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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Aesthetics of Contemporary Music Programming  
Through the Lens of Molecular Gastronomy

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Brendan D. Nguyen

Committee in Charge:

Professor Aleck Karis, Chair  
Professor Susan Narucki  
Professor Charles Curtis

2010

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2010

## DEDICATION

To my parents:

As I get older, I see how I am more like you...

## EPIGRAPH

*To entertain a guest is to be answerable for  
his happiness so long as he is beneath your roof.*

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

*Nulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt  
Quae scribuntur aquae potoribus.*

*'No verse can give pleasure for long, nor last,  
that is written by drinkers of water.'*

Horace (65-8 BC)  
Epistles, Book 1, number 19, line 1

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |      |
|--|------|
| SIGNATURE PAGE.....                                    | iii  |
| DEDICATION.....  | iv   |
| EPIGRAPH.....  | v    |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS.....                                 | vi   |
| PREFACE.....   | vii  |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....                                   | viii |
| ABSTRACT.....  | ix   |
| CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION .....                         | 1    |
| CHAPTER 2 – MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY AND MUSIC.....        | 4    |
| CHAPTER 3 – A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT AND APPLICATIONS..... | 13   |
| CHAPTER 4 – LOVE AS A KEY INGREDIENT.....              | 22   |
| CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION.....                            | 24   |
| REFERENCES .....                                       | 27   |

## PREFACE

The work presented here is the result of an idea brewing in my mind for quite some time. Not only am I a performer of classical and contemporary music, I am also an amateur chef – and at best a lover of food. My dedication to preparing a concert program is matched by my preparation of a seven-course meal. Having done both enough times, I find that my thoughts on both activities are very similar. It is difficult not to think about one without doing the other... and now I've decided to write about it.

At worst this could be a mistake – an academic miscalculation. At best there could be potential for considering the role of our olfactory senses in the field of music cognition – a venture requiring the scientific discipline that I admittedly lack. The truth could be somewhere in the middle. Perhaps my love for and thoughts of music and the culinary arts have coagulated in my brain for so long that I now suffer from gustatory synesthesia. Hopefully, knowledge of my alleged disorder is compelling enough for you to read on.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude toward Professor Aleck Karis for his encouragement and support. I would also like to thank Professors Susan Narucki and Charles Curtis for their critique and for stimulating discussions about music and our roles as performers. Finally, they were not directly involved with this document I would like to thank my colleagues – composers, artists and performers alike who have worked with me here at UC San Diego. Your ideas, work ethic, and commitment to the craft of music drive me to do my best every day.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Aesthetics of Contemporary Music Programming  
Through the Lens of Molecular Gastronomy

by

Brendan D. Nguyen

Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Aleck Karis, Chair

Music and food critics, scholars, and the general public make the similarities between the consumption of music and food casually and surprisingly often. These analogies will be discussed and then further used as a thought experiment to test if the fundamental tenets of food science can refine the aesthetic of programming and conception of contemporary music concerts. Also, the apparent difference in public perception between the culinary arts and contemporary music will be discussed. One area that is problematic for performers of new music is our lack of empathy for guests, a problem for which avant-garde chefs may have a solution.

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The similarities between both concert and dining experience are numerous. When dining, you are given a menu of items to from which to choose; in a concert you have a program. The writer of the recipe is analogous to the composer; the chefs are the performers, and the audience the invited guests. Both experiences involve the consumer seated, with expectation for being pleased and satisfied in some way. The stage is the dining table, and the performed works are the objects of gustatory desire. The general length of time of the two experiences can generally be between one to two hours – at which point, to consume any more could verge on the side of gluttony and indigestion. If one were to examine the experience of sitting down for a thoughtfully prepared multi-course meal, the ritual, traditions and overarching experience really do parallel that of a music concert. What if we were to literally prepare a program to mirror that of a dining experience? If we considered pieces as individual dishes, how would that change how we select and order the pieces? And how can this change the traditional concert experience?

