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Repurposing Sound:

A Conductor's Guide and a Focused Analysis of Viet Cuong's Wind Ensemble Version of *Re(new)al*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts in Music

by

Janet Song Kim

2022

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2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Repurposing Sound:

A Conductor's Guide and Analysis of Viet Cuong's Wind Ensemble Version of *Re(new)al*

by

Janet Song Kim

Doctor of Musical Arts in Music

University of California, Los Angeles 2022

Professor Travis J. Cross, Chair

This research explores the wind ensemble version of Viet Cuong's piece *Re(new)al* (2019). This new work has not been performed often yet, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but many future performances are sure to follow. This study includes an examination of Cuong's musical style through identification of frequently used compositional devices, an in-depth biography based on a personal interview with the composer, a brief look at the medium this work represents (percussion chamber concerti) and the role *Re(new)al* plays within it, interpretive and logistical considerations, and well as suggestions for further study. This dissertation posits that Cuong's choice of orchestration and cyclical harmonic progressions combine to create tension and a musical energy to help each movement rise and fall. This highlights how Cuong purposely orchestrated *Re(new)al* entirely through a hocket, showing the beauty of teamwork in music and humanity, especially when it comes to making the shift to use renewable energy and solve one of the world's biggest problems.

The dissertation of Janet Song Kim is approved.

Theresa Dimond

Robert Fink

Ian Krouse

Neal Stulberg

Travis J. Cross, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

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**This document is dedicated to my Korean immigrant mother, Joan 혜숙 Kim.
Thank you for making all of this possible.**

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I would be remiss if I were not to thank Viet Cuong, the composer of *Re(new)al*. Thank you, Viet, for your time, access to your scores, fantastic conversations, and for writing beautiful, meaningful music.

Thank you to my siblings, Jane Kim Estantino, Enrico Estantino, and Steve Kim, for providing me with a home, support system, and love as I pursued this degree. It's also important to note that I am incredibly lucky that my sister, Jane, taught me how to read and write in English. I remember holding your hand (or just two of your fingers because my hands were so small) in our gray Plymouth Voyager and telling you: "I want to get my doctorate one day." You told me you'd take care of me, get rich, and pay for it all so that I could do it, and you kept your word. There was no way I could have started without you.

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BIOGRAPHY

Janet Song Kim is the Director of Instrumental Activities and Assistant Professor of Music at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska. Kim teaches Conducting, Arranging and Instrumentation, and Saxophone Lesson while conducting the NWU Symphonic Band, Jazz Band, and directs the Pep Band. They are also the director of the Early Career Program with Girls Who Conduct, a non-profit organization that strives to provide mentorship and training for the upcoming generation of women, women-identifying, and non-binary conductors. Kim is also a part of the And We Were Heard team, an organization that seeks to give underrepresented composers a platform to have their music heard.

Kim studied with Dr. Travis J. Cross for their doctorate of musical arts in wind band conducting. Previously, they earned a master of arts degree in instrumental conducting from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and their bachelor of music degree in music education and jazz studies magna cum laude from Montclair State University. During their time at Montclair State University, Kim also had the opportunity to study composition with Alan Ferber and studied orchestration with Patrick Burns. Their primary conducting teachers include Dr. Travis J. Cross, Dr. Timothy A. Paul, Dr. Jason Worzbyt, and Dr. Shelley Axelson.

Kim's performance career began during their time at Montclair, and has performed as a bassoonist, saxophonist, flautist, and clarinetist in various settings. They have performed as a principal bassoonist for the Ridgewood Concert Band, the MSU's Wind Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra, IUP's Wind Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra, and BLYSO. They have also performed as a chamber musician with Lyrica Chamber Music, Lignum Winds, and has also been a scholarship recipient for the Imani Winds Chamber Music Festival. During this time, Kim also worked closely with Jazz House Kids, a non-profit organization for jazz education and performance.

Kim began their career as a band director and conductor at Northern Valley Demarest High School and went on to be a middle school and high school band director in other schools in the state of New Jersey. They led ensembles to perform at Region Band Festivals, District Band Festivals, and has successfully brought home gold and silver ratings during her time as a public-school educator. During their time at UCLA, Kim also served as the associate director of the Peninsula Symphonic Winds. As they finished their coursework, Kim was hired by UCLA to teach Audio Technology 101 because of their interests in Audio Technology, including but not limited to: DAWs, Synthesizers, Recording Techniques/Equipment, Microphone Technology, and other Sound Equipment. Kim has served as a guest conductor, clinician, and judge for soloist, chamber, and wind ensemble settings in New Jersey, California, Pennsylvania, and Nebraska.

Chapter 1: Method of Study and Literature Review

Method of Study

The research method for this document comprises four processes:

1. Biographical study
2. Circumstances behind the development of the piece
3. Focused, specific analysis of form, harmony, and orchestration
4. Interpretive and logistical considerations

Viet Cuong's *Re(new)al* (2017–2021) is a percussion quartet concerto comprising three movements (I. Hydro, II. Wind, and III. Solar). Commissioned by David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony Dogs of Desire in partnership with GE Renewable energy, it was initially composed with a sinfonietta accompaniment and was then re-formed into a full-scale orchestral work. After partaking in a commissioning consortium of twenty ensembles from around the country, Cuong was able to write a wind ensemble version. Before the full-scale premiere, there were several small performances of parts of the wind ensemble version of the piece. Professor Jerry Junkin from the University of Texas, Austin, performed the full Wind Ensemble version of *Re(new)al* with the Dallas Winds in 2019.¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, another version was born; this iteration was written for chamber winds in 2021 to help facilitate social distancing. There are now four total versions of the ensemble that accompanies the percussion quartet: one sinfonietta (chamber for string and wind instruments), one orchestral, one wind band, and one chamber-winds (wind ensemble reduction) version. Each iteration has minute differences in form and content, with expected variances in orchestration.²

¹Jerry Junkin, The University of Texas Bands. "Interview: Viet Cuong." *YouTube* video, 7:43. June 14, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdSYIW4VWfYandt>

²Viet Cuong, *Re(new)al*. Blue Dot Collective, 2019.

Cuong's orchestration style, as well as his general compositional approach, is discussed in the second chapter. There is also a detailed biography, including information collected from prior interviews, several articles, and an in-depth interview conducted for this paper. This includes more specific information about Cuong's family, education, and upbringing and how his background affects his music.

The third chapter explores the circumstances behind the composition of *Re(new)al*, in particular, the genesis and re-orchestration of all four versions of the piece. Additionally, the innovations of this work within the history and context of percussion quartet/ensemble concerti are discussed, as this piece may mark a turning point in the existing repertoire for these forces. This chapter also examines the commissioning of the Wind Ensemble version in-depth.

The focused analysis in the fourth chapter concerns form, harmony, and orchestration in the wind ensemble score and will discretize the music into tangible, distinct categories. This section includes more traditional aspects of analysis such as form recognition, but most of the analysis is explained through categorization of content and events. The analysis helps to provide more detailed information about how Cuong:

1. Defines form through various sections of increased musical tension in various parameters, henceforth referred to as ramping (verb) and ramps (noun).
2. Manipulates orchestration and texture as an indication of change within the form.
3. Develops ramps in his music using cyclical harmonic progressions (CHP).
Ramps consist of one or more of the following elements: increasing in volume over time, increasing tempo or diminution over time, textural growth (orchestration becomes thicker and bigger), frequency vectors (lower or higher pitch over time), and harmonic tension.

According to Junkin in an interview during the premiere of the Wind Ensemble version, Cuong's piece defines a style of masterful writing and orchestration for the wind band.³ With that said, programming this work is no small feat—it does not present the workflow of a typical piece for wind ensemble, which is why the fifth chapter expounds upon the different possibilities for interpretation. The members of the percussion quartet must work together to lead the wind ensemble. As the quartet leads with virtuosic material consisting of complex hockets, members of the wind ensemble must listen to each other in each section, as they have interlocking parts that are supposed to enhance the concerto soloists. With more chamber-concerto pieces emerging within the medium, it will be beneficial to identify some challenges that occur when preparing a piece for wind ensemble featuring a chamber group, as well as detailing some interpretive considerations.

Literature Review

Related literature is limited since Cuong is a young composer about whom relatively little has been written so far, despite his promising career. He has multiple residencies and commissions scheduled (recently and notably with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic) and received his doctorate in composition and theory from Princeton University in December of 2021.⁴ Cuong is currently a visiting assistant professor of composition at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Re(new)al (2017–2021) is a new composition, and this document is the first scholarly research on the piece. With that said, this dissertation serves as more than just a primer to *Re(new)al*, but also compiles information about Cuong as a composer and his contributions to the wind band medium and beyond.

³Junkin, “Interview: Viet Cuong.” *YouTube* video, 7:43.

⁴Viet Cuong, “Viet Cuong.” December 1, 2020. <https://vietcuongmusic.com/about>.

Biographical information exists online in the form of *PDF* files of programs that contain his works, websites of orchestras that have performed his pieces, professional announcements, blogs, his website, as well as multiple profile pages. Many of these sources reiterate information found on Cuong's website, which contains a self-written biography. Additionally, *The Horizon Leans Forward*, a book edited by Erik Kar Jun Leung, director of bands at Oregon State University, features multiple contributors sharing personal stories about their struggles and triumphs within the wind band community.⁵ This book contains excerpts from interviews with Cuong, as well as others, and gives readers a look into Cuong's life as a gay, first-generation Vietnamese American. All these sources combined with the interview conducted for this document help to contextualize the timeline of Cuong's life events and compositions alongside the announcements of their performances and premieres.

The book *The New Winds of Change* lists Cuong's piece *Diamond Tide* as a suggestion for programming; his other pieces may be pertinent to this study, because older pieces inform the understanding of his newer works.⁶ For example, his piece *Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine* (2015) for percussion quartet is relevant because *Re(new)al* shares the same orchestration and musical material in its first movement.⁷ Some of Cuong's other wind band compositions were considered but are not applicable within the

⁵Erik Leung. *The Horizon Leans Forward ...: Stories of Courage, Strength and Triumph of Underrepresented Communities in the Wind Band Field*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 2021.

⁶Frank L. Battisti and Thomas C. Duffy. *The New Winds of Change: The Evolution of the Contemporary American Wind Band/Ensemble and Its Music*. Delray Beach, FL: Meredith Music Publications, 2018. 251.

⁷Viet Cuong. *Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine*. Blue Dot Collective, 2015.

scope of this dissertation, as they do not share enough similarities with *Re(new)al*. However, some chamber and orchestra pieces written within six years of when *Re(new)al* was composed are utilized to further contextualize and define Cuong's style.

Other relevant writings and primary source history about Cuong and his general compositional style take the form of three formal, scholarly documents. The first is Cuong's own dissertation, "Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al* (2022)", published shortly before this document. His abstract states: "This dissertation reviews the piece's background, provides insight into the piece's influences, and explores the discoveries made during the adaptation process."⁸ The second is a University of Kansas doctoral dissertation written in 2019 by Nils Landsberg about Cuong's chamber work *Bull's-Eye* (2019).⁹ Cuong's piece *Zanelle* (2009) is the other work explored in a scholarly setting and may prove to be useful, especially as it contains pertinent and more detailed information about Cuong's upbringing. Patricia Tran from Cal State Northridge wrote a master's thesis in 2020 analyzing *Zanelle* and delving into Cuong's compositional approach.¹⁰ While *Zanelle* was not written within the aforementioned timeframe, Landsberg's document on *Bull's-Eye* provides additional insight into Cuong's more recent process, as it is a similar document to this one, and the piece was completed in 2019, within the same time frame as the wind ensemble version of *Re(new)al*.

⁸Viet Cuong. "Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*," Princeton University. 2022.

⁹Nils Fredrik Landsberg. "Viet Cuong's Bull's-Eye: A Conductor's Analysis," University of Kansas. 2019.

¹⁰Patricia Tran. "Virtuosity Abound," California State University of Northridge. 2020.

Several interviews repeat the same information about Cuong's life, but many of these do not necessarily concern his approach to writing music. His interviews with the California Symphony, Mizzou's New Music Initiative, Blackbird Creative Lab, New Music USA, Northshore Concert Band, Dallas Winds, Oregon State University, Flute New Music, and the Columbia Tribunes reaffirm the information found on his website's biography and give insight to a few more details of his life. In some of these interviews, specifically with ensembles (California Symphony, Dallas Winds, Northshore Concert Band), Cuong expounds upon his experience with a particular residency and the piece he was engaging at that moment. These interviews provide some pertinent information about Cuong's compositional process, even though he may not be talking about *Re(new)al*, specifically.

As mentioned earlier, relatively few sources directly relate to *Re(new)al*, thus the reason for this document aside from Cuong's own dissertation on *Re(new)al* detailing his adaptive process. As *Re(new)al* becomes more commonly programmed, this dissertation exists to serve others in their pursuit to perform the piece as it gains traction in multiple musical realms: Orchestra, Sinfonietta, Wind Band, and Chamber Winds. According to Cuong, the piece is reflective of the current state of our world and provides a positive outlook on how humanity is capable of working together to create renewable energy. As climate change continues to ravage our planet, Cuong's optimism shines through this piece to remind us, in his own words: "If we can create renewable energy, we can do anything."¹¹ In the spirit of teamwork, I hope this document serves others, both in performance and research, for years to come.

¹¹Carol Reynolds. "Wind Notes | Viet Cuong *Re(new)al*." *YouTube* video, 6:55. April 23, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zD9f0wS_94/.

Chapter 2: About the Composer and his Music

Introduction

In their *Guide to Score Study for the Wind Band Conductor*, Frank Battisti and Robert Garofalo posit, “The printed score is only an approximate representation of the music as it was conceived in the mind of the composer. It is the primary responsibility of the performer to interpret that score with as much insight, skill, and understanding as he [sic] can muster.”¹² Their process begins with a step they call Score Orientation, which includes familiarizing oneself with the composer’s name, author/librettist/translator, editor/arranger, transcriber, dedication/commission, additional information including the composer’s upbringing and background, and introductory/program notes. Accordingly, this chapter is intended to familiarize the reader with Viet Cuong’s upbringing and background.

Battisti and Garofalo indicate that conductors should consider what lies behind the name of the composer. They write: “What’s in a name? The answer depends on your knowledge and experience. A composer’s name and music may be very familiar to you, or it may draw a blank...” It ultimately states that: “The process proposed in this book assumes that the conductor has some knowledge of the composer’s background and is generally familiar with his or her music.”¹³ This particular chapter is meant to provide the reader, or prospective conductor, some knowledge of Cuong’s upbringing and general familiarity with his music from the past six years as a first step in the score-study process.

¹²Frank Battisti and Robert Garofalo. *Guide to Score Study for the Wind Band Conductor*. 4.

¹³Ibid, 5.

The Present

Viet Cuong is a composer who writes music for orchestras, wind ensembles, chamber ensembles, and soloists, both instrumental and vocal.¹⁴ Cuong has been composing music professionally and as a student for the past few years, but has been writing music since he was 11 years old. He has taught composition and theory at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia. During the time this dissertation was created, Cuong accepted a position and began working as a visiting assistant professor of composition at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In between the workload of these appointments, he finished his doctorate in composition and theory at Princeton University as of December 2021.

Cuong is a member of the Blue Dot Collective, which describes itself as a group of highly accomplished Wind Band composers “dedicated to composing new works for wind band that are well-crafted, compelling, sincere, exciting, and fresh.”¹⁵ Cuong premiered several pieces at the Midwest Clinic: International Band, Orchestra, and Music Conference in December of 2021.

Cuong’s *Thu Diểu* was premiered and performed by the United States Army Field Band. At the time of writing this dissertation, he is also making progress on a piece that he is composing for a middle school band and the professional chamber woodwind quintet, Windsync. In the past six years, he has written 34 pieces for varying ensembles and is continuing to write more for various groups with differing instrumentations.¹⁶

¹⁴Cuong. “Viet Cuong.”

¹⁵Blue Dot Collective. “About Blue Dot Collective.” December 2019.
<http://bluedotcollective.weebly.com/>.

¹⁶Cuong. “Viet Cuong.”

Family and Early Childhood

Cuong was born on September 8, 1990 in West Hills, California, lived nearby in Simi Valley, California, moved to Arizona at the age of three, and his family ultimately settled in Marietta, Georgia, when he was seven years old. Cuong is conflicted about his upbringing below the Mason Dixon line:

I spent most of my childhood in Georgia, it's where most of my memories are as a kid... And you know, I had mixed feelings about growing up in Georgia, for some reasons that are probably obvious, but I feel very fortunate that I went to a high school that had a really amazing, incredible band program.¹⁷

Cuong's family ended up in Lassiter High School's district due to its academic rigor. According to Cuong, "It [Lassiter] was a school with good test scores, but it wasn't the *best* set of test scores. They couldn't find a house in the area with the better school that they could afford. It [Lassiter] was third on their list but it was good enough."¹⁸ Cuong's family valued education, and ended up having reservations about Cuong pursuing a career in music.

His parents are immigrants from Vietnam, and he describes his dad as having been a "street kid" in Vietnam, and also explains how his father did not have much family. On the other hand, Cuong's mother had a large family with many siblings, but states that "After the Fall of Saigon, it was all gone." Cuong says that his mother eventually came to the United States from a refugee camp in Malaysia with nothing more than a paper bag with some underwear and \$20, and describes his mother as "one of the boat people." In Erik Kar Jun Leung's book, *The Horizon Leans Forward*, Cuong recounts his family's experience of coming to the United States:

¹⁷Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

¹⁸Ibid.

...my parents immigrated to the United States in the 1970s. My dad came to the U.S. in 1973 on a student visa to study at UCLA. Continuing his graduate education in the U.S. was the path to a better life, because he had very little means.¹⁹

He then goes on to describe how his mother's experience contrasted that of his father:

She is the youngest of thirteen children, and her family lived in South Vietnam. After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, their lives changed completely. Amongst other hardships, her father and some of her brothers were sent to Communist reeducation camps, where they endured harsh conditions (and even torture).²⁰

He then further explains how she escaped from the camps in 1978 and spent some time at a Malaysian refugee camp. Eventually, a church in the U.S. sponsored her to come to America. She arrived and worked at a sewing factory to put herself through college.

Now, his mother is an engineer with a master's degree and his late father was a physicist after earning a PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles and completing a post-doc at the California Institute of Technology. Cuong recalls how his parents wanted him to become an orthodontist, and tried to steer him away from the path of becoming a musician. At one point, his father even stated: "Musicians do a lot of drugs!" Cuong laughs while recalling this memory and reflects upon his father's remarks: "You know, maybe he's right, but I don't think he fully realized what I had envisioned for myself." Cuong has a younger brother named Nam, who became an engineer and has a Master's degree from Stanford University. While his parents had high expectations, Cuong realized that it was just their way of showing love. In *The Horizon Leans Forward*, Cuong explicitly states:

I think these expectations came from my parents not wanting me or my brother to take for granted any of the opportunities we had growing up. We were to make the most of

¹⁹Erik Leung. *The Horizon Leans Forward ...: Stories of Courage, Strength and Triumph of Underrepresented Communities in the Wind Band Field*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 2021. 61.

