

DOROTHY CHANG / Composition and Collaboration: Music for Stein's "For the Country Entirely: A Play in Letters" (1916)

Here are a few notes about composing the music for the first play of Adam Frank's *Radio Free Stein* project.

To start with, Adam suggested that the music should have an early 1900s sound, so for the beginning of the play I chose to write in a neo-classical style. The lines are very clean; the ensemble starts the first act with a simple waltz. In fact, the entire first act mirrors the structure of the Classical sonata form in that there's an introductory movement, followed by a slow movement, and ending with a fast movement.

Act Two, which is a bit of a scherzo, is the longest continuous act and is divided into a series of letters which the music responds to. Every time there's a "Dear sir," "Dear Mr. Colin Bell," "Dear Mr. Lindo Webb," the music responds to that as a cue to move on to the next musical pattern or phrase. There's a lot of interaction between, or at least parallel movement, between the dialogue and the music.

Act Three is a rehashing of the music of Act One, but things start to go awry. Conflict begins to emerge in the dialogue and the music reflects this with distorted versions of the neo-classical material of Act One.

With Act Four, Adam and I decided that the play should move into another sound world, reflecting a shift in the type of interaction between characters. The scenes are much shorter and more self-contained; Act Four is a series of seven different miniatures and the music reflects these in a variety of ways. You'll hear a lot of effects on the string quartet such as tone clusters and pitch bends, sounds that you wouldn't typically hear from an early 20th century quartet.

Act Five, the final act, takes Act One in reverse. There we have the music from Scenes Three, Two, and One, but all of it somewhat disjointed after the experience of going through the previous three acts.

The principle of design for the overall structure of the music was to run parallel to the dramatic content of the dialogue, reflecting Adam's adaptation of Stein's text.

As for the music itself, when we started this project we were thinking of a few things. First, that the music would have a specific relationship to the text. It would not simply be background music. In that sense, the music can stand alone—remove the text and the music will make sense as an independent piece, as will the dialogue. But we also wanted to find way of intersecting and intertwining the two. Not an easy task! It was a bit like painting with another painter, both of us blindfolded. I used red, he used green, both of us working in our own spheres. At the end, with our blindfolds off, we had to see where we might be able to meld our two creative visions. It was a very interesting experience. You'll find that in many places the music does respond to the text: in some places it is providing affect, in some places it is providing commentary, and in some places it's in dialogue or in counterpoint with the text.



Radio Free Stein, "For the Country Entirely. A Play in Letters" by Gertrude Stein, May 3, 2013, Western Front, Vancouver, Canada