

ailments, fruits, presidents

solo mandolin

Dirk (,) Rodney

**reconstructed from the original mss.
by Tyler Kingdom**

ailments, fruits, presidents, for solo mandolin, was reconstructed from manuscript materials in the Dirk (,) Rodney Estate Archives, Liverpool, England, by American composer/scholar Tyler Kingdom. Written in 1963, it appears to be Rodney's only work for solo mandolin, which he once described as "the king of the instruments."

ailments, was, according to Dirk's journals, written under the influence of a powerful (but unknown) psychotropic substance while the composer was beginning his association with the mysterious *win gum* sect (which later assumed an important role in his life and work). He wrote:

"each note, tie, slur, accent, art/iculation, I-con, signifier and trope differentiated itself to me from amidst a heptadecagonal maelstrom of autochthonic musical glyphoids, resting finally in their proper and collafycoidal [the *win gum* term, meaning, more or less, "harmonious"] points in the iterative rant-measure" (*Journals*, 1963).

As far as we know, Rodney never performed this difficult piece. He meant for a pickup to be placed on the mandolin, and for some form of distortion or heavy amplification to be used.

In the score for *ailments*, Dirk says to "move immediately to *fruits*," but since *fruits* begins in a different tuning, it is unclear what is expected (a second mandolin? Playing *ailments* in the tuning for *fruits*?). It is clear that at times, Rodney thought of these three pieces as one set of movements, at other times, as three separate pieces.

fruits, by far the most complex of the three movements (pieces?), requires that the performer retune the mandolin during the performance of the piece. The piece is an exploration of the harmonic series (Rodney calls them "übertrollen"). The initial tuning is to a harmonic series on F# (F#-B#-A#-E; or the 1st, 11th, 5th, and 7th harmonics). Over the course of the first section, during the rests, the performer should gradually tune (with the left hand), down to a harmonic series on F-natural (F-B-A-Eb; again, the 1st, 11th, 5th, and 7th harmonics). Over the course of the second section (Rodney did not use "Section 2" to delineate this in the ms., only the cryptic phrase about dancing), the mandolin is retuned (again, with the left hand, while open strings are played), to a harmonic series on Bb (F-Bb-Ab-E; 3rd, 1st, 7th, and 11th harmonics).

These tunings should not be equal-tempered (Rodney: "Faure's iron maiden!"), but adjusted for the harmonic series. 11th harmonics should be about a quarter-tone flat of the tritone, 5th harmonics a little flat of the major third; 7th harmonics about a sixth-tone flat of the minor seventh.

All pitches in the piece are either open strings, 2nd harmonics (at the 12th fret), or, in two cases, 3rd harmonics (the C# in the first section and the C-natural in the second section are played as harmonics on the fourth string, 7th fret). In the first section, tuning should be done in the "open spaces" (Rodney calls them "agorasytes"). Rodney indicates where a given string's retuning is meant to begin

(usually when the cumulative process has reached its halfway point). In the second section, tuning must occur in measures marked "tune" [et. sic.] (where only open strings are used, freeing the left hand). Rodney wrote at one point in the *Journals* that to use the "left hand on the mandolin is ... a sinistral act," and that it should be "free to assist with important bodily ... functions at all times." Rodney does not mark harmonics in the ms.

Rhythmically, each measure is a complex gruppetto of harmonic series-related durations, and Rodney emphasizes in his notes that the performer should try to play these accurately (11:7:5:3:2). The entire piece should have a constant tempo, each measure should be the same length. It is unclear how fast it can be played (or whether Rodney himself could play it!), but clearly, the upper limits of tempo are determined by the difficulties of retuning on the fly and the complexity of the densest measures.

Each measure in the piece is repeated as many times as the performer likes. Rodney specifies that a "tape" or "organic" delay system should be used in performance. Contemporary performers may certainly use digital delays, reverbs, etc.

presidents, for speaker and mandolin (one performer), was clearly written before Nov. 22nd 1963, because of the final entry in the order of succession. It reflects Rodney's fascination with the United States (which he referred to occasionally as "Fender-ika" in homage to his beloved Jaguar). The names seem to have been drawn from a rather odd children's book he read entitled "Those Naughty, Naughty FLOTII," but the actual volume has not yet been located. Dirk mentions, in the *Journals*, that he performed this piece on the streets of Cambridge, Oxford, and, of all places, Cornwall, in the winter of 1963. The performer should take care to pronounce the names as Rodney would most likely have done (e.g. "Jah - qui- LYNE"). The piece appears to be written with some sort of pseudo-random procedure — in the *Journals* Rodney mentions the use of marbles and a section of barbed-wire fence to create a "goose-yawn" and of "distributing" his tram-repairman's "uniform," but it is unclear exactly what this means.

The original sketches for *presidents* show the "process" (or what Rodney called the "antagonist delusion of ontology") used for the piece. The one page score should be played 17 times. Each time thru, the player should (cumulatively) substitute a name (spoken) for a note, depending on the number below. In other words, if the number below a note/name is "5," that name should start being spoken at the fifth repeat, and remain in. Gradually, by the seventeenth iteration, all the names are spoken. The only name spoken the first time thru is "Martha." "Jacqueline" is the final name to be added. Although Rodney must have played this piece from memory, keeping the order of word entry in his head, the modern performer should probably make his own version of the score, working from Rodney's one page "recipe."

In his notes, Rodney is unclear whether or not the mandolin keeps playing as names are added. The contemporary performer, not having the benefit of the

composer's guidance, must make his own decisions about how much mandolin to use, and when. Clearly, the mandolin should play the notes until that repetition in which that name is called for. After that — ? There is even a suggestion that Dirk wanted a kind of singsong declamation of the text, possibly approximating the pitches or just the contours of the melody (in an undecipherable sketch, he penciled in, next to the name Lucretia: "As in Trial By Jury!!!!").

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