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Star Burning Blue (2000) by Kelly Marie Murphy (b. 1964)

Star Burning Blue is a single-movement work that depicts the life cycle of a supergiant star. Completed in July 2000, Murphy provides the following description of what this piece intends to portray:

“Some supergiant stars are of a high luminosity and shine with a blue light which indicates their high temperature. The strong gravity of the massive star attracts more and more matter to it, giving it greater mass. This, in turn, magnifies the star’s gravitational influence, which increases the rate at which it can gather more matter. The bigger the blue star becomes, the brighter it shines, and the faster it burns its nuclear fuel, until the inevitable stellar explosion. Then the cycle begins again in the remnants of the supernova”

This piece starts with an explosion of fast passages that sweep up and down the entire piano range. Murphy exhibits crystalline color and dense texture in the first section, until the gesture diminishes, transitioning into the middle section. Soon after, the music intensifies as the tempo increases and the range becomes more extreme to the very end. The last notes to this work are the lowest and highest pitches of the piano range. Through the large use of repeated notes, sequences, and accents placed on various places of the beats while the meter frequently changes, Kelly Marie Murphy vividly depicts the fusion of chemical elements within this rare and short-lived star.

Ombres Op. 64 (1917) by Florent Schmitt (1870-1958)

As a second-class soldier stationed in Toul during World War I, Florent Schmitt composed *Ombres, Op. 64* to illuminate his reaction to the tragic events of the war. The first piece, *J'entends dans le lointain*, was completed at the pinnacle of the First World War in September 1917. Schmitt chose a quote from Lautréamont’s novel *Chants de Maldoror* (1869), and used it as an epigraph: “I hear in the distance drawn-out cries of the most poignant grief”. Lautréamont’s novel reveals the upheaval of humankind against itself and against its vicious brutality. Notated on three staves, the piece opens with a cry of despair, elicited by tremolos. The turmoil gradually recedes into an echo, where the

second theme, a lament full of sorrow, is introduced. Based broadly on the central motive from the beginning, the development section presents a third theme that quivers in ambivalence and fragility toward the chaos of the warfare.

Mauresque embodies Schmitt's recollections of his exploration in the Mediterranean countries. Unlike past recipients of the Prix de Rome, Schmitt decided to use the funding to travel to several countries, including Turkey and Morocco. *Mauresque* is a 15th century pantomime dance in which the performers wear North African attire. In its early stages, it appeared in two forms: as a solo dance, and as a couple or group dance in which dancers mime a sword fight. As the only piece in the set that has no literary basis, it serves as a charming interlude. A "nonchalant" first theme indolently emerges after a brief introduction, which leads to a somewhat slower, expressive central idea in 4/4 meter, followed by progressions of fifths that shine radiantly, and that sustain the serene character.

The third piece, *Cette ombre, mon image*, composed in 1916, is inspired by a Walt Whitman poem: "That shadow, my likeness, that goes to and fro, seeking a livelihood". After Debussy's *Images* (1907) and Ravel's *Miroirs* (1906), Schmitt echoes the characteristic Impressionistic theme of the reflected image. This introspective piece reflects on the choices that influence human destiny. Written predominantly on three staves, the spatial writing presents a questioning theme that steadily unfolds. A melancholic second theme arises, which leads to the appearance of a serene third theme that floats over a steady quavering accompaniment. In a sudden change of mood, the second theme reappears in an animated tempo. Florent Schmitt's solo piano works have been absent in the standard piano repertoire, and the examination of *Ombres*, *Op. 64* may contribute to the re-establishment of one of the most innovative French composers of his generation.

La Mandragore (1993) by Tristan Murail (b.1947)

La Mandragore, "the mandrake", is a Mediterranean plant that takes the shape of a human being, and is used in witchcraft for its magical powers. Murail provides the following description: "Under the gibbet grows the mandrake. At midnight, when the moon is full, we pick it, under the hanged man swinging..."

According to legend, the mandrake grows under the gibbet, where a hanged man hangs. Small pieces of the root of the mandrake are placed in a chalice of water and are exposed to the moonlight until the moon becomes full. The result is 'Moon Water', which is used in purification and lunar rituals.

This piece echoes Ravel's *Le Gibet* with regards to the notion of soundscape, harmonic colours, and the gibbet setting. The music develops like a spiral centred on timbre and spectral chords. As a student of Olivier Messiaen at Conservatoire de Paris, Tristan Murail began his journey composing spectral music by developing the Patchwork composition software, which is a computer system that analyzes the quality of timbre in acoustic music and artificial timbres. *La Mandragore* is a prime example of Murail's use

of sonographic representations and mathematical analyses of the sound spectra in order to inform his own compositional decisions.

Types (1924) by Pierre Octave Ferroud (1900 – 1936)

Ferroud's first solo piano composition, *Types*, is a set of satiric character sketches based on French literature works. The first piece, *Vieux Beau*, sets a scene from Molière's theatrical comedy, *L'École des Femmes* (1662). The title, meaning "old flirt", refers to an old man named Arnolphe who tries to seduce a young girl living in a nunnery, Agnès, in hopes of landing a marriage. Through the ironic use of tonal range and harmonies that correspond to each character, Ferroud depicts a carousel of the interaction between the old man and the young girl.

Bourgeoise de Qualité, the second piece, is based on Paul Jean Toulet's last novel, *La Jeune Fille Verte* (1920). Taking place in the province of Béarn, the story centres on education in the countryside. Through the frequent use of remote harmonic modulations and character changes in this waltz movement, Ferroud musically illustrates the image of a high-status woman decorated in perfumes and linen attire.

The last piece, *Businessman*, is also based on a story by Paul Jean Toulet, titled *Les Trois Impostures* (1922). The programmatic material is provided above the score and the English translation reads: "Money is a third hand". Written in contrapuntal texture, the music bustles in a whirlpool of themes in the absence of a key centre. The themes wind up and unfold with lucid fantasy. In the second exposition, the music leads to a great final stretto that concludes in a frantic hurry. In this set of three pieces, Ferroud displays his budding compositional style as he integrates Impressionist harmonies with Neoclassical rigor, creating a work both charming and vigorous, a rare achievement in the 1920's Paris scene.