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Eric Mandat's Style and Compositional Process for Solo Clarinet Music

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ERIC MANDAT'S STYLE AND COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS
FOR SOLO CLARINET MUSIC

by

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INTRODUCTION

To the average musician, the name Eric Mandat may not spark instant recognition. But to contemporary clarinetists, Mandat stands out as a progressive composer who has been writing clarinet music that feels particularly well-suited to the instrument. No surprise, since Mandat is one of the increasingly rare composers who is eminently capable as a performing instrumentalist.

In the past several years, Mandat's music has gained a larger following. Several clarinetists now perform his works, and a few college professors have added his pieces to their lists of standard repertoire for advanced students.

Eric Mandat's works often draw in listeners and performers alike through their unique approach to the avant-garde—much of his solo clarinet music is laden with extended techniques. A conversation with the composer combined with examples from two of his pieces, *Folk Songs* and *The Jungle*, reveals some of the inspiration and the process of improvisation and analysis that Mandat uses to create his music.

Folk Songs and *The Jungle* are written for solo B^b clarinet, so all references to pitch will be the notated pitches, which are written a whole step above sounding pitch. The register of notes will often indicate clarinet register (chalumeau, throat, clarion, and altissimo) as well as standard register notation with c representing , c¹ representing , c² representing , *et cetera*.

MANDAT'S BACKGROUND

One of the first questions for any composer is “what made you start composing?” Although some of his first compositions were small pieces for his piano lessons, Eric Mandat’s main compositional impetus was a natural outgrowth of his clarinet playing:

...when I was playing clarinet, especially when I was getting involved in experimenting with extended techniques and playing some of those pieces, I found that the things I wanted to play weren’t written. And so I wanted to try to do the sounds I was experimenting around with and just try to organize them in a different way than what I had seen in compositions at the time. So that’s when I started a little more seriously actually writing things.¹

Mandat cites Gyorgi Ligeti and George Crumb as important influences on his early compositional style. He feels particularly influenced by “the highly-concentrated, pitch-organization elements in Crumb’s music combined with that kind of exotic sound [that remains] structurally relatively straightforward.”² It is this characteristic of Crumb’s music that Mandat feels has most permeated his works.

A performer as well, Mandat has been influenced by instrumentalists as well as composers. Two players he first mentions as influences are not clarinetists: “I liked listening to a Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek and I also liked listening to

¹Eric Mandat, Phone interview by author 22 December 2003 Carbondale, Tape recording, (Carbondale, IL).

²*Ibid.*

recorder virtuoso Frans Brüggen a lot. They were really influential on sound and macro rhythm concepts.”³

³*Ibid.*

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE AND PROCESS

Style

When asked to describe his compositional style, Mandat summarizes it succinctly:

I use non-conventional sound techniques—unconventional sounds—in a fairly traditional structural context which is influenced by rhythmic organizations of jazz and pitch organizations of traditional, non-Western music.⁴

Mandat further underscores this “traditional structural context:”

There’s no doubt that I probably don’t work at stretching certain structural boundaries, and composers who are interested in those kinds of things find my structures pretty superficial. And they are! The idea is to put different colors on the same basic structural relationships.⁵

It is these “unconventional sounds” and “different colors” that attract the ears of many performers and listeners. The opening of the first movement of Mandat’s *Folk Songs*, entitled “Spirited; as if from a distant Appalachian hill,” is a striking example of the kind of sound that he creates. The moving notes beneath a sustained, clarion c^2 are surprising, creating a sonority that many listeners would not believe possible on the clarinet.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

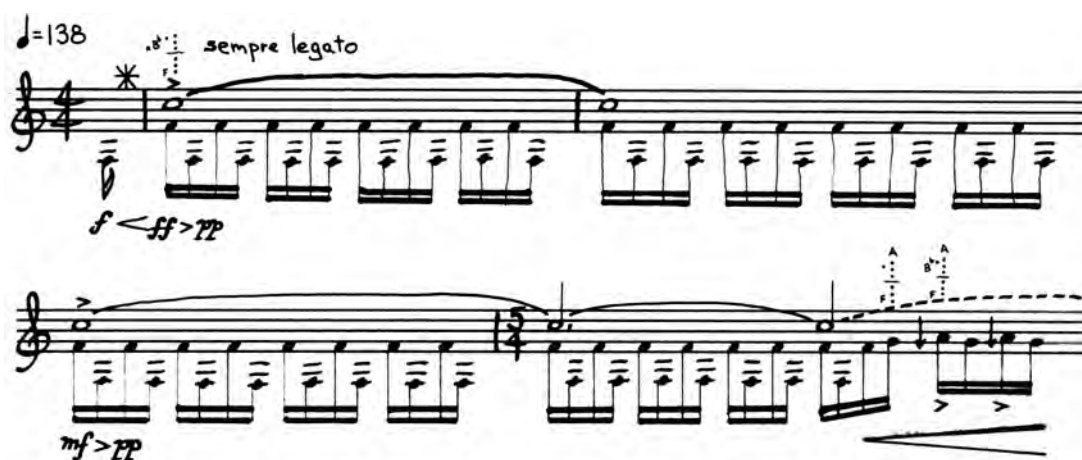


FIGURE 1. *Eric Mandat—Folk Songs, Movement I, opening*

Since the majority of the major literature for clarinet was written by composers who were not clarinetists, having an accomplished clarinetist write for the instrument benefits the canon of works by expanding the possibilities for the instrument in idiomatic ways. With the increasing prevalence of extended techniques in solo clarinet pieces, composers will benefit from having a more comprehensive knowledge of the instrument to be able to incorporate these techniques into their pieces.

