

# Laberinto Borgeano

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## Program Notes

*Laberinto Borgeano* was inspired by Borges' short story *La casa de Asterión* and the formation of globular clusters in the universe. The first measure of the piece is based on the earlier work for piano *Cúmulos globulares (Globular Clusters)* by the composer. The second measure is a music metaphor the entrance to a unicursal labyrinth, the type of greek labyrinth in which the Minotaur lives in Borges's story.

Asterion is a mythological creature that is half man and half bull, its name means "ruler of the stars" or "starry". In Borges' story, Asterion compares his house with the universe.

The piece is a metaphor for the creation of the universe and the composer's creative labyrinths. These two elements: the man and the bull, are developed and expanded.

The first one is gradually transformed and leads into the B section of the work where the sense of a path is lost. The second short motif representing the entrance to the labyrinth, transforms into the labyrinth itself, revealing the end of the labyrinth where the universe ends. The work emphasizes the concept of duality creating the illusion of more than one piano being played.

## Analysis

*Laberinto Borgeano* is a work for piano constructed through the concept of duality which is found at every level in the form of the piece. The first two measures contain the material that is developed in different sections of the work. At the immediate surface level, there are two motives that are expanded and transformed into sections respectively. There is an introduction, where the material is presented, and there are short transitions to the main sections of the piece. The concept of duality is furthered explored by technique (independence of the hands) resulting in the feeling of more than one piano, or four hands, being heard.

### Introduction

The first musical gesture (mm. 1)

The musical score shows the first measure of the introduction in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 50. The music is in G minor, indicated by a flat sign on the B line. The upper staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line starting on B4, marked with an 8va dynamic. The lower staff (bass clef) contains a bass line starting on G3, marked with an mp dynamic. The piece concludes with a fermata over the final notes. A pedal point is indicated by a horizontal line with a vertical bar at the end, extending across the measure. A dashed line above the staff indicates the octave range. A thick black line above the staff is labeled with the number 9. A small asterisk is placed above the first note.

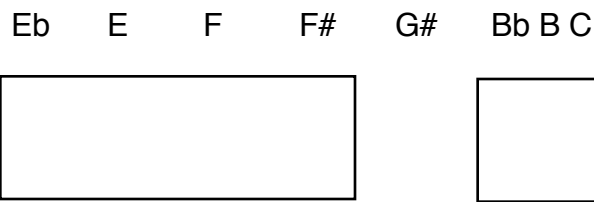
Example 1.

Motif 1 (M1) is an accelerating gesture in the high register in which its intervals become smaller ending on a cluster of three notes: Eb, E, F. that are held with a long fermata. Its pitch collection contains: Eb, E, F, F# G# Bb-B-C in example 2.

If we look into the pitch collection we find symmetrical subsets based on axial symmetry G#. The collection resembles Morton Feldman's concept of *crippled symmetry*<sup>1</sup> which is

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<sup>1</sup> Feldman, Morton. "Crippled Symmetry" in *Give My Regards to Eight Street* " edited by B.H. Friedman, 134-49. Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000.



Example 2.

not a mirrored image but a symmetrical image with a slightly variation. In this example, the second subset (Bb,B,C) has only three pitches instead of four.

Another aspect of the opening motif is that it is not just a gesture. The cluster being held invites the listener to listen for the dissonant resonances of the three notes. The use of pedal prevents the complete motif to be drawn by it, leaving only the cluster and its spectral envelope. The importance of this gesture is revealed at the end of the piece.

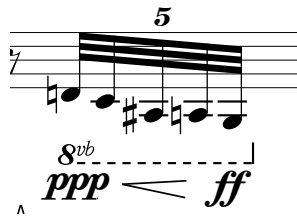
Example 3.

Motif 2 (M2) is shorter and is enclosed by a triplet. It starts with a symmetrical collection of three pitches: C-D-E, and ends with a chord that opens the space in contrast to the cluster in M1. The chord is the asymmetrical set C-Db-Gb-Bb. The composer indicates the motif to be played like an echo (*come un'eco lontano*). This echo is a foreshadowing element and will reappear throughout the work finally disappearing at the end of the piece. As in Borges' *La casa de Asterion*, the ending is a metaphor for the dead of the minotaur and the end of the labyrinth.

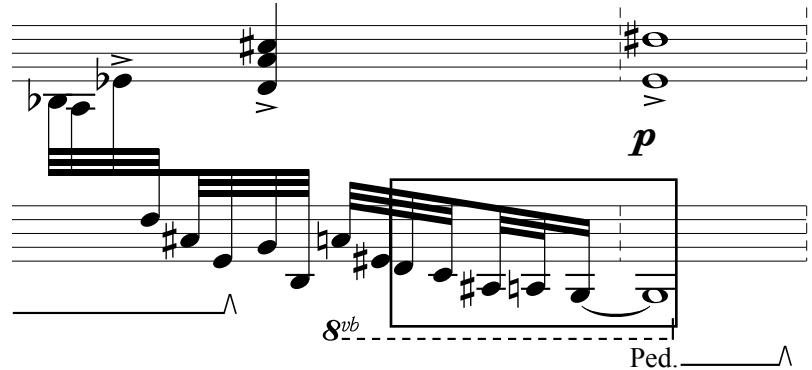
The second motif is a time compression and harmonic field expansion compared to M1; being both M1 and M2 the foundation of the work. They provide the material for the piece and also present the main idea of duality.

