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Diary of a Seducer  
from musical intimacy, an epic vision emerges

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**The Speaking Hand of the Guitarist.** Robert Martin's Diary of a Seducer is a collection of thirty-six pieces composed over a 15 year period and published in three volumes. Volume I contains fifteen solo pieces, Volume II contains fifteen duos, and Volume III six trios. Starting somewhat simply, these pieces become increasingly involved. Played in succession, these pieces have a powerful cumulative effect. There are harmonic reference points at musically distant locations supporting a large scale architecture. Also, there is an insistent lyricism, narrative in its quality—it seems to tell a delicately private story.

The composer says that the “Diary of a Seducer is a collection and need not always be performed in its entirety.” Guitarists have performed some of the pieces to fit their particular concert. The freedom of selection allows the construction of new forms using the short pieces as building blocks, for example, [solo5, solo9, solo6], [duo, solo, duo, solo, duo] or [trio, duo, trio, solo, trio]—and these may be presented *attacca* (with no break between pieces).

The reason why this building block approach works so well is that each piece in the Diary of a Seducer conveys a sense of finality, or more accurately a sense of inevitability. Paul Griffiths, of the New York Times, writes, “How can the speaking hand [of the guitarist] be felt to have said something meaningful, to have said it completely, and to have said nothing redundant along the way? Here are thirty-six answers to that question.” Later in the record notes (of the only recording on the now defunct CRI label), he adds, “Each of these pieces is saying one thing (though it may be a complex and polyphonic thing), and saying it strongly.”

**Quiet Opening of Musical Voyeurism.** The first piece is quasi monophonic—there are occasional dyads. It is only 13 measures long and is marked “No. 1” and “Sonoro.” The metronome marking indicates quarter note equals forty. About one minute in duration, it is mysterious like a whisper of love.

On a statistical basis, all twelve notes are presented with relatively even distribution—but what is quite unusual is that all eleven intervals also are presented with relatively even distribution. Perhaps we should view this piece as an “eleven interval” piece (as opposed to a “twelve tone” piece). Other pieces in the Diary also have this “all-note/all-interval” characteristic, and this feature becomes clearer with a larger sample.

The outer notes often connect by steps. The high G-sharp in the first measure falls down a semitone to the G-natural in the last measure. The low E-natural in the first measure makes an ascent to F-sharp, then F-natural in measure 5, to G-sharp then G-natural in measure 6, to A-natural to B-natural in measure 7, and finally to C-natural in the penultimate measure which falls to a (*quasi niente*) B-natural in the last measure.

This constant reference to leading tones—either climbing or falling—permeates the Diary of a Seducer. It is especially apparent in the last piece, where hundreds of rising leading tones—not forming chromatic scales—are condensed into a very, very small musical space. From the Diary’s quiet opening of musical voyeurism, to this final ascension, the listener is taken on a forty-five minute musical journey of epic proportions for such small musical forces. It is an orchestral vision rendered with the greatest economy—only three guitars. By the time we arrive at the last piece, everything has changed—it is no longer a whisper of love—but an *erhebung* (“powerful uplifting force”) of ethereal ecstasy.

**They were desperate...I was desperate.** As David Denton, music critic for Fanfare Magazine, once observed, “Robert Martin has lived a life that many of us can only dream about.” Born in 1952, he earned composition degrees from Peabody Conservatory and won several national awards including an Ives Scholarship and a Fulbright to Vienna. After several years of struggle as a composer, living in the most modest of circumstances in New York, he became involved on Wall Street—by accident. There was a wanted ad on a bulletin board at Juilliard, and Robert Martin was the only one to answer. As he relates, “they were desperate for new employees and I was desperate for an employer—I had no background in financial matters, but Wall Street was booming in 1980 and in six months I was promoted to manager of that firm.” During the next 15 years, Martin received a series of promotions to the level of Senior Vice President in Investment Banking at a major firm. His career covered diverse areas such as the financing of Colleges, Universities and Hospitals throughout the United States.

