Concerto Blue, for Classical Guitar

Bruce H. Johnston

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CONCERTO BLUE, FOR CLASSICAL GUITAR

By

Bruce Hurley Johnston

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2012
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

CONCERTO BLUE, FOR CLASSICAL GUITAR

Bruce Hurley Johnston

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Concerto Blue is a three-movement concerto for classical guitar and medium-sized orchestra. Aesthetic considerations of this piece involve taking essential ingredients that define the blues and de-contextualizing them into an artful collage. The work celebrates the blues guitar by utilizing elements and phrasing that span the tradition of the blues from its acoustic foundation in the Mississippi Delta to the formation and expansion of rock music. The concerto is scored for an amplified classical guitar that can compete sonically with the orchestra as they are often pitted against each other for an affect reminiscent of a concerto grosso within the Baroque tradition as well as an old fashion duel often found in the blues tradition. A loop pedal for the guitar is called for in the score to create textures that rival the orchestra in volume and density. The entire work in three movements can be seen as a sonata form while a traditional blues progression is used as a basis for tonal polarity. Near the end of the third movement, the guitar is given a highly technical cadenza. The orchestra then merges with the guitar at the end of the cadenza to create a sentimental conclusion. The live loop effect and extended techniques offer a contribution to the evolution of the guitar concerto genre.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

*Concerto Blue* is written as a vehicle for my career as both a performer and a composer. As a performer, it gives me the opportunity to play with orchestras throughout the world. As a composer, it gives me the chance to create something that is a significant contribution to the literature and accessible to virtuosic classical guitarists.

From an aesthetic point of view, the piece is generated from elements of the blues in an approach similar to creating a collage. The formal design is also significant, as there is homage to the classical sonata form while working simultaneously with blues tonality. Another important feature is the use of digital looping effects that are generated by the guitarist during live performance. Within the orchestra, a drum set is incorporated into the texture in an artful way that evokes the blues but without creating a big band sound. A final aspect is the nationalistic quality of the piece resulting from using the blues tradition.

Whereas a more typical approach to create an American nationalistic sound has been to incorporate the influence of Appalachian music, I used the blues. I believe this to be a necessity to further the classical guitar tradition, and the University of Miami’s Classical Guitar Program Director Dr. Rene Gonzalez fueled my desire when he stated, “the guitar has been lagging behind whatever has been going on in the music world”.¹ In

¹ R. Gonzalez, personal communication, March 2, 2011.
general, innovative and fresh classical guitar concertos are lacking in today’s repertoire. There was an initial struggle when considering the blues as the inspiration for this piece. While a sense of the blues is in my heart from years of listening, study and performance, I will always be a bit of an outsider due to the fact that I could never fully relate to the plight of the African American throughout modern history. In the end, I reflected upon how much the blues has impacted my life. It has taught me a great deal about music, relationships, emotion, and human nature. I feel that I owe a debt to this art form. It is my musical offering to put the blues on the pedestal that it deserves within the highest realms of art music.

Blues music is intrinsically associated with the guitar. This association spans many decades beginning with its inception as a substitute for the plucked lutes of the Griots of West Africa. In the 20th Century, the mystic virtuosity of the early blues guitarists like Robert Johnson and Son House influenced the evolution of the electric blues guitar via Muddy Waters. The following generations have seen the elaboration and evolution of the ‘electric church’ expansion of improvisational blues by Jimi Hendrix. Thanks to these African American guitarists and many others, the blues has attained a tremendous influence. This can be further seen in the evolution of rock music as guitarists like Muddy Waters and T-Bone Walker influenced early rockers like Chuck Berry and Jimi Hendrix who in turn inspired modern day masters such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and Eddie Van Halen. All the guitar facilities developed in the blues have been

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expanded to extreme levels by means of technical virtuosity. This is truly America’s
guitar music.

In my quest to create a concerto for Blues that was both relevant and unique, there
were a few requirements that were necessary to fulfill. It was important that the concerto
compare with the contemporary repertoire in terms of artistic substance. There was a
strong desire to craft a collage type composition filled with authentic materials
decontextualized in a postmodern fashion. Along with pushing to the edges of
contemporary art music, it was important to simultaneously honor tradition.

In response to the daunting task of taking the reigns from blues revolutionaries
such as Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Eddie Van Halen, I felt it necessary to add a
further expansion that had not been explored within the realms of blues, thus the loop
pedal has become an important part of my contribution to the evolution of the guitar
concerto. Because of the nature of the blues guitar being such a strong voice, sound
reinforcement is a vital part of this piece, as the guitar needs to be able to directly
compete with the orchestra as if an equal partner in a duel with the orchestra. I wanted to
include improvisation in this piece; however, I desired to also make the performance of it
as accessible to as many performers as possible. Therefore, it was necessary to find a way
to create an option for improvisation without it being a necessity. To help build a unique
language for the guitar that offers subtle variations on stock blues riffs, I call for an
alternate tuning system. Ultimately, this piece is the culmination of my musical style.
CHAPTER 2
AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

When contemplating the traditional style of the classical guitar, there is always a reference to a Spanish/Flamenco style. Of course, this is fitting due to the fact that the modern guitar as we know it was a product of Spain.\(^5\) However, there is a risk that this Flamenco style has become a bit overused. It has led me to question why there is not more of an effort to utilize the stylizations of the blues guitar by American composers.

Postmodern?

The goal in composing *Concerto Blue* was to create a performable work that is a collage of the many things that define the music and emotion of blues guitar music in America. This effect is a collage of stylistic characteristics that are associated with the blues. In the execution of this collage, all facets of the blues are considered—from folklore, psychology, sociology, melodic language, harmony, songs, and performance practice. All these components are separated into their own entities and then decontextualized in an artful way that avoids banality.

There is a danger when presenting a piece for the concert stage that is based primarily on folk themes and dialect. Critics could see it as a work lacking the serious quality and texture of a traditional concert piece. Out of respect for the sociological aspects surrounding the evolution of the blues, it is important for this work to be quite

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serious in nature. Thus, the typical ironic nature associated with postmodernism is avoided. The ultimate goal was to create something that has all the ingredients of blues with the blues feel and sound without coming across as simply an orchestrated transcription of a blues song. It has to be something entirely unique and original in conception. I do not wish to use any materials that are considered inauthentic in this concerto but make every attempt to juxtapose and de-contextualize authentic style in order to create something fresh.

