for 4 marimbas
and computer commentary

Larry Polansky
1985

for William Winant

(Cantillation Study #3)
(E’leh Tol’d’ot) (These are the generations...)
(Cantillation Study #3)

for four marimbas and optional live computer commentary

for william winan:

Aleh Tol’d’ot is the third in a set of three works based on Masoreric Torah cantillation melodies for the shabbat morning. The first two pieces in this series are ברי’sheet (In the beginning...) (Cantillation Study #1) for voice and live computer, and לים של (V’le’er’shol) (And to rule...) (Cantillation Study #2), a computer composed work for five flutes.

The piece may be played by four marimbas, or with live computer commentary. The optional computer commentary should be based on the same melody as occurs in Marimba I (the tropes themselves), and should be done live. A program by the composer for Macintosh, MIDI keyboard and MIDI synthesizer is available from the composer.

If the computer part is made by the performers themselves, many of the details are of necessity left to the software developer. However, there are certain criteria that should be kept in mind. The computer should either listen to the first marimba, or follow a keyboard or other MIDI input which plays the Marimba I part in unison (but should not be heard). The computer sounds should be based on that information (the tunes themselves). There should be a kind of “morphogenetic trajectory” in the commentary algorithms used which parallels that of the piece itself. This trajectory should begin with a high degree of computer generated morphological transformation of this part, and end by trying to follow it as closely as possible. The change from one extreme to the other should be gradual, changing a little bit with each “verse” of the piece. This process is analogous to the way the other marimba parts relate to the cantillation melodies over the course of the piece (and is the same, in some respects, as Cantillation Studies #1 and #2). The work, in other words, begins in a state of maximal development, and gradually moves towards a state of no development. The computer algorithms used need not be complex. The most important idea is that they start out varying the tropes greatly, and gradually close in on unison.

Optionally, the 17 verses from the Torah upon which the piece is based (תנ”ך פ”ב: פ”ב, פ”ב-III.20, beginning with נ”ל המ”ב and ending with the verse beginning נ”ל המ”ב) may be sung before the piece is played, using the same tropes as are in the piece. This part should ideally be sung by a woman.

Aleh Tol’d’ot was premiered in Zurich, Switzerland, in March, 1994, by Jaqueline Ott, Matthias Wiersch, Christoph Brunner, Lucas N. Niggli, marimbas, and the composer performing the computer part.

Larry Polansky
Oakland, CA/December, 1986
(slight edits: 5/6/94, Lebanon, NH)
*Marimba III: On a five octave marimba, these two notes should be doubled at the lower octave.*