RETRORHAPSODY

FOR TWO PIANOS, TWO BASSES AND PERCUSSION

A DISSERTATION IN
Music Composition

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

by

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Kansas City, Missouri
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RETRORHAPSODY

FOR TWO PIANOS, TWO BASSES AND PERCUSSION

by

James Arthur Rivers for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree

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ABSTRACT

RetroRhapsody takes its inspiration from the culturally fascinating early-to-middle portion of twentieth-century American popular culture. Two of the biggest musical developments were, of course, jazz and rock 'n roll, and this piece attempts to capture some of the spirit and crazy (dance-infused!) energy of the day. It is written in honor of my parents, James and Julie Rivers, who are both professional pianists and composers.

Cast in one movement (with contrasting sections), RetroRhapsody begins with a five-note motive which serves as a springboard for the rest of the piece. The main intervallic ingredients of this motive consist of a major second, a minor second, a tritone and a major seventh. The first three notes of this opening motive, the major/minor seconds, reappear throughout the entire composition in an almost obsessive fashion and are subjected to frequent variation/permutation, depending on the character of the music.
In a sense this piece is a jazzy exercise in "developing variation," to quote Arnold Schoenberg. These opening intervallic relationships further expand to include octatonic sonorities which are a main feature of the section initiated by the vibraphone solo.

The character of the piece, as alluded to earlier, is mainly that of dance music, and, as a quasi-stylized piece, it borrows certain rhythms and sonorities that were somewhat typical of the early jazz age, but it also offsets rhythms at key moments to maintain interest (a constant interplay of repetition and variation).

The overall musical effect, the author hopes, is that these carefully calculated motivic modulations do not supercede, but rather serve to strengthen the joy and abandon of the dance, itself.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance, have examined a thesis titled "RetroRhapsody," presented by James Arthur Rivers, candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

**Supervisory Committee**

Reynold Simpson, DMA, Committee Chair
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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.................................................................................................................. iii
INSTRUMENTATION................................................................................................... vii
PERFORMANCE NOTES.............................................................................................. vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS................................................................................................. viii
RETRORHAPSODY....................................................................................................... 1
VITA............................................................................................................................. 114
RetroRhapsody
(Duration: ca. 10 minutes)

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Pianos
2 Contrabasses

Drumset (played with sticks only)                           Percussion 1:                           Percussion 2:
  BD = Bass Drum                                           medium susp. cymbal                     snare drum
  Toms (small, medium, floor)                               bongos (low/high)                      claves
  SD = Snare Drum (R.S.= rimshot)                           congas (low/high)                      vibraphone
  CB = Cowbell                                              woodblock (low)
  CHH = Closed Hi-Hat                                       cowbell
  HH w/f = Hi-Hat with foot                                 tambourine (mounted)
  RC = Ride Cymbal                                          4 temple blocks
  CC = Crash Cymbal                                         vibraslap

(refer to drumset staff key on page 1)

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The following pyramid (or semi-circle) setup
is suggested for performance in order to maximize
eye contact between all players (a conductor may
be necessary):

      percussion 1  percussion 2
    bass 1     drumset     bass 2
      piano 1            piano 2

Amplification may be required for the pianos, basses and vibes in order to achieve proper
balance with the drumset.

Percussion 1: due to rapid changes of instruments (particularly in the middle section), it is
recommended that set up should accommodate this (trap table, mounted tambourine, etc.)
so that all instruments are reachable with sticks.

Drumset: freedom of expression (according to one's own "swinging-ness" and desire to
embellish) is encouraged, therefore strict adherence to every notated bar is not always
necessary, however, please mind those measures with specific notation (cymbal crashes,
fills, bass drum/cowbell "punctuations," ) and measures where counting is a must,
phrase-wise, in order to be with the rest of the ensemble.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Reynold Simpson for his support, patience and enthusiasm during my work on *RetroRhapsody*. His knowledge is truly inspiring, and this piece would not have come to fruition without his invaluable insights and suggestions. Thank you to Dr. Paul Rudy for encouraging me to broaden my musical horizons and also for piquing my interest in the world of electronica. Thank you to Dr. William Everett for inspiring me to be thorough in my work and research, and for supporting my endeavors, past and present. Thank you to Dr. Andrew Granade for teaching an interesting class on post-1945 music(!), and thank you, also, to Dan Thomas for sharing with me some of his expert knowledge of jazz.

I especially want to thank my parents, James and Julie Rivers, who are the inspiration for *RetroRhapsody*. They are both fantastic pianists, parents and human beings. I am honored and humbled to write this piece for them.

Lastly, I want to thank my brother, David, whose humor and intelligence continues to both amuse and inspire!
RetroRhapsody
for two pianos, two basses and percussion

To my parents, James and Julie Rivers

Art Rivers

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Cb. 1

Cb. 2

D. S.

Perc 1

Perc 2
Cb. 1
?

Cb. 2
?

D. S.
?

Pno. 1
?

Pno. 2
?

Perc 1
?

Perc 2
?

(to low woodblock)

(to vibraphone)

15
Cb. 1

Cb. 2

D. S.

Perc 1

Perc 2
Cb. 1

Cb. 2

D. S.

Perc 1

Perc 2

Tambourine
Pno. 1

Pno. 2

Cb. 1

Cb. 2

D. S.

Perc 1

Perc 2
Cb. 1
Cb. 2
D. S.
Perc 1
Perc 2
VITA

James Arthur ("Art") Rivers (born 1971) is a native of Topeka, Kansas. He started violin and composition lessons at the age of six. As a young violinist he won concerto competitions with the Omaha and Topeka Symphony Orchestras. As a young composer he won the KMTA composition competition on two occasions.

Mr. Rivers composes in a variety of genres ranging from orchestral to electro-acoustic, and his music has been commissioned and performed by orchestras, chamber ensembles and choral groups in Texas and the Midwest. In addition, he has written scores for several short films, one of which recently won an award at the San Antonio Horrific Film Fest. Rivers also arranges music for performance, most recently a rendition of Michael Jackson's "Thriller," performed by the UNT Orchestra on a Halloween Pops concert.

Mr. Rivers holds degrees from the University of North Texas (B.M. in violin performance and M.M. in orchestral conducting). He is currently completing the doctorate degree in composition from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance, and will be graduating in May of 2013.