

***Irrational Exuberance* (2005)**

Ever since I first heard Alan Greenspan's phrase "irrational exuberance," I have wanted to write a piece embodying all that the phrase suggests to me. I immediately envisaged a work of wild, explosive textures, a continuity of disruption, musical about-faces, madly contrasting styles and characters. The classicist in me delighted in puzzling over the problem of how to give such a chaotic surface a solid structural foundation, a rational form to buttress the irrational surface.

The final product, an eleven-minute overture, is in five tableaux, five musical depictions of irrational exuberance, each with its own tempo and distinct character. While there are some smooth transitions in the work, several sudden contrasts intensify the irrational quality in the work.

The first tableau ("Giddy, Reckless") is the highest and fastest section, principally characterized by a flurry of woodwinds. Elements from later sections interrupt in short spurts that grow longer as the section unfolds, giving a hint of what is to come, before the first section crashes abruptly into the gently undulating string texture of the second section ("Whimsical, Dizzy"). Seated mainly in very low orchestral voices, this tableau takes as its model the carnival or fairground with its bizarre mix of lights—flashing, garish, iridescent, glaring—and sounds—bells, sirens, whistles, crowds, screams, laughter. Formally, it is a maze of mirrors and glass. The bass trombone, bassoon and cellos give a lyrical line which wanders through lengthening succession of refrains, each representative of one of the tableaux. The next section ("Wild, Fiery") is simpler in concept: musical fireworks. This field of pyrotechnics bursts, cracks and then wrecks unaccountably into a starkly still dreamscape ("Tranquil, Nostalgic"), a musical terrain of memories, fond, wistful, vivid and vague. Memories of music past and omens of music to come echo, transform, and disintegrate. In slow swells, the fifth section ("Blithe, Delirious") emerges from the remains of memories. Eddies and waves gain momentum and orchestral mass, sweeping toward the piece's close.