

Force and delicacy, two qualities that might appear antithetical, consistently support the music of Pedro Amaral, and perhaps by their opposition create its irresistible dynamism. Force (not just loudness) comes out in complex textures of mixed instrumental colours - in precisely modulated uproars - but perhaps even more so around single notes that are being reiterated within instrumental lines or being passed from one line to another. Delicacy is there in the music's exceptionally fine finish.

Amaral profited from studies between 1994 and 1998 at the Paris Conservatoire, where his compatriot Emmanuel Nunes was his professor, and also from visits to IRCAM, but his musical personality was already formed at a strikingly young age, before he left his native Lisbon for the French capital. Born in 1972, he wrote his first acknowledged work, ...Textos, Paráfrases, Perspectivas..., in 1994, and, knowingly or not, set out his musical programme. As its title suggests, the piece develops some initial ideas ('texts') by means of paraphrase and projects them along different perspectives. On the larger scale of a dozen years rather than twenty minutes, this Opus 1 can be recognized as affirming general principles-harmonic, rhythmic, gestural, formal-whose implications and possibilities the composer has gone on discovering.

The work is also characteristic in having the piano at its centre, joined in this case by trios of strings, upper woodwinds and brass-an ensemble just adding a cello to the nine instruments of Webern's Concerto (though Varèse is this music's nearer forefather). As the central or source instrument, the piano begins the piece alone, calling out from an otherwise silent stage, and doing so by means of motifs that will determine what follows: an arpeggio rising like a summons, some crucial intervals, the element of repetition. More than three minutes have gone by before other instruments start to wake up, and then quite soon these other instruments take over as an eruptive tutti, out of which the brass lead emphatic descents. There are episodes for soloists and groups, including the string trio in a lengthy stretch of entanglement looking forward to Amaral's quartet of 2003. From here the whole wind-string nonet gets going again, often juddering with energy, until, with sustained sounds, the atmosphere becomes conversely lost and bleak. A flute solo is seemingly countered by the rest of the ensemble, with the string trio briefly spotlighted. Then everyone is quietened by the reappearance of the piano, leading back to its initial proposals, as if dissatisfied with the outcome it has generated, waiting for further paraphrases and perspectives.

Spirales (1998) is scored for a somewhat larger ensemble, the biggest difference being the addition of two harps and three percussionists. There is also a change of character. This is again strongly self-generating music, extending out of memorable ideas, but circular form is replaced by spiral and the music is more sensuously slow in its movement. It starts not with an appeal but with an almost tangibly liquid pool of sound: a minor sixth struck by chiming instruments (harps,

piano, cowbells and vibraphone) and prolonged by winds and strings. The music's spiral unfolding through progressively wider loops produces the effect (to maintain the watery imagery) of broadening ripples. Elements of the opening keep coming back, with more or less increasing alteration, and new figures are also developed. Important towards the end are wave-like sequences of upward rushes lapping between woodwinds and strings, after which the music holds on to its essential nature as it dissipates.

It may be difficult to remember Amaral was still a student at this time; Organa (2001) finds him fully fledged. The commission came from the city of Oporto, for its year as European Cultural Capital, and the composer dedicated the score to Peter Eötvös, with whom he had recently been studying conducting. Effectively there are four duos: piano and percussion at the rear, and then, across the front of the platform, violin and oboe, viola and flute (doubling alto flute and piccolo), and cello and bass clarinet (doubling clarinet in A). Amaral worked at IRCAM on a computer spatialization involving eight loudspeakers around the hall, one for each instrument, but the piece can also be played and heard quite satisfactorily without this.

Organum (in the singular) was an early medieval style of decorating chant: one singer or group of singers would keep to the hallowed melody while another would sing a new line, starting out from the same note and similarly ending in unison with the chant. This was the first sort of polyphony to be written down, and as such it stands at the head of the entire western musical tradition. For Amaral, organum also marks a departure from music as ritual to music as art-music of the kind his *Organa* is, even if, in its millennium-long glance into the past, it recovers echoes of ritual: slow melody, the interval of a fifth (a fundamental consonance in organum) and the tinklings of bells (here *crotales*, i.e. small cymbals). Within a more recent time-scale, there are connections with *Spirales* in the measured pace and the spiralling out from some elementary ideas, notably a low F and the chords that follow from it. Echoing, too, within Amaral's output is the burst from the string trio, interrupting the work's generally stately progress towards its final striking moment of liberation.

Notable works since *Organa* include Amaral's quartet, his *Script* for solo percussionist on tuned instruments with electronics (2003), and *Paraphrase*, which was commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation and first performed by the London Sinfonietta under Eötvös's direction in February 2006. While reflecting the title of the first work here and the instrumentation of the second (being for seventeen players), *Paraphrase* is very much its own kind of creature: ebullient, perhaps even alarmingly so. The pulsing triplets that rapidly come to dominate, and that weave around the orchestra as other things briefly happen, suggest a giant *gigue*. This continues for about six minutes, up to the point where it is finally stopped by the piano, which now holds the stage with a grand *cadenza* running for around three minutes. There is then a slow, dark orchestral recovery, but, just where the dance seems set to recommence, the trumpet takes command. And though there are challenges from the piano, the work finds its fulfilment as a trumpet solo with accompaniment.

Paraphrase is literally a paraphrase of an earlier work of Amaral's, his *Densités*, which he wrote for members of the Ensemble InterContemporain to play at the Witten Music Days of 2005 as an eightieth birthday tribute to Pierre Boulez. In redrawing the original quintet (piano with trumpet, clarinet, violin and cello) across a larger canvas, the composer also, by his own account, clarified its form. As he has also noted, the two main panels-diverse as they are: communal dance and solo instrumental song-are congruent. Indeed, it is as if the same harmonic framework lay behind both. And there are paraphrases also within the trumpet melody, 'whose development increasingly adds more notes in between the five initial ones, which then become thirteen, then twenty-one, always returning to the beginning'. Amaral thus justly describes the work as a 'paraphrase on a paraphrase'-or another ripple, one might say, in the shaping of time he had begun twelve years before.

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