

concerning the musical concept of “henning sieverts – symmetry”

A palindrome (from the Greek word *palindromos*, running back again) is a symmetric word, phrase, sentence, or number that reads the same backwards or forwards. Some well-known palindromes are “Otto”, “Anna”, “Madam, I’m Adam”, “1881”.

There are also palindromes in music – single elements, as well as complete works – a chord or series of chords, a scale, a rhythm, a bar, a song-form, etc.

Such musical palindromes are hidden within all the compositions on “**henning sieverts – symmetry**”

The beauty of this symmetry intuitively reveals itself; you don’t need a calculator or a degree in higher mathematics to enjoy the music! However, for those who want to know where the symmetries are in particular, here are some details (by the way, all of names of the compositions are palindromes!):

top spot - begins like the droning of a choir as it warms up. The symmetry begins after the third phrase. The second part of the composition is based on a symmetric six tone scale that dances between major and minor.

sun is in us – The symmetry is tucked into the harmonic framework of this sunny composition: four augmented (symmetric) triads are built off the tonics: Db-F-A, C-E-G#, B-D#-G, and Bb-D-Gb.

lion oil – is an entirely symmetrical miniature that is mostly composed. It ends in the manner of a four-voice canon.

deep speed – forceful driving dark energy. The symmetry initially lies in the theme’s meter: four phrases in 15/4 divided in 9-6/6-9/9-6/6-9. The theme’s final section is built on a diminished (symmetric) chord (G-E-Db-Bb) played over four bars of $\frac{3}{4}$.

all for one, one for all - The first section is a repeated bass line using a 12-tone-row with a symmetrical sequence of intervals (fourth-fourth-fifth-fifth-fourth-fourth, etc.) When the piano comes in, it plays six minor chords ascending in consecutive whole-tones. The tonics of the chords thus form a (symmetric) whole tone row. Six major chords immediately follow. These chord sequences reappear in reverse order at the end of the composition: major chords first, and then the minor chords. A further symmetric element is found at the end of the piano solo. The tonics (D-B-Ab-F) of the repeating four bar sequence of chords form a descending diminished (symmetric) chord.

bird rib – This completely written-out miniature is as delicate and fragile as a sparrow’s wing. The chords and scales are symmetrical throughout the composition.

leaves fall fall leaves - is a meditation in which the consistently symmetric chords, like leaves in autumn, gradually change their textural colors. The rhythm is also symmetric: it alters between two 12/8 bars with a 2-3-2-3-2 symmetrical structure and two 13/8 bars with a 3-2-3-2-3 symmetrical structure.

sum summus mus (Latin for “I’m the smallest mouse”) – This is what it sounds like when mice swing. The theme is composed of unadulterated flatted fifths, thus symmetrically

dividing the octave into two equidistant halves. The 12-bar form follows the typical blues schema with one distinctive feature: every bar has a different tonic as its foundation, creating a 12-tone-row.

luz azul (Portuguese for blue light) – In the first section, Miles Davis' classic "Solar" is "hexatonally" illuminated (from the Greek *hexa* = six). This six-note scale has a minor third-minor second-minor third-minor second-minor third-minor second intervallic structure. (e.g. C-Eb-E-G-Ab-B-C). In the second section, clarinet and trombone play together, each a mirror to the other's ideas as they circle the meditative axis of the bowed bass.

never odd or even – Just as the composition's name is paradoxical, so too is its structure unusual, with its four independent elements:

1. The drums play a continual rhythm – precise as a machine, but as delicate as a music box.
2. From time to time the clarinet and trombone glide into the picture with quick, mirror-like melodies.
3. Now and then the piano plays ascending melodies, while at the same time the intervals diminish (major 7th-minor 7th, major 6th-minor 6th, 5th, etc.)
4. A fine-spun cello improvisation rises over this sometimes opaque sometimes translucent weave. Drums, clarinet/trombone, and piano play in three different tempos and meters that are all related to each other: a 9/4 bar played by the clarinet/trombone lasts as long as two 3/4 bars played by the drums; a 4/4 bar played by the piano has the same length as the drums' 3/4 bar.

evil olive - is a backhanded blues played simultaneously in three keys: E major (trombone), G major (piano), and Bb major (tenor sax). The bass moves constantly back and forth between the keys. Since E major, G major, and Bb major have a (symmetrical) minor third relationship to each other, they sound pretty good together!

we few - is a tender miniature with a symmetric A-B-A-B-A form: composed motif – free improvisation – composed motif – free improvisation – composed motif. In the composed passages, the clarinet and trombone each play one of the two (symmetric) whole tone scales. The clarinet plays C-D-E-F#-G#-A#, and the trombone plays Db-Eb-F-G-A-B. The two scales together compose a 12-tone-row. The piano plays a 12-tone-row distributed over the three composed passages.

emit time – The piano begins and ends with 12-tone-row arpeggios consisting of the four (symmetrical) augmented triads. These rows also provide the foundation for the solo cello-clarinet, and the trombone solo.

dr. awkward - is a short five-voice canon in which the same (symmetric) motif of two fourths is built off five different tonics and played in five different tempos.