Combining clarinet expertise and compositional skill, Mandat is able to create new techniques to fit his inspirations. He wrote the fourth movement of *Folk Songs*, entitled “With devotion, like a prayer,” to be performed by removing the mouthpiece and barrel from the clarinet and blowing across the top of the instrument like an end-blown flute (Fig. 2). The effect is reminiscent of a Japanese *shakuhachi*. This piece is the first instance of this technique in the clarinet literature and requires performers to spend some time figuring out the flute-like sound production.

FIGURE 2. Eric Mandat—*Folk Songs, Movement IV*

In another of his pieces, *The Jungle*, Mandat uses a programmatic theme to organize the juxtaposition of two contrasting musical ideas. Originally composed for a program entitled “My Life in the Jungle of Zeroes and Ones,” *The Jungle* is a protest against the overuse of electronic music.

I was working to combat ... [electronic] composition at that particular time. Hence the first movement, the “Call to Arms,” was that battle, where I would juxtapose very machine-like, very regular kinds of sounds with very quirky kinds of strange numbers of notes per beat, non-traditional, non-equal-tempered tuning in the little pitch collections, and then use little quotations from bugle calls and pull them out of shape and stuff them in the middle of all of that battle.⁶

The machine motive ((A) in Fig. 3) and human motive ((B) in Fig. 3) are readily apparent from the printed page. The bugle calls Mandat mentions (Fig. 4) are produced by muting the end of the clarinet, allowing the instrument to overblow all of the partial harmonics like a brass instrument (as opposed to the odd-numbered harmonics to which an unstopped clarinet is limited).

⁶*Ibid.*

I. Call to Arms
♩ = 132

(A) muted *
p
gradually intensify
B
repeat ad lib.

Chord diagrams:
F: F, A, C, E
A: A, C#, E, G
G#: G, B, D, F#

mf

FIGURE 3. *Eric Mandat—The Jungle, Movement I, opening*

overflow
continue steadily

FIGURE 4. *Eric Mandat—The Jungle, Movement I, bugle call*

Process

Mandat creates many of his new sounds through improvisation:

...with very very few exceptions, the generators for all my compositional ideas are through little improvisations. And so, generally speaking, I move left to right as opposed to creating some large, architectural structure and then filling in the details. Usually, for me, I'm sort of a bottom-up as opposed to a top-down composer. The details over time begin to suggest a large architectural shape whereas some other composers will create the large shape first and then fill in with details and specific materials.⁷

⁷Ibid.

Because Mandat generates these musical ideas through playing the clarinet, there is an idiomatic feel that makes much of his music lay well in the fingers. This good feeling is not just accidental. Mandat carefully selects motives that feel the best:

If I'm writing something and, because I'm listening to it a lot as I'm writing it, if it's really enjoyable or it makes me laugh or it makes my fingers laugh—there are certain patterns that feel really good—and I practice them for weeks and weeks and they still feel good and make my fingers laugh, then I think they're good patterns.⁸

Some of these “finger laughing” patterns are not always obvious by looking at the printed music. But a clarinetist learning a piece for the first time will notice the facility of these patterns, such as the opening of the third movement of *Folk Songs*.

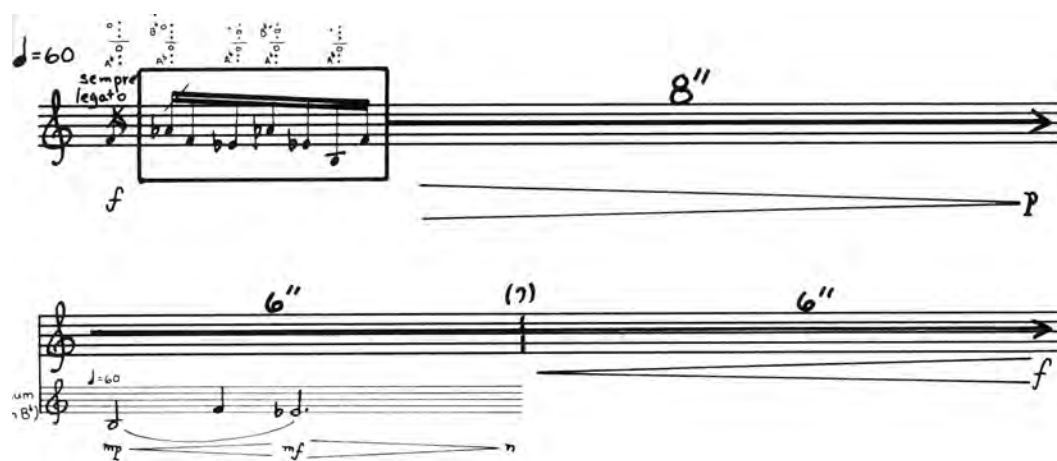


FIGURE 5. Eric Mandat—*Folk Songs*, Movement III

It is crucial for this movement that the repeated cell of notes feel comfortable in the fingers since the performer must also hum through the passage (the lower line in the second system of Fig. 5).

