

## *The Noise Between Thoughts*

*The Noise Between Thoughts* is a reaction to the political forces whose acts of aggression are one of the defining elements of our time. I began composing this piece in the fall of 2002, after the attacks against Afghanistan, during which a militaristic American propaganda campaign was insidiously and chillingly marching the world toward its next carefully primed target, Iraq. Since 9/11, many Americans including myself have been involved in a process of educating themselves about U.S. history, foreign policy, and geopolitical violence. Having devoted much time this year to delving more deeply to the roots of these issues has led both to despair and determination; despair that massive atrocities are not only possible but profoundly ingrained in capitalistic society, and determination that actions that support such atrocities be exposed and countered.

My compositional method modeled the approach that I was taking in my studies of political science. I felt it necessary in both areas to "start from scratch", to free myself of preconceptions about the subjects I was approaching (in this case, writing for string quartet) to allow a new understanding to emerge. With this piece, I tried to focus on the instruments' physical entity without being swayed by previous knowledge. Trying to sustain this perspective throughout, I extended playing techniques as far as I could to create a personal vocabulary that suited the particular emotional forces that needed to be expressed. This investigation yielded a wide variety of sounds, from subtle beating of near unisons to exotic multiphonics, glassy, unusual harmonics, and a broad palette of "noise" afforded by carefully determined bow positioning and pressure. Many of the sounds result from a self-imposed constraint that the fingers of the left hand come in contact with the fingerboard as little as possible until the very end of the piece. With this material I was able to generate an unstable, intense reflection of the difficult extra-musical challenges being posed by the current state of events.

Initially, I had imagined the piece integrating string quartet with electronics. The computer was to be used as a way of extending the acoustic possibilities of the instruments. After several months of explorations with the computer, another idea emerged. The idea was one of an acoustic string quartet that uses innovative approaches towards playing string instruments to generate a new sound world inspired by the possibilities of electronics. I wanted a sound world that was analogous to the emotionally raw content of the piece. Being so strongly influenced by feelings of anger and despair, as well as fragile flights of hope, I wanted to keep the sound production as closely linked to the physical presence of the performers as possible. The detailed and complexly nuanced presence of sound generated directly by the players, particularly combined with the visceral impact of the performers generating such unfamiliar and challenging sounds without the use of auxiliary technology, promotes an unmediated engagement with the piece.

*The Noise Between Thoughts* is not merely an abstract expression of anguish. It is rather a reaction to the promise of continued violence throughout the world. In this sense, it is a positive, life-affirming statement, despite some of the aural roughness that characterizes it. This piece is a testament to my need to make a statement of opposition to acts of

aggression, destruction, and deception that governments such as that of the United States undertake for the sake of morally bankrupt economic interests. Music is not an apolitical haven, a world apart from the world. However, without a text it is difficult to make a clear political statement. An instrumental piece can serve to communicate the essence of one's feelings about the struggle against institutionalized violence and one's alienation from undemocratic actions. The title, *The Noise Between Thoughts*, refers to the friction between political and musical ideas, and the music that results from an active attempt to reconcile the two.

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