A CAPELLA ELETTRONNICA

THESIS

Presented to Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

By

Paul G. Bonneau, B.M.

Denton, Texas
August, 1995
Bonneau, Paul G. *A capella Eletronnica*. Master of Music (Composition), August, 1995, 22 pp., 2 illustrations, bibliography, 6 titles.

*A capella Eletronnica* is a single movement work, approximately fourteen minutes in duration, and scored for vocal quartet (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The vocalists are electronically processed by two digital sound processors: the Yamaha SPX1000 multi-effects processor, and the Ensoniq DP/4 parallel effects processor. Each voice sings into a microphone and is processed and amplified through a sound system. The result, then, is a live-electronic manipulation of acoustic sound sources.

The intent of *A capella Eletronnica* is to explore the possibility of the human voice as the most versatile of musical instruments. The voice, capable of melodic, harmonic, percussive and rhythmic effects, is also employed for spoken text and conversational elements as musical sources. My aim was to enlarge this array of vocal techniques with the use of electronic processing and amplification.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

DISCUSSION OF FORM

_A capella Eletronnica_,¹ is a single movement work, approximately fourteen minutes in duration, and scored for vocal quartet (SATB). The sounds produced by the vocalists are electronically processed by two digital sound processors: the Yamaha SPX 1000, and the Ensoniq DP/4 parallel effects processor. Each singer sings into a microphone and that sound is processed and amplified through a sound system. The result, then, is a live-electronic manipulation of acoustic sound sources.

The intent of _A capella Eletronnica_ is to explore the possibility of the human voice as the most versatile of musical instruments. The voice, capable of melodic, harmonic, percussive, and rhythmic effects, is also employed for spoken text and conversational elements as musical sources. My aim was to enlarge this array of vocal techniques with the use of electronic processing and amplification.

All of the text is spoken. All of the melodic and motivic sections are sung with vowel and consonant sounds I have selected to achieve a desired vocal tone quality. I concur with Iannis Xenakis in my decision not to use sung text in vocal works: "I got tired of going to the opera and not understanding what the singers were singing."² Certainly, text is not a prerequisite for effective vocal writing; consider Rachmaninoff's _Vocalise_ and the

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¹The spelling is Italian.
²Iannis Xenakis, Meet the Composer; pre-concert talk, Union Chapel, London, 24 June, 1990.
last movement of Holst's *The Planets* as examples of untexted vocal music. This special genre has also been explored by other twentieth composers, such as György Ligeti (*Aventures, Nouvelles Aventures*), John Cage (*Aria*), Larry Austin (*La Barbara*), and Stephen Montague (*Tigida Pipa*).

I have chosen to represent juxtapositions of conversations in collage as well as "stream-of-consciousness" recitations as musical sources. My aim is to explore the use of so-called non-musical sounds as musical material. This approach was expressed eloquently by John Cage in his essay, "The Future of Music: Credo" (1937), where he wrote, "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating." I feel the term "non-musical" cannot arguably be applied to spoken text when one considers the rhythmic and melodic aspects of the recitation of poetry, sound-poetry and text-sound composition.

The spoken portions of the work are directly influenced by Luciano Berio’s treatment of text in the third movement of his *Sinfonia*, for orchestra and voices. In fact, there are many references to the *Sinfonia* in the spoken sections of *A capella Eletronnica*, including a few direct quotes; however the majority of the text is original. When a quote has been taken from *Sinfonia*, one or more of the singers respond with "Thank you, Mr. Berio" or "Thank you, Mr. Beckett;" much of the *Sinfonia* third movement is derived from Samuel Beckett’s novel, *The Unnamable*.

