

Eternal Rhythm

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2018
Duration: 25 min
Orchestration: perc + 2(II:pic,afl).2.2(II:bcl).2(II:cbn)/2.2.2.0/timp.perc/str
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Program Note

Audio

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Composer note

Rhythm is, perhaps, the most fundamental aspect of music. In fact, the basic properties of rhythm express the essential signs of life. Without a pulse, we cannot live. Without pulsation and repetitive motion, the physical world cannot exist. To the best of our knowledge, the universe began with a large impulse, and the resulting oscillations, pulses, and beats, are what we still experience — an Eternal Rhythm that stretches from the beginning of time in perpetuity.

The concerto begins with a short introduction based on the harmonic series of overtones. Structured in five movements, each part is connected by a short interlude that echoes the familiar introduction. Each of the movements echoes the general idea of the harmonic series — an infinite series of oscillations — in a different way. The soloist alternates between a variety of percussion instruments, including vibraphone, marimba, glockenspiel, and crotales, as well as a melodic set of tom-tom drums and a variety of tin cans and cow bells.

The music of the Balinese Gamelan inspires much of the first movement, employing a limited number of pitches, yet organizing them in complex rhythmic cycles. As in Gamelan music, metallic keyboard percussion features prominently, along with a variety of flute-like melodic combinations. As the movement progresses, energy accumulates leading to a virtuosic drumming section. The movement ends with a

simple tune that repeats and recalls the opening materials.

The second movement begins with an expressive chromatic melody. The accompanying figure employs spiral structures oscillating at perfect fifths (the second interval of the harmonic series). As the movement develops, more spirals and melodic lines emerge and weave together into a complex web.

Rhythmic and angular, the third movement is structured as a call and response between the orchestra and soloist. Rising scales and syncopated rhythms come together to create a movement that is both light-hearted and energetic. While the scales initially appear to be standard at the outset, every few notes, a "wrong" interval appears. As a result, as the scale rises, the music arrives at different and unexpected places. While the harmony of the movement is completely consonant (again drawn from the natural harmonic series), the rate of change is so fast that our ears hear what they interpret as "dissonance."

The heart of the piece is its fourth movement. Featuring a Hebrew text from the 11th century, this movement raises deep questions regarding our interaction as conscious beings with the physical world:

Does the tear know whose cheek it runs down,
Or the heart by whom it is turned?
It turns to its light that is now in the ground,
And the ground knows not who has returned.
Returned is a grandee of our town,
A man who feared God and was upright and learned.

(original poem by Yehuda Halevi, translated by Hillel Halkin)

The text figuratively reverses the roles of consciousness and physicality, asking whether one's tears know who is crying them and whether the earth knows who lays in it. At this point in the piece we realize that the rhythm of life and rhythm of the universe are one and the same; our experience of the world is inevitably linked to the pulse of the universe and the oscillation of matter and energy.

The work ends with an exuberant movement: a celebration of life, energy and an

ever-present and eternal rhythm.

— Avner Dorman

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