

Contact Binaries (2005-6) from ***Local Economy*** (2004-7)

In astronomy, the term ‘contact binary’ refers to two astronomical bodies so close to each other that they lightly touch each other. In the case of asteroids, a contact binary is caused when two gravitate toward each other, forming an oddly-shaped single body.

In this piece I took the notion of two objects lightly touching and influencing each other as a loose analogy for the way the trumpet and percussion interact, working through various approaches to unanimity and rhythmic subdivisions and coming together at certain pre-defined rhythmic points that function something like an *Aavartanam*—a large-scale repeated rhythmic cycle—does in Carnatic music. In contrast to ***exit wound*** that follows, the percussion has the lion's share of the active material, while the trumpet punctuates and comments like a back-seat driver.

Local Economy was commissioned by Duo Contour with funding from Creative New Zealand.

© 2006 James Gardner

exit wound (2004) from ***Local Economy*** (2004-5)

Unlike some governments I could mention, I had a clear idea of my exit strategy when I started out on this incursion into foreign territory. As a result, ***exit wound***—the final module of the larger work-in-progress ***Local Economy*** was the first to be completed. I've finished, so I'll start...

Of course the 19-tone trumpet – like humans – is full of tubing and compromises, and just like its more familiar incarnation it aspires to, rather than reliably embodies, its nominal temperament. I don't see this as a problem, as I'm not one to cling to any temperament or tuning system with religious zeal.

In a very early phase of the composition I did in fact make a systematic exploration of some 19-tone pitch resources, but the results struck me as sounding far too much like pedagogical exercises to be of interest. Vestiges of these ‘warming-up licks’ do, however, remain.

A useful way of approaching the piece might be to think of the trumpet as the character, familiar from science fiction movies, who wakes up one morning to find himself in a new body, and who goes through the clichéd ritual of studying the alien contours of his new visage in the mirror with a mixture of horror and fascination.

By the same token the percussionist could, perhaps, be imagined as some sort of sidekick, offering advice, encouragement and occasionally a dissenting voice.

But this is, after all, a piece of music and such crassly reductive quasi-programmatic schemes don't hold for long.

The percussionist's set-up, and the performative energies deployed in the part are modelled on those of an improvising percussionist, inspired in part by the Wellington-based percussionist Anthony Donaldson, who ought not be blamed for any shortcomings in this piece.

Thanks must go to Stephen Altoft and Lee Ferguson not only for commissioning the piece with funding from Creative New Zealand, but also for their enthusiasm and forbearance in the face of continually missed deadlines.

© 2005 James Gardner