Through a glass, darkly

for 6 players

Sean Clarke

Written for Ensemble Mise-En and the 2016 Red Note New Music Festival, Illinois State University.

Program Notes

The title comes from an evocative passage in 1 Corinthians, which reads "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." It points to the difficulty of seeing things clearly, to the imperfection of our knowledge and perception.

This piece is made up of slowly rolling waves of sound, by turns foreboding, lyrical, and violent. Themes gradually grow and transform; return and break off; appear and fade away; and reemerge unexpectedly. Players mimic each other, weaving dense webs of sound out of similar musical threads. The trombone repeats a funereal dotted rhythm that begins as an understated background detail but later dominates the entire texture. Sections return, develop, and build in intensity without achieving a clear sense of closure. There are glimpses of light and clarity, but the work ends in the dark muddled low register of the piano and contrabass.

Instrumentation

Flute
Clarinet in B-flat

Trombone

Piano

Violin
Contrabass

Score is notated in C.

Duration

ca. 7 minutes

Performance notes

- *Flute and clarinet:* Notes with X note-heads should be played as airy "tongue pizzicato" notes – mostly air and tongue sounds with a rough, airy tone. Notes with three slashes through the stem are flutter-tongued.

- *Violin and contrabass:* Spiccato notes should have a rough, aggressive, scratchy tone.

- *Piano:* Tremolo chords at lower dynamic levels should be played slowly and expressively, with rubato-like variations in speed. The player should freely play the notes within both hands instead of alternating right- and left-hand chords. Tremolo chords at higher dynamic levels should be played rapidly and aggressively, alternating between hands.

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Lamentoso

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♩ = ca. 40

Flute
Clarinet
Notated in C
Trombone
Piano
Violin
Contrabass
Fl
Cl
Trb
Pn
Vn
Cb

mostly tongue and air; rough tone
mute in
spiccato, rough tone
sul pont.
sotto voce
with mute
sul tasto
8vb
Ped.

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Fl

Cl

Trb

Pn

Vn

Cb

14

19

Fl

Cl

Trb

Pn

Vn

Cb

(with mute)

sul pont.

norm.

sul pont.

Furioso

23

Fl

Cl

Trb

Pn

Vn

Cb

spiccato,
rough tone

norm.

pizz.