In totality, this piece is to be considered eccentric and postmodern; however, a notion is maintained that traditional form will help the audience develop an understanding of the work. As a model, the Baroque concerto grosso is used as a loose design for interaction between the guitar and the orchestra. When discussing this with Dr. Gonzalez, he had this to contribute:

There’s a concerto by Radamés Gnattali…I think the orchestration is great because whenever the guitar plays, it’s playing with 2 or 3 instruments; so it’s almost like a Concerto Grosso. You have the orchestra playing tutti; and when the guitar comes in, it is doing a little chamber work. And then you can make use of all the different timbres. The guitar will sound different when it’s with the strings, or the blend is going to sound different when it is with the woodwinds.\(^6\)

With this in mind, combinations of instrumentation were used to create this Concerto Grosso feel while employing looping effects that allow the guitar to sound like multiple instruments serving the continuo role.

Ultimately, the loop pedal is used to create textures by creating collages of blues riffs layered to create sheets of sound. In his *Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra*, Tan

\(^6\) R. Gonzalez, personal communication, March 2, 2011.
Dun achieves a similar effect with the orchestra. There is a recurring rhythmic theme in the strings that seems to be born out of the guitar; this is something that a loop pedal could create. In many contemporary concertos, there is a noticeable separation between the orchestra and the guitar, almost as if they exist in two different worlds that come together in a cooperative effort. I seek to create a more homogenous effect by utilizing the guitar with the orchestra like Dun has accomplished, so that there is a merging of the two in order to create a coherent work of sound art.

**The Guitar Vs. The Orchestra**

A strong aesthetic concern involved the use of sound reinforcement. In order to accommodate the use of the loop effect, the guitar must be plugged into either a Boss pedal (in my case) or a laptop utilizing a loop patch. From the effects processor, it is then plugged into an amplification system. A stronger effect will be obtained by using a pick-up to directly input into a processor. However, this does not isolate those purists who swear by microphone reinforcement as the Boss Loop Station—or any industry standard laptop—will handle a microphone input. With that stated, the preferred method is to use direct input because a microphone will not only pick up the guitar, it will also pick up the orchestra. It is important to only be looping the guitar.

Direct input will also enable accompaniment from a larger orchestra. If there is complete control of the volume level, there will be no issues with balance between the orchestra and the guitar. This is a key aesthetic factor in the piece. The premise of the interaction between the orchestra and the guitar is that they are actually being pitted against each other in an old-fashioned blues duel. It is crucial that the guitar is able to overpower the orchestra at certain points of the piece.

A practical consideration to make regarding the orchestra is size.; a chamber orchestra will provide a better opportunity for performance. There is a better chance of getting performances if the orchestra is small. The piece requires full strings and single woodwinds with auxiliary winds of piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet and contrabassoon (not doubling). The brass section is slightly smaller with only two horns, two trumpets, a tenor and bass trombone, and tuba—not only for punctuation, but also for soft blankets of sound. The timpani was used for support in these sustaining moments with rolls as well as for support at moments of punctuation with a key role being a signature heartbeat sound that recurs throughout. The incorporation of a drum kit creates a dilemma. While it is highly conducive to a blues setting, there is a chance that it could give the piece too much of a big band sound—particularly in combination with brass. The drum kit was used artfully by phasing it in and out with blues rhythms and also is used for points of punctuation. An additional percussionist is used in the piece to produce other orchestral timbres with a key role being the performance of the steel anvil.

**Synaesthetic Texture**

Another major aesthetic issue that is addressed involves the handling of tonality. The blues definitely has its own vocabulary, and it is rooted in tonality. My musical language is not rooted in modal tonality, and I have a preference for centricity, set theory, and 12 tone completion.

I also have synaesthesia, which is a cross-sensory neurological condition that enables me to visualize music in colors and shapes simultaneously as I hear the sound. Pitches have color associations while timbre and rhythm are perceived in shapes. This often influences a thought process in terms of abstract art—freely painting the air with
music. Throughout the piece, there is quite a bit of melodic juxtaposition, sustaining harmonies, phasing of orchestral timbres, and canonic elaboration—all of which trigger a personal synaesthetic experience. A clear-cut example can be seen in the treatment of the brass beginning in measure 41—as seen in Example 1.1.

Example 1.1. The strobe light, tracer effect.

A simple blues riff is introduced by trumpet 1 on the downbeat of the measure. It immediately sets in motion a domino effect of eighth-note canons, which are voiced by each brass instrument. I perceive the result as a tracer effect similar to watching a single object move with a strobe light.
Conceptualization of the Movements

It was absolutely crucial that the piece cover not only the sonic characteristics of the blues, but also the psychological and sociological results of a human being who has turned to the blues for comfort. It is important to bring historical elements into the piece. As previously mentioned, the guitar and orchestra are to be engaged in a duel similar to what can still be found in blues clubs in which two soloists trade licks. Beyond that, it was necessary to dig into the roots of blues history in America and try to have some symbolic reference.

A steel anvil opens the piece in reference to John Henry. The ballad of John Henry is a strong example of the work songs of the African American slave, and Henry was seen as a heroic figure. He was a mythological rail worker who could lay tracks faster than the modern machines of the time—as the song says, “a steel drivin’ man.” The timpani quickly joins the anvil with a heartbeat-like rhythm that creates a polyrhythm with the anvil moving at a faster rate to symbolize the heart of the slave rising above their plight. Many years ago, I read a quote by Alan Lomax that has always stuck with me: “W.C. Handy brought the blues from the fields to the city.” This quote and the plight of the African American slave are the major influences for the title of the first movement, *From the Fields*.

This genesis of the blues is also portrayed in the guitar style utilized in the first movement. A vast majority of the opening cadenza-like section is played in a free stroke technique in an acoustic blues style reminiscent of the legendary early bluesman, Robert Johnson. Meanwhile, the second movement is based around a T-Bone Walker style.

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language. The movement is named—*The Language of the Kings*—after the fact that T-Bone set the mold for the bluesman of the electric blues era that would follow him. BB King, Albert King, Freddie King, and Earl King all fall within this lineage, and the riffs that are contained within the second movement relate to their electric sound. There are subtle quotes from blues language and repertoire embedded in the movement. Throughout the movement, tension is built between the orchestra and the guitar, leading to a movement III *finale* that should be seen as the showdown between them.

