

A MUSICAL PERIODIC TABLE

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Many of our readers have probably seen, or even possess, one or more of the wall charts showing the Periodic Table of the Fruits, Vegetables, or Desserts. For those who haven't: they're attractive and entertaining, especially the imaginative Latin names given to the entries; but the matching of elements to entries is mostly uninspired, usually relying on a letter combination somewhere in the name (e.g., in the dessert table, atomic number 17 is éclair—Cl). A musical periodic table is potentially much more intriguing, given the possibilities for connections between element names and musical pieces. I've been playing with this idea for a while and have about a third of it done. I report here on "work in progress." (For those who are interested and/or amused, I have relegated some of the explanations of correspondence to footnotes, so you can try to figure them out on your own.)

A number of elements are easy in that they have direct referents from reasonably familiar pieces; these include:

Au: Many possibilities—the Shosta-

kovich ballet "The Age of Gold;" Bach's "Goldberg" Variations; etc. Or if we allow the composer to be the referent, we could use any piece by Karl Goldmark, or Erich Korngold, or George Auric.

Hg: The "Mercury" movement from Holst's suite "The Planets."

Pm: Beethoven, "Creatures of Prometheus."

Am: Again many examples: Dvorak's "American" Quartet; the Varese piece "Amériques;" an interesting but ambiguous choice would be Gershwin's "American in Paris" as it codes for a second element as well [1].

Re: Schumann Symphony #3, subtitled "Rhenish."

Some elements have equally direct referents, but to less familiar pieces:

Pb: Pierne, "March of the Little Lead Soldiers."

He: Nielsen, "Helios" Overture.

Tm: The aria "Il était un roi de Thule" from Gounod's "Faust."

Still others make somewhat more obscure connections:

Se: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 27#2 [2].

Ti: Thomas, Overture to "Mignon" [3].

Cu: Beethoven, Rondo a Capriccio Op. 129 [4].

Pt: Varese, "Density 21.5" [5].

Co: Bazzini's violin piece "Dance of the Goblins" [6].

Still others can be extracted from compounds: H and O from Handel's "Water Music;" Cu and Zn from Ingolf Dahl's "Music for Brass;" and so forth. The most "elemental" piece that I've so far come up with simultaneously gives an actinide element and a binary compound and codes for the latter in two different ways [7]!

I would welcome any further contributions. Maybe when we've got the whole table finished, we can get a record company to produce an aural version.

NOTES

1. **Lu:** After Lutetia, the original Latin name for Paris.
2. The "Moonlight" sonata; Selene was goddess of the moon.
3. One of the major themes in the overture is the aria "Je Suis Titania" (sung by an actress portraying the queen of the fairies in "Midsummer Night's Dream").
4. Subtitled "Rage Over a Lost Penny."
5. 21.5 is the density of platinum; the piece was written for a flutist who had just acquired a flute made of platinum.
6. Cobalt comes from the German "kobald" or goblin.
7. The opera "Einstein on the Beach" by Philip Glass; the binary compound is, of course, SiO_2 .