The Innermost Point

David Hidek

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THE INNERMOST POINT

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By
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December 2009
THE INNERMOST POINT

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ABSTRACT

THE INNERMOST POINT

By

David J. Hidek

December 2009

Thesis Supervised by David Stock, M.F.A.

In Ranier Maria Rilke’s “To Music,” he depicts an emotional musical experience as “when the innermost point in us stands outside.” The Innermost Point develops two themes: one rhythmically stable but melodically lacking, and the other melodious but rhythmically puzzling. Over the course of the piece each theme attains an identity in its own orchestral setting, but a harmonious balance between the two is only found when they function toward the same goal: The Innermost Point. The work is scored for full symphony orchestra and is approximately nine minutes in duration.
DEDICATION

THE INNERMOST POINT is dedicated to my parents, for their unwavering love and support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I’d like to gratefully acknowledge Professor David Stock and Dr. David Cutler, whose wisdom and counsel has been invaluable to my growth as a composer.
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The success of *The Innermost Point* relies on the creation of effective context for each theme; in other words, creating a musical environment in which each theme and its variations are emotionally relevant. This is accomplished through the creation and release of various forms of tension, such as harmonic dissonance, textural density, rhythmic complexity, contrasting dynamics and juxtaposed musical phrases. The following analysis will explore each of these devices as they occur, in order to provide insight into the mechanics of *The Innermost Point*.

It is first important to identify the main compositional aspects of the piece so that they may be covered and understood thoroughly. These aspects include thematic material, harmonic identity and progression, the recycling of motivic ideas (both rhythmic and melodic) and last but undoubtedly not least, orchestral texture. It should be made clear that the most crucial of these aspects is thematic material, as it brings identity to work and distinguishes it from being simply a long string of harmonies that transfer among the different sections of the orchestra.

The second most important aspect of the piece is its harmonic scheme; should the work be reduced for piano, it would still maintain its identity, even without the orchestral textures or layers of common motives. That being said, orchestral texture is crucial to the emotional effect of the piece, as it can at times overwhelm the senses in ways that a single piano might find difficult. As indicated by the provided list-form analysis (Figure 1), *The Innermost Point* has few places that are autonomous in motivic identity, and thus a subliminal bond binds the piece together over the span of nine minutes.

Before beginning the analysis, it is also important to gain context for the purpose of *The Innermost Point*, as a clear understanding of the composer’s intent can at times
Figure 1

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<tr>
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<td>ii. (141-149)</td>
<td>[Variation of m. 1-6]</td>
<td>(Tutti, Glockenspiel)</td>
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1 Some delineations occur in progressive layers, as indicated by overlapping measure numbers.
reveal more than any academic breakdown. The title of the piece stems from Rainer Maria Rilke’s *To Music*, in which he depicts an emotional musical experience as “when the innermost point in us stands outside.” *The Innermost Point* seeks to exemplify just that, however, in a completely and obviously subjective manner. The work develops two themes: one rhythmically stable but melodically lacking, and the other melodious but rhythmically puzzling. Over the course of the piece each theme attains an identity in its own orchestral setting, but a harmonious balance between the two is only found when they function toward the same goal: The Innermost Point. It is also no mistake that the second theme, considered to be the most significant theme of the piece, is located directly at the center of the work.

To briefly look at the overall form, *The Innermost Point* is ternary, with an interlude between the second and third sections. The purpose of the first section is to develop the first theme, likewise, the second section develops the second theme exclusively. The third section amalgamates both themes into a climactic finale, distanced from the initial two sections by an interlude. The interlude symbolizes an epiphany of thematic purpose, re-routing both themes toward a common end.

Tonally, *The Innermost Point* exists in generally major keys and modes, with occasional minor harmonies employed at opportune times in order to maximize the effect of a change in harmonic quality. While Lydian is the most commonly utilized mode, Dorian is also employed to soften long passages of A minor and D minor. Many, if not all, of the vertical harmonies throughout the orchestra are extended and often appear in clustered intervals acting as pandiatonic chords. The notes in these chords are chosen with harmonic color and textural density in mind, rather than by their function, as is done
in traditional voice leading. Additionally, there are several instances of bitonality and polytonality, usually occurring as an effect to increase or intensify the harmonic density of a given passage. Overall, the harmonic map of the piece employs harmonic parallelism, though not as strictly or obviously as the early twentieth-century masters. Most of the parallelism occurs in support of an overriding theme, and usually occurs over bar lines, rather than several times within a bar.

