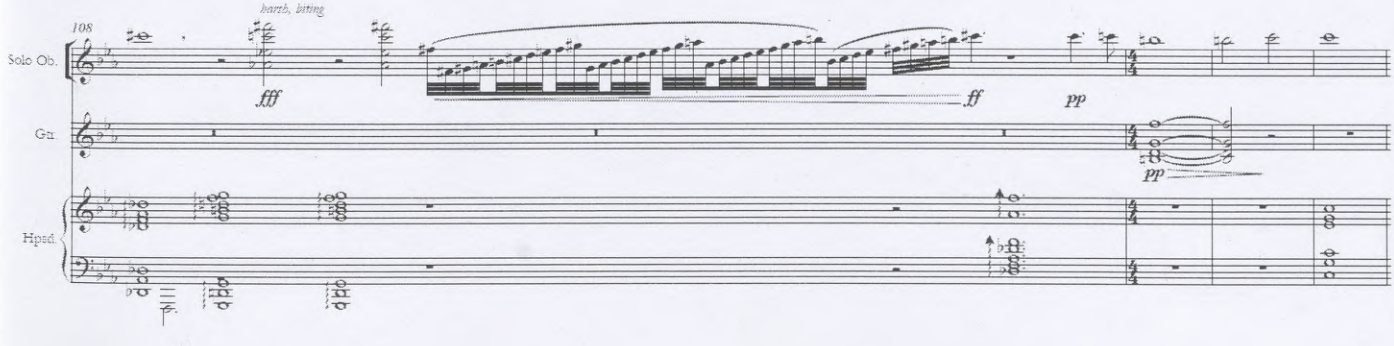
The techniques of aleatory and cluster chords are inventions of twentieth century music, as is seen in the music of Witold Lutoslawski and Henry Cowell. While Lutoslawski was not the first composer to make extensive use of indeterminate music, he was the one of the first composers to expand the technique into the powerful modern composition technique that it became, even using the technique in highly organized, contrapuntal ways. (O'Brien 3) Similarly, Henry Cowell, a prominent American composer, used clusters in innovative ways; "the

tone clusters in *The Tides of Manaunaun* and *Tiger* and the sounds created inside the piano in *Aeolian Harp* and *The Banshee* were steps in his quest to create new sounds to reflect his inspirations." (Clough 1) It is from this sound-world, the rich, chaotic, and explosive world of the twentieth century, that the climax of *Breaking; Mending* falls.

Thus, as the piece begins with Bach's Baroque music, a music from the era of monarchy and courts, it peaks in the twentieth century, the era of democracy, the fall of dictators, and of greater freedom throughout the entire world. This aligns itself with the role of the oboe in the piece; the oboe seeks greater freedom, greater means of personal expression; to achieve this, it pulls the piece further and further into the twentieth century. As it strains against the orchestra, the orchestra fights back, insistent in its roots in the Bach BWV 1060, which leads to the eventual collapse of the piece.

After the climax, when the orchestra comes to a violent, chaotic halt at a large harpsichord cluster, the cadenza begins. The cadenza is inspired by the secco recitative, an operatic form that was popularized in the Baroque era where the soloist sings in a speech-like, declamatory style accompanied by sparse chords from the continuo voices. (figure 5)

Figure 5



"Secco", itself, means dry, which is a reference to the sparse accompaniment of the continuo voices. This cadenza also references the idea of Sprechstimme, an innovation of the 20th century that is similar to recitative. The cadenza begins without a key center; consecutive tritones circle around the chromatic scale until the harpsichord interjects itself into the scenario with a non-diatonic chord (built on a G-Db tritone). The oboe then proceeds to assert F# minor, despite the urging of the guitar (in imitation of the Baroque lute) for a cadence in C minor. The oboe is more insistent in its refusal to cadence, even escalating to the point of fortississimo multiphonics, the most dissonant and abrasive sound that the oboe can make. Finally, with the guitar and harpsichord working together, the oboist cadences in C minor, and the second part of the piece *Mending* begins properly.

Although in C minor, which was the key of the oppressive orchestra at the beginning of the piece, the oboe's role has changed from rebellious aggressor to a free and expressive voice in its own right. No longer does the oboe imitate the soloists within the orchestra; instead, the oboe and the orchestra serve as allies, trading expressive phrases. Thus, the oboe is transformed through the cadenza and becomes the true focal point of the piece, with the other instruments following its lead. The orchestra finally acknowledges the power of the soloist as an individual, separate from the confines of the orchestra. In the end, the oboe leads the orchestra in long suspension that resolves to a C Major chord with an added D. Thus, the piece ends, resolving the conflicts of *Breaking*, and leading us through the path to *Mending.*

This narrative is driven largely by the harmonic development of the piece. The piece, much like Bach's own BWV 1060, begins rooted firmly in C minor. In fact, the harmonic progression of Bach's own *Double Concerto* is, in essence, the lynchpin of *Breaking; Mending*. Bach's progression, Figure 6a, is largely diatonic.