The elements of measures 1 and 2 will reappear in different forms throughout the entire work.

There is another important element that appears in mm. 1-6. A quintuplet figure (m5) played as a fast gesture in the lower register is derived from a transformation of M1 in m3.



Example 4.



Example 5.

The triplet of M2 and the quintuplet of M3 are the only tuplet figures used throughout the piece. M3 which is a highly chromatic gesture will serve as the basis for an entire section of the piece: mm 35-44.

Another key element of the introduction is the addition of a short contrapuntal passage on m.5 Example 6



Example 6.

Although the sonority and effect achieved by this will be used for the next section (A) that starts at m7, it will never reappear in its original form. That is four 32nd notes against a triplet of 16th notes.

## Section A

As mentioned before, section A: mm. 7-44, uses material derived from the introduction. The goal of the section is to portray a sense of displacement of voices and to avoid any sense of linear counterpoint or even polyphony.

Section A has a faster metronome mark:  $q = 96$  and is indicated to be played without pedal sounding *meccanico e secco*. There is also a *martellato* indication. The section tries to portray the feeling of a complex fixed structure, perhaps like a labyrinth. The sense of a fixed structure is emphasized by the single dynamic mark: ***f***. Only towards the end becomes something linear and predictable.

A new element appears in m. 10, Example 7. The writing seems related to other aspects of the section but it has its own metronome and dynamic marks,  $q=165$  and ***ff*** respectively and uses the pedal thus creating a rapid gesture that masks its minor seconds that rapidly move from the mid-high to mid-low registers of the piano.

The image shows a musical score for Example 7. At the top, a quarter note is followed by "= 165". Below this, two groups of three notes are indicated by brackets with the number "3" underneath each. The first group consists of a treble clef, a sharp sign, and three notes: a quarter note on G4, a quarter note on A4, and a quarter note on B4. The second group consists of a bass clef and three notes: a quarter note on G3, a quarter note on F3, and a quarter note on E3. A dynamic marking of ***ff*** is placed below the first group. A pedal line labeled "Ped." is shown below the bass clef, with a bracket indicating it is held for the duration of the second group of notes.

Example 7.

This gesture (M4), acts as a foreshadowing element. It will be the foundation of the transition to the contrasting section B starting at m. 60. It will not appear again in A. Further into the same section the sonorities start to reveal a slowly descending pattern on the right hand that starts to emerge in m. 21 with an accented note on the right hand.

This pattern will become evident at m. 35 where becomes detached. At this point, M3 has already been transformed into a chromatic descending line that culminates with

a **ff** cluster on the lower register that somehow resembles M4. The sense of directionality and openness of the introduction are now clear by the contrast of sonorities in the upper and lower registers of the instrument.

Example 8.

At m. 47, M4 appears again this time transformed by the cluster of m. 45. It starts as a gesture that is drowned by the pedal that gradually reveals its rhythmic pattern. This transition also includes a transformation of M1 that is trapped by the elements of the transition. Its purpose is to symbolize the labyrinth as a trap and also to remind the listener of M1 which is followed by M2 in the first bars of section B at m.50. perhaps reminding us of the introduction.

### Section B

Section B starts at m. 60 with the first element of M2 followed by a single pitch F#. The first measures give the listener something similar to M1 but at m.62 is evident that the passage is a new section that derives from M2. The connection is not as evident on the score as it is by listening to the piece. The entire section tries to create a great sense of independence of the hands and it sounds as two unrelated ideas. One is a chromatic descend and the other is a pointillistic idea that floats on the higher register of the piano symbolizing the starts of the universe. This idea will gradually become an ascending line that ends with a repetition of a transformed M1 and a symmetrical cluster of three pitches A#,B,C.

## Conclusion

*Laberinto Borgeano* is a work that constantly juxtaposes two different ideas without trying to create a sense of linear counterpoint or polyphony. The idea of duality is present throughout the work and is presented at the beginning with two different motifs that become the pillars of the work. The form of the piece consists of: Introduction - A - Bridge - B as shown in Example 9.

These two motifs, M1 and M2, are developed in each section of the work respectively. Moreover, M3 gradually becomes an important element in A at the end of the section. The addition of M4 in A creates the material for the transition between A and B. M1 is deconstructed at the end of the work intersecting with M2's chord *come un'eco lontano*



Example 9.

## Index of motifs

Musical notation for Motif M1. It is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of ♩ = 50. The notation features a melodic line in the treble clef with a dynamic marking of *mp*. A slur covers a sequence of notes, with a '9' above it. An 8<sup>va</sup> bracket indicates an octave transposition. A pedal point is marked at the bottom.

M1

Musical notation for Motif M2. It is written in 4/4 time. The notation features a melodic line in the treble clef with a dynamic marking of *pp* and the text *come un'eco lontano*. A slur covers a sequence of notes, with a '3' above it. A pedal point is marked at the bottom.

M2

Musical notation for Motif M3. It is written in 4/4 time. The notation features a melodic line in the treble clef with a dynamic marking of *ppp* and *ff*. A slur covers a sequence of notes, with a '5' above it. An 8<sup>va</sup> bracket indicates an octave transposition. A pedal point is marked at the bottom.

M3

Musical notation for Motif M4. It is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of ♩ = 165. The notation features a melodic line in the treble clef with a dynamic marking of *ff*. A slur covers a sequence of notes, with a '3' above it. A pedal point is marked at the bottom.

M4