⁸*Ibid.*

Later in the third movement, Mandat uses multiphonics to create two interacting musical lines.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a tempo marking of 'pitu mosso' with a metronome marking of 84. The music consists of two main lines. The upper line features a series of notes with a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking and a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic. A performance instruction 'slap lh. middle finger for each note' is written above the staff. The lower line starts with a 'mf-p' dynamic and includes a 'PFP (echo)' marking. The score concludes with a dynamic range from 'mp' (mezzo-piano) to 'pp' (pianissimo).

FIGURE 6. *Eric Mandat—Folk Songs, Movement III, multiphonic lines*

The feasibility of writing these two musical lines relies on Mandat's intimate awareness of the clarinet's possibilities. By capitalizing on multiphonics that respond well and can easily shift emphasis from high to low, he has conceived a musical gesture unique to a clarinetist-composer.

In progressing from improvisatory inspiration to completed work, Mandat goes through a process of developing a musical idea:

I'll work hard to memorize the little excerpt and then just continue building on it, pretty much left to right. And then when I get stuck, I'll go back and analyze what I wrote in terms of direction and pitch structure and things like that. Then if I can't come up with anything through inspiration, I'll maybe create a set of options based on arithmetic patterns that would be suggested based on the previous material, and maybe one or another of those gets my inspiration going again and then I can move through onto something else.⁹

⁹*Ibid.*

An example of one of these arithmetic patterns is a figure in the fifth movement of *Folk Songs*.

FIGURE 7. Eric Mandat—*Folk Songs*, Movement V, arithmetic figure

The pattern consists of three different sequences, spinning out in permutations of four-, three-, and two-note sequences of notes drawn from pitches in the previous phrase. These sequences progress out of phase then converge. The first sequence (notes marked α in Fig. 7), throat $f^1 a^1 g^b1 a^b1$, repeats through two full iterations. The second sequence (notes marked β in Fig. 7), chalumeau $g^b a^b f$, stops one note short of the third full iteration. The third sequence (notes marked γ in Fig. 7), chalumeau $b b^b$, repeat through four iterations. The pattern stops right where it would have started repeating.

Mandat also uses similar arithmetic manipulations on a larger scope. He likes to use intervallic relationships within a melodic line to determine pitch structure later in the movement.

The fifth movement [of *Folk Songs*], for example, is probably as clear [an example] of that as any. Of course, it's a sort of E phrygian sound. And so E and F natural and G play a large role not only on the surface, but through time. The whole first section is in E (Fig. 8), moves toward a larger section in G (Fig. 9), then back down through F, briefly (Fig. 10), and finally to E, once again.¹⁰

¹⁰*Ibid.*

d = 160
d = 92
 Like a Flamenco dancer with
 St. Vitus Dance
 sempre legato
 ppp sub.
 crescend
 poco a

FIGURE 8. Eric Mandat—*Folk Songs, Movement V, E emphasis*

d = 160
d = 92
 sempre legato
 p
 mp
 cresc. poco a poco

FIGURE 9. Eric Mandat—*Folk Songs, Movement V, F emphasis*

p
 cresc.
 poco a
 poco
 mf
 cresc.

FIGURE 10. Eric Mandat—*Folk Songs, Movement V, G emphasis*

CATALOG OF WORKS

Since there is no official catalog of Eric Mandat's composition, the list here is the composer's account of his works.

Title	Year	Instrumentation
<i>Tricolor Capers</i>	1980	Solo Clarinet
<i>Folk Songs</i>	1986	Solo Clarinet
<i>The Jungle</i>	1989	Solo Clarinet
<i>Etude for Barney</i>	1990	Solo Clarinet
<i>Music for Clarinets</i>	1992–1994	Solo Clarinet with clarinet ensemble: three B \flat clarinets, two bass clarinets doubling B \flat clarinet, and B \flat contrabass clarinet
<i>Preludes, Book I</i>	1994	Solo Clarinet
<i>Sub(t)rains o' Strata's Fears</i>	1996	Solo Clarinet
<i>So What Elsa's New</i> (Dedicated to Elsa Verdehr)	1997	Clarinet Duet
<i>Chips Off the Old Block</i>	1999	Solo Bass Clarinet
<i>Ritual</i>	2000	Clarinet Duet
<i>One Liners</i>	2000	Clarinet trio, one doubling E \flat clarinet and one doubling bass clarinet
<i>Coconut Candy</i>	2000	Solo Clarinet
<i>Three for Two</i>	2001	Clarinet and Percussion
<i>Finger Food</i>	2001–2002	Clarinet Etudes
<i>Dark Energy</i>	2002	For the Tone Road Ramblers: Vocalist, Flute, Clarinet, Trumpet, 2 Trombones, Percussion
<i>No Holds Barred</i>	2003	Flute, Clarinet, Alto Saxophone, Trumpet, 2 Trombones, Accordion, Percussion, Violin
<i>(Untitled)</i>	2004	Clarinet Duet