The third movement, *The Devil in Rosedale*, is named for the blues mythology surrounding Robert Johnson. According to bluesman, Son House, the real location of the crossroads where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil was at the point where Highway 8 and Highway 1 meet in Rosedale, Mississippi. In 1986, there was a movie entitled *Crossroads* where a young classical guitarist from Juilliard went on a journey to find the crossroads where Robert Johnson sold his soul. At the end of the movie, there is a big performance duel between this young classical guitarist and a blazing guitarist who did sell his soul to the Devil. The classical guitarist won by utilizing his supreme classical technique, which could not be matched by the Devil’s ringer. I wanted to capture this moment of the movie in the cadenza section. This is the moment in *Concerto Blue* where the guitarist wins the battle against the orchestra. The loop pedal is explored with abandon. Finger tapping techniques popularized by Eddie Van Halen are used as the picking hand presses the string against the fret board making a sound and then pulling off the string, followed by a hammer on in the normal fretting hand producing three tones in rapid succession. The amplification of the guitar is taken to its most extreme level, thus establishing power over the orchestra.
I wanted to follow the tradition of the concerto grosso of the Baroque era, so the piece was written in multiple movements. However, I also wanted to avoid the awkward silences that accompany multi-movement works in the concert hall. The piece needed to have a seamless feeling from movement to movement, so I employ an attacca between each.

I also wanted to make each particular movement able to work on its own; great care was taken to craft individual movements that had clear endings. The use of dynamic diminuendos was used to create this seamlessness; and in the end, the diminuendos empower the silence in between each movement. It’s been observed that a good length of silence is actually necessary to fully process each movement before moving to the next. In the end, I decided what I wanted was a middle ground between an attacca and a complete relaxation of the orchestra.

Form

In the quest to write a piece that had ties to the early concerto tradition, the use of sonata form was an appealing choice. While writing the first movement, the idea of actually having the sonata form engulf all three movements rather than just the opener. Thus, the logical choice was to attempt a three-movement work with the exposition serving as the first movement, the development as the second, and the recapitulation as
the finale.

I felt it was important to have this tie to tradition, as it was equally critical to have a formal link to the blues. I decided it was crucial to walk a fine line whereas tonality was used as a tool to achieve a blues sound while still remaining ambiguous enough to avoid predictability. With the idea of using the sonata form as a skeleton for the piece, modulation would have to be addressed. After much pondering, I decided that using a traditional blues form to span the entire piece was the solution. Thus, I decided to have the entire piece shift tonally through one entire chorus of the twelve-bar blues progression while simultaneously being a sonata form.

As seen on the following page in Table 3.1, there are two themes in the first movement. Although the opening of the piece has the feel of an introduction, it is part of the first theme. The a section of the theme is then repeated with slight variance beginning at measure 24–still in the home key of E major. The b section of Theme I begins in measure 39 with an ostinato in the form of a traditional blues riff on the guitar. It is interrupted after two measures by the brass section; this is the first incidence of the orchestra lashing out against the guitar in a dueling manner. The a section of Theme II begins at measure 56 and triggers the first harmonic change of the piece, as it shifts to the key of A major. This reflects a quick change to the IV found in many blues progressions. At measure 65, the b section of Theme II returns to the home key of E with the guitar playing in a style reminiscent of Robert Johnson; this triggers another episode of the orchestra overtaking the guitar. The interplay continues between the orchestra and the guitar on this same thematic material until measure 82. At this point, a variance on Theme II section a is introduced by the guitar and the low strings. After only three
measures, a canonic outbreak begins in all the strings and eventually spreads climactically to the woodwinds. At this point, the piece moves back to the IV; and by measure 91, the timpani re-enters with the heartbeat motive (now on A as opposed to B-flat) from the introduction of the piece. The re-entry of the percussion serves as a bookend to the movement, while the shift to A in the timpani is an important transitional device as it sets up a smooth segue to Movement II—the development section.

Table 3.1. *Born in the Fields* formal analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement I</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1a</td>
<td>meas. 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a'</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2a</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b'</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a'</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second movement was conceived as a scherzo-like romp. It begins in the key of the IV with the trumpets and horns re-introducing a melodic phrase first occurred in measure 41 of Movement I. The brass phrase is developed while flute and piccolo sounds reminiscent of Movement I dominate until measure 138. At this point, theme 2 begins in the guitar and expands to the whole orchestra before dissolving back into developmental material at measure 149. A guitar phrase that was originally introduced in measure 71 of the first movement re-emerges in measure 154 carrying the piece until measure 205. At this point, the trumpets recapitulate the opening phrase developing it into a chaotic canon in the full orchestra; this canon serves to climactically bring the piece back to the key of
E major (the I) at the downbeat of measure 225. Developmental material based upon the opening phrase continues until measure 254, at which time the guitar begins to build a loop that overtakes the orchestra. The ‘John Henry motive’ of the steel anvil reappears with the heartbeat timpani accompaniment in this section as the loop builds in intensity while gaining support from the orchestra. This leads to a climactic point resulting in a solo guitar statement of the opening trumpet theme at measure 290. As the development continues there is a tug of war between the orchestra and guitar as guitar phrases are interrupted by strong tutti attacks. The guitar theme originally introduced in measure 138 surfaces out of the ‘tug of war’ section and is spread throughout the entire orchestra by measure 338. The theme morphs into a canon as it builds momentum and to the major climax of the movement at measure 362. It then dissolves to the end of the movement in the home key of E major. Table 3.2 displays the thematic and developmental nature of the movement.

Table 3.2. *Language of the Kings* formal analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement II</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td>meas. 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2’</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1’</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2’’</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The idea for the third movement recapitulates the thematic materials from the first movement and transforms them into a different context. The I (E major) key would typically be expected in a sonata recapitulation, however the opening briefly tonicizes the key of C major (the VI) before settling on the V in measure 382. This unorthodox key area enables the blues form to continue over the entire piece and is an homage to what is sometimes called the “B.B. King turnaround”, which was famously used in *The Thrill is Gone*. The movement begins with the steel anvil, timpani, and high winds just as Movement I; however, there is a furious rhythmic drive that was not present in the first movement. This dissolves into a guitar part that is a variation of measures 18 and 19. A guitar loop begins in measure 408 that builds intensity and overtakes the orchestra eventually to be cut off by a pair of forceful tutti hits at measure 415. A variation of Theme Ia occurs before transitioning to the b section at measure 436. The b section officially begins at measure 441 with a variation on the original guitar riff in measure 39. The b’ section begins in 453 in the key of A major; the transition that occurs in the b section is symbolic of the V to IV turnaround found in a blues chorus between measures 9 and 10. The movement continues in the key of A major all the way to the cadenza, which begins in measure 480. The cadenza shifts back to the home key in measure 507; and despite a few interpolated V chords, it remains on the I chord for the rest of the piece. These interpolated chords come about at the end of the cadenza between measures 536 and 551; this is specifically as an homage to the traditional end to a cadenza wherein the solo instrument trills and plants a very blatant dominant chord before moving to the closing section. This closing section uses guitar ideas found in the first movement as

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ostinati while developing melodic motives found throughout the work. It is meant to end with a bit of sentimentality on the same percussive motives from the beginning and a strong I chord. Interestingly, Movement 3 begins at the timed golden proportion of the piece and ends on measure 610, which is a Fibonacci number. Table 3.3 graphs the movement.