The sections without text in *A capella Eletronnica* are composed in an instrumental style rather than a purely vocal style. I approached these sections with something of a string or wind quartet in mind. I have kept in mind considerations of breathing and range, but the electronic effects lessen these limitations. Technology permits the prolongation of a pitch after the singer has stopped singing, and the extension of vocal

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range within a single voice by means of "pitch-shifting" or transposing effects. Pitch-shifting is heard most dramatically in the beginning of the work with a quote from the opening of Richard Strauss' Also Sprach Zarathustra, where the bass singer's pitch, C^3, is electronically transposed down two octaves to match the pitch of a string bass with a low C extension.

As a member of the so called "post-modern" generation, I have chosen stylistically varied compositional techniques in the writing of A capella Eletronnica. I describe the post-modern condition as being "culture-in-crisis," resulting from a seeming over-abundance of choices available for aesthetic expression. With this in mind I have used different techniques such as collage, quotation and "non-musical" elements (as described above), as well as the limited aleatoric techniques, as utilized by Witold Lutoslawski, and twelve-note chord harmonies. I have also used modal harmonic writing, in the style of the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, and folk melody references, which, of course, have been explored by just about every composer at one time or another. My intent was to bring cohesion to some current and seemingly disparate techniques. The details of the use of these techniques will be discussed in the analysis portion of this paper.

Form in A capella Eletronnica

I cannot address the matter of form in A capella Eletronnica without first reproducing a passage from Conversations with Witold Lutoslawski, where conversations between Lutoslawski and music critic Tadeusz Kaczynski were conducted and recorded for publication. In Conversations, Lutoslawski states, "I distinguish, in all music, moments of greater concentration of musical events and moments of a certain relaxation or dilution of content. This is as indispensable to the process of listening to music as breathing. Listening to music is in fact rather like breathing: greater concentration is followed by lesser, effort by rest, tension by relaxation. This natural rhythm of man's receptive
apparatus in listening to music is an important element in the construction of a major form. Here [in Livre Pour Orchestra] there is a clear connection between the moments of concentration and dilution and the two kinds of music: the a battuta and the ad libitum."^4 This statement proved to be of much greater influence in the construction of A capella Eletronnica than I had initially anticipated.

A capella Eletronnica may be divided into five distinct sections: section one, rehearsal letters A through C; section two, rehearsal letter D; section three, rehearsal letters E through M; section four, rehearsal letters N through P; section five, rehearsal letters Q through S. Sections one, three and five are intended to be "moments of greater concentration," while sections two and four are offered for relaxation. There is a short coda at the close of the work at rehearsal letter T, which is designed to provide final repose. I have organized the sections so that material in the first section (beginning at letter A)—designed as music of concentration—switches roles in the fourth section (letter N). Similar material in the fourth section is offered for relaxation (specifically, the portions of spoken text juxtaposed with non-text singing). Consequently, a germinating cell heard in the second section for relaxation (D), is developed in the fifth section and assumes the role of music of greater concentration (Q). The third and largest section of the work (E through M) allows for the "role reversal" to take place. This section is harmonically most complex (E through F) and harmonically most simple (G through L). Its component parts are derived from the first and second sections respectively. It is the most rhythmically active of all the sections of the work. Because of these aspects, as well as the length of the third section, material in the fourth section is heard as a moment of relaxation despite its direct relationship (in the use of text) to the first section.

Rehearsal: A D E N Q T

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Section: I II III IV V

= spoken text juxtaposed with non-text singing

= minor-sixth (germinating cell), developed in section V

= new material; derived from I and II respectively

G.C. = greater concentration

R. = relaxation

Fig. 1. Structural Layout of the Form

I again acknowledge the work of Witold Lutoslawski, for in *Conversations* he discusses this role reversal as he applied it to *Livre Pour Orchestra*. In *Livre*, the first three "chapters", as he terms them, are performed *a battuta* (conducted, with a beat). These are separated by interludes performed *ad libitum* (not conducted, without a beat) and are offered for relaxation. The last interlude proceeds into a large *ad libitum* section leading to the climax of the work. Lutoslawski states "Subsequent sections, played *ad libitum*, acquire more and more meaning, until the listener, who at first took the beginning of this movement for another interlude, realizes that this is no longer a period of relaxation but that something important is beginning to take place."\(^5\)

The concept of concentration and relaxation, when applied to musical form, seems organic and logical to me, and the idea of changing roles seemed appealing; for these reasons, I have applied these to the construction of form in *A capella Eletronica*. Each of the specific sections will be discussed in detail in the analysis section of this paper.

