

NENAD SAVIĆ

LECTURE RECITAL:

BRYAN JOHANSON'S
13 WAYS OF LOOKING AT 12 STRINGS

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SCHOOL OF MUSIC
ORGAN HALL
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COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

Bryan Johanson is a composer, guitarist, professor of music, and the department chair at Portland State University. Born in 1951 in Portland, Oregon, Johanson has been praised for celebrating the unique taste and motifs of his native Portland in his compositions. As a member of Oregon Guitar Quartet, Johanson further conveys the textures of the vast American canon and Pacific Northwest by including his own arrangements and transcriptions of traditional folk tunes, ballads, drinking songs, bluegrass, and blues in the ensemble's repertoire. He is also a member of Third Angle New Music Ensemble, which focuses on performing contemporary music from all over the World. Johanson is the founder of the guitar department at Portland State University and its Classical Guitar Recital Series. In 1991, he established the annual Portland Guitar Festival, which has become internationally recognized.

Johanson studied composition with Charles Jones and William Bolcom and his guitar mentors include Christopher Parkening and Alirio Diaz, among others. A prolific recording artist and composer, Johanson has won national and international prizes and awards from institutions such as Aspen Music Festival, UCLA, The Kennedy Center, Esztergom International Guitar Festival, and others.

As a guitarist and composer, Johanson is instantly recognized by his unique, yet very eclectic blend of influences. His inspiration and motifs have strong roots in his native Pacific Northwest milieu, and range from ancient mythology through Bach and Weiss to Jimmy Hendrix, Frank Zappa, and James Brown.

INTRODUCTION

13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings is an imaginative and inventive exploration into sonic possibilities for two guitars. Johanson created this piece to capture his wonderful mixture of capricious eclecticism bringing together as many influences, techniques, and sound effects as possible. According to the composer:

I wrote this piece that will just kick your ass it's so cool. It's wacky, but the entertainment value is very high. It just does everything-- it's like the world of the guitar. When I wrote it, I didn't set out to write a long piece. I just had the goal that I wanted to incorporate everything I love about two guitars into one piece. I wanted to take the two guitars and look at them from every conceivable angle that I could imagine. I really wanted to explore this combination of two instruments and what they can do.

JAMMUS VULGARIS

The "big bang" is reserved for "Jammus Vulgaris," which is the final movement of Part III, and the entire composition. It incorporates the twelve-bar blues progression, improvisation, rhythmic propulsion, powerful chords, unusual harmonics, and original sound effects. It is the longest of the movements, with a lengthy coda.

Ex. "Jammus Vulgaris" vibrato harmonics and "cricket chirps," mm. 1-15.

Jammus Vulgaris

The musical score for "Jammus Vulgaris" is written for two guitars (Gt. 1 and Gt. 2) in 2/4 time. The tempo is marked "Allegretto giocoso" with a metronome marking of 120-126. The score includes several performance instructions: "(sempre) molto vibrato" in the first measure, "nat. harm." (natural harmonics) in measure 7, and "cricket chirp" in measure 8. The score is divided into three systems, each with two staves. The first system covers measures 1-6, the second system covers measures 7-11, and the third system covers measures 12-15. The music features a mix of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, with dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *f*.

CONCLUSION

From my performance perspective, *13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings* is a wonderfully entertaining and challenging work. It showcases Johanson's eclectic and inventive approach to composing. This exciting piece appeals to music professionals and amateurs alike. Besides being a work of high artistic merit, *13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings* also plays an important role as a means to popularize classical guitar music. This composition connects with contemporary audience, while maintaining its responsibility to preserve and convey artistic and classical values.

FUGUETUDE

“Fuguetude” requires a high level of virtuosity. The first movement of Part III is a canon, and this is also a fugue. Johanson is using more contrapuntal tools. Whereas imitation exists in other movements, in this movement it is a formalized fugue. It is also an etude:

“I want it to be just smoking. It’s unrelenting. It’s a *perpetuum mobile*. It’s always moving, even when it goes to major in the more lyrical part.”

Fuguetude

Vivace assai $\text{♩} = 176-184$

1. Gt. 2.

7

1. Gt. 2.

14

1. Gt. 2.

19

1. Gt. 2.

25

1. Gt. 2.

13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings consists of thirteen movements grouped into three main parts: *Cool Cubed*, *Pentadigitopia*, and *Cube Squared*. Eleven movements, out of thirteen, are for two guitars. The two remaining movements are for solo guitar, which divide the work into three main sections.

PART I: COOL CUBED

TOCCATAESQUE

13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings opens with “Toccataesque”. This *allegro con fuoco* movement entertains a duel-like exchange between the two guitars. The music dialogue is rich with syncopation and a constant, fast rhythmic drive. It features fast-moving virtuosic passages and brilliant licks

Toccataesque

Allegro con fuoco $\text{♩} = 112-120$

1. Gt. 2.

BAD EGG CAFE

“Bad Egg Cafe” is an example of Johanson’s use of encoded motifs in his compositional process. The title is a sequence of pitches in the melody: B,A,D,E,G,G,C,A,F,E, which recur throughout the entire movement.

