

d e c e m b e r

for string orchestra

Ben Stonaker

(2004)

"december" was written in memory of two members of my immediate family. Friday, December 19, 2003, marks the death of my grandmother, Nelda Jean Simmons at the age of 65. One week later, Friday, December 26, her granddaughter, my 17 year old cousin Amanda Jean Simmons, was killed in a car accident. This was also my first completed composition after moving to Kansas City, having my car stolen twice and totaled, and adjusting to life away from home. The piece explores the idea of certain emotions (along with mixed feelings) having a specific sound and timbre. The piece is divided into two large sections. The first is an elegy that uses intervals based on *Silent Night*, while the second makes use of aleatoric notation to essentially transform emotions into sound (while experimenting with different textures available in the string orchestra).

Instrumentation:

12 1st Violins
12 2nd Violins
8 Violas
8 Cellos
6 Contrabasses

Duration: 6'30"

Notes: Throughout the work, there are very specific instructions that the performers must follow closely (with regards to vibrato, near the bridge, over the fingerboard, etc.). *Ord.* indicates when performers should play with normal vibrato and bow placement (canceling out any previous instructions). During the tremolo in measures 52-55, a glissando is written with a graphic that indicates wide and slow motion to narrow and fast. This effect should happen within the section throughout all 4 beats in the measure and should not be coordinated. Starting in measure 80, the conductor will only give the rehearsal cues marked by the circled letters. During the *col legno battuti* section, the performers may use wooden dowels instead their bows. The performers should play as loudly as possible without causing any damage to the instrument. The conductor may resume beat patterns at letter M or cue each note.

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Score

Very slow, lamenting (♩ = 54 or slower)

senza vib.
sul tasto
sul G

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Cello
Contrabass



8

1
7
2
7
Vla.
7
Vc.
7
Cb.
7

1
Vln. 13 *ord.* *pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

2
Vln. 13 *ord.* *pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

Vla. 13 *pizz.* *mf* *arco* *pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

Vc. 13 *molto* *f* *ord. sul G* *pp* *mf* *f*

Cb. 13 *p* *mp* *mf* *f*

18 *poco accel.* (♩ = 72)

1
Vln. 17 *mf* *sf* *f*

2
Vln. 17 *mf* *sf* *f*

Vla. 17 *mf* *sf* *f*

Vc. 17 *al tallone sul pont.* *ff* *ord.* *sf* *f*

Cb. 17 *al tallone sul pont.* *ff* *sf*

Musical score for measures 22-24. The score is for five instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.).

- Measures 22-24:** The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature changes from 3/4 to 2/4.
- Violin 1 (Vln. 1):** Starts with a dotted quarter note, followed by eighth notes. Includes a *div.* (divisi) instruction and a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic marking.
- Violin 2 (Vln. 2):** Features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 22. Includes a *div.* instruction and a *ff* dynamic marking.
- Viola (Vla.):** Plays a series of eighth notes. Includes a *ff* dynamic marking.
- Violoncello (Vc.):** Plays a series of eighth notes, including a triplet in measure 24. Includes a *ff* dynamic marking.
- Contrabasso (Cb.):** Remains silent throughout these measures.



Musical score for measures 25-28. The score is for five instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.).

- Measures 25-28:** The key signature changes to two flats (Bb and Eb). The time signature changes to 4/4.
- Violin 1 (Vln. 1):** Starts with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic, then gradually decays to *pp* (pianissimo) by measure 28. Includes a *poco rit.* (poco ritardando) instruction.
- Violin 2 (Vln. 2):** Starts with a *mf* dynamic, then decays to *pp*.
- Viola (Vla.):** Starts with a *mf* dynamic, then decays to *pp*.
- Violoncello (Vc.):** Features triplets in measures 25 and 26. Starts with a *mf* dynamic, then decays to *pp*.
- Contrabasso (Cb.):** Starts with a *ppp* (pianississimo) dynamic, then gradually increases to *mp* (mezzo-piano) by measure 28. Includes an *ord.* (ordinario) instruction.

28 A Tempo

1. Vln. 1: *ppp* (measures 28-30), *pp* (measure 31), *pp* (measure 32). Includes *unis.* and *(V)* markings.

2. Vln. 2: *ppp* (measures 28-30), *p* (measure 31), *pp* (measure 32). Includes *unis.* and *(V)* markings.

Vla.: *ppp* (measures 28-30), *p* (measure 31), *mf* (measure 32), *p* (measure 33), *pp* (measure 34). Includes *(V)* marking.

Vc.: *ppp* (measures 28-30), *p* (measure 31), *mf* (measure 32), *p* (measure 33), *pp* (measure 34).

Cb.: *sempre* (measures 28-34). Includes *rebow as needed* and *molto legato* markings.

General instruction: *poco a poco sul pont.* (measures 31-34).

1. Vln. 1: *f* (measures 32-34), *pp* (measure 35). Includes *punta d'arco sul pont.* and *tr* markings.

2. Vln. 2: *f* (measures 32-34), *pp* (measure 35). Includes *tr* and *pp* *sempre* markings.

Vla.: *f* (measures 32-34), *pp* (measure 35). Includes *punta d'arco sul pont.* and *tr* markings.

Vc.: *f > p* (measures 32-34), *pp* (measure 35). Includes *punta d'arco sul pont.* and *ord.* markings.

