JOHN MELCHER

Drastic Measures

An electric symphony for synthesizers, and electric guitar

(1977-2003)

In four movements and scored for a virtual orchestra of synthesizers, guitars and samples, I've long thought of it, secretly, as a symphony, though I'm uncomfortable with the implications of that label.

The first electronic version of *Drastic Measures* was realized in 1981 with a Mountain Computer Music System, a digital wavetable synthesizer running inside an Apple II computer; this was a pretty amazing concept to most people at the time. However, some musical ideas, in particular the tune that begins and ends it, date back to some projects I did from 1975 to 1977 that never really got off the ground, for an ensemble of multiple keyboards. Since the 1981 version, I rewrote, revised, reorchestrated and renamed it numerous times . That's a long time for something to go unfinished, and it changed a lot along the way, picking up bits and pieces of other musical influences over a 25-year stretch.

I. Fast. The opening section began as an exercise in overlaying repeating patterns of different lengths, in this case 11/8+10/8, 14/8+15/8 and 4/4. The second section builds up a 9-note pattern a note at a time, develops the theme, then drops off the notes in reverse order. Along the way everything collapses and then reforms. It reminds me of the "centrifuge" ride at an amusement park. **10:30**

II. Moderately. Two patterns in a 4:3 tempo ratio (sixteenths against eighth triplets) and a oddly repeating chord progression that builds up and then breaks down one chord at a time (Fm / Fm Eb / Fm Eb Db / Fm Eb Db Bbm…) build slowly to a Zappa-esque outburst before subsiding. **11:15**

III. Slow and *molto rubato*. Originally a solo piano piece, this is the world at four in the morning. A pattern of five descending chords repeats, each time an octave lower and with an additional note added to the top, and a bit of monkey business. When I was writing this, I was reminded of Henry Brant's *Machinations.* **6:00**

IV. Fast. This movement, the longest, also began as a piano piece with the left- and right-hand parts in different, constantly shifting meters. At the end a modified version of the opening section returns. A 1985 work entitled for piano solo also called *Drastic Measures,* comprising this movement plus some other stuff which became *A Full Quarter Hour*, was premiered by Philip Aaberg in Los Angeles in 1987. **18:00**

Total playing time: **48:00**

All tracks were digitally recorded, mixed and mastered (in 2003 at my studio in Bangkok) at 48 kHz, 24-bit resolution, using a Pro Tools MIX audio workstation. Instruments used on this recording were a Roland M-GS64 General MIDI synthesizer, Access "Virus", McDSP "Synth One" and Digidesign "Soft SampleCell" virtual synthesizer plug-ins, and a few "real" guitar parts played by me on a Gibson Nighthawk. The male vocal at the end of the Fourth Movement is a composite of samples from the Spectrasonics "*Heart Of Asia*" collection of Asian musical instrument samples.

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