

SURROUNDEDNESS

Surroundedness for 14 musicians, composed in 2012, was commissioned by Vienna's Ensemble "die reihe" on the occasion of its 50th anniversary season. In the early days of chamber orchestras founded exclusively to interpret new music, "die reihe" was a pioneer, preceding the London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Modern, and others.

In *Surroundedness*, my personal, complex rhythmic language is immersed into a musical discourse that focuses on small-scale movement and texture. At the beginning of the piece, short moments of fast movement occur in seeming isolation; they are, in fact, embryonic cells that are gradually brought into closer and closer proximity, finally fusing to weave a tapestry consisting of multifaceted, polymetrically-knotted ornaments. A melodic thread, moving slowly, is "surrounded" by rapidly oscillating trills of various kinds; the result is a simultaneity of tightly-knit contrapuntal bands. The overall impression is one of sweeping, blurry textures; but when the ear hones in on the details, the overlay of held notes and oscillations becomes obvious. The main influence for this instrumental music comes from electronics: frequency modulation, whereby a carrier signal is affected by a modulator, is a popular technique in radio transmission and music synthesis, well known from instruments like the Yamaha DX-7. In the 1990s, I worked for two years at Stanford University, the birthplace of FM synthesis, and the idea of "translating" this phenomenon to an "acoustic" environment had been on my mind for a long time.

These melodic threads of tightly-woven ornaments overlap, one surrounding and painting over the others, ever taking turns, appearing and disappearing in the overall texture. Also present, however intermittently, is a variety of melodic lines moving at a faster pace, reminiscent of melodies from the inland regions of western Africa that have become like a home to me over the years... a distant echo, usually covered up by chorale-like threads and their modulating ornaments, but sometimes shimmering through... a memory rarely perceptible but actually surrounding and embracing everything else we hear.