Table 3.3. *The Devil in Rosedale* formal analysis.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Movement III</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Theme 1a</td>
<td>meas. 377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a’</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b’</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadenza</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1b’’</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a’’</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall tonal parameters of *Concerto Blue* are graphed and pitted against a traditional blues progression in Table 3.4. Movement I follows the first four bars of the blues progression: I–IV–I. Movement II symbolizes measures 5 through 8 of the progression: IV–I. Movement III is meant to tonally replicate the chords involved in the turnaround section of the blues progression: (VI)–V–IV–I.
Table 3.4. *Concerto Blue* tonal sketch in comparison to 12 bar blues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mv. I</th>
<th>Mv. II</th>
<th>Mv. III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Bar Blues

| I | IV | I | I | IV | IV | I | I | V | IV | I | I |

**Harmony**

The overall harmonic framework for the piece has been addressed with relation to form; therefore, the harmony section will address harmony at a local level. Following a blues progression to set a tonal framework is obviously not going to automatically produce the blues sound. Thus I did not simply use the roots of the chords for the tonal plan; I also used the Dominant 7\(^{th}\) chord, the blues scale, and tritone substitution.

Because the blues is typically comprised of primary chords all voiced as Dominant 7ths, it was important to figure out ways to add variety. Not only was variety necessary to avoid stagnation, but also it was crucial to find a justifiable manner to introduce the minor second sound. The minor second dissonance is an interval I have embraced in my musical language. Fortunately, the minor second can relate to the Dominant 7 (#9) chord and the #4 blue note in the blues scale.

The Dominant 7 (#9) is effectively known in the blues guitar world as “The Jimi Hendrix Chord”. He used the #9 tension consistently throughout his career when handling dominant chords, and clear examples can be heard in two of his most famous
songs, *Foxy Lady* and *Purple Haze*. My method for using this chord is not exactly in line with standard blues and jazz practice. Typically, the major 3rd of the chord is voiced in a lower register with the #9 (or minor 3rd) being reserved for a higher octave. In order to get the desired minor second harmonic crunch, I voiced the #9 and the major 3rd in the same register. This dissonant voicing technique is illustrated in Example 3.1.

Example 3.1. The E7 (#9 #11) voiced unconventionally.

The occurrence of the #4 within the blues scale was utilized unconventionally as well. It presents an opportunity for another minor second voicing by keeping the #4 and the 5th within the same register in harmonic situations. This once again is a bit unconventional; as when found in contemporary harmony, the #4 is typically voiced as a #11 in a higher register than the 5th of the chord.

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The entire piece is based upon the combination of a Dominant 7\textsuperscript{th} chord and the blues scale: the Dominant 7 (#9, #11) chord. In terms of set theory, the prime form would be the hexachord (013479). Subsets allow for some interesting chromatic harmony, and this was exploited to generate dissonant sustaining sounds. Example 3.2 shows an instance in which a cumulative set is formed from the bank of potential chords utilized in the piece. D relates to E7 and Bb7; Db relates to Eb7 and A7; E relates to E7 and A7; Ab relates to Bb7 and E7; finally, F relates to F7 and Bb7.

Example 3.2. The cumulative set.

With the #11 playing such a prominent role in the harmony, it provided a graceful means of utilizing tritone substitution by serving as an invariant tone. Tritone substitution is simply an elaboration of dominant harmony; so it made sense to use the concept to add
variety to the blues, which in its simplest form is made up of only dominant 7\textsuperscript{th} chords. Rather than think of this in a set theory fashion with transposition levels, it seemed simpler to think of the harmonic possibilities in terms of the primary chords associated with the blues and their respective tritone substitutions. Thus, tonal pole for the I chord could be represented by either E7 or Bb7, the IV would be A7 or Eb7, and the V represented by B7 or F7. Example 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate how this tritone relationship is used within the piece.

Example 3.3. Bb/E tonal pole.

Example 3.4. A7(#9) / Eb7(#9).
Example 3.3 is the resolution of a T-Bone Walker riff in the key of Bb. In the moment, the E sounds like the note of tension; but in actuality, Bb is being used to create tension against the true root of E. In Example 3.4, tension is created by the tutti attacks of the orchestra, and the tritone relationship between the chords serves to compound the hostility of the orchestra, as it is attempting to disrupt the guitar part. This tritone polarity relationship was crucial in creating a sound with a rich color palette without straying from the Dominant 7th sound, which encapsulates the blues.

**Melody**

A few approaches were taken to create convincing blues melodies. Just as was the case with harmonic content, it was important to find justification for high levels of chromaticism. It was also crucial that traditional blues have stylistic representation. Also, it was absolutely necessary to use the minor pentatonic and the blues scale. Lastly, certain guitar riffs were used that are either exact quotations and variations on riffs or motives from blues repertoire.

With respect to melodic chromaticism, a lot of attention was directed to the chromatic opportunities between scale degree 1 and 5. Essentially, the only note that I typically avoided was the minor 2; however this was not absolute, it was just necessary to not overuse the minor 2 scale degree in order to avoid the Phrygian sound. A good example of chromatic blues writing can be seen in Theme II of the second movement beginning at measure 138. Example 3.5 on the following page shows the use of a chromatic motive spanning from the second scale degree to the tritone in the key of A major.
Example 3.5. Theme 2 from Movement II.

Another way that chromaticism is used comes out of the idiomatic practicality of the guitar. Example 3.6 is an instance of the utilization of a ‘box’ style of guitar soloing technique in which the chromaticism is a result of a repetitive pattern from a single hand position.

Example 3.6. Box pattern chromaticism.

Fingers one, two, and three begin the pattern on the fifth string and each slurred grouping represent a shift to the next string (5\textsuperscript{th} to 4\textsuperscript{th} to 3\textsuperscript{rd}, etc.). The skeletal outline is primarily an A minor pentatonic scale with all chromaticism linking the scalar notes. There is a slight shift between slurred grouping 3 and 4—it requires a momentary hand position shift in order to avoid a repeated D-natural that would have occurred, thus the D\# to F grouping is a continuation of the previous group resulting in a six note chromatic run.

One issue that had to be addressed was the conflict between traditional blues timbre and those of a traditional orchestra. In particular, the piccolo and flute seem miles apart from the blues in just about every aspect. In reality, African slaves were known to have utilized homemade cane fifes in an attempt to carry on drum and fife traditions from
West Africa. The solution was to immediately give them a blazing minor pentatonic riff echoing this tradition. This can be seen in the Example 3.7.