Food analogies in music are abundant; music analogies in the culinary arts are made just as often. It may be accurate to say that our vocabulary in describing music is sodden with culinary terminology. In musicologist Jann Pasler’s close study of concert programs during fin-de-siècle France “Concert Programs and Their Narratives as Emblems of Ideology” she remarks:

French critics commonly referred to concerts as *consommation musicale*, a form of musical consumption. Along with the other food metaphors they used, this image refers not so much to the public's participation in the emerging market for music as to their concern that music *nourish* the population. [Pasler, p. 365]

If both musician and chef are so inclined to make these parallels, what is to stop us from going beyond analogy and to actually apply the principles of one art form to another? The culinary world's more scientific branch, coined in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as gastronomy, is fueled by passionate public and international interest. Within the study of gastronomy is an even more focused area of study. Molecular gastronomy, essentially the application of the scientific method on food preparation, has released waves of innovation and public interest in the future of food. The contemporary music community often suffers from public disinterest, if not absolute distaste for the music performed. While many scholars have analyzed this issue at the social, cultural and psychological perspectives, actual solutions to the problem are rare. These issues will color the discourse; however, my central position is less about the music itself, but rather the *programming* of the music. It would behoove performers to honor great music by respecting listeners' ability to consume it. Inspired by the developments in the field of molecular gastronomy, this paper will propose a possible solution. By taking principles and ideas behind what molecular gastronomists apply to the dining experience and analogously applying these ideas to concert programs of contemporary music it is possible that a renewed public interest and desire for the contemporary community can be attained.

As an aside, there is an aspect to molecular gastronomy that is pure science with scientific motives – to produce knowledge and enhance the understanding of the

interactions of ingredients and effects of different cooking methods. Then there is the aesthetic side of molecular gastronomy – the phenomenological side of the experience of a new cuisine. Though the work done by scientists working in music cognition is valuable (and in my estimation still not studied thoroughly enough), as a performer the discussion of the experience itself is of greater interest. Similarly, the technical aspects of food preparation, while exceptionally interesting, don't always serve us in the discussion of the actual phenomenology of consuming exciting, new cuisine.

## CHAPTER 2 – MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY AND MUSIC

The term *gastronomy* is often times misunderstood, if understood at all, as the science of food preparation – what tastes good, what tastes bad. However, even casual research reveals that gastronomy involves much more than food. It is the study of the relationship between food and almost every aspect of the human condition, making it a subject limitless in scope. Originally submitted as a new field of study by the French lawyer, politician and epicurean Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826). Two months before his death he published *Physiologie du gout* (*The Physiology of Taste*) and it wasn't until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century that it was translated into English. Written in a rather obtuse, aphoristic writing style, that at times comes off misogynistic [p. 35], it has nonetheless remained one of the most important contributions to culinary literature. He is credited as being the first to frame the art of cooking, and eating, as a science.

In 1988 physicist Nicholas Kurti and chemist Hervé This created the subfield molecular gastronomy. A physical chemist on staff at the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique in Paris, Hervé This is a leading figure in molecular cuisine. In describing the difference between gastronomy and molecular gastronomy This says "... the first is the preparation of food, whereas the latter is the knowledge of whatever concerns man's nourishment. In essence, this does not concern food fashions or how to prepare luxury food... but rather an understanding of food." [Nature.com]

By definition molecular gastronomy is a scientific discipline that studies the physical and chemical processes that occur while cooking, seeking to investigate and explain the chemical reasons behind the transformation of ingredients, as well as the social, artistic and technical components of culinary and gastronomic phenomena in general. As a science, its default position is that of not knowing – a wise point of departure for any endeavor.

The crowning commercial achievement of this new science is the restaurant *e/Bulli* in Roses, Catalonia, Spain, judged by the publication *Restaurant*, a British magazine aimed at chefs, as the world's best restaurant in 2002, and 2006 through 2009. In the world of *haute cuisine* it is all about deliciousness. There is potential for the problem of the relativity of taste, however. To reiterate: my purpose is not to judge the music chosen by a performer, rather to develop an aesthetic for dealing with different pieces regardless of one's taste. The chefs at *e/Bulli* don't necessarily think of it as a restaurant either. It functions more like a research institute. In addition to an annual waitlist of 300,000 people, only 8,000 of which are honored each season, the restaurant is closed half of the year in order to give the chefs adequate time to construct the following year's innovations, literally making *e/Bulli* the vanguard of food culture. Interestingly, a long scenic drive to its remote location is also included as part of the dining experience.

What is the equivalent in the field of contemporary music? One could argue for the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt, or for all new music festivals collectively, as the forefront of 'new music culture.' However, these institutions seem to serve those who feed into it, subsequently creating a walled

garden that nobody from the outside seems interested in visiting. Is it merely a difference in marketing? Or an unwilling and ignorant public? Studies show that given even a simple introduction to music that inexperienced listeners may find alienating they are able to not only show signs of comprehension but are more open to the experience. [Bartel and Hamamoto] This is still quite a long way from generating sustained interest and there are no follow-up studies that show these subjects seek out new Western art music after participating in the study.