²⁰Ibid., 62

what were fortunate to have, because *they* were not fortunate to have such opportunities.²¹

To further solidify his gratitude towards his family, he thanks both his mother and father in the dedication section of his thesis:

Thank you to my mother for your fierce support my musical pursuits. I would never have gotten this far without you...

Finally, thank you to my father, my biggest fan. I miss you dearly. I know you would've been very proud to see that I now have a PhD, just like you.²²

Music at an Early Age

Because of his parents' desires for high achievement for their son, Cuong was enrolled in Suzuki piano lessons from the age of five. He recalls his mother convincing him to endure lessons by promising him something from the vending machine; he always got the Twizzlers. He also remembers not wanting to practice, and he cites his age as the main reason for this trait. Cuong also loved Disney movies as a child, and wanted to play "Part of Your World" and songs from *Beauty and the Beast*, but was relegated to playing "Lightly Row" for months on end as the method would prescribe. He states that, "I felt that it [Suzuki Method] didn't allow me to explore what I liked, and I think maybe if I'd got to, I would have liked to have practiced more."²³ When he was taking lessons, he remembers fooling his mom into thinking he was practicing by making up random improvisations. Cuong jokes that his first compositions were simple explorations of the white keys on the piano, "these horrible A-natural minor improvisations." He would never write these "compositions" down because he kept them in his head. Then, he moved; Cuong eventually was able to take more piano lessons with a local music teacher in Marietta, Georgia, who was more

²¹Ibid., 70

²²Viet Cuong. "Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*," Princeton University. 2022. Acknowledgements.

²³ Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

relaxed about the repertoire they worked on. It was at this point that Cuong really began to compose and learn about the concept of dissonance and the functionality of moving chords.

In middle school (grades six–eight), Cuong joined the school band and played as a percussionist. He began to listen during rehearsals while he had multiple rests, and would pay attention to how the rehearsal was run. He would listen to how the conductor would group flutes and clarinets together, while the horns and saxophones played together. A turning point was a Lassiter High School Band Recruiting Weekend Camp for middle schoolers. One of the teachers, Catharine Sinon Bushman, led a workshop on Finale Notepad, and Cuong found the tool he needed to write his piano pieces down.

After going home and downloading Finale Notepad, Cuong attempted to write a piece that depicted a storm with a lot of ostinatos, simply because at school he had been practicing Robert W. Smith's *Into the Storm* with his classmates. He recalls that this is the time where he learned his biggest lessons about transposition the hard way: Cuong, as a young composer, didn't understand why the clarinet line had two sharps when the other parts were in C. He went ahead and ignored the seemingly errant key signature, wrote his piece out, and when the *MIDI* played it back, he heard consistent parallel major seconds. It was then that he realized if he had just written the pitches for the clarinets one whole step higher, everything would sound in unison. Cuong learned on his own, because though his parents were supportive of him taking lessons on piano and on percussion, they had no concept of lessons in musical composition. While he didn't have the opportunity to take composition lessons until college, he persisted by continuing to compose music all through high school.

The Role of High School Music

During high school (grades nine through twelve), Cuong was involved in the Lassiter Band, playing percussion in the marching bands and clarinet in the concert bands. Close to graduation, his parents realized that he wanted to compose music. Initially, they were very hesitant, but not because they wanted to crush Cuong's dreams. His parents were unsure of what a composer was and how a composer would make music, and likened their lack of understanding to the fact that they were immigrants who came to the U.S. They eventually came around to support him because he stressed to them that he could not imagine himself doing anything other than music. As Cuong puts it, "They just realized that it was what I wanted to do, it was what I was going to do, and that there was nothing else I could do."²⁴ They finally came around, and began to envision exactly what Cuong had set out for himself: to become a professional composer. In an interview with the California Symphony, Cuong recalls his memories in high school band:

I look back on my experiences in high school band so fondly. It was where I really fell in love with making music, and where I found a sense of community and belonging. They said you can take a kid out of the band room, but you can't take the band room out of the kid... well, no one *actually* says that, but I do love to write music that feels big, bold, and dramatic. I think my background with marching band in particular has colored my compositional style in this way.²⁵

Continuing Education

Cuong completed his bachelor degree in music composition at Peabody Conservatory, where he was able to study with composers Kevin Puts, DMA in Composition, and Oscar Bettison, PhD in Theory/Composition. Cuong completed his bachelor of music in three years due to his advanced placement credits from high school, and enrolled in what would be a five-year master's/bachelor

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ A.A. Christi, "California Symphony Announces Viet Cuong as New Young American Composer-in-Residence." *Broadway World*: Los Angeles, February 18, 2020.

degree program. Because he graduated within three years, the five-year program became a four-year endeavor, instead, and he graduated in 2012 with both degrees. Directly after that, Cuong went into the PhD program at Princeton University, obtained his master of fine arts in 2014 as part of the degree program, and was conferred his doctorate in theory and composition in December of 2021. Irish composer Donnacha Dennehy was his main advisor, but he also had the opportunity to work with and learn from Steven Mackey, Daniel Trueman, Dmitri Tymoczko, Barbara White, Paul Lansky, and visiting professor, Louis Andriessen. From 2017–2019, Cuong earned an artist’s diploma at Curtis, exploring orchestral composition with David Ludwig and Jennifer Higdon; he was also able to study with Richard Danielpour when time permitted.

In speaking with Cuong, it is clear that he really valued his time with each of his teachers and mentors as he did not have any formal composition lessons until he entered college. Cuong’s skills were refined by mentors whose skills revolved around contemporary composition, intersecting with multiple styles from different decades. His mentors’ generational identities nest within Generation X and Baby Boomers, while Andriessen is the outlier, as he was born in 1939. This combination of generational identities through his experiences at Peabody, Princeton, and Curtis allowed him to access world class composers and contemporary writing techniques. Despite his lack of formal training prior to attending Peabody, higher education is what allowed Cuong to further access his own potential as a composer.

Being a Gay, First-Generation, Person of Color

Cuong identifies as Vietnamese American, and spent some time talking about his ethnicity and how it affected his path in music in Leung’s *The Horizon Leans Forward*. He talks about the familial/cultural pressures he had to face, as he mentions how his mother read about the “Mozart-

effect” and made him take piano lessons, as the Suzuki method suggests, to make him “more successful in STEM-related pursuits.”²⁶ However, he is careful to explain to Leung that this was not unusual in his culture: “From speaking with Asian musician friends of mine, it really does seem like getting the approval and support from your family is a common hurdle.”²⁷

He also talks about common stereotypes that Asians face, like being assumed to be overly quiet and shy. Cuong talks about how he was, however, quiet and shy and says, “I attribute this to my desire to blend in at all costs as I was growing up. At the time, going with the flow seemed like the best way to avoid bringing attention to the fact that I didn’t look like everyone else.”²⁸ Cuong goes on to urge teachers to “find thoughtful ways to encourage students of color to embrace what makes them unique and be unapologetic about who they are.”²⁹ He now sees himself as a role model: “We can support young Asian musicians by simply being the people that they can imagine themselves as one day.”³⁰ Cuong also shows his support of his AAPI (Asian-American Pacific Islander) heritage and community by the subjects he chooses for compositions. Recently, Cuong wrote a chamber piece for soprano and chamber ensemble based on a Vietnamese poem, *Thu Diếu*. When asked about the piece, he expressed a desire to compose more works focused on his heritage because of how rewarding it was to compose *Thu Diếu*.

²⁶Erik Leung. *The Horizon Leans Forward*, 72.

²⁷ Ibid, 77.

²⁸ Ibid., 73.

²⁹ Ibid., 74.

³⁰ Ibid., 78.

In being gay/queer, Cuong recalls, “I don’t think it’s actually possible for me to put into words just how much I *didn’t* believe in myself back then. But I will say that my ethnicity and Queerness did contribute quite heavily to this lack of self-confidence, as I felt like both an outsider both visibly and invisibly.”³¹ It was within the band room where Cuong found his confidence, and he recalls the empowering feeling of putting on a marching band uniform and working with three-hundred others towards a common goal. He states that, ultimately, his past musical experiences gave him the confidence to and helped him to believe he could make it one day as a professional composer.

In the past, Cuong has been hesitant to publicly discuss his partner or his personal life, and rationalized this hesitance with the desire to be known for his music. He wanted the merit of his music to speak for itself, rather than be clouded by his ethnicity or orientation. He now acknowledges that the root of his fears to speak upon these topics comes from having grown up in a homophobic, predominantly white community. However, as he becomes more established as a composer, he states: “I feel even more compelled to be open about being gay, in an effort to help others who may feel alone.”³²

An Introduction to Cuong’s Musical Style

Cuong likes to describe his own style as eclectic, as his favorite thing to do is explore musical styles with his compositions. He states:

It’s hard to categorize sometimes, because I do have some pieces that are more post-minimalist, and I have some pieces that are very inspired by spectral music. I have pieces that combine a lot of things, so maybe just eclectic is a good word.

³¹ Ibid., 125.

³² Ibid., 126.

Nils Landsberg's dissertation, "*Bull's Eye: A Conductor's Analysis*" suggests that Cuong's career has phases. Landsberg writes that Cuong is currently in a stage where he explores the concept of being whimsical in how Cuong is inspired by both visual and aural cues.³³ Cuong agrees with this statement, and cites his double oboe concerto as proof: "I like to explore whimsical things, like my double oboe concerto... for years I had it in my head that I wanted to compose a concerto for two oboes where one of the oboes plays a lot of multiphonics and the other one doesn't, just for the silly contrast that would occur."³⁴

Cuong's whimsical exploration of unconventional sound production doesn't stop at multiphonics—he has composed a piece for snare drum that necessitates the use of a plastic comb and a credit card called *Well-Groomed* (2019). Cuong states, "With every piece, I want there to be that one thing that acts as the thesis of a piece. It's the thing I want the audience members to walk away with, and I want them to remember my piece for that reason." This shows up in *Re(new)al*; Cuong explicitly states that he wants audience members to leave the concert thinking about wine glasses and choreography. Having a memorable concept that either acts as an aural or visual cue helps the average listener to remember the piece, and that is important for him. In our interview, Cuong said:

When you go through so many years of school and you're a trained professional musician, you're not the naive kid you once were, so it's kind of hard to put yourself in the shoes of an audience member who doesn't know much about music when what you do is think about music most of the day. I try to think of it like I'm writing for an audience of myself, but not of myself as I currently am, but more of myself when I was like thirteen when I knew some stuff about music, but not that much at all, and somehow, I still loved it and didn't know why. I try to write with the potential to be inspired in mind.³⁵

³³ Landsberg, "*Bull's Eye: A Conductor's Analysis*," 6-7.

³⁴ Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

³⁵ Ibid.

As Described by Others

The opening line in Cuong's biography on his website cites that his music is described by the New York Times as "alluring" and "wildly inventive," while the San Francisco Chronicle says his music as "irresistible." Howard Barnum's blog "Wine, Physics, and Song" describes Cuong's compositions by highlighting his skill with motives:

Cuong knows how to recombine and play with motives, scales, harmonic tropes and other elements to create interest, unify the piece and move things along in a satisfying way. He shows this from the outset, with a clever motive consisting of a rising and descending scalar figures, played against a similar but inverted figure (or perhaps they are both fragments of the same extended figure that they evolve into, running up and down on flute, changing direction at different pitches), then relaxing into some Iberian-ish sounds.³⁶

Brad Baumgardner from *Music City Review* gives an explicit overview of his take on Cuong's writing style in *Re(new)al*. He mentions each movement and what happened, and what is perceived from the perspective of an audience member:

When the ensemble began to add its voices to the soloists, the rich decay of the goblets was augmented initially by the strings and piano with a specific awareness on articulation and decay, matching the characteristics of the percussion section...The percussion soloists eventually transitioned from the meta drum kit to compressed air canisters (wind), which were sonically rewarding especially when paired with a bombastic initial statement... The simple choreography created by the sharing of instruments and the intricate, cooperative motions required by the soloists to realize their parts was hypnotic. This delicate teamwork, coupled with the Messiaen meets Radiohead post-minimalist aesthetic provided by the shimmering pitched percussion and slowly moving string accompaniment, held the audience spellbound.³⁷

The critical consensus is that Cuong is a witty, intellectual composer who combines musical elements from the past and present to create fresh compositions. Additionally, Cuong's music is

³⁶ Howard Barnum. "Viet Cuong, Moth." *Wine, Physics, and Song*, December 16, 2014. <https://winephysicsong.com/2014/12/16/viet-cuong-moth-from-performance-today/>.

³⁷ Brad Baumgardner. "An Evening of Renewal with Intersection." *Music City Review*, October 8, 2019. <https://www.musiccityreview.com/2019/10/08/an-evening-of-renewal-with-intersection/>.

repetitive and “hypnotic” in that he reuses the same motifs over and over again to help drive his motivic points home in most of his pieces. Barnum, at one point, describes Cuong’s music to have hints of music from the 1920s and 1930s while somehow revealing minimalist ideals. Cuong relies heavily on the extended techniques of instruments in any given ensemble, as many pieces written by Cuong in the past six years utilizes some kind of glissandi, pitch bending, or multiphonics.

As noted in the first chapter, Jerry Junkin, Conductor of the Wind Ensemble at University of Texas, Austin also praises Cuong’s work. The imprimatur of an established wind ensemble, conductor, and pedagogue, combined with the ability to bring together a consortium of twenty ensembles for the wind ensemble version of *Re(new)al* is a sign of Cuong’s success; praise from an influential conductor is one thing but being entrusted to create a piece that twenty ensembles will want to program is quite another.

Style from the Past Six Years

Through a study of eight selected scores from the past six years, sent and shared by Cuong, I have identified seven different elements in his compositional toolkit: extended technique, cyclical harmony, flourishes, repetitive motifs, extreme dynamic shifts, floating/ethereal musical content, and sliding/glissandi. Here are the different elements as a key for the figure shown below:

Figure 1: Cuong’s Compositional Toolkit

1	Extended Technique (ET)
2	Cyclical Harmony (CH)
3	Flourishes (F)
4	Repetitive Motifs (RM)
5	Extreme Dynamic Shifts (EDS)
6	Floating/Ethereal Section (FES)
7	Sliding/Glissandi (SG)

The figure below is a chart that maps out the pieces that Cuong has written in the past six years with the stylistic characteristics described in addition to a check list of the seven elements of Cuong's music. The elements present in the composition are indicated with a '✓' in the corresponding column. Within this chart, one might glean that not all of the pieces exhibit all seven traits, but one might recognize that there is no one piece with any less than five of these traits, even when writing for different settings or instrumentation.

Figure 2: Seven Pieces by Cuong

Title	Year	Ensemble, Soloist	Stylistic Characteristics	1 ET	2 CH	3 F	4 RM	5 EDS	6 FES	7 SG
<i>Commitment Bed</i>	2016	Chamber	Sounds very much like Cuong's 2014 piece <i>Prized Possessions</i> , lots of gliding, restraining, held back, ethereal, floating	√	√		√	√	√	
<i>Electric Aroma</i>	2017	Chamber, Orchestra	Begins with a hoquet for all instruments, all performers share one line with which they contribute part of the melody, be it two eighth notes or one bass note, repetitive motifs, sliding/glissandi, clarinets trading ascending/gliding pitches, extended techniques, etc.	√	√	√	√	√		√
<i>Extra Fancy</i>	2017	Chamber	Repetitive motifs, lots of gliding between pitches in bassoon, extended techniques, whimsical, simple chord progression	√	√	√	√	√	√	
<i>Moxie</i>	2018	Orchestra	Uses extended technique, ethereal section, honks/squeaks, glissandi, repetitive material to 2nd mvmt of <i>Re(new)al</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	
<i>Extra(ordinarily) Fancy</i>	2019	Orchestra, Two oboe soloists	Baroque-ish, Whimsical (extended technique), silly, boisterous, overlapping textures, repetitive motifs, simple chord progressions	√	√	√	√	√	√	
<i>Bull's Eye</i>	2020	Chamber	Ethereal, gliding, repetitive motifs, moves into quirky section with flutter tonguing, playful, driving bass lines with flourishing wind accompaniment, sounds almost like Carter Pann	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Re(new)al</i>	2017–2021	Orchestra, Sinfonietta, Wind Ensemble, Chamber Winds, Percussion Quartet, Soloists	Lots of extended techniques, overlapping textures, ensemble-wide cross-rhythms, “echo” composite rhythms, repetitive motifs, lots of glissandi, simple chord progressions	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Thu Điều</i>	2017, 2018	Chamber, Soprano Soloist	Similar texture and harmony to Movement III of <i>Re(new)al</i> , lots of bending lines, rising harmony, quick flourishes from harp and flute, lots of repetitive motifs	√		√	√	√		√

In observing and listening to these compositions written in the past six years, I have identified that there are several unifying themes that are recurrent in his music: the use of extended techniques, simple harmonic/chord progressions, glissandi, overlapping repetitive motifs and textures, and a manipulation of orchestration to create cross-rhythms and processed effects. Interpreting Cuong's works should come with the understanding that these unifying themes, or his compositional toolkit, were made because he was trying to create different effects for these ensembles that don't typically happen. In using aerosol cans, he's created a way to mimic the effects of opening and closing a noise gate. In using repetitive dotted eighth sixteenth figures, Cuong is creating a processing effect that sounds like the instruments have a delay pedal, without actually using a delay pedal. In his document, he writes: "I love devising ways to acoustically recreate my favorite electronic sounds and effects in the music that I have been asked to write. Though it is not without its difficulties, this approach has become something of a signature of mine over the years."³⁸ As a conductor rehearsing his music, it's important to know that Cuong desires to mimic these electronic processes.

All of these themes are prevalent in his composition, *Re(new)al*. Not only are these themes in *Re(new)al*, but the actual musical content is not dissimilar from his past pieces. For example, in *Moxie*, Cuong uses the same sort of processed-effect where he places dotted eighth sixteenth notes over quarter notes climbing up to a climax point with a rising pitch and driving snare drum rhythm leading to a horn rip.

³⁸Viet Cuong. "Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*," Princeton University. 2022. 9.

Figure 3: *Moxie*, mm. 96–101; processed effect and glissandi

This musical score for *Moxie* (measures 96–101) features a complex orchestration. The woodwind section includes three Oboes (Ob. 1, 2, 3), three Clarinets (Br. Cl. 1, 2, 3), and a Bassoon (Bsn.). The string section consists of Violins I and II, Violas, and Violas. Percussion includes three different types (Perc. 1, 3, 4) and Piano (Pno.). The score is marked with dynamics such as *f* and *p*. A box labeled '98' highlights a specific measure in the woodwind parts. The bottom of the score is labeled with measure numbers 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, and 101.

Figure 4: *Re(new)al*, mm. 188–191; processed effect and glissandi

This musical score for *Re(new)al* (measures 188–191) features a woodwind and string ensemble. The woodwind section includes Flutes 1 & 2 (Fl. 1-2), Flutes 3 & 4 (Fl. 3-4), Oboes 1 and 2 (Ob. 1, 2), Bassoons 1 and 2 (Bsn. 1, 2), and Clarinets in B-flat 1, 2, and 3 (Cl. in Bb 1, 2, 3). The string section includes Violins I and II, Violas, and Violas. The score is marked with dynamics such as *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. A box labeled '188' highlights the beginning of the first measure. The bottom of the score is labeled with measure numbers 188, 189, 190, and 191.

Figure 5: *Re(new)al*, mm. 188–191; processed effect and glissandi, continued

The image displays a musical score for the piece *Re(new)al*, measures 188–191. The score is arranged in a system with ten staves. The top four staves are for Horns in F (Hn in F), numbered 1 through 4. The bottom six staves are for Trombones (Tbn) and Euphonium (Euph.), numbered 1 through 3, and then B. Tbn and Euph. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with dotted eighth and sixteenth notes over quarter notes, and straight eighth notes. Dynamics are marked with *mp*, *pp*, *ppp*, *p*, and *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and glissandi markings.

In *Electric Aroma*, Cuong uses the same exact cyclical harmony that he employed in the third movement of *Re(new)al* in conjunction with, again, these dotted eighth sixteenth notes over quarter notes and straight eighth notes. He also uses the same climbing glissandi, except instead of brass instruments, it's voiced in the strings.

Without knowing Cuong's style, it would not have been possible to make these observations about his music, much less, *Re(new)al*. With this information, one can surmise that there are elements of his music that we can chalk up to simply being a part of his persistent, eclectic style and other characteristics which we can attribute directly to being new, original content for a piece.

Chapter 3: Circumstances Behind the Composition

Versions

There are four different versions of Cuong’s piece *Re(new)al*, each commissioned by a different ensemble or sponsor. All four versions have four percussion soloists that shift to different instruments for each movement. From movements one to three, the percussionists use crystal glasses, kick-drums with a shared snare, and a combination of metallic percussion instruments, respectively. The following outlines differences in instrumentation (not including the four percussion soloists) between each ensemble, as well as when each version was created:

Figure 6: Four Versions of *Re(new)al*

Ensemble	Sinfonietta (2017) ³⁹	Symphony Orchestra (2018) ⁴⁰	Wind Ensemble (2019) ⁴¹	Chamber Winds (2021) ⁴²
Strings	Violin I (1); Violin II (1); Viola (1); Cello (1); Bass (1)	Violin I (16); Violin II (14); Viola (12); Cello (10); Bass (8)	Amplified Double Bass (1)	Amplified Double Bass (1)
Woodwinds	Flute (1); Oboe (1); Bassoon (1); Clarinet in Bb (1); Soprano Saxophone (1); Baritone Saxophone (1); Trumpet in C (1); Horn in F (1); Trombone (1)	Flute - <i>doubling piccolo</i> (2); Oboe (2); Clarinet in Bb (2); Bassoons (2); Trumpets in C (2); Horn in F (4); Trombone (2); Bass Trombone (1); Tuba (1)	Flute - <i>doubling piccolo</i> (2); Oboe (2); Bassoons (2); Contrabassoon (1); Clarinet in Bb (3); Bass Clarinets (2); Soprano Saxophone (1); Alto Saxophone (2); Tenor Saxophone (1); Baritone Saxophone (1); Trumpet in Bb (4); Horn in F (4); Trombone (3); Bass Trombone (1); Euphonium - <i>doubling is recommended</i> (1); Tuba - <i>doubling is recommended</i> (1)	Flute - <i>doubling piccolo</i> (2); Bassoons (1); Clarinet in Bb (2); Soprano Saxophone (1); Alto Saxophone (1); Tenor Saxophone (1); Baritone Saxophone (1); Trumpet in Bb (2); Horn in F (2); Trombone (2); Tuba - <i>doubling is recommended</i> (1)
Percussion	N/A	Timpani (1); Bass Drum (1); Triangle (1); Tam-tam (1); Suspended Cymbal (1); Crash Cymbal (1); Crotales (1); Marimba (2); Xylophone (1); Vibraphone (1)	Timpani (1); Bass Drum (1); Upper Octave Crotales (1); Crash Cymbals (1); Marimba (2) Xylophone (1); Triangle (1); Tam-tam (1); Suspended Cymbal (1)	Xylophone (1); Upper Octave Crotales (1); Triangle (1); Bass Drum (1); Marimba (2); Whip (1); Tam-tam (1); Vibraphone (1); Suspended Cymbal (1); Crash Cymbal (1)
Keyboard	Piano (1)	Piano (1)	Piano (1)	Piano (1)

³⁹Viet Cuong, *Re(new)al* for Sinfonietta. Viet Cuong, 2017.

⁴⁰Viet Cuong, *Re(new)al* for Orchestra. Viet Cuong, 2018.

⁴¹Viet Cuong, *Re(new)al* for Wind Ensemble. Viet Cuong, 2019.

⁴²Viet Cuong, *Re(new)al* for Chamber Winds. Viet Cuong, 2021.

The changes in orchestration forced Cuong to experiment with scoring and instrument/color combinations, but between the four versions, there are not many variances in musical content or form. Because of these vast changes in instrumentation, balancing the ensemble with the same set of percussion soloists could have been challenging. However, Jerry Junkin, conductor of the Wind Ensemble premiere of *Re(new)al*, asserts "...there were absolutely no issues with balance. It's so well scored that it was never an issue."⁴³ Additionally, the various versions of *Re(new)al* demonstrate Cuong's enthusiasm for blending percussion and winds, as well as his desire to expand the repertoire of percussion chamber concerti.

Commissions and Consortiums

Sandbox Percussion's premiere performance of *Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine* (2015) was the very first time any part of *Re(new)al* was performed. No one knew it at the time, but *Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine* alludes to the opening musical theme of *Re(new)al* that repeats throughout the first movement.

Cuong's relationship with Sandbox Percussion is an integral part of how *Re(new)al* was born, as they had been in conversation about a concerto for percussion quartet for nine years. As soon as Cuong received the commission, he immediately reached out to Sandbox Percussion to see if they would be willing to help Cuong discover sounds as well as perform the piece. As soon as they said yes, Cuong visited their studio in New York; he recalls being let into their rehearsal studio and when he got there:

One of them had a mallet in one hand and the other person had one mallet in their hand, and started striking one marimba bar together. They started going back and forth and they got faster and faster until it was just a roll, but then, they slowed down, too. They're so in tune with each other that they can sound like one player speeding up and slowing down a

⁴³Jerry Junkin, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

roll. It was then that I knew that they could handle hocketing sixteenth notes with their feet on kick drums.⁴⁴

In our interview, Cuong goes on to talk about how he believes that “Hockets are almost Sandbox’s specialty, a lot of the music they play necessitates this skill.”⁴⁵ This helped inform Cuong’s writing process, and this idea of an “anti-solo,” as Sandbox calls it,⁴⁶ became the premise for his piece. The solo part should not and cannot be played by one person, as it was purposely created to necessitate the concept of teamwork to reflect the efforts required in shifting more people to use and harvest renewable energy.

The inscription on the original chamber version states that *Re(new)al* was commissioned by the Albany (NY) Symphony Orchestra, David Alan Miller, Musical Director, and GE Renewable Energy in 2017. Cuong was asked by their sponsor, GE Renewable Energy, to write a piece about the renewable energy initiatives that they had been working on. In our interview, Cuong recalls going to GE Headquarters:

They showed me around, they showed me this room that had all these computers that controlled wind turbines all over the world, and it kind of struck me, like “How many people are working together to create clean energy and to make it possible?” I wanted the message of the piece to obviously be about renewable energy, but on a deeper level, it’s about how when we work together, we can make impossible things happen.⁴⁷

Soon thereafter, Cuong was asked by David Alan Miller, director of the Albany Symphony, to create a version for the full orchestra in 2018. Cuong dedicates this specific version to Sandbox Percussion, the quartet for whom this piece was originally written, harkening back to 2015, when *Water, Wine,*

⁴⁴Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Sandbox Percussion, interview by author, April 2021

⁴⁷Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

Brandy, Brine was created. In the wind ensemble score from 2019, Cuong writes almost the exact same thing, that *Re(new)al*, in its original form, was commissioned for the 2017 American Music Festival by David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony's Dogs of Desire (a new-music ensemble that consists of 18 chamber-musicians and aims to program music by "America's most adventurous composers")⁴⁸ in partnership with GE Renewable Energy, but was ultimately created in a joint-commission with multiple universities.

It would be remiss to forget that GE, also known as General Electric, is a multinational conglomerate company that has had multiple scandals and a lengthy record of criminal, political, and ethical transgressions, including those that have hurt the environment of the planet. In 1998, GE agreed to a \$200,000,000 settlement in principle of environmental claims resulting from polluting the Housatonic River (as well as other areas) by chemical releases from GE's plant in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. GE has also had a long history of carelessly disposing of polychlorinated biphenyls and other hazardous substances (all of which GE no longer uses for manufacturing).⁴⁹ With that said, there have been other situations in the realm of art where large conglomerate companies partake in the act of "greenwashing" or the "green sheen," which is a form of marketing in which seemingly environmentally-friendly PR and green marketing are falsely used to persuade the public that an organization's products, aims, and policies are environmentally friendly. Marianna Ritchey, in

⁴⁸Dogs of Desire. "Albany Symphony: Upcoming Concerts," Dogs of Desire – Albany Symphony, Retrieved June 2, 2017, <https://www.albanysymphony.com/upcomingconcerts/2016/8/11/dogs-of-desire/>.

⁴⁹ "Press Release." U.S. Securities and Exchanges Commission, December 9, 2020. <https://www.sec.gov/news/press-release/2020-312>.

her book *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era*, writes about how the neoliberalization of classical music has put music at the service of contemporary capitalism, blurring the line between creativity and entrepreneurship:

As artists, critics, and institutions work to attain patronage and revenue for classical music within a culture that increasingly cherishes only financial profitability, some are attaching ideas about this music to the most prized ideals of the free market. However, I am not only interested in how music practitioners are transforming classical music in accordance with neoliberal values as a means of survival; in the pages that follow, I also interrogate how the idea of classical music itself has been useful to contemporary capital.⁵⁰

While this might be a common argument a musicologist may bring up in opposition to Cuong's piece, the general impetus for Cuong's contribution to this commission was not fueled by what GE has done wrong, but what GE is trying to do better as they move forward. While there has been a lot of controversial discourse in musicology regarding the tension between idealism and the ethics of personal responsibility, Cuong navigates this gracefully by addressing his personal responsibility. Criticisms about his use of compressed air cans in this piece is addressed within his dissertation, as he makes the call to use reusable cans that can be refilled with bicycle air pumps as opposed to the one-time-use compressed air cans that others have criticized.⁵¹ It is clear that while the funding for this piece may have come from a multinational conglomerate company with a sordid past, Cuong took the funding and created a genuine, meaningful message of his own through *Re(new)al*.

⁵⁰Marianna Ritchey. *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago press, 2019. 2.

⁵¹Viet Cuong. "Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*," 4. "Having learned of the negative environmental impact of compressed air cans, I ask performers to use refillable air cans that can be manually filled with a bicycle or tire pump."

As mentioned previously, the Wind Ensemble version was created through a consortium that Cuong put together himself. The commissioning consortium consisted of twenty groups, which comprised eleven university ensembles, four community bands, and five high school organizations.

The following universities were involved in the consortium:

- Central Connecticut State University, Robert Schwartz, conductor
- Michigan State University, Kevin Sedatole, conductor
- Northwestern University, Shawn Vondran, conductor
- San Jose State University, David Vickerman, conductor
- The University of Alabama, Ken Ozzello, conductor
- University of Georgia, Cynthia Johnston Turner, conductor
- University of Houston, David Bertman, conductor
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Steve Peterson, conductor
- University of Oregon, Dennis Llinás, conductor
- University of Texas at Austin Wind Ensemble, Jerry Junkin, conductor
- Williams College, Brian Messier, conductor

The following community wind ensembles were involved in the consortium:

- Brooklyn Wind Symphony, Jeff W. Ball, conductor
- Dallas Winds, Jerry Junkin, conductor
- North Shore Wind Symphony (Australia), Andrew McWade, conductor
- Valley Winds, Brian Messier, conductor

The following high school organizations contributed to the consortium of the third movement

(Solar):

- Cy-Fair High School, Mark Veenstra, conductor
- Pelham High School, Justin Ward, conductor
- Sandia High School, Tyler North, conductor
- Wakeland High School, Tanner Smith, conductor
- West Springfield High School, Eric Hoang, conductor

The most recent version, the chamber winds version, was commissioned by Vanderbilt University, and the idea to create this instrumentation came about due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conductor at Vanderbilt, Thomas Verrier, wanted to program *Re(new)al*, but needed to accommodate the social distancing rules that were set in place. This would mean that there would need to be fewer instruments placed in a larger room to perform the piece. They hosted a recording session instead of doing a live performance for its premiere in 2021.

Premieres and Performances

The original premiere performance of *Re(new)al* took place on June 2, 2017 at the Experimental Performance Art Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. The performing group was the Albany Symphony Dogs of Desire. On February 10th and 11th of 2018, Sandbox performed *Re(new)al* with the Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra in Santa Monica, California.

According to their website, Kaleidoscope “performs music that speaks profoundly to our community and is both representative of its time and timeless, whether written today or centuries ago.”⁵²

On October 13, 2018, the full orchestra version with the Albany Symphony was premiered.⁵³

Sandbox released a vlog series on YouTube that followed their whereabouts and their rehearsal routine, as well as some behind-the-scenes laughter shared between Cuong and the quartet.

However, Sandbox immediately moved into another performance on November 30th with the Michigan State Symphony, with Kevin Noe as the director. Sandbox performed the concerto, again, this time with the New Orchestra of Washington and conductor Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez on May 4, 2019.

Cuong had continued to work on this massive consortium commissioned by twenty wind ensembles behind the scenes while still adding to the number of premieres and performances. The very first performance of any part of the Wind Ensemble version of *Re(new)al* happened at the Midwest Clinic: International Band, Orchestra, and Music Conference, on December 19, 2018. This was considered

⁵²“About.” Kaleidoscope, Retrieved April 2021, <https://www.kco.la/about>.

⁵³Sandbox Percussion. *Viet Cuong concerto with Albany symphony*. October 22, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKlQR5aELaQ>.

the “pre-premiere” and only the third movement was performed by the Cy-Fair Symphonic Band with Matthew McInturf as its guest conductor. Sandbox played part of the piece with the Brooklyn Wind Symphony and conductor, Jeff W. Ball, on March 23, 2019. On April 30, 2019, Jerry Junkin worked with a different set of soloists, Epoch Percussion, with the Dallas Winds, and then again on May 5, 2019, with the UT Austin Wind Ensemble and performed the full wind ensemble version. Epoch performance with the Dallas Winds and the UT Austin Wind Ensemble allowed the rest of the world to readily access the piece *Re(new)al* because of their broadcasted concerts. Each of Jerry Junkin’s performances were published and posted onto YouTube, which is how more people were able to see, hear, and experience Cuong’s piece, at least virtually. Since these landmark performances of the Wind Ensemble version, *Re(new)al* has been played several times since then by the following ensembles according to Windrep.org:

- Dallas (Texas) Winds (Jerry Junkin, conductor; Epoch Percussion Quartet), December 16, 2021 (2021 Midwest Clinic)
- University of North Texas (Denton) Wind Symphony (Eugene Migliaro Corporon, conductor), October 28, 2021
- University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa) Wind Ensemble (Kenneth Ozzello, conductor; Epoch Percussion Quartet), March 5, 2020 (86th Annual ABA National Convention)
- San Jose (California) State University Wind Ensemble (David Vickerman, conductor), February 22, 2020 (2020 CASMEC Conference, Fresno)
- University of Oregon (Eugene) Wind Ensemble (Dennis Llanás, conductor), February 12, 2020
- University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa) Wind Ensemble (Kenneth Ozzello, conductor; Epoch Percussion Quartet), January 30, 2020
- San Jose (California) State University Wind Ensemble (David Vickerman, conductor), December 8, 2019
- Williams College (Williamstown, Mass.) Wind Ensemble (Brian Messier, conductor) May 10, 2019⁵⁴

⁵⁴Nikk Pilato, *Windrep*. “*Re(new)al*.” 2016. [https://www.windrep.org/Re\(new\)al](https://www.windrep.org/Re(new)al).

Within the Context of Chamber-Percussion Concerto Grosso

Cuong's piece can be categorized into an existing repertoire of a canon of concerti that exists for more than one percussionist. Whereas most percussion concerti are written for a single soloist who either plays a singular instrument or uses multiple instruments, there is a smaller subset of concerti written for percussion duos, trios, quartets, and more.

The following list comprises many significant percussion concerti written since Bartók's Concerto for Two Pianos, Percussion and Orchestra (1940) and William Kraft's Concerto for Four Percussion Soloists for Symphonic Wind Ensemble (1964) that necessitate more than one soloist.⁵⁵ For the purpose of this document, this particular instrumentation will be referred to as "Percussion Concerto Grosso." According to the Harvard Dictionary of Music, Concerto Grosso is "characterized by the use of a small group of solo instruments..."⁵⁶ Below is a table of works in this medium leading up to the beginning of 2022.

⁵⁵List was compiled through several interviews, state lists, percussive arts society's performance lists (all listed in bibliography)

⁵⁶Don Michael Randel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. 195.