Example 3.7. Pentatonic descents in the piccolo and flute.

This pentatonic motive in the flute and piccolo becomes a signature motive in the piece and is brought back at several transposition levels.

While it was important to use the blues scale in this piece, there was a danger of overuse. When analyzing the piece, it is actually a bit astounding to see how the blues scale is continually varied upon—very rarely was the blues scale used in isolation. Example 3.8 displays a clear example of the playfulness in the utilization of the blues scale by the guitar.

Example 3.8. Creative exploitation of the blues scale.

Measure 59 plays around with the A blues scale while measures 60 and 61 have shifted up a half step to a Bb blues scales. The pitch C#/Db is the major antagonist to the blues scale in 59 with the last note of G# serving as a leading tone to help pivot to the sound of
an E major. This is immediately shifted to the tritone after the low E downbeat of measure 60, and the result is a clear Bb blues scale ending the phrase to ease the tension.

Many of the traditional acoustic blues style riffs were generated from a simple stock riff as seen in Example 3.9.

Example 3.9. The stock, open E blues riff.

The riff is oversimplified, but it is the skeleton for many traditional acoustic blues licks that could be heard from the likes of Robert Johnson or Son House. The slurred groupings all move fluidly from string to string–beginning at string 1 and continuing to the B on string 5 by the end of the phrase.

The riff involves a pull-off technique in which the first note of the slur is attacked and then followed by two pull offs, with the first three groupings resulting in open string notes on the last beat (open E to B to G). It was taken as a model and expanded to multiple positions up the guitar neck. Example 3.10 on the following page shows the opening guitar cadenza as a prime representation. Measure 17 is the only measure in this opening that does not embellish upon the “oversimplified” riff shown in Example 3.9.

The use of quotation was an element of melody that had to be handled with care. It was a concern if the quotation was blatantly used, it would come across as a bit predictable.
Example 3.10. The opening guitar theme.

Using of a self-generated riff that was a generic representation of style was a practical way to avoid the obvious.

Another important factor is the tuning configuration of the guitar. With the second string being tuned down to A instead of its traditional B tuning, it gives the opportunity to exploit the opening motive with this pull-off technique. Notice through the examples on the following page how this is crafted within the piece. In 3.11a, the opening motive is displayed in its original open string voicing. In measure 396, the aforementioned pull-off technique is utilized to put emphasis on open E, A, and G strings in an ornamental embellishment—as shown in 3.11b. This phrase introduces a loop section as notated in 3.11c. All notes involved in the loop are present by measure 415 creating a velocity comparable to the entire orchestra.
Example 3.11a. The opening motive from Movement I.

Example 3.11b. Embellishment in Movement III.

Example 3.11c. Further embellishment via loop effect.

In order to capture an authentic blues guitar sound, it was absolutely necessary to utilize guitar riffs that encapsulate the style. However, the art would have to be in creating something that was authentic in style, but unpredictable in context. There’s a rootless Dominant 7\textsuperscript{th} riff commonly used in introducing a blues tune that has been seen from the earliest of acoustic blues tunes to progressive electric blues. Examples 3.12a and 3.12b show how Robert Johnson used this rootless voicing in the opening of his song *Me and the Devil Blues* as well as an arpeggiated example of Jimi Hendrix’s famous introduction to *Red House*. 


Example 3.13 shows how the device was embellished in *Concerto Blue*. Instead of merely using the bottom three strings of the guitar (as in the above examples), the voicing actually begins with an open Em7 chord in which the three-note finger picking begins on the low E string. The picking pattern moves toward the bottom three strings on each successive sixteenth note triplet. The actual riffing on the Dominant 7th voicing begins in the middle of the second beat on measure 65 and measure 66; and once it begins, the A minor scale is spelled out in the upper voice of the arpeggiated chord.

Example 3.13. Arpeggiated seventh chord riffing.
One of the most important motives of the entire piece comes from the inspiration of blues great, T-Bone Walker. The basic riff from his song *Midnight Blues* is notated in Example 3.14. He typically uses this as a call motive whereas he will begin the phrase with this cell and then answer it with another cell. There are many different answers as well as variations that he plays upon this motive, and just about every recording of T-Bone has at least one variant of this *Midnight Blues* riff.\(^{11}\)


In the spirit of T-Bone, I found that the motive it lends itself to opportunity for unlimited variation within my piece. I wanted to use clear examples of blues melodic language. T-Bone is one of the most influential blues guitarists of the 20th Century, and nearly every blues great has used this blues language. So even if this is considered homage to Walker, it is warranted; and I have found myself calling the thematic material the ‘T-Bone phrase’. As seen in Example 3.15 on the following page, it is first used as a contrasting b section in the opening movement of the piece. Instead of having the brass play a heavy, bluesy articulated version of the phrase in unison, I decided to create an intense canon. This was a way to de-contextualize such a strong motive upon its initial introduction into the piece.

In the second movement, the T-Bone phrase was used as the opening thematic material—as shown in Example 3.16a. The call motive was further embellished by many different answers throughout the movement. Further, the phrase was transferred from a compound feel to a driving fast triple feel, which underpins the entire movement. The On the following page, Example 3.16a illustrates the potential for variation in the answer, while Example 3.16b shows the clearest voicing of the T-Bone phrase.
Example 3.16a. Theme 1 of Movement II.

Example 3.16b. Movement II – T-Bone guitar riff.

Up to the point of rehearsal letter H, the phrase has undergone a canonic effect in the first movement while receiving countless melodic embellishments as well as a fiery full orchestra canon in the second movement. This has all led to a climactic moment in which the guitar lucidly plays this phrase in a quasi-cadenza setting. This is the only point in the piece other than the cadenza in which the guitar plays solo with no accompaniment.

The opening motive seen previously in Example 3.11a was not intentionally meant to be a quote, but it reminded me the opening motive to Senor Blues by Horace Silver. Upon further investigation, I found that it actually consists of different intervals; but there is something about the nature of the 3-note phrase that reminded me of the Silver motive. As seen in Example 3.17a, a subtle quote was embedded as soon as the possibility presented itself. Shown in 3.17b, another quote that was more of a compositional opportunity came in measure 160. As the phrase was ending, there was a
perfect chance to give homage to Hendrix with a quote from one of my favorite songs, *Third Stone from the Sun*.

Example 3.17a. *Senor Blues* guitar quote.

Example 3.17b. *Third Stone from the Sun* guitar quote.