\(^5\)Ibid., 52
CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL SECTIONS OF
A CAPELLA ELETRONNICA

The work opens with the quartet breathing audibly, in rhythmic unison, into the microphones (the electronic effects for the entire work will be discussed in a following section). The stage is to be cast in total darkness for this opening. Each singer turns on his/her music stand light at the entrance following the Also Sprach Zarathustra quote. The measured breathing lasts approximately ten seconds. My motivation for opening with audible breaths is to symbolize life, to establish the voice as the first musical instrument of humanity, and to show that the breath of life is the voice of music. The sunrise motive from Also Sprach Zarathustra that follows the opening breaths was chosen to reinforce this symbolism. The Strauss quote was chosen also to provide a sharp contrast with the traditional expectation of sound coming from a vocal quartet. The intensity of amplitude from the voices with octave doubling (provided electronically) and more amplitude and reverberation effects are designed to achieve a dramatic opening. These two short events are presented as an introduction.

The main body begins at the animato heading in the score (rehearsal B). The soprano begins to establish the motivic and harmonic basis of this section. She takes up the semitone gesture from the Strauss motive, which then leads to the harmonic structure of a twelve note chord, built with combinations of semitones and minor thirds, with the bass note C.
Lutoslawski discusses, in *Conversations*, his use of twelve-note harmonies. He states "...twelve-note chords, after all, vary greatly in character: some are gentle, some brutal, some have an element of deliberate ugliness,...[some] are mild in character, as opposed to other chords which I consider hot, and others again cold." I have organized the twelve-note chord of this section to achieve a dark and somewhat brutal character. I perceive this chord to be brutal because of the close proximity of dissonant intervals inherent in its voicing. Each of the voices is assigned a three or four note motive, each motive containing a cell of the chord. The full unfolding of the chord does not occur until rehearsal F. The lower three voices do not immediately participate in the voicing of the chord, since they are involved "in conversation" (rehearsal B).

Here (rehearsal B), conversation is first introduced as a musical device of greater concentration. The alto and bass share a dialogue regarding the composers "audacious" choice of materials, including the Strauss quote and the matter of text for the work, while the tenor simultaneously recites an introduction to the work proper, as follows:

A: "I think he should apologize.
B: Absolutely
A: He hasn't the integrity.

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6Ibid., 86.
B: Pretentious git.

A: "And what about the text?!"

B: "Yes, what about the text?"

A: "What shall be the text?"

B: "Sounds like hopeless meanderings"

A: like sounds hopeless

B: meandering soundlessly."

A: "I think the text is important...whatever that is..."

( meanwhile )

T: "The purpose of this production is to explore some of the possibilities of the human voice, in the hopes of achieving some sort of musical experience..."

This "conversation" (against the soprano's motivic singing) is designed, ostensibly, to play on the normal expectation of the listener, who, by now, will be seeking cohesion amidst the confusion. It is my desire that the listener becomes intrigued enough to increase concentration in order to discover an emerging meaning.

In this first section the musical content gradually shifts from mostly spoken voices to mostly sung voices. Each singer completes her or his spoken text and picks up an assigned motivic cell that will eventually complete the voicing of the twelve note chord. Tension is increased by way of emerging dissonance emphasized by dissonant harmonic intervals inherent in the chord. This factor, combined with more frantic expressions of the motives, increased dynamics, increased electronic effects, and the tenor's repetition of a fragment of speech, demands some sort of repose.
Repose is provided in the second section, at rehearsal D, following seven seconds of silence. The silence is not offered as repose; quite the contrary, silence in music can provide more tension than the most dissonant of chords. Here tension is increased because the listener will be waiting to hear what happens next. Repose comes by way of a very long, slow, quiet voicing of a Bb minor chord (see rehearsal D). The ascending-minor-sixth motive in the alto (at rehearsal D) is offered as a moment of relaxation, or lesser concentration. The same motive will be developed in the third section of the work and, because of the more complex musical texture, is presented there as music of greater concentration. The root Bb does not serve as a structural harmonic change but rather as a lower neighbor to the structural twelve-note chord with a C bass that is prolonged through the beginning of the third section at rehearsal E.

