

Tom Armitage

Tangoul Morçii

(2020)

Mezzo-Soprano

Piano

Cello

Tangoul Morții

By Tom Armitage, to words by *Paul Celan*

Duration: *c.* 5'

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Tangoul Morții is the Romanian translation of *Paul Celan's* German-language poem, *Todesfuge*.

In this setting of the words, I decided to focus on notable criticisms of the poem, instead of seeking to create a Holocaust piece. Writing music that reflects the Holocaust has always been a subject I have actively avoided in composition, for fear that I may inevitably create something that digs too shallow into the horrors of the tragedy. But in this instance, I found a connection in the perceived flaws in the poem because it related to these very reservations.

Critics of *Todesfuge* have denounced its lyricism and a failure to truly reflect the abomination of the Holocaust.

In a sense, I can sympathise with *Celan* on this matter. I frequently question if art can really reflect life. Often, I find myself sitting on the side of the fence that believes otherwise. But then I am moved to tears by a particularly gut-wrenching symphonic episode, or I may find myself empathising with an opera character who has been particularly hard done by. This is usually followed by a realisation that these feelings are not comparable with actually experiencing the crises the music is attempting to reflect, but it is a composer's best attempt—which may be a very convincing attempt, nonetheless. So why do we do it? Why do we even attempt to handle these topics? Don't expect an answer from me here.

My first action in this piece was to take a step toward stripping back some of the overt lyricism that already exists in the text. You will not find a complete word setting here, because I have attempted to present further abstraction in *Celan's* already-criptic text. Only selected phrases are used here, mostly unrelated, and often out of order. In some instances, I have even broken up the individual syllables of words. This, I found to work effectively in a recent composition of an opera in which a character is raped, and often talks about the horrors of their ordeal. I did not want this character to speak so openly and confidently about an event which brought her great shame, so I never allowed her to complete her execution of the word without first breaking it up into several notes, each divided by numerous rests.

This piece may employ a tango element, but once again I explored the lyricism of the dance form here. The tango rhythm is scarcely completed in full, often resulting in particular beats landing out of place. A particular tango element, which I would like utilised here with plenty

of exaggeration, is the force of the stronger third beat. This should, indeed, be extreme, whereas the other beats can be barely a whisper in comparison. The dynamics reflect this and should be adhered to accordingly.

A moment which has caused me much discomfort is my inclusion of a *'party-like'* atmosphere within the mostly-instrumental tango intermezzo. There is a very clear oxymoronic nature between the culture of the tango genre and the monstrosity of the Holocaust. The two should never sit comfortably alongside each other, mirrored also in the grotesqueness of Nazi officers forcing musician detainees to play within that setting.

Schwarze Milch der Frühe
(Black milk of morning)

Wir trinken und trinken
(We drink and drink)

Schwarze Milch, Schwarze Milch
(Black milk, Black milk)

Er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz
(He commands us to play for the dance)

Ein Mann wohnt im Haus
(There's a man in this house)

Seine Augen sind blau
(His eyes are blue)

Er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen sind blau
(He tugs at the sword in his belt he swings it his eyes are blue)

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
(Black milk of morning we drink you at night)

Tangoul Morții

Tom Armitage
 Words taken from 'Todesfuge' by Paul Celan
 January 2020

Quasi-Tango (♩=90)

Mezzo-soprano

Piano

Violoncello

arco
 senza vib. | quickly increase vib.
 to a wide wobble

Mezzo

4

pp *ffp* *ff* *p*

Schwar - ze Milch, Schwar - ze Milch,

Pno.

Vc.

8 *mf* 3 3 3 3 *sub. p*

Mezzo

der Früh - -

Pno. *p* 6 6 6 6 3

Vc. arco *pp* *mp*

10 *f* *pp* 3 *f*

Mezzo

- e Schwar-ze Milch, Schwar - ze Milch,

Pno. *pp* *sffz* 3 *pp* *pp*

Vc. *subito senza vib.* pizz. arco *pp* *sffz* pizz. 3 *p* *pp*

15 *sempre p* **molto accel.**

Mezzo

Wir trink-en und trink-en und trink - en und trink - en und

Pno.

sffz pp *sempre pp*

Vc.

arco pizz. *p* **approx. pitch and free timing fretboard tapping with fingers** *ad lib.* **ff**

17 **glottle the 'k'**

Mezzo

trink - en, trink - en, trink - en, trink - en, trink - en, trink - en, trin(k)

Pno.