Figure 7: Percussion Concerto Grosso List

Title	Composer	Year	Instrumentation	Ensemble
<i>Concerto for Two Pianos, Percussion, and Orchestra</i>	Béla Bartók	1940	Duo (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Concerto for Four Percussion Soloists for Symphonic Wind Ensemble</i>	William Kraft	1964	Quartet (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>Aggajegers</i>	Elizabeth Hoffman	1971	Trio (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Concerto for Percussion and Wind Ensemble</i>	Karel Husa	1971	Quintet (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>Deja Vu for Percussion Quartet and Orchestra</i>	Michael Colgrass	1977	Quartet (multi)	Wind Ensemble, Orchestra
<i>Concertino</i>	Andrzej Panufnik	1980	Duet (timpani and multi)	Orchestra
<i>From me flows what you call time</i>	Toru Takemitsu	1990	Quintet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Headlines</i>	Anders Koppel	1992	Duet (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Goldrush Concerto</i>	Jacob ter Veldhuis	1997	Duet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Bach to the Future</i>	Per Nørgård	1997	Duet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Concerto for Percussion and Wind Ensemble</i>	Bruce Yurko	1997	Nonet (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>Concertino for Four Percussion and Wind Ensemble/ Orchestra</i>	David Gillingham	1997	Quartet (multi)	Wind Ensemble, Orchestra
<i>In Lovely Fields for 7 solo percussion and chamber orchestra</i>	David Maslanka	1998	Septet (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Studium</i>	Poul Rudurs	1999	Duet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Concerto for Two Timpanists and Orchestra</i>	Philip Glass	2000	Duet (timpani)	Orchestra
<i>Grace</i>	Martin Bresnick	2000	Duet (keyboard perc)	Orchestra
<i>Quadruple Percussion Concerto</i>	John Psathas	1992, rev. 2001	Quartet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Prism Rhapsody II</i>	Keiko Abe	2001	Duet (keyboard perc)	Wind Ensemble or Orchestra
<i>Crossings</i>	Áskell Másson	2002	Duet (multi)	Orchestra

<i>Concerto for 3 percussion and Wind Orchestra</i>	Emmanuel Séjourné	2002	Trio (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>Paper Concerto</i>	Tan Dun	2003	Trio (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Rituals</i>	Ellen Taaffe Zwilich	2003	Quintet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra</i>	Gareth Farr	2004	Quartet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Brazilian Fantasy (Bach in Brazil)</i>	Ney Rosauero	2004	Duet (keyboard perc)	Orchestra
<i>Cerulean: Double Percussion Concerto for two solo percussionists and ensemble</i>	Carson Cooman	2005	Duet (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Spices, Perfumes, Toxins!</i>	Avner Dorman	2006	Duo (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Glorious Percussion</i>	Sofia Gubaidulina	2008	Quintet (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Cuico</i>	Greg Danner	2010	Trio (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>Oblique Music for 4 (Plus Four)</i>	Jason Treuting	2011	Quartet (multi)	Chamber Ensemble
<i>Bombasticism</i>	Randall Cornelison	2011	Quartet (keyboard perc)	Orchestra
<i>Black Rainbow</i>	Nathan Daughtrey	2013	Sextet (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>Invisible Cities</i>	Dinuk Wijeratne	2014	Quartet (multi)	Wind Ensemble
<i>RADIANT CHILD</i>	David T. Little	2015	Quartet (multi)	Wind Ensemble, Orchestra
<i>Sonichroma</i>	Gene Koshinski	2016	Duo (multi)	Orchestra
<i>man made</i>	David Lang	2017	Quartet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Sonorous Earth</i>	Augusta Read Thomas	2018	Quartet (bells)	Orchestra
<i>Re(new)al</i>	Viet Cuong	2017–2021	Quartet (multi)	Sinfonietta, Orchestra, Wind Ensemble, Chamber Wind Ensemble
<i>Drum Circles</i>	Christopher Theofanidis	2019	Quartet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Meander, Spiral, Explode</i>	Christopher Cerrone	2019	Quartet (multi)	Orchestra
<i>Orbital - Percussion Quartet, Orchestra, Live Electronics, Audio</i>	John Psathas	2021	Quartet (multi)	Chamber Ensemble

This is a relatively small repertoire as it stands currently; the hope is that this genre will continue to expand over time. This list includes only six pieces written and published between the early 1900s and 1990. In the 1990s alone, there were nine new pieces written for the Percussion Concerto Grosso medium. In the first two decades of the 21st century, a total of twenty-four pieces were written and premiered, with eleven written between 2000-2008, and fourteen written between 2010-2021. All of them are varied among wind ensemble, orchestra, and chamber ensembles as their compositional backdrops, but most composers preferred to write their concerto with an orchestral accompaniment. In total, there were nine pieces written with a chamber ensemble of some kind, eleven were written for wind ensemble, and twenty-one concerti were written for orchestra.

Cuong's piece *Re(new)al* is unique in how it has a separate version for wind ensemble, orchestra, and two different chamber ensembles. This makes *Re(new)al* a wonderful addition to an instrumental music concert program because of its flexibility in instrumentation. Cuong essentially contributed four times to the list with his one piece due to his choice to voice *Re(new)al* for several different kinds of ensembles.

Chapter 4: A Focused Analysis

An Introduction to the Focused Analysis

This chapter's focused analysis is separated into three parts, one for each movement of the work.

Each part addresses three specific statements about the wind ensemble version of *Re(new)al* and how Cuong:

1. Defines form and structure through sections of increased musical tension in various parameters, henceforth referred to as ramping (verb) and ramps (noun) which consist of varying compositional techniques, as discussed below.
2. Manipulates orchestration and texture as an indication of change within the form.
3. Uses cyclical harmonic progressions (CHP) to develop ramps in his music.

Ramps consist of one or more of the following elements: an increase in volume over time, increasing tempo or diminution over time, textural growth (orchestration becomes thicker and bigger), frequency vectors (lower or higher pitch over time), and/or harmonic tension. Cuong's music is not driven by large, symphonic form, but rather emphasizes repetitive, groove-based motifs and chord progressions.

For each movement, I have mapped out the harmonic tension, textural growth, motivic development, and basic musical elements such as tonal center and meter in an arc-diagram that is placed at the start of each movement's analysis. Within the arc-diagram, each small arc is a phrase, and the larger arcs constitute a section within the form. From top to bottom, I placed the line of ramping to the climax, time stamps in reference to the YouTube recording of UT Austin's performance, section names and/or letters, measure numbers, the (changing) meter(s), and any relevant CHP that occurs. While each of these figures contains other musical elements to help define form, they may also display a list of instruments' entrances in alignment with where they come in within the form; this denotes the duration of their presence in the music if and when applicable. Cuong manipulates orchestration to create different timbral textures and to set markers as the music

progresses to a point of climax. Cuong stacks instrumentation (textural growth) over time to help create ramps leading up to the climax points in his music, and this is displayed in the diagrams with a diagonal line leading up to the word “Climax.” These diagrams are also meant to show when and where Cuong’s groove-based cyclical harmonic progressions (CHP) are present in the music and how they aid in building tension. There are several definitions of CHP, one being that these progressions are made up of chord movements based on a particular interval, creating an inevitable cycle.⁵⁷ Another definition is based on pop music and how the chord cycle maintains the same harmonic progression throughout the duration of a song via repetition. Cuong merges both definitions by working with traditional chord functions to create cyclical progressions based on intervals while also using repetitive chord changes throughout different parts of each movement. In this analysis, CHP refers to both the intervallic relationships between each chord in a given progression and the repetitive nature of each set of chords he uses to create tension or create musical momentum, which also reveals the form.

Cuong uses each movement of *Re(new)al* to evoke specific imagery or other musical concepts and sounds. For example, Cuong states several times that the second movement of this piece is reminiscent of Drum and Bass (drum’n’bass) tracks from the 90s and says, “it’s not a mistake if a listener is reminded of this style of music.”⁵⁸ Cuong claims that the piece, in its entirety, is through-composed, but still has simple, repetitive harmonic progressions within his music.⁵⁹ The chords are meant to sound like they’re “melting into one another” in the third movement to depict heat that

⁵⁷Ibid., 218.

⁵⁸Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

⁵⁹Ibid.

radiates from a sunrise.⁶⁰ The orchestration in the first movement is meant to “flood in” to depict water.⁶¹ I use these images and concepts to frame my discussion of orchestration for each movement.

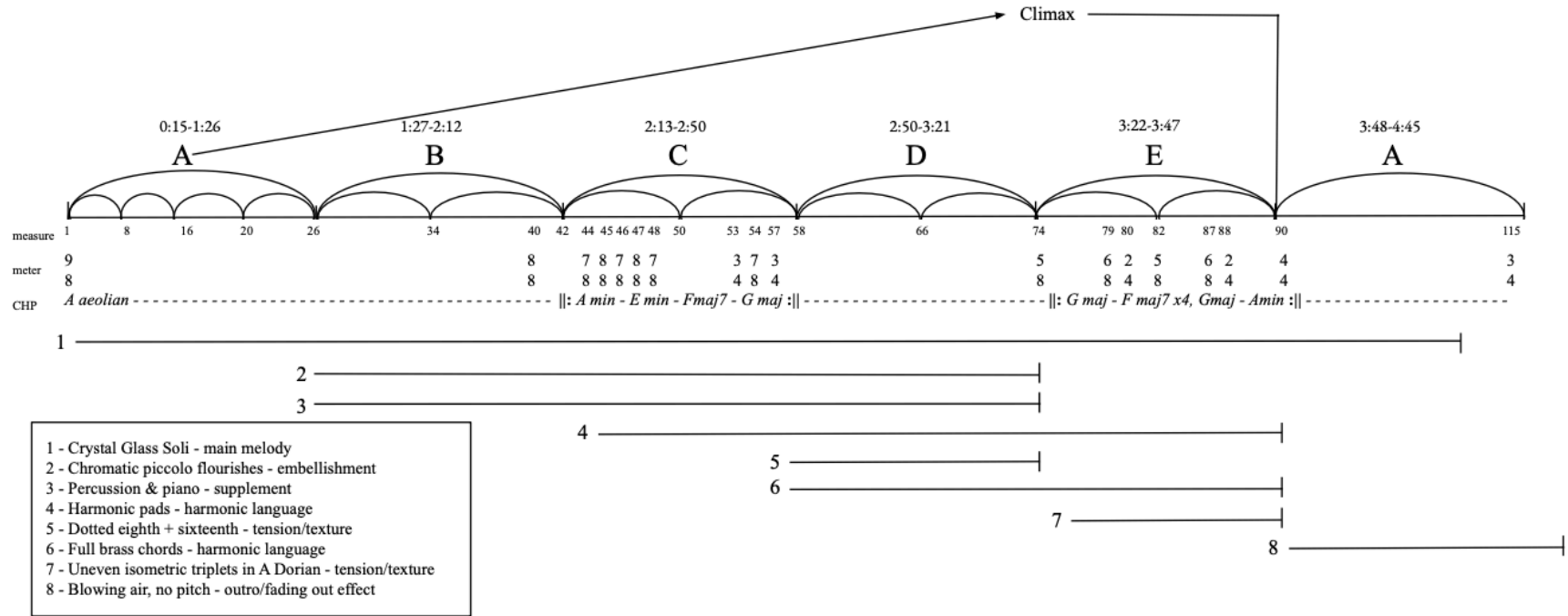
While all of the technical aspects of Cuong’s writing for the soloists makes *Re(new)al* an incredibly virtuosic concerto, what makes the music so effortless and beautiful is his ability to capture the essence of each movement through sound. In the first movement “Hydro,” Cuong deliberately chose crystal glasses filled with water to emphasize the theme of hydro-power, but drives the theme home with the way he orchestrates the music to sound like it is flooding, trickling, or seeping in. He does the same thing in the second movement by asking the ensemble musicians to make audible breaths through their instruments and pairing it with swirling, uneven isometric sextuplets reminiscent of a wind turbine sweeping up air from its surroundings. For his last movement, the representation of solar power resides in his choice to use glimmering, metallic percussion to depict sunlight, but he also uses harmony to his advantage. Cuong alters each passing chord by one half or whole step, only affecting one pitch in the chord, resulting in a gradual change that depicts the rise and fall of the sun. To me, the most magical and artistic of all is the resulting positive message of cooperation and togetherness through his use of hockets in the soloists’ parts throughout the piece.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

Movement I

Figure 8: I. Hydro, Arc-Diagram



Form

The form of the first movement is mostly through-composed with six main sections. Each of the six sections has been given a letter, in which the first and last are the same. Thus, when using letters to label each segment, the form can be interpreted as A-B-C-D-E-A₁. Since the A returns at the end, the form cannot be fully considered through-composed. Some may argue that this movement should be considered strophic because it uses the same repeated melody from the soloists' crystal glasses without any pitch changes (aside from additive material which stays within the previously set key) for the duration of the piece. However, the development of the harmonic and motivic material that surrounds the crystal-glass melody denotes new, different musical statements. As seen in Figure 8, each arc has a different number of measures and phrases. For the purpose of this study, only the form that follows the shifting textures and cyclical harmonic progressions will be used.

The phrase "evolving ostinato" is one that I came up with while analyzing this piece, and it is used because while the crystal glasses are ostinato-like in their repetitive material, there are inevitable changes in rhythm due to the changing time signatures; there are also several moments of rest before new sections. Thus, the melody defies the strict definition of the term ostinato on its own, but since this motif is ostinato-like and adapts to new material, evolving ostinato is a more fitting term. After the first A, each portion of the form ramps to the climax, with the apex occurring in E right before the final A₁. As mentioned above, in the first A, the soloists use crystal glasses to clink the melody repetitively with additive material over time, building an evolving ostinato that lasts through the entire movement, as seen below in Figures 9–10.

Figure 9: A – Crystal Glasses (mm. 1–25)

Figure 10: A₁ – Crystal Glasses (mm. 90–115)

The rest of the piece has more traditional two and four bar phrases, but there are one-measure extensions and elisions throughout the piece resulting in irregular phrase lengths. After the first A, which lasts twenty-five measures, the ramping begins by adding more instruments, as each section can be defined with the entrance of a new part. Cuong likens this stacking of instruments to the idea that the musicians are “flooding in.”⁶² B begins with the chromatic/diatonic flute flourishes at m. 26 as seen below in Figure 11.

⁶² Ibid.

Figure 11: Chromatic piccolo flourishes – embellishment (mm. 28–33)

C begins to grow harmonic pads (sustained chords that ‘pad’ the texture with more pitches) with dotted eighth and sixteenth notes going against straight eighth notes in the piano/percussion to create an echo or delay effect at m. 42. In his document, Cuong writes,

Some of the most noteworthy examples of acoustically recreating electronic sounds in *Re(new)al* are the piece’s acoustic representations of delay... These strategies are sprinkled through, but certain structural elements in the first movement, “Hydro,” best illuminate these approaches...⁶³

Figure 12: Percussion and piano – supplement

Figure 13: Harmonic pads – harmonic language

⁶³Viet Cuong. “Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*,” 10.

Figure 14: Dotted eighth + sixteenth (ascending chromatically) – tension

The next section, D, starts with full brass chords at m. 58.

Figure 15: Full brass chords – harmonic language

E, also known as the climax, has all of the above motifs (minus chromatic flute flourishes) in conjunction with additional uneven, overlapping isometric triplets in A Dorian at m. 74. In isometric music, “every time a value is a multiple of a beat, and the measures are equal...groups of measures become units of time, and the space of time measure by these units may in turn become a unit in a yet larger group, and so on.”⁶⁴ All of these isometric triplets have staggered entrances, and the

⁶⁴Don Michael Randel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. 729.

resulting sound and composite rhythm results in a large, moving mass of swirling notes that overtakes the listener’s attention.

Figure 16: Uneven isometric triplets – tension/texture

The image displays a complex musical score for a multi-instrument ensemble. It consists of ten staves, labeled on the left as Flute 1, Flute 2, Piccolo, Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Clarinet in B-flat, Clarinet in A, Bassoon, and Bass Clarinet. The score is divided into measures 82 through 89. Above the staves, there are large numbers indicating measure counts: 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, and 90. The music is characterized by dense, swirling patterns of notes, often in triplet groupings. Dynamic markings such as *f* (forte), *p* (piano), and *ff* (fortissimo) are used throughout. The time signature changes from 3/8 to 2/4 and back to 3/8. The overall texture is highly rhythmic and dense.

Immediately after the apex of the piece at measure seventy-four, the music trails off into A_1 which feels like an “outro.” The term *outro* can be defined as a short, distinct closing section at the end of a piece and is often used in the realm of popular music. In A_1 , instruments are blowing air through their instruments, making sounds reminiscent of shores lapping up at a bay⁶⁵ while the piano plays a pedal tone. The crystal glasses are now repeating the same melody but playing less and less, inevitably stopping before the movement is over, essentially doing the opposite of the first A , creating a sort of musical-symmetry. However, having two A ’s does not mean that it fully conforms to the rules of any traditional musical form, which is why I consider this first movement to be mostly through-composed. For example, in the first A , there are four sub-sections, based on phrasing, totaling twenty-five measures, separated into one seven-measure phrase and three six-measure phrases. In A_1 , there are no distinct musical passages/phrases, as it creates more of an ambiance and “fade-out” or “outro” effect as opposed to the initial, building statements that occur

⁶⁵Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021.

in the first A. We may consider both to be A-sections, within the flexibility of the through-composed form, because of the ensemble's musical content, despite being in different meters, as seen in figures 9–10. The word “outro” is used because of how A₁ functions: it is not a new part in addition to the basic structure, but a continuation of it as it fades out and repeats the same material. The crystal glasses continue to play in addition to the clarinets, saxophones, trumpets, horns, and low brass blowing air through their instruments to emulate shores lapping up at an ocean bay.⁶⁶

Figure 17: *Outro/fading out*

As mentioned above, the last A almost emulates a “fade-out” effect, another processing effect as mentioned in chapter two when discussing Cuong’s musical style, due to the way everyone except soloists and piano are blowing air, with no pitches, until the very end.

⁶⁶Ibid.

Orchestration and Texture

In my interview with Cuong, he expressed that the first movement was meant to sound like it was “flooding in” with sound, which can also be a direct explanation for the ramping techniques discussed in the introduction of this chapter. Each instrument can be interpreted as having a motivic role, and they all stack over time to create tension and growth in volume. There are eight total musical motifs and roles in the first movement of *Re(new)al*; provided here is a list of each motif and role and the measures in which they reside:

1. Crystal Glass Soli - main melody
2. Flute and Piccolo – chromatic flourishes (embellishment)
3. Percussion and Piano – echo (supplement)
4. Woodwinds – harmonic pads⁶⁷ (harmonic language/accompaniment)
5. Woodwinds – dotted eighth and sixteenth notes ascending (tension)
6. Brass – harmonic movement (harmonic language)
7. Woodwinds – uneven isometric triplets (tension/texture)
8. All except soloists – air sounds (Fade out/Outro)

These assigned roles and motifs help add to the ramping in this movement. Because the parts of each instrument are so fixed, the orchestration not only leads directly to the apex aurally, but also does so visually. The role of each musician is clear because of how long they have to hold onto each of these motifs. Textural growth is the main method of ramping in the first movement.

Each contribution to the texture (seen in figures 9-16 above) does not deviate from the given pattern/melody/etc., except at the end of phrase to transition into a new section. There is a clear distinction between each section with a unifying sforzando or fortissimo chord played by all the ensemble members towards the end of three sections (A to B, D to E, and E to A₁). Here, unifying

⁶⁷Viet Cuong. “Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*,” 10. The word pad is used because Cuong writes about the original chamber version using this language: “In fact, the strings often act like a synthesizer pad in these movements, where they are asked to play long stretches of whole notes.”

is used rather than “in unison” because all instruments are not all playing the same note, but all instruments are playing in rhythmic unison. The term unifying also denotes the fact that all the instruments are playing their assigned roles, but abandon those motifs and come together for these transitional moments.

