THE MUSES OF BEDLAM

(a *cadavre exquis* in three parts)

for solo contrabass

by

Michael Hartt
Joseph Klein
John Mickel

May-September, 1991

PROGRAM NOTES

The idea for the work *The Muses of Bedlam* came from bassist/composer Michael Hartt, who challenged his colleagues John Mickel and Joseph Klein to participate in the joint composition of a three-movement work for solo contrabass. The tenet was simple: each of the three composers would begin a movement, compose three measures, then send the fragment along to the next composer, who would in turn add three measures and send it to the third composer, etc. (It should be noted that in the final copy of the work, several of the original measures have been divided into smaller units to facilitate the work's performance.) This process was allowed to continue until all three composers had deemed the work finished (in this case, after completing four cycles over a period of approximately five months). The result of such a process is called a *cadavre exquis* ("exquisite corpse"), a term coined by the dada and surrealist artists who first applied this technique to poetry and drawing. In the present work, the first movement was begun by Mickel, the second by Klein, and the third by Hartt. Though each composer's personality manifests itself throughout the each movement, the resulting work is surprisingly organic, perhaps because of the dialectic nature of the materials themselves.

The Muses of Bedlam was first performed by Michael Hartt at Indiana University on February 23, 1992.

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PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Accidentals apply only to the pitches which they immediately precede, with the exception of repeated pitches (in which case they apply to the entire grouping).
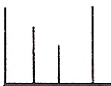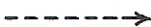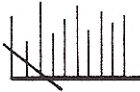
The whistling at the end of the first movement and the vocal part in the second movement (both of which are notated at sounding pitch) are to be executed as subtly as possible, the effect being that the sound is emanating from the bass itself. The vocal part should lie reasonably well within either a male or female player's vocal range, and must be sung as written; however, if any vocal part lies beyond the range of the performer, it is to be omitted rather than sung in octave transposition.

The stage set-up consists of a single music stand, bass stool (if required), and a tray (to the player's left), upon which is placed a police whistle, dowel, cow toy (child's toy which makes a "moo" sound when inverted), and various other accessories of the player's choosing. While not directly specified in the piece, the purpose of placing these latter miscellaneous items on the tray is twofold: in the first place, their presence leads the audience to believe that this wide array of items will be used in the piece, thus piquing their curiosity; second (and most important), they add to the noise made when the accessory tray is "accidentally" knocked off the stage in the third movement. For these reasons, the player should choose items which are both unusual in appearance and which will create a distinct noise when dropped.

Lighting for the performance is to be minimal, consisting simply of one or two lamps attached to the music stand. With this lighting, the audience should be able to see only a portion of the player and his/her instrument, as well as the entire contents of the accessory tray (which must be placed within the lighted area). When the music stand is knocked off of the stage in the third movement, the lights will, of course, go with it; thus, the player will be left in darkness at the work's conclusion.

Because of the theatrical nature of the third movement, the music is arranged in such a way as to allow for the appropriate page turns (as specified in the part). Several loose sheets of paper (of the same dimensions as the actual music) are to be inserted in the part between pages 11 and 12; these are to be tossed over the shoulder as indicated, giving the impression that the player is flipping through several pages of music.

SYMBOLS

c.l.   col legno (battuto)

s.p.   sul ponticello

s.t.   sul tasto

s.p.   *s.t.*   continuous change between sul
ponticello and sul tasto
("circular bowing")

– – – – – →   gradual change from one mode of play
to another

overpressure: increase pressure
and decrease speed of bow until
sound breaks, resulting in
crunch/scratch (down-bow)

overpressure (up-bow)

snap pizzicato

c.l.   play col legno (battuto) on the
tailpiece

play between the bridge and the
tailpiece

rib   strike rib with knuckles
(as indicated)

↑   highest pitch possible

indeterminate pitches

accelerando

as fast as possible

continue in the same
manner

∅   senza misura

relatively short fermata

relatively long fermata

THE MUSES OF BEDLAM

solo contrabass

Michael Hartt
Joseph Klein
John Mickel
(1991)

