

Seda Röder: Blackbox #003

How *Méandres* meanders – Seda Röder on Bert Van Herck's *Méandres*

Hello and welcome to the third episode of my podcast series Blackbox!



Today I will introduce another contemporary solo piano piece from my repertory: “Méandres” written by the Belgian composer Bert van Herck. More specifically I would like to talk about a fascinating aspect of this piece, which is the question of “how the composer transforms an idea that seems secondary at first into a supporting pillar in this composition?” Before going into more detail about the music let’s hear some measures from the beginning of the piece for a first impression.

[\[First excerpt – Click to listen\]](#)

What I really like about this beginning is the fact that all of the musical elements that will become important in the composition are presented to the listeners right away. You can realize right from the start that “Méandres” is a piece that is based upon two main contrasting ideas. The first one occurs immediately at the beginning of the composition. It is the rhythmic, energetic opening idea. Let’s isolate and hear it once again:

[\[Second excerpt – Click to listen\]](#)

This more energetic first idea constitutes the main subject of the piece. Throughout the composition this rhythmic idea recurs on different levels. Sometimes it is played higher or lower in pitch, sometimes it is modified in its length, and sometimes it appears only as a rhythmic gesture. The important thing is that whenever this idea returns we get the sense of a “light bulb moment.”

The second idea is not as prominent when we hear it first. It is employed in between the recurring episodes of the first idea and it is softer and has a more subtle character than the dominant first theme. Let’s hear the second idea now.

[\[Third excerpt – Click to listen\]](#)

Further into the piece this secondary idea gains in importance. It becomes much longer and offers not only a nice contrast to the rhythmic idea of the beginning, but also starts to function like a transitional element that connects the two appearances of the first idea. Let’s listen to such a transitional moment now. In the following excerpt you will hear a statement of the first idea then a transition



that is comprised of the second idea and finally we will return back to the first idea but this time more mysterious and in counterpoint with the transitional material.

[\[Fourth excerpt – Click to listen\]](#)

As we heard in the excerpt, the second idea—which seemed not to be very prominent in the beginning of the composition—is now not only an important transition that connects two similar instances of the first idea. But it also functions as a kind of switch point that changes the musical direction and orientation of the returning first idea.

This brings us back to the title of the composition: “Meanders.” In geographic language the term meander describes a snake-like bend in the watercourse of a river that helps transport the water over a terrain of varying heights. Like in its geographic counterpart, Bert van Herck’s musical meander makes sharp and often unforeseen twists and turns. These musical bends (the transitions) help the water (the first idea of the piece) navigate through the musical plateaus and valleys of the composition.

Let’s listen to the whole piece now. The recording you will hear was made last year in Paine Hall at Harvard. It is my live performance of this piece in its American premiere. Enjoy!

[\[Seda’s performance of the entire composition – Click to listen\]](#)

That’s it for today! Thanks for listening, and as always please don’t hesitate to contact me with questions. I am also always looking forward to hearing your comments. You can leave your message on my website www.sedaroder.com or simply email me directly at seda@sedaroeder.com.

Seda Röder is a concert pianist, Harvard Fellow, and piano instructor at MIT, who focuses her energy on bringing contemporary music to new audiences.

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