

Commodious Vicus

Concerto for Tenor Saxophone and Orchestra

- I. Here Comes Everything
- II. Spiral Into
- III. A Recreation of Nocturnal Life
- IV. Return

Solo Tenor Saxophone

Flute 1

Flute 2 (doubling Piccolo)

Oboe (doubling English Horn)

Clarinet

Bass Clarinet*

Bassoon

Horn in F 1

Horn in F 2

Trumpet in Bb 1

Trumpet in Bb 2

Trombone

Bass Trombone

Tuba

Percussion 1* (crotales, triangle, mark tree, claves, snare drum, glockenspiel)

Percussion 2* (vibraphone, xylophone, triangle, woodblock, tom toms, multi-bass)

Percussion 3* (glockenspiel, bongos, suspended cymbal, small opera gong, concert bass drum, flexatone)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Bass

*Percussion list and doublings subject to change

Concept:

“Commodious Vicus” is a concerto for tenor saxophone and orchestra that draws loose inspiration from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* — or at least from my associations with the book, Joyce himself, and a variety of tangents that branch off from those starting points. The sound of the tenor saxophone itself is also a major inspiration for the piece, as is the history of the saxophone.

The recurring elements of the piece (in no particular order) are:

- The sonorous timbre of the tenor saxophone
- The ideas of circuitry and symmetry
- Sheets of sound and the “Giant Steps” progression
- Association of the saxophone with all things sinful
- Introspection and “the universe of the mind”
- Layered patterns (particularly isorhythmic patterns)
- Vastness, both in the sense of being gigantic and in the sense of universal emptiness

Textural, Tonal, and Metric Language:

- Overall the language of the piece should feel familiar, but just slightly wrong to a lay audience: it won’t be tonal but it also won’t be jarringly dissonant (at least not all the time). Because of the circuitous nature of things, many ideas will return throughout
- Non-centric, but will incorporate triads (primarily diminished and augmented triads) and polytonal (primarily dissonant polytonal centers) elements
- Some jazz harmonies (tertian extensions), especially in mvt. III
- Mvt. II will feature extreme stratification of texture and possibly isorhythmic patterns
- Metric language will largely avoid symmetry (symmetric meters will be masked by syncopation)

Structure:

- I. Bombastic introduction juxtaposed to drifting and introspective interludes. Harmonically drifting, largely based on the juxtaposition of IC5 and IC6
- II. Thin and ethereal, with occasional moments of brilliance. “Harmonic” areas based on the phrases “Commodious” (02368) and “Vicus” (0137) will alternate and transpose by IC4 throughout as a foreshadowing of the “Giant Steps” progression. Incorporation of the 3rd Mode of Limited Transposition reinforces this.
- III. Movement begins with a sensuous ostinato against which the saxophone plays a smoky melody. Harmony begins in extreme stasis, with gradual movement in contrary motion away from the initial center to establish two groups, each IC3 away from the central drone (so a tritone apart from each other). The drone continues, while the two groups begin “Giant Steps” cycles in opposite directions. The saxophone weaves through this landscape, gradually intensifying towards a “Sheets of Sound” texture even as the accompaniment becomes crazed. Tension builds until it snaps, leaving the saxophone alone for a cadenza. Aleatoric percussion accompanies the cadenza, which will be very loosely structured so as to allow considerable improvisation/embellishment. The cadenza slowly fades away
- IV. A chime sounds, inviting the return of the saxophone, which re-enters in a vaguely mirrored version of the cadenza. The movement then continues is a rough accelerated rewind of the previous movements — like a rubber band snapping back to its starting point — until it reaches what was the introduction, which is played as a near-exact retrograde of the opening material of movement I, followed by a near-exact repetition of the opening measures

Musical Intertexts, Jokes, and References:

- References to Coltrane will be everywhere, but there will be nods to Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Sonny Rollins, and Wayne Shorter scattered in as well. No quotes, but things that I associate with their playing styles and/or writing.
- Elements of my own style that are inspired by Duke Ellington, George Crumb, Charles Ives, Joan Tower, Ruth Crawford, and William Bolcom will be prominently featured. Again, no quotation or explicit references
- In addition to the phrase “Commodius Vicus” (converted to PC sets via my cryptoserialist technique), the letters HCE will be sprinkled liberally throughout the piece (as B-C-E (traditional pitch cipher) and as GDE (cryptoserialist cipher)), as will various quotations that I think appropriate to the mood of the piece