It was in rare quiet moments during business travel that the Diary of a Seducer took shape. “Quick sketches in hotels and on planes coalesced into an ever larger musical continuity, until one day, I was retired from my adopted profession and the piece was finished,” Martin reflects. It was 1995, and Martin sent the Diary to the Theodore Presser Company, now located in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. “They had never heard of me, nor could they find anyone who had ever heard of me, but they recognized that the Diary was extraordinary, and agreed to take me on as one of their composers.”

This is a piece that appears from nowhere and exists outside of the musical stream of historic literature. The Diary is a treasure chest of fascinating composition techniques and approaches. David Denton observed that in Robert Martin’s music, “nowhere do I detect any particular influences at work.” So in order to gain insight, the theoretician must work from scratch.

**Escher-like multiple staircases.** The last musical entry in the Diary is 144 measures long and lasts one minute forty seconds. We are at quarter note equals circa 184—and it keeps accelerating—to 192, 200, 208, 216, 224—finally 232. It is marked “No. 36” and “Sempre Stringendo.” Paul Griffiths writes, “Right at the end [of the entire Diary] comes...Escher-like multiple staircases of scale patterns getting faster and faster. Here the music is starting to become public....”

This last piece has two layers of musical activity presented simultaneously. First, there is a quiet, ever-present background of strange, rapidly climbing, scale patterns. Second, there is a louder dramatic foreground of musical material. All three guitarists pass both layers back and forth throughout the piece. One guitarist bursts forth with a prominent passage, then falls back into the quiet scale-like background as the next guitarist pushes forward with another dramatic surge. It is a fascinating example of sophisticated contrapuntal technique.

Actually, to refer to these as scale patterns is misleading—there is no similarity to traditional scales or the chromatic scale. They are ascending intervallic constructs of non-repetitions. These “strange scale patterns” provide a background of hundreds of leading tone relationships. Every few notes or so, there appears a note which acts as a leading tone to the next. In the foreground there are also leading tones at work. With a relentless compositional rigor, successively higher semitones appear, starting with the F-sharp in guitar 3 at measure 4. In this case the note appears in the “strange scale pattern” layer, but as is shown below, it may appear in the dramatic layer or in both layers:

Note	Measure	Part	Layer
F#	4	gtr 3	“strange scale pattern” layer
G	6	gtr 1	dramatic layer
G#	11	gtr 1	dramatic layer
A	22	gtr 1	dramatic layer
A#	26	gtr 3	dramatic layer
B	30	gtr 1	dramatic layer
C	31	gtr 2	dramatic layer
C#	35	gtr 3	dramatic layer

D	43	gtr 3	dramatic layer
D#	46	gtr 2	dramatic layer
E	65	gtr 2	“strange scale pattern” layer
F	76	gtr 2/3	both layers
F#	77	gtr 3	dramatic layer
G	85	gtr 3	“strange scale pattern” layer
G#	91	gtr 1	“strange scale pattern” layer
A	101	gtr 2	dramatic layer
A#	110 & 111	gtr 2 & 3	both layers
B	118 & 122	gtr 3 & 1	dramatic layer
C	129	gtr 1/2/3	the point where the two layers and three guitarists intersect—they all become one at this point
C#	136	gtr 1	“strange scale pattern” layer
D	136	gtr 1	“strange scale pattern” layer
D#	136	gtr 1	“strange scale pattern” layer
E	137	gtr 1	“strange scale pattern” layer
F	143	gtr 1/2/3	final chord

This formal characteristic of background or foreground leading tones as a structural device is an important aspect in the *Diary*. Paul Griffiths refers to it as “periodic rises to progressively higher notes or falls to progressively lower notes.” Robert Martin himself terms such architecture, (where the range opens with successively higher and/or lower semitones or wholetones either in a foreground or background), as “musical infundibula”—conical or funnel-like musical structures which grow ever wider. In fact, the entire *Diary of a Seducer*, as a macro structure, has these infundibula characteristics.

