

Deconstructing Eddie by David Schumacher

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Deconstructing Eddie was commissioned by and written for Joshua Thomas of the US Coast Guard Band. Josh approached me with the idea to do a heavy metal inspired piece for saxophone. The goal was to make use of the elements of that style to write a modern, virtuosic piece that wouldn't alienate a general audience. Something that could remain accessible to the listener, yet provide a serious challenge for the performer. Since we both grew up in awe of the outlandish guitar solos of Eddie Van Halen, we decided to start there.

I found a book from Alfred Publishing with meticulous transcriptions of every song Van Halen ever recorded. After weeks of listening and analyzing Eddie's playing, several distinctive and often unexpected consistencies emerged. Among them were Baroque influenced harmonic progressions and cadences complete with quoted passages from Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor. And they say heavy metal is a bad influence on our children!

To highlight these distinctive and consistent threads I decided to make informal use of a technique derived from the 20th century French philosopher Jacques Derrida that has become popular in today's over-televized culinary circles: deconstruction. Although the term originally referred to "a form of philosophical and literary analysis...that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or 'oppositions,' in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts" according to Britannica.com, pop culture has morphed it into a method of isolating the components of a commonly-accepted whole to see how those elements relate outside that whole. In FoodTV-speak, taking the ingredients of a Caesar salad (lettuce, anchovy, egg yolk, and shaved Parmesan) and presenting them in separate piles on a plate.

Employing the short, contrasting sections that are integral to this style of music, I explore in depth each of the deconstructed elements I found to be of interest and adaptable to the saxophone. However, this piece is not about clever abstractions and subtle derivation. It's meant to be a fun, clearly derivative, over-the-top work that pushes the limits of the performer and inspires a little "air guitar" from the listener. This one's for all of us who have ever wanted to be a rock star.

Many other works of various style, instrumentation, and level of difficulty are available from this composer. Commissions for new works, orders for existing works, and information about guest artist residencies should be directed to David Schumacher at stroderode@earthlink.net or 617-970-1177.

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