As each section of *The Innermost Point* is explored, it is important to note the type of analysis used to identify important chords and phrases. Because the work is constructed without regard to large-scale harmonic function, and occurs in a generally linear sequence, a roman numeral analysis would be redundant; instead, it is more practical to identify the most important chords and harmonies, as well as the interval at which each section or phrase modulates. One will find that intervals such as minor thirds, major seconds and minor seconds dominate the harmonic flow, and, when used in combination with parallel major harmonies, produce a detached, however refreshing sentiment in the context of the work.

The first section of the piece is sixty measures long and can be divided into four phrases: measures one through seventeen, eighteen through thirty-four, thirty-five through forty-six and forty seven through sixty. These four phrases all stem from the first theme, and overall, they create a check mark shaped dynamic envelope: fortissimo before sharply dropping to pianissimo, progressing through mezzo forte before ending at fortissimo. Each phrase presents its musical information to the listener in a new way, though through sharing the same basic harmonic characteristics, as well as the same thematic material, they are each logically related.
The piece begins with a G-sharp major diatonic cluster, voiced by the strings with
tremolo. The cluster fades to fortissimo from almost nothing at all, and is considered to
be a form of the “swell motive,” the idea of “fading in” without a proper resolution, or
the reverse, “fading out” without a proper attack. This motive reoccurs many times
throughout the piece, on many different levels, and will be addressed as it occurs,
particularly later in the work. Measure two introduces a divided orchestra in two units:
the first being the winds, brass and strings; and the second being the glockenspiel,
vibraphone and harp. This division provides two contrasting textures that alternate; the
second, found at measures two and four, seemingly spawned from the aftermath of the
imperious first. This first texture, found at the first beat of measure two, dictates meter,
tempo, and tonality, while the second texture, which is also the first theme and prime
motive for the entire “A” section, appears in between breaks in the precise orchestral
bursts.

The portion of the second texture that appears in measure two, as performed by
the vibraphone, is the first theme, with the harp sounding verbatim, although an eighth
note later, and the glockenspiel highlighting the meandering melodic line. Additionally,
in this instance, a single flute echoes the glockenspiel. Together, the result is a chiming,
mysterious survey of C Aeolian that is neither easily memorable nor quickly forgotten.
Thus, when it reappears throughout the piece, it is comfortably familiar though fresh
enough to remain interesting. The trio of instruments formed by the harp and percussion
appear in collaboration several times throughout the work, usually creating a similar
texture.
Both the staccato bursts and the calm progression of the percussion are relatively based in C major, though the former features a sharp fourth scale degree, qualifying it to be in the Lydian mode, while the later is wholly natural and based around the pitch A, making it C Aeolian, as mentioned before. This slight difference in harmonic quality is enough to cause a minor detachment in the ear of the listener, adding a wrinkle to the fabric of this already peculiar passage.

At measure five the piece makes one of its many short modulations, this time upward by a minor third to E-flat major, before return to C major at measure seven for a variation of the first six measures. The variation is slightly different, as the fourth measure of the pattern contains rhythmic differences, and the sixth measure modulates down by a semitone to D major. The phrase seemingly ends at measure twenty-five with a sudden shift of another semitone to D-flat major, however, at measure twenty seven, the phrase shifts once more by a semitone to C major. This large scale harmonic planing is featured throughout the piece as a sudden, though usually welcome, change in harmonic tone.

Measure eighteen marks the first shift in overall texture, as the momentum built up over the first seventeen measures vanishes, and is replaced by sustained strings and the percussion and harp trio. The harmonic scheme of the work shifts from C Lydian to A Dorian, which contains the same notes, but is much darker when based around the minor triad at the bottom of the scale. Beginning at measure eighteen, the trio still carries the first theme, but only in fragments. The cellos eventually provide stability at measure twenty with one of the many sub-themes of the work. These sub-themes appear only once and act in support of progressing the orchestral texture. Usually associated with the
prominent theme of the section at one point or another, they are only a few bars long and may be followed with variations, but always lead to the return of the central theme. In this case, the sub theme at thirty leads to a variation of the first theme at measure twenty-seven, accompanied by sparkling glockenspiel and vibraphone.

