

S' Wonderful
(that the man I love watches over me)

The Flute Concerto 'S' Wonderful', in memory of my mother, D. Ruth Brazier, was written with the help of a generous grant from the Toronto Arts Council. It is based on three Gershwin songs that were some of the many my parents played at parties when I was a half awake, half dreaming child. Only later, in my twenties, did I become intimately familiar with the film/ Broadway tradition, and its' many stars and technical geniuses. The title is derived from the mashing of 'S' Wonderful', 'the man I love' and 'Someone to watch over me', vaguely imitating the current trend of 'mashing' samples of songs together. But it also echoes the medieval technique of the quodlibet: the integration of popular melodies into a piece as the theme, as the countersubject, or by just using the harmonies from the tunes. Coincidentally, the title also is a play on sacred/secular blurring from the medieval troubadour tradition.

The structure combines the mentioned quodlibet, with the memory of those multi-tempo dance sequences of MGM musicals that just seem to spin so convincingly on and on forever (only here it's more Busby Berkeley layered on top of an Ecstasy soaked rave). These two formal approaches (ancient and new) are merged together by an overall tempo/harmonic plan. Thus, tempo 90 equals the key of G3, then the sampled fifth above is 2/3 faster and the sampled fifth below is 3/2 slower. The harmonic/tempo plan ping-pong through the circle of fifths to the extremes of quarter =10 (Key of G0) and 720 (G6). The main musical interest or challenge is to create seamless transitions in these modulations, to create the seamless/weightless space between the music of duple and triple. Thus, giant rhythmic grids of 2 multiples (2,4,8,16,32,64,128,256,) collide into walls of triple multiples, (3,6,12, 24,48,96,192,384)-- in search of that elusive disequilibrium. The quest is the 'in between' world, the 'Tristan' world between sleep, peace, the spirit, the eternal, death and awake, desire, flesh, the temporal, alive (which accidentally again references the duality of the title).

The sampled movie dialogues are from 1930's gangster movies and romantic musicals, which also articulate all the harmonic/tempo modulations. In the quotes is a natural progression from two lovers' innocent infatuation, picket fence hopes, alcohol-drenched domestic quarrels to ranting gangster megalomania (eternal to temporal). Other sampled material includes lots of tap dancing, many standard singers of the last 70 years, and various big band excerpts.

The final group of samples used is late, 19th C. chromatic orchestral excerpts triggered by the main chromatic moments in the songs. I find it fascinating how the vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley song form developed sophisticated harmonies by the 30s' (having a parallel cross fertilization with the development of blues and jazz). Most of these harmonies had been appropriated from European late 19th chromaticism, their historically origins being rooted in the Jewish Diaspora to America (NB. same harmony *still* used in current film!!). Accordingly, at points in the piece, the music 'time travels' into 'rooms' of just late 19th classical music (nothing more fun than combining audio 'time stretching' and an audio 'transposer' to integrate other music into ones' own).

The flute part appears as augmented inversions (like slow backward tape) in the main thematic areas, the countersubject in the secondary areas, and various DDB motive permutations of S' Wonderful in all the transition sections and choruses. All the 'slow' movements use the same pop/jazz melody, again based rhythmically on the DDB motive and the melody of s'wonderfuls' B section.

Featured singer is Sam Sinanan doing the autotune parts.