

# Locriana

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for Piano Quartet (2008, rev. 2011)

These four movements include a wide variety of textures and moods flavored with the piquancy of the locrian mode. Locrian is an inherently unstable scale with half steps between the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> degrees, a tritone from the 1<sup>st</sup> degree to the 5<sup>th</sup>, and a vague, dark and chocolaty flavor. The music at once exploits and tempers these characteristics. Chromaticism is applied moderately and freely, and some use is made of the superlocrian mode, i.e. locrian with a lowered 4<sup>th</sup> degree. Acknowledging the prominence of the diminished triad in locrian, the four movements are “keyed” in A, C, Eb, and F#. Modulations within movements are limited to these four keys, and the key of the moment is often announced by stabbing octaves in the piano. Much of the harmony is quartal and 5<sup>th</sup> scale degrees are treated as dominants. The melodic material introduced in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement reappears, with alterations, in all of the following movements. Melodies tend to emphasize tritone relationships and the half steps characteristic of locrian mode.

## **I. Yin & Yangs**

A brief sonata form, in which 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> themes are given very opposite characters. After a violent, lurching introduction, the two themes are presented in the reverse of the traditional order—a gentle, lyrical 1<sup>st</sup> theme in pan-diatonic Eb in violin and viola (yin), followed by a forceful and ponderous theme in the piano made up of motives from the introduction (yangs). A polyphonic development section begins gently (yin) and progresses to a bold conclusion (yang), followed by a shortened recapitulation that develops the two themes a bit more. Finally, the introduction is briefly reprised and the movement ends with a grand gesture in A locrian. Duration about 4'40".

## **II. Tango Excéntrico**

Off-center in approach—often detached and cryptic rather than passionate, missing half of every 4<sup>th</sup> beat—this movement commits itself only partially to the typical tango mystique. The material appears and returns in a sort of rondo form, with each return varied in some way. At the end it sputters out in fractured little tango rhythms in C locrian. Duration about 4'35".

## **III. Night Music**

Dark, hazy and enigmatic, this begins by presenting previous melodic motives in scattered, ephemeral gestures. The lyrical theme from the first movement appears in the middle section in a fairly recognizable form, but soon develops into a tangled web as all three strings present it in simultaneous variations. A chorale-like section in the strings ushers in a third section that mixes and develops material from the first two and eventually dissolves in a quiet chord progression in D# locrian. Duration 7'30"-8'.

## **IV. Modular Agitations (revised 2011)**

In this finale blocks of music of various lengths make frequent reappearances, varied in their content and sequence—a sort of extended rondo. Whether loud or soft or thick or thin, its temperament is generally unsettled. The characteristic locrian half steps and tritones are subjects of obsession in the melodies of all sections. The movement is keyed at beginning and end in F# locrian, but all the keys of the previous movements are revisited. A long dominant pedal point on C heralds the ending in F#. Duration about 5'50".

## **Interpretive suggestions**

### **I. Yin & Yangs**

Maintain an absolutely steady pulse until the last measure. Emphasize the difference between relatively loud and thorny passages, such as 1-10 and 30-40, and the more delicate portions such as 11-18. The second part of the development section, starting at 55, must begin gently enough that it can build all the way to its climax at 75.

The palm slaps in the piano can be thought of as striking a splash cymbal; note that from 97 to the end they move gradually higher.

## II. Tango Excéntrico

With a steady pulse throughout, though mostly in 32. Some sections should effuse with typical tango passion, but others, such as the beginning and the coda, are mysterious or enigmatic. *Glissandi* in the strings should be broad and spread evenly across the duration of the starting pitch. Do not do strums too quickly. *Sul ponticelli* – in this and succeeding movements—should be as thin and raspy as possible. The tango flavor of the melodies should be intensified with a big, rich tone and by playing just a little behind the beat.

## III. Night Music

This movement is primarily designed to project a colorful, morphing and thoroughly blended mist, above which shards of melody are occasionally heard. Each part should be shaded with maximum attention to nuance and in a manner that will best contribute to the whole. The brief high register motives in the piano are to be placed in a rhythmic position approximated by their appearance in the score; avoid synchronizing them with the pulse or playing them too fast. These motives, and the chords that begin in measure 10 (which are founded on a sort of passacaglia bass that reappears twice more), should stand out slightly above the trills and the repetitive quarter notes. The harmonic *glissandi* in the strings should lightly glisten with the various overtones sounding in rapid succession. Tempos fluctuate where indicated; the ending dissolves into nothingness.

## IV. Modular Agitations

Whether loud or soft, this movement pulses relentlessly ahead in a jazz/rock sort of way with a variety of *ostinati*, locrian scale patterns, and parallel chord sequences. There are only a couple of exceptions to this-- bars 25-33, which introduce this movement's version of the locrian thematic material, and bars 213-218, the brief calm before the storm of the ending. All players have their turn at carrying the various motoric accompaniment parts, which should be rendered strictly and energetically; solo melodic parts set against these, especially if marked *espressivo*, can be played with a little rhythmic nuance. Be sure at 219 to begin softly enough to leave room to build to the upcoming *fortissimo* passages. A moderate *ritardando* at the very end is appropriate.