Simultaneously, the first violins and violas are continuing the diatonic cluster motive that began the piece; however, they are now reversed as they fade away over the course of three to four beats. Following a small “faux” crescendo at measure thirty that seems to lead the listener out of the dream-like state brought about by measures eighteen through twenty-seven, the listener is enveloped in an even darker setting, and it happens to be one of the most harmonically complex sections of the entire work. The complications arrive when the violins, cellos and percussion are still in A minor, just as they were before the faux crescendo, but other accidentals are introduced in new voices. The bass enters with a D flat, which creates dissonance with the viola’s D natural; however, it is easier to think of the bass as sounding a C sharp, which creates a mixed third with the C natural of A Dorian. Simultaneously, the vibraphone announces the first theme without accidentals while the glockenspiel, formerly its partner, retains the F sharp that formerly contributed to A Dorian. The harp and contra bassoon underscore this dissonance with two resounding D flats before resolving to D natural as the bass resolves to C natural, and the orchestra to C major, at measure thirty-four. It then becomes obvious that another large-scale harmonic shift is in store, this time upward to F major at measure thirty-five. In summary, measures thirty-one through thirty-four feature a sense of bimodality due to the presence of both F natural and F sharp, and bitonality due to a
mixed third created by the D flat, before resolving to C major and regaining harmonic momentum and rhythmic drive.

Measure thirty-five marks the beginning of a third phrase in the work, which makes obvious strides away from the opening measures and seeks, at times, to establish an identity of its own through melodic themes in the strings and winds. However, this is found to be impossible, as the tempo and harmonic qualities bind the section to the material that both precedes and follows it. The first two measures of the phrase merely serve as a transition to measure thirty-seven, where the cellos enter with the first truly melodic theme of the work, which melodically and rhythmically alludes to measure twenty. Ironically, this theme, like the one at measure twenty, is merely a passing theme, serving only to further develop the harmonic and textural momentum of the orchestra. Because of its inferiority in the grand scale of the work, it is overlapped with cannons in the winds and glockenspiel, all in a bed of tremolo strings, oscillating clarinets, vibraphone and harp.

The rhythmic motion intensifies at measure forty-one as the piece shifts upward by a fourth to B-flat major. These next four measures are a variation of measures thirty-seven through thirty-eight, with three key differences. First, the basses now outline the harmony with pizzicato arpeggios. Second, the basses are echoed by the harp and vibraphone. Third, the high winds are now independent of the theme, and providing counter-melody. This new setting for the cellos provides refreshing accompaniment to the familiar melody and harmony. Like the four measures before it, measures forty-five and forty-six are also variations, but only in the interest of progressing the harmonic sequence, this time down by a major second to A-flat major. As the sequence that began
at measure thirty-seven is beginning to lose its harmonic drive, the dynamic levels fall
and the first theme sounds in the glockenspiel at measure forty-five, signaling the result
of the efforts of the past twenty-nine measures.

Measure forty-seven marks the beginning of the end of the first third of the piece,
a large-scale “swell” of several layers of rhythmic and harmonic motives, all masking the
glockenspiel which defiantly chimes in the background. This ten-measure “swell”
incorporates several themes and motives from the opening six measures, such as the
“swell” motive from measure one and the first theme from measure two; however, the
most important theme of the section begins at measure fifty in the horns. The phrase is
slow-moving and calm, a direct contrast to the frantic activity of rest of the orchestra,
slowly ripening by measure fifty-five into a more noble version of the previous cello
themes. The horns push the orchestra to a climax at measure fifty-eight, and begin to be
swallowed by the harmonic shift to D-flat major. The chimes end the “swell” at measure
sixty with a variation of the first theme, which brings a sudden halt to the orchestra,
ending the first third of the work.

The second section begins abruptly at measure sixty-one and introduces a passive
and open texture in B-flat major with an E natural, suggesting Lydian, just like most of
the first sixty measures of the piece. A short motive in the harp, reminiscent of the
clarinets in measure thirty-six, cautiously iterates over sustained violins and soft cymbal
accents. The vibraphone quietly enters at measure sixty-three with what is the main
melodic theme of the work, though in its initial stage, rhythmically awkward and
harmonically simplified. In support of the vibraphone are wind and string tremolos, both
of which reference the first third of the piece. The dynamic of the orchestra increases as
the strings introduce a more confident version of the second theme at measure sixty-nine, accompanied by a harmonic shift to G-flat major. This variation, however short-lived, is a direct reference to measures thirty-seven through forty-six, specifically, the cannons at measure thirty-seven, the pizzicato bass at measure forty, the tremolo strings and the pastoral sub-theme formerly voiced by the cellos, now voiced by the violins. By measure seventy-two, it is clear that this light variation is only a temporary surge in color, as it dwindles with the end of the variation, back to the pulsing harp and sustained violins.

