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Conversations We've Had

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“Conversations We’ve Had” – Composer’s Note:

This piece is a musical testament to a series of conversations I had with a colleague named Sarai Buchanan during my time at the City College of New York. The conversations mainly involved the topic of religion, specifically Christianity, a faith with which I was raised and know very well. The conversations inspired me to revisit my lost faith, and although the process never came to fruition through my recognition of God, they did lead to a spiritual experience that warranted capturing through musical creation.

The piece is written in a loose rounded binary, and literally every section of the piece is symbolic of an excerpt from one of the many correspondences between Ms. Buchanan and myself, specifically referencing the emotional content as understood from my perspective. There are four main viewpoints present in the piece. The first is represented by the introduction that takes place prior to the first theme, and that viewpoint is my own. I initiated the topic of religion without any real expectation of serious further development, and what ensued was far more seminal than I had anticipated. The second point of view is represented by all the occurrences of the first theme in any key, and every sequence that connects the smaller sections. This is my musical interpretation of Ms. Buchanan’s perspective of the conversation, of religion, of God, and of myself.

The third viewpoint represented by the music is that of Temptation. Temptation, in this piece, is symbolic of anything evil or sinful. I specifically chose to use modal mixture in this section of the composition in order to create a quasi-disruption to the tonality of the piece. As a metaphor, this concept is meant to

illuminate the ever-present apparition of Temptation (disruption) that relentlessly haunts the human condition throughout life (tonality) in modern society. The reason modal mixture is employed instead of any other technique is because although I wanted to *disrupt* the tonality in an aesthetically pleasing and intriguing way (as Temptation always seems to its prey), my intention was never to *destroy* the tonality, as would a more drastic shift to an atonal means of organization. This symbolizes how according to Ms. Buchanan, Temptation may disrupt the moral or ethical trajectory of one's life, but in God's eyes, through repentance, that life can never be destroyed.

The final point of view musically portrayed through this composition is that of God's. Although I cannot claim to know the truth of His existence or non-existence, I can imagine a universe in which an all-powerful Divinity can look down on his subjects to observe behaviors on who's grounds He will later pass judgment. The B section of the piece (marked the key change to Cb major) is meant to be the actual conversation between Sarai and I from the viewpoint of God. The melody in the higher octave represents her voice, and the answer to that melody in the lower octave acts as my voice. Throughout the section, a haunting triplet accompaniment oscillates between a higher and lower octave. I chose to begin this section with this accompaniment figure because for me that *is* my understanding God. He is ever-present, and within Him we can always find ourselves. The rhythmic breakdown of the "voices" are, except in rare exceptions, always a piece of the ever-present "God" motive. This is meant to portray the concept of finding within God, each and every person (here specifically, Ms. Buchanan, and myself). The shifting between octaves

that takes place in the “God” motive displays His ability to relate to everyone, male/female, old/young etc, by having that motive employed in both the “female voice” range, and the “male voice” range.

The music that follows the B section of the rounded binary contains corresponding sub-sections to the original A section. The voices represented in A' by these sub-sections are meant to parallel those in the A section. It is no mistake that the sub-sections representing Ms. Buchanan's perspective greatly outnumber my own. The reason behind this is simply that within these conversations she spoke much more, and I attentively listened. The extension of the opening material that represents my voice in the A' prime section is quite significant though. This material being elongated is not only a metaphor for my ability to speak more on the topic due to the knowledge imparted to me, but also represents a critical shift in my own perception of the topic. My perspective now functions as the avenue through which the piece returns to Ms. Buchanan's perspective, which is a musical metaphor for my unfruitful endeavor into revisiting my faith.

The final aspect that remains is the sudden tonal shift that occurs at the end of the piece, beginning with the rising triplet arpeggio pattern. If my good friend Sarai happens to have placed her faith accurately, than her soul will ascend to Heaven to be with Him for eternity. With hope for the future, I decided the only fitting ending to this musical conversation was one symbolic of the only happy ending that Ms. Buchanan could ever know.