The third and largest section of the work begins at rehearsal E. It begins with all voices sounding the root of the twelve-note chord and then expanding out until the complete chord is sounded at rehearsal F, (in the first section of the work the pitches B and Bb are not present in the chord, because the tenor’s recitation of text does not permit him to sing his melodic cell). This point is, harmonically, the most complex moment in the composition. It immediately proceeds to the point that is harmonically most simple, at rehearsal H. However, the music at H is not intended to be a repose, despite the harmonic simplicity. The harmonic construction here is centered around the Bb aeolian mode; the structural root now has descended from C to Bb. Rhythmically very active, this section picks up the ascending minor sixth motive (from the second section, rehearsal D) and develops the motive beginning in the soprano at rehearsal I. Here, the musical role reversal takes place. The reversal is engaged as the music from rehearsal D (harmonic and motivic), presented as music of relaxation, is taken up and developed as music of greater concentration (rehearsal I).
Rehearsal J marks a point of structural harmonic descent from a Bb root (Bb aeolian at letter H) to an Ab root (Ab mixolydian). The modal writing in this section provides contrast from the large opening section of the work. Temporary repose is offered within this large section at rehearsal letter L. The repose, a dissolution of texture and harmony, does not mark the close of this section but allows the listener a breath before the activity picks up again, at rehearsal M.

The fourth section of the work, composed as music of lesser concentration, begins at rehearsal N. The structural root of this section is the pitch G, referencing the first section of the work with the spoken recitations by the singers. The difference here is one of intent: what was intended in the opening as music of greater concentration is now presented as music of relaxation. This section, despite its relation to the opening section, is characterized by its lighter character and relatively uncomplicated texture. The material beginning at N is written in a "stream-of-consciousness" style and may be seen as being influenced most directly by the Berio *Sinfonia*, third movement. This section is a collage of folk melodies, references to *Sinfonia*, references to Beckett's *The Unnamable*, and conversational excerpts in the character of the opening section.

The fifth and final section of the work begins at rehearsal Q. It completes the structural descent from C^3, in the opening, to F^2, which closes the piece. The structural descent of the F minor scale, from the dominant, influenced my decision of closing the work with an F minor harmony.

The material, beginning at rehearsal Q, is derived from the material at rehearsal D. Thus, the final reversal of roles has taken place. The music here, at Q, is offered as music of greater concentration. It exploits the melodic minor sixth, which was offered for relaxation at rehearsal D. This section is written in very long, slow *portamentos* that do not exceed a minor second. My interest here is to exploit the overtone conflict resulting
from voices sounding in close proximity. This final section descends in a stepwise manner from F³ to F² (in the bass) and includes a short codetta that begins at rehearsal T.

The coda, beginning at rehearsal T, is written in a chorale style. This coda is written to serve as a quiet resolution of the entire piece. My intent here is to provide the listener with a peaceful sense of repose following all of the seemingly disparate material that is the body of the work. The coda is imitative in style, a traditional chorale technique, and uses vertical sonorities of combinations of seconds, rather than tertian harmonies. The imitation leads to a quiet resolution of an F minor harmony that closes the piece.

