

***Contrasts for Guitar* (1976)**

1. Freely
2. Fast
3. Slow
4. Fast with nervous agitation
5. Slow
6. Fast

First performance: 20 June 1978, Toronto

Contrasts for Guitar was first performed at the Toronto Guitar Festival in 1976 and was dedicated to the festival's chief organizer Eli Kassner. Cuban guitarist/composer Leo Brouwer commissioned and then premiered Weinzwieg's first major work for solo guitar. Not only does *Contrasts for Guitar* mark a significant (if rare) Canadian contribution to the guitar repertoire, but it also employs serial techniques, an unusual approach given the repertoire's frequent reliance on chordal textures or homophonic writing (that is, melody and accompaniment).

While technically straightforward, *Contrasts for Guitar* poses a musical challenge to the player: with numerous slow, sparse, and often repetitious melodies, each note must be intentional and appropriately expressed. The use of serial techniques and pitch-class sets (a collection of pitches) demonstrates formal details that for the most part cannot be heard. It is the performer's role to draw out the tonal and motivic relationships and numerous contrasts in tempo, technique, texture, and tone within and across the six sections.

The work opens dramatically as the guitarist repeats short motives based on four equal pitch-class sets; an artificial harmonic on G# emphasizes its role as a tonal centre for the section. The texture is sparse, leaving the guitar to create intensity through subtle dynamic changes; the sparsity is occasionally relieved by arpeggios. Following an emphatic chordal passage, Weinzwieg finally presents all twelve tones in a fast ascending scalar passage. The section ends quietly, following a cadential gesture between Ab (or G#) and Eb.

The contrast of the second section is immediately apparent in both tempo and texture as the guitar plays sixteenth-note patterns that slowly expand out from their limited range; these patterns are occasionally interrupted by loud snaps. The texture becomes more fragmented with shorter motives alternating with silence; one final sixteenth-note pattern attempts to restore the momentum, but the energy dies away. Suddenly the guitar strums one chord repeatedly for the closing part of this section; this chord asserts F# as the tonal centre of the section.

The third section poses the greatest interpretive challenge to the player, with its slow, free melodies. While pitch-class sets are generally not restricted by octave placement, here Weinzwieg keeps the sets in their closed forms, allowing for more conjunct and

recognizable melodies. One particular motive (C-A#-B, in addition to transposed forms) becomes a cadential gesture, creating closure for musical phrases. Two almost identical three-note motives are introduced near the end of the section, and emphasize E as a tonal centre.

The “nervous agitation” of fourth section is clear from its opening tremolo on F#. The section centres on a soft, almost melancholy, motive as it turns from a major to a minor third over A. The fragmented texture, with great dynamic contrasts, short motives, and sudden pauses, is brought into relief by the continual return to the main motive.

The slow and gentle fifth section draws on the idiomatic capabilities of the guitar, including percussive tapping on the guitar body. Despite frequent microtonal intervals, this section establishes a clear tonal centre of E through frequent emphasis of E, A, and B (or I, IV, V). The singularity of this subtle section is emphasized with its lack of clear referencing in the final section.

As is often the case with large-scale formal design, the final section recalls many features of the previous sections, including the rhythmic vitality of the second section, a quotation of Section 3’s opening phrase (including the C-A#-B cadential gesture), and the fragmented texture of the fourth section. This final section makes a nod by omission to the first section: Eb and G#—the tonal centres from the first section—are absent from this 10-tone section. The work ends aggressively, with loud strummed chords, tremolo chords, pizzicato motives, and arpeggios.

Written by Alexa Woloshyn