Bad Egg Cafe

Lento sostenuto ($\text{♩} = 64$)

mf mp

MR. OWL ATE MY METAL WORM

“Mr. Owl Ate My Metal Worm” is a semantic as well as musical palindrome. In measure 47 the fulcrum figure at the center of the movement is where the music turns on itself.

Musical score for "Mr. Owl Ate My Metal Worm" for guitar. The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo of 64-68. It consists of two systems. The first system starts at measure 42 and ends at measure 46. The second system starts at measure 47 and ends at measure 51. A fulcrum figure is indicated by a downward arrow above measure 47. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *mp*, and *p*.

LE PETIT GROOVE ROYALE

“Le Petit Groove Royale” relies on J.S.Bach’s *Thema Regium* from *The Musical Offering*. The original theme is characterized by intervallic leaps followed by a chromatic descent and is encrypted in this movement.

Le Petit Groove Royale

Musical score for "Le Petit Groove Royale" for guitar. The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo of 48-52. It consists of two systems. The first system starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 8. The second system starts at measure 9 and ends at measure 16. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *mf*, *mp*, and *p intensivo*.

Ex. “Give the Strummer Some” excerpt from the improvisation-like introduction.

Musical score for "Give the Strummer Some" for guitar. The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo of 64-68. It consists of two systems. The first system starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 4. The second system starts at measure 5 and ends at measure 8. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp* and *f*, and performance instructions such as *Sostenuto*, *sempre ritmico*, *solo, ad libitum, poco più mosso, sempre intensivo*, *accel.*, *rit.*, and *a tempo*.

The second part of the movement is dominated by powerful strums and exciting rhythmic patterns.

Ex. “Give the Strummer Some” excerpt from strumming patterns enforced with snap pizzicatos, mm. 46-52.

Musical score for "Give the Strummer Some" for guitar. The score is in 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system starts at measure 42 and ends at measure 45. The second system starts at measure 46 and ends at measure 52. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *mf*.

EGAD!

“EGAD!” is a backward reference to the “Bad Egg Cafe.” The title contains four pitches that are introduced first as harmonics and then as a short thematic material. “EGAD!” is a formalized and developed canon. The two guitar parts are chasing each other throughout.

Ex. EGAD!

Allegriissimo $\text{♩} = 124-128$

EGAD!

1. 2. Gt.

harv. 12

harv. 7

div.

mp

GIVE THE STRUMMER SOME

“Give the Strummer Some” begins with a fairly extended improvisatory introduction. It exploits the idea of a strict timekeeper juxtaposed with the other expressive and rhythmically-free player. Guitar 2 keeps the steady harmonic and rhythmic pace utilizing slow and repetitive chords:

Extensive glissandos are combined with sharp staccatos in both guitars. String surface glissandos enforced with string percussion take over and create a remarkable movement finale.

100

1. 2. Gt.

p

f

sim.

dim.

106

1. 2. Gt.

string surface gliss.

pp

PART II: PENTADIGITOPIA

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE FLY

Part II begins with “A Philosopher’s Song,” the first movement of a miniature two-movement suite entitled *The Philosopher and the Fly*. The other movement is called “From the Dairy of a Fly,” and as movement number nine, it concludes *Pentadigitopia*.

Ex. “A Philosopher’s Song” the ending line.

mf

4x

riten.

p

pp

Ex. "From the Dairy of a Fly" opening motive, mm. 1-4.

From the Diary of a Fly

Allegro agitato $\text{♩} = 120$

Ex. "From the Dairy of a Fly" closing phrase, final line.

Ex. "From the Dairy of a Fly" closing phrase, final line.

STRINGS ETOUFFE

Between the two movements for solo guitar, we have the three little games of *Pentadigitopia*. The first one, "Strings Etouffee", uses the mute (sordino). It's largely about the texture, in tandem, mostly playing together.

SLIDE RULE

"Slide Rule" is the second game in *Pentadigitopia*. When it is performed, it looks like two scratch artists at turntables are on the stage. The guitar is to be held in the performer's lap, strings facing upward.

Ex. "Slide Rule" three-line notation, mm. 1-4.

Allegro giocoso $\text{♩} = 108$

STEEL PANS

"Steel Pans" is the third game. It calls for a metal piece woven through the strings. This movement imitates the Jamaican steel drum.

Steel Pans

Both guitars should be equipped with a metal mute woven through the strings as close to the bridge as possible. (See diagram) The mute can be made from a straightened-out large metal paper clip.

Allegro spiritoso $\text{♩} = 112$

PART III: CUBE SQUARED

The last section, *Cube Squared*, blends all of the different compositional approaches from the previous movements. Improvisations, games and puzzles, and new and exciting techniques are gathered into these four movements, which are a little more engaged. These are the longer movements where all of the music material that comes up to the last movement sets up the last movement and presents it all together. The weight of the composition is felt at the end rather than in the beginning.