

Exploring the Prehistoric

‘Jurassic 1’ Commentary

By Jamie Hancock



Commentary

Exploring the Prehistoric consists of 'Jurassic 1' and 'Jurassic 2'. The photograph above of a view of Budleigh Salterton beach on the Jurassic Coast seemed fitting for the music, which has a sound world evoking scenes of dramatic landscapes and creatures from a prehistoric time.

The Timing of Each Section - Minutes and Seconds - in 'Jurassic 1'

- 'Jurassic 1' opens with solo bass clarinet as an introduction.
- At 1 min and 25 secs the bass clarinetist plays with the expectation that his audio will be recorded and processed through Nobuyasu Sakonda's *Granular 2.5 Max/MSP* patch on a laptop.
- The laptop part enters at 2 mins and 6 secs.
- At 3 mins 44 secs the laptop part fades out and solo bass clarinet dominates for a very short time before the laptop fades in again at 3 mins 50 secs.
- At 4 mins 23 secs the laptop part fades out. At 4 mins 29 secs the laptop part fades in again very closely followed by the bass clarinet entry.
- At 5 mins 19 secs the laptop part fades out and at 5 mins 26 secs the bass clarinet also pauses.
- At 5 mins 32 secs solo bass clarinet enters.
- At 6 mins 41 secs the bass clarinetist plays with the expectation that his audio will again be recorded and processed through Sakonda's *Granular 2.5*, the laptop part enters again at 7 mins 10 secs.
- At 9 mins 14 secs the laptop part fades out and shortly after the bass clarinet pauses. Solo laptop enters at 9 mins 18 secs and solo bass clarinet takes over at 10 mins 1 sec.
- The laptop part enters at 10 mins 18 secs complimented by the bass clarinet at 10 mins 59 secs and from 11 mins 24 secs the laptop brings the piece to a close.

'Jurassic 1'

'Jurassic 1' is in part inspired by the concept of microsound. Curtis Roads introduces the concept as follows:

'Beneath the level of the note lies the realm of microsound, of sound particles. Microsonic particles remained invisible for centuries. Recent technological advances let us probe and explore the beauties of this formerly unseen world. Microsonic techniques dissolve the rigid bricks of music architecture – the notes – into a more fluid and supple medium. Sounds may coalesce, evaporate, or mutate into other sounds.'¹

¹ Curtis Roads, *Microsound*, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001) vii

The term grains, is used in reference to looking at sound particles this way. And 'Jurassic 1' uses granular synthesis, implemented in the graphical programming environment Max/MSP, specifically Nobuyasu Sakonda's *Granular 2.5* patch.

The score performance direction to the bass clarinetist of concentrating on register both high and low and on short duration/fast/rhythmic, suggests the microtonal and microrhythmic, which links to the idea of tiny sound particles. The performance direction of focussing on volume, both loud and faint encourages the bass clarinet playing to move from breathy and quiet to great swells and subsequent dispersal, evolving to a new state as is characteristic of working with microsound. Also, the performance direction of using the extended instrumental techniques/effects of multiphonics and embouchure distortion is like a probing and exploration of the fundamental construction of the bass clarinet sound.

In composing 'Jurassic 1', Jamie also took inspiration from the idea of moment form, conceived of by Karlheinz Stockhausen and first self-consciously applied while composing his piece *Kontakte* (1959-60). Jonathan D. Kramer who has written on this explains: 'Moments are defined as self-contained entities, capable of standing on their own yet in some sense belonging to the context of the composition.' It is the idea of moving through various musical episodes, each with its own character, not relating to each other in any functionally implicative manner.² Indeed, this applies to 'Jurassic 1', which is about imagining prehistoric creatures and exploring different moods and atmospheres.

² Jonathan D. Kramer, *Moment form in Twentieth Century Music*, in *The Musical Quarterly*, 179