

Program Note: Rounds for solo piano and string orchestra

Rounds for solo piano and string orchestra is inspired by the imagery and themes from T.S. Eliot's epic poem *Four Quartets*. Early in the first poem, *Burnt Norton*, we find these evocative lines:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, Neither
ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

Text © T.S. Eliot

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In addition to this inspiration, while working on the piece, I became fascinated by fractals (infinite patterns found in nature that are self-similar across different scales) and also delved into the work of contemporary biologist and philosopher Andreas Weber who writes about the interdependency of all beings. Weber explores how every living organism has a rhythm that interacts and impacts with all of the living things around it and results in a multitude of outcomes.

Like Eliot in *Four Quartets*, beginning to understand this interconnectedness requires that we slow down, listen, and observe both the effect *and* the opposite effect caused by every single action and moment. I've found this is an exercise that lends itself very naturally towards musical gestural possibilities that I explore in the work – action and reaction, dark and light, stagnant and swift.

Structurally, with these concepts in mind, I set the form of the work as a rondo, within a rondo, within a rondo. The five major sections are a rondo; section "A" is also a rondo in itself; and the cadenza – which is partially improvised by the soloist – breaks the pattern, yet, contains within it, the overall form of the work.

To help share some of this with the performers, I've included the following poetic performance note at the start of the score:

Inspired by the constancy, the rhythms, and duality of life, in order of relevance to form:
Rondine - AKA Swifts (like a sparrow) flying in circles patterns
Playing with opposites - dark/light; stagnant/swift
Fractals - infinite design

I am grateful to my friend Awadagin Pratt for his collaborative spirit and ingenuity in helping to usher my first work for solo piano into the world.

– Jessie Montgomery (February 2022)