

# This Mortal Coil

for Pierrot ensemble plus percussion

2011

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LeFrak Concert Hall, Queens College, CUNY  
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## Program Notes

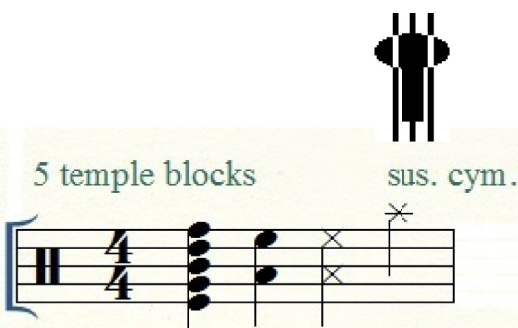
In October of 2010 I attended a concert of shakuhachi music at Pennsylvania State University. Prior to the concert I met with the performers, Michael Chikuzen Gould plus Chieko and Kodi Iwazaki, for a shakuhachi lesson. After the lesson, Mrs. Iwazaki graciously presented me with a gift – a small jar in the shape of a bell – and related the following Japanese folk tale:

One day, a woman met a traveling priest in her village and fell in love with him. She confessed her love, and though the priest found her enticing, he was resolute in overcoming his passions. The priest prepared to leave the village and the woman pleaded with him to remain; he appeased the woman by promising to return and marry her. As time passed, the woman realized the priest never planned to keep his promise. Fueled by rage, she pursued him. Eventually the two met at a river crossing, where the priest convinced a boatman to help him cross the river while giving no assistance to the woman. The woman turned into a serpent and swam across the river herself. When the priest reached the shore he ran into a nearby temple and shouted for help. Fellow priests hid him within a large temple bell. However, the serpent entered the temple, smelled the priest, and attacked the bell. The serpent coiled around the bell and burst into flames, killing the priest and itself in the process.

Traditionally the woman serpent, sometimes called Kiyohime, survives. In one Noh adaptation, *Kanemaki* (“Enwrapped in a Bell”), the woman kills the priest then achieves enlightenment and vanishes. In its successor, *Dōjōji*, the serpent is driven from the temple and back to the river. These didactic tales, which are based on 11th or 12th century Buddhist *setsuwa*, undermine feminine power and cast women as obstacles to man's spiritual growth. *Dōjōji* even goes so far as to exclude women from Buddhist salvation. My version of the Kiyohime myth, in which both priest and woman perish in flames, ends with an act of self-immolation that may be interpreted as protest against such gender politics. From here I leave the politics to you and present a musical narrative based on an extremely evocative story of love, lust, treachery, and revenge. The title of the composition comes from Hamlet's famous suicidal soliloquy.

## Performance Notes

Bb3 is always notated in the score with an x-notehead because the note is prepared. Thread a thin piece of sturdy metal through the strings of Bb3 beyond the hammer within the piano. The resulting tone should sound like a bell ideally pitched near A3. I recommend using a thin key positioned as shown:



5 temple blocks

sus. cym.

Percussion

2 toms - x noteheads for rim shots  
(hard mallet with a little felt, possibly timpani mallet;  
meant to mimic the sound of taiko throughout)



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A woman leaves home ♩ = 50

rall.

10

Fl. *molto rit.* *p*

B♭ Cl. *lightly growl* *mf* *arco* *p*

Vln. *pizz.* *f* *p*

Vc. *p* *mf* *f*

Pno. *mf* *molto rit.* *A woman leaves home ♩ = 50* *f* *legato e rubato* *rall.* *♩ sempre*

Perc.

13

Fl. *a tempo* *n.* *f* *rall.* *a tempo*

B♭ Cl.

Vln. *pizz.* *f*

Vc.

Pno. *a tempo* *mf* *rall.* *a tempo*

Perc.

This Mortal Coil

♩ = 100

16

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*arco*

*f*

*mf*

21

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*mp*

Musical score for measures 25-28. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), Piano (Pno.), and Percussion (Perc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 5/4. The flute part starts at measure 25 with a *mf* dynamic. The bass clarinet part has rests in measures 25 and 26. The violin part has a *f* dynamic. The piano part has a *f* dynamic. The percussion part has rests in measures 25, 26, and 27. A small asterisk is present at the end of the piano part in measure 28.

