

ABOUT EXIT STRATEGIES

EXIT STRATEGIES often sounds unrelated to any other music I've written thus far. It certainly does things that none of my previous "mature" (whatever that means) music has ever done. For starters, it's mostly triadic. (In fact, the principal melodic/harmonic material is derived from the final cadence of the last movement of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's String Quartet in D Major, K. 575; more about that later.) Yet while its harmonic language is unquestionably tonal, perhaps even annoyingly so, it lacks a consistent rhythmic pulse; it actually shifts meters almost every measure. Hopefully these familiar harmonies help to make these often extremely unfamiliar metrical patterns easier to follow. But there's a catch. Though many of my previous pieces have explored tunings beyond so-called standard 12-tone equal temperament (what you get when your guitar or piano is "in tune"), I've always picked a specific tuning, 12-t E.T. or otherwise, and stuck with it for the entire piece. *EXIT STRATEGIES* defiantly changes tuning toward the end, from 12-t E.T. to 17-limit just intonation (the so-called tuning of nature, though taken to the highest prime I've yet explored in my music). What gives?

The last four years were very difficult for me as a composer. The aftermath of the 2016 United States Presidential Election mostly derailed my desire to write music. I felt I was faced with two equally unsatisfactory options—create work that sounded oblivious to our current reality or poison my music with its ugliness. So I mostly chose silence. I revised older scores and added a few additional sections to some previously unfinished work which nevertheless mostly remained unfinished. In 2019, my friend Marina Barry asked me to create an electronic score that would serve as incidental music for a production of her play *All Catherine* and by immersing myself in her surreal narrative, which seems beyond time as we know it (and certainly beyond our present time), I was able to create a series of metrically disorienting interludes that I was happy with and thankfully she was happy with, too. A while before that, Delta David Gier asked me to write a piece for the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra. I had planned to visit South Dakota in the hopes of taking my mind away from the zeitgeist, but that never happened. Instead the pandemic did, and the overwhelming human tragedy that it has caused was something far beyond the uninspiring political quagmires that have been engulfing our society. It demanded my response as a composer; so I wrote *Already Yesterday or Still Tomorrow*.

And then we had another Presidential Election. But we wound up not knowing the result for several days and, even once we did, it continued to drag on, since the incumbent who lost refused to concede. On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, it reached a breaking point when said incumbent inspired the siege of the United States Capitol in an attempt to prevent the certification of the Electoral College votes which had given him only a losing total of 232 votes. A week later, he was impeached by the House of Representatives for inciting an insurrection by a total of, again, 232 votes. Finally, on January 20, a new president, Joe Biden, was sworn in—as luck would have it—232 years after the very first U.S. Presidential Inauguration back in 1789. While conspiracy theorists might try to find hidden meanings in all these instances of 232, I simply wanted to find a way to turn this number into music. I was writing a piece for the Del Sol Quartet's ongoing Joy Project, so it seemed a perfect opportunity to engage in a kind of musical schadenfreude—a journey through rhythmic permutations of 7 notes parsed into groups of 2, 3, and 2, which hopefully are very easy to hear. As for the use of the cadence of K. 575, it too is 232 years old. The string quartet has certainly come a long way since then even if my borrowing of it as the *idée fixe* for a seemingly never-ending ending never quite does.

Since I have a personal aesthetic aversion to big bombastic endings and am admittedly somewhat skeptical even of most conventional endings, many people have commented that my music always somehow ends suddenly. No one is likely to react that way about this piece since it is, after all, all about this long overdue ending which hopefully will (hence the climactic change in tuning as well as a resolution to the key of B) engender a new beginning for all of us!

—Frank J. Oteri (February 21-24, 2021)