

# **Sequenza No. I**

for solo flute

A Brief Analysis  
by John A. Hartmann

In 1958, Luciano Berio completed *Sequenza No. 1* for solo flute. It is the first of thirteen pieces for solo performer in the *Sequenza* series. The others in the series are written for harp, mezzo-soprano, piano, trombone, viola, oboe, violin, clarinet, trumpet, bassoon, alto saxophone, and accordion. *Sequenza No. 1* is an exploration of the modern virtuoso flautist's technique.

*Sequenza No. 1* was the first piece to be written by Berio in proportional notation. It does not have a notated meter and the rhythms are indicated by their placement upon the page. The tempo is indicated by marked sections of the score approximately one-inch apart (see Ex. I). The beamed notes are to be played in a connected fashion, while unbeamed notes are to be played separately. *Sequenza No. 1* is also one of the first pieces to require multiphonics on the flute.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this technique, other technical demands are placed upon the performer in the form of flutter-tonguing and key clicks.

Severino Gazelloni, a famous, virtuoso Italian flautist, premiered *Sequenza No. 1* in 1958. In 1992, Berio published a revised score for the piece that uses traditional notation. This version makes use of extremely complex rhythms to ensure that performers play the correct rhythms. Berio made this revision in response to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hometown.aol.com/jlowpie/Berio.html>

unsatisfactory performances.

Sequenza No. 1 is organized according to levels of density on a high/medium/low scale. This scale is applied to four dimensions: pitch, temporal, dynamic, and morphological (how the flute produces sound).<sup>2</sup> Two of these dimensions are at their maximum at any given time in the performance of the piece. Thus there are moments of extreme agitation and moments of silence.

### **Analysis of Pitch Content**

Sequenza No. 1 uses all twelve tones in a manner that hints at serialism but is not a serial work. The primary use of pitch is to explore the melodic and textural potential of 2nds, 7ths, and their transposed equivalents.

The piece opens with an altered 12-tone row (see Ex. I). The alterations include the repetition of introduced pitch material. The opening 12-tone row, or its melodic shape, is repeated four times during the piece. The first repetition is of the opening rhythm and melodic contour on page one, fourth through fifth system (Ex. II). In the second repetition, the opening row's pitch class order is reiterated on page one system seven through page two system one (Ex. III). The third time the row is repeated, it also appears as a reiteration of the pitch class order (page 2 systems 9-10)(Ex. IV). The fourth repetition is also of the pitch class order on page 5, system 4-5 (Ex. V). These repetitions of the row act as anchors in the piece. All the other pitch material is the development of the row through the active use of 2nds and sevenths. The row is repeated with substitutions. The pitch content is less important than the texture it creates and the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.arts.ed.ac.uk/italian/MusicaItalia/Pages/programmenotes96.html#Anchor23240>

density of the four dimensions.

70 M.M.

*sfz* *ff* *ff* *mf* *ff*

Ex. I

*sfz* *ff*

Ex. II

*f* *sfz* *ppp* *sf* *pp*

Ex. III

*ff* *p* *f* *mf* *p* *mf* *ff* *mf*

Ex. IV

(dolce)

*ppp* (*ppp sempre*) (*ppp*) *p* *ppp* *mf* *ppp*

Ex. V

## Analysis of Structure

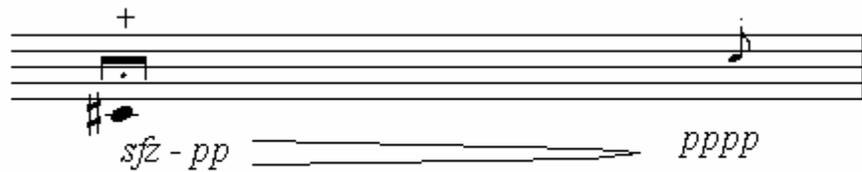
Since Sequenza No. I is organized around relative density, the best way to analyze

it is by observing which dimensions (temporal, dynamic, pitch, and morphological) are at play at any given moment. The first dimension I will observe is the temporal dimension; or rhythm. The piece opens with flourishes of rhythmic activity in which the note values gradually lengthen. The rhythmic structure at this point sets up the entire piece.

Moments of great activity are followed by relative calm. This pattern is maintained throughout the entire score. Directly linked to the rhythmic activity is dynamic activity. When the rhythm accelerates, there is an increase in dynamics. The longer note values are held at a lower dynamic. I will skip over the pitch structure as it has already been covered previously. The last dimension to be explored is the morphological. The piece opens with an open flute sound without any alterations. As the piece progresses, alterations such as flutter tonguing and key clicks are introduced. The flutter tonguing technique is used in conjunction with increased rhythmic activity and heightened dynamics. It is also used to make connections between differing sections of dynamic and rhythmic activity. Key clicks are used in a similar manner. The clicks act as a connector to the pitch and dynamics. The pitches at a higher dynamic level are accented with key clicks while the pitches at a lower dynamic level are played as normal, without any clicks.

The final playing technique used is multiphonics. The multiphonics only appear for a brief time and are used to add density to very long rhythmic values as well a lowered dynamic. The pitch content is significant in that the upper pitch is also the final pitch of the piece (Ex. VII). The multiphonics appears after an extremely agitated section of high rhythmic activity, increased dynamics, and flutter tonguing which constitute the climax of the piece. The four dimensions combine to form a structure of density that

centers and gives balance to the piece.



Ex. VII

## Arguments and Commentary

David Osmond-Smith, Berio

David Osmond-Smith's Berio is an exploration of Berio's life and works. Osmond-Smith puts the works into context with Berio's life. This approach gives the reader a glimpse into the mind of Berio and a more thorough understanding of the motivational forces behind each work. Osmond-Smith makes the point that Sequenza No.I is a result of Berio's serial background and his moving away from strict serialism. He also says that the Sequenza series is an exploration of the potential within the each featured instrument.

Paul Nauert, "Berio's Re-Notation of Sequenza I:

Representations of Surface and Structure in Nonmetric Music"

In Nauert's paper on Sequenza No.I, the discussion is about the reasons for using proportional notation. He also discusses the performer's decisions about tempo and rhythm and how they compare with the 1991 revision of the score. Nauert believes that the original score took more control away from the composer than what was originally

intended. Nauert then dealt with the topic of performance practice of complex, notated rhythms.

Nauert also put forth an analysis of Sequenza No.I based on three hierarchic components: grouping structure, a beat hierarchy, and a time span hierarchy. He says that these structures are often ambiguous and open to performer interpretation. A large portion of Nauert's paper deals with performer interpretation and the 1991 revision and how they differ.

## **Conclusion**

The first time I heard Sequenza No.I, I was left scratching my head in a lost and confused manner. I wasn't sure what to make of this piece. The second time I listened to it, I enjoyed myself a lot more by *not* trying to listen for audible structures. This resulted in a new found love of the piece. After having taken a much closer look at the piece, I must say that my love of it has only increased. I know feel that I understand more of the structure that is present. I am no longer trying to hear a melody or an implied harmony; I am listening for the ways in which Berio creates a counterpoint of densities. Since working on the analysis, I have begun to listen to the *Sequenzas* with a renewed vigor.

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