

Groove

Groove is the result of feeling stuck, frustrated, irritated, and annoyed. In the fall of 2001, during the first year of my masters program at San Francisco Conservatory, I was hard at work on an epic, serious piano piece, when I hit a wall and simply could not get anywhere with it. Then one night I went to a concert of Conservatory faculty playing chamber music, and I found myself so annoyed by the polite applause, by their pretty little bowties, by the tastefulness and refinement of their playing, by all the formalities and niceties that seemed to get in the way of direct communication of the music. After the performance I went up to the practice room and vented by jamming on my bass clarinet. I liked what I was coming up with – it was raw, aggressive, unrefined, and direct, everything I was missing from classical music at the time – and I started writing some of it down. Over the next few days I generated all of the ideas that would form the basis of *Groove*. I worked on this material off and on over the course of about a year until I finally molded it into its (hopefully) coherent yet still raw final form.

That sense of frustration and feeling stuck is evident in the stubborn ostinato that opens and pervades the first movement. It is interrupted by other material of various sorts – much of it wild or angry, some of it more lyrical – but the ostinato always returns and can always be felt lurking in the background. After expending much energy and reaching a wailing climax, the ostinato figure fades out and the movement ends softly. The second movement is lyrical and expressive, with seven varied verses over a ground bass. All seems well, but the first movement ostinato has some unfinished business to attend to....