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The Inimitable Brightness of the Air

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the inimitable brightness of the air

Lisa Robertson

the inimitable brightness of the air
for flute, viola and violoncello

Lisa Robertson

Duration: c.5'00''

'...the world all shut out, *the face of things unchanged by any of man's doings. Here was no living presence, save for the limpets on the rocks, for some old, gray, rain-beaten ram that I might rouse out of a ferny den betwixt two boulders, or for the haunting and the piping of the gulls. It was older than man;* *it was found so by incoming Celts, and seafaring Norsemen, and Columba's priests. The earthy savour of the bog-plants, the rude disorder of the boulders, **the inimitable seaside brightness of the air,** the brine and the iodine, the lap of the billows among the weedy reefs, the sudden springing up of a great run of dashing surf along the sea-front of the isle, all that I saw and felt my predecessors must have seen and felt with scarce a difference. **I steeped myself in open air and in past ages.'***

(RL Stevenson - 'Memoirs of an Islet' 1887)

Signs of living presence at every turn,
the haunting landscape buried in the debris
of our very recent past, the disorder of mismatched
indulgences and the dark, dullness of urban smog.
Smog billowing among towers, the springing up of
industry, the dashing along of transportation. We are left
gasping for breath, steeped in the clogged air,
of our own latest creation.

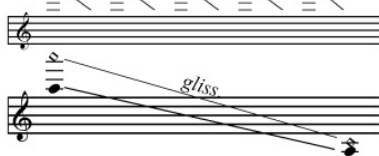
('Memoirs of a City' 2018)

Performance Directions

- glissandi** - if no slur is indicated, then the notes should be played separately, even though there is a gliss.
- pitch bend**- micro-glissando downwards, up to a semitone.
- molto vib.** - wider and faster vibrato than normal but not so wide that the pitch would be distorted.
- sing & play (S&P)** - sing diamond notehead pitch, play ord. notehead pitch simultaneously.
- bar 74** - There is a general feeling of crescendo even though within this, the air notes will obviously be of a lower dynamic. However, the notes should have an increasing sense of energy.

- flute air notes ('air')** - inhale and exhale - lips fully encircle the embouchure hole. Inhale notated with an 'up bow' symbol and an upwards arrow notehead. Exhale notated with a 'down bow' symbol and a downwards arrow notehead.
- whisper tone (W.T.)**
- key clicks** - play only the keys, without blowing to sound the notes. Fingering ad lib.
- flz.** - flutter tongue
- pizz.** -

- scordatura** - Cello C string is tuned down to an A throughout the piece. Notes to be played on this string are notated at sounding pitch rather than being transposed.
- strings air notes ('air')** - bar 1-12, the string should be dampened and any noticeable pitch should be avoided. Elsewhere in the piece, eg. when 'slight pitch' is written, the notated pitch may be slightly heard, but the sound should be mostly white noise.
- ext. tasto** - extreme sul tasto so that the tone quality is somewhat lost
- scratch** - scratch tone which doesn't completely distort the pitch. The sound should not be overly aggressive.
- 1/2 scratch** - half way between ordinary tone and scratch tone.
- ext. scratch** - extreme scratch tone. The sound is more aggressive and the pitch almost distorted.
- 'circle'** - circular bowing. The speed of the circular motion should be very fast (until the viola is marked 'slower circles' when the motion should be much slower) It should have the feeling of tremolo, and it is notated as such.
- 'paper'** - (square notehead) place a piece of paper on the floor and move it with the foot so that the paper slides across the floor making a 'swoosh' sound. This would work best on a wooden floor (or similar surface).
- Roman numerals I, II, III, IV are used to indicate which string to use.
- left hand pizz.** - marked with the symbol +
- col legno ric.** - col legno ricochet (cello in b.6 - the number of notes in the group is ad lib. but the speed of the notes begins fast and gets slower.)
- tap cello body** - notated with cross notehead. Tap anywhere on the body of instrument with fingers.
- 'seagull effect'** - artificial harmonic glissando. This is a stopped harmonic beginning in a very high position with an octave span between the fingers. Glissando down the length of the fingerboard, without adjusting the space between the fingers (which thereby diminishes the interval). The sounding result is shown below:



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♩=65
 air note (no pitch)
 inhale exhale

Flute
like surging waves
pp *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp*
 key clicks
 air note ('air') (with pitch)