BIOGRAPHY

From performing the Mozart Concerto on basset clarinet with the Latvian National Chamber Orchestra in Riga (the site of the first documented performance of the work) during the Mozart bicentennial celebration in 1991, to presenting a recital of his own compositions as an invited guest artist during the 1994 ClarinetFest in Chicago, to performing the title role in the 1996 world premiere of John Eaton's opera for instrumentalists, *Don Quixote*, clarinetist/composer Eric Mandat is taking versatility to a new level. He tours extensively as a soloist and chamber musician, presenting lectures and recitals featuring new American clarinet music and extended performance techniques. He also performs regularly as part of the Chicago Symphony's new highly acclaimed contemporary chamber music series, MusicNow.

Mandat is a member of the Tone Road Ramblers, an eclectic sextet specializing in improvisation and experimental music. The Ramblers have performed throughout the United States, including Merkin Hall in New York for the 1997 World Music Institute Interpretations series. Their CD, *Intersections & Detours*, was described as "filled with wit, joy and creative sparkle" by *Option* magazine. Since 1993, the Tone Road Ramblers have held an annual residency at the Ragdale Foundation, an artist colony in Lake Forest, Illinois. Their latest CD, *The Tone Road Ramblers: The Ragdale Years*, is available from Einstein Records.

Mandat has been equally active throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia as a performer of more traditional clarinet repertoire. He is a member of the Transatlantic Trio, whose CD performances of trios by Brahms and d'Indy "easily rank with the best available releases" according to *Fanfare* magazine. The Transatlantic Trio will soon release its second CD, featuring works by Beethoven and Latvian composers Peteris Plakidis and Talivaldis Kenins.

As a composer, Mandat focuses on works for clarinet solo and in small chamber ensembles. His compositions utilize multiphonics and microtones within a musical framework influenced largely by jazz and traditional music of non-Western cultures. His Folk Songs for solo clarinet received the following review by Linda Pierce in *The Clarinet*: “A composition of this caliber will most likely enter the performance repertoire as the representative piece of the decade!” Folk Songs and other of Mandat’s works are featured on his solo CD, *The Extended Clarinet*, which received the following review by Michele Gingras in *The Clarinet*: “In one word, *The Extended Clarinet* is astonishing. Eric Mandat’s process at writing and playing is bound to leave any listener in awe.” Mandat is a recipient of a 2000-2001 Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship Award for composition, and his music is published by Cirrus Music.

Mandat received his education at the University of North Texas (B.M.), the Yale School of Music (M.M.), and the Eastman School of Music (D.M.A.). His principal teachers have included Richard Joiner, Lee Gibson, Keith Wilson, Stanley Hasty, and Charles Neidich. He is Professor of Music at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where he teaches clarinet and courses in musical analysis. He was named Southern Illinois University’s 1999 Outstanding Scholar.¹¹

¹¹*Professor Eric Mandat @ SIUC School of Music*, <http://www.siu.edu/~music/faculty/mandat.htm> (5 Mar. 2004).

INTERVIEW

Greg Oakes What inspired you to start composing?

Eric Mandat I've always diddled around with it. I composed little tidbits before I ever took piano lessons. Just little tiny things. And when I was taking piano, my first teacher would actually make me compose things as part of assignments; little tunes and things. I got a taste of doing that early on. Then, later, when I was playing clarinet, especially when I was getting involved in experimenting with extended techniques and playing some of those pieces, I found that the things I wanted to play weren't written. And so I wanted to try to do the sounds I was experimenting around with and just try to organize them in a different way than what I had seen in compositions at the time. So that's when I started a little more seriously actually writing things.

GO Do you have particular composers that influenced you at the time?

EM I would say I was always interested by George Crumb's music. The colors, especially. And I like a lot of Gyorgi Ligeti's music from the '60s and '70s. I listened to a lot of that, and I just like those kinds of thick textures.

GO Do you find some of these influences have come through in a recognizable fashion in your music, or is it an influence that affected you more internally?

EM I would say, because I've written for smaller numbers of instruments, the kinds of sounds that Ligeti was using haven't really factored into my music. I would say a certain amount of the highly-concentrated, pitch-organization elements in Crumb's music combined with that kind of exotic sound while at the same time being, struc-

turally, relatively straightforward always appealed to me as well as the kind of symmetrically shaped things that Crumb was doing. So I would say that probably a lot of elements of what I have seen in Crumb's music have made their way into my music.

GO You've also been influential enough for enough time now that I'm curious if there are any composers that you have influenced in this time.

