

JOHN MELCHER

Drastic Measures

An electric symphony for synthesizers, and electric guitar
(1977-2003)

In four movements and scored for a virtual orchestra of synthesizers, guitars and samples, I've long thought of it, secretly, as a symphony, though I'm uncomfortable with the implications of that label.

The first electronic version of *Drastic Measures* was realized in 1981 with a Mountain Computer Music System, a digital wavetable synthesizer running inside an Apple II computer; this was a pretty amazing concept to most people at the time. However, some musical ideas, in particular the tune that begins and ends it, date back to some projects I did from 1975 to 1977 that never really got off the ground, for an ensemble of multiple keyboards. Since the 1981 version, I rewrote, revised, reorchestrated and renamed it numerous times. That's a long time for something to go unfinished, and it changed a lot along the way, picking up bits and pieces of other musical influences over a 25-year stretch.

I. Fast. The opening section began as an exercise in overlaying repeating patterns of different lengths, in this case 11/8+10/8, 14/8+15/8 and 4/4. The second section builds up a 9-note pattern a note at a time, develops the theme, then drops off the notes in reverse order. Along the way everything collapses and then reforms. It reminds me of the "centrifuge" ride at an amusement park.

10:30

II. Moderately. Two patterns in a 4:3 tempo ratio (sixteenths against eighth triplets) and a oddly repeating chord progression that builds up and then breaks down one chord at a time (Fm / Fm Eb / Fm Eb Db / Fm Eb Db Bbm...) build slowly to a Zappa-esque outburst before subsiding.

11:15

III. Slow and *molto rubato*. Originally a solo piano piece, this is the world at four in the morning. A pattern of five descending chords repeats, each time an octave lower and with an additional note added to the top, and a bit of monkey business. When I was writing this, I was reminded of Henry Brant's *Machinations*.

6:00

IV. Fast. This movement, the longest, also began as a piano piece with the left- and right-hand parts in different, constantly shifting meters. At the end a modified version of the opening section returns. A 1985 work entitled for piano solo also called *Drastic Measures*, comprising this movement plus some other stuff which became *A Full Quarter Hour*, was premiered by Philip Aaberg in Los Angeles in 1987.

18:00

Total playing time: **48:00**

All tracks were digitally recorded, mixed and mastered (in 2003 at my studio in Bangkok) at 48 kHz, 24-bit resolution, using a Pro Tools MIX audio workstation. Instruments used on this recording were a Roland M-GS64 General MIDI synthesizer, Access "Virus", McDSP "Synth One" and Digidesign "Soft SampleCell" virtual synthesizer plug-ins, and a few "real" guitar parts played by me on a Gibson Nighthawk. The male vocal at the end of the Fourth Movement is a composite of samples from the Spectrasonics "*Heart Of Asia*" collection of Asian musical instrument samples.

John Melcher,
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