



## Ether-Cosmos No. XX: Translation Technique

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### Abstract

*Ether-Cosmos* comprises of twenty pieces for piano. The length of each piece is about 1-3 minutes, except the piece no. 18 which is longer than 12 minutes. *Ether-Cosmos No. 20* is about 1.50 minutes in length. This piece was made by translating a name of an individual into musical notes or called “translation technique.” All pitches of melody in section A and B were derived from the composer’s first name and last name, whereas rhythm and pitch of each note of the melody were created by the composer. Besides, the melody throughout the whole piece was placed on the top notes. The tonal center in section A and the home key are on the note G that is related to the last note of the melodies. In terms of the harmonic or chord progression and key signature, the composer has created to suit the stated melody using chromatic chord and third-relation modulation or chromatic mediant that move to the key of B $\flat$ . Moreover, the composer imitates many compositional concepts from Romantic music era. Therefore, the sound of this piece is similar to music in Romantic period.

**Keywords:** Translation Technique, Chromatic Mediant, Ether-Cosmos

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### 1. Introduction

The last piano piece, *Ether-Cosmos No. 20*, is a musical composition within “Ether-Cosmos Twenty Pieces for Piano” which is under the creative research project of “Ether-Cosmos: Piano Music Compositions for Analysis.” The creative research was granted funding from the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) and National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) in 2015. The composer had composed each piece of this music composition using compositional techniques and concepts in the twentieth century including common techniques or unique concepts of important composers. *Ether-Cosmos No. 20* is a romantic sound like that employs translation technique.

Music of the romantic period manifests with expressive sound and songlike melody. Romantic composers prefer using wide ranges of tone color, dynamic, and pitch, including broad harmonic vocabulary with more emphasis on colorful and unexpected chords. They revealed in rich and sensuous sound using tone color to obtain variety of mood and atmosphere. The piano is the favorite instrument of the era. It became more singing and its register was extended. Therefore, the pianist could produce more sound, especially using the damper pedal allowed a sonorous blend of tones from all register (Kamien, 2010, pp. 257-259). In addition, Timothy W. Sharp (2005, pp. 73-75) explains:

“The Romantic ideal is characterized by the freedom of personality and individual expression. ... Many syncopation devices are used—cross rhythms, duple against triple, irregular rhythms, complex meters, and rhythmic surprise. ... Harmony in rhythmic movement is principal interest. Melody conceived as a product of harmony; lack the strong contrapuntal voice leading of horizontal melody. Developed harmony—new relationships, untired harmonic combination, chromaticism, and dissonance abound. ... Counterpoint is often an outgrowth of the harmonic structure. ... The scope of the emotional range is very wide.”

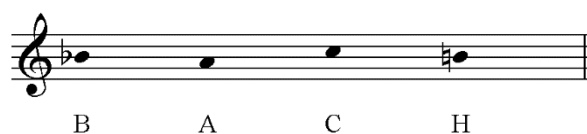
For *Ether-Cosmos No. 20*, the composer applies music composition techniques that has been used from the past until present in order to embody a name of a person in a melody. Narongrit Dhammabutra (2010, p. 126) described, according to history of western music, a name of a person was translated into main theme. For example, *Abegg Variation* for a solo piano composed by Schumann, whose theme started with notes, A, B $\flat$ , E, G, G, which derived from a lady’s name entitled Meta Abegg (in German alphabet systems, letter B refers to the note B $\flat$ ).

[939]



The practice of translating letters of the alphabet into notes for a theme or motive usually serves to honor someone (Trakulhun, 2011, p. 13). The best known of such themes is probably B-A-C-H (B $\flat$ -A-C-B), which was employed by J.S. Bach himself and which has subsequently appeared in many other composers' works. A published catalogue for the 1985 exhibition 300 Jahre Johann Sebastian Bach lists about four hundred works by at least three hundred composers that are related to Bach, especially the B-A-C-H motif (cited in Yang, 2007, p. 7). Many composers in the twentieth century, such as Arnold Schoenberg and Arvo Pärt, have used Bach inspired elements.

### Example 1 Bach motive



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was a German composer in the Baroque period. His family name, Bach, has been always generated as musical cryptogram which is cryptogrammatic sequence of musical notations between alphabet and note names as a motive. Also, in German musical terminology, the letter H is translated to the note B $\flat$  (Example 1). The use of B A C H motive in any music compositions sometimes can be transposed to other pitches. Furthermore, the rhythmic pattern of the motive depends on the creativity of each composer.

*Variations for Orchestra Op. 31* (1926) by Arnold Schoenberg is an excellent example of the use of the B-A-C-H motive within atonal music. The twelve-tone piece comprises an introduction section, nine variations, and a closing finale. Marija Benić Zovko (2007, p. 50) asserts that:

“The B A C H motif is made up of various combinations of a row, or several rows. The last section of the Finale shows that its diastematic structure is related to that of the row: tones 2 3 4 5 of the antecedent, when permuted, create the B A C H motif (or one of its transpositions). It shows the extent to which the developing variation technique can transform the row content, providing it with new meanings and contexts.”

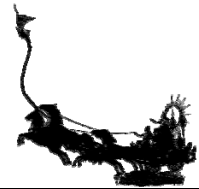
Arvo Pärt, an Estonian composer, composed *Collage über B-A-C-H* for oboe and strings in 1964. Paul Hillier (1997, p47) states that:

“The first appearance of a reference to Bach, although this is only explicit in the work called *Collage*, which is both based on the B-A-C-H motif and also quotes actual music by Bach. But the B-A-C-H motif, variously transposed and inverted, can also be traced in several other works, suggesting a potential link between them.”