At this point it is important to note that not every performer or composer's aim is to achieve this level of satisfaction in the audience. I've worked with a composer who recently lauded my premiere of a work of his because I achieved the level of "boringness" he desired. While perplexing to me, I gladly accept a composer's intentions – however, the aim of this paper is to discuss how this level of satisfaction in the culinary arts can be achieved in new music.

In a contemporary musical culture with so many influences from institutions (Universities, festivals, countries, schools of thought), an ever-changing and ever-accelerating social climate, and the rise of popular music, we are losing awareness of the need to put on a good show. The programming of concerts involving contemporary music can be distasteful not because the music isn't good, or because the performances are bad (though both can be true) – but the resulting sensation of 'musical indigestion' is common.

There is no methodology by which we curate and arrange pieces in a concert that aims to give pleasure to the audience. Nor should there be, lest the entire enterprise of performance turn stale, but there is a tendency to assume that the



audience will just enjoy whatever is presented. We have gotten so used to the idea that the only people who come to listen to new music are already pre-disposed to liking or at least tolerating it. In other fields of study such as music cognition our listening habits are well known and discussed, yet in the contemporary music world we can sometimes disregard the audience's experience. Like a meal made of ingredients that consist of too much of a good thing, it probably is not appropriate to have a program that consists of three 40 minute long works. There have been many attempts and experimentation with the traditional concert experience, but nothing that has become widely understood as effective in addressing the problem that continues to consign the area of contemporary music performance to the *ivory towers* of academic institutions. While we may have become masters of both complex and transcendental forms of music, we are woefully ignoring the concerns relating to the concert experience.

In a recent performance at a fairly prestigious venue in downtown Los Angeles, I was fortunate to have been invited to play, but even more so to be first on the program. The event began at 8:30 PM and had two intermissions and one *pausette*. In that amount of time, I performed, listened to another hour of performances, in frustration left to have some of the most delicious Japanese Izakaya (a tapas-style cuisine) offered in the Little Tokyo district, and came back by 11 PM to the concert hall assuming it had already ended. To my astonishment the concert was far from over, and it seemed as if most of the performers who had already played were outside of the hall enjoying the libations offered at the bar. Though I do not know the curator for that particular evening, it was obvious that there was a complete

disregard for the audience's experience; for some reason, it was decided that to have a 45 minute long horn trio comprised solely of sustained notes in the middle of the program was a good idea. What service to our already struggling community of contemporary music does it serve when audiences are driven to insanity at our performances? The performance was over by 12:30 AM. Though I understand art should also challenge an audience, it is not often you hear casual listeners say that contemporary music concerts are inspiring as well.

It is bad enough that humans are biologically hardwired to be neophobic, but to reinforce peoples' fears of contemporary music by actually making them suffer seems futile... but perhaps this is being too harsh. Maybe we are searching for a novelty that will stick. The gastronome Hervé This says on the notion of novelty "that innovation is a successful novelty. In business, one encounters the related idea that a novelty becomes an innovation when it becomes marketable." [This, p. 57] Performers of contemporary music tend to take themselves very seriously, shuttering at the notion that our work be 'marketed' at all, as if that would smack of 'selling out.' Music critic and composer Gregory Sandow wrote a piece in the New York Times in 1999 addressing the issue of the marketability of new music where he proposed the notion that we seek out an "alternative classical" scene. While the scope of this paper will not deal directly with the marketing aspects of concert production, it is important to note that part of the excitement about food culture is associated with the success of not only the product itself, but the marketing of it.

Examples of innovation in new cuisine are numerous, but some have stuck around in the culinary zeitgeist more than others. Here is a list of my favorites:

- Frozen food: Flash-freezing is a mainstay technique for molecular gastronomists. elBulli described earlier was the first to experiment with quickly freezing the outside of various foods, sometimes leaving a liquid center, using a volatile set-up involving a bowl of liquid nitrogen nicknamed TeppanNitro. Later, chefs began using an appliance called the Anti-Griddle whose metal surface freezes rather than cooks.
- Spherification: Also known as “ravioli,” spheres are what you get when you mix liquid food with sodium alginate, then dunk it in a bath of calcium chloride. A sphere looks and feels like caviar, with a thin membrane that pops in your mouth, expunging a liquid center. Popular experiments with this technique have included ravioli made from pureé of foods like mangoes and peas.
- Meat glue: One of the greatest hits of the movement has been Wylie Dufresne’s “shrimp noodles,” which, as the name states, are noodles made of shrimp meat. They were created using transglutaminase, or meat glue, a substance that binds different proteins together and is more familiarly used in mass-produced foods like chicken nuggets.
- Froth: Sometimes called foams these are sauces that have been turned into froth using a whipped cream canister. Again, this is an invention of elBulli.
- Edible document: Arguably the most aesthetically “post-modern” innovation has been the edible menus by Homaro Cantu of the

restaurant Moto in Chicago. Using an ink-jet printer adapted for inks made from fruit and vegetables, and paper made of soybean and potato starch, he has created menus that taste like everything from sushi to steak.

- Bacon: Arguably one of the world's most delicious meats, at least to Western tastes, has received some of the most interesting treatments in new cuisine. Immediately, as a musician I am reminded that "oldies" can still be goodies... A new multi-course tasting menu may include a crispy piece of bacon decorated with butterscotch and dehydrated apple, served threaded on a horizontal wire. This dish made famous by chef Grant Achatz of restaurant Alinea (Chicago) exemplifies the use of creative serverware, and molecular gastronomy's enthusiasm for dehydrators and savory-sweet combinations in general.

These examples aside, I hope that I haven't painted molecular gastronomy as a movement that is perfecting the dining experience. It is by no means perfect – if anything, it has been extremely useful in its ability to describe the mechanics of food preparation. By laying to rest generations-long disputes among the world's best chefs, like finally describing in absolute detail what keeps the perfect mayonnaise from collapsing, or the complex mechanics behind the delicate soufflé, molecular gastronomy has astonishing explanatory power. Its creations, however, are not always successful. Some dishes have been terrible. Rack of lamb with banana

consommé; a “cocktail” of dehydrated powdered rum and cola-flavored Pop Rocks; lamb encrusted with crushed Altoids; and chilli-cheese nachos for dessert made of sweet corn chips, kiwi salsa, and mango sorbet... these might sound like a toddler’s afternoon spent unmonitored in your kitchen, but they have all been offerings at some point at even the best molecular gastronomy restaurants. For myself, this is a cautionary tale in the application of new ideas – but can one ever be blamed for making the attempt?

The case submitted here regarding the relationship between the consumption of food and that of classical and avant-garde music is not meant to be entirely literal. Gastronomes do, however, have a methodology steeped in knowledge about food and how food relates to humans. What I find respectable about this is that their work is grounded in reality – something that we musicians tend to forget, if not to intentionally ignore in our consistent habit to attempt to convey lofty, abstract ideas and satisfy some intellectual preoccupation. Though to the credit of musicians, music itself is quite conceptual in nature – you can’t hold the experience of music in your hands like you can hold pistachio gelato. Music has no physical mass, but it excites similar faculties in our experience of stimuli that have more of a physical presence. Perhaps this is why we often hear inter-disciplinary re-appropriation of terminology. Musicians constantly describe complex timbres in terms of ‘color’; we hear food critics hail delicious meals as ‘symphonies’ of flavors; composers and architects even approach their craft in similar terms. It’s this more cerebral connection between food and music that I find interesting. While reading Hervé This’ book I was delighted by the frequency of analogies he made to classical music.

By way of a simple thought experiment and taking broad gastronomic ideas as applied in programs I have constructed, this point will be made. Hervé This is a proponent of a new movement within gastronomy called *culinary constructivism*. It aims to produce dishes without reference to those of the past, taking into account only their gustatory effects. Hopefully, we can do the same with music – for instance, removing the artifice of chronology in a program, or ordering pieces by their length of time. There can be more elegant solutions made by dealing with the experience of each piece as it stands in relation to the greater concert experience.

## CHAPTER 3 – A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT AND APPLICATIONS

One of the most interesting aspects of gastronomy is the mixing of seemingly incompatible flavors and ingredients: Oyster in passion fruit jelly with lavender; Grain mustard ice cream with red cabbage gazpacho; Jelly of quail with langoustine cream, and parfait of foie gras; chocolate mousse drizzled with olive oil; aged balsamic vinegar and watermelon... One will find that a meal can range anywhere from 5 to 35 courses and naturally, the more courses, or the more rich or intense the flavor, the smaller the portion.

