

Howard Kenty

Any Lucky Ten

(For clarinet in Bb, violin, and electronics)

Presented at the 12 Nights Festival, Harold Golen Gallery, 2009, The 12th Biennial Symposium on Arts and Technology, Connecticut College, 2010, and the New York City Electronic Music Festival, City University of New York, 2010.

Program Notes (Short Version):

Any Lucky Ten is primarily a piece concerning desolation, loneliness, and sadness, and the potential for beauty in what we breathe forth from our own inner world into the space without us and the emptiness of silence and darkness. It is scored for clarinet, violin, and electronics.

I began this piece while staying in a relatively remote region of New Hampshire in the summer of 2009. In contrast to the busy and chaotic aural environment that I have become accustomed to while living in Brooklyn, the nights there are peacefully and eerily quiet, marked largely by the disconsolate moans of loons on a nearby lake, the occasional slow, decaying rumble of distant cars, and the ubiquitous sibilance of crickets. *Any Lucky Ten* seeks to express the beauty and sadness evoked by these sounds through an organic integration of field recordings, electronic processing, and instrumental material. (Bonus: anagram.)

Program Notes (Long Version):

Any Lucky Ten is primarily a piece concerning desolation, loneliness, and sadness, and the potential for beauty in what we breathe forth from our own inner world into the space without us and the emptiness of silence and darkness.

I began this piece while staying in a relatively remote region of New Hampshire in the summer of 2009. In contrast to the busy and chaotic aural environment that I have become accustomed to while living in Brooklyn, the nights there are peacefully and eerily quiet, marked largely by the disconsolate moans of loons on a nearby lake, the occasional slow, decaying rumble of distant cars, and the ubiquitous sibilance of crickets.

I captured these sounds with a portable recorder intending to use them compositionally, though without a specific initial concept. I did know that I specifically wanted to avoid the cliché of any kind of peaceful, new-age nature soundscape, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, anything sinister or frightening. I sought to focus as much as possible on the forlorn sadness and beauty that seemed to me so much to be expressed in these sounds. I began by sorting through several hours of materials to find the best recorded instances of these sorts, and processed them by removing much of the background noise and filtering them to isolate the appropriate frequency ranges that I was looking for, leaving the loons, the cars, and just a bare hint of the omnipresent chirp of the crickets.

It gradually became clear that to tread this fine line in balancing the ominous, isolated, and sad with the beauty of silence and darkness, the piece would work best as an electroacoustic composition, and I began considering instrumentation. I required instruments that could sustain for a relatively long amount of time, with textures appropriate to the previously recorded material, and eventually settled on clarinet and violin. After brief consideration, I dismissed as unnecessary the idea of using percussion, as it would not convey the appropriate sensibilities; each hit could end up as too much of an event, instead of a more ambient texture that melded seamlessly with the other elements. I began by experimenting with overlaying melodies on my processed field recordings; as a musician who plays neither of my chosen instruments, I used samples to start. To avoid conventional structural lines and mimic the introspective implications of the recorded sounds, I made the instrumental lines diverge at times, almost as if each were pondering its own thoughts, but maintained a coherence by bringing them together at specific junctures. By introducing microtonal bends, I was able to make the instrumental parts mimic and expand upon the loon calls themselves, in ways subtle and thematically coherent. A sort of octatonic mode, but not strictly followed, seemed to best embody the mood I was seeking; it provided a bewitching yet often consonant quality with room for some surprising and pleasing dissonance.

Matching the instrumental material sonically and emotionally to the prerecorded sounds was the next process. I wanted to get a breathy, textural quality from the instruments in my draft recordings that samples couldn't provide. Using an old violin and several toy instruments, I recorded samples of myself producing these sounds as best I could by breathing through the instruments, dragging the bow lightly across the violin's strings, and so forth. Next, to create samples that bridged the gaps in timbre between the instruments and the outdoor recordings, I began cross-processing different versions of my outdoor recordings with the sampled instruments and instrumental recordings, using convolution to apply the characteristics of one sound to another. Using multiple programs such as MAX/MSP, Sonar, Ableton Live, and numerous plugins, I implemented additional processes such as stretching, reversing, spacial processing, and altered sampled playback. I believe the result is a very organic integration of all of the different elements that fully expresses the beauty and sadness that inspired the composition. (Bonus: anagram.)

- Howard Kenty