

Douglas Ragon, Composition Recital

October 24, 2021

3:00pm

All Faiths Chapel, Kansas State University

PROGRAM

Night and Day Cole Porter
Arr. Douglas Ragon

Douglas Ragon, Trombone
Nathan Byard, Piano

Sonata No. 1 for Jazz Quartet and String Trio Douglas Ragon

Douglas Ragon, Trombone
Nathan Byard, Piano
Michael T. Brown, Bass
Robert Rodriguez, Drums
Ryan Keith, Violin
Blake Modean, Viola
Nicholas Dvorske, Cello

Prelude in Beige Douglas Ragon

Douglas Ragon, Piano

On Blue Whale Boulevard Douglas Ragon

Tony Rodriguez, Soprano Saxophone
Blake Crawford, Tenor Saxophone
Douglas Ragon, Trombone
Nathan Byard, Piano
Michael T. Brown, Bass
Robert Rodriguez, Drums

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School of Music,
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PROGRAM NOTES

Night and Day

"Night and Day" is a popular jazz standard composed by Cole Porter, and performed by many musicians over the years. I wanted to take my own spin on the tune, and combine the jazz and "legit" (or classical) idioms, in the vein of Russian pianist and composer Nikolai Kapustin. The piano begins with a driving rhythm, which it carries throughout the piece, before the trombone enters with hints of the melody. After the introduction, the piece moves into the typical jazz form: head (or melody), solo, head out. In the "solo" section, the rhythmic feel switches from straight to swing, and the piano plays a walking bassline in the left hand while comping (chordal accompaniment) in the right hand. The trombone plays a solo evocative of improvised solos by trombonists such as J.J. Johnson, and playfully interacts with the piano. After the end of the "solo" section, the rhythmic feel returns to straight, and the head is played again, building in energy to the climax before letting the energy die down in the ending.

Sonata No. 1 for Jazz Quartet and String Trio

"Sonata No. 1 for Jazz Quartet and String Trio" continues the theme of combining the jazz and classical idioms, this time featuring the traditional sonata form in a new context. The piece opens with the piano stating a four-note theme which will be heard in variations throughout the piece. After the introduction, the jazz quartet enters with the first main theme of the piece, which is an homage to the Miles Davis tune "Nardis." On the second play through of this theme, the strings enter with sweeping lines to complement and contrast with the more detached, cool groove of the jazz quartet.

After the first theme, the feel transitions from swing into straight to guide us into the second theme: a romantic theme more rooted in diatonic harmony, in stark contrast to the first theme. This theme is evocative of music by colossal jazz guitarist and composer Pat Metheny. The theme is first stated by piano, before the rest of the ensemble enters with a straight groove evocative of early Metheny tunes such as "Bright Size Life" or "Phase Dance." After coming to a climax, the texture thins out to a solo bass cadenza, which brings us back to the first theme (and a repeat of the exposition section, as is traditional with sonata form).

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Sonata No. 1 for Jazz Quartet and String Trio Continued

Following the exposition, we move into the development section. Traditionally in sonata form, the development features snippets of the main themes while moving through many different key centers. Here, the development section is re-contextualized to incorporate the jazz idiom: this is now an improvised solo section for the trombone. The feel switches back to swing, but now in a slower tempo (evoking feelings of film noir). Underneath the trombone solo, the strings play variations of the two main themes. In the middle of the trombone solo, the solo stops to allow the strings to play a rhythmically offset section that moves rapidly through different keys, before building in energy to allow the trombone solo to return. After the trombone solo is finished, we transition into the recapitulation.

In the recapitulation, we first hear a restatement of the first theme, before hearing the first theme again while the key is shifting rapidly. This brings us to the second theme, now played in the same key as the first theme and used in a slightly different harmonic context. During the second theme, the energy builds to the climax of the piece, before dying down for the outro. The outro features final restatements of both of the main themes, as well as elaborating on the four-note theme which was first heard during the introduction and then heard in variations throughout the rest of the piece. Finally, the ensemble ends the piece by landing on an open E.

Prelude in Beige

"Prelude in Beige" is a short solo piano piece written with twelve-tone harmonic content, inspired by composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and Carl Vine. The piece begins with an open, neutral sounding theme, overlaid with quartal harmonies. After the initial theme, we transition into a new theme heard in separate four note increments. This theme, played at first in quarter notes alternating between the left and right hands, then switches to very fast bursts of 32nd notes in the left hand alternating with long tones in the right hand. The tension builds, before leading back into the first theme: now played with high dynamic energy and built on more diatonic harmonies, in contrast to the freely flowing harmonic content heard elsewhere in the piece. After the energy dies down, we return to the second, four-note theme. This theme leads us to the ending: a slight return to the first theme, now played timidly, before the second theme in 32nd notes closes things out abruptly.

On Blue Whale Boulevard

"On Blue Whale Boulevard" is a jazz tune based on both of the whole tone scales; the title is a play on "On Green Dolphin Street," a popular jazz standard. The tune begins in a Latin, bossa-like feel, with the melody switching back and forth between the whole tone scales. Eventually, the two whole tone scales are heard simultaneously, creating a crunchy dissonance. The bridge switches to a swing waltz feel in a slightly faster tempo, with harmonic content that sounds more diatonic (but is in fact still based on the whole tone scales). In the middle of the bridge, there is one measure of a rhythmic "hiccup" before getting back into the swing groove, and eventually returning to the original Latin groove before the solos begin. The whole tune is very aggressive, taking inspiration from both aggressive jazz music and metal music.