

“Music is a medium that provides an open canvas for colour combinations”

It can be seen that music is indeed a medium that provides an open canvas for colour combinations, seen both in differing time periods – that of the last 25 years and from the 19th Century. This is evident within ‘Dawn Mantras’ by Ross Edwards, ‘Tokyo by Night’ by Nigel Westlake and ‘Sunken Cathedral’ by Debussy.

Due to the unusual combination of instrumentation within ‘Dawn Mantras’, this is able to accentuate the various tone colours of the different instruments. This is seen within the low continuous drone on a C upon the digeridoo, creating a sonorous and resonating timbre, similar to the bass/alto and tenor voices. A difference in timbre can be seen from both the Shakuhachi’s breathy and airy timbre compared to the Cor Anglais’ warmer tone as they both play the melodic line seen in figure one. As they imitate one another, a difference can be seen from their timbres as they both play the same melody. These instruments coupled with the glistening crotales and bright tone colour of the childrens choir who sing (figure 4) demonstrate a wide variety of colour combinations. This is especially seen in the repeated Section B in which the child soloist over the children’s choir is quite piercing due to the melodic line reaching a high C as seen in figure 7.

This is similarly seen in ‘Tokyo by Night’ as Westlake uses a full symphony orchestra with two string sections to demonstrate a canvas of broad tone colours. The wide variety can be seen from the first bar as the woodwind and high pitched strings play in unison (figure 2) demonstrating diversity through the bright string timbre and distinct metallic piercing flutes and airy oboe. As these instruments continue their motivic cell motif, the interjections of the brass instruments from figure 5, specifically the trumpets clashes with the other instruments due to its brash and brassy tone colours, creating a diverse range. Furthermore as the percussion (elaborate on tone) are added playing ostinato such as semiquavers on the snare drum, the dry brittle and sharp timbre coupled with the piercing glockenspiel contrast the instruments, allowing the listener to hear a large variety of tone colour combinations. *The harp with its glissandi always heralds the next new section, creating a sparkle and glistening effect. The lush blends of tones near the end of the work as a resolution of the frantic paced movement.*

This is also seen in the ‘Sunken Cathedral’ in which Debussy exploits the wide range of the piano in order to demonstrate a wide variety of tone colours. This is seen in the beginning of the of the piece within the LH pedal point (figure 6) which creates a resonating and low timbre before the RH playing figure three which contrasts the LH due to the gentle and misty tone, that establishes the 20th century atmosphere. As Debussy utilises 4 voices to interweaves with one another, coupled with figure 6 as a pedal point to figure 3, the lower and upper register contrast one another especially in the climatic section of the Sunken Cathedral in which Debussy utilises the very upper register of similar notes to figure three which becomes much more piercing due to the loud dynamic that it is supposed to be at, differing from the initial previous and low resonating LH. *Furthermore the use of the sustaining pedal creates the overtone that Debussy seeks to create with a ‘blurred’ image. The midrange of the piano, the colour becomes much more plaintive while the higher range is more bell like.*

Thus it can be seen that although from different time periods, music is a medium that provides an open canvas for tone colour combinations – within ‘Dawn Mantras’, ‘Tokyo by Night’ and ‘Sunken Cathedral’