- Michael Koltosky

for Sarai Buchanan
Conversations We've Had

Dreamy, Floating

Michael Koltosky
(2013)

♩ = 110

Musical score for measures 1-6. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 110. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern.

(Carefree, Innocent, Playful)

Musical score for measures 7-12. The piece continues in the same key and time signature. The upper staff starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and features a more active melodic line with slurs. The lower staff continues with a consistent eighth-note accompaniment. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking appears in the final measure of this system.

Musical score for measures 13-18. The upper staff begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The lower staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. A mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking is present in the middle of the system.

poco a poco decrescendo

(Nostalgic)

Musical score for measures 19-24. The piece concludes with a nostalgic mood. The upper staff starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The lower staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. The dynamics in the upper staff decrease from mezzo-forte (*mf*) to piano (*p*) and finally pianissimo (*pp*). The tempo is marked as *rit.* (ritardando).

(With anxiety, like hide and seek)

25 *a tempo*

pp *ppp*

(Building in suspense)

29

f

(Regal, Courty)

33

mp *mf*

(Singing, Elusive, Bittersweet)

37

p *mp* *p*

(Serious, Passionate, Moving)

41

mf *p* *mf*

3 3

46 *rit.* *Rubato* *(Let Fade)*

f *mp* 3

Slower, Ominous, Softly

50 *pp* *8va*

(Hopeful, Elevating [Hear the Conversation])

53 *p* *8va*

56 *pp* *mp* *8va*

59 *pp* *8va*

62 *rit.* (Pensive, Indecisive) Adagio

3 3 3 3

ppp

67 Evasive, but futile a tempo

pp

71 (With struggle)

f

75 (Falling) (Like a spirit of the 17th century)

mp *f*

(Meaningful, Personal, Intimate)

79

mp mf

Detailed description: This system contains measures 79 through 83. The right hand features a complex, flowing melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, often beamed together. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with eighth and quarter notes. Dynamic markings include *mp* (measures 79-81) and *mf* (measures 82-83). There are also several accents (>) placed over notes in the right hand.

84

mf mp f

Detailed description: This system contains measures 84 through 89. The right hand continues with its intricate melodic patterns, now including some longer note values and slurs. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent. Dynamic markings are *mf* (measures 84-85), *mp* (measures 86-88), and *f* (measure 89). Accents (>) are used throughout the right hand.

90

mp

(Deceptive, Prodigious, "Home")

Detailed description: This system contains measures 90 through 94. The right hand has a more rhythmic, repetitive melodic motif. The left hand accompaniment is simpler, with some longer note values. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present in measure 94. The system concludes with the text "(Deceptive, Prodigious, 'Home')".

95

pp mp rit.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 95 through 98. The right hand features a more spacious, chordal texture with some slurs. The left hand accompaniment is steady. Dynamic markings include *pp* (measures 95-96) and *mp* (measures 97-98). A *rit.* (ritardando) marking is placed above the right hand in measure 97.

(Slower, Romantic, Expressive)

99

f

Detailed description: This system contains measures 99 through 104. The right hand has a very slow, expressive melodic line with wide intervals and slurs. The left hand accompaniment is also slow and expressive, with some chordal textures. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present in measure 99.

104 rit.

112 (Safely, Relaxed)
a tempo

118 rit.

124 accel.

127

Musical score for measures 127-128. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, both containing triplet patterns. The right hand starts with a half note followed by a triplet of eighth notes, then continues with a series of eighth notes, some grouped in triplets. The left hand mirrors this with a similar triplet pattern. The piece concludes with a fermata over the final notes.

129

rit. *8va* *rubato*

Musical score for measures 129-132. The piece continues in 3/4 time with two flats. Measure 129 begins with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The right hand features a melodic line with triplet eighth notes and a *8va* (octave) marking. The left hand continues with triplet patterns. In measure 130, the dynamic is marked *p* (piano). In measure 131, the dynamic is marked *pp* (pianissimo), and the tempo is marked *rubato*. The piece ends with a fermata over the final notes.