**No wonder it sounds so right.** The final chord in measure 143 is played by all three guitarists. It consists of three notes forming an augmented triad. There is something overwhelmingly “right” about ending with this augmented triad—and it sounds “right” because it is carefully prepared from the piece’s inception.

From measure 130 to 136, all three guitarists make a sweeping run upward. In this passage, they all play the “strange scale patterns.” Each guitarist does not play a continuous run, instead each plays several notes, then rests, then notes, then rests, and so on. Their brief entrances overlap so that, usually, only two notes are sounding together.

By measure 136, all three guitarists are playing throughout the measure—and in fact, this is the only place where all three guitarists are playing the “strange scale pattern” throughout an entire measure. This passage reveals that the relationship between any two of the guitarists’ parts is that of a major third. Thus, this upward run is really a very rapid series of augmented triads. When the unadorned final chord sounds in measure 143, it is a logical consequence of the prior ongoing spray of rapidly occurring augmented chords.

Furthermore, throughout the entire piece, whenever two guitarists are playing the “strange scale patterns,” the relationship between their parts is that of a major third or minor sixth. Although the dramatic layer often interferes with the “strange scale pattern” layer, nevertheless, the ongoing threads of major thirds forming implied augmented triads act as a long-term preparation for this final augmented triad in measure 143. No wonder it sounds so “right.” It provides an inevitable conclusion, not only to the last piece, but to the entire *Diary*.

**Do we “hear” the missing notes?** Melodically, there are no major thirds or minor sixths in these “strange scale patterns.” This allows them to be layered at the level of a major third or minor sixth without the same chromatic note appearing in a cross relation. Robert Martin refers to this melodic versus harmonic technique as “interval partitioning—a certain interval is singled out—nowhere does it appear melodically, but harmonically it appears everywhere.”

In effect, the multiple layers of “strange scale patterns” run through the piece from beginning to end faster and faster, in a somewhat predictable fashion, but still unpredictable because they never repeat exact—the obvious analogy is to “strange attractors” in Chaos Theory. To appreciate this, one must reconstruct notes which are implied but omitted. Only at one climatic moment in measure 136 is this all obvious—prior to this, not all the notes in the layers are filled in. Do we hear the missing notes?—once you understand the structure, it is hard not to. In an interview with Raymond Tuttle, music critic for *Fanfare Magazine*, Robert Martin points out, “just as our eyes play tricks on us, so do our ears. It is one of my compositional interests to employ these illusions for the benefit of my pieces.”

**Contributions to the Guitar Literature.** Robert Martin has achieved something marvelous with the *Diary of a Seducer*. As one searches through the twentieth century guitar literature, the *Diary* is a one of a kind—it stands alone in its own landscape. For the performer it is simple, but demanding—Robert Martin takes on all aspects of composition as one organic whole. The *Diary* acts as a separator of those that know it

from those who don't, from those who have played it from those who can't, and an almost cult-like following of honorary seducers has taken root. The CRI recording—now unavailable—is becoming a collector's item.

But Robert Martin continues to contribute to the guitar literature. Currently his chamber works with guitar include Charred Beloved (flute, oboe, violin, cello and guitar), Winter Shadows (flute, violin and guitar), Japanese Gardens (flute and guitar), Water of the Flowery Mill (flute, guitar, percussion, violin, viola and cello), Musical Amulets (alto flute, bass flute and guitar), and Emerson Songs (soprano, flute, oboe, two guitars, violin and cello). All these pieces are published by the Theodore Presser Company.

“I will never stop composing for guitar.” Robert Martin adds, “I can't play the guitar in the same way that I can't play the orchestra—and I must admit that sometimes it is difficult for me to determine which is more expressive, which is more powerful.” Certainly, here is a composer who is an American original.