

“Treize Etudes Pour L’Orchestre” by Sylvia Constantinidis

The *Treize Etudes Pour L’Orchestre* is formally a through-composed work. It creates a long arch throughout the different movements inter-related by the use of similar motivic materials. Two dynamically intense climaxes, the first and the sixth etude, and the second and the ninth etude, create the axis of the arch that is drawn throughout the composition. The last etude recapitulates the material and intention of the first etude. However, it contains aspects of other moments of the work while it elaborates on materials presented in the first etude. In this respect, the thirteenth etude breaks with the sense of simple recapitulation. In addition, the thirteenth etude has the same intention of the first etude, but it ends differently: it also builds into an exuberant final climax, but a sudden pianissimo ends the work “not with a bang but with a whimper.”¹

Movements two and seven are the resting points of the piece. Although they are different in material, these two etudes are similar in mood. They are also similar in intention as they both represent an exploration in colour. However, they are different in style. The second etude is based on Schoenberg’s idea of ‘tone color melody’, *Klangfarbenmelodie*, and also it is built on spectral chords based on overtones. The seventh etude, on the other hand is a through-composed melody supported by a pointillistic string accompaniment, while a polyrhythmic sound-curtain plays in the background.

The third and the eleventh etudes are two points of dynamic tension. They assist in subdividing the whole work into five dynamic-mood related waves. However, these two etudes are very different in intention and style. While the third etude is pointillist in style, the eleventh etude is a textural wave: it builds from the lowest registers of the orchestra and softest dynamics into an acme section in the highest register with loud dynamics, returning later to the initial register and dynamic as a recapitulation. The eleventh etude is a twelve-tone composition.

The fourth and the eighth etudes are similar in character. They share the same mood and tranquil pace. Both are built with minimalist but with different material. Also, both etudes produce a hypnotic driving sensation that leads into the next section. The fifth and the twelfth etudes are atmospheric in character with emphasis on the melodic material, which is presented differently in each. *Etude No. 5* presents a melodic line that links different instruments throughout the movement. *Etude No. 12* contains some of the material of the fifth etude in addition to other materials and a second melodic line. *Etude No. 10* is a ‘melting pot’ of materials presented throughout previous etudes. It evokes moods of *Etudes No.4 and No. 8*.

The most unique moments of the work are in the sixth and ninth etudes. The ninth recalls several familiar materials, now organized in a new context. The intention is to build a quadrasonic effect. The sixth etude, on the other hand, deeply explores extensively the bird-song transcriptions creating the biggest climax of the work in a very descriptive context that clearly evokes the Amazon. Many of the musical elements of the work appear, in one form or another throughout the different movements. There is no time separation between the different etudes of this work. They are all interconnected.

In regards to style I will describe my music as a “Nationalist Romantic Texturalism.” It is “Nationalist” because of its inspiration in Latin American melodic and rhythmic material, as well as geographic and cultural reminiscences. “Romantic” in its use of driving melodic lines charged with emotional energy. “Texturalism,” is used because of a search for creating different levels of density with colour and textile qualities, resembling Seurat’s pointillist canvas. Inspiration comes from the artistic early concepts of modern art: the atmospheric paintings of impressionist artists like Monet and Manet; Cezanne’s unrevealed decomposition of forms; The Fauves’ passionate use of strong colors; Gauguin’s primitive naïve simplicity. Another inspiration for my work evolves from the animalistic primitivism found in African inspired works Like Matisse’s *Red Room*, in its intensity of colors, and, Picasso’s *Mademoiselle D’Avignon*, a work that reflects Picasso’s obsession with African Masques. My urge to express an animalistic primitive force is evoked in my work as rhythmic barbarism, through percussive texture and intensity of dynamics, taking rhythmic ideas from African elements.

¹ T.C. Elliot.