

Elastic Band

Program Note by the Composer

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Elastic Band is scored for clarinet, string quartet and one percussionist (marimba, vibes, three toms, pedal bass drum, three suspended cymbals, crotales, and woodblock).

Elastic Band was conceived as a fun, divertimento-like work. The title refers to the elastic nature of the work which happily straddles the Classical, 20th Century, and Pop music worlds. It is also a pun as much of the ensemble writing is more reminiscent of a jazz “little big band” than of a traditional chamber ensemble. The scoring for clarinet and string quartet has classical resonances. But, add percussion to the mix and the work takes on a decidedly jazzy-rock tinge: the Mozart Quintet... with a *twist*, if you will.

The idea was for all three music worlds to co-exist and co-mingle within the piece. Some elements are clearly “Classical,” or, rather Neoclassical: the overall three-movement design (a modified fast-slow-fast form); the more serious toned sonata form of the first movement; the quirky, second movement which acts like the dance movement - an “Ellingtonian” scherzo; the rondo-like form of the lighthearted third movement; and the clear articulation of sections and phrases. The free chromatic writing, metric modulations and irregular meters and rhythms are from the world of 20th Century concert music. That said, much of the work’s detail - the rhythmic, harmonic, and gestural language - comes from jazz or funk-fusion music.

Oddly enough the harmonic and rhythmic materials found in some 20th Century music, e.g. Stravinsky and Bartok, bear resemblance to the worlds of jazz and funk. This is explored in *Elastic Band*. Much of the first and third movements of *Elastic Band* are derived from that favorite scale of Stravinsky and Bartok: the eight-note Octatonic collection. In this piece the material is at times more tightly “filtered” and distributed to create jazz harmonies - dominant seventh chords with their upper extensions (e.g. b9’s, #9’s, #11’s, 13’s, etc.) - that float in a not-quite-functional tonal way. At other times the filter is “opened” and language becomes more densely chromatic and linear-motivic. Syncopation against a clear, strong pulse is also important to all these musics, including *this music: Elastic Band*.

The first movement is cast in a tight sonata form, including the opposition between the tenser, more fully chromatic opening theme and the more expansive tonal-sounding second theme. The movement is tightly constructed, based almost entirely on variants of the clarinet’s opening theme: a falling perfect 4th followed by a rising major 2nd. Even the brief, seemingly improvisatory rock-style drum breaks that periodically explode during the movement reappear in the pitched instruments in various guises throughout. By the way, the rhythm of these drum breaks echo a figure used by Ringo Starr in his one commercially recorded Beatle drum solo (here’s a hint: it’s on *Abbey Road*). At the center of the movement is a brief moment of repose – the eye of the storm – that marks the beginning of a terse development section that gradually regathers momentum and

drives towards the return of the opening themes. The movement ends with a perpetual motion coda.

There is no true slow movement in *Elastic Band*. Instead, the middle movement, “Pure Happenstance,” functions like a scherzo and is a quirky, jazzy movement with Ellington overtones in the primal drum Ostinato and the clarinet’s timbre (think of Ellington’s “jungle music”). Unlike the Classical development of motives found in the outer movements, this movement relies more on juxtaposition and pop-like repetition. The scoring is reminiscent of jazz big band writing and the percussion, unlike the outer movements, is totally unpitched throughout.

The third movement, while often the most overtly “jazzy,” also harkens to the Classical model of the *finale*: a fun romp. The materials might be a cross between *Earth, Wind, & Fire* and the *Brecker Brothers*, but the sudden temporal shifts thrown in here and there via metric modulations are 20th Century concert music. Ideas from the first movement are freely recapitulated. The rondo and the subsequent theme are characterized by funky syncopated rhythms. In contrast, the central section, signaled by the first sudden tempo change, is lyrical and broad. Later on a swaggering blues treatment of the second theme briefly appears only to be cut short by a compact, breathless coda.

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