In almost all of the performances given as a requirement for a degree, I have made it a task to construct my programs in unconventional ways. While pursuing my undergraduate degree, I performed a program with works of Luciano Berio, Claude Debussy, and Toru Takemitsu. While at the time the term gastronomy was as foreign to me as the notion that I would one day get fat, in retrospect the program itself was unintentionally fulfilling my gustatory instincts. To borrow from Brillat-Savarin's now often cited *Aphorisms* from *The Physiology of Taste*: "From the most substantial dish to the lightest; this is the right order of eating." [Brillat-Savain, p. 4] This may sound antithetical to the traditional consumption of a multi-course meal, but it is important to note that 'most substantial' does not necessarily mean 'entrée' in gastronomic terms. Of course, this is the man who also said, on the same page no less that "Dessert without cheese is like a pretty woman with only one eye." At any rate, the 'menu of pieces' I presented was:

*Sequenza IV, for piano* by Luciano Berio  
 from *Préludes, Book II* by Claude Debussy  
     I. ... Brouillards (Mists)  
     IV. ... Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses  
*Piano Distance* by Toru Takemitsu  
     X. ... Canope  
     VI. ... 'General Lavine' – eccentric

The virtuosic and challenging *Sequenza IV* is the most substantial, and the rest of the pieces are much lighter. However, the choice to place Takemitsu's 1961 piece amidst the Debussy *Préludes* may confound the reader. Many aspects of *Piano Distance* make it a perfect balance. Like its companion preludes, it is similar in length at roughly three minutes long as well as sharing a coloristic and evocative nature. The decision to place it right after 'Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses' was the result of a fortunate coincidence: the very last sustained note in the Debussy is a delicately placed D-flat above middle C, whereas the note that begins *Piano Distance* is a D-flat just one octave higher. This gave me a reason to continue onto the Takemitsu without pause, as a sort of appendix to the preceding piece. It can be described as the subtle infusion of an exotic flavor within a very familiar dish.

While this retrospective is amusing to reflect on, it does not necessarily convey an active application of gastronomic principles, whereas a more recent program constructed with the help of Professor Aleck Karis had a more purposeful gustatory motive. The program was assembled as follows:



|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Beethoven    | Sonata No. 13 in E-flat, Op. 27/1            |
| George Crumb | <i>Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979</i> |

## Intermission

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| D. Scarlatti | Sonata in g minor, K54/L241, Fuga, <i>moderato</i> |
| S. Sciarrino | Notturmo No. 3, non troppo lento                   |
| D. Scarlatti | Sonata in C Major, K132/L457, Cantabile            |
| S. Sciarrino | Duo Notturmi Crudeli: I, Senza tempo e scandito    |
| D. Scarlatti | Sonata in d minor, K141, Allegro                   |
| S. Sciarrino | Duo Notturmi Crudeli: II, Furia, metallo           |

The Beethoven opened in familiar sonic territory, and the Crumb's almost overwhelmingly fragrant mini-movements acted as segue to the unfamiliar world of Sciarrino. In the last half of the program, all six pieces are meant to be 'movements' of a larger whole, relating it in structure to the two preceding works. The decision to order them as presented was three-fold. First, I wanted to give the listener a 'time-warp' sensation between pieces, jumping four centuries backwards and forwards. The desired effect was to subvert the listener's expectation every few minutes. This was also partly social commentary on the fact that we live in a time of short attention spans. Watching cats play the piano on YouTube is a wonderful use of spare time. Where were we? Oh yes, secondly, the order of the pieces was intended to convey an overarching dramatic structure, with the most dynamic pieces towards the end. Lastly, to quote from the program notes written for the occasion:

My decision to pair Sciarrino with the Sonatas of Scarlatti might seem odd. The differences between the music of these two Italian composers are obvious at the superficial level; separated by 400 years, there should be no surprise there. However, there is an elegance of composition, focus of intent, and style of narrative that I believe both composers share – a sort of musical heredity. My hope is that the listener will be shocked not only by their differences, but also by their similarities.

In molecular gastronomy, chefs have learned that while tradition and eating habits tell us what ingredients taste good (or not) what has opened up the doors for entirely new exciting dishes is the notion that ingredients could also be paired based on many other factors. The chemical composition and acidity levels are balanced in order to produce the most delicious and interesting effect. This has made way for strange but incredibly delicious combinations like egg and bacon ice cream. The combination works because the fattiness of the cream is very similar to bacon fat. While the thought of the two can elicit a feeling of disgust, the actual experience of tasting it is unexpectedly delectable. It is this microscopic correlation that I aimed to exploit in the pairing of the Sciarrino and Scarlatti works.