EM (Laughs) I sure don't know of any!

GO Who has helped form your personal style?

EM Compositionally?

GO Compositionally as well as performing.

EM Performing, there were a couple of players who I always enjoyed listening to, choosing music as a career. I liked listening to a Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek and I also liked listening to recorder virtuoso Frans Brüggen a lot. They were really influential on sound and macro rhythm concepts. I think from every one of my teachers I got something different, and a really nice combination through the various teachers that I've had, teachers that sort of came to be what I am now.

GO How would you describe your compositional style?

EM I use non-conventional sound techniques, unconventional sounds, in a fairly traditional structural context which is influenced by rhythmic organizations of jazz and pitch organizations of traditional, non-Western music.

GO With your music, I know that you've recorded some of your important works on your *Extended Clarinet* CD. Who else has recorded your music?

EM Sean Osborn has just come out with a CD that has my *Preludes, Book I* for solo clarinet. To my knowledge, there aren't any other recordings out.

GO I guess it's hard to compete with the composer's definitive statement.

EM Well, it would be nice to hear a lot of other statements.

GO Certainly. Along those lines, has anyone cataloged your work?

EM No, other than me! (Laughs) I don't have that much in the way of composition to catalog.

GO Where do you get the ideas for your pieces?

EM They come from lots of different sources. Some times, I have a specific idea in mind based on a concept or a title. I try to follow that thread. Sometimes, it's just a sonic pattern or even finger pattern that feels or sounds kind of fun as a result of just improvising. I'll try to write that down and build around it. Those are the two main generators of compositional material.

GO Once you have these extended techniques or a certain scale pattern in mind, how do you plan your composition to integrate those into a full piece?

EM I'll work hard to memorize the little excerpt and then just continue building on it, pretty much left to right. And then when I get stuck, I'll go back and analyze what I wrote in terms of direction and pitch structure and things like that. Then if I can't come up with anything through inspiration, I'll maybe create a set of options based on arithmetic patterns that would be suggested based on the previous material, and maybe one or another of those gets my inspiration going again and then I can move through onto something else. Or if I don't end up using something arithmetic like that, it may open up some new sound ideas that I can just follow, which then creates new patterns that I can draw on later.

GO One of these arithmetic patterns I noticed in your *Folk Songs* in the fifth movement, after the first pause, where you're iterating through three different cycles of pitches.

EM Like the three note and two note and two note?

GO Yes. Is that kind of pre-compositional technique a pervasive part of your language?

EM It crops up. (Laughs) Because I do enjoy analysis—I spend a lot of time doing analysis, I teach it—it ends up being a part of what I do. That particular segment, I remember a preoccupation with the concept of being sort of rotational and out of phase and then ultimately rotating back into phase over time. It made that an easy choice for something to do right then. Sometimes those kinds of patterns do crop up that way.

GO Speaking of *Folk Songs*, what is the relationship between folk music and the *Folk Songs* as you've written them?

EM Not much, in terms of exact quotation or exact attempt at imitation of particular folk pieces. But in a couple of cases, certainly imitation of folk-like sounds. For example, the fourth movement was inspired by listening to recordings of Japanese shakuhachi music. And while some of the gestures may sound similar to some shakuhachi pieces, I certainly didn't transcribe something off the recording and then try and copy it down. It sort of reminded me of that sort of sound. The first movement is the same kind of thing. The beginning of it sort of reminded me of some fiddle playing, and I certainly didn't copy any particular fiddle tune. Also, in general, the restricted pitch content is typical of a lot of folk music piece that I knew at the time.

GO Was this another one of the pieces you describe where you had a title in mind first and that drove the way that you wrote the piece?

EM I actually wrote the third movement first, very strict with a limited intervallic collection: little pitch sets. And the sound ended up... there were certain kind of folk sounds, especially in the middle section of the third movement. So I just called that

piece *Folk Songs*, and, as I played it, I started thinking of some other companion pieces that I might link to it. That's how that piece sort of grew out of that one movement.

GO Along those lines, I wonder if you could go into more depth about your compositional process for *Folk Songs*.

EM The third movement, you heard pretty well how I went with that. The process was pretty much starting a pattern and then analyzing the pattern in terms of pitch set structure. And then, when I would move to a new pattern, I would choose between maintaining that same pitch set structure or moving to a different one but maintaining a sort of harmonic relationship to the surface pitch structure. So, for example, if a particular pitch set was a major second and a minor third together, then I might choose to use that collection in the next segment of a movement. Or if I didn't choose that, I might move each of the subsequent sections harmonically to a pitch center area that was a major second and then a minor third from the original pitch set area. There was a fair amount of that kind of game-playing going on. The fifth movement, for example, is probably as clear a one of that as any. Of course, it's a sort of E phrygian sound. And so E and F natural and G play a large role not only on the surface, but through time. The whole first section is in E, moves toward a larger section in G, then back down through F, briefly, and finally to E, once again.

GO So it sounds like, when you're describing a lot of this, that your composition is very performance-based, and the analysis often times is sort of an extra tool as opposed to some composers who may form a pre-compositional idea in advance of sitting down to compose their work.