The Sound Processors

Performance of A capella Eletronnica requires the use of two digital, multi-effect processors. It was written with two specific processors in mind: the Yamaha SPX1000 Multi-effect Processor, and the Ensoniq DP/4 Parallel Effects Processor. Both of these devices perform the same tasks, that is to alter, electronically, or enhance a sound input. The DP/4 is more sophisticated than the SPX1000, in that it can accept four independent input signals (here, four human voices) and add independent effects to each voice. In essence, because of this ability, the DP/4 acts as four different effects processors in one. The SPX1000 is capable of adding effects to only one input signal. Thus, the DP/4 is used for most of the processing in A cappella Eletronnica. The SPX1000 is capable of a few functions that the DP/4 is not designed to handle: a more versatile Pitch Shift effect, for example. I require both devices, because the SPX1000 is called upon to assist the DP/4. The DP/4 will allow only one algorithm (effect) per voice when operating in the four voice configuration (four independent inputs to four independent outputs). The SPX1000 can add an additional effect (reverberation, for example) to all the voices during those times. Thus, both units are necessary for the complete realization of the work. Both units are capable of selecting preset configurations via a MIDI foot switch.
In this manner, program (algorithm configuration) changes are easily accessed in performance.

A list of effects programs and configurations is provided in the beginning of the *A capella Elettronica* score. The program changes are identified in the score by Arabic numerals that are enclosed in triangles. The preset parameters for the specified algorithms are acceptable, but I encourage future musical directors of the work to experiment with different parameters for varied degrees of effects. Some may discover effects more interesting than those that I have discovered. Or, for instance, reverberation should be adjusted based on the resonant characteristics of the performance space. Thus, I have not included specific parameters in the effects program list. Personally, I am likely to extend or reduce certain algorithm parameters from one rehearsal to the next. I request only that changes of the parameters be made to serve (not undermine, or supplant) the musical structure of the work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


A Capella Eletronnica

for

Four Voices

and

Electronic Effects

Paul G. Bonneau

1995
**Performance Instructions**

*A capella Eletronnica* is scored for four amplified voices (SATB). Two digital sound processors are required for the realization of the work; the Ensoniq DP/4 parallel effects processor and the Yamaha SPX 1000. Four microphones (one per voice) and an adequate mixing board and amplification system are also necessary. The settings for the sound processors are defined below.

**Notation and Interpretation**

The text, written in bold print located on the staves, is to be spoken in a conversational tone but with a measure of theatrical flair. The singers are free to take some liberties in regard to repetitions of phrases for declarative emphasis. The spoken portions must not be rushed, in order to provide time for the sung motives which occur simultaneously with other members of the quartet. They must not be recited so leisurely as to allow gaps in the texture.

The sung motives, beginning at rehearsal letter B in non-metered repeats, are to be performed rapidly.

The repeats followed by a wavy line are to be sung to the end of the repeat before continuing to the next event.

The repeats followed by a solid bold line indicates that the previous repeat may be abandoned anywhere within the event in order to proceed to the next event.

If no syllable is written below a note-head, then the previous syllable is repeated.

The *glissandi*, beginning at rehearsal letter Q, are to be performed slowly. The vertical alignment of the sonorities, while specific, are not intended to be synchronized exactly unless indicated in the score (as found at rehearsal letter R).
Effects Programs and Configurations for the Ensoniq DP/4
and the Yamaha SPX1000

The Yamaha SPX1000 is to be used to assist the Ensoniq DP/4. The DP/4 will allow only one algorithm (effect) per voice when operating in the four source configuration. The SPX1000 will provide an additional effect (reverb, for example), to all the voices during those times. The DP/4 settings are to be programmed and ordered, in advance, and then accessed by way of a MIDI Foot Switch (see DP/4 and SPX1000 manuals). The following table lists the settings for the effects changes as they are found in the score. The changes, in the score, are identified by Arabic numerals enclosed in triangles.

In the DP/4, Four Source Configuration: Soprano=A, Alto=B, Tenor=C, Bass=D. Algorithms chosen from DP/4’s 1 Unit RAM Presets for the four source configuration and may be edited for more desirable effects. The composer requests that further edited algorithms serve, rather than undermine, the structure of the composition.

