

Amalgamation

Composed By Andrew Martin Smith

The discipline of music theory may be used not only to determine how a particular piece of music is constructed, but also how to convey these disparate parts to an audience. After all, that is the purpose of musical performance. This column will be devoted to explaining how various compositions of the saxophone repertoire are built, and subsequently, how a performer may be able to use that knowledge to aid in their interpretation of the music.

For this inaugural column, I have chosen a newer work for alto saxophone and piano by a very promising young composer, [Amalgamation](#) by Andrew Martin Smith. Composed for this author in 2010 and premiered at the West Point Military Academy in 2011, *Amalgamation* makes use of

seemingly disparate musical ideas. However, once we peer underneath the surface, we find that each of these ideas forms part of a cohesive unit that may be shown through performance. I will discuss these ideas in detail.

When approaching any piece of music, whether it is new or familiar, possessing a basic understanding of the work's form is essential. This not only aids the performer in studying and practicing the work, but also to display these formal structures aurally to an audience. *Amalgamation* is constructed in five basic parts, commencing with an introduction and utilizing transitions to connect the remaining sections. Smith does an excellent job labeling each of the sections of the piece through the use of double bars and descriptive indicators, which should be applied to the playing style used for each.

As such, there are three characters throughout *Amalgamation*: Decisive, Expressive, and Frenzied. If one follows the score and marks them, we derive the following form: Introduction (Decisive, mm. 1-11), A (Expressive, mm. 12-33), B (Frenzied, mm. 34-53), A' (Expressive, mm. 54-83),



Analysis By Brian Kauth

Transition (Decisive, mm. 84-92), B' (Frenzied, mm. 93-111), Transition (Decisive, mm. 112-119), A'' (Expressive, mm. 120-141). This is shown schematically in Figure 1. From this schematic, we can conclude that this piece is in ABABA form.

An exhaustive analysis of the pitch content used throughout *Amalgamation* is not necessary for the purposes of this article. However, a discussion of certain pitch relationships is necessary in order to understand the musical ramifications they impose on performance of the work. The three basic musical characters used in the piece, Decisive, Expressive, and Frenzied will each be discussed separately.

Due to the brevity of the Decisive sections, they function as introductory and transitional passages in the

piece. There are two primary pc sets at work: [0136] and [0137], each of them making appearances in both the piano and saxophone parts. Throughout these passages, each instrument plays a limited number of pitches, ranging from four to seven. Musical motion is created through rhythmic drive and reorganization of the pitch content into various melodic motives and harmonic inversions. The opening Decisive section functions as an introduction, with the repeated sixteenth-note rhythmic pattern seemingly acting as a "fanfare." The second and third Decisive sections do not contain this "fanfare" rhythm; however, they do possess similar rhythmic motives, notably sixteenth-note triplets, to link them together. The performer must make this connection apparent during performance.

The Expressive sections, though they do not contain the same melodic material as that found in other areas, uses the same pc sets that are incorporated throughout the rest of the piece. The opening Expressive section contains many instances of pc sets [01246], [01248], and [0137]. These sets are utilized as vertical sonorities, melodic fragments, or

Figure 1

A (mm. 12-33)	B (mm. 34-53)	A' (mm. 54-83)	B' (mm. 93-111)	A'' (mm. 120-141)
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arpeggiations throughout each occurrence of this section. Saxophone timbral effects occur frequently, either as *bisbigliando* (timbral trill) or vibrato effects.

The opening Expressive section (mm. 12-33) is very closely related to the final Expressive section (mm. 120-141). The opening piano sonority (m. 12) is a transposed version of what is found in m. 120. The saxophone's first melodic statement in mm. 13-14, as well as the corresponding melodic statement in mm. 121-122, are inversions of each other (the first one ascends, the last one descends), each utilizing pc set [01248] and the technique of *bisbigliando* (timbral trill) on the long tones. This connection must be made to effectively bring the composition to a close.

The central Expressive section (mm. 54-83), the longest portion of the work, contains some different pc sets and musical textures than are found elsewhere. Though it begins quite similarly to the outer two A sections, rhythmic motion is intensified in mm. 68-70 and mm. 73-75 through the use of sixteenth notes in the piano, outlining pc sets [0158] and [0148] respectively. This "music box" gesture adds a definite pulse that is not present in the other slow portions.

Pitch saturation is a hallmark of each Frenzied section. The first Frenzied section (mm. 34-53) is saturated with pc set [01468] in the piano, while the saxophone is saturated with pc set [01246]. It is important to note that throughout this section, the piano only plays the following pitches [A, Bb, D, E, F#], either as vertical sonorities or in melodic counterpoint to the saxophone, whereas the saxophone only plays pitches [C, D, E, F#, G#, A, Bb] that forms a whole-tone collection with the addition of the [A]. The entire gamut of pitches is used with the sole exception of concert Ab. Also of note is the fact that the saxophone pc set [01246] is the same pc set used in the opening piano sonority of the Expressive A section, m. 12.

The second occurrence of the Frenzied section (mm. 93-111) contains the same kind of pitch saturation found in the earlier section (mm. 34-53), albeit with different pitches. Pc set [01248] is utilized in the saxophone part, containing the pitches [D, D#, E, F#, A#], whereas the piano uses pc set [013579] containing pitches [Gb, Ab, Bb, C D, Eb, E]. It should be noted here that the pc sets in this section are slightly different from the first occurrence of this material: the saxophone's set differs by one pc, whereas the piano's set is expanded by one pc. As before, the entire gamut of pitches is used; however, in this case, the one exception is concert B.

Rhythm plays an important role throughout *Amalgamation*, either through its emphasis or its ambiguity. All of the Decisive and Frenzied sections are rhythmically strong, frequently incorporating repeated figures and syncopations. In fact, if the rhythmic syncopations are played very "decisively" in the Decisive sections, the musical effect is more pronounced. The same is true of the Frenzied sections, which use flurries of sixteenth note passages and trills to create the "frenzied" effect. Emphasizing the rhythm in this way enhances the musical characters desired by the composer. On the other hand, the Expressive sections display a metric ambiguity that allows for greater flexibility in lyrical playing. Though the rhythms are clearly defined, there is a definite lack of a strong metric pulse, which is frequently compounded with elided phrases, slurs, and soft

dynamics. By emphasizing the lyrical qualities of these sections, the performer creates a marked contrast with the pronounced rhythmic activity of the others.

Andrew Martin Smith's *Amalgamation* is a wonderful new addition to the saxophone's repertoire. The composer's clear formal structure, consistent writing, and great use of character, have created a piece worthy of performance by any saxophonist today. It is hoped that the few paragraphs used to describe this piece have stirred up the interest of others who may want to consider programming it. While this is not an exhaustive or thorough analysis of the entire work, it gives the reader a basic understanding of what musical materials have been employed and how to go about using them in preparing the piece for performance. §

Amalgamation

Performed By

Matthew Younglove, alto saxophone

Stephanie Titus, piano

(click art below to listen)