EM Yeah, obviously because my own musical orientation is performance-based. And, with very very few exceptions, the generators for all my compositional ideas are through little improvisations. And so, generally speaking, I move left to right as opposed to creating some large, architectural structure and then filling in the details. Usually, for me, I'm sort of a bottom-up as opposed to a top-down composer. The details over time begin to suggest a large architectural shape whereas some other composers will create the large shape first and then fill in with details and specific materials.

GO In another piece of yours, *The Jungle*, I've heard you describe it as a programmatic piece. How do these programmatic aspects pervade the piece?

EM I wrote it for a performance I was doing in Chicago, and the title of my little program was "My Life in the Jungle of Zeroes and Ones," and this particular piece was sort of a comment on the overuse of electronic music, which, obviously, with a solo, acoustic instrument, I was working to combat that or have a little battle with that style of composition at that particular time. Hence the first movement, the "Call to Arms," was that battle, where I would juxtapose very machine-like, very regular kinds of sounds with very quirky kinds of strange numbers of notes per beat, non-traditional, non-equal-tempered tuning in the little pitch collections, and then use little quotations from bugle calls and pull them out of shape and stuff them in the middle of all of that battle. That pretty much was the bulk of the pitch collection in the first movement.

GO And so those repeated notes, are those emblematic of the zeroes and ones whereas the microtonal aspects are more of the acoustic performer?

EM That's right, yeah. That's sort of the battle going on there. Using the muting technique also hints toward the bugle call idea. Especially because, at the beginning, as I overblow, it does overblow at the partials like the bugle, third fourth and fifth partials.

GO So then, when we have the second movement, "The Lament," is that also meant to be a very visceral kind of statement?

EM Well, it's also based on the idea of juxtaposing the clean and unclean or the perfect and imperfect, or whatever you want to say. It actually starts with perfect interval multiphonics that are pulled slightly out of tune. Then I have twelfths that are tweaked a little bit or elevenths: perfect fourth idea and then pull that out of tune a little bit. That pretty much becomes the generator for that movement. Of course the lament melody is pretty freely composed, although there are a lot of quarter tones in places where a more traditional-sounding melody would not have those quarter-tones in it. And then the final movement combines those ideas of the repetitiveness with the quirkiness so that you have these repeated structures, but yet in a non-equal-tempered construction.

GO So "The Lament," is that a lament of something that is lost, or just something that is not as prevalent as it should be?

EM No, it's not really a calling out for something that's lost. It's kind of like a complaint about this whole concept of digital versus acoustic that I was playing with.

GO After having looked at this as a programmatic piece, do you have other pieces that have such a programmatic theme to them?

EM In some ways, all of my pieces are programmatic, to some extent. Not all of them, but almost all of them. Because I seem to be able to write a little more effec-

tively if I'm drawing on current aspects of my life and what's going on in my head and in my ears. So I do try to relate somewhat directly to what might be going on around me at the time. To get much more specific than that would entail a kind of long biography of each of those points in my history, and might not be particularly relevant to the music itself, except on a really giant size scale.

GO Which, I suppose, is true of many composers.

EM Yeah. I think a lot of people must have similar kinds of feelings. They get inspired by the environment in which they live, and, to some extent—consciously or unconsciously—some of those elements that they experience make their way into the music. I try to stay conscious of it, but I also try not to force it. Obviously, the music's personal for me, but I also have a strong interest in making music that I hope will be listenable as well. So that's my tough balance. I try to come to terms with that which is personal and still try to make it sound like it means something to somebody else, too.

GO When I've heard people describe your music, I've actually heard them say that that's one of the primary things they notice. That despite all of the extended techniques, they find it very listenable. One can sometimes use the word "accessible." Certainly something that people can relate to very easily. Is that something you spend a lot of time thinking about, or is that something that's inherent in your style?

EM Yeah, I do spend a lot of time thinking about it. John Eaton always says about composition, when he's talking to his students, that they have to write something that they would want to listen to. And I feel that way a lot. If I'm writing something and, because I'm listening to it a lot as I'm writing it, if it's really enjoyable or it makes me laugh or it makes my fingers laugh—there are certain patterns that feel really good—

and I practice them for weeks and weeks and they still feel good and make my fingers laugh, then I think they're good patterns. (Laughs) So I search for that a lot. I search for things that feel good to me and continue to feel good to me even after putting it away and coming back to it. That's kind of what I aim for.

GO Have you ever had any composers approach you and somehow feel that they had a problem with the kind of music you were writing because it's not necessarily in the same vein as some of the more erudite mentalities?

EM There's no doubt that I probably don't work at stretching certain structural boundaries, and composers who are interested in those kinds of things find my structures pretty superficial. And they are! The idea is to put different colors on the same basic structural relationships. Like looking at a great mountain scene, but instead of purple and green, you're going to use yellow and blue. Sometimes it makes it kind of humorous, I think, but I don't really do a lot to mess up traditional structures. I like traditional structures. I like the concept of architecture as something that is bound by certain principles of balance that kind of need to be adhered to unless one radically changes the materials to such an extent that those balance aspects of the architecture can be altered as well.