1 (DP/4)= A: Large Hall Reverb,  B: Same as A,  C: Same as A,  D: Same as A.

2 (SPX1000 Only)= A: Pitch Change 3; 1st pitch shift: -24, 2nd pitch shift: -12; 3rd pitch shift: +12,  B: Same as A,  C: Same as A,  D: Same as A.

3 (DP/4)= A: Dual Delay,  B: Small Plate,  C: Flanger,  D: Same as B.

3a (SPX1000 with DP/4)= Gradual increase in Reverb from SPX1000 over DP/4 effects until a cacophonous wash of sound results. Continue until rehearsal letter C in the score.

4 (DP/4)= A: Large Plate,  B: Same as A,  C: Same as A,  D: Same as A.

5 (DP/4)= A: Small Plate,  B: Same as A,  C: Same as A,  D: Same as A.

6 (SPX1000 with DP/4)= A: Dual Delay,  B: Same as A,  C: Same as A,  D: Same as A. SPX1000 to provide small plate reverb over all voices.

7 (DP/4)= Same as configuration #4.

8 (DP/4)= Same configuration as #6.
9 (DP/4) = Same configuration as #5.

10 (DP/4) = A: Pitch Shifter; vc 1 = +12, vc 2 = -7, B: Same as A, C: Same as A, D: Same as A.

11 (DP/4) = Same configuration as #5.

12 (DP/4) = Same configuration as #10.

13 (DP/4) = Same configuration as #5.

14 (SPX1000 with DP/4) = C only: Pitch Shifter; vc 1 = +12, vc 2 = -12. SPX1000 to provide large hall reverb.

15 (SPX1000) = A: Large Plate, B: Same as A, C: Same as A, D: Same as A.

16 (SPX1000 with DP/4 set in Two Unit ROM Configuration) = A: 3.3 sec. Delay 2U (Two Unit ROM Preset #50), B: Same as A, C: Same as A, D: Same as A. SPX1000 to provide very large Plate reverb.

17 (DP/4) = A: Small Plate, B: Same as A, C: Same as A, D: Same as A.
A capella Eletronnica

(Breathe in unison in long slow, measured breathes)

(Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Breaths should be audible and directed into the microphones)

(Normal breathing at "A")

(SopranO)

10-20" Largo

(Accept)

(Ah)

(Ah)

(Ah)

very rapid

(Ambrose ad lib with bass)

I think he should apologize. He hasn't the integrity. And what about the text? What shall be the text?

(As if speaking at a lecture)

The purpose of this production is to explore some of the possibilities of the human voice, with the hopes

(Absolutely)

(Pretentious git)

(Yes, what about the text)

(Sounds like)
Like sounds hopeless. I think the text is important. Mr. Xenakis does not. Well, I do.

of achieving some sort of musical experience. The singers before you are being assisted by a device known as the Ensoniq DP/4, and...

Hopeless meanderings, meandering soundlessly. So did Mr. Lutoslawski. Mr. Berio is somewhere in between. Thank you, Mr. Berio.

another, the Yamaha SPX-1000, as well as other electronic equipment, all of which are being controlled by —— the sound engineer.

But I must have said this before. I know I've heard it before. This all seems so self-indulgent, this stream of consciousness, thisssss
of the day. Enigmatic du jour. We also have, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Together we will indulge in a

stream of sss, this consistent, that is, incessant sssstream, flowing, eddying, meandering endlessly, hopeless not soundless.

all of the so-called elements of music, a little tone-hunting, if you will. Oh yes, do let me not forget, I will not forget this.
S: Yes, me too. What should we do now? I would like to exercise.

A: Andante

T: When I'm glad that's over. I would like some chamber music.

B: Shh... What about the text, what shall be the text?

S: Yes, Thank you, Mr. Berin. Such a pretty

A: do re mi fa sol fa mi re
do re mi fa sol

T: Nothing more restful than chamber music.

B: shh

Yes, it is.