To me, *Third Stone* is a symbol of everything that I was trying to accomplish in *Concerto Blue*. It is an example of Hendrix taking the blues to a transcendent level. From a music standpoint, the song encapsulates the idea of experimentation and expansion; which are also two of the main goals of *Concerto Blue*.

**Rhythm and Texture**

When pondering the right approach to rhythm with this piece, the same question arose that has been an overriding theme for this piece: How can this be done without being banal? It was decided immediately to avoid the shuffle rhythm; while it is strongly associated with the blues, it is nearly impossible to use without immediately evoking a big band sound. Due to the fact that there would be an actual trap set playing beats, it was decided that the 12/8 slow blues rhythm provided more of an opportunity for elaboration
and potential de-contextualization. The rhythm has a very floating quality and there is a certain symmetry to it that keeps it from becoming overtly directional. The shuffle rhythm, on the other hand, has a leaning quality. It is as if the beat is perpetually stumbling forward with a highly directional momentum; this was simply not attractive to my rhythmic conception of this piece.

With an attempt to begin the piece in an acoustic blues sort of aesthetic, the first movement needed the slow moving nature of a 12/8 blues. This allowed for the blazing triplet rhythms that are a characteristic of the blues style. Further, the 12/8 slow blues drum rhythm could phase in and out during the movement in a very smooth fashion that would come across quite naturally. This natural quality allows for the drums to be used as a texture, where it can contribute another layer to the music with its presence; however, there is no feeling of emptiness when they drop out, as in other cases, the drums are used as a means to connect one idea to another.

As can be seen previously in Examples 3.15 and 3.16b, the rhythmic idea was to achieve a metric modulation where the eighth note from the triplet figure of the T-Bone Walker phrase becomes the quarter note pulse in Movement II. From an aesthetic point of view, it has also been addressed that the middle movement would have a tie to tradition way of a scherzo-like “romp”. When pondering how to incorporate drums into this movement in the same artful manner as presented in the first movement, the drumbeat to Jimi Hendrix’s *Manic Depression* became the obvious choice.\(^{12}\) *Manic Depression* is a progressive song; never has a blues-based rock song been so aggressive in a commonly waltz time signature. Hendrix’s drummer, Mitch Mitchell, was typically known for a very

aggressive style, filled with improvisation and ornamentation. However, with *Manic Depression*, he stays extremely true to the driving manner of the tempo and time signature. This drive was precisely what needed to occur in the middle movement of *Concerto Blue*; where the drums often were used in the first movement to glue ideas together, the sole function of the drum pattern in Movement II was to increase intensity and rhythmic drive.

As previously discussed, the third movement is meant to be a varied recapitulation of Movement I; however, it was important to create an exciting energetic finish. The 12/8 feeling of the first movement needed to be captured, but there needed to be a drive that the first movement was lacking. The first step was to use a 6/8 time signature with the idea that the duple quality might psychologically project a little more forward momentum. Along with this psychological shift, the tempo was taken up from 60 bpm to 68. The idea was to take the slow blues drum rhythm to the brink of a shuffle without losing its slow blues character. Once again stealing from Hendrix, the drumbeat to *Jelly 292* off his postmortem *Blues* album was the inspiration. From a textural standpoint, the rhythms are much more driving than the opening movement, and this lends itself to a more directional use of the drums in comparison to the first movement. In Movement I, the drums phase in and out with a 16\textsuperscript{th} note triplet motor rhythm that has a static quality; however, in the second movement, the drums actually intensify the momentum that has already been established through the melody of the T-Bone phrase. In effect, the listener has been teased with drum patterns phasing in and out through the whole work—particularly the first movement. Thus, in the last movement, the beat is

\[ 13 \text{ Jimi Hendrix, } Blues, \text{ performed by Jimi Hendrix, with various acc, MCA, CD, } 1994. \]
basically used to satisfy the listener in a tension/release manner. The drive to the end of
the piece—beginning at measure 584—provides the longest and most transparent drumbeat
of the entire piece, and this is an attempt to indulge the listener with an uplifting ending.
CHAPTER 4
PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

My intent was to compose a work that would be challenging and satisfying for every performer involved. Moreover, in a concerto, a virtuosic, passionate performance by the soloist is expected. This is exactly what blues audiences love to see: a guitarist playing with complete passion. But this isn’t enough, the audience responds to passion from the entire orchestra, and so I wrote *Concerto Blue* in a way that gives each performer a voice.

**Performer Vs. Composer**

It was inevitable fact that my fingers would be writing every note for the guitarist. It is loaded with personal statements that are highly idiomatic on the instrument. I have spent 24 years honing an original style, and the blues was my first love. However, it was absolutely crucial that any virtuosic guitarist be able to play this work. For as much as I am a performer, I am also a composer and know that a successful composition is a work that is sought out by other performers.

While pondering the notion about what it is to be a classical guitarist, I asked Dr. Gonzalez how he felt about this, and he replied: “I really don’t care for the term ‘classical guitar’. It is a description that I feel is misunderstood. Many connect the term with a
particular repertoire or era…rather it refers to an evolved technique for playing any type of music on the guitar. If it’s written out, we play it.”

With regard to the utilization of effects pedals, he said this:

I see more and more that the young guitarists are more versed in both styles: electric and classical. You don’t find too many these days that just started out on classical. Many of them fall into classical after they’re interested in Rock and Roll and Metal. More from my period, you might find some people that just kinda’ got stuck in one [classical style]…never had the opportunity [to play rock guitar].

It seemed from his professional view, that the performance demands and the subject matter would be reasonable. This was a key question for me. The classical guitar community must embrace this piece, or it will obviously never be accepted into the repertoire. There will always be traditionalists, but they seem to be a minority.

**Performer Contributions**

Another performance concern that has been addressed is the improvisational demands. The blues is a highly improvisational art form–particularly from the perspective of the lead guitarist. If this were merely a piece for me, I would have probably saved myself a lot of work by using slash notation and indicating within the score that the performer improvise. However, many classical guitarists are not improvisers. In order to reach the maximum number of performers, it was imperative that I provide notation throughout. All cadenzas are fully notated, but an element of improvisation has been

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preserved with an indication that the performer may depart and return to the written notes at any point where improvisation seems expressively appropriate.