The inspiration for using the B-A-C-H motif has various reasons and depends on each composer. The use of the motif has very different approaches, relying on each composer's style as well. Other composers, Krzysztof Penderecki's *St Luke Passion* (1966), Charles Ives's *Three-Page Sonata* (1949), and Anton Webern's *String Quartet, Op. 28* (1938), are also inspired by the B-A-C-H motif. Even, Bach himself also marked his signature in a number of his works, such as the *Art of Fugue* and *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her*.

## 2. Result and Discussion

There are many techniques of translating a name of a person into pitch materials. This piece translated a name of a person in English letters into musical notes respectively. The A-G in English should refer to A-G of musical notes whereas the following notes had to be respectively comparable with A-G of musical notes as shown in Figure 1.



<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>
H	I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
V	W	X	Y	Z		

**Figure 1** Translating letters of the alphabet into musical notes

For this last piece, the composer translates his full name in English (Wiboon Trakulhun) into musical notes. The translated notes are presented in Example 2.

**Example 2** Translating composer's name to musical notes

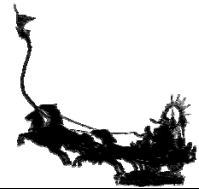


This piece is structured in A B A B A form according to pitch materials of the music composition. The musical structure is composed in formal structure under rounded binary form (unrepeated sign) with about 1.50 minutes long. The melody in section A is derived from the composer's first name whereas his last name is applied for the melody in section B. Further than translation technique, the harmonic progression of this piece was also in functional harmony.

**Table 1** Formal structure: rounded binary

Sections	A	B	A	B	A
mm.	1-12	13-20	21-24	25-32	33-36

The composer set the home key of this piece in G because the last note derived from the first and last name is G. The piece begins the harmonic progression of section A with I-V-I pattern. The first part of section A has 3 phrases which each phrase comprises of 4 bars and its melodic progression was in the highest note of the phrase. The first phrase is translated into notes directly from the name (Example 3).



**Example 3** The composer's name on the first phrase in section A

W I B O O N

*p leggiero*

G : I E V<sup>7</sup> I

The melodic variation and a little adjustment on harmonic progression are applied in the second and third phrase. At the end of the section A (the third phrase), the Neapolitan sixth or N<sup>6</sup> is used. Then, the key signature is immediately modulated to B $\flat$  in section B (m. 14) which causes a chromatic mediant relationship with its home key (Example 4).

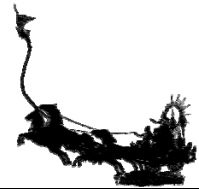
**Example 4** Modulation by using chromatic mediant

11 13

*mp*

G : V<sup>7</sup> N<sup>6</sup> V I B $\flat$  : I vi<sup>7</sup>

The melody of section B applies the last name only once, but it is divided into 2 phrases which each phrase comprises with 4 bars. The harmonic progression is in the key of B $\flat$  together with using secondary function, both dominant seventh chord and diminished seventh chord, including pivot chord or common chord. Moreover, the composer, in the m. 19, applies borrowed chords from the key of G minor and modulates the key signature to the home key, G Major (Example 5). From mm. 21-36, the concepts applied in section A and B are brought back both in the melodies, harmonies, and accompaniment.

**Example 5** The composer's last name in the section B

13 T R A K

*mp*

B $\flat$ : I vi<sup>7</sup> V<sup>6</sup>/vi vi<sup>7</sup>

17 U L H U N

*mf* *p* *pp*

vi<sup>6</sup> vii<sup>7</sup>/iii | v<sup>7</sup> I

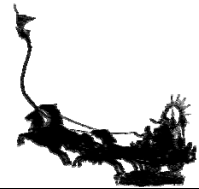
G: vii<sup>7</sup>/V

**3. Conclusion**

All of the above statements show the melodies throughout the whole piece which are placed on the top notes. All pitches of the melodies in section A and B are all translated—called “translation technique”—from the first and last names of the composer whereas the rhythm of each note in the melody is created by the composer. The tonal center and the home key are on the note G that are related to the last note of the melodies. In terms of the harmonic progressions or chords and key signatures, the composer selects to suit the stated melodies by applying chromatic chords and modulations using the third relationship approach or chromatic mediant that move to the key of B $\flat$ . Moreover, the composer imitates many compositional concepts from Romantic music era. That's why, the sound of this piece is similar to music in the Romantic period.

**4. World Premiere**

Ether-Cosmos Twenty Pieces for Piano was presented as a lecture-recital. The 20 compositions were premiered on August 31, 2016 at Auditorium Building 11, Rangsit University. *Ether-Cosmos No. 20* was performed by Assistant Professor Dr. Pawalai Tanchanpong



# Ether-Cosmos XX

*Wiboon Trakulhun*

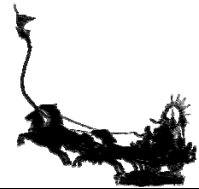
Andante ♩ = 82

5

9

13

The score derives from Trakulhun (2016), *Ether-Cosmos twenty pieces for piano*, pp. 108-109.



17

*mf* *p* *pp*

21

*p leggiero*

25

*mp*

29

*mf* *p* *pp*

33

*p leggiero* *rit.* *pp*

1'50"  
May 9, 2016



## 5. Acknowledgement

*Ether-Cosmos*, twenty pieces for piano, is quite flexible. In many pieces, the composer gives opportunities for pianists to freely interpret the music such as emotions of the music, choices of piano pedals, using right or left hand on different melodies, flexibility of tempo, etc. Furthermore, the composer intends to have each piece played at intermediate level (or a little higher) because the music might be taught by those who weren't pianists. Consequently, they could play for students. However, there are some requirements that pianists should follow due to the concept of musical composition.

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