ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: PANDEMICS IN PARALLEL: VIOLIN MUSIC DURING THE SPANISH INFLUENZA (WORLD WAR I) AND COVID 19

Erica Tursi, Doctor of Musical, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Professor David Salness
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My dissertation incorporates in-depth research of composers (and their relevant compositions) living through parallel pandemics and political crises. These periods of time include: COVID-19 and international conflict, as well as The Spanish Flu and World War I. The pieces for violin alone were all created in 2020 as part of the *Alone Together Project,* launched by Jennifer Koh in response to COVID-19 and the financial hardship it placed on so many in the arts community. There are sixteen current composers which will be noted in the following pages. Composers and their works from the past include, Claude Debussy (Violin Sonata in G minor), Leos Janáček (Violin Sonata), Vaughan Williams (The Lark Ascending), and Igor Stravinsky (L'Histoire du Soldat score for clarinet, violin, and piano). My dissertation delves into each composer's experiences, gaining awareness of how they cope with these difficult times, what inspires their compositions, and their productivity during these uncertain times. Three video recitals are included in my dissertation representing Program 1, Program 2 and Program 3 as described in detail in the written supporting materials.

PANDEMICS IN PARALLEL: VIOLIN MUSIC DURING THE SPANISH INFLUENZA (WORLD WAR I) AND COVID 19

by

Erica Tursi

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
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The Alone Together Project

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the arts community and placed many in financial hardship. In response to this massive disruption of work and life, violinist Jennifer Koh launched an online commissioning project offering financial support to composers. Twenty composers, most of whom have salaried positions or other forms of institutional support, agreed to donate a short work for violin alone. They then recommended a fellow freelance composer to write their own violin work on paid commission from the artist driven nonprofit ARCO Collaborative. Some of these works for violin alone are dispersed throughout the recital programs, representing the experiences of composers during COVID-19.

PROGRAM #1

Kindling by Rajna Swaminathan (2020)

Shiner by Cassie Wieland (2020)

Quiet City by inti figgis-vizueta (2020)

Hail, Horrors, Hail by Missy Mazzoli (2020)

Warm In My Veins by Nina Shekhar (2020)

Thirst and Quenching by Kati Agócs (2020)

Violin Sonata in G minor by Claude Debussy (1917)

I. Allegro Vivo
II. Interméde: Fantasque et léger
III. Finale: Très anime

Kindling

The title, *Kindling,* represents the most primitive meaning of the word: small pieces of wood used to ignite a fire. The work was created by Rajna Swaminathan. The composer, in addition to writing music, is an acclaimed mridangam artist. Mridangam is the main percussion instrument of the South Indian or Karnatik form of music. Through extensive experience performing in the Karnatik music and Bharatanatyam scenes, an affinity for various streams of South Asian film, and collaborative work in New York's jazz and creative music scene, Swaminathan developed experimental approaches to improvising. Her

music explores the undercurrents of rhythmic experience and emergent textures in collective improvisation.

The following is Swaminathan's note on *Kindling:* "As the world faces a period filled with uncertainty and tragic loss from the COVID-19 crisis, I offer this piece, like a kindling to a fire, with the intention of igniting a reorientation of our ways of being. During this intense reorganization of time, space, and physical movement, it is my hope that this music can serve as a channel for the vibrancy of this stillness."

The composer strives to capture the ever-changing emotions one was feeling day-to-day during the beginning of quarantine. There are elements of stillness, sadness, joy, and challenges that emerge from needing to confront parts of yourself that wouldn't have necessarily been faced pre-pandemic. The piece consists of three independent themes, each with a different approach to time and texture. Double bar-lines mark the end of each theme.

The first theme, which is marked *Introspective, earnest, freely,* highlights sinuous melodic lines. There is consistently a note from the previous double stop hanging over the bar line, which bleeds one phrase in to the next until the 5th measure, offering some direction to the performer. Swaminathan also clearly indicates phrasing gestures by including commas or breath marks throughout the first theme (Figure 1).

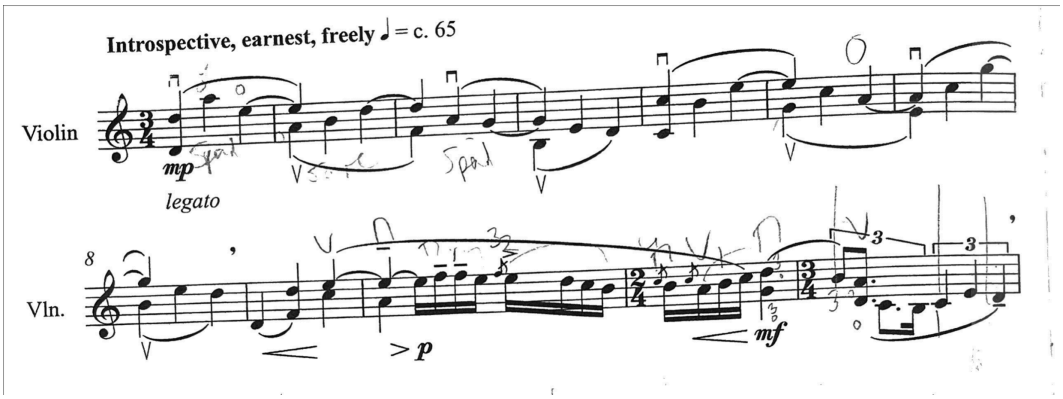


Figure 1: *Kindling,* mm. 1-12

The second theme labeled *Gently resolute, calm,* is marked by frequent multiple-stop chords. Mostly due to the chordal texture, this theme is more extroverted and dynamic. The rhythms and grace notes, which can be seen below, (Figure 2) especially in the third line, offer a dance-like feel. Different from the first theme, Swaminathan places fermatas to indicate ends of phrases, which perhaps inspires longer pauses and leaves even more room for creative possibility at the performer's discretion.



Figure 2: *Kindling,* mm. 25-36

The third theme, *Joyful flight,* focuses on a rapid dance of the bow. There is much contrast in bow technique throughout this section. It begins with legato slurring over the fingerboard, evolves into faster bow changes with just two notes per bow (ordinary contact point), and ends with quick separate notes close to the bridge.

Shiner

The next work, *Shiner*, was also written as part of the "Alone Together" project by Cassie Wieland. As a composer, Wieland is in known for experimenting with timbre and texture by exploring intimate and fragile sounds to achieve the "hand-made" sound she is often searching for. In *Shiner,* Wieland creates small moments of joy and sparkles of light, bringing relief to a repetitive strand of days during the quarantine. The title of the piece comes from her favorite brand of beer which she would drink weekly with friends before the pandemic hit.

The following is a quote from Wieland: "This music is for anybody in need of something small and beautiful. Like a tea light, or a chocolate chip, or a cheap beer on a patio full of friends."

The beginning line of the piece is all pizzicato, which immediately creates a very intimate sound world. The line is repeated three times, inspiring a monotonous feeling, a shared experience among many during the beginning of the quarantine, when life seemed to come to a stop. Throughout the composition,

Wieland experiments with sul ponticello, short and long articulations, pizzicato, and artificial harmonics.

Quiet City (& easter bells from the bowery)

The next work for violin alone, *Quiet City (& easter bells from the bowery)*, is composed by inti figgis-vizueta. Many of figgis-vizueta's compositions are greatly inspired by her direct Andean and Irish heritage. As an avid poetry reader, figgis-vizueta constructed the violin piece out of a poem that is carefully dispersed throughout the score.

The intention of *Quiet City* was to imitate all the sounds that were heard in east village of New York during the quarantine, when the city was eerily empty. The composer shared a note about the piece: "Here, I am drawing on the sounds both present and absent from my neighborhood in Lower Manhattan. The score includes a poem, placed between the musical materials, guiding interpretation of its many spaces and short duration." The poem follows:

Quiet digging
Sun-spots, clay-fired
Bright eyes shut
Ambulance fading into distance
Sip…of water, ache
Grow (joyous), SHAKE
Glass all over
Into sand
Sinking
Reaching
Lingering
Fading

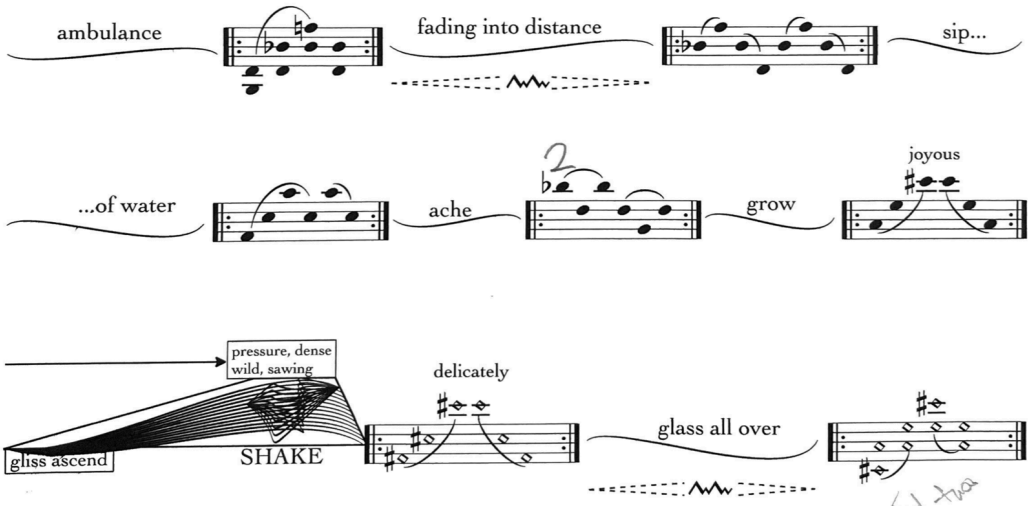


Figure 3: ***Quiet City, (3 Lines of text and score)***

The construction of the score is unique and non-traditional. Each measure is isolated between text, with repeat signs and open-ended rhythm/tempi. There are, however, very specific gestures written in the form of slurring throughout the piece. The interesting architecture of the piece can be seen below (Figure 3). The symbol under "fading into distance" and "glass all over" indicates a gradation of noise and grittiness at the performer's discretion.

Hail, Horrors, Hail

The next work for violin alone, *Hail, Horrors, Hail,* was created by Missy Mazzoli. She is known for her wide array of compositions, including operas, large orchestral compositions, string quartets, and works for solo instruments and voice. Mazzoli is also an active pianist and keyboardist who often performs with a band called Victorie.

The title, *Hail, Horrors, Hail,* comes from a passage in Milton's Paradise Lost:

Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy forever dwells! Hail, horrors! Hail,
Infernal World! And thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor- one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven, a Hell of Heaven

The work offers an elastic feeling of tempo and allows the performer to be completely in control of speed. Most measures are continuous with no bar-lines or time signature. The score shown below (Figure 4), shows a color coding system, where notes that are pink, can be played at any duration. The piece is organized in an arc shape, as it begins slow, gradually gets faster and faster until it reaches a climactic point—then returns to the beginning material with evolved harmonies.

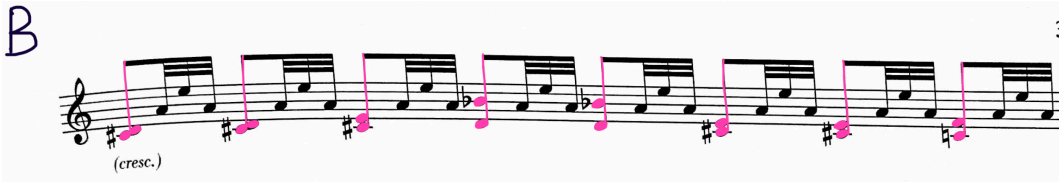


Figure 4: *Hail, Horrors, Hail,* mm. B

Warm In My Veins

The title, *Warm In My Veins,* comes from a quote by pioneering American nurse Clara Barton in which she states, "The patriot blood of my father was warm in my veins." The composer, Nina Shekhar, was inspired by her Native American Indian roots when creating this work as it embodies Hindustani music.

In an interview, Shekhar described *Warm In My Veins:* "In the face of catastrophe, it is easy to lose sight of our essence of self and being. But our sense of identity is deep and impenetrable - the blood of our ancestors runs warm in our veins, carrying their culture, wisdom, and fieriness of spirit. Our present communities run warm in our veins, our love for one another runs warm in our veins, and resilience will always run warm in our veins."

Similar to many of the previous works for violin alone, *Warm In My Veins* is noted in a way that allows for freedom and approximate rhythms throughout the passages. There are suggested tempo markings, but the overall aim is to play as expressively as possible. Shekhar writes in the directions of the piece, "rhythms may be compressed or elongated as needed based on their momentum of the phrase." Here, the composer states that accidentals only apply to the note they directly precede, unlike the usual understanding of accidentals which carry over through the measure. There is a key indicating what certain symbols represent in the music (Figure 5).

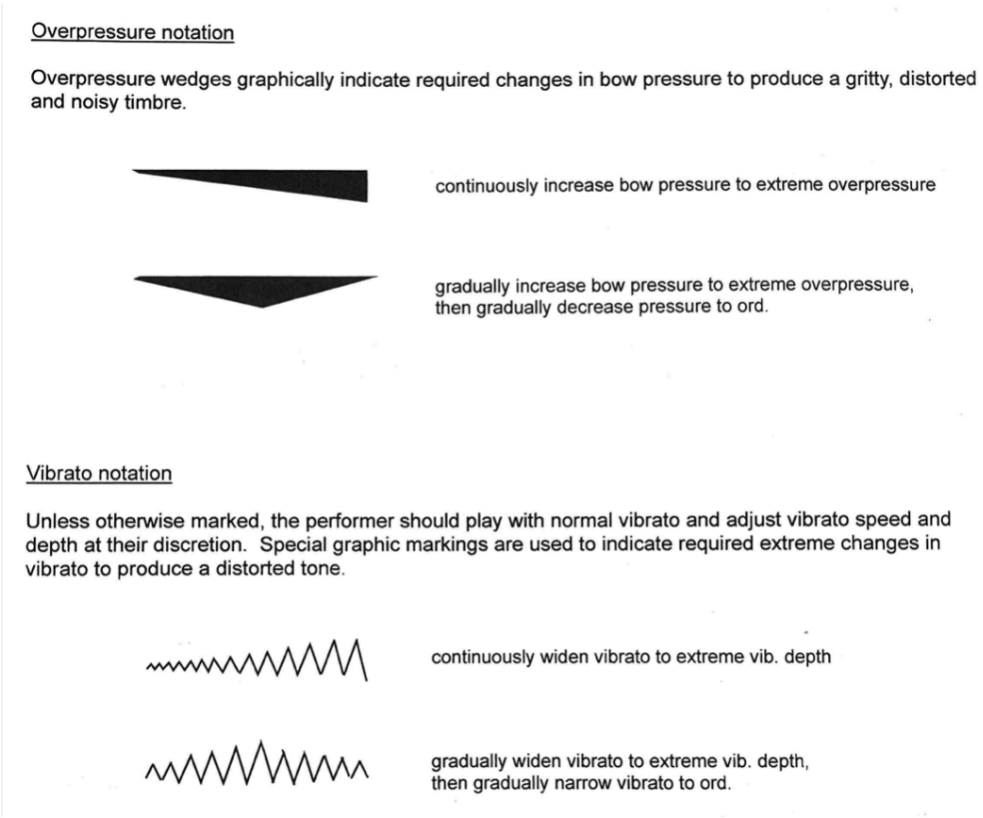


Figure 5: *Warm In My Veins,* notation key

Thirst and Quenching

Katie Agócs is a Hungarian American composer who wrote *Thirst and Quenching* during the early days of the pandemic, while on lockdown with her family in Boston. She wrote the work over a five-day period and created it with the violin playing of Jennifer Koh in mind. Agócs wrote the following notes about the piece: "*Thirst and Quenching* is a meditation on hiatus, absence, and longing. The piece establishes a suspended state with a delicately evolving metabolism, articulated by a regular rhythm that is gradually interrupted by left-handed pizzicati. The rhythm of these lacunae (gaps in the line) later transmutes into

empty space, while the line develops into more rhapsodic and ornate melismas with glissandi articulating gentle sighs, conveying a sense of release."

Although the format of the music is traditionally written out with bar lines and time signatures, the composer asks that the performer does not play rhythms strictly and should add natural rubato throughout. Pauses in the piece, which are written out with exact rests and time signatures, do not need to be observed strictly. Similarly, slurring marked throughout the piece indicates gestural direction: therefore, bowings can be interpreted freely by the performer.

***Debussy Sonata* for Violin and Piano**

During the time of World War I, Debussy was grappling with both the state of his homeland and his fast-growing illness. He stated that he composed his last works with feverish speed, "like a madman, and rather sadly." Debussy also said that he was fighting against illness himself, and was a nuisance to everybody.[1] The proposed sub-title of the cello sonata was *Pierrot fâché avec la lune,* meaning Pierrot (a stock male character in French pantomime), angry at the moon. This may have reflected Debussy's feelings for his remaining compositional years.

As the war raged on, Debussy continuously declared himself a French musician and gave encouragement with his *En blanc et noir* work, quoting the Marseillaise. He could not fight in the war, but he could express his viewpoint

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[1] W. H. Mellers. "The Final Works of Claude Debussy or Pierrot Fâché Avec La Lune." Pg 175.

through his music. The prologue of his 1915 cello sonata (his first of the three sonatas) sounds like a heroic summoning, as if going to war.[2]

For Debussy, fleeing from Paris was his way to escape the war and the people living around him to go be free in nature. He went to the coastal town of Pourville, Normandy "…under a free sky and silent trees" where he proceeded to compose the sonatas. His physical suffering could only be soothed by morphine and he was dealing with the thought of death nearing. Still, he had high expectations to complete half a dozen sonatas and planned for future concertos.[3]

Among many of Debussy's compositional muses, *Gregorianum* and the sixteenth century *a cappella* art that grew out of it was one that inspired the sonata for violin and piano. When he was studying in Rome he wrote home: "At a church named Anima I have heard two masses, one from Palestrina, the other from Orlando di Lassus. I wonder whether you know this church which is at the back of beyond, in a labyrinth of sordid little streets. I like it very much because it is built in a very plain and pure style: that is where it differs from many other churches overloaded with a veritable orgy of statues, paintings, and modals which I find a little too theatrical."[4]

These experiences were reflected in the sonata, as the music uses modal chords and pentatony, drawing on Gregorian chant. At the very beginning of

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[2] Kecskeméti, István. '"Claude Debussy, Musicien Français', His Last Sonatas." Pg. 120

[3] Ibid

[4] Kecskeméti, István. '"Claude Debussy, Musicien Français', His Last Sonatas," pg. 143

movement I, a G minor and a C major triad are introduced in the middle register of the piano. In Debussy's effort to achieve simplicity and naturalness, he utilizes the power of soft tones and imitates the sound of soft harps or an organ.



Figure 6: *Debussy Violin Sonata,* mm. 1-4 (mvt I.)

The violin and piano sonata dives into the world of pentatonic tunes and harmonies, with Debussy experimenting and adding his own flavor along the way. The second theme of the first movement is an example of this as Debussy presents it like a real Gregorian recitative with small-interval singing (Figure 7).

The second statement of it is in a fit of passion with one interval augmented and harsh triads booming underneath (Figure 8).



Figure 7: *Debussy Violin Sonata,* mm. 18-24 (mvt. I)

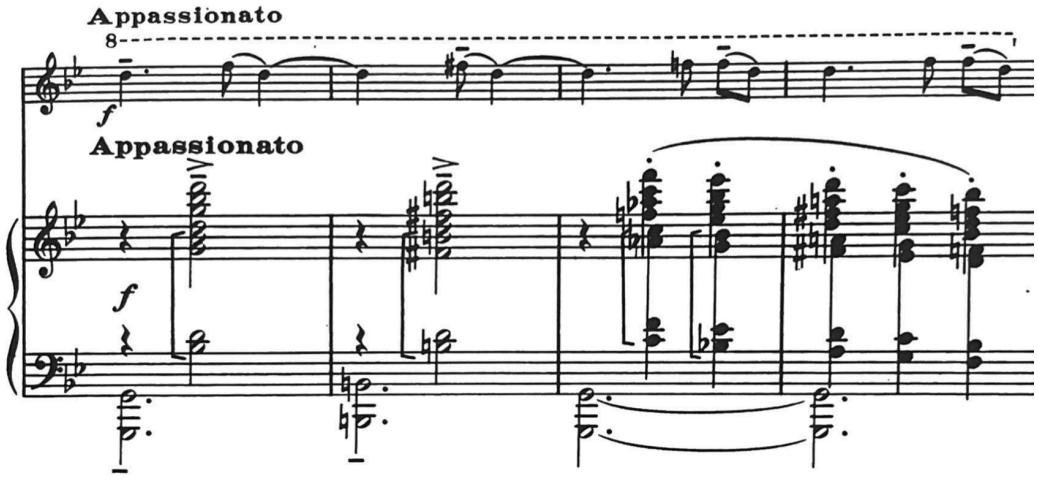


Figure 8: *Debussy Violin Sonata,* mm. 56-59 (mvt. I)

The second movement, The *Intermède,* is quite humorous and has very character-filled textures, such as an ostinato of short, repeated notes, seeming to represent diaphragm-inflected laughter. Debussy also writes high-register, Puccini-like, love melodies, which adds to the ironical theme of the movement.[5]

The Finale was written separately from the other two movements. Debussy wrote: "Not long ago on the promenade to Cap Féret I found the nucleus of the finale for the violin sonata…Unfortunately the first two movements will have nothing to do with it… You know me well enough to understand I will not force on them to bear the presence of an annoying neighbor."

In 1917, the sonata was revised for the last time and thematic relations were restored between movements. In addition to the quotation of the first theme,

[5] Kecskeméti, István. '"Claude Debussy, Musicien Français', His Last Sonatas." Pg. 147

the spirit and technique of the principal movement also returns with the faster tempo and excitement of a final movement.[6]

PROGRAM #2

Violin Sonata by Leoš Janáček (1914)

I. Con moto
II. Ballada
III. Allegretto
IV. Adagio

Hovering Green by Joungbum Lee (2020)

....Your Heart Dreams of Spring by Elizabeth Younan (2020)

Urman by Adeliia Faizullina (2020)

The Lark Ascending for violin and piano by Vaughan Williams (1914)

Janáček Violin Sonata

The wreckage of World War I had a massive impact on Janáček's productivity, and no compositions were unveiled until three years after the start of the war. Then, in 1917, the violin sonata, an opera titled *Vylety Páne Broučkovy* (Excursions of Mr. Brouček), and a piano sonata subtitled *A Street Scene* were introduced. He worked on the violin sonata for over seven years and it was first rejected by the Czech virtuoso, Jaroslav Kocian, before its completion in 1921.[7]

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[6] W. H. Mellers. "The Final Works of Claude Debussy or Pierrot Fâché Avec La Lune." Pg 183.

[7] Mirka Zemanova, *Janacek* (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 2002), 118.