Viola
like surging waves
pp *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp*
 air note 'air' IV, stopped, no pitch
 col legno ric. col legno tratto
 'circle' 'air'

Violoncello (C string scordatura down to A)
like surging waves
pp *mf* *pp* 'paper' *mf* *pp*

9

Fl.
 key clicks
 tongue pizz. 'air'
mf *p* *pp* *mf* *pp*

Vla.
 slower circles
 'air' (slight pitch) scratch 'air' (slight pitch)
mf *p* *pp* *mf* *pp*

Vc.
 scratch 'air'
 'air' (slight pitch) scratch 'air' (slight pitch)
 'paper'
mf *p* *pp* *mf* *pp*

A

16

Fl.
 non vib.
p *ppp*

Vla.
 'scratch' sul tasto III
 ord.
p *ppp*

Vc.
 'scratch' sul tasto
 ord.
p *ppp*

*(C string scordatura down to A for whole piece)

28

Fl. *mp* *pp* *molto vib.*

Vla. *mp* *pp*

Vc. *mp* *pp* *molto vib.*

32

Fl. *mp* *pp* *non vib.* *ord.* *tr* *p* *building*

Vla. *mp* *p*

Vc. *mp* *p* *building*

35

Fl. *f* *mp* *earthy*

Vla. *f* *earthy* *pizz.* *arco* *ext. tasto* *molto vib.* *ord. vib* *mp*

Vc. *f* *tap cello body* *arco* *earthy* *sul pont II* *'paper'* *mp*

C

*'seagull' effect

whisper tone (W.T) ord. flz. molto vib. → ord. W.T. ord.

39

Fl.

Vla.

Vc.

pizz. arco molto vib. ord.

f *mp* *f* *mp*

44

Fl.

Vla.

Vc.

flz. molto vib. ord. non vib.

f *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

springing

48

Fl.

Vla.

Vc.

flz. trill-harmonic and ord. ord.

tap cello body

(arco)

ff *ff* *f* *ff* *f*

50

Fl. *f* 5 5 *ff* 3 3 *f*

Vla. *ff* II II III 3 3

Vc. 3 scratch → ord. 3 scratch → ord. 3 scratch → ord. *ff* *grovly*

53

Fl. *ff* *mf* **D** 3 3

Vla. *f* *fff* *mf* 3 3

Vc. *f* *fff* *mf* 3 3

57

Fl. 3 5 *f*

Vla. 5 *f*

Vc. 3 5 *f*

59

Fl. 3 3 *mf* *f*

Vla. 3 3 5 *mf* *f*

Vc. 3 3 5 *mf* *f*

E

Fl. *mp* *f* *mp* non vib. ord. vib. sing & play (S&P) *

Vla. *mp* *f* *mp* sing & play (S&P) * (o arco)

Vc. *mp* *f* *mp* *f* scratch ord.

Fl. *f* *mp* *mf* S&P

Vla. *mp* *mf* pizz. arco S&P scratch ord. non vib.

Vc. *mp* *mf* sing (upper) + play (lower 2) * pizz. arco 5 piping

Fl. *pp* *mf* *mp* *f* (S&P) lip pizz. 5

Vla. *pp* *mf* *mp* sul pont ord. molto vib. ord. vib. scratch ord.

Vc. *pp* *mf* *mp* scratch ord. scratch ord. pizz. (arco)

*sing & play (S&P) - sing diamond notehead pitch, play ord. notehead pitch

74

Fl. ord. flz. S&P S&P S&P

mp cresc. gasping for breath

Vla. f mp p cresc. ext. tasto sul tasto 1/2 scratch sul tasto sul pont. scratch sul pont.

Vc. f mp cresc. ext. tasto sul pont. sul tasto 1/2 scratch sul tasto sul pont. ord. sul pont.

78

Fl. flz. flz. flz. flz. flz. flz. ff jet whistle

choking

Vla. ord. scratch 'air' choking ff ext. 'air' ext. scratch

Vc. ord. scratch 'air' choking ff ext. 'air' ext. scratch

* losing pure tone

*gradually losing pure tone. Air notes and scratch tone becoming more exaggerated until there is just noise. Despite the tone quality, there should still be strong articulation so that the rhythm is clear. There is a general feeling of crescendo even though within this, the air notes will obviously be of a lower dynamic. However, the notes should have an increasing sense of energy.