Each transition, except C to D and B to C, has either a forte or sforzando unifying chord.

Additionally, there is always a shift in orchestration, wherein instruments are either added or taken away in each transition. Please see below for a list of figures that are representative examples of the unifying transitions from the first movement:

Figure 18: (A to B) Woodwinds unifying chord transition; mm. 24–26

The image shows a musical score for Clarinets & Saxes, spanning measures 24 to 26. The score is written for a woodwind section and features a unifying chord transition. The notation includes various dynamics such as *f* (forte), *pp* (pianissimo), and *p* (piano), along with accents and slurs. The woodwinds play in rhythmic unison during the transitional moments.

Figure 19: (A to B) Brass unifying chord transition; mm. 24–26

All brass

This musical score shows the brass section for measures 24 to 26. It consists of 12 staves, each representing a different brass instrument. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *f* (forte). The instruments are arranged in a standard orchestral order from top to bottom: Trumpets (1-4), Trombones (1-4), and Euphonium/Tuba.

Figure 20: (D to E) Woodwind unifying chord transition; mm. 72–73

This musical score shows the woodwind section for measures 72 and 73. It consists of 12 staves, each representing a different woodwind instrument. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *pp* (pianissimo). The instruments are arranged in a standard orchestral order from top to bottom: Flutes (1-2), Oboes (1-2), Clarinets (1-2), Bassoons (1-2), and Basses.

Figure 21: (D to E) Brass unifying chord transition; mm. 72–73

Musical score for brass instruments, measures 72–73. The score consists of 12 staves. Measures 72 and 73 are indicated at the top. The music features a unifying chord transition from D to E. The notation includes various brass instruments (trumpets, trombones, and tubas/euphoniums) with dynamic markings such as *f* and *sfz*.

Figure 22: (E to A₁) Flutes isometric triplets; m. 89

Musical score for flutes, measure 89. The score consists of 5 staves. The music features isometric triplets. The notation includes various flute parts with dynamic markings such as *mf* and *ff*. A 4/4 time signature is visible at the top.

Figure 23: (E to A₁) Clarinets and Double Reeds unifying chord transition; m. 89



Figure 24 (E to A₁) Saxophones isometric triplets; m. 89



Figure 25 (E to A₁) Brass unifying chord transition; m. 89



Leading into the climax, there are a series of staggered entrances, allowing the music to ramp up to the peak of the movement. This can be visually depicted as a staircase, as seen in Figure 6. As mentioned earlier, one of the components of ramping is textural growth, where the orchestration gets thicker over time. Inevitably, with more instrumentation within the wind ensemble setting, the volume of the music grows throughout the duration of the movement. The textural growth in conjunction with the increasing volume over time is what carries the music to its apex, ultimately dictating the structure of the music.

Cyclical Harmonic Progressions

There are two main cyclical harmonic progressions (CHP) that exist in this movement. While most of the movement consists of the resulting A-Aeolian harmonies between the crystal glasses and chromatic/diatonic flute flourishes, there are two distinct sections, one leading into (mm. 50–74) and one within the climax (mm. 74–89) of the movement that have CHP. Since the material in the crystal glasses, flute flourishes, piano, and percussion (not soloists) are so repetitive and consistent throughout most of the movement, I am not considering these instruments as part of the progressions mentioned. While creating textural growth and variety, the crystal glasses, flute flourishes, piano, and percussion only function in service of adding textural tension but do not drive the progression. For the purpose of this section, the progressions will be based on the instruments playing “harmonic pads” and “full chords” [see: Figure 6].

The first CHP begins at m. 50, and consists of the following chords: A minor - E minor – F major⁷ - G major [see Figure 26]. These chords repeat a total of three times between mm. 5–73, but the moment of change within these progressions is not immediately obvious due to the elisions happening in the chord-tone playing instruments. For example, the chord in m. 52 has the pitches A-E-G-B, which could be analyzed as an A9 chord with an omitted third. However, reading the chord as an E minor chord with the A held over from the A minor chord makes more sense in this context as the E minor chord will stand alone two and a half beats later, also in m. 52.

Figure 26: Brass chords; mm. 50–57

A min----- E min----- F maj⁷----- G maj -----

The second set of CHP occurs in the climax at m. 74, and consists of the progression: G major - F major x4, G major - A minor [see: Figure 27]. Within this CHP, Cuong repeats the first two chords four times, keeping the music suspended between G major and F major before resolving up to A minor, landing the music back in another A-section.

Figure 27: Brass chords; mm. 74–81

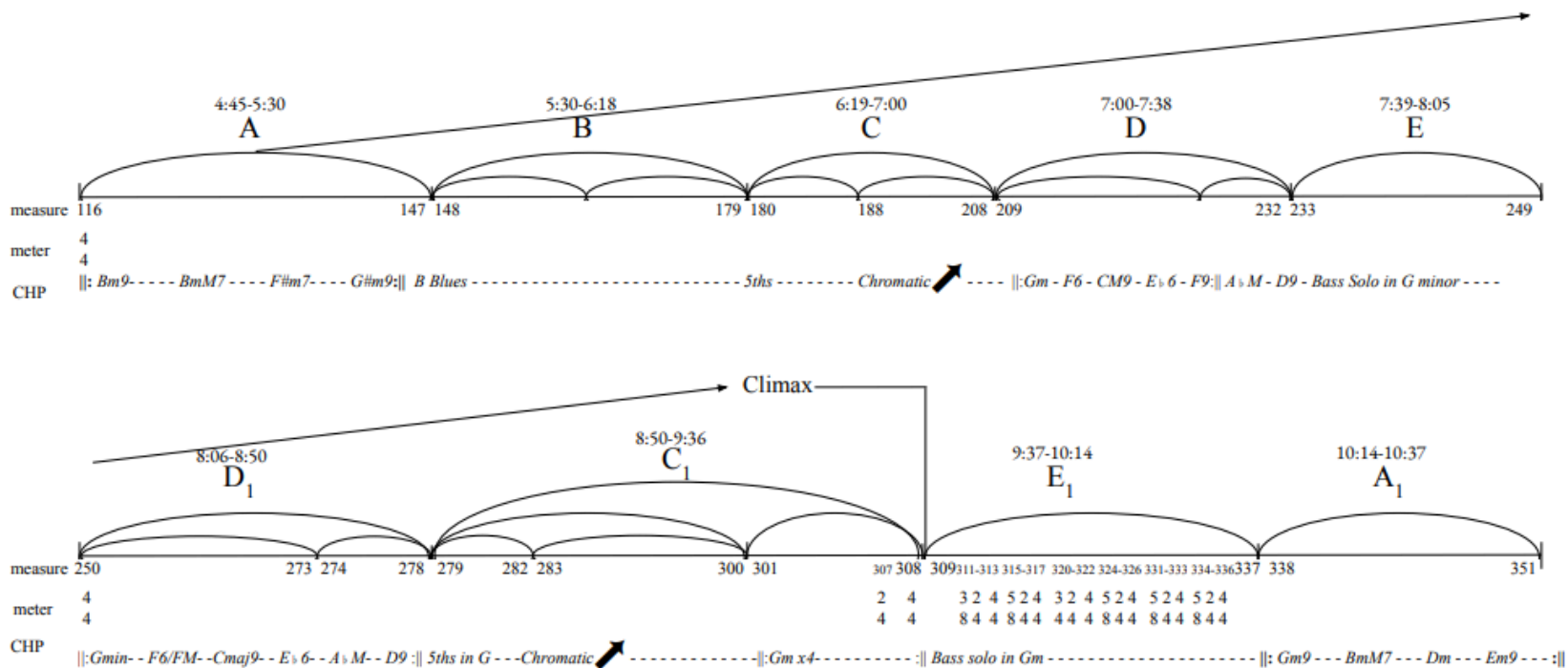
Gmaj----- Fmaj----- Gmaj----- Fmaj----- Gmaj----- Fmaj----- Gmaj-----
Fmaj-Gmaj-Amin

Rather than using the CHPs as the harmonic framing of the entire movement, or the entire piece, Cuong adds them only in the last two sections leading up to the climax. These progressions happen

within a limited temporal space, but repeat enough times such that they can fit within the aforementioned definition of CHP. The progression is cyclical, repetitive, and functions as part of the ramping that Cuong uses to reach the apex of the movement. The CHP in this movement tells us that the apex is approaching, and guides the listeners' and performers' ears. The CHP highlights the growth in texture and inevitable increase in volume to further emphasize the ramp built from the beginning of the piece, creating a pathway directly into the climax of the piece.

Movement II

Figure 28: II. Wind, Arc-Diagram



Form

The second movement consists of ten total sections with a different number of bars in each section and represents an altered arch form. Each section has been assigned a letter based on its musical content, and results in a form of: A-B-C-D-E-D₁-C₁-E₁-A₁. See Figure 28 for a visual example. If this movement exhibited the characteristics of a traditional arch form, the latter letters would reflect the former half of the form after the first E, and the musical material would be symmetrical on either side of this section. The typical symmetry of musical material in an arch form is interrupted because the apex of the movement occurs in m. 301 with three bold G-minor chords, resulting in a peak or change in musical material that does not match up with the central point of a symmetrical arch form. Additionally, in place of where the second B (or B₁) would be in a traditional arch form, Cuong adds another section for a lengthened bass solo, labeled E₁. With the aforementioned alterations alongside the almost-perfect symmetry, I have analyzed the second movement in such a way that reflects an arch form, which is why this movement is an altered arch form.

Like the first movement, the first A and A₁ are similar in musical material. A₁ has different harmonies than the initial A. The effect is the same in that the soloists are playing eighth note hockets as ethereal, modulated seventh and ninth chords with the same progression from the first A section floats in the background from the ensemble members. In the first A, the chords reside in the entire ensemble, while A₁'s chords are mostly played by the saxophone section. See figures 29, 30, and 31 for a comparison of the harmonic progressions found in the first eight bars of sections A and A₁:

Figure 29: mm. 116–123 of *A* (Woodwinds)

Musical score for woodwinds, measures 116–123 of *A*, *Presto* ($\text{♩} = 160$). The score includes parts for Flute 1 & 2, Oboe 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, Clarinet in B-flat 1 & 2, Bass Clarinet 1 & 2, Soprano Saxophone 1 & 2, Alto Saxophone 1 & 2, Tenor Saxophone 1 & 2, and Baritone Saxophone 1 & 2. The tempo is *Presto* ($\text{♩} = 160$). The score shows various dynamics such as *pp*, *f*, *mf*, and *p*, and includes performance instructions like *harmon muffle attack soft* and *straight mute*. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into measures 117, 118, 119, 120 (labeled 'Flute'), 121, 122, and 123.

Figure 30: mm. 116–123 of *A* (Brass)

Musical score for brass, measures 116–123 of *A*, *Presto* ($\text{♩} = 160$). The score includes parts for Trumpet in B-flat 1, 2, and 3; Horn in F 1, 2, 3, and 4; Trombone 1, 2, and 3; Bass Trombone; Euphonium; and Tuba. The tempo is *Presto* ($\text{♩} = 160$). The score shows various dynamics such as *pp*, *f*, *mf*, and *p*, and includes performance instructions like *harmon muffle attack soft* and *straight mute*. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into measures 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, and 123.

Figure 31: mm. 338–345 of A_1 (Saxophones)

338 339 340 341

342 343 344 345

Between these two points (A and A_1) there is a diverse range of musical material. Each of the sections can be denoted by the entrance of a different motif from within the ensemble. There are ten total transitions in the second movement of *Re(nen)al*, provided here is a list of measure numbers in which each of those transitions occur:

1. A to B (m. 147)
2. B first phrase to B second phrase (m. 163)
3. B to C (m. 180)
4. C to D (m. 208)
5. D to E(m. 232)
6. D_1 to C_1 prefix (m. 278)
7. C_1 prefix to C_1 main phrase (m. 282)
8. C_1 main phrase to C suffix (m. 300)
9. C_1 to E_1 : Bass solo (m. 308)
10. E_1 to A (m. 337)

These transitional moments are different from the previous movement, because of how the soloists play the same melody and rhythm throughout the duration of the first movement. Additionally, the first movement flows from section to section, whereas in *Wind*, the soloists, in addition to the ensemble, also play transitional statements that line up with the sections of the form. The perpetually shifting orchestration between each section creates textural changes that outline the form and denotes specific sections through clear transitions. Not only does this add to Cuong’s ramping techniques in this movement through textural shifts/growths, but it also happens to add an element of surprise. These transitions include one or a combination of the following gestures: fortissimo quarter note chord at the end of a phrase, eighth note sforzando chord, or repeated forte-piano crescendi. These transitions are shown in the list of figures below:

Figure 32: Transitional figure 1 – *A fortissimo quarter-note chord (mm. 300–301)*

301

The image displays a musical score for measures 300 and 301. A box containing the number '301' is positioned above the first staff. The score is written for 12 staves, likely representing different instruments or voices. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'sfz' (sforzando). The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The score shows a complex texture with multiple melodic lines and harmonic support.

Figure 33: Transitional figures 2 – An eighth-note sforzando chord (mm. 232–233)

The image shows a musical score for Figure 33, consisting of ten staves. A box at the top center contains the number '233'. The score features a series of eighth-note chords, each marked with a sforzando (sfz) dynamic. The chords are arranged in a way that creates a sense of tension and release, typical of a transitional figure. The notation includes stems, beams, and dynamic markings.

Figure 34: Transitional figure 3 – Repeated fortepiano crescendo chords (m. 258)

The image shows a musical score for Figure 34, consisting of eight staves. The score is divided into two sections: the top four staves are labeled 'Tpt in Eb' and the bottom four staves are labeled 'Hn in F'. Each staff contains a series of repeated chords, with dynamic markings ranging from fortissimo piano (fp) to fortissimo (f). The chords are arranged in a way that creates a sense of tension and release, typical of a transitional figure. The notation includes stems, beams, and dynamic markings.

Despite CHP being a cyclical, repetitive element in Cuong’s music, each of these transitional points in the *Wind* presents a pivot or shift in the cyclical chord progression, creating variance despite having repetitive material.

In addition to these distinct transitional statements, Cuong ramps up to the climax differently than in the first movement. In the first movement, he neatly stacked the orchestration to show where the different sections of the movement lay, with no help from the soloists as their material did not change over time. In this movement, he uses more Cyclical Harmonic Progressions (CHP) than in the first movement to generate forward momentum and to fill out the form with these distinct transitions acting as book-ends for each CHP. However, much like the first movement, Cuong's compositional choices in methods of ramping outline the structure of the overall form.

Orchestration and Texture

There are eight total musical motifs and roles to match the eight transitions in the second movement of *Re(new)al*. Each instrument plays a role in either adding texture, melody, harmony, or embellishment, etc. and contributes to the ramp in growing the dynamics of the piece, simply based on thicker orchestration, and growth in texture within a wind ensemble context. In this movement, Cuong mimics the gust of air that rises up whenever a wind turbine picks up air, and combines it with a Blues melody in the ensemble and drum'n'bass music in the soloists' parts. By Blues, I am referring to the typical minor Pentatonic scale taught to young jazz musicians when just starting to improvise; it is important to note that Cuong refers to this music as quasi-swing because "triplet-based rhythms do not accurately represent swung eighth notes in jazz."⁶⁸ In researching both wind turbines and the orchestration choices that Cuong made, I decided that the overall arc of the storyline represented in this movement can be depicted as gusts of wind, growing and falling, while growing larger after each "fall" in order to charge, so that the energy can be used to output the apex and then fades out into the next movement.

⁶⁸Viet Cuong. "Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Re(new)al*," 24.

Cuong ramps by growing the dynamics leading up to the apex of the movement, but only to signify that it has arrived and not to actually guide the listener to it; the dynamic shifts that occur within the movement are fairly sudden or used for a “phasing” effect. Typically, phasing can be defined as a compositional technique where the same part is played on two or more instruments, in a steady, but not identical, tempo resulting in a slight lapse in time that brings the two or more instruments back in time with one another due to the cyclical nature of phasing and time. He manipulates dynamics to create this effect, but his use of CHP and different modes that occur in this movement is what truly builds and leads us into these swift transitions.

As an introductory section, Cuong utilizes the ensemble to create an ethereal atmosphere with sustained pitches and swells, reminiscent of gusts of wind swirling up into the air and falling back down as he leads into the next section at m.148.

Figure 35: A; alternating sustained chord progression #1 in mm. 116–147 (mm. 116–124 pictured)

The image displays a page of a musical score for a Presto movement (♩ = 160) in 4/4 time. The score is for a full orchestral ensemble, including Trumpet in B♭, Horn in F, Trombone 1 & 2, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, and Tuba. The music features sustained chords with dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mf*, *f*, and *pp*<. Performance instructions include "harmon mute stem out" and "straight mute". A box highlights measure 124. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with staves for each instrument.

Beginning at mm. 148-163, or at the beginning of the B section, Cuong utilizes a B major Blues scale in the low woodwinds, brass, and left-hand piano part. The energy is picking up in this moment and we can hear that more is about to happen. The relation to wind here lies in the “air sounds” that he wrote for everyone else. The air hits come right in the middle and at the end of each phrase, as seen in figure 36 below:

Figure 36: B; Bass register Blues melody, air bits in mm. 148–163 (mm. 148–152 pictured)

The image shows a musical score for Figure 36, which is a bass register blues melody. It consists of six staves. The top two staves are for the piano, with the left hand playing a bass line and the right hand playing a melody. The bottom four staves are for woodwinds and brass. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *f* (forte), and performance instructions like "brush and solistically" and "harmonic glissando". The melody is characterized by a bluesy feel with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, and some trills.

The Blues material continues, but beginning in m. 164 the alternating, sustained chord progressions come back from the first A section and also adds fragmented, swirling sixteenth note trills and chromatic flourishes. These motifs and roles add to the volume and textural depth of the music. [see figures 37–38]

Figure 37: B; alternating sustained chord progression #2 in mm. 164–180 (mm. 172–175 pictured)

The image shows a musical score for Figure 37, which is an alternating sustained chord progression. It consists of eight staves. The top four staves are for trumpets (Tpt in Bb) and the bottom four staves are for horns (Hn in F). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* (mezzo-forte), *pp* (pianissimo), and *p* (piano). The progression is characterized by sustained chords that alternate between two different voicings. The score also includes performance instructions like "fl." (flute) and "ord." (order).

