

Orchestration Workshop – Oct. 6, 2018 **Turning Point Ensemble – Owen Underhill**

The Vancouver Pro Musica workshop will concentrate on innovative orchestration practices for large chamber ensemble. Material covered will include practical tips about how to become a better orchestrator, different practices of mixing instruments, and twentieth century and contemporary techniques. Score examples will be presented including music written for the Turning Point Ensemble. The workshop should be of general interest for development of orchestration skills for composers, as well as provide information that would be useful to composers who intend to write for the Turning Point Ensemble as an ensemble-in-residence for this year's Vancouver Pro Musica Sonic Boom Festival.

General Orchestration Tips

- Know instruments in detail including in addition to ranges, the character and quality of different registers e.g. oboe in very bottom register is very hard to play soft, flute in bottom register is hard to play loud
- Wherever possible, ask players to try parts where you have questions, respond to advice
- Listen to orchestration in the music of others, find sounds that you like and study scores to analyze how the timbre, orchestrational mix etc. has been created,
- Make your scores detailed in the notation of dynamics, articulation, timbre, phrasing, special effects etc., your notation should be as clear as it needs to be to get the desired musical sound/effect – do not over-notate and do not under-notate
- Try and have your music workshopped, if you do have this opportunity, take full advantage through listening carefully (make recordings) and making adjustments even if they are minor ones
- Performers are your friends, treat them well – good parts, listen to what they have to say, try and learn something every time you go to a rehearsal
- Go to live large ensemble concerts – Turning Point Ensemble and ecm+ (Ensemble Contemporain de Montréal) – Sunday, October 28, 2018 – Orpheum Annex

Orchestrating in 2018

- You do not have to follow late nineteenth century 'rules' of orchestration
- Try and imagine the sound or chord; be like a painter, you want to find exactly the right sound for the context in your piece, do not orchestrate with clichés (e.g. it might in a particular situation be very interesting to have a bassoon play higher than a flute in a chord)
- If you are composing for particular individuals, don't be afraid of writing for their strengths, you are writing for human beings, not just instruments

- DO NOT OVERREACT to instrumental synthesis programs in your software program, DO NOT BE LIMITED by things that your instrumental synthesis cannot do
- Use extended techniques judiciously and accurately, make sure they work in the musical context, make sure you have notated them as clearly as possible
- Find a way to make your own distinct compositional voice/sound with high quality orchestration techniques

Orchestration Concepts

- Spacing of Registers – narrow to wide, be open and sensitive to spacing changes that will improve orchestration
- Voicing – there are many aspects of voicing that are directly relevant to orchestration including, voice leading
- Density of voices – monophonic to densely polyphonic
- Weighting – insure that various layers are weighted properly in relation to other layers
- Timbre – there is a kaleidoscopic palette of timbre in instrumental orchestration depending on registers, dynamics, and many other effects (e.g. sul tasto/sul ponticello, wind sound/focused sound, attack, mallets used in percussion etc.)
- Mixing – like mixing paints, it is possible to achieve an extraordinary variety of instrumental colour through mixing instruments
- Sound Mass/Texture – creating blocks of instrumental sounds through clusters or other effects that accentuate sound mass over individual instruments
- Placement of players in different locations

Writing for large ensemble like the Turning Point Ensemble

- Writing for 10 – 20 instruments is not the same as writing for orchestra, the ensemble has a transparency that orchestras do not have due to the individual instruments, be careful not to overbalance the individual strings with woodwinds and brass
- You do not need to have all instruments playing at the same time, within the ensemble are soloists, duos, trios, sections (woodwind, brass, piano/percussion/ harp, strings), and mixtures
- It can be very effective to have unison mixtures, to effectively create new instruments through blending
- Do not be afraid to discover sounds that are unique and mysterious
- You do not have to use every possible orchestrational effect in a piece, you may wish to be very focused in the orchestrational approach you use in a given piece
- Don't be afraid to experiment, but experiment from a foundation of knowledge and understanding, make improvements when you find out what works or does not work

- Try not to exhaust players through overwriting or extended passages that are extremely difficult (e.g. very high writing in brass)

Writing for Turning Point Ensemble Sonic Boom 2018/19

- Turning Point Ensemble features 16 performers + conductor, with the following instrumentation:
 - For this concert TPE will have available the following instruments (also see list above): flute (doubling piccolo and alto), oboe (doubling english horn), clarinet (doubling bass clarinet), bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, piano, percussion (1 player), harp, violins (2), viola, cello, double bass.
 - Submissions including other instruments or singers will not be considered.
- Works must be scored for a minimum of four (4) performers, up to the full ensemble of sixteen (16).
- Maximum duration: 8 minutes. *Please note that time limits will be strictly enforced to allow as many pieces as possible to be programmed.*
- TPE welcomes questions relating to possible submissions. Please email Owen Underhill at underhil@sfu.ca.

Note: Composers of selected works should submit parts to Vancouver Pro Musica by **December 28, 2018**. These works will be played by **Turning Point Ensemble** at a reading session on **January 12, 2019**. After the reading session, composers may make revisions based on their experience at the reading session. Revisions are due **February 17, 2019**.

Important Dates:

- **October 6 2018 10am-2pm:** Open workshop at the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Music teaching studio, room 4350 (SFU Harbour Centre campus).
- **December 7, 2018:** Score submission deadline.
- **Mid-December 2018:** Submitters notified of preliminary selection results.
- **December 28, 2018:** Parts due.
- **January 12, 2019, 10 am—2 pm:** Reading session with Turning Point at the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Music teaching studio, room 4350.
- **February 17, 2019:** Revisions due.
- **March 24, 2019:** Concert at the Orpheum Annex (7:30 pm).