An interesting consideration raised by Dr. Gonzalez involved whether the performer should sit or stand while performing this concerto:

Traditionally, classical guitarists sit down. They put there left leg up; the guitar goes there (mimics traditional position). There are some classical guitarists now that are strapping the guitar and playing standing up. And they’re playing traditional classical music, but they want to feel free to move like the violinist moves—or the flute player when they’re standing. So they are standing up, and they’re getting into the music…something different. If you have the strap position right, you can have the guitar in the same position as when you are seated.16 Sitting provides the piece with another anchor in tradition, thus giving me a little more room in the compositional realm for experimentation. It is also an anchor in the tradition of the original acoustic bluesman (i.e. Robert Johnson)–and even further, a direct line to the Griots of West Africa. Meanwhile, standing is more contemporary and alludes to today’s electric bluesman (i.e. Buddy Guy). The compromise has been to devote a section in the preface indicating ‘standing’ as an alternative to the traditional sitting and providing the theories on the interpretive difference between standing and sitting in this concerto. This provides the soloist some freedom in performance. Between this and improvisational options, this piece will offer much opportunity for individual approaches to the performance of the piece.

Alternate Tuning

An alternative tuning system was used for the guitar in *Concerto Blue*. The traditional tuning of the guitar from 1 to 6 implies tertian harmony: E B G D A E. In my view, the B string is the signature string in the traditional guitar sound. It disrupts the descending fifth system with a major 3rd, and it is completely understandable within the confines of the tonal system; however, about two years ago, I started detuning the B down a step to A. With this, there is now an implication of the jazz equivalent of a ‘Sus’ sound in strings 1 thru 4. It allows for very easy barring of a sus4(9) chord as opposed to a min7 sound implied by the traditional tuning system. It is really hard to describe how much this little tweaking of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} string affects the entire mood of the instrument.

Jimmy Page uses a similar system in some of his acoustic work. *The Rain Song* from the album *Houses of the Holy* in particular used the system E A D A D E.\textsuperscript{17} In comparison, my system is E A G D A E. The 4\textsuperscript{th} string “G” gives a more elaborate sound to the harmony and is an easier adaptation.

The alternate tuning provides a fresh canvas for guitar riffs. In the quest to keep a more postmodern take on the blues, using the tuning system allows immediate variation on what might have been a stock blues phrase. After years of playing patterns that have reached the point of muscle memory, the phrases have been given a new life. Blues guitar language is generated through digital patterns played in specific locations on the fret board. When string configuration is slightly altered, those digital patterns suddenly produce fresh color tones. The left hand fingerings stay the same, but new notes arise and add another dimension to a stock blues riff.

I was concerned as to whether this variation in tuning would make it less attractive to other performers. Dr. Gonzalez offered this in response:

It is not uncommon to tune for a particular chord or key. Much of the early music we perform calls for the third string to be tuned down a half step to F# as was the five course vihuela of the time. Some repertoire calls for dropping the 6th string to D and the 5th to G. Most advanced classical guitarists can adjust quickly to the strings being in a different place.\(^1\)

The piece is meant to be enticing to guitarists, thus it is imperative that the performer not be dissuaded by unorthodox techniques. Although this tuning system may be a bit unconventional within the blues tradition, it is a perfectly acceptable request to make upon the performer; and it adds a colorful flavor to the melodies.

**The Loop Pedal**

The difficulty using a loop pedal should not be underestimated. There is an element of danger when triggering the effect during live performance in conjunction with a conductor. A performer should spend an ample amount of time practicing the art of building loops. After proficiency has been attained, working in conjunction with a conductor is highly advisable. Clear communication between the performer and the conductor must be established. Potential mistakes and mishaps during performance must be addressed in order to find alternative solutions for the unfortunate scenario.

The loop pedal is an attempt to expand blues guitar technique; moreover, it connects to the more progressive blues of Jimi Hendrix. The Boss RC-20XL Loop Station has a feature that allows for reversing phrases; this was a key component in the Hendrix sound, but actually applied this via magnetic tape in the studio:

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Remarkably, Hendrix was one of the only musicians to ever master playing backwards. This technique involved recording a backing track, then playing it backwards while recording a guitar line over the top…And while Hendrix was busy directing the engineer to set up tapes backwards, forwards, then backwards again, there was always the secret suspicion that the final product would have to be scrapped for being slightly off, or, worse, a mess. But somehow it was always note perfect.\textsuperscript{19}

His song \textit{Are You Experienced} from the album of the same name was recorded exclusively using this concept.\textsuperscript{20}

After much reflection about whether or not to incorporate this reverse tracking into the piece. It was decided that this would immediately diminish the accessibility of performance. Not all loop pedals and patches accommodate this function; and typically, it requires an additional investment of money. Not to mention, incorporating a reverse track in perfect time with an orchestra would prove to be nearly unattainable on a consistent basis. So the perfect solution was to give the player the option for reversing the loop during an ostinato section of the cadenza.

\textbf{Sound Reinforcement}

The concept of sound reinforcement has already been addressed in Chapter 2, so this will be kept brief and directly related to performance considerations. When attending a blues concert involving a guitar showman, it is difficult to not be taken aback by the volume level that is sought. This is not to say that a bluesman only plays at full throttle, but the full dynamic range is necessary to capture the feel of blues. Most have seen the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{20} Jimi Hendrix Experience, \textit{Are You Experienced?}, by Jimi Hendrix, performed by Jimi Hendrix and others, MCA, CD, 1997.
\end{flushleft}
wall of Marshall amps that Hendrix employed; however, blues greats like B.B. King and Albert King attained their tone by cranking solid-state amps to a maximum volume. Stevie Ray Vaughan could only attain his sound by putting plexi-glass in front of his two massive Fender tube amps. Thus, the performer should not fear a high threshold of volume; however, respect should be given to the ears of the audience as well as the blend with the orchestra. As previously mentioned, a high threshold will actually be necessary to attain the aesthetic ideals of the piece. However, it is important for the performer to work collaboratively with a trusted sound engineer in order to attain a suitable volume level. It will also be worth exploring amplification placement and the possibility of miking a smaller amplifier that is merely used as a stage monitor. This way, the engineer can spread the sound of the guitar around the hall with the house pa system. By this method, the guitar will easily be able to compete sonically with the orchestra without the intensity of the sound coming from a single source.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

On February 4th, 2012, Concerto Blue was performed on the Frost School of Music’s annual Concerto Winner’s Concert at Gusman Hall. Having the piece performed has offered a unique perspective on the dissertation process. Knowing how difficult it is to get an orchestral piece performed, it has been an incredible opportunity that I will never take for granted. With the first four chapters dealing primarily with the conception of the piece, it seems only appropriate that the concluding chapter should offer insights learned in the process of preparing and executing the performance.

A Piece Without Program Notes

The Concerto Winners’ Concert is an incredible opportunity for a composer, and it was important to make certain that the piece was presented correctly to the audience. It is tradition for the composer to speak about the piece prior to performance in lieu of program notes. Ultimately, it was a good opportunity to build a bond with the audience. I was actually pleased with my speech; however, in the aftermath, there was a realization when speaking with Dr. Gonzalez that a key element of the piece had been left out in the brief speech. This element was the dueling scenario that I was trying to create between the guitarist and the orchestra.