At the start of the war, there was urgency for Janáček to destroy all pro-Russian documents and evidence of pro-Russian activities. There were some Czech intellectuals, Janáček included, who saw Russia's involvement in the war as a path to attain Czech independence. The connection between Janáček's Violin Sonata and World War I was confirmed by the pianist, Karel Solc, who performed the work with concertmaster of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Stanislav Novak. In the final movement of the sonata, Janáček insisted on an extremely agitated rendering of a high-piano tremelo over the last hearing of the chorale-like theme. Solc stated that it signified "the Russian armies entering Hungary."[8]

The sonata is typical of Janáček's style, with his use of short and repeated themes, ostinato patterns, and qualities of rapid, repetitive speech patterns reflective of some dialects in the Czech Republic. Although he did not explicitly quote folk songs in his violin sonata, the spirit of Czech folk music is present. The sonata is structured around the second movement, the Ballade, which he composed first. All movements surrounding the Ballade went through many revisions and also changed order as Janáček was constantly reworking the sonata over that seven-year period.

The first movement begins with a three-bar introduction of solo violin. Analyst Ladislav Prick describes this entrance as a "declamatory solo voice intended to project a warning prior to the outbreak of World War I."

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[8] Vogel, Jaroslav. Leoš Janáček. Revised by Karel Janovický. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981. Pg. 400

He connected these early measures of the work with *halekacka* (call song), a version of an unaccompanied folk song from Valachia (a Czech region).[9]



Figure 9: *Janáček Violin Sonata,* mm. 1-3 (mvt I)

The Ballade is the most lyrical movement of the sonata, with a tender and innocent nature. Janáček was very attracted to Roma (Gypsy) tradition that had been part of the Eastern European culture for many centuries. He had a great interest in Gypsy instruments, bands, and the blend of Gypsy and folk traditions over time. The second movement hints at this inspiration with punctuated articulations, the accidentals in measure 116, and Janáček's directions of *senza rigore* (without strictness), allowing for ad libitum (Figure 10).

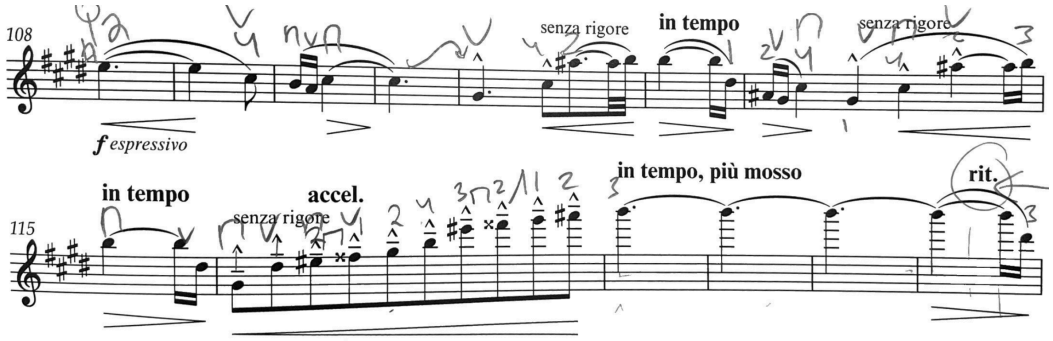


Figure 10: *Janáček Violin Sonata,* mm. 108-120 (mvt. II)

[9] Ladislav Prick, "Stylistic Evolution of Leoš Janáček's Lesser Known Compositions for Violin" (DMA thesis, Arizona University, 1996), 70.

The Allegretto is a traditional scherzo, with very lively textures in the first section, a lyrical middle section, followed by a repeat of the beginning material. This movement showcases Czech folk music at its finest, and even resembles a particular folk song from a region adjacent to Pribor. The example below demonstrates similarities in rhythm and melodic contour, suggesting Janáček's inspiration when writing this movement (Figure 11 & 12).

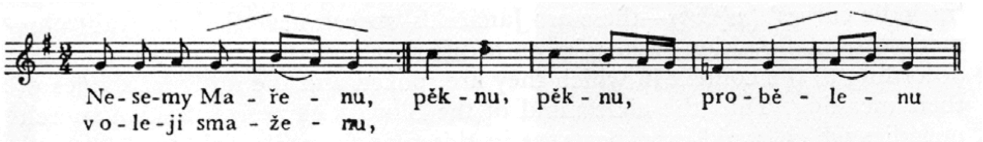


Figure 11: Lachian folk song excerpt, (Vogel, Leoš, Janáček, pg 116.



Figure 12: *Janáček Violin Sonata* (reduced excerpt mvt. III (Ibid, pg. 214)

The final movement, Adagio, intermingles two starkly different characters. One being a four-note soaring figure introduced in the piano part, and the other, a disruptive, obsessive, repetitive figure heard in the violin. These short, repeated figures are prominent in many of Janáček's compositions (Figure 13). One notably similar example is the third movement of his String Quartet no. 1 "Kreutzer Sonata," where the second violin and viola interrupt the long lines of the first violin and cello parts (Figure 14).



Figure 13: ***Janáček Violin Sonata,*** **mm. 39-46 (mvt. IV)**



Figure 14: ***Janáček String Quartet no. 1*** **mm. 1-7 (mvt. III)**

Soon after, the violin line is swept up in to the pianos texture and takes over the four-note phrase, expanding upon it. The music seems to become emotionally spent as both parts join together, murmuring the repetitive figure, and die away together.

…Your Heart Dreams of Spring

Elizabeth Younan, the creator of *... Your Heart Dreams of Spring,* is a Lebanese composer from Sydney, Australia. The composer's Lebanese roots inspired a deep affinity to Kahlil Gibran's works.

The title of this piece for violin alone quotes a verse from Gibran's *The Prophet.* The full quote is below:

"And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring."

—- "On Death"

Younan reflected this quote in her work by creating a very rhythmic texture that its constantly bubbling under the surface. It embodies the struggle in the process of waiting for Spring to arrive. Her writing is precisely measured with very clear tempo changes when directed. Younan utilizes rests, accents, glissandi, and dynamics to propel the line forward.

Urman

Adeliia Faizullina is a Tatar (Turkic ethnic group originating from the region of Kazakhstan) composer, vocalist, and quray (long open end-blown flute with two to seven finger holes) player. Her writing is greatly inspired by the music and poetry of Tatar folklore. *Urman* was written at the beginning of the

pandemic when Faizullina was struggling with extreme anxiety and a lack of ability to focus. Like the rest of the world, she did not know when she would be able to see her family in person. Below she explains her inspiration and process of creating *Urman:*

*"*The piece is about creating solutions through limitations. I composed this piece using a borrowed violin that didn't have a 4th or a 1st string. I thought this limitation could be an interesting source for creativity. *Urman* means "forest" in Tatar, my native language. When writing, I mentally went to places where I used to go with family, to the quiet, green woods around the city where we lived in Tatarstan, and heard soothing sounds of birds. My musical ideas are really short, just some bird calls, different sounds of nature such as a drop or distant sounds. Because it was such a challenge to focus on big things, I explored evocative, tiny sounds. I'm very thankful for this project, which helped me to forget my anxiety for some moments, and listen to these tiny sounds, these little phrases, and try to meditate on them."

Hovering Green

Hovering Green was written by Joungbum Lee. He often composes electronic works as well as orchestral music. Poetry, visual art, nature, and Eastern/Western philosophy are all elements that influence his work. *Hovering Green* was composed at a time when the world was longing for "normalcy" and even more so with springtime approaching. Lee was inspired by Beethoven's Violin Sonata no. 5, known as the *Spring Sonata* when writing his piece for violin

alone. He felt that Beethoven's sonata perfectly depicted the feeling in which hope and despair coexist at the same time.

Hovering Green is written without time signature and measure definition is occasionally marked with dotted lines. There are square note heads which are to be played on the bridge imitating a sound coming from an old radio or poor reception. Notes throughout the piece have specific accidental markings which indicate microtones (Figure 15).

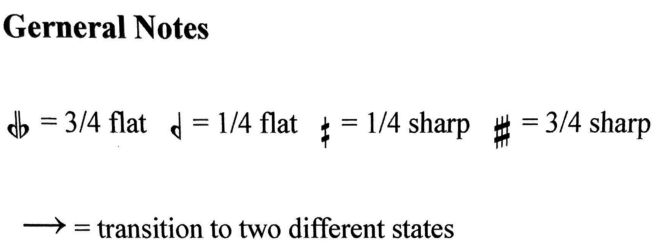


Figure 15: *Hovering Green,* General Notes

The Lark Ascending

Vaughan Williams began composing *The Lark Ascending* in 1914, but because of his enlistment in the Royal Army Corps at the outbreak of World War I, his work was put on hold. He continued composing the work in 1919 and dedicated it to violinist, Marie Hall, who gave the first performance of the orchestral version with the British Symphony Orchestra.[10]
The title comes from the poem by George Meredith with twelve lines of which Vaughan Williams prefaced the score:

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[10] Kennedy, Michael. "The Lark Ascending." Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, England 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. (2008)

The Lark Ascending

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.

For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes.

'Till lost on his aërial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

Certain characteristic figures such as pentatonic folk melodies recur a great deal in Vaughn William's works, giving it a pastoral quality. *The Lark Ascending* is a quintessential example of Vaughn William's writing, as it begins with a free, rhapsodic melody, directed "senza misura." There is very little harmonic background at the beginning of the work, as the violin freely swoops around. His music often uses a recurring note figure to which the melody frequently returns. This is evident in *The Lark Ascending,* as the opening melody comes back three times throughout the work. Some of his other "landscape" compositions also embody this element, including *The Shepherds of the*

Delectable Mountains, his *Pastoral* Symphony, and *Flos Campi* (Flower of the Fields).[11]

Literary critic Peter Marinelli believes that pastoral poetry's overriding characteristic "is that it is written when an ideal or at least more innocent world is felt to be lost, but not so wholly as to destroy the memory of it or to make some imaginative intercourse between present reality and past perfection impossible. Nostalgia cannot be the emotion of those who are not conscious of having experienced loss."[12]

Vaughan Williams had suffered enormous loss during the war. Many of his friends had died and he noted that "out of 7 [of his colleagues] who joined up together in August 1914, only 3 are left" and their absence made him "dread coming back to normal life with so many gaps."[13] There was also the challenge of resuming his professional career postwar, and seeing if his art was even still relevant. T*he Lark Ascending* can be interpreted as a mourning and pining for a past that has been destroyed by the war.

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[11] Kimmel, William. "Vaughan Williams's Melodic Style." *The Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1941): pg. 495.

[12] Saylor, Eric. '"It's Not Lambkins Frisking at All': English Pastoral Music and the Great War." pg. 49.

[13] Ibid

PROGRAM #3

Turns of Phrase by Andrew Norman (2020)

Ultraviolet, Efflorescent by Lester St Louis (2020)

The Fragile Season by Tonia Ko (2020)

Descent by Rafiq Bhatia (2020)

Brick Red Mood by Ellen Reid (2020)

You Are Still Here by Sarah Gibson (2020)

Vacuum Packed by Thomas Kotcheff (2020)

L'Histoire Du Soldat (The Soldier's Tale) by Igor Stravinsky (1915)

I. Marche du Soldat
II. Le violon du Soldat
III. Petit concert
IV. Tango- Valse- Rag
V. Danse du Diable

Turns of Phrase

The final program begins with *Turns of Phrase* by Andrew Norman. Unique from the other works on the programs, and curiously, *Turns of Phrase* is unrelated to the climate of the pandemic. The work explores the concept of speech and pronunciation in music. Norman takes a simple phrase and dissects it in great detail, emphasizing and bringing to light different parts of the phrase while also adding to it as the piece unfolds. The composer wrote, "for me it's about trying to

explore how we construct meaning in musical phrases and how that can shift around depending on the phrase notation."

The score has very specific rhythms and rests as well as dynamic instruction, yet contrastingly, has no time signature or measure distinction. *Turns of Phrase* is written in a palindromic way as it begins with a short phrase, morphs into something more complex, and eventually makes its way back to the opening phrase.

Ultraviolet, Efflorescent

Lester St. Louis, the composer of *Ultraviolet, Efflorescent,* was inspired to write this piece when thinking of the unseen growth that could occur from the COVID-19 pandemic. He wrote in his program notes: "Ultraviolet, situated beyond the visible spectrum. Efflorescent, the action or process of developing and unfolding (perhaps harkening to the state of mind that Andrew Norman in the above work was inspired by). When things go unseen, can they still be measured? *Ultraviolet, Efflorescent* is a crystal of the process of unseen, unmeasurable growth we will have away from external value creation."

Most of the piece consists of a bow technique titled "Windshield Wiper Bow." This technique is half col legno tratto with a vertical motion up and down, spanning between sul ponticello and molto sul tasto (Figure 16).

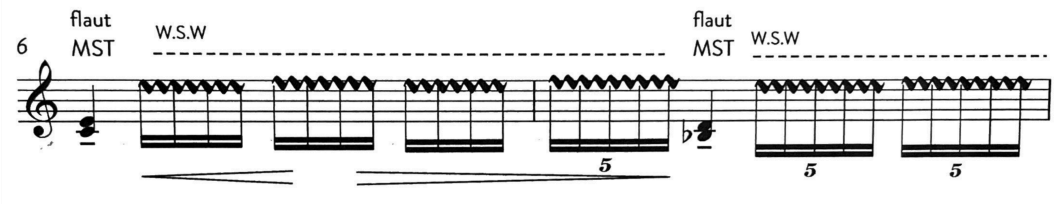


Figure 16: ***Ultraviolet, efflorescent,*** **mm. 6 & 7**

The Fragile Season

The Fragile Season by Tonia Ko is written with pizzicati from start to finish. It explores different textures, such as loose strumming behind the bridge and left hand pizzicato—sometimes simultaneously (Figure 17). The piece is meant to expresses a poignant tension as apposed to a lush texture with which one would normally associate Springtime.

The Fragile Season is based on a poem written by the composer herself:

A fragile Spring:
Shards of petals
Scatter in panicked gusts.

Over the coming weeks
They will harden into lumps of glass,
Sinking into the earth.

The season is no longer soft;
We find cracks in everything

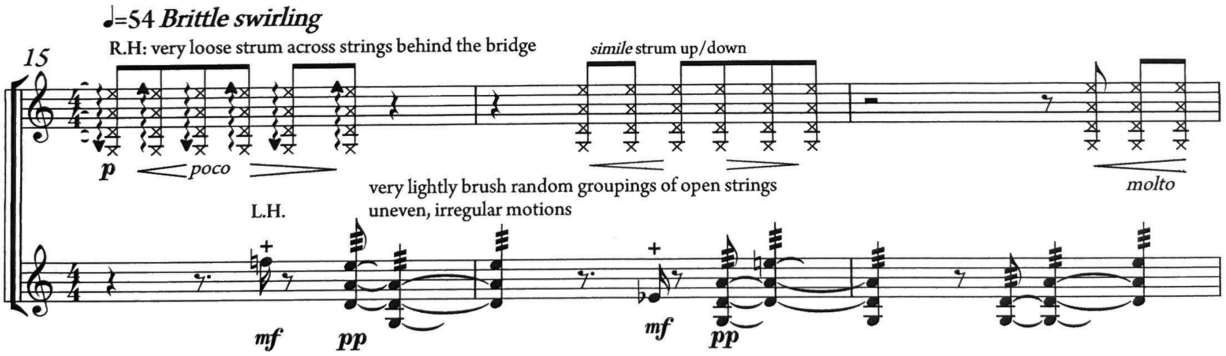


Figure 17: ***The Fragile Season,*** **mm. 15-17**

Descent

Descent by Rafiq Bhatia explores and challenges the concept of time. His work is a very slow progression written with no time signature but very specific timing directions for each note in the piece. Notes or double stops are sempre tremolo, with different bow pulse variations as directed, and until the last four measures, notes are constantly sliding downward. There is a key at the top of the music which demonstrates three different bow pulse variations (each becoming more intense and frequent). Bhatia spoke about *Descent* and where his inspiration was sparked:

"Descent represents an attempt to grapple with the way time unravels in an exponential crisis. Though the initial indications—the early whispers, the unheeded warnings, the steadily mounting evidence in the face of willful ignorance—may appear to approach slowly and somewhat steadily from a distance, the problem multiplies in urgency, force, and speed as it draws nearer. As human beings, we lack an intuitive understanding of exponential growth, but

catastrophes ranging from coronavirus to climate change underscore an undeniable need to make ourselves more familiar."

Brick Red Mood

Brick Red Mood by Ellen Reid was inspired by a feeling of crisis during the early days of COVID-19. The composer quoted "I see a wall of bricks and I can't go over it, it is impenetrable." Reid often writes with colors in mind as a way of organizing her musical thoughts. For Reid, the color red represents blood and earth. She also quoted, "I wanted to explore the feeling of flatness, of nothingness..directionless that I was feeling during that time."

In *Brick Red Mood*, Reid articulates mood and atmosphere very clearly with descriptive words including, "earthy, bold, angry, peaceful, and ghostly." She also makes a distinct difference between sections of the work that are in time and out of time.

You Are Still Here

You Are Still Here by Sarah Gibson is a conversational work with two main motives alternating throughout the piece. One motive is more tense and active while the other is static and stark. It was inspired by Mona Hatoum's artwork of the same name. The work, which is a double mirror containing the titular phrase sandblasted on the surface, allows the viewer to see their face doubled in their reflection with this phrase stamped across their view. Hatoum describes this artwork as a way to spark a conversation with oneself about the confirmation of existence and survival.

Gibson said the following about her piece: "I wrote this piece to remind people that you are still here, you're still alive, and you're still hopefully able to make something or take a step forward even during this strange time. You can look at it as microscopically or gargantuanly as you want. This sentiment, and the need to talk to oneself about these subjects, powerfully spoke to me during the beginning of the pandemic. I was seeking a frantic need for personal expression contrasted with a calmer desire for an empathetic space in which to create during a dark time."

Vacuum Packed

Vacuum Packed by Thomas Kotcheff was written during the first three weeks of the COVID-19 shelter-in-place quarantine order in California. The piece contains quotations form Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D Major, that are decontextualized and juxtaposed against his own music which is frenetic and constantly shifting. The title, *Vacuum Packed,* is a reflection on both Kotcheff's personal isolation as well as the piece itself being a vacuum-sealed rendering "as both an homage and a bastardization" of one of his favorite concertos.

Kotcheff quoted, "In this piece I am trying to maintain my own bubble of sanity. So I thought maybe if I vacuum-packed my own piece, and sealed it away from the rest of the world, I could enjoy this safe bubble of creating music and experience beauty during this time."

L'Histoire du Soldat

L'Histoire du Soldat was composed out of necessity for survival during the time of the Spanish Flu and World War I. During this time of political unrest, Stravinsky was forced to live in exile in Switzerland and his primary source of income, the Ballet Russes, was no longer running. Stravinsky and his novelist friend, Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, decided to join forces and create a traveling production for income. Stravinsky speaks of the work as "being born partly out of a desperate desire to raise funds, but even as this mad enterprise requiring capital itself and with only the slenderest hopes of yielding any profit."[14] Ramuz decided to write a story to be reshaped for the stage, as he was unfamiliar with theatrical writing. The two were in agreement that the music would be independent from the text to allow for separate performing as a concert suite.[15] The result of this creation was a stage production with dancers, a narrator and music.

There are three versions of *L'Histoire du Soldat:* 1) a septet of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, cornet à pistons, trombone, and percussion meant as a 'pit-orchestra,' 2) a septet arranged by Stravinsky as a concert suite, and 3) a trio transcript for clarinet, violin, and piano. The concert suite consists of eight movements, while there are only five movements in the work for trio.[16]

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[14] Cox, Jeremy. '"Le Théâtre Forain': Historical and Stylistic Connections between 'Parade' and Histoire Du Soldat'." pg 577

[15] Eric Walter White, Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 265.

[16] Ibid, pg 275.

Stravinsky and Ramuz claimed the text as the originating element behind *L'Histoire du Soldat.* Stravinsky stated, "I discovered my subject in one of Afanasiev's tales of the soldier and the Devil. In the story that attracted me, the soldier tricks the Devil into drinking too much vodka. He then gives the Devil a handful of shot to eat, assuring him it is caviar, and the Devil greedily swallows it and dies. I subsequently found other Devil-soldier episodes, and set to work piecing them together. Only the skeleton of the play is Afanasyev-Stravinsky, however, for the final form of the libretto must be credited to my friend and collaborator, C.F. Ramuz. I worked with Ramuz, translating my Russian text to him line by line."[17]

The story of *L'Histoire du Soldat* evolved from this into the story of a Russian soldier named Joseph playing fiddle by a stream. He is approached by the Devil who offers him power, wealth, and knowledge in exchange for his fiddle. The soldier agrees and can no longer play the violin. He soon longs for his old life and agrees to lose all of his wealth and gains to the Devil in a card game. In a sequence of three dances, the soldier saves an ailing princess who promised to marry the first man to cure her illness. The Devil tries to frustrate the soldier's relationship with the princess, but the soldier forces him into a manic dance, *The Devil's Dance.* The solider is faced with choosing between his new life with the princess and the happiness he knew in his childhood home. So, he sets off for his village. As soon as he leaves the princess' kingdom, the Devil reclaims his soul

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[17] Zak, Rose A. '"L'Histoire Du Soldat': Approaching the Musical Text." pg. 103

and the narrator offers the moral of the story, "You must not seek to add to what you have. No one can have it it all. It is forbidden."

With much financial hardship during that time, there was enormous struggle to fund the vision and creation of *L'Histoire du Soldat.* Luckily, Stravinsky and Ramuz were able to secure the backing of philanthropist Werner Reinhart, who covered the entire commission and project.[18] The production still faced many obstacles as the Spanish Influenza was spreading rapidly and performances were forced to be put on hold. Following the premier, everyone involved in the production including Stravinsky, became ill from the influenza and the tour came to a close. Performances of *L'Histoire du Soldat* did not resume until 1924.[19]

Conclusion

Just as Stravinsky's performances were put on hold due to sickness, this time of COVID-19 has been a mirrored experience with performers, composers, and artists experiencing set-backs and static periods of time. The three recital programs discussed above combine works from composers written during the most isolating time of the COVID-19 pandemic (during quarantine), and composers writing works during the time of World War I and the Spanish flu. The recitals were carefully organized to demonstrate different textures and offer balance to the listener. The second recital has a more explicit thread through the

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[18] Igor Stravinsky, Igor Stravinsky: An Autobiography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 70- 71.

[19] Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Stravinsky in Pictures, 166.

program, which is nature. *The Lark Ascending* offers a pastoral feeling, while also clearly linking to Janáček's *Violin Sonata* and all that was lost from the war. The Alone Together pieces in the second program relate to nature in different ways, whether it be nostalgia of a "normal" Spring, or physically being in nature as a way of escaping.

Two overarching themes which became clear throughout the experience of the recitals and research, are the importance of human connection and our perception of time. Many of the composers of the past were intertwined in some way, whether it be a long-lasting friendship and respect between Stravinsky and Debussy, or the evolution of musical styles which morphed from one composer to the next. There was a special connection amongst the composers in the Alone Together project, as each established composer contacted another ambitious, emerging composer, giving them the space to create music and receive well-earned compensation.

The element of time became a prevalent theme within the dissertation research: whether relating to time in which the pieces were created, how the composers utilized their time (productive versus unproductive), or how the composers from the Alone Together Project became liberated from structural rhythm and time signatures.

The Alone Together pieces are all short in length, while the works from the early twentieth century are quite a bit longer. It seems clear that in both instances, composers from the past and composers from the present were greatly

struggling to produce music during a time when everything was in question. Pieces composed during the war and the Spanish Flu seem to have taken longer to complete, while the short nature of the Alone Together works likely made for a speedy turn around. Even with these distinctions, the level of productivity seems to be equal to the scale of time that each composer had during these turbulent times.

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