Vc.

A tempo *pp* *fp* **accel.** *f* *ffp* *liberamente*

Mezzo 18
Schwar-ze Milch, Schwar - - - ze

Pno.

Vc.

Meno mosso *pp* **Tempo Primo** *energetically mp* *f* *mp* **poco accel.**

Mezzo 24
Schar - ze Milch Er be-fiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz

Pno. *pp* *sfz*

Vc. arco *pp* *mp*

Intermezzo:

Tirelessly

A tempo

30

Mezzo

Pno.

Vc.

p *sfz* *mp* *f*

fp *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp*

32

Mezzo

Pno.

Vc.

pp *sfz*

fp *fp* *fp* *fp*

33

Mezzo

Pno.

Vc.

mp *sfz p*

fp fp fp fp fp fp fp

35

Mezzo

Pno.

Vc.

sfz mp f

fp fp fp fp fp fp fp

37

Mezzo

Pno.

Vc.

ffp *ffp* *ffp* *ffp* *sffz p* *pp* *sffz*

fp *fp* *fp* *fp* *sffz* *gliss.* *sffz* *arco* *sffz* *p*

approx. pitch, ad lib.
 Improvised party-like whooping
 and laughing

41

Mezzo

Pno.

Vc.

ff *pp* *sffz* *pp*

pizz. *arco* *sffz* *p* *pp* *sffz* *pizz.* *p*

gliss.

(Woo)

43

Mezzo

gliss. *gliss.* *slowly*

(Woo) (Woo) (Woo) Ah!

Pno.

sffz pp *sffz pp* *sffz pp*

Vc.

arco

pp sffz p ff

6

46

Mezzo

gliss. *gliss.* Ah!

Pno.

sffz pp

Vc.

6 6 6 6

poco accel.

Improvised:

pained wailing, turning into crying

continue ad lib.

Mezzo

Ah!!! Ah!!! Ah!!! Ah!!!...

Pno.

sfz pp sfz pp sfz pp sfz pp pp sffz

poco accel.

**scratch tone on a high note
sul pont.**

Vc.

fff

Slow and spacious (♩=50)

lunga

mp

Mezzo

Ein Mann wohnt im Hau(s) - sss...

Pno.

lunga pp

Vc.

lunga Rauschen pp

57 *p*

Mezzo *port.*
Sei - ne Au - gen sind blau,

Pno.

Vc.

Urgently (♩=100)

62 *mf* *ff*

Mezzo
Er greift nach dem Ei - sen im Gurt er schwingst_

Pno.

Vc.

gl/xy.

sffz

sffz

pizz.

sffz

65 **Slow and spacious** (♩=50)
mp

Mezzo
Sei - ne Au - gen sind

Pno.
pp
8^{va}
3
7
8^{vb}
7

Vc.
arco
Rauschen
pp

69 *half-sung/
spoken at pitch
senza vib.* **L'istesso tempo**
sffz *mp*

Mezzo
blau, ...der Frü - he

Pno.
8
pp

Vc.
L'istesso tempo
pizz.
mp
3

74 **rit.**

Mezzo

wir trin-ken, wir trin - - - ken dich nachts

Pno.

ppp *pppp*

Vc.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for three parts: Mezzo (voice), Pno. (piano), and Vc. (violin). It begins at measure 74. The Mezzo part is in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are 'wir trin-ken, wir trin - - - ken dich nachts'. The first two measures have a triplet of eighth notes. The third measure has a long note with a slur. The Pno. part is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first measure has a triplet of eighth notes in the bass clef. The second measure has a long note in the bass clef. The third measure has a long note in the bass clef. The Vc. part is in a bass clef with a key signature of one flat. It features three triplets of eighth notes in the first two measures and a long note in the third measure. The tempo marking 'rit.' is above the Mezzo part. The piano markings 'ppp' and 'pppp' are below the Pno. part. The score ends with a double bar line.