

Electric Counterpoint: Steve Reich

Background:

- Electric Counterpoint is the last in a series of 3 pieces for soloists playing along with pre-recorded multi-track tapes of themselves.
- Electric Counterpoint was commissioned for the jazz guitarist Pat Metheny to perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's 'New Wave' Festival. Metheny would record all the instrumental parts himself (12 guitars and 2 bass guitars). This would be used as a stereo 'backing track' (it is a way for the performer to perform in an ensemble with himself).
- This piece takes the act of tape loop in a different direction- instead of using one, constantly repeating tape loop, the composer used the tape as a way of capturing the sound of one performer (giving the whole piece a togetherness of sound that would not be possible using different performers).

General Analysis (3rd movement 'fast'):

- Electric Counterpoint is built up in layers.
- In the 3rd movement (fast), there are 7 pre-recorded electric guitar parts and 2 bass guitars. The live guitar is then performed along with the recorded parts.
- The texture gradually builds up in the first section (section A), with the guitar parts entering in the following order: Guitar 1, Live Guitar, Guitar 2, Guitar 3, Guitar 4, Bass Guitars 1 and 2, Guitar 5, Guitar 6 and Guitar 7.
- This piece is divided into 2 main sections with a coda. The main sections are then subdivided into 4 small sections, each of which is defined by changes in key and texture.

Detailed Analysis (3rd movement 'fast'):

- **Ostinato:** The piece begins with guitar 1 repeating a one bar **ostinato**.
- **Note Addition:** The live guitar part starts with 3 notes of ostinato 1, building up to the full ostinato by bar 6 using **note addition** technique.
- **Layering:** Guitar 2 enters in bar 7, playing ostinato 1, but one crotchet later.
- **Resultant Melody: a new melody produced when a variety of parts each play their melodies at the same time:** when all the parts have entered, the live guitar starts to play the **resultant melody**.
- The bass guitar parts are introduced at bar 24. **The 2 bass guitars are panned to the left and right speakers-this balances the sound.**
- At bar 36 the live guitar introduces a new idea by playing strummed chords. This has a dramatic effect on the texture by introducing a new, rather percussive sound that cuts across the rest of the parts.
- The first big change of key to C minor at bar 74. This signals the start of section B.
- The key shifts back to E minor around bar 82 and then the piece alternates between this key and C minor to create tension.
- At bar 106 guitars 5-7 and the two bass parts begin to fade out, gradually at first, but quickly at bar 113.
- The piece ends with a crescendo to a final E5 chord played simultaneously in all 5 remaining parts at the end of bar 139.

Other key points:

- Tonal ambiguity:

- Modal:

- Texture:

- Rhythmic development:
