

Jacob Sachs-Mishalanie – Pole, Steam, Tree, Glass

 [composerstoolbox.com /2017/06/11/jacob-sachs-mishalanie-pole-steam-tree-glass/](https://composerstoolbox.com/2017/06/11/jacob-sachs-mishalanie-pole-steam-tree-glass/)

View all posts by
DanLisMusic

6/11/2017



Jacob Sachs-Mishalanie’s work “Pole, Steam, Tree, Glass” is an inventive approach to timbre, idiomatic writing, a certain poetry, and the interaction of acoustic and electroacoustic approaches. As he writes in his program notes in the [score](#),

“Program Note: In this collection of four short pieces, I contemplate questions about electroacoustic music, searching not necessarily for answers, but for poetic expression. To name a few: Do sounds from a speaker flatten or expand space? Are electronic sounds expressive in the same way as sounds made by a person on stage? When a recording is played back, is it a statement or a re-statement? What characteristics make a sound feel real or artificial, and is there something between? – Jacob Sachs-Mishalanie”

As one listens to the piece, one hears the interaction of the acoustic performance and the live processing. The result is a fragile, distinct, and lyrical exploration.

The score is rife with very idiomatic violin writing. Take, for example, the opening phrase:

1 $\text{♩} = 60$ mechanical 3

Here he uses double stops resolving and preceded by single notes, oscillating between the G and D strings. His knowledge of the violin, and what is easy for bowing and fingering, allow this passage to breathe and take on crystalline form.

This work progresses with different motivic elements, but the fragile, precise nature continues. Jacob achieves this by using very carefully notated dynamics. Take, for example, this passage from movement 3:

59

Here Jacob shapes the line by micromanaging dynamics. Even though the dynamic rhythm is quite fast, the effect achieved is a meticulously phrased investigation into violin tonal.

Let us return to his program note. There is a key dichotomy in this piece: what is a live instrument, and what is an electronic instrument? The two in this work are nearly inseparable, even though the violin part is busier and the electronics intermittent and shy. This raises important questions of any piece with live sampling: are any of the notes in the piece “fake” or “generated”? Since the electronics rely on the violin, does that make them secondary, or is this relationship mutually beneficial? After all, the electronics bind the piece together.

While the answers in this piece are of lesser importance than the questions posed, there are “answers” we can learn as composers. Here are some of the takeaways I have from this work:

1. Know your instrument inside and out. Jacob knows the strings, fingerings, and slur techniques of the violin quite well. If you do not know how he achieves this successful performance, find a violinist, become friends, and ask them to tell you everything they know about their instrument
2. Electronics do not have to be grandiose. Instead of creating very complicated setups, or walls of sound, this piece relies on a few key elements that do not enhance the piece—rather, they make the piece what it is at a core level
3. Poetry is not reserved for romantic, lush, melodic gestures. In my judgment, this piece is a series of four succinct, humble poems. They meander a bit, but in essence remain like water flowing in a stream: there is always water, but it is moving at its own pace, on its own time, always downward but never gushing

I hope you enjoyed this work; it is a serene landscape that relies on details to make it convincing, which opposes many of the works analyzed here.

Happy Composing!

Dan