

## ***Sassafras Leaves: Nine Variations on a Cryptogram***

***CIRE PERDUE***

***SERENATA***

***MOLTO ADAGIO***

***VALEDICTION***

***HALL OF MIRRORS***

***VELOUTÉ; METALLIQUE***

***RIPPLES***

***FALL and CHORALE***

I began *Sassafras Leaves* as I was walking on Sassafras Point, on the banks of Lake Ontario, in November 1997. I started to hum the tune that the letters of the name make, using, German, English and French note names.

*CIRE PERDUE* an art term, initially excludes all the notes of the cryptogram (A, Eb, D F), but uses the other eight possible notes, so as to make a sort of tonal or harmonic "hole" or mould. In other senses too it is the negative of the theme - the music avoids all the intervals that the cryptogram will use, and the register. Into this rather bland vacuum, like a rush of molten brass, comes the cryptogram, eventually complete with all of its constituent notes and its 3-against-4 rhythmic characteristic.

*SERENATA* is simple and pictorial use of the cryptogram. The chords start off being made up additively (from the bottom, a minor third [4 semitones] has a major third on top of it [5 semitones], which has a perfect fourth on top of it (6 semitones] etc.). No doubt this derives from the pattern of the cryptogram notes when clustered. The three-As-and-four-Ebs characteristic of the cryptogram led me to a three-against-four feature in the set as a whole, and in *SERENATA* the twelve quavers of each bar are divided either into four lots of three Or three lots of four, and sometimes both at the same time.

Three As are regularly (and symmetrically) spaced within the cryptogram, which is probably why the idea of bells came to me for one variation. So, in *VALEDICTION*, Abased resonances are heard alone near the beginning; later on, Eb-based resonances are superimposed, and D-based and F-based resonances join in too, eventually, to make the whole cryptogram in bell-like sounds. This variation in particular - and the whole set - are dedicated to Mladen Liby, who died when I was in Canada at that time.

In *HALL OF MIRRORS* the cryptogram is, literally, distorted - stretched or squashed, all within a loud, *scherzando* context. *MOLTO ADAGIO*, next, sees a slow, expressive inversion of the cryptogram. *VELOUTÉ; METALLIQUE* contrasts textures - the velvety and the metallic; it concentrates largely on the intervallically additive implications of the cryptogram, and on the 3 against 4 element (which becomes at one point 2 against 3, 4, 5 and 6), *RIPPLES* sees the cryptogram float away into melody once again.

The first bar of the very short *FALL* is the cryptogram again, although the music has already begun to fall towards the end of the first bar; the 11/8 key signature is basically the nine quavers of the cryptogram, with an asymmetric extra two beats. The resonances change from light and airy to dark and turgid as the music falls, and out of the darkness emerges *CHORALE*. This is just a tune which starts off with the nine notes of the cryptogram; the intervals of the following phrases might have something to do with the theme (things usually happen that way); the second phrase, by the way, has

10 melody notes, the third has 11, and the fourth has 12 - just a private puzzle!

The first complete performance of the work by Masauki Tayama took place on 3rd March 1999 at St Olave's Church in the City of London.