From measures seventy-five to seventy-seven, fragments of the second theme as a cluster of basses and bass drum rumble in the background. As the second more sustained fragment sounds in the violins, the orchestra suddenly swells, launching into the center of the work, measures seventy-seven through eighty-one. It is here that the second theme matures into a more stable and expressive version in E major (Lydian) with support from the entire orchestra. Voiced by the violins, violas and horns, the theme is set at a slightly faster tempo and contains several layers of underpinning in the winds, percussion, harp and longer sustained harmonies in the low strings and brass.

As the second theme ends, a melodic answer follows, voiced again by the violins, violas and horns, with the first trombone as well. Adding an oscillating motion in the background are the winds, with thirty-second note runs that repeat for the duration of each harmony. What is striking about this section is the modulation from C major to E minor at measures eighty-three and eighty-six, one of the few instances where a minor tonality is dominant. The idea of a quickly shifting harmonic progression counters the static harmonies that occupy measures sixty-one through eighty-one, and helps to heighten the intensity of the moment without straying from the general harmonic pace of
the work. The sequence that began at eighty-two takes a surprising turn at measure eighty-eight, as the orchestra halts abruptly and the brass introduces a D-major diatonic cluster, which lacks the sharp fourth scale degree that defines so many of the previous clusters. Simultaneously, tremolo strings begin to swell with an A-flat cluster that lacks a third, but includes a major sixth and seventh, suggesting a major quality. The A-flat cluster adds the sharp fourth that the D-major cluster lacks, as well as a flatted second and third, which ultimately forms a chromatic cluster. It seems then that the strings have their own agenda, which becomes obvious in the following measures. The lack of low-register support by the low brass renders the D-major cluster unable to support its own weight, and it succumbs to a D-flat major cluster that includes both a natural fourth and a sharpened fourth scale degree. With this downward shift, the strings add a third to their cluster, suggesting the Lydian mode but lacking a sixth scale degree. This harmonically confusing passage is an unresolved ending to the second third of the work, and it becomes clear that some sort of re-ordering is in store.

Measure eighty-nine begins what is essentially an interlude between the second portion of the piece and the third and final portion. It is here that the “swell” motive dominates the texture, moving between combinations of strings, winds and muted brass. The flexible tempo of seventy-eight to eighty-four beats per minute relies on the conductor to abandon the established pulse of the work in favor of seemingly slow-moving, broad strokes of orchestral color. Each swell is comprised of a cluster of notes that reflects the harmonic identity of the work: major keys with minor key accents, as well as both the Lydian and Dorian mode. While at first the progression is difficult to identify, due to the soft dissonances of the clusters along with the sharply changing
timbre of the instrument groups, the chord sequence can be broken down in the following way, assuming that the string cluster at measure eighty-nine serves as tonic: I - b III - b vii - b II - I - b VII - iv - I - V/III - I (C major). Fittingly, C major ends the sequence at measure ninety-eight, and immediately the strings depart to G-sharp major to begin the third and final section of the work.

The final section of the piece combines several motives and textural ideas from previous sections and introduces them individually to create a layered, large-scale swell that comprises most of the final section. As might be expected, this borrowing of material leads to several key areas occurring simultaneously, which will be identified as they occur. Again, this polytonality and bimodality serves to create harmonic density and confusion, rather than two clear tonalities sounding at once.