Figure 6a

c	f	Bb	Eb	f	Db	G
i	iv	V/III	III	iv	N6	V

Even the secondary dominant chord, V/III, is unremarkably diatonic, as it can also function as VII in the key of C minor, making it entirely within the pre-established key center. Where the chief non-diatonic divergence comes in the scope of the Bach is the Neapolitan chord before the cadence. In an otherwise diatonic harmonic progression, Bach's use of the Db sonority is atypical of music of the time, as the two keys are unrelated according to common practice harmony. This chord functions in a largely traditional and logical way, emphasizing the cadence in the tonic key with a tritone root motion from Db to G before resolving in C. Bach has emphasized the cadence even more by structuring the rest of the progression in a pattern largely reliant on the circle of fifths, making the sudden tritone root motion unexpected and powerful to the listener's ear. Bach even foreshadows his tritone motivically in the second bar of his concerto, when the orchestra falls silent for a single beat to emphasize a descending D to Ab tritone in the solo voices. (see Figure 1) This tritone motion became the entire basis for the harmonic development of *Breaking; Mending*. As the piece progresses, the harmony moves away from the C minor of the Bach towards bitonality, pitting C minor against F# minor. These two keys are the most distantly related keys, and

they typically never appear together in context in common practice harmony. C and F#, however, are linked by the Db major chord, which appears as the Neapolitan in C and the dominant in F#. When these two chords are played simultaneously, they form six of the eight notes need to form the octatonic scale, a scale consisting of alternating half and whole steps. This scale, which has been used by a multitude of composers including Stravinsky, Messiaen, Ravel, and Debussy, appears as a commonplace pitch collection used in music since the twentieth century (Tymoczko 1) For *Breaking; Mending*, the scale is the pitch collection upon which the harmonic development is largely based.

At the beginning of the piece, Bach's progression is presented largely as it appears in his *Concerto*, altered slightly, with the harmonic rhythm slowed from changing every bar to every two bars. What follows is largely a set of variations on the progression and it accompanying bass line, played by the left hand of the harpsichord and the cello, in the style of continuo. At first, the progression is altered only slightly, with the changes still relying largely on C minor as a key center. (Figure 6b).

Figure 6b

c **Ab** f f Bb Bb Eb Eb f f Db G^7

As the piece progresses, the harmonic progression begins stepping away from C minor as borrowed chords, secondary dominants, and eventually non-diatonic chords, extended tertian harmonies, and chords played simultaneously are changed in the progression.(Figure 6c)

Figure 6c

c Ab f **F** Bb Bb Eb Eb f f Db G^7

c Ab f F^7 Bb Bb^7 Eb Eb f Ab^7 Db G^7

c Ab f F^+ Bb Bb^{+7} Eb Eb f Ab^7 Db G^7/Db

Throughout the changes, however, the first chord of every pair remains as it was, cementing the Bach into the fabric of the variations. These measures, where the harmony is still rooted in C minor, are the measures that the orchestra plays without the soloist, alternating with the increasingly dissonant and harmonically complex measures of the oboe's solo, which is attempting to move the key center to the distant F# minor. The last iteration of the chord progression in the first half of the piece at letter G has completely destabilized the harmony, with chords from F# minor and C Minor and their closely related neighbors appearing simultaneously and fighting for control of the key center. (Figure 6d)

Figure 6d

$c/C\ A^7\ Bb^7/D^7\ E^7\ Bb^{7b9}\ B^7\ Eb/Fb\ B^7\ f^{dim7}\ Ab^7/E^7\ Db^7/D^7\ G^7/F\#$

This leads to an inevitable collapse of the piece at measure 95, where a harpsichord cluster appears to destroy all sense of tonality.

From this collapse emerges the cadenza at letter H, where the oboe, harpsichord, and guitar seek to find mutual ground. Using the Db/C# major chord as the link between F# minor and C Minor, the oboe cadences in C minor (Figure 3). At letter I, the progression reappears in its original form, unchanged until the very last measure of the piece, where, instead of the expected C minor final chord, there is a C major chord with an added D. This leaves the final chord mostly, but

not completely, unresolved. This reflects the overall narrative of the piece as a struggle of the oboist against the tyranny of the orchestra; the conflict remains unresolved. In this way, the harmony of the piece serves to drives the narrative of the piece, and this reflects the narrative of composition into the 20th century. The Baroque Era saw the establishment of tonal harmony, and the next three hundred years of music history saw the expansion of tonality to the point of its eventual destruction in the twentieth century; just as it happens at the climax of *Breaking; Mending.*

Breaking; Mending is constructed from a narrative standpoint. The piece tells the story, with the soloist taking the role as the protagonist against an antagonistic orchestra trying to limit his or her potential. As the two become more impassioned in their conflict, the sound world unravels and is destroyed. With help from the continuo players, the oboist leads the listener to *Mending*, where the oboe has the opportunity to play more than mere imitation of or reaction to the melodies of the orchestra. Instead, the soloist leads the ensemble, playing and trading expressive ideas with soloists from within the orchestra itself. The soloist, assuming the role of the equal with the orchestra, reflects the progression of democracy into the twentieth century. Thus, the narrative of the piece moves from the Baroque era to the 20th Century as tonality collapses and democracy prevails.