Cb.: *(s.p.)* (measures 32-35).

General instruction: *poco a poco sul pont.* (measures 32-35).

1 *sim. tr*

Vln. 1 37 *pp sempre*

Vln. 2 37

Vla. 37 *pp p mf unis. p div.*

Vc. 37 *p mf niente*

Cb. *niente*



42 With more motion (♩ = 64)

Vln. 1 42 *niente f unis. ord. ff*

Vln. 2 42 *niente f ord. ff*

Vla. 42 *f unis. ff*

Vc. 42 *f unis. ff div.*

Cb. 42 *f ord. div. ff*

1 Vln. 46 *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

2 Vln. 46 (no gliss.) *mp* *mp* *p*

Vla. 46 (no gliss.) *mp* *mp*

Vc. 46 *ppp*

Cb. 46 *ppp*



50

1 Vln. 49 *f* *mp* *pp* sempre

2 Vln. 49 *mp* *f* *mp* *pp* sempre

Vla. 49 *f* *p* *pp* sempre

Vc. 49 *f* *pp* sempre

Cb. 49 *f* *pp* sempre

punta d'arco sul pont.

div.

unis.

1 (gliss.) poco rit.

2 (gliss.)

Vln. 52 (do not coordinate) niente

Vla. 52 (do not coordinate) niente

Vc. 52 (gliss.) (do not coordinate) (no trem.) ppp

Cb. unis. mp mf mp ppp

57 Tempo I

1 Solo (1 only) ord. mp

2 Solo (1 only) ord. p mf

Vla. 57 Solo (1 only) ord. mp mf³ 3

Vc. 57 Solo (1 only) ord. mp mf > mp

Cb. 57 Solo (1 only) mp 3 p

1
Vln. 61 *mf* *p* *mp* *tutti*

2
Vln. 61 *mp* *p* *tutti* *mf*

Vla. 61 *p* *mp* *tutti* *mf*

Vc. 61 *mp* *mf* *sub. p*

Cb. *mf* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *f*



65

accel. poco a poco -----

1
Vln. 65 *mf* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

2
Vln. 65 *mp* *f* *p* *mf* *f* *mf*

Vla. 65 *f* *sub. p* *mf* *p* *f*

Vc. 65 *mp* *mf* *p* *mf*

Cb. *p*

----- (♩=72-80)

molto rit.

Musical score for measures 69-73, featuring five staves: Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, *mp*, *f*, and *sf*. It also features triplets and various articulations like accents and slurs. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 73.

74 Tempo I

Musical score for measures 73-77, featuring five staves: Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f marcato*, *sf*, and *(non div.)*. It features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and slurs. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 77.

E

F

G

8"

1 Vln. *fff* all gliss. to highest note
 2 Vln. *fff* all gliss. to highest note
 Vla. niente
 Vc. *sim.* (col legno battuti) 3 as fast as possible
 Cb. *sim.* (col legno battuti) 3 as fast as possible niente

repeat the rhythm on the highest possible note at varying tempi

H

I

J

K

5"

1 Vln. *fffz* scratch tone behind the bridge *sim.*
 2 Vln. stop suddenly
 Vla. *fff sempre* pizz. 3 as fast as possible
 Vc. *fff sempre* pizz. 3 as fast as possible
 Cb. *fff sempre* pizz. 3 as fast as possible

(L)

(M)

10" (♩=80) *molto rit.* ----- (♩=48)

scratch tone (do not coordinate accel.)

1 Vln. *fff* (non div.) *sim.* pizz. arco behind the bridge

2 Vln. *fff* (non div.) *sim.* pizz. arco behind the bridge

Vla. (pizz.) arco *sul pont. s. vib.* *mf* *poco a poco ord. (s. vib. sempre)*

Vc. *sim.* (pizz.)

Cb. *sim.* (pizz.)



(N)

(O)

6" 12"

Solo Vln. *s. vib. sempre* *gliss. div. a 5

1 Vln. *pp* (5 - - - - - 1)

2 Vln. *s. vib. sempre* *gliss. div. a 6

Vla. *pp* *gliss. div. a 8 (8 - - - - - 1)

Vc. *p* behind the bridge pizz. 3 as fast as possible

Cb. *p* behind the bridge pizz. as fast as possible

*Each individual should choose one the final notes in the cluster, gliss. to the pitch, and sustain.

P

Q

c. 20" 5"

(♩ = c.60)
Solo (1 only)

Solo Vln. *p* *mf* *pp* *mp* *pp* *p* niente

con sord. molto esp.

sul tasto $\overbrace{\hspace{2em}}^3$

1 Vln. poco a poco sul tasto ----- (s.t.) niente

2 Vln. poco a poco sul tasto ----- (s.t.) niente

Vla. poco a poco sul tasto ----- (s.t.) niente

Vc. *niente*

Cb. *niente*



R

S

T

8" c. 20" 8"

1 Vln. *pp* *s. vib. sempre* *gliss. div. a 6* niente

2 Vln. *pp* *s. vib. sempre* *gliss. div. a 6* niente

Vla. *niente*

Vc. *niente* *div. poco a poco sul pont.*

Cb. *niente* *arco unis.* *div.* *pp* *poco a poco sul pont.*

(♩ = c.60)

niente *p* *mp* *pp* *p* *pp*