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Analysis of the Use of Silence in Frédéric Devreese's *Passage à 5, Mascarade, Danse de l'Auberge and Valse Sacrée*

ABSTRACT

Background

Frédéric Devreese (1929–) is a prominent Belgian classical and film composer who has written over 160 compositions and 20 film scores. In this paper, we approach the analysis of four of his compositions, including one film score cue, based on the presence and absence of silence. Currently, there are not many modern musicological analysis from the silence perspective, perhaps, because some of the most influential analytical methods and theories developed during the past century did not address directly the silence phenomenon (e.g. Schenkerian analysis, Set-Theoretical analysis). Therefore, a theoretical framework is built upon the revision of rather unpopular and segregated theories about silence functions and classifications developed throughout the 20th Century.

One of the first important advancements in the field was made by Braman (1956) with a silence analysis of over 8,000 movements from the Baroque, Classical and Romantic eras. Braman's analytical methods were referenced and expanded by Dougherty (1979) in his study about 'The Significance of Silence in the String Quartets of Beethoven'. A more aesthetical approach was addressed by Lissa (1964), which was recently expanded in a comparative study by Wang (2013). On the other hand, Clifton (1976) extended the concept of silence beyond its temporal framework, defining 'silences in registral space' and 'silences in motion'. Alepin (2002), in her tensional analytical method for contemporary music, contrasted Clifton's model against Murray Schafer's writings. In this direction, a more perceptive approach was taken by Margulis (2007), with a comparison of scores and recordings.

Aims and repertoire studied

The main goal of this paper is to analyze the use of silence in four selected compositions by Frédéric Devreese: 'Passage à 5: for violin, guitar, accordion, piano and contrabass' (2015, 2002), the third movement of 'Mascarade pour piano' (2015, 1953), 'Valse sacrée: for symphonic orchestra' (2005, 1989), 'Danse de L'auberge' from André Delvaux's film 'Un Soir un train...' (1968). These scores were personally recommended by the composer himself as being relevant to silence analysis. Our subject of study will be limited to score-represented silence (mainly rests, but also, some phrase marks, staccatos, breath marks, etc.), specifically, the so-called 'total' silences excluding the 'partial' ones (Braman 1956, 1). Hence, we aim to reach a better understanding of the silence devices employed by Devreese, and, also, we intend to present an analytical method for studying musical silence.

Methods

We followed a three-step method. First, we examined closely the score and enumerated all silence instances, largely, rest-represented. When many silence occurrences happened together, we grouped them in clusters (see Fig. 1) indicating the number of rests and the average rest duration in seconds (s). For calculating the average duration, we considered the metronome mark, meter, and rest values. Second, we described and commented each silence or cluster instance using the terminology coined by the above-mentioned studies. In this step, we drew links between the silences and their context, stressing their position within a hierarchical structure. Third, we condensed graphically all silence instances in a barcode diagram using black stripes to display the presence of silence in a temporal x-axis respecting their time proportions (see Fig. 2).

Implications

'Passage à 5' is a theme with variations structured into 6 sections: Introduction-Theme, Variations 1, 2, 3, 4, and Finale. Altogether, it presents 156 absolute rests grouped in 12 clusters.

Cluster number (c.)	Measure numbers	No. of rests	Avg. rest duration (s)
1	74–82	19	0.17
2	86	1	0.27–1.09
3	87–111	44	0.11
4	160–168	5	0.85
5	174–181	2	1.23
6	208–211	3	0.86
7	253–259	4	0.68
8	260–263	1	3.39–5.03
9	307–335	63	0.12
10	380	1	0.83–3.43
11	488–501	3	1.64
12	525–540	10	0.18

Fig. 1. Clusters of silence in *Passage à 5*.

The rests from clusters 1, 3, 9, and 12, display primarily a rhythmic function, creating both symmetrical (c.9) and asymmetrical (c.1, 3, 12) separations. Considering the brief average rest duration and the overall dynamics (*f–ff*), we notice how the release tails fill almost completely these rests. Here, the rhythmic rests also sharpen the staccato articulation. Clusters 2, 8, and 10, were written with a flexible duration, because they are followed by an end-bar, c.8 has also a fermata sign, while c.10 is preceded by a fermata note. For our calculations, we presumed that the end-bar with or without a fermata sign, could add an extra measure of silence. These clusters and the last rests from c.4, 6 and 12 are end-rests, because of their conclusive structural function. The last two rests of the score can be also interpreted as a detached-ending. Clusters 4, 6 and 7 have a motivic function associated to an interrupted motif in the accordion that

culminates with a tutti chord (*ff* c.4 and 6, *pp* c.7). This motif follows a shrinking progression in eighth notes: 12, 6, 4, 1 (c.4, 7); and 12, 4, 1 (c.6). If we examine the rest durations, we see an irregular sequence: 6, 6, 2, 6, 11/19 (c.4, 7); and 8, 6, 5 (c.6). This ternary distribution (ABA), defines the start, middle and end of Variation n°2. The longest inner-rests are found in c. 5 and 11, where the rest interrupts a longer musical phrase (4–5 mm.). There is a contextual difference between both clusters though, c.5 has 2 silences (2 and 1 measures long, respectively) and uses only guitar and double bass (*p* crescendo to *f*); while c.7 has 3 symmetrical silences (2 measures long each) in tutti (*ff* in crescendo). The later constitutes the climax of the piece, because of its abruptness, insistence, and position.