The tremolo violins that begin the third section at measure ninety-nine are most closely linked to the material from measure seventy-two, and the basses confirm that relationship with a cluster that links to measure seventy-four. This dense texture is encouraged by dampened timpani, which sets a clouded sonic backdrop. The vibraphone introduces a curious variation of the first theme at measure 101, with the material from measures two and four occurring at the same time, performed by both percussionists. This pattern repeats every five and half beats, making the 6/4 meter difficult to follow, and also implies A minor over the G-sharp major strings. The next significant allusion comes with the violins at measure 104, reminiscent of the string figures at measure forty-eight. The difference lies in the spurts of activity, and most importantly, that the new material is derived directly from the first theme. This same material later sounds in the clarinets, flutes and piccolo as the section’s dynamic builds, all suggesting A minor.
More borrowed material appears in the contrabassoon at measure 105, which is later doubled by the bassoons and basses, and is directly lifted from the cello figures which began at measure eighteen. The presence of an F sharp also implies Dorian in spite of the F naturals in the strings. Directly afterwards, at measure 106, the second violins and violas glissando to an A natural, which alludes to the string material at measure sixty-three. Later at measure 113, they begin to take on a tune of their own, borrowed from the horns at measure fifty. At measure 109, a solo oboe in A Dorian borrows from measure seventy-eight while the timpani crescendos and diminuendos, much like measure thirty-one. As the violins and violas end their lyrical phrase at measure 117, the cellos enter, playing every other sixteenth of the violins. The result is a mid to low register extension of the violin material, making it more audible in the multiplying layers of color. One measure after this entrance, the horns and trumpets recall the swell motive, much like the trumpets and trombones at measure fifty-two. Their alternating of swells, both in A minor, along with irregular repetitions, allow for a seemingly independent layer of dynamic, contrasting material. At the same time, the second violins and violas begin to slowly diminish their rhythmic values, eventually reaching sixteenth notes by the climax at measure 129. Not long before that, at measure 122, the horns and trumpets begin to swell at more frequent intervals, while the strings become more frantic and with longer iterations of the first theme. Eventually by measure 127, the orchestra is boiling with activity and the strings, low brass and double-reeds begin a syncopated ascent toward F-major Lydian, which finally arrives at the urging of the glockenspiel at measure 129.

The climax of the piece, measure 129, sees the insistent repetition of the first theme bloom into a fully orchestrated second theme, this time lacking the drawn out
notes and long pauses in favor of a decisive and driving tempo, much like the first theme
during the first few bars of the piece. The second theme is now most clearly featured in
the first violins, doubled by half of the second violins and all of the cellos, while the rest
of the strings combine with the high winds to carry on the feverish sixteenth figures
formerly maintained by the first violins. Simultaneously, the horns and trumpets attack in
bursts with diatonic clusters while the low brass, basses and timpani provide the root and
other fundamental pitches of each chord. The harmonic progression in this section, like
measures eighty-two through eighty-four, prominently features a minor quality for effect,
being that most of the harmonies are major in quality. The minor chord in focus is D
minor with a sharp sixth, implying the Dorian mode, though it is the modulation from F
major to D Dorian that is effective, not simply the presence of the chord. The minor
quality quickly gives way to B-flat major at measure 133, before modulating downward
by a major second to A-flat major, then again by a major second to G-flat major at 135,
before falling to E major at 136. Just as the climax begins to lose its momentum, the
trumpets interrupt at measure 137 with layered runs over a surprising A-major chord in
the horns, before resolving to a C major Lydian chord at measure 139, announcing that
the end of the work is approaching.

The final nine measures of the piece are a driving variation on the first six
measures of the piece, featuring a thunderous imitation of the first theme by the timpani.
Just as the vibraphone at measure 101 repeated its phrase before the measure was
complete, the timpani repeats every five eighth notes, making it difficult to identify or
follow the meter. Fragments of the first theme are sprinkled throughout the glockenspiel,
which is interrupted by the orchestral bursts that shaped measures one through twelve.
The horns, trumpets, and trombones resurrect the swell theme one last time at measures 144 and 145, just as the orchestra shifts upward by a minor third, mirroring measure five. At measure 146 the harmony shifts upward again, this time by a major third, and rhythmically references measures five and six. The timpani maintains the pulse, however, and the momentum carries until another upward shift by a minor third signals the boiling point. The piece concludes in C major, featuring a tri-tone and a natural fifth, reflecting a combination of the work’s modal character and the degree of its harmonic density.

As a whole, The Innermost Point is an exercise in expression. Each portion of the work attempts to sow certain thematic seeds that hopefully blossom at the climax of the piece and instill a sense of fulfillment as the final note sounds.
Instrumentation

3 Flutes (3rd doubling Piccolo)
  2 Oboes
  English Horn
2 Clarinets in Bb
  Bass Clarinet
  2 Bassoons
  Contrabassoon
4 Horns in F
  3 Trumpets
3 Trombones (3rd doubling Bass Trombone)
  Tuba
  Timpani
  Percussion (Two players) *
  Harp

Strings

*Percussion I: Glockenspiel, Bass Drum, Chimes, Crotales (shared), Vibraphone (shared)
Percussion II: Vibraphone (shared), Crotales (shared), Suspended Cymbals (three sizes), Tam Tam.

Duration: ca. 9 minutes