Figure 38: B; staccato high-pitched eighth- notes, sixteenth note trills and chromatic flourishes in mm. 164–180 (mm. 172–175 pictured)

At m.180, the sustained pitches remain, this time with an addition of longer “air sounds.” After six measures of open fifths, the chromatic flourish is no longer fragmented and interrupted by trills, but it is symmetrical and guides the listener into new musical material. [See figure 39]

Figure 39: C; sustained fifths, chromatic flourish in mm. 180–187

The texture of the sustained fifths and alternating chord progressions from earlier in the movement remains in mm. 188–208, but the progression changes and the trombone glissandi are more persistent. Also, the woodwinds and ensemble percussion parts have displaced dotted eighth-rhythms that echo each other, creating another processed delay effect. [See figures 40–41]

Figure 40: C; ascending chromatic chord progression, ascending glissandi in mm. 188–208 (mm. 188–191 pictured)

Musical score for Figure 40, showing ascending chromatic chord progression and ascending glissandi in mm. 188–208. The score includes parts for 1st and 2nd Horns in F, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Trombones, and Euphonium. Dynamics range from mp to ppp.

Figure 41: C; displaced dotted-eighth sixteenth figures in mm. 188–208 (mm. 188–191 pictured)

Musical score for Figure 41, showing displaced dotted-eighth sixteenth figures in mm. 188–208. The score includes parts for Flutes 1-2 and 3-4, Oboes 1 and 2, Horns 1 and 2, Clarinet in Bb 1 and 2, and Clarinet in Bb 3. Dynamics range from f to p.

The Blues melody and the swirling sixteenth notes arrive once again, and while the orchestration doesn't necessarily ramp up to the climax, there is a shift in key. [See figures 42–44]

Figure 44: D; Bass register Blues melody, displaced dotted-eighth sixteenth figures, piano accompaniment in mm. 225–232 (mm. 225–228 pictured)

The musical score for Figure 44 shows five staves. The top four staves are for a piano accompaniment, featuring displaced dotted-eighth sixteenth figures. The bottom staff is for the bass register blues melody. Dynamics include *ff*, *p*, and *mf*.

In E, the percussion soloists move to more of a triplet-based feel, coming out of the fast sixteenth note style of the drum'n'bass music that Cuong was emulating in the first few sections. The air sounds in the low brass are supposed to emphasize the canned air sounds that the soloists are using in place of a hi-hat, while the pianists' right hand and ensemble percussion plays consistent triplets to further emphasize the change from a duple to a triple feel. This sudden lull in the music also has a bass solo, but only for a short moment between mm. 233–249. [See figure 45]

Figure 45: E; Air hits, triplet accompaniment, bass solo in mm. 233–249 (mm. 241–244 pictured)

The musical score for Figure 45 shows six staves. The top five staves are for air hits, featuring triplet accompaniment. The bottom staff is for the bass solo. Dynamics include *n-f* and *f*.

In D₁, there are no orchestration differences from the previously stated D section. It has the same elements, such as the Blues melody in the bass register instruments, the alternating sustained chords and the displaced dotted eighth-sixteenth note rhythms. [See figures 46–47]

Figure 46: D₁; Bass register Blues melody, alternating sustained chord progression #4, piano accompaniment in mm. 250–278 (mm. 250–256 pictured)

The image shows a musical score for Figure 46. It consists of multiple staves. The top section features a bass register Blues melody with dynamics ranging from *mp* to *pp*. Below this, there are several staves of alternating sustained chords, with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *mp*. The bottom section shows a piano accompaniment with dynamics ranging from *f* to *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 47: D₁; displaced dotted-eighth sixteenth figures in mm. 250–278 (mm. 250–256 pictured)

The image shows a musical score for Figure 47. It consists of four staves. The top staff features a displaced dotted-eighth sixteenth figure with dynamics ranging from *ff* to *p*. The second and third staves show similar rhythmic patterns with dynamics ranging from *ff* to *p*. The bottom staff shows a piano accompaniment with dynamics ranging from *ff* to *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

This next section (C₁) has the most significant unifying transition in the entire movement. This is the peak of the movement, and the entire ensemble plays sudden G minor chords. Some of the instruments (upper woodwinds, euphonium, and tuba) are sustaining pitches in a G minor chord, while the rest of the ensemble sweeps up to a third above the chord tone for a beat and a half and lands back where they started. In between each of these strong statements of the G minor chord,

the soloists are trading sixteenth note rhythms with one another as loud as they can. See below for a figure of the unifying chords:

Figure 48: *C*₁; Unifying *G* minor Chords in *mm.* 279–308 (*mm.* 301–306 pictured)

The image displays a musical score for ten staves. The top six staves contain rhythmic patterns of sixteenth notes and rests, with some notes marked with accents. The bottom four staves feature sustained chords, each marked with 'gliss' (glissando) above the notes. The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values and dynamic markings.

Just like the last *E* section, *E*₁ has a prominent bass solo. In this iteration, it is elongated and the percussion soloists move back into their jazz triplet feel. There are no air sounds in this portion of the movement, unlike the first *E* section, and the orchestration is sparse. After being charged up to play the *G* minor chords so boldly, the musical turbine slows itself down through a thinning orchestration and lessening dynamic.

As mentioned earlier within the form portion of this movement's analysis, *A*₁ has similar orchestration and musical material as the first *A* statement. The main difference is the addition of long air sounds in the trumpets, trombones, and tubas. Please see below for a figure of the similar sustained chords that happen in *A*₁:

Figure 49: *A*₁: Alternating sustained chord progression #1 in mm. 338–351 (mm. 344–351 pictured)

With creating each of these roles and motifs, Cuong created a series of sonic stories, many of which overlap. The orchestration plays a role in creating each of these sonic stories built over a loosely transcribed DJ Hype drum'n'bass track.⁶⁹ Each of these motifs overlap and create different combinations because they are adaptable enough to fit over different chord progressions.

Cyclical Harmonic Progressions

This movement is driven by the CHP, which is aurally prominent because of the rhythmic motifs and simple, repetitive, chord progressions. For this section of the paper, I used traditional jazz nomenclature to denote the quality of any given chord: M stands for Major, m stands for minor, and additional chord tones are denoted by number. There are a total of fourteen harmonic structures and progressions that are used in this piece, some of which are related or similar to each other.

⁶⁹Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

Below is a list of each CHP in the movement, what measures they reside in, and what part of the form they are in:

1. A, mm. 116–147:
Bm9 – BmM7 – BM7 – BM9 – F#m – G#m9/Bm7
2. B, mm. 148–163:
B Dorian/Blues Melody
3. B, mm. 164–179:
B Dorian/Blues Melody, Bm – AM – EM/G# – GM – A
4. C, mm. 180–187:
Parallel Fifths: B – F#, C – G
5. C, mm. 188–208:
Bm - chromatic ascension - DM – GM
6. D, mm. 209–224:
G Dorian/Blues Melody, Gm7 – F6 – CM9 – Eb6 – FM9 – AbM – DM9
7. D, mm. 225–232:
Gm – Dm7 – CM9 – Cm
8. E, mm. 233–249:
isolated air hits, repetitive material, bass solo
9. D₁, mm. 250–279:
G Dorian/Blues Melody, Gm7 – FM – CM9 – EbM7 – AbM – DM
10. C₁, mm. 279–282:
Parallel Fifths G – D, Ab – Eb
11. C₁, mm. 283–300:
Gm – chromatic ascension – DM - Gm
12. C₁, mm. 301–308:
Gm – Gm – Gm – Gm
13. E₁, mm. 309–337:
percussion soloists, bass solo
14. A₁, mm. 338–351:
GM9 - DM7/B - DM9 - GM9 - DM7 - D7#5

The first harmonic structure is considered a CHP because it repeats four times and does not allow the music to fall stagnant, and is a small representation of how Cuong uses simple, repetitive chord progressions seen in popular or jazz music, wherein the chord cycle maintains the same progression throughout the duration of a section, via repetition. These simple, jazz-like progressions allow the music to move forward because the soloists have a driving rhythm and the chords repeat in a cyclical manner. The chords listed in the first progression also have moments where pitches overlap each other creating “new” chords as the progression occurs. Additionally, this first CHP can be considered a “fade-in” while the CHP in A_1 can be considered a “fade-out.” Both are similar in that they have these floating chords that overlap with one another and create new chords while passing through. Additionally, in both sections, there are only these chords and soloists, no other part is orchestrated. It is important to note, however, that these sections are only similar in function but not in tonality. The chords for each section are vastly different, as the first A has the progression: Bm9 - BmM7 - BM7 - BM9 - F#m - G#m9/Bm7, and A_1 has a progression of GM9 - DM7/B - DM9 - GM9 - DM7 - D7#5.

Within the list in the first paragraph of this movement’s CHP analysis, there are four sections noted (2, 3, 6, 9) with motifs and CHP based on a Dorian and Blues-scale, they also contain the same melody. These will be referred to as the Blues sections moving forward. The first Blues section (number 2 in list and no specific progression is listed) of the form in mm. 148–163 does not get repeated or reiterated in the second half of the arc in the same key, and does not have any underlying harmonies or chords like the other Blues sections. In the second Blues section (number 3 in list) in mm. 164–179, CHP appears. Cuong pairs air-hits (a special effect on wind instruments) with a B Blues-melody in the bass instruments while the soloists are playing driving rhythms. In this section, the music has the following chord progression: Bm - AM - EM/G# - GM - AM. This jazzy

melody reappears later in the movement with a different tonal center in its latter two repetitions, this time with harmonic accompaniment. The same melody reappears from mm. 209–224 (number six in list), it is the lack melody from the first second statements transposed up a fourth to G, paired with the following chord progression: Gm7 - F6 - CM9 - EbM6 - AbM - DM9. The music in m. 250–279 (number nine in list) has a progression that is slightly shortened: Gm7 - FM - CM9 - EbM7 - AbM - DM. Number six's and nine's Blues sections have chord progressions underneath, just like the second iteration of this melody. The music in mm. 209–224, and mm. 250–279 are essentially the same as the music in mm. 164–179, in that they all encompass all the same air hits and Dorian/Blues-scale melody; they also all have an underlying CHP that makes it move forward.

Number four on the list of progressions is the beginning section of the first C (mm. 180–187). This CHP is significant because it happens more than once, and it acts as a bit of a lull or transitional period of music. In it are parallel fifths in the played by bass/tenor register instruments (bassoon, contrabassoon, bass clarinets, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, horns, trombones, euphonium, tuba, string bass, timpani) alongside Cuong's notated air sounds. These parallel fifths come back in the prefix of section C₁ (mm. 279–282) as the tenth listed CHP, this time with reduced instrumentation as compared to its previous statement (tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, trombone, bass trombone, and timpani). Both the fourth and tenth listed CHP's prepare the listener for a big transition with flourishing sixteenth notes leading into rising chromatic harmonies. This progression, in both instances, can be considered a prefix of the chromatic ascending chords.

Item five in the CHP list is specifically labeled “ascension” because of how Cuong uses chromatic-stepwise motion in the chords leading up to the next big transitional statement. Chromatic ascension functions as a CHP not in the repetitive way, but in that it moves consistently based on an intervallic

relationship. To further elaborate, in addition to aligning with the proposed definition of CHP in the first section of this chapter wherein a progression consistently repeats several times in a row to create momentum, this particular progression aligns with the definition of a traditional cyclical progression in which chord movements are based on a particular interval. Because Cuong uses this chord progression over an extended period of time, the intervals eventually end up creating a cyclical progression, with the particular interval being a half step or whole step. This ascension, as Cuong describes it, functions like a V/V climbing upwards. This is a significant part of this piece, as this sort of CHP is not common, but when used, is extremely effective in emulating something like a shepherd's tone to emulate the feeling of moving up or towards a specific point.

The seventh item on the list moves us out of the second Blues section described earlier, and brings us to a simple minor progression: Gm - Dm7 - CM9 - Cm. This small portion of the piece, mm. 225–232, acts as a phrasal suffix or transition for D within the form, and is jarring because of how the chord progression no longer moves a whole step down, but moves up a fifth. Both the seventh and twelfth items on the CHP list prepare the listener for the eighth and thirteenth CHPs, in that they both behave like transitions.

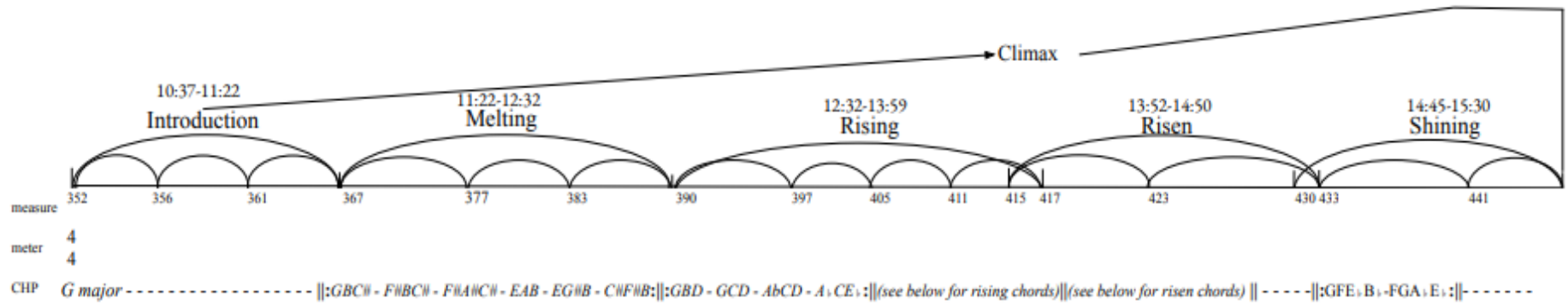
The peculiar part about the twelfth section is that although it acts like a phrasal suffix, it can be considered the climax or peak of the movement. For the first time in the piece, mm. 301–308 contains four sweeping G minor chords that overtake the whole ensemble as a suffix for C₁ within the form. The listener's ears are guided up to this point in the music through the previous CHPs ascending chromatic movement and repetitive, cyclical progressions, and these four G minor chords are easy to catch onto because of how different it is compared to the material on either side of these bombastic G minor chords.

Measures 233–349 and 309–337 (listed as the eighth and thirteenth progressions in the CHP list in the beginning of this movement’s CHP analysis), is that there are no harmonic structures explicitly implied under the bass solo, which plays in G minor Blues, but is not considered a Blues section like the second, third, sixth, or ninth listed CHPs because it does not play the same melodic motif as the Blues sections from sections. This mimics a jazz bass solo as one might hear in a jazz trio setting, in which pianists do not play complementary(comp) chords very often, and if they do, it is only when the chords change. The surrounding sounds consist of air sound as well as the percussion soloists changing to a triplet-based feel, creating an illusion of stretched time, almost as though there is a relaxed section that does not necessarily feel the need to go or “ramp” up to any climax.

Each of these CHPs also helps to denote different parts of the form. Cuong defines form through various sections of increased musical tension and by his use of cyclical harmonic progressions aid in developing ramps. The CHPs that occur also denote new sections in this movement. Much like a lot of Western art music, Cuong follows the format in which each section is reflected by changes in orchestration, harmonic material, and musical material, in general. The CHP, however, is the most prominent aspect of the form in this movement, as it continuously creates tension leading up to the climax of the music (the G minor chords between mm. 301–308). Thereafter, it immediately takes a backseat to the timbral and textural elements of the music, which creates a lull before the start of the next movement.

Movement III

Figure 50: III. Solar – Arc Diagram



Form

The third movement of *Re(new)al* consists of five total sections with an elision occurring between the third and fourth sections, depicted in figure 50 above with overlapping arches. This movement is truly through-composed, wherein the music is not bound to any form and does not repeat any section as it continuously develops new material. Within the figure above and in this analysis, each section has been given a name based on its place in the movement and the sonic painting Cuong creates: Introduction (mm. 352-366), Melting (mm. 367–389), Rising (mm. 390–416), Risen (mm. 415–432), and Shining (mm. 433–445). Each section has been named due to either its placement in the music (Introduction), how Cuong describes the music (Melting), or because of what is happening in the music (Rising, Risen, and Shining). Rather than assign letters to the form (in which case the form would be A-B-C-D-E), I wanted to use Cuong’s choice of descriptive terminology to help the reader further understand what each section of the music has the possibility to depict. In our interview, Cuong went most into detail about these sections and what they were supposed to portray to the listener.

The musical material of the third movement continues to shift over time and does not repeat sections like the previous movements. Cuong simply moves through the movement with seamless transitions from one section to the next. The most intriguing part of the form in this movement is the use of an elision, Cuong wrote a small, two to four measure transitional statement between mm. 414–417 and mm. 430–433, which can be seen in figure 50 above where the arches intersect each other. These intersecting, transitional statements are what make it so difficult to tell whether or not those few measures are an extension or a prefix/suffix of a longer phrase. Initially, I found it difficult to discern whether these transitional measures belonged to the phrase that it precedes or secedes, but ultimately the idea that made the most sense was the fact that these transitional

statements don't belong to either section to introduce or conclude, but rather, they exist on their own to bring two separate entities together, as elisions do.

The Introduction section is less rhythmic, creating an ethereal, floating effect. The opening features sustained quarter note melodies in the soloists' part while the harmony remains on a G major chord in the left-hand piano part for this section. This section is rather sparse in terms of texture, and although there is not a lot of black ink on the page, the sparseness creates a sonic depiction of the hazy-feeling of the sun/heat through sustained chords' crescendos in the ensemble's parts. The Introduction section can be split into three small phrases, each consisting of four measures, five measures, and six measures, respectively. The first measure of each iteration has a note pattern of E-D. [See Figures 51–52 of mm. 356 and 361]

Figure 51: Measure 356

356

The image shows a musical score for measure 356. It consists of three staves. The top staff has a treble clef and a dynamic marking of *mp*. It contains a quarter note G4, a quarter rest, a quarter note F4, and a quarter rest. The middle staff has a bass clef and a dynamic marking of *mp*. It contains a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, and a quarter rest. The bottom staff has a bass clef and a dynamic marking of *mp*. It contains a quarter rest, a quarter note G2, and a quarter rest.

Figure 52: Measure 361

The image shows a musical score for Measure 361. The score is written for eight instruments: Glock. 1, Vib. 1, Glock. 2, Vib. 2, Glock. 3, Crof. 1, Glock. 4, and Crof. 2. The measure number '361' is enclosed in a box at the top left. Glock. 1 has a whole rest followed by a quarter note. Vib. 1 has a 'mallet' instruction and a *mp* dynamic marking, with a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. Glock. 2 has a whole rest. Vib. 2 has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note with a sharp sign and a *n* (nada) marking. Glock. 3 has a whole rest. Crof. 1 has a whole rest. Glock. 4 has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note. Crof. 2 has a quarter rest followed by a quarter note.

With this, the movement immediately presents irregular phrase lengths, with the repeated melodic line from the soloists lengthening with each repetition, not dissimilar to the first movements' crystal glass melody with additive material.

The title for the second section, Melting, has much more to do with the harmonic movement and function that occurs within it than its actual placement within the form. When asked about what musical materials depicts sunlight, Cuong mentions this section:

There's a lot of stuff in this movement where I try to make it sound like sunlight...There's this G major triad, and it melts basically in half steps- the G goes down to an F#, and the triads continue to melt down with all these glissandi going down, so it's almost like a triad is melting in the sun and is made malleable with all these glissandi.⁷⁰

Melting begins at m. 367 and ends at m. 389, and consists of two smaller sections. The beginning of the melodic phrase in the soloists at the beginning of the piece is still occurring in the Melting section and it continues to lengthen even further, seeming also to melt slowly. Much like the

⁷⁰Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021.

Introduction, the first measure of each iteration in Melting has a note pattern of E-D-C# [See Figures 53–54 of mm. 367 and 377).

Figure 53: Measure 367

367

The musical score for measure 367 consists of seven staves. The top staff is labeled 'mallet' and contains a single note with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second staff is labeled *mp* and contains a whole rest. The third staff is labeled 'bowed' and contains a note with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The fourth staff contains a note with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The fifth staff contains a note with a dynamic marking of *f* and a slur over it. The sixth staff contains a note with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The seventh staff contains a note with a dynamic marking of *mp*.

Figure 54: Measure 377

377

The musical score for measure 377 consists of seven staves. The top staff is labeled 'mallet' and contains a note with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second staff is labeled *mp* and contains a whole rest. The third staff is labeled 'bowed' and contains a note with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The fourth staff contains a note with a dynamic marking of *f*. The fifth staff contains a whole rest. The sixth staff contains a whole rest. The seventh staff is labeled 'lift from snare' and contains a note with a dynamic marking of *f*.

The second statement of the melody lasts the longest - going all the way until 385. After repeating the initial chord progression several times in a row, Cuong changes the chord progression to start transitioning into the next section at 386. He outlines these progressions with coinciding pitches, overlapping sustained tones in the ensemble with crescendos and decrescendos.

Rising is the third section in which Cuong describes constantly shifting dominant chords that sound as though they are, well, rising:

Later on, instead of it melting down, there's all these secondary-dominant-like chords that keep rising up, and I think of that as a sunrise. The chords are climbing and climbing very slowly, and now the glissandi are going up and up and up.⁷¹

This particular section lasts from mm. 390–417. This section can be characterized by the rising secondary dominant harmonies⁷², ascending glissandi, and the isometric sixteenth note triplets in the woodwinds, and the soloists' parts shifting to have more and more sixteenth note triplets. This entire section, due to the harmonies, upward glissandi, flurry of notes from woodwinds, busier parts in the soloists' music, feels and sounds as though it is headed to a specific destination. Cuong also states: "As the chords climb, the percussion becomes more active, which makes it more sparkly, which kind of shows that there's more light coming through."⁷³ This destination happens to be a Bb Major chord at measure 415. This is another example of an eliding transitional section. Although the music implies that the Bb is where we were supposed to, a new section blossoms out of the previous chord starting at 417.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷² Secondary Dominants by function, but not in terms of literal harmony as there are chords within this progression that do not abide by the traditional definition of secondary dominants

⁷³Interview with Cuong

The second to last section, *Risen*, refers to the metaphorical Sun having fully risen. Cuong posits: “So, the whole movement is basically depicting a slow sunrise, and it’s fully risen by the end and you can hear the percussion still shining through the thick texture.”⁷⁴ This section is the first time in the whole piece where all ensemble members are playing and adding to the same part to create a dense, monolithic texture, as opposed to playing different motifs and roles to create a layered, complex texture as in the previous movements and is the climax of the piece. They are holding large block chords that overlap each other as they pass through a repetitive cycle of two sets of four chords, eventually landing on a stacked B \flat major chord on the downbeat of measure 430. Between 430–433, the B \flat major chord is sustained with a *fortepiano* crescendo in the woodwinds with a *pianissimo* crescendo roll from the China cymbal and suspended cymbal.

Shining is the shortest section in the movement, lasting a total of thirteen measures. Starting at m. 433, the sustained pitches in the ensemble move together through a cycle of two chords. Then, at m. 437 the ensemble moves to more stationary chords, sustaining pitches together as a full ensemble, at the same time, for the first time in the whole piece. This section is called *Shining* because of how it ends with the percussionists quickly passing sixteenth note triplets back and forth on a glockenspiel and to allude to the title of the movement: *Solar*.

In this third movement, ramps define the form mostly through the manipulation of cyclical harmonic progressions and orchestral changes. The orchestration shifts slowly through this movement, but there are enough changes that show us exactly where the different sections and transitional sections of the form lie. In the penultimate section leading up and into *Shining*, the full

⁷⁴Viet Cuong, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021.

ensemble plays large block chords together for the first time and for an extended period of time; Cuong calls this C minor chord the climax of the piece. I of dropping off after the climax like the rest of the movements, the music grows in volume and intensity until the brass instruments drop off at m. 430.

The piece ultimately ends with the four soloists playing one instrument together at the same time, contributing to the same texture and sound. As Cuong stated earlier, it acts as a message, that once we come together and learn to work together is how we unlock the potential of humanity and renewable energy, and that is the only we get to continue to see the sun shimmer and shine through working cooperatively towards renewable energy initiatives.

Orchestration

Indicators of changes within the form of *Re(new)al* ultimately happen through a combination of changes within the orchestration and the harmonic progression. In this movement, most of the changes rely on the harmonic progressions because the orchestration changes in the third movement move slowly. Within the ensemble, the orchestration stays nearly the same through the first two sections (Introduction and Melting). This orchestration consists of a repeated dotted quarter and eighth notes sounding a G major triad in the second marimba and the piano. The marimba and piano function as the motor within the tied whole notes and half notes in the rest of the ensemble. The soloists have broken entrances that create a composite melodic line that is spaced out and, as mentioned earlier, lengthens over time. The soloist's part starts repeating the lowered crotales on the snare more frequently and at a faster rate over time. In the introduction section, the crotales are lowered once in fifteen bars. In the Introduction section, the crotales are lowered onto the snare five times in twenty-three bars, with the last three occurring between mm. 382–386, towards the end of

the section and right before the transitional material from mm. 386–389. The main thing that progresses over the course of this section is the amount of people playing, as the initial chord progression grows in instrumentation and has most of the ensemble playing by m. 383.

As stated previously, the orchestration and musical content shifts incrementally at first. The first shift does not occur until m. 397, after the first full phrase of Rising. In Rising, the texture from the ensemble becomes more varied and also introduces a rhythmic figure that is soon to appear in the soloists' parts. With a pick-up to m. 397, isometric sixteenth note triplets make a return from the second movement in the woodwinds.

Figure 55: Isometric Sixteenth-note Triplets

The image shows a musical score for woodwinds, specifically measures 396 and 397. The score is written for four parts: Flute 1-2 (Fl. 1-2), Flute 3-4 (Fl. 3-4), Oboe 1 (Ob. 1), and Oboe 2 (Ob. 2). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins at measure 396 with a pick-up. In measure 397, all four parts play isometric sixteenth-note triplets. The dynamic markings are *mf* for Flute 1-2, Flute 3-4, and Oboe 2, and *pp* for Oboe 1. The measure number 397 is boxed at the top of the score.

The brass instruments continue to stay consistent with playing sustained tones but begin ascending glissandi in m. 400, with the ensemble percussionists and the left hand of the piano playing the same rhythm as before. However, the chords in the piano and ensemble percussionists do the opposite function as melting—they add a half step or whole step to one of the pitches in the chords to land the music in a new tonal center.

The second shift slowly begins to happen at 412, but only within the soloists' parts. This is when the soloists begin to incorporate sixteenth-note triplets into their part.

Figure 56: Soloists incorporate sixteenth-note triplets (mm. 411–412)

The image shows a musical score for measures 411 and 412. The score is written for four staves. The first staff is marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The second staff also has a forte 'f' dynamic. The third staff has a forte 'f' dynamic. The fourth staff has a forte 'f' dynamic. The music consists of sixteenth-note patterns. In measure 412, there are sixteenth-note triplets indicated by a '3' over the notes. The key signature has one flat (Bb major).

The instrumentation expands again at m. 415, right after an ascending sixteenth note figure that occurs in the fourth beat of m. 414 leading into a small transitional section. Suddenly, all the sixteenth note triplets in the woodwinds are in unison as opposed to being staggered like earlier, and almost the entire ensemble (with the exception of third and fourth trumpets) are playing a Bb major chord, with the soloists clinking metal pitches within the chord and with sixteenth note triplets. Rising undoes all the dropping that Melting called for in the harmonic structure, and leads the listener into the next section through harmonic ascension.

The fourth section is called Risen because the repetitive harmonies (a consistent set of four chords that repeat over the duration of two measures) stay within the same key built up to by the previous section. The chords are outlined in the right hand of the piano but also are surrounded by sustained pitches that are a part of the chord like the first Introduction section. Risen's section is not only denoted by harmony, but also by the fact that Cuong has the ensemble emphasize the fourth beat with a quarter note in mm. 423 and 425 leading up to the horn line. The horn line outlines the chord progression via quarter notes beginning at m. 427 and adds a strong emphasis on that progression. Once again, the entire ensemble lands on the downbeat of measure 430 with a Bb major chord, with

all the low woodwinds and brass playing a B \flat major chord with a quarter note, while the soloists sustain their sixteenth note triplet figures with a sustained chord from the woodwinds on top. The piano continues to arpeggiate through to the ensemble's end, and at the beginning of Shining (mm. 433), the sustained pitches in the ensemble move together as the harmony is reduced to two chords. Then, from m. 437, the ensemble moves to more stationary chords, sustaining pitches together, as a full ensemble at the same time, for the first time in the whole piece, holding an E \flat (a fourth above the B \flat sustain, with one more bar than the last one). Additionally, this piece ends the ensembles' playing with large block chords with all instruments contributing to the same texture for an extended period of time (more than two measures) for the first time with the low brass overlapping glissandi over each other. As mentioned earlier in this analysis, this section acts as a musical metaphor or message, in that once we come together and learn to arrive at the same place at the same time and work together in harmony, we will unlock the potential of our planet and the sun. Cuong's choice to end his piece the same way he started it, with only the soloists playing, also showcases the incredible virtuosity necessary to play in a hocket for the duration of an entire concerto.

Cyclical Harmonic Progressions

As mentioned earlier, the harmonic progressions in this movement are imperative to understanding the compositional tools that Cuong used to create this sonic landscape. Just like the other movements, Cuong ramps by utilizing CHP, but this time he slowly transforms the piece by manipulating texture and instrumentation instead of doing it with each section. Overall, the movement begins in G major and dances around G major for most of the piece, but ends in E \flat major. The introduction is less rhythmic and remains on a G major chord in the left-hand part of the piano and the second marimba part (see figure 25 below). As stated above, there are some sustained

notes from the other instruments that also outline a G major chord, while the soloists play an E-E-D in the first iteration of the melody. The eventually evolves into a motif with E-E-D-C#, then E-E-D-C#/F# throughout the movement.

Figure 57: Introduction to Solar

Adagietto ♩ = 72

The musical score for the introduction of 'Solar' is presented in a standard staff format. It includes five staves: Piano (p), Double Bass, Timpani, Crotalos, and Marimba 2. The tempo is marked 'Adagietto' with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The Piano part is the most active, playing a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The other instruments are mostly silent in this section.

Melting starts with the original G major chord, but turns into a G-B-C# chord for the first time halfway through m. 371, which then turns into an F#-B-C# chord which turns into an F#-A#-C# chord, and then repeats that chromatically descending progression starting from the G major again starting at m. 377. However, in the second repetition of this progression, Cuong melts a little bit further, dissolving the F#-A#-C# to an E-A-B to E-G#-B, then he jumps a half-step lower and lands on a C#-F#-B chord. Provided below are two figures that include both repetition of the chord progression’s “melting” qualities over the duration of this section of the form.

Figure 58: Melting Chords in mm. 370–375

The musical score for Figure 58 shows a chromatically descending chord progression. The chords are G-B-D, G-B-C#, F#-B-C#, and F#-A#-C#. The score is in 4/4 time and shows the progression over several measures.

Figure 59: Melting Chords in mm. 381–387

The musical score for Figure 59 shows a sequence of chords in mm. 381–387. The score is in 4/4 time and features a melodic line on a treble clef staff and a bass line on a bass clef staff. The chords are: G-B-D, G-B-C#, F#-B-C#, F#-A#-C#, E-A-B, and E-G#-B. A box labeled '383' is placed above the third measure of the score.

He outlines these progressions with coinciding, overlapping sustained pitches in the ensemble with dynamic swelling.

At m. 390, also known as the beginning of Rising, Cuong places another elongated G major chord, lasting for three and a half measures. He starts with a simple chord progression that goes from G major to a Gsus4 chord, Ab major with a lowered fifth, and an Ab major chord. This CHP happens two times, but instead of moving to the Ab-C-D chord, he moves to a first inversion C minor chord and begins “rising” in intervals of a whole step or half step from one chord to the next. This is what Cuong calls secondary dominants, mostly because they function in a sliding motion the same way that secondary dominant chords do, but they do not specifically spell secondary dominant chords. These chords are considered part of CHP because of how they are intervallically related and, thus, are cyclical in nature. These ascending intervals in conjunction with the ascending glissandi in the low brass creates the sensation of a slow sunrise, and mimics the effects of a shepherd tone, especially with the bass sustaining tones underneath.

Risen has two separate, repeated CHP, this time, not with an intervallic cycle (although they can still function that way), but in a very pop-like, repetitive manner. The first progression happens in mm. 417–422 and consists of the following chords: C minor - Bb major - G minor - Ab major chord progression, and this occurs over the duration of two measures, and happens 3 times in total. The second progression happens in mm. 423–432 and consists of the following chords: F minor - Eb

major/G - Ab major - Bb major. This progression happens over the course of two bars and happens three times in total. The final repetition in this progression lands on an elongated Bb major chord that lasts three bars. After the last time the progression happens, there is an extra AbM and C minor chord that occurs before the Bb, and the Bb ends up happening on the downbeat of bar 430.

Between mm. 430–433, the Bb is sustained with a fortepiano crescendo and a pianissimo crescendo roll from the China cymbal and suspended cymbal. Because of the elongated Bb after consistently repeating material, these few measures are jarring since there is no CHP happening for a moment. The music is stagnant for a moment, which is why the title “*Risen*” uses the past participle tense. This stagnancy also highlights all of the consistent cycling of the two types of CHP that has occurred in the piece up to this point.

In *Shining*, the final section, the sustained pitches in the ensemble move together as the harmony reduces to two chords starting at measure 433: EbM and AbM four times, and from m. 437, the ensemble moves to more stationary chords, sustaining pitches together, as a full ensemble at the same time, for the first time in the whole piece, holding an Eb (a fourth above the Bb sustain, with one more bar than the last one). This might leave a listener with a sense of suspense because this very short CHP repeats eight times, when previous chord progressions have not repeated more than three times. The CHP suddenly stops, again, for the second and last time, and leaves us with a swirling set of triplet–sixteenth–notes passed back and forth between the soloists. The sudden drop of the CHP, once again, highlights how much Cuong wrote the music in *Re(new)al* to push forward and ramp up to a final point. Finally, there is no ramping or leading; there is only arrival.

Conclusion

While using easily accessible, tonal harmonies, Cuong uses modern ways of approaching and using traditional chord functions. His harmonic structures are more like the progressions one might find in pop and jazz music rather than in Mozart and Beethoven, but that doesn't make his music any less structural or have any less integrity. In fact, it adds to his musical style and allows us access to a different type of wind ensemble music based on ramping, cyclical harmonic progressions, and a focus on manipulating texture through careful orchestration. Cuong's music creates a sense of movement and structure through groove of repetitive CHP, textural manipulation, and tension. The objective and function of Cuong's musical structure was to depict energy and human synergy, and a beautiful sonic sunrise, and through ramping, his *telos* was met.

Chapter 5: Interpretive and Logistical Considerations

For the conductor and musicians involved with performing *Re(new)al*, interpreting the score in an individualistic way might be difficult because of how clearly Cuong communicates his vision. When asked about any difficulties with rehearsals or interpretation, in my interview for this paper Jerry Junkin states:

Any time you do a concerto it doesn't matter what instrument the soloist is, you're always concerned about balance. In this particular piece, there wasn't as much of a concern because it's wonderfully scored. I wondered what the transfer would be if there were balance issues, because this piece lives in several formations, and you might wonder if maybe there might be some inherent balance problems, but there were not; they were all taken care of. It's also not just because it's a percussion concerto, because there are some very tender moments for the soloists. I think it's just that it's so well scored you don't have to deal with that.⁷⁵

Typically, when dealing with interpretations of music, conductors study a score and determine exactly what it is they want to hear: the perfect balance of a chord; where the phrases should grow, fall, begin, and end; determining the location of the climax within the music; and more.⁷⁶ As discussed in chapter four, Cuong's phrases develop through changes in orchestration and ramping, so instead of conductors determining the rise and fall of the phrases based on their own interpretations, everything is evident in the score.

With that said, the conductor can still make interpretations about the balance of any given chord, how dynamic shifts occur between phrases, and how to ramp up to the peak of each movement. Aside from what Cuong, Andrew Lyng from Epoch, Ian and Johnny of Sandbox Percussion, and Jerry Junkin have said about the piece, there is more to be explored about how determining the

⁷⁵Jerry Junnkin, interview by author, Zoom, April 2021

⁷⁶ Frank L. Battisti and Thomas C. Duffy. *The New Winds of Change: the Evolution of the Contemporary American Wind Band/Ensemble and Its Music*. Delray Beach, FL: Meredith Music Publications, 2018. 251.

different aspects of interpretation impact a performance. These interpretive considerations are what make musical performances from different ensembles worthwhile, because if everyone were to perform it the same exact way, it would lose its human element. This humanity, especially the spirit of cooperation, is the most important message behind *Re(new)al*.

In this chapter, the interpretation of Cuong's musical phrasing, visual aspects of how to perform the piece, and score instructions of the physical placement of instruments and soloists will be discussed. Considering the amount of time it would take to clear instruments off the stage between movements and the number of items that would need to be moved, the performance either necessitates a large enough stage for all three stations (one for each movement) or a very large stage crew that can quickly, stealthily, and efficiently move everything on and off between movements. Since the piece is written as *attacca*, allowing for no space between movements, it is imperative that the movement of the instruments, in general, does not get in the way of the music. Interpreting these notes for performers rehearsing and performing the piece is integral to how this piece is experienced by listeners. The visual contributions required of the ensemble help communicate cooperation and teamwork through difficult, physical demands, once again alluding to the teamwork theme in the piece, and the topic of each movement, to the audience. Extended techniques and repurposed sounds, for both the ensemble and soloists, along with how they should be observed to best retain Cuong's vision, will also be explored in this chapter.

Phrasing

Phrasing in *Re(new)al*, like many other pieces, is determined by motivic cells and harmonic progressions. Because of the fact that the delineation between phrase endings and beginnings are so clear, the music should simply guide you to the actual length of the phrase. The focused analysis in

chapter four provides clear information on phrase lengths and the resulting form of each movement. Additionally, Cuong’s music can be described as repetitive and hypnotic, but there are still definitive phrases within these repetitions, and they must be emphasized/recognized for this piece to sound complete.

Many of the motivic cells, if played flat and without emphasis, would not drive the piece forward. For example, the recurring “Blues Melody” in the second movement could be played as written. There are accents, articulation markings, and glissandi throughout the parts, along with the words, “brash and soloistically” as it begins. However, one might consider putting a slight crescendo after the accent on the fourth beat, or any note that lasts longer than an eighth note without an indicated staccato articulation throughout the phrase to lead into the next short note that occurs. This kind of dynamic growth on longer notes is often heard in big band settings and this section uses a Blues melody reminiscent of music played by that kind of ensemble, but is not directly written into the score.

Figure 60: Blues melody as written

Figure 61: Blues melody with interpretive suggestions

Another moment in which this kind of interpretation takes place by the performer and conductor occurs in the first movement. Starting at m. 26, the flute section plays sixteenth note and thirty-second note triplets and flourishes to each other with sustained tones in between. While there are dynamic markings included, this resembles a small chamber moment against the clinking crystal glasses and tinkling percussion and piano parts. The flute players are free to explore how they will pass this music onto each other, or not, through their movement and discussing whether or not they want to sound like four different instruments. Some questions to consider are: Will the flute players all begin their notes the same way? Will the flute players end their notes the same way? Will the flute players play this section as though they are passing the notes to each other, or as if they are all playing four separate lines of music? How dramatic will these dynamic changes be from cell to cell? Between mm. 22–66, throughout the duration of this section, is there an intended peak or is the flute section to stay stagnant in their set dynamics for that period of time? Throughout the piece, these kinds of decisions are up to the section and the conductor, and while the phrases are set in length due to the harmonic underpinnings, the movement and turn of each phrase leading up to the peak of each movement can be determined through asking these kinds of questions. One possible solution would be for the flute players to work and learn their parts together, just as the soloists do. Water, itself, is considered a pure compound substance; to fully realize this sonic imagery of “flooding in,” the flute players should try and sound like they are bonded together the way hydrogen and oxygen must be for water to exist.

Extended Techniques

Extended techniques appear throughout the work for both the ensemble and soloists. Cuong has a key in the beginning of his score, titled “Performance Notes,” wherein he describes each of the

different markings he uses to denote extended techniques or special articulations. He specifies how crescendos and decrescendos should be played. The following list comes directly from his score:

Figure 62: *Re(new)al Performance Notes*

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

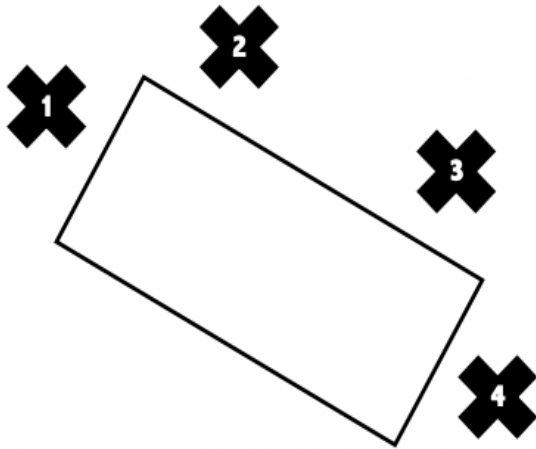
- ▲ - the hardest, sharpest accent. When used at the end of a slurred or tied wind phrase, the tongue should immediately stop the air to create a sudden release, without actually rearticulating.
- n. - *niente*
 - An accidental remains in effect for the remainder of its respective measure, unless cancelled out by a subsequent accidental. In addition, accidentals are exclusive only to the octave they are in.
 - Air sounds are used to emulate gusts of wind. These sounds are notated with x and hollow diamond noteheads, with x noteheads used for quarter, dotted, quarter, and eighth notes, and hollow diamonds used for half, dotted half, and whole notes. In addition, a special clef is used to designate air sounds from normal, pitched playing. For the air sounds blow air into the instrument without creating a pitch. Use any fingering (or lack of one) that achieves the loudest air sound.
 - Crescendos and decrescendos that have a flared beginning or end shape indicate to save most of the dynamic contrast for the beginning or end of the hairpin. This is also sometimes referred to as a "trumpet bell" shaped hairpin.
 - Harmonic glissandi are used in the second movement in the bass clarinet, tenor sax, and bari sax parts. For a tutorial on this technique, please visit Earspasm Music's Youtube channel and for the video titled "Harmonic Glissando: So you want to be a Bass Clarinet player." [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mah7O2RHW8Q>] The use of this sound in this piece was inspired by saxophonist Leo Pellegrino of Too Many Zooz.
 - All glissandi (in the trombones) are to be performed over the full durations of the indicated notes. Strive to play them as gradually and evenly as possible.
 - Harmon mute (in the trumpets): a "+" symbol indicates closing the bell with the hand, and "o" symbol indicates opening the bell. Shifts between open and closed should always be as gradual as possible.
 - Amplification of the double bass is recommended for the second movement of the piece, particularly during the two pizzicato solos (m. 233 and 309). This can be done with a pickup/amp, or with a microphone signal sent to the house speakers.

Cuong is very intentional throughout the score in what he asks from the musicians. He has dynamics markings in almost every instrument's entrance, and descriptive, as well as direct, language to help clue the performer into understanding his intent. He uses words like, "hypnotic" and "brash" alongside directions for sustained tones like "flutter tongue" and "stagger breathe."

Visual Aspects

Cuong's instructions at the beginning of the piece include a guide on the placement of instruments as well as the four soloists. Because the soloists' instruments change from movement to movement, the set up naturally changes as well. This is another form of virtuosity that Cuong wrote specifically because he knew Sandbox Percussion was capable of doing it and it would add to the performance, which is why a large space is necessary. The first movement calls for a table, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 63: I. Hydro - soloists' set up



For this set up, Cuong writes, “The four soloists will sit at a table to toast the glasses. Percussion 1 and 2 are paired, and Percussion 3 and 4 are paired.” He also notes that the eight crystal glasses used are amplified with two microphones: one for each pair.

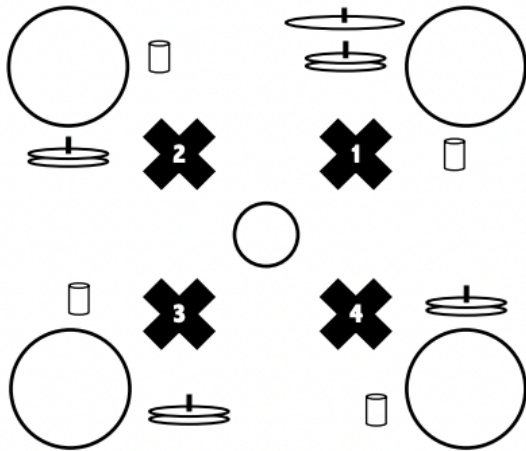
The performer’s approach and demeanor at the table contributes to emphasizing the visuals and the meaning behind playing the glasses. Andrew Lynge recalls his performance with Epoch for both the Dallas Winds and the University of Texas at Austin and some of the special steps that Jerry Junkin took:

Jerry decided to hire a choreographer, Andrea Ariel, for our rehearsals, which was really hip, and she was with a dance studio... All four of us [in Epoch] are very visual, so if you see the second movement, you’ll see us all bobbing our heads up and down to the music, but we obviously can’t do that in the first movement, because we’d spill water... We worked on our posture, simple head movements, eye-contact, and expressions with her to try and draw out as much from that performance as possible. She made us realize that it starts with how we pick up the glasses, and we were told to pick them up as if we were at a very fancy banquet.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Andrew Lynge, interview by author, April 2021.

For the second movement, Cuong creates a physical representation of a wind turbine with a shared snare drum and four different kick drums, as shown in the figure below:

Figure 64: II. Wind - soloists' set up



In explaining this set up, Cuong writes, “The shared snare drum (played with each soloist’s left hand) is set up in the center of the quartet, with the kick drums and hi-hats surrounding it in a circle.” Since the players’ left hands are being used on the snare, the group rotates counter-clockwise around the center snare drum. The players end up at different drums at certain points, but should ultimately land on their original kick drum. Throughout the entire second movement, the physical movement of the players emulates a wind turbine, representing the blades that spin around the center axis, which, in this case, is a snare drum. This formation is utilized to emphasize the notated movement within the score entitled “spin choreography;” this marking is written beginning at m. 180, as seen below in figure 65.

Figure 65: II. Wind - spin

The image shows a musical score for four drummers, labeled Dr. 1, Dr. 2, Dr. 3, and Dr. 4. Each part is titled "spin choreography" and marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The notation is complex, featuring syncopated rhythms with various note values and rests. Dr. 1 and Dr. 3 have similar patterns, while Dr. 2 and Dr. 4 have more intricate, overlapping rhythms. The score is presented on four staves, each with a drum set icon at the beginning.

According to both Sandbox Percussion and Andrew Lynge from Epoch Percussion, this section is the most technically difficult part of the piece for the percussion soloists. Lynge recalls:

The most difficult part was definitely the spin in the second movement, getting that together and making it correct is hard... We ended up creating check-points around the drum, so by so-and-so measure, we'd be at this kick drum, or someone would be in between kick drums, and to get faster and faster, we had to figure out how to walk while keeping the tempo the same in all of our hocketed parts.⁷⁸

There are two moments within the movement where the soloists are asked to play aerosol cans to mimic the function of opening and closing noise gates in a music production setting. Lynge talks about how adding a bit more attention to how the aerosol cans made a difference for the performers:

For the transition from the second movement into the third movement, where we pick up the air cans and play with the bassist, Andrea encouraged us and worked with us to do some flowing movements with the air cans to further accentuate the rhythms we were playing. She also encouraged us to look at each other as we passed rhythms off to each other, and that really helped us to feel like we were one soloist, together, even when playing something like spray cans...⁷⁹

Listening to and watching UT Austin's performances reveal that the soloists don't just hold up the aerosol cans. Their movements give an illusion of shape to the sound, especially towards the end of

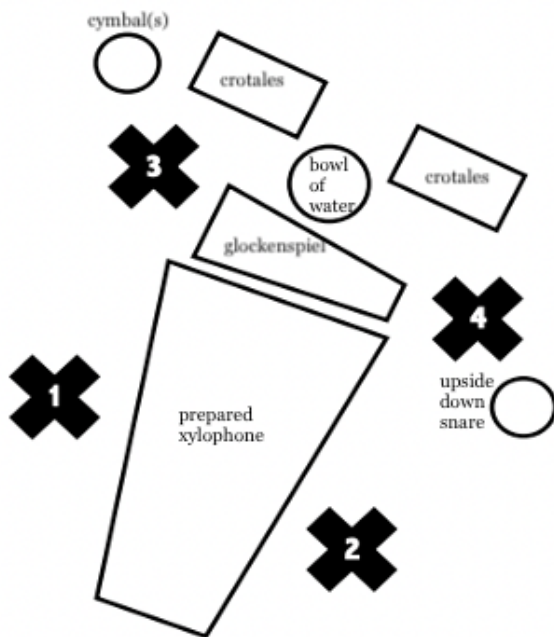
⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

the movement, and listening to the recording without the visual aspects involved does not have the same effect in this section.

The last movement, *Solar*, sets up some of the instruments such that they have to be played “upside down.” The instruments listed for the soloists in this section include: upside down snare drum, prepared xylophone with aluminum foil on resonators, crotales’ lower octave (tied to a string and accompanied by water so that they can be submerged), suspended cymbal, China cymbal, and a shared glockenspiel. While some of the instruments are set up correctly for two of the soloists, the other two must play the same mallet instrument set-up from the other side, forcing them to play it upside down.

Figure 66: III. Solar – soloists’ set up



This setup is meant to depict a makeshift solar panel with mallet instruments. There is no choreography written in the score for this movement, so the set up alone does not add any emphasis

to the music itself, aside from allowing the soloists to interact together in a more intimate setting than if they were to play on their own. In the same interview with Lynge, he emphasized how the choreographer⁸⁰ really helped them to move in a musical way, even in the third movement. He specifically talks about the gentle care that went into dipping crotales into water, as well as being coached on how to bow the instruments:

In the third movement, Andrea had us really move our bodies to emphasize the music at hand, she asked us to think about the beautiful big chords and the long tones that come out of that piece. It was interesting coming from a non-musician, but everything she said made so much sense and just added more to the performance. She told us to be thoughtful about how we pulled the sound out of the instruments we were playing, to dip the crotales carefully, to pull the sound out of the mallets with the bow. It made a big difference, visually, too, looking back at it.⁸¹

Intentional playing helped the visual aspects of their performance throughout the entire work. While playing instruments is always an art form, it is not always a visually artistic form. Watching the recorded performance reveals that Epoch's arms float in the air for a moment after they pull the sound out of each bar and when they finish a unison line on the center snare drum, instilling a magical, ethereal visual element to the performance. The amount of care involved in how they approach dipping a crotale into the water reinforces what to listen for in the music, and these special effects are among what make *Re(new)al* sound so refreshing.

While hiring a choreographer to help your soloists is optional, many of the different visual aspects listed in the score are essential to making the piece's performance complete. Adding that visual layer and choreographed component takes this concept to another level. In our interview, Johnny from Sandbox Percussion said:

⁸⁰Andrea Ariel of Andrea Ariel Dance Theatre, <https://www.arieldance.org/>.

⁸¹Andrew Lynge, interview by author, April 2021.

... When I think of how hockets work really well, it's not just an athletic thing, unless you're spinning around a snare drum in a circle and going faster and faster. Hockets are also this idea of reading someone else's mind and playing as, no longer just part of the equation, but playing as if you are everyone, and everyone is you.⁸²

Part of what makes the piece so special is how virtuosic the soloists' parts are and the way they move represents a high level of commitment to cooperation and teamwork that Cuong wishes to communicate with the piece.

⁸²Sandbox Percussion, interview by author, April 2021.

Chapter 6: Further Suggestions for Research and Conclusion

Further Suggestions for Research

This document seeks to help a conductor feel more prepared in programming and rehearsing this piece for the first time. There is always further research to be done on any given piece of music; this chapter intends to identify some other elements of the piece that were not discussed or studied in this dissertation.

The first thing to consider is a more in-depth look at the different versions of this piece (chamber orchestra, orchestra, chamber winds). While the multiple iterations are mentioned throughout this dissertation, there is no in-depth exploration or information on the minute differences in form and musical content between each version, Cuong discusses adaptive processes of orchestration in his dissertation but does not explore the advantages for the performers/conductors, while my document focuses mostly on the wind ensemble version. In knowing the differences regarding form, rehearsal issues, interpretive decisions, and challenges, we will be able to more quickly glean the benefits of performing each version (outside of the timbral changes that might prove obvious).

Another suggestion for research is to analyze this piece with a more in-depth and all-encompassing approach in mind. The document includes a discretized analysis of three elements of Viet's music, including form, harmonic structure, and orchestration/texture. A detailed analysis of how he passes through different spectral landscapes by manipulating frequency vectors would be helpful in finding more patterns in his compositional style.

In addition to *Re(new)al*, Cuong's catalog is full of potential for further study. He has several concerti, orchestra, wind ensemble, and larger-scale chamber works that, to date, have occasioned no formal scholarly analysis or written research:

Wind Ensemble Works:

- *Thu Diến* (2021)
- *Tuba Concerto* (2019)
- *Moth* (2013)
- *Sound and Smoke* (2011)

Orchestra Works:

- *Extra(ordinarily) Fancy* (2019)
- *Neon* (2016)
- *The Wild Woods: Prelude to Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf* (2016)
- *Nothing If Not* (2015)

Chamber works:

- *Explain Yourself* (2019) - Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Piano
- *Fine Lines* (2019) - Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano
- *Commitment Bed* (2016) - String Quartet
- *Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine* (2015) - Percussion Quartet
- *Prized Possessions* (2014-15) - Saxophone Quartet
- *Trains of Thought* (2012) - Oboe, Bassoon, Piano⁸³

Final Thoughts and Conclusion

This document discusses and explains several topics: Cuong's life, musical style, the role of *Re(new)al* among other percussion ensemble concerti grossi, the commissions of *Re(new)al*, a focused analysis of Cuong's use of ramping, and interpretive considerations.

The second chapter ultimately reveals that Cuong's life, as someone who was born in 1992, affected his learning process and style of writing; his music is reflective of the sounds he heard on television, and growing up with computers infused his music with compositional devices influenced by computer-generated processed effects. He distinctly recalls his first time saving a Finale file onto a floppy disk as a young student, and because his whole life was spent with technology, his affinity for

⁸³ Viet, Cuong. "Viet Cuong

electronic effects made its way into his compositions. Additionally, a catalog of his music from the past six years with a chart that breaks down his compositional traits in conjunction with his musical studies shows that his music is reflective of with whom he studied.

The third chapter comprises an examination of the commissions of the different versions of *Re(new)al* and the role that this piece contributes to the context of percussion chamber concerto grosso. Understanding the motive behind the commission may provide more of an impetus to program *Re(new)al*. Knowing the context behind how the piece was commissioned and how four versions came to be can provide some insight in why one version may work for a performance while others might not, giving more variability as to whether or not someone can program the piece.

An analysis of the form, an examination of what makes the form easily discernible, the development of cyclical harmonic progressions involved in each movement, as well as a look at Cuong's orchestration choices reveal some aspects of what makes Cuong's music so special. The fourth chapter exists to answer the question: "What makes his music feel and sound so magical?" The concept of ramping, or building up tension, is a tool used by many composers, but how each composer chooses to approach the climax of a piece is unique. The fourth chapter reveals how Cuong pays particular attention to his orchestration and cyclical harmonic progressions to manipulate tension in his music. Serendipitously, his orchestration and harmonic choices not only reveal tension and release points in his music, but when paired with counting measures and number of repetitions, these elements also inevitably reveal each phrase, which ultimately determines the form of the piece and where the peak of each phrase should be.

Many of the interpretive decisions in *Re(new)al* are so straightforward because Cuong writes with so much detail in the score. However, there is considerable room for technical and logistical nuance in performance. Paired with the analysis, the interpretative considerations mentioned in the fifth chapter might help future conductors of this piece see how *Re(new)al* has been performed by other ensembles. There are moments where the quartet might need more time because they're transitioning to another setup, and then there are others where the conductor needs to decide whether or not a specific section will be choreographed. Chapter five provides ideas for adding to any performance of the piece beyond what is in the written score, specifically for the soloists; *Re(new)al* provides multiple opportunities to make an emotional, moving performance through the director's imagination and attention to small details.

Overall, *Re(new)al* is a robust, dynamic piece that utilizes extended techniques, employs masterful orchestration, and tells a deep, meaningful message of humanity. Cuong's choice of orchestration and cyclical harmonic progressions combine to create tension as the music reaches the apex of each movement. Through all of