

Arranging and Interpreting Techniques of Take 6

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[Editor's note: For the purpose of inclusion in this Proceedings, we present only a reduced text-based version of Krieger's largely audio-based presentation. Please contact Franz Krieger for further information.]

Take 6 belongs to the best known western vocal groups in the field of popular music and gospel respectively. Their arranging and interpreting techniques encompass a wide field of highly professional work which would be worth being investigating in detail. The author of this article published a first paper on Take 6 some time ago which deals with general biographical and musical aspects of this group (Krieger, 1999).

The actual investigation has the aim to broaden the knowledge on the music of Take 6 by presenting selected aspects of their rhythmic behaviour. The means of the investigation as well as of the presentation of this musical aspect are self made transcriptions. These transcriptions include information on various aspects (rhythm, harmony, voicings, etc.); at the same time they can be really helpful only by listening to the music simultaneously. The reason for this lies in musical means like timbre, emotional, micro variation in tempo and/or dynamics which cannot be written down in an adequate way by using the western musical notation.

All in all there are ten musical examples which were selected under two aspects. Firstly, they demonstrate the ability of Take 6 to produce rhythmical and highly interesting music by using very simple means. Secondly, the selected recordings do not really depend on technical support like drum computer or sequencer. This investigation is not just a research report written for other researchers, but it is also helpful means for singers and arrangers.

The 1990 recording of the song "Come unto Me" is an example of minimal rhythmic movement. If there is any syncopation the slow tempo of the tune makes the rhythm sound softer. The main effect of the arrangement lies in the harmony ($C\flat\text{maj}^{7/9/13} - C\flat^{9/\sharp 11/13} - F\text{m}^{7/9/11} - F\flat^{7/\sharp 9/\sharp 11} - E\flat\text{m}^{7/9/11} - A\flat^{7/9/\sharp 11/13}$, and so on), one main aspect of the interpretation is the perfect intonation.

More rhythmical movement can be found with the gospel song "If We Ever." The singers are using much offbeat emphasis, and they are snapping their fingers on the "two" and the "four." This snapping with the studio recording is not done exactly to create a live atmosphere. The sound of the body percussion is electronically modified; it is rather hard, with a flanger-like reverb.

The latest CD of Take 6 is a live recording which presents the tune "If We Ever." With this live recording one can hear a lot of modifications in the arrangement. One of the most important has to do with the audience: Take 6 tries to electrify their audience from the beginning of a performance. An important aspect in achieving this lies in an emotionally presented musical dialogue between a soloist and the answering choir, accompanied by the enthusiastic hand clapping (on "two" and "four") of the audience. The walking bass provides rhythmic breaks, especially in dense transitions.

Similar means are used in "David and Goliath," which resembles more of a big band arrangement. The bass and the accompanying background choir use a jazz-like offbeat rhythm. The tune is a spiritual; it tells the story of David and Goliath. The tune "David and Goliath" features also big band-like passages with close harmony. One of the singers is using a walking

bass, all the other voices are interpreting the melody in a homophonic way. The only body percussion is the finger snapping.

The Take 6 interpretation of the tune "I've Got Life" is in a rather fast tempo. Nevertheless one can hear that the walking bass is using a special amount of tension within every note. Together with the fugue-like action of the background choir, the beginning of this tune shows a lot of rhythmic and dynamic variations.

Variation is one of the deciding musical means of Take 6. It includes, for instance, harmony, rhythm, and the splitting up of the voices into different sections (soloist, background choir, maybe a body percussion section).

The recording of "Away in a Manger" begins with a homophonic passage, followed by a bass figure in eight feeling. Rests are used as means of increasing the musical tension. The background choir is accompanying by using harmonies which create the musical tension, for example, with the #11.

The next example is the tune "Amen." The more simple this song is, the more difficult it is to perform in an interesting way. Take 6 has arranged and performed this tune by creating unusual harmonic progressions (e. g., the minor chord with the flat seventh instead of the tonic triad in measure. 6), using a dominant and rhythmic leading bass, and creating a tension which results from the combination of a rather homophonic background choir and a cantillating soloist.

The role of the bass with Take 6 is a special one. It is not only a matter of the arrangement, but also the interpretation and the ability of the bass to perform the music emotionally and full of life. An impressive example of this special role and an extraordinary musical tension, is the introductory bass figure with the live recording of the Miles Davis tune "All Blues."

The tension is held throughout all this tune, and it is increased by using body percussion. Additionally, one of the singers presents an outstanding imitation of an electric guitar, which underlines the highly detailed preparation of Take 6.

All in all, most of the recordings of Take 6 show rhythmically simple means, used in a absolutely professional way. "Accidents" are well planned and performed accurately. At the same time the detailed preparation and performance of their music enables the Take 6 members to sing with the greatest of ease and thus create music which touches their audience in special ways.

Discography

- Dawson, O. (1990). Come unto me [Recorded by Take 6]. On *So Much 2 Say* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner.
- Dorsey, T. (1928a). If we never needed the Lord before (we sure do need him now) [Recorded by Take 6]. On *Take 6* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner. (1988)
- Dorsey, T. (1928b). If we never needed the Lord before (we sure do need him now) [Recorded by Take 6]. On *Take 6* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner. (2000)
- Kibble, M., & Thomas, D. (1994). I've got life [Recorded by Take 6]. On *Join the Band* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner.
- Miles, D. (1959). All blues [Recorded by Take 6]. On *Live* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner. (2000)
- Take 6. (1988). David and Goliath. On *Take 6* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner.
- Take 6. (1991a). Amen! On *He is Christmas* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner.
- Take 6. (1991b). Away in a manger. On *He is Christmas* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Warner.

Reference List

- Krieger, F. (1999). Take 6: Musikalische ingredienzen einer ungewöhnlichen vokalgruppe [Musical ingredients of an unusual vocal group]. In H. Rösing & T. Phelps (Eds.), *Erkenntniszuwachs durch analyse: Populäre musik auf dem prüfstand*: Vol. 24. Beiträge zur popularmusikforschung (pp. 91-105). Karben: Coda.
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