

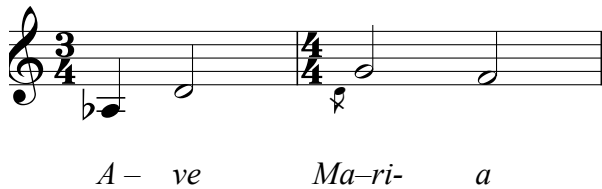
Julie Harting
Coagula

Program Notes

Background

My original concept for this piece was to write a clarinet solo inspired by the *Ave Maria*, the traditional Catholic prayer seeking intercession from the Virgin Mary. I had recently read “The Blindfold’s Eye” by Dianna Ortiz, in which she describes her horrifying experience of being kidnapped and tortured by the Guatemalan government. For many days I was overwhelmed and despondent by a sense of the outrageous pain and damage people inflict on others. I started writing this piece as a prayer – or perhaps a question - or as my muted response - for people so horrendously brutalized.

The “Ave Maria” is easily heard in the opening notes:



But, as with most of my music, the original inspiration transformed to encompass more than I had at first envisioned. As I was composing, I came to a place in the music where I stopped hearing music and heard the words “Auch, deine Wunde.” At first the words haunted me – Did I make them up? Did I hear them in a dream? Did I read them somewhere? Was there any significance to hearing them? I began looking through my books of poetry and rediscovered them in the opening words of Paul Celan’s poem *Coagula*: “Auch, deine Wunde, Rosa.” I felt as though the poem was calling itself into the fabric of the music and decided to include it in the piece. The poem is recited by the clarinetist about 2/3 of the way through the piece; first in the original German and later in an English translation written by poet and scholar Pierre Joris.

About Paul Celan and the poem *Coagula*

Paul Celan was born in 1920 in Romania. His parents died in Nazi labor camps. He himself was imprisoned and forced to work in a labor camp for 18 months. He committed suicide by drowning himself in the Seine in 1970. Celan’s compressed, image-driven poetry uses neologisms and broken syntax to produce an impactful, direct and emotional, but unsentimental, language.

Scholars believe that the Rosa in Celan’s poem *Coagula* refers to the German socialist Rosa Luxembour. Luxembour was born in Poland in 1870. In prison in Germany for organizing labor strikes against the impending war (WWI), Luxembour wrote an especially moving letter describing a scene from her prison window: a water buffalo (a spoil of war from Rumania) pulling a cart of bloodied clothing from the war zone, is beaten and its hide lacerated by a German soldier. In the letter, Luxembour identifies

with the fear and helplessness of the animal. In *Coagula*, Celan references Rosa's "Rumanian Buffel."

Luxembourg was released from prison and arrested again following a failed worker's uprising. This time, in 1919, she was shot by German Freikorps, her body thrown into a canal in Berlin.

Coagula and Alchemy

Scholars also believe that Celan's poem *Coagula* may reference alchemy. Alchemy was the search to turn base metals into gold. The Latin phrase "*solve et coagula*" was used to refer to the alchemical process. An alembic is a flask that was used by alchemists in the distillation process. It can also refer to something that refines or transmutes.

Carl Jung, as well as various Sufi mystics, believe the alchemical processes described in the alchemical texts are an allegory for inner processes of the soul.

Conclusion

To me, the opening words of the poem, "Your wound, too" implies that there are others who have wounds. The inspiration for this piece expanded from Dianna Ortiz's torture to include Paul Celan's imprisonment and later suicide, and Rosa Luxemboug's imprisonment and murder and of course, to all who have suffered brutality.

But this piece is not a tone poem of brutality - it's really a prayer - or perhaps simply an acknowledgement of others' wounds.

The music employs my first use of quartertones and some multiphonics.

Coagula by Paul Celan

Translation by Pierre Joris

Auch deine
Wunde, Rosa,

Your wound, too
Rosa.

Und das Hornerlicht deiner
rumanischen Buffel
an Sternes Statt uberm
Sandbett, im
redenden, rot-
aschengewaltigen
Kolben.

And the hornsight of your
Rumanian buffaloes
In star's stead above the
sandbed, in the
talking, red-
ember-mighty
alembic.

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