

Some place where your spirit sounds...., for tenor saxophone and chamber ensemble

Program Notes

The idea of composing a chamber work featuring tenor saxophone came first from my love of the incredible range of colors and the inherent human vulnerability of the saxophone and also from the past collaborations with inspiring saxophonists, including my colleague at MU, Leo Saguiguit, from whom I always learn much -- about craft, surely, but also about the kinds of motivations and questions that elevate music making from craft to art. (It was important to the process that Leo agreed to perform in this premiere before I began work on the composition.)

Perhaps it was through thinking about such things, that the idea of a solo concerto as a kind of instrumental opera emerged. But soon, my object became the creation of a recognizable personality, in the musical material of the soloist, that one can follow through its interactions with a variety of contrasting musical environments – distinct musical communities – portrayed by the ensemble. That ensemble was chosen to include instruments that are in some way related to the saxophone (oboe & clarinet) or to each other (oboe & bassoon; violin & cello; clarinet & horn) or quite distinct from one another (strings, winds, piano) but also are capable of combining to create additional colors and textures.

The title, “Some place where your spirit sounds...” is a translation of a line from a Rilke poem written in response to the death of his friend, the proto-Modernist portrait artist Paula Modersohn Becker, at age 31. This artist continues to be highly esteemed for her combination of important technical innovations with a deep empathy for her human subjects. Because Paula’s life was filled with travel to study and create in a variety of artistic communities and because her own work was always immediately recognizable even as it grew in both craft and art, it is possible to think of this music as associated with her story, specifically. But it is also, by design, instrumental music. And, if there is any narrative here at all, it is surely a more universal one, perhaps related to the determined and unsteady search we all make for whatever it is that can sometimes transform experience into art.

-- Paul Seitz