GO The interesting thing, on the other hand, is that I've heard composers and audience members who've responded to pieces of yours; they come up afterwards and are ecstatic. In some ways, despite not having gone past, in your words, "superficial structures," there's something that's very new about the things they hear and haven't necessarily been exposed to. I wonder if you feel like there are other people who have your similar mentality who are composing, right now.

EM Oh, I'm sure there are! I haven't spent enough time talking shop with composers about compositional style to really feel comfortable suggesting who those people might be, but absolutely, there are a lot of people who feel similarly in their work, and I would say in the last twenty years, there has been a lot of movement by a lot of composers to think about using some traditional elements and altering some of the other elements while maintaining a larger shape that fairly recognizable by a large group of people.

GO We've spent a lot of time talking about your composition and your influences, and one thing that comes to mind is how does your performance with the Tone Road Ramblers [Mandat's improvisatory chamber group] influence your composition?

EM One of the very good things that the Tone Road Ramblers does for me is keeps me out of ruts, because each of the members of the group is such a good improviser. Each of the people can just take the music in a completely brand new direction instantly, and you're forced to build on that just as quickly as they've taken you there, and it just keeps you really fresh and aware that there are more possibilities always than you've ever thought of and to try and just be open to grabbing onto a possibility and moving with it.

GO When I spoke with you a couple of days ago, you mentioned that you're going to be premiering some new pieces this summer. How would you describe those pieces?

EM The second one is not finished yet. It's a companion piece to the first one that I wrote a couple years ago, and it's called *Ritual*. It's for clarinet duet. And the second one is maybe called *Chaos*. I don't know for sure about that yet. They're opposites, obviously, and they both involve some optional choreography. *Ritual* begins with very

slow, low melody that gradually works up the range to a climax point, and then fades away. The choreography is that the players enter from opposite sides of the stage, gradually move to the center of the stage, and then, alternately, they begin to push buttons on the other one's instrument. Over the course of this very slow-moving piece, they eventually are actually fingering the other person's instrument while still blowing into their own. And then, ultimately, they go back to their own instrument. So it's a very strong interweaving visual effect, and the music is kind of always interweaving in that way. It's kind of imitative and contrapuntal. The *Chaos* will also likely be contrapuntal to some degree, although a little more separate. I don't envision any contact between the two players like there is in *Ritual*, but there will be movement activities and it'll be pretty much the opposite in as many ways as I can think to do it. I imagine the second one will be quite fast.

GO So it's a companion piece by contrast.

EM Yeah!

GO Who are you going to be performing that with?

EM It'll be with Ani Berberian.

GO You've talked about incorporating these theatrical elements in to the pieces. That's something that's a little different than what you've done before?

EM In my own composition, I haven't formalized those things. But even as early as *Tricolor Capers*, which is about as early as I go in my pieces, some of the initial concepts behind that piece had to do with little theatrical events taken out of my daily life as a student when I was doing my graduate school at Yale. I had some gestures and verbal things in early sketches of *Tricolor Capers* that were pulled directly out of some of my school experiences. Ultimately, only the note sounds remain, after a while, but

I think a lot of my music has kind of a theatrical root somewhere hiding down there and I just haven't put it into the music as a specific thing to do other than the music, and this is the first time I've tried that. But I've always enjoyed theatre. I've always enjoyed the visual part of performing as well as the sonic part.

GO Do you see this as an extension of your composition that you'd like to explore?

EM Maybe. I don't know that I would make a big thing out of it. Partly because it's been a part of all my compositions, thinking about some of the visual elements of what happens when I'm actually playing a certain gesture. So I don't know that I'll pursue it in a formalistic way.

GO We won't see an Eric Mandat *Harlekin*, in other words?

EM (Laughs) Probably not!

GO Along the lines of these new things you've been thinking, where do you see your music heading?

EM I've gotten more interested, in recent times, in writing for larger groups of people. Not huge, but more than one. Whereas most of my earlier stuff was just for one. The more people I write for, the less aural impact multiphonics have, for example. I have been using not so many multiphonics in my pieces. Even my more recent solo pieces have not used a lot of multiphonics. I think that's just growing out of my interest in having more players involved performing.

GO Do you find that multiphonics muddy the texture?

EM There are some really delicate balances that one needs to be able to maintain that sometimes are interfered with when there are a number of players, especially other clarinet players playing in the same space—same environment—at the same time. There are strange interferences that occur, and sometimes the multiphonics actually

don't work when you're playing them side-by-side with somebody. Each person individually could play them beautifully in separate rooms, but when they get together, the interferences create some strange effects. It's hard to believe, but I remember doing a certain amount of improvising with Bill Smith when I visited him some years ago in Washington. This is already at least ten years ago, maybe more. We were just improvising in his living room. We thought we would get into this multiphonic thing, and it was really rough for both of us. We were having a terrible time. I have subsequently done some of those kind of experiments with students, and the same kind of thing happened. We would find structures that we were sure we could play by ourselves easily. Then we would play them together and they suddenly became very difficult. The result for an outside listener just wasn't too thrilling. So that's why I haven't really worked too hard at that. There are some places I have multiple multiphonic moments for multiple players, but not much. For comic effect and not really for growing musical, thematic things.

