

The 2010-11 *Rapido!* Composition Contest Experience

It's not often that I listen to a performance of a piece I have written and think 'that's exactly what I had in mind.' This was my reaction last January when the Atlanta Chamber Players performed my *Junk Shot* in the final round of *Rapido!* And since I heard the other finalists as being very strong pieces with equally excellent performances, I was extremely flattered to have my work be the one chosen for expansion.

Because there is so much that is out of one's control in an enterprise like this, my primary goal in writing this piece in June of 2010 was to have something that I liked and that I felt I would be able to use regardless of what happened with the competition. Because of this it was, again, quite meaningful to have it chosen from among the other fine pieces but I also took it as an affirmation of what I often hear myself saying to my young students which is that it is important to write what they think they want to hear, not what they think someone else wants to hear.

And this is what I tried to continue to do in more than tripling the length of *Junk Shot*. When I heard the original three movements, there were a few things that I thought I would like to do differently in the writing, so the first task was to make those changes. But the main effort in the expansion of the piece was to attach two 7-minute movements, one to the beginning and one to the end. These new movements lead into and out of the original without breaks. In terms of content, what I have done is to continue building on the two original ideas for the piece: the interactions of E-flat Major and A Major, and images from the Gulf oil spill. And although I have always believed myself to be congenitally averse to programmatic narrative in instrumental music, I seem to have ended up following one here.

Part of the *Rapido!* award was a two-week residency at the Hambidge Center, a creative residency program in northeast Georgia. It has never occurred to me to go on an artist's retreat and I am so glad I did. Hambidge is a beautiful place and I could not have found the experience more meaningful on a number of different levels. Spending time with the other artists was extremely interesting and I learned a tremendous amount in the time we were together. Most importantly though, this uninterrupted block of time gave me a chance to think deeply about my work in general terms and this piece in particular. This thinking was primarily expressed in the doing of a lot of theory exercises, looking at patterns and symmetries. Compositionally, what happened as a result of the residency was that I found myself discarding an unusually large number of ideas that I really liked but that ultimately didn't contribute to the trajectory I was trying to follow and this was different for me.

This whole thing from beginning to end has been a first-rate experience. I want to express my deep gratitude to Paula Peace, Ron and Susan Antinori, all the excellent performers, Nancy Haber and everyone else who created this and made it happen. *Rapido!* 2010 has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my professional life.

--John Elmquist