Musical score for measures 29-32. The score continues with the same instruments and key signature. The flute part has a *ff* dynamic in measure 30. The bass clarinet part has a *p* dynamic in measure 32. The violin part has an *arco* marking in measure 29 and dynamics of *f* and *p* in measure 32. The viola part has dynamics of *ff* and *p* in measure 32. The piano part has dynamics of *ff* and *f* in measure 32. The percussion part has rests in measures 29, 30, and 31, and a *leo* marking in measure 32. A small asterisk is present at the end of the piano part in measure 31.

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33 *rit.* ♩ = 50

Fl. *p* *mf*

B♭ Cl.

Vln. *pizz.* *f*

Vc. *pizz.* *mf*

Pno. *mf* \* Reo. \* Reo.

Perc.

37 *rit.*

Fl. *p* *rit.*

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno. *mf* *rit.* \*

Perc.

To meet a striking priest ♩ = 92

39

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*ff* arco

*f* arco

*f*

*mf*

42

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*f*

*f*

This Mortal Coil

45 *rit.*  $\text{♩} = 60$

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*p* *f*

Promises are made but not kept  $\text{♩} = 60$

49 *rit.*

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*p* *f* *p* *f*

*pizz.* *arco*

*ppp* *f* *p*

*rit.*

54 *a tempo*

Fl. *f* *mf*<sup>3</sup>

B♭ Cl. *p* *f*

Vln. *p* *pizz.*

Vc. *f* *arco* *f* *p*

Pno. *a tempo*

Perc. *f*

58

Fl. *mf*

B♭ Cl. *mp* *wide vibrato to simulate light growl*

Vln. *mf*

Vc. *mp*

Pno. *mf*

Perc. *mf*

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Thus begins the pursuit... (♩ = 60)

Musical score for measures 62-66. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), Piano (Pno.), and Percussion (Perc.).

- Fl.:** Starts at measure 62 with a *rit.* marking. Dynamics range from *p* to *ppp*. Includes a *tr* (trill) in measure 64.
- B♭ Cl.:** Remains silent until measure 64, then plays a *tr* (trill).
- Vln.:** Starts at measure 62 with a *rit.* marking. Dynamics range from *p* to *ppp*. Includes an *arco* marking in measure 64.
- Vc.:** Remains silent until measure 64, then plays a *tr* (trill).
- Pno.:** Starts at measure 62 with a *rit.* marking. Dynamics range from *p* to *ppp*. Includes an *arco* marking in measure 64.
- Perc.:** Starts at measure 64 with a *tr* (trill) and a *sc.* (scat) marking. Dynamics range from *f* to *ppp*. Includes a *solo* marking in measure 65.

Tempo markings: *rit.* (measures 62-63), *a tempo* (measures 64-66).

Musical score for measures 67-70. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), Piano (Pno.), and Percussion (Perc.).

- Fl.:** Remains silent.
- B♭ Cl.:** Remains silent.
- Vln.:** Remains silent.
- Vc.:** Remains silent.
- Pno.:** Remains silent.
- Perc.:** Starts at measure 67 with a *tr* (trill) and a *sc.* (scat) marking. Dynamics range from *f* to *pp*. Includes a *solo* marking in measure 68.

Tempo marking: *accel.* (measures 67-70).

Performance instruction: *slowly decrease roll speed* (measures 69-70).

Dynamics: *ff* > *p* (measures 69-70).

71 *a tempo* 72 ♩ = 126

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno. *a tempo* 72 ♩ = 126

Perc. *f* *♩ sempre*

76 80

Fl. *mf*

B♭ Cl.

Vln. *pizz.* *mf*

Vc. *pizz.* *mf*

Pno. 80 *mf*

Perc. (mallets) *ad lib.* *p* *f mp*

81

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 81 through 86. The Flute part (Fl.) features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The Bass Clarinet (B♭ Cl.) part is mostly silent, with rests. The Violin (Vln.) and Viola (Vc.) parts have sparse, rhythmic accompaniment. The Piano (Pno.) part is silent. The Percussion (Perc.) part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents.

87

88

*sempre staccato*

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*mf*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 87 through 92. Measure 87 is marked with a box containing the number 87. Measure 88 is marked with a box containing the number 88 and the instruction *sempre staccato*. The Flute (Fl.) part continues with a melodic line. The Bass Clarinet (B♭ Cl.) part begins in measure 88 with a melodic line starting on a half note, marked with a box containing the number 88 and the dynamic *mf*. The Violin (Vln.) and Viola (Vc.) parts continue with their sparse accompaniment. The Piano (Pno.) part has a few notes in measure 88, including a flat sign. The Percussion (Perc.) part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents.

96

93

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*f*

*mp*

103

99

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Perc.

*sempre staccato*

*mf*

103