In that same conversation, I realized that the blues is also very different for each person. It is an individual interpretation and perception. People go to the blues to ease
their soul. From a listener’s standpoint, this might lead to the interpretation of the blues as a soothing music. However, as a performer of the blues, I feel the intensity of every note. Intensity does not have to equate to volume, however I do see it as an aggressive display of venting emotion. In the most soothing blues, I still want to see the performer grimace with each bend of the guitar string. Basically, as all embracing as I have attempted to be in this postmodern collage of the blues, *Concerto Blue* is a personal interpretation of the blues.

**Challenges**

Writing the piece was one of the most efficient efforts I have experienced as a composer. The music seemed to flow out of me effortlessly. In a way, I was spoiled by the process or perhaps lured into a false sense of security. However, in preparing for the performance, there were surprising challenges both as a composer and a performer.

The biggest performance challenge comes from measure 296 to the end of Movement II. First of all, the pulse is moving at 180 beats per minute, and the guitar is playing a sparse syncopated passage. Meanwhile, the orchestra is interacting with the guitar in the dueling nature that encapsulates the piece by way of tutti attacks that must fall directly within the correct moment of the guitar part. When writing the piece, I was naïve to think that a performer could approach this section in an improvised fashion; when this was attempted in rehearsal, the conductor was completely confused. So a part that I thought the performer could simply improvise through became the most difficult part of the piece. The second half of that section is an intense canonic episode that climaxes at the end of the movement. Intentionally giving the guitar downbeat entrances, I thought that this would make the part easier for the performer, yet in performance I
realized that there is hardly any perception of where the downbeat once the canon is in full motion. Not only was this the hardest section for me, the performer, it was the hardest section for the entire orchestra and the conductor.

**Incorporating the Slide**

While preparing the guitar part for performance, it became bothersome I had not included a passage calling for the slide guitar in the piece. This was intentional, as the slide is not exactly conducive to a classical guitar. With sound reinforcement, the effect is possible; but from an aesthetic point of view, it seemed that it might give rise to a similar issue of banality that led me to avoid the shuffle drumbeat. However, the slide in combination with a loop pedal can create some colorful nuances that are highly original. I decided that there needed to be incorporation of the slide into the improvisatory section of the piece. A collage effect of blues slide riffs could be used in a de-contextualized layering. The result ended up being the climax of the cadenza–if not the entire piece. With the loop effect already engaged, I planned to ascend to a peak note in the upper register and transfer on that note to the slide while engaging the loop so that the climactic slide riff would engulf the texture.

This slide technique was held back in rehearsals, as it was to be a surprise element. Because this was executed during the solo, I felt that there would be no issue of confusion with the conductor or the orchestra. It was intended to inspire a passionate ending. In performance, this built an amazing amount of tension, which was released in animated fashion by dramatically stomping the loop pedal to disengage the loop resulting in a sobering silence. At that point, there was a returned to the written cadenza, and it is brought to a sentimental conclusion. In the aftermath, I contemplated whether or not this
should be incorporated into the score. I concluded that every soloist should to have a personal identity in this piece—this is the nature of the blues guitar—and the improvisatory section of the cadenza is the appropriate place for originality. So, this will be part of my personal performance contribution.

**A Final Thought**

In the midst of investigating aspects of the concerto repertoire, I stumbled across a particular quote that is a complete stereotype of contemporary classical music. While not agreeing with the statement, it is recognized that this is a common misconception:

Unfortunately, in the 20th century classical composers have for the most part done little more than see just how much grating noise they could make. It's a style of music not really suited to the guitar, if you ask me. It can be fun, and even greatly exhilarating, if done right (I just love Prokofiev's piano concertos, for example) but at least to my ears, it doesn't work on the guitar. This ideology needed to be proven false and it motivates me to create music that helps dispel these stereotypical beliefs.

Thus, I challenged myself to write a work that brought folk elements and 21st century concepts of composition to the forefront without compromising beauty, artistic freedom and ‘high art’ value. There is certainly room for new guitar music, and *Concerto Blue* offers a possible, and hopefully unique choice for performance. The piece provides a nationalistic identity that represents a significant style of American guitar at its highest stage; moreover, it honors a way of life as seen through the eyes of a bluesman. It was not

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my intention to simply provide a caricature of a time in history. I wanted to create something highly original with the hope that people will think about what they are hearing and ultimately appreciate the beauty in the artistic statement.
BILOGRAPHY


APPENDIX: FULL SCORE
Concerto Blue
for Classical Guitar

Duration: 18’11”

Bruce Hurley Johnston
11/13/11
Concerto Blue is a three-movement work paying homage to the blues in a contemporary setting, written with the intent to be performed by the composer.

Following is the list of instruments:

- Piccolo
- Flute
- Oboe
- English Horn
- Clarinet in B-flat
- Bass Clarinet
- Bassoon
- Contrabassoon
- 2 Horns
- 2 Trumpets
- Tenor Trombone
- Bass Trombone
- Tuba
- Timpani

Percussion: Crash Cymbals, Snare Drum, Steel Anvil, Suspended Cymbal, Tam Tam, Triangle

Drum Set

Guitar with loop effects (EADGAE)

- Violins
- Violas
- Celli

Double Basses
PERFORMANCE NOTES:

*Concerto Blue* is a postmodern homage to the blues tradition. Sitting during performance provides the piece with an anchor in the tradition of the acoustic bluesman of the delta—and even further, a direct line to the Griots of West Africa. Meanwhile, standing is more contemporary and alludes to today’s electric bluesman. Thus, standing during performance is a valid alternative to the traditional seated technique of the classical guitarist. Each soloist should feel free to choose his or her own approach.

The piece is intended to emulate a duel between the guitar and the orchestra; therefore, sound reinforcement should be used in order to allow the guitar to compete sonically with the full orchestra.

Loop effects are written into the guitar part; however, it is possible to play the concerto without effects. A Boss RC-20XL is recommended, but there are other pedals that will suffice. A laptop with a loop patch is also a viable option. It is recommended that the guitar plug directly into the processor rather than a miking option.

The guitar uses an alternate tuning (1-6): E A G D A E

Improvisation is encouraged during the cadenza; however, the basic structure of the written part should be used as a guide.

brucejohnstonmusic.com
II. Language of the Kings
III. The Devil in Rosedale

[Sheet music page with notes and symbols]
Cadenza
Feel free to depart from and return to the written music in an improvised fashion during the Cadenza.