

Tinkelenberg Rhythms

Tony Peña's album follows a chronological order, and embraces the work of Tom Johnson in almost all the period from 1973 to the 2010s. *Tinkelenberg Rhythms*, composed in 2014, comes naturally as a conclusion to this journey. The title indicates its essentially rhythmic nature, and refers to Frank Tinkelenberg, a Dutch software developer who designed the mathematical data on which the work is based. Tom Johnson explains this briefly but clearly in the introduction to the score. Let's say, for simplicity, that the composer drew nine rhythmic formulas of three sounds, interlocking in groups of three, to form 12 sections of nine successive sounds.

So *Tinkelenberg Rhythms* is a mathematical composition, as is the music of Tom Johnson in general, but what is striking about this piece, at least at first, is rather its mysterious, poetic character. Of the five pieces presented here, this is the quietest and most bare. Something taking place gradually, finally reaches fullness, and then quickly undoes itself, returning to silence. Then the same process begins again with other sounds, other rhythms. One feels a certain rhythmic activity at work, but it is seldom present in its entirety. The rest of the time there is ellipse, and the rhythm gives the impression of being veiled, internalized.

Of course, the sense of mystery is largely due to the fact that the mathematical logic behind this music is too complex to be fully understood just by listening. The piece follows its program, but the listener cannot anticipate, and the arrival of each note, each rhythm, is still a surprise.

That said, the work is still built on the basis of a clear compositional scheme that we can identify. First, the new rhythms are presented one after the other, separately, nine notes arranged in descending order (the same note is always assigned to the same rhythm throughout). After each introduction, we witness the presentation of the combined rhythms in groups of three. These combinations are twelve in number and the piece consists of twelve sections, all following the same path: the three selected beats are first played alone (always in descending order of the notes that correspond to them), then they come back, repeating and interlocking into each other gradually, a little like a canon, and finally they leave in reverse order, so that the last one ends alone, followed by a long silence. After that the next section begins, which takes place in exactly the same way.

Tom Johnson says in the introduction that he worked on *Tinkelenberg Rhythms* for a while without knowing what instrument, or what formation, the piece was composed for, until the choice of guitar prevailed. And the composer added: “I particularly like the idea of playing three notes in each section on three separate strings without moving the left hand, letting the notes resonate nicely.” That's what Tony Peña has done. One section, toward the beginning of the piece, allows this resonance only at the price of an uncomfortable distance between fingers of the left hand, but the musician does not let this muscle tension affect the music, which flows from beginning to end with the calm of a natural phenomenon that nothing disturbs.

—Gilbert Delor (August 2016)