

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition: **Through Thick and Thin** – flute, clarinet, viola, and piano

Date: 1990

Duration: 12:37

Recording: by Carol Adee, flute; Peter Josheff, clarinet; George Thomson, viola; Karen Rosenak, piano

Program Note:

*Through Thick and Thin* refers simply to the flux of textural densities and tempi. It has no intended rhetorical, political or social meaning. Writing it was a pure compositional act. However, in a strange and unavoidable way, I believe that the nuances of contemporary concerns are always insidiously and unconsciously engaged even when the creative approach is abstract. Hence the spirit of the piece is just as nebulous to the composer as to the listener and, therefore, there is no specific message. Therefore, I comment only on some of the special musical aspects of the piece. I wanted this work to begin and end wildly, with great energy and bravura. It was to be a piece that gave the performers a chance to enjoy their consummate technical skill. In a single movement, of course, one cannot easily maintain such high energy level without exhausting both performers and auditors. Hence, shifts in speed and density have to be injected internally. Thus the form of *Through Thick and Thin* is sectional; it is, in fact, a “checkerboard.” Tutti sections alternate with soloistic ones. The sectional laminate has a special feature, however: the tutti sections progress incrementally from fast to slow, while the solo sections progress incrementally from slow to fast, beginning with the piano. The piano solo is followed by the clarinet, viola, and the flute solos respectively; the last is the most frenzied. The flute solo brings the piece to a high energy level again, and the ensemble joins in for a lively coda-like race to a frantic and exhilarating finish.

In 1983 I started experimenting with a pitch scaling which I have coined arc scaling. A “Pentarc” is a complex of stacked five-note diatonic major scales. In the same way that a work using conventional eight-note diatonic scales fills the musical pitch spectrum with stacked octaves, a work using pentarcs stacks five-note major scales. No inter-diatonic chromatics are used when applying pentarc scales. If and when a specific chromatic pitch is required, the composer must find the specific register in the pentarc where that pitch class can be found. No octave transfers are allowed! One of the natural consequences of using pentarcs is that sonorities tend to be pandiatonic if their tones are more or less conjunct and quasi dodecaphonic if they are disjunct. Combining these options is one of the compositional responsibilities involved in the writing of the piece. *Through Thick and Thin* is my seventh and most intensely arc-oriented work to date. The first was “.from out the sounding cells.” from *Pentarcs* for piano solo. In *Through Thick and Thin* I have integrated not only pentarcs, but tetrarcs as well (scales that involve the stacking of perfect fourth scales instead of perfect fifth scales.) They often occur together.