I

* subtly dovetail bass harmonic into whistled tone, matching pitch, dynamics, and timbre as closely as possible; freeze in place with bow still on string while continuing to whistle.
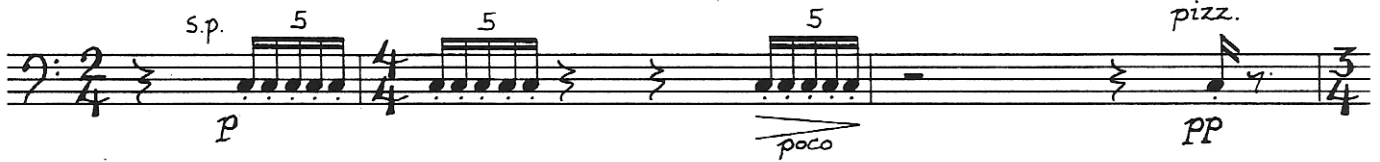
II

III

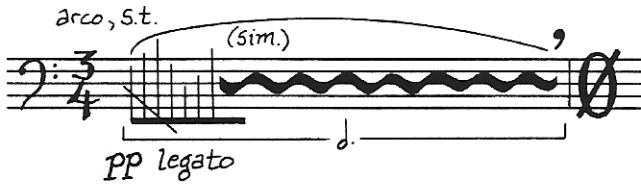SCRATCH FOREHEAD,
TURN PAGE...

(14)

ADJUST STAND, ROSIN BOW, TIGHTEN BOW HAIR, STRETCH, SCRATCH CHIN
(look confused/pensive and most of all <u>VERY</u> <u>CONCERNED</u>)

15

S.p.

5   5   5

pizz.

p   poco   pp

18

arco, S.t.

(sim.)
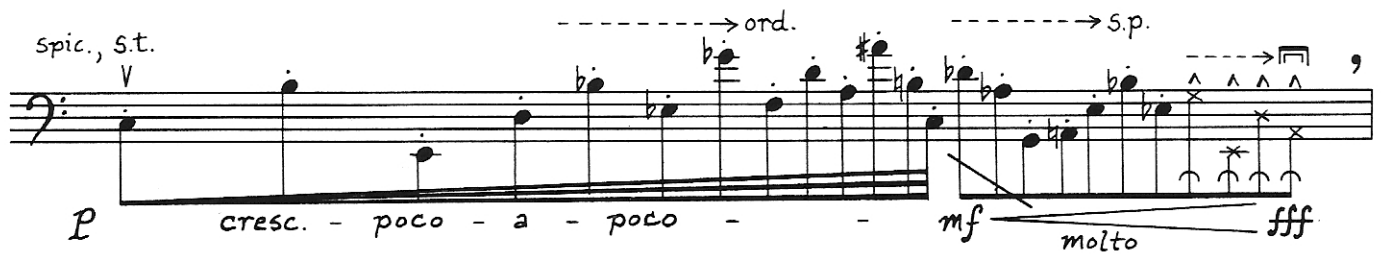
DELIBERATELY TURN PAGE...

pp legato

(19) sigh noticeably, then continue:

STOP SHORT, becoming frustrated; TURN PAGE...

➡️ frantically flip through the following loose pages, throwing them disgustedly over the shoulder onto the floor (as though searching for a "more reasonable" part); continue on page 12: ➡️

RESUME PLAYING HERE: take police whistle from accessory tray and place in mouth; then continue:

POLICE WHISTLE

20

CB

return police whistle to
accessory tray; take
cow toy and turn it over:

FREEZE IN PLACE

FREEZE IN PLACE

(29)

take dowel from accessory tray, very briefly
rattle it between strings II and III.

(31) awkwardly return dowel to accessory tray; stretching to reach,
"accidentally" tip tray over, causing it to fall off the edge of the stage;

EXIT STAGE

lunging to catch the tray, "accidentally" knock music stand
off the stage as well.