

Still, for solo piano

James Romig, composer

Ashlee Mack, piano

PROGRAM NOTE

Still, for solo piano, inspired by the paintings of Clyfford Still, was commissioned in 2016 by Ashlee Mack, Carl Patrick Bolleia, Louis Goldstein, Paola Savvidou, and Michiko Saiki, with additional support provided by the Clyfford Still Museum (Denver, Colorado). The work comprises 43 individual “Iterations” that may be performed in a continuous unbroken strand of music that lasts approximately 55 minutes, or it may be divided into smaller segments or suites. As the work unfolds, a strand of 24 notes (a contiguous string of 8 unique trichords) is gradually revealed in groups of three, four, five, or six pitches at a time. This results in a slow-moving alternation of sparse and dense textures over the course of the entire work. On a smaller scale, similar progressions from sparse to dense (and back again) inform each of the 43 individual iterations, resulting in a faster fluctuation of moment-to-moment density that interacts with the work’s large-scale background structure.

Music exists in time, and time moves in only one direction. A listener’s attention is temporally directed by the composer, and one is only able to revisit moments of music as much and as often as memory allows. Because of this, many works of music provide a listener with a relatively narrow aesthetic path, and the intention is for all listeners to have more or less the same experience. A viewer of visual art, on the other hand, is usually free to choose which artwork to observe, where to stand in relation to that artwork, where to look within the boundaries of the image, and for how long. When visiting the Clyfford Still Museum, one wanders intuitively from work to work, making connections between different paintings. Each visitor has a unique experience, but because all the works come from a single creator a Big Picture eventually emerges. The goal of this piano piece is to create a “museum of sound,” allowing a listener to develop a notion of the work’s entirety by listening to multiple iterative variations of harmony (color) and rhythm (form). Though an audience will of course be bound by temporality as the music unfolds over the course of an hour or so, it is hoped that the inner repetitions and variations within the 43 sections of music might provide each listener with a unique experience, determined by whichever musical features are noted and remembered from iteration to iteration.

A recording of *Still*, performed by Ashlee Mack, is available from New World Records.