GO One other question I have for you is, since nobody else has cataloged all your works, I wonder if you could list your catalog of works that you've written.

EM Let's see how well I can do that in terms of chronological order. I can probably do it. As far as those pieces which are out there. I wrote pieces while I was in school, but those don't really count. *Tricolor Capers* (1980) for solo clarinet, *Folk Songs* (1986) for solo. Then *The Jungle*, also for solo, 1989. *Etude for Barney*, solo clarinet (1990). Then between 1992 and 1994 I wrote a piece called *Music for Clarinets*, and that's clarinet solo with large clarinet ensemble: three Bbs, two basses that also double on Bb, and also a contra part. Then, in 1994, I wrote *Preludes, Book I* for solo. Then 1997 was *So What Elsa's New* for clarinet duet.

GO I'm assuming dedicated to Elsa Verdehr.

EM Yeah, I wrote it for Elsa and Gerry Errante for Elsa's contemporary festival she had in 1997. Then 1999, I wrote *Chips Off the Old Block* for solo bass clarinet. Then, in 2000 was *Ritual* for two Bb clarinets. And also *One Liners* for clarinet trio, one doubling on Eb and one doubling on bass and the third staying on Bb the whole time. Also in 2000, maybe in 1999, now I've forgotten, a solo piece called *Coconut Candy*. Oh, I forgot, in 1996 I wrote a piece called *Sub(t)rains o' Strata's Fears*.

GO Does *Strata* refer to Donald Martino's *Strata*?

EM No, it has to do with different pitch levels in the piece, the last movement, particularly. It's a big play on words. Then in 2001 I wrote *Three for Two* for clarinet and percussion. In 2001-2002 I did a set of etudes called *Finger Food*. They're just left hand and right hand etudes, seven or eight of each. Then there a couple of Tone Road Ramblers pieces. In 2002, I guess, I wrote *Dark Energy* for the Ramblers. That's a big-sized group: sextet plus vocalist actually. The vocalist did a text for the music, as well. In 2003, also for the Ramblers plus a few more, I wrote *No Holds Barred*: accordion, violin, flute, clarinet, trumpet, two trombones, alto saxophone, and percussion. That's pretty much all I've done. And then there's this other piece that I've got to get done, as yet to be named, that will be a companion to *Ritual*. It depends on how I feel about it, I may just put them together under some kind of supertitle. But I don't know for sure what that might be.

GO Do you have your music published, or is it self-published?

EM It's self-published. From a technical standpoint it is published, but from an established publishing company's standpoint, it's not. I just do it that way because I

know best who my potential audience for these pieces might be and they don't get tucked in underneath the junior high band music.

GO Are all of these pieces available to people who might be interested in checking them out?

EM Yeah! As you can see by the dates, the last few years have been more active, and I'd like to try and continue that. I suppose that's the biggest change in my composing is just that I'm doing more of it.

GO Is that due to increased ideas that you have right now, or is this a subtle change in your workload?

EM A combination of things. I like composing, and I've done a lot of the playing things I've wanted to do. I've done a lot of solo performing and traveling around and things, and that's been very enjoyable. I just don't feel like I have to continue doing that. I think some years ago I really still enjoyed doing that. Not that I dislike it, I still do it a lot. This last semester was probably my biggest solo playing semester ever! I do have a change in my workload at school. Since 1999, I haven't had to teach saxophone anymore, and that has helped my load a bit. So I can focus on the clarinet a little bit more. And just focus on getting more music for more people to be involved with. I think, in those earlier pieces, I wrote a lot just for me to play, and now I'm writing more with the idea that I hope more people will play, so that's another reason I'm writing for more clarinetists than just one.

GO Do you think you'll ever write pieces that don't involve clarinet at all?

EM I might, but I kind of doubt it. There's no real need to do it. I've not been really highly encouraging of non-clarinetists who've wondered if they could commission something from me. I say "well, you'll have to wait a long time because I'm so slow."

I don't know. Certainly, I'm not driven by commissions or anything like that, so it's highly unlikely I'll be writing something that I can't be involved with.

GO That would seem somewhat contrary to your style and perhaps the entire joy of what you're doing.

EM Yeah, I think a whole lot of that is I want to have something I can participate in.

GO Eric, thank you so much for sharing your time.

EM Oh, you're welcome.

CONCLUSION

Eric Mandat's music for solo clarinet is both distinct and attractive to the ear. His particular style of applying new sounds to straightforward structures combines familiar and progressive elements. His process of extrapolating pieces from improvisations gives the highly idiomatic feel that makes these sounds easy and enjoyable to play on the clarinet. By developing his improvisatory inspirations through analytical techniques, Mandat creates compositions that entrance performers and audiences.

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