The third movement of ‘Mascarade’ presents 40 absolute rests spread between 5 sections: theme, variations 1–3, and coda. The theme (mm. 1–40) has only 2 rests (mm. 8, 38): 0.25 and 0.75 s, respectively. These are, primarily, end-rest, likened to the breath marks of a phrase end, as the ones of mm. 40, 44, 61, 69 or 77. Variation 1 (mm. 41–77) has no ‘total’ rests, but only the abovementioned pauses. The 5 rests in Variation 2 (mm. 78–129) define an ABA form: A (mm. 78–9), B (mm. 113, 115–16, and 121), A (mm. 122–3). The first and the last silences (1.34 s each) have a motivic function, detaching and reiterating the head of an 8-measures phrase. The 3 inner rests of B (0.45, 0.45, and 0.91 s) are placed as a culmination of a rising passage, followed by the reprise of A. Variation 3 (mm. 130–181) is more complex: 29 rests grouped in 6 clusters. The first 12 rests (mm. 130–141) arrange in 3+4+5. Most of them play a rhythmic and motivic role, except for rests 3, 7 (interruptions for greater impact), 11 (anacrusis) and 12 (end-rest). The clusters 2 and 4 are identical (mm. 142–5, 162–6), 6 rests (0.23 s each) in 3+3. They continue the rhythmic function of the c.1 adding a new melodic line. Clusters 3 and 6 (mm. 157/161, 177/181) are also twins, 2 rests (0.23 s each) equivalent to m. 8. The long rest of m. 173 (0.91 s) is a variant of m. 153. This omission marks the climax of this variation. The coda (mm. 182–216) has 3 rests (excluding the final rest) with an augmenting duration: m. 207 (0.3 s), m. 211 (0.6 s), mm. 212–13 (1.32 s). The first is analogous to m. 177, while the second and third are detached-endings, deluding a false ending.

The score of ‘Danse de l’Auberge’ has only 3 rest-notated silences, in bars 8, 11 and 14, with a duration of 2.5, 1.88, and 1.25 seconds, respectively. In the film, these three get filled diegetically with footsteps in eighth notes. Similarly, in bars 1–6 we encounter 3 ‘silences’ filled with a resonance written for strings and electronic organ. If we combine all 6 silences, we obtain a shrinking silent progression (7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 quarter notes) that complements an expanding sounding material (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 8 quarter notes). Thus, an effect of interruption, acceleration and gradual thematic exposition is achieved.

In ‘Valse sacrée’, 4 rest-notated silences were found in bars 31–2, 163, 171–2, and 238. The first and the third are 1.67 s each, while the second and the fourth are 0.69 s each. An interesting effect of incomplete ending is achieved by finishing the composition with the same material that has been sounding before the first and third silences (bars 25–30, 165–170, 240–5). The second and the fourth rests act as the resolution of a climax, preceded by a rising section. However, due to a shorter duration, these rests are likely to get covered by the resonance of the *tutti*

chord. A non-rest-notated pause is found in the double bar that separates the introduction from the waltz, potentiated by a fermata sign (m. 24).

In Fig. 2. we represented a silence barcode diagram for all four compositions, allowing us to easily compare the rest position within the form with their measure numbers and conserving their time proportions based on the score metronome marks.

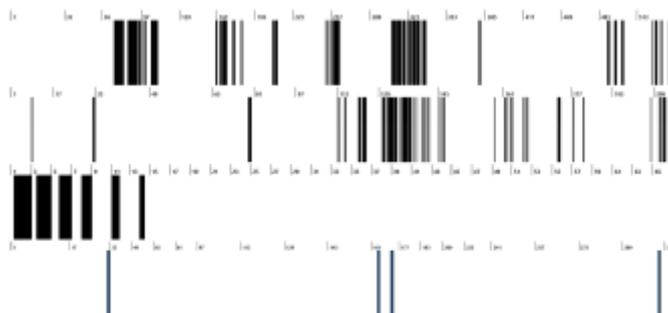


Fig. 2. Silence Barcode Diagram of Passage à 5, Mascarade, Danse de l’Auberge and Valse Sacrée (from top to bottom)

The analytical results have shown us a wide variety of types of silence in the music of Devreese. The first two pieces have more complex silences devices. Also, we saw the declining progression of ‘Danse de l’Auberge’ and the symmetry in ‘Valse Sacrée’. Thus, we are in an original and unique perspective about music and musical analysis, where silence speaks to us. It is hoped that the present study has opened new horizons for future silence-based musicological analysis.

Keywords

Silence, Rhythm, Contemporary Music, Film Music, Instrumental Music

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