

Clyde Beatty is Dead

[for chamber ensemble]

Written for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players with generous support from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University.

As is often the case, I did not come up with a title for my work until I had already finished it. I had a working title, though, and it was "The Way Things Go", which alluded to the wonderful installation/video by Peter Fischli and David Weiss that shows an inanimate circus act involving a chain-reaction of water, air, and fire that is as precarious as is imaginative, unpredictable, poetic and, ultimately, human.

I realized that my piece had indeed a lot to do with erratic processes (imperfect—or, as Klee would call them, "twittering" machines) that are set into motion and allowed to continue their course entirely by themselves. I thought then of another film: Errol Morris' "Fast, Cheap and Out of Control", where four unusual individuals describe their passion for various facets of human creativity, from topiary gardens to robot making.

I would definitely like to see my piece as "fast, cheap, and out of control". I trigger a process that for a moment seems to have a clear goal, only to stray away from it. The piece stumbles its way through various musical areas, always in idiosyncratic manner, yet never quite falling over. It has a life of its own, one over which the composer has no real control.

Rodney Brooks—one of the characters interviewed by Morris—describes one of his insect-robots in a way that may very well apply to my own composition:

One of the critical things about [the robot] Genghis was: You switched it on, and it walked. The walking isn't programmed in: 'I think, therefore I walk, and how I walk is: I do this, I do that.' Instead, it's all these little feedback loops, and when you put them all together, the robot walks. A well respected professor from Germany said: 'But how do you tell the robot what to do?,' and my only answer was: 'I don't tell the robot what to do... I switch it on, and it does what is in its nature.'"

The title "Clyde Beatty is Dead" comes from the most moving scene in the film, where Dave Hoover, a lion tamer, laments the death of his all-time hero, and with it, the death of the world as we know it.

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Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez' Clyde Beatty is Dead (2002) was commissioned for the San Francisco Contemporary Chamber Players by the Fromm Foundation. Its ensemble of six instruments began the piece with a few jerky, hesitant sounds that gradually gained

momentum, pushing the music into a teetering chain of connected fragments, often breaking apart and then re-forming. Underneath the fractured surface patterns was intricate and elegant ensemble writing, whose clarity of detail and imagination made this piece, after *Revueltas' Homenaje [a García Lorca]*, the most successful and interesting work of the evening.

Jules Langert, San Francisco Classical Voice (San Francisco)