Breaking; Mending is an exploration of how a motifs and harmonies from a piece of music by Johann Sebastian Bach, which is more than 250 years old, can be used and manipulated to tell a dramatic story about the nature of the soloist and his or her varying roles. This narrative informs every aspect of the composition; the

tempo, harmony, energy, rhythmic values, and textures of the piece are all designed to fuel the overall narrative arc of the piece. As the harmony of the piece expands, the narrative progresses, dramatically unfolding. The oboist asserts herself more dominantly as her role shifts from imitator to full-fledged soloist throughout the piece. The harmony of the piece dramatically expands, eventually breaking apart the tonal center of C minor.

This narrative is a complex and multi-layered; the first layer of the narrative reflects the progression of the Baroque into the Contemporary, and of tonality into atonality. The narrative also speaks of the progression of monarchy and totalitarianism as the oboist blossoms into an expressive and independent solo voice.

At the deepest levels, however, the oboist represents the voice of an oppressed child. This "child" is abused by the remaining members of the ensemble, stifled and even violently attacked by the tone clusters in the harpsichord and accents in the ensemble. The story of the oboist against the orchestra, of democracy versus monarchy, of Bach versus the titans of the twentieth century, is, at the deepest levels, an allegory for the pain that many children face as a result of injury and neglect from people that they love. The oboist, seeking freedom from the tyranny of abuse, attempts to pull away from those that love them, much as children seek freedom. As the orchestra balks at the oboist's assertions of autonomy, the oboist pulls farther and farther away from the orchestra. Finally, the cycle of abuse and violence is abruptly ended with the collapse. At the end of the piece, the oboist has escaped the harsh abuses of the orchestra, asserting itself as a

fully-fledged soloist. The allegorical child in the piece, broken in the first half of the piece, is mended, embracing the rest of the orchestra, the people that it loves in the allegory, in a peaceful and beautiful conclusion.

Works Cited

Bach, Johann S. Concerto for Oboe and Violin in C Minor. New York: International Music, 1947. Print.

Clough, Allison. "A Performance Guide for Selected Works for Piano by Henry Cowell." Diss. 2013. University of Alabama, May 2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.

"The Four Seasons". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 14 Apr. 2015 <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215043/The-Four-Seasons>.

Maus, Fred Everett. "Music as Drama." Music Theory Spectrum 10 (1988): 56-73. Web.

O'Brien, Michael. "Witold Lutoslawski's Venetian Games." (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.

Roseman, Ronald. "Baroque Ornamentation." The Journal of the International Double Reed Society 3 (1975): n. pag. Idrs.org. International Double Reed Society. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

Tymoczko, Dmitri. "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration." Music Theory Spectrum 25.1 (2003): 68-102. Print.

Appendix A- Author's Note

Breaking; Mending was commissioned by Susan Tomkiewicz, Professor of Oboe at Columbus State University and the Director of Riverpark Honors. It was premiered on December 5, 2015 by the Mostly Honors Chamber Orchestra, a chamber ensemble assembled specifically for the premiere the piece, with Dr. Susan Tomkiewicz as the soloist and the composer conducting in Studio Theatre at Columbus State University. The premiere was a lecture recital and the piece was performed and discussed with accompanying examples from both *Breaking; Mending* and Bach's BWV 1060. Funding was provided by the Columbus State University Honors College led by Dean Cindy Ticknor.

When I was first approached about writing a piece for Dr. Tomkiewicz, I enthusiastically began surveying a vast array of oboe repertoire from every time period. I listened to dozens of pieces before I encountered Bach's BWV 1060, his *Double Concerto for Violin and Oboe*. I was captivated by the piece; the harmonies, textures, and especially the expressive second movement built around traded expressive solos between the two soloists enthralled me. I knew instantly that this piece would inform my own composition upon studying it. At first, the piece was simply a sonata, then a piece for string quartet and oboe. Finally, I expanded it to a full chamber orchestra (which was later reduced). Several months later, an ensemble consisting of my peers and faculty from the Schwob School of Music, began rehearsing the piece with myself conducting. Dr. Constantina Tsolainou was my conducting and rehearsal coach for the premiere.