Sciarrino's distinct sound-worlds have an almost anti-musical bent, preferring to exhibit some alien phenomenon rather than convey a narrative. The Scarlatti pieces are wonderful examples of Italian baroque style – antithetical to the music of Sciarrino. What *are* the “covalent bonds” that tie these works together? Sciarrino's music is often credited (and occasionally derided) as being *gestural* – meaning that the larger motion of the phrases and musical sentences take precedent and sometimes overshadow the precision of the “small notes.” We see this in Scarlatti to a certain extent, no I don't think “lesser notes don't lose their importance in his Sonatas. Contrasting it to his German contemporaries, whose music is more structuralized in nature, Scarlatti seems to be more interested in making rhetorical sweeping statements, especially evident in the somber middle section of the Sonata in C Major, K132/L457. The Sonata in g minor, K54/L241, *Fuga*, contrasted with that of Bach's

Fugues does not share the same structural rigidity but has a narrative style that Bach does not embrace. Sciarrino's Notturmi have a similar rhetorical quality. The pieces selected between the two composers also feature a similar use of repetition where a certain level of expectation is created for long periods of time only to be subverted in extreme ways.

Another prominent similarity between the two Italian composers is the treatment of pathos. When listening to Sciarrino one can't help but think his *modus operandi* is to manipulate your emotional state, a quality that some cheer but for which he is oft disparaged. The Duo Notturmi *Crudeli* exist in a perpetual state of rage, yet they both manage to end on musical material that is antithetical to everything that came before. The first characterized by an incessant screeching in the high register of the piano ends in a placid state. While not quite this dramatic Scarlatti achieves the successful control of emotion in other ways. In Sonata in d minor, K141 he is able to maintain excitement throughout using well placed rests, far-reaching harmonic progressions (in the development section, for instance), and the steady building and release of tension. It was the accumulation of tension in this piece that led me to believe it would make sense to allow the final Sciarrino Notturmo to begin just moments before the Sonata was finished, to achieve a "spilling-over" of energy to the next piece and heighten the climax of the recital as a whole.

So are these the threads that tie the two composers together? They certainly are part of the tapestry of ideas that could be valid, but it was the careful selection, re-ordering, and conceptualizing the material I was working with that ultimately made this conglomeration of pieces a success.

While there may be plenty to do in the selection and ordering of pieces, there are still more parameters we can toy around with. One of the most interesting aspects of molecular gastronomy is the playfulness chefs began introducing in the representation and experience of food. It could be interesting, if not just for fun, to toy with the conventions of the concert experience in general. In the culinary world, there are many examples of successful novelties that turn the traditional dining experience on its head. The restaurant Opaque—Dining in the Dark with locations in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego is a critically acclaimed dining experience that only employs blind servers while guests sit in a pitch black dining room. While the notion of experimentation with the concert experience is nothing new, perhaps the food industry could provide some interesting solutions. We could create a sort of sonic museum in the dark where guests are taken by hand in a space that is pitch black by ushers wearing night vision goggles. As they traverse through this space musicians at different stations play improvised or written music, or even creepily following guests with percussion instruments.

The analogous relationship between a menu of food and a printed program can be taken even further. What if an ensemble were to prepare many works presented in the program as menu items that the audience would have to vote on as a starter, soup, salad, entrée, etc.? This idea is not the most intellectually satisfying, but it adds an element of humor and lightheartedness that new music concerts tend to lack. Instead of lengthy program notes, each piece could be described as if it were a dish, highlighting the textures, aromas, and the like.

There are also interesting accounts of the mixing of the consumer's expectation with dishes made to look very familiar, but made of entirely different ingredients. For instance, a dish that looks like a perfect fried egg, sunny-side up. The yolk itself even oozes like one would expect. Except that when you take a bite, you taste carrot juice and maple syrup in the yolk, and coconut and cardamom in the white – a culinary *trompe l'oeil*. This dish made by chef Wylie Dufresne's New York restaurant WD-50 is part of an 11-course tasting menu. His restaurant has garnered fame for this subversion of expectation. Would it be too strange to imagine a violinist 'air bowing' a piece that a hidden trombone is actually performing?

This is an idea that may lend itself well to music. Consider this as half of a program:

Maurice Ravel - *Gaspard de la Nuit*  
 I. Ondine  
 II. Le Gibet  
 III. Scarbo  
 Salvatore Sciarrino – *de la nuit*

You would be right to think that the later piece is somehow related to Ravel's famously virtuosic triptych *Gaspard de la Nuit*. In fact, Sciarrino's *de la nuit* is literally made from fragments of *Gaspard* that have been re-arranged in a sort of psychotic collage within a cloudy soup of other material that has its origins in his first Sonata for piano. This short work has all the fireworks of *Gaspard*, quoting passages from *Ondine* and *Scarbo*. The effect of hearing *de la nuit* is incredibly striking for those familiar with *Gaspard* – it is like a dream where the events of an unpleasant day get reprocessed in a jumbled, incoherent and frightening manner.

This pairing is an obvious one. I would imagine that any pianist who comes across this piece isn't tempted by this idea. It's a perfect example of the redistribution of familiar ingredients in a fresh and innovative manner. Like in molecular gastronomy the components of *Gaspard* are removed out of the context in which they are familiar, given different dramatic roles within the framework of a new concept using different techniques, an extra ingredient to hold things together and voila! The most ingenious idea of Sciarrino's was to end the piece with the quiet end of *Scarbo*, the last movement, which is concatenated with the famous right hand pattern that begins the opening of *Ondine*. It is the musical equivalent of getting tickled. What was originally a macabre work of music is now one that leaves you with a smile – a work of humor. This level of playfulness echoes that of the chefs behind the *trompe l'oeil* of the egg that isn't an egg – the familiar is reprocessed as something new that gives you a different experience.

All these comparisons are interesting, but the real underlying issue that is more difficult to address is in the actual science of new food preparation. Even the process is put under a microscope. What are the ingredients to the perfect accompaniment to a lobster fricassé? According to Hervé This melt 100g glucose and 20g tartaric acid in 20cl of water. Add 2 g or polyphenol. Boil and add sodium chloride and piperine. Bind the sauce with amylose. Take off the heat and stir in 50g of triacylglycerol. There is a rigor in the preparation of this sauce that might be interesting to apply in terms of sound. Our Black Box Theatre at UC San Diego is highly lauded as a technological marvel – and while I love the artificial reverb effects of the room sometimes I feel like that's all we ever use it for. I don't claim to have any

technical knowledge or even know of the limits of the theatre, but I've heard discussions revolving around the ability to localize certain sounds to specific areas of the hall that would be less audible if not entirely inaudible elsewhere in the hall. The idea itself is temptingly sinister – imagine if we were able to carefully simulate effects of auditory hallucinations and guests are invited to move around the space; perhaps apply a sort of abstract narrative to the experience where one part of the room guests are startled by a sound that nobody else can hear. I also envision the decibel levels in each area to be controlled in such a manner that the experience can be “perfected” to a certain degree.

At this point the possibilities really are endless, but I'm a firm believer that we in the industry need to make these leaps; make it marketable, likeable, and economically sustainable to generate new public interest in music. Concerts like this would be easily appealing to a younger generation who want something new and fresh that still appeals to their sophisticated tastes. I'm not one to think that younger people can only accommodate 3 minute ditties in their truncated attention spans – I just think that they need things to be re-branded, re-packaged in a way that doesn't appear to be flat, traditional and boring. While molecular gastronomy and its products have been a big hit internationally and with a wide variety of age ranges, the buzz was proliferated by middle-income people in their 20's and 30's that love food – people who can't afford to go to elBulli. I would argue that these same people want more from musical experiences – something to be excited about; something to fill the blogosphere.

## CHAPTER 4 – LOVE AS A KEY INGREDIENT

... steak and French fries can be interpreted in quite a number of ways. The fries can be more or less thick, more or less regular, more or less crispy, and so on. In good cooking, everything is thought out in advance. Nothing should be left to chance. Steak and fries also raise the question of love: How should these two elements be presented so that the diner sees at a glance that someone has taken trouble on her account – that she is loved? Can we be satisfied with haphazardly throwing the fries on a plate, or are we better advised to give some thought to their arrangement? [This, p. 72]

In This's book *Building a Meal* he often draws on of the notion of *love*. The mentioning of love is peppered so much throughout the book that one might say he is rather obsessed with the idea. Although one might think it strange of a scientist to rely on such an emotional aspect to cooking, as a scientist he has picked up on a simple observation about it: The mere act of preparing a meal for close friends or family involves a great deal of genuine love. Moreover, when preparing a meal without this emotional element, the result tends to leave more to be desired – and the guests will know as well. While admittedly an impossible topic to discuss in this context, I can't help but wonder if an adequately arranged program itself doesn't call for this need to be loved. If the performer doesn't love the work, and the program, how could the guests possibly feel the same way?

The performance I mentioned earlier that lasted four hours is an example of a program that lacks this fundamental care for the experience of the guest. This is not to say that the work of someone like La Monte Young would fall under this same category. From a consumer's point of view one might as that attending a work of Young's would be akin to a large, but occasional feast, say, Thanksgiving in the USA;



delicious, lengthy, but certainly not to be experienced regularly. Ultimately, this is Hervé This' point: no matter one's methodology, no matter one's artistic medium there ought to be an element of love for the experience of those who receive it. Again, taking a consumer's perspective it would be hard to think someone would want to experience a concert where his or her aesthetic nourishment wasn't carefully considered.

Interestingly, we are in a time where some performers seek out to discomfort their guests – with some over-amplifying their instruments so as to induce long-lasting ringing in the ears and even plans of so-called “vomit operas” there is a great need to emphasize the ethics of musical performance. The food industry is notoriously finicky with regards to regulations. In California, the grading of cleanliness of restaurants are some of the first things one sees besides the OPEN sign. Most people will never set foot inside of an establishment that didn't have the highest “A” rating proudly displayed. I'm not advocating for such a system for concert halls. That would be ridiculous. Luckily, besides the rare examples mentioned earlier music doesn't carry with it medical risks.

At any rate, as a musician I have been inspired and awestruck by many performances of many varieties – to be on a stage and be able to replicate that same experience for guests of my performances is always a major goal. Performers have an innate desire to please, and to care for your listeners is in my estimation foundational to the art.

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

Ultimately, a great chef is the ultimate connoisseur of taste. Subsequently performers ought to be great listeners. Chefs wouldn't dare serve a dish that they themselves have not tried, as someone in charge of programming and performing a concert should be just as willing to sit through their own concert. Perhaps it is just this shift in thinking that is necessary. If we have empathy for the listener and for their experience, maybe we can create more positive experiences. There may be a greater issue to address, still.

Every now and then I am one of millions of Americans guilty of pulling up to a drive-thru at McDonald's. My favorite time is in the morning, when I am comforted with what is in my estimation the most delicious, crispy hash browns known to mankind. Not even the skilled preparation of potatoes by Anthony Bourdain could assuage my need for McDonald's breakfast every now and then. It's widely understood that this food is literally engineered to taste incredibly delicious to us humans. The comparison between fast food and popular music as it relates to our consumption of it is easy to make here. I can't help but wonder if somehow the engineers of the taste of fast food also collaborate with Justin Beiber's producer.

I would like to avoid placing values on different types of music, but there is something fascinating about the consumption of food and entertainment in America: While a lot of it *is* mass produced to the point of being tyrannical in our focus and marketing of specific products, whether it be food or music, the fact remains that people still have eclectic tastes in all areas of their lives. It is difficult to imagine a

world where contemporary western music is the most widely attended form of music, but people generally in their 20's and older seem to seek out niches of the musical spectrum. In the past month I've met an economist who seeks out underground dub-step scenes in Southern California, a local business owner who frequents the highly acclaimed Low-End Theory event in Los Angeles that premieres what could only be described as avant-garde hip-hop music every Wednesday night, and a group of twenty-somethings who would stop at nothing than to experience a Portishead concert.

I may have to concede that the type of new classical music I am so fond of is as popular as it needs to be. In the contemporary musical landscape, the music of Xenakis, Feldman, et al is, after all just a niche – just as the concoctions of molecular gastronomy really only appeal to a certain affluent and sufficiently cultured segment of the society. It is well known that the sounds created by great composers many years later end up mainstream, as is the case with Stockhausen's work with electronics – those quirky sounds in his early work are the bedrock of the even the most mundane productions of popular music. If it isn't too much of a clumsy analogy from an entirely different field of art and quoting from an embarrassingly mainstream work of semi-fiction: In the book "The Devil Wears Prada" there is a moment where the young, naïve protagonist faces the ire of her powerful and ruthless boss, Miranda, who is credited with being the precipice for every trend in fashion. Responding to her allegedly smug attitude towards fashion she growls:

You see that droopy sweater you're wearing? That blue was on a dress Cameron Diaz wore on the cover of Runway – shredded chiffon by James Holt. The same blue quickly appeared in eight other designers' collections and eventually made its way to the secondary designers, the department store labels, and then to some lovely Gap Outlet, where you no doubt found it. That color is worth millions of dollars and many jobs. Your superior attitude is not acceptable at this magazine. In this industry. Or in my presence.

While the intricate hierarchies of the fashion, culinary, and music industries differ greatly, one can't help but make these top-down comparisons of how material is passed around, used and proliferated. Are the composers and performers of contemporary music serving a similarly unrecognized role? Perhaps that is a question I need to wrestle with – am I comfortable being at the bleeding edge of an art while going unnoticed in the mainstream? At any rate, while still adorning the label of “student” of my craft it may behoove me to continue the experiments and deal with my role in the industry when that time comes.

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