Symphony,

“Implausible”

for large orchestra

Kyle Gann
2014
Symphony: “Implausible”

What is implausible about my symphony, that I should give it such a title? First of all, it is in an idiom known in certain circles as postminimalism, and as it is the only postminimalist symphony I know of aside from Elodie Lauten's Symphony 2000 (which has only been performed once to my knowledge), it remains to be seen how well a symphony in this idiom will work. In part this means that each movement has an individual concept: the first movement's basis in the harmonic series, the second movement's layering of three tempos, the fourth movement's ceaseless 8th-note motion, and so on. The overall work is based on an earlier series of rhythmic etudes of mine for two pianos called Implausible Sketches, and it may have been foolhardy to base a symphony on rhythmic etudes. It seems implausible that I, as an "experimentalist" composer, would have eventually written a symphony, although I am preceded in that regard by Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, George Antheil, and a few others. Finally, it seems implausible that the work will be played during my lifetime.

There are five movements, and only the final one is notably fast. That the first movement is longer and more complex than the other four is one of the piece's more traditional features. It is one of my many phase landscapes, with themes and ostinatos that recur at regular, though out-of-phase, intervals; the listener will particularly note four processional-like interruptions, equally spaced. The prominence of the solo piano part creates an almost concerto-like texture at times. The second movement (somewhat revised in 2018) is a dreamy exercise in three tempos at once, in the quintessentially totalist ratios of 4:6:9. The third movement is a fugue couched in the octatonic (diminished) scale. The fourth movement, the symphony's center of gravity, is a long, mournful adagio, possibly too long, but the sense of delay and alienation was intentional. The more cheerful finale is a rousing jamboree on a five-against-four rhythm, in the style that I learned to write from William Duckworth's example. Its coda features a nostalgic reminiscence of the symphony's beginning.

- Kyle Gann

Duration: 40 minutes
Symphony, "Implausible"

I

Mellow, unhurried

\( \frac{j}{4} = 54 \)

Piccolo

Flute

Oboe

English Horn

Clarinet in B♭

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Cymbals

Tam-tam

Vibraphone

Harp

Piano

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

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April 17-June 8, 2011
Germantown, NY
II

Dreamily
\( \frac{j}{=} 80 \)

Flute

Oboe

English Horn

Clarinet in B

Vibraphone

Piano I

\( \frac{j}{=} 80 \)

Violin I

Violin IIa

\( \text{PP} \)

Violin IIb

\( \text{PP} \)

Viola

\( \text{PP} \)

Viola

Violoncello

"Implausible" Symphony, II
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III.

Violoncello

\( \text{stately} \)

\( \text{mp} \)

Bsn.

Vln. I

Vc.

Eng. Hn.

Bsn.

Pno.

Vln. I

Vc.

Cb.

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"Implausible" Symphony, III
Steadily, but with warmth

\( \mathbf{\hat{i}} = 55 \)

1. \( \sum \sum \sum \sum \)
"Implausible" Symphony, IV
with restrained excitement

\( \text{\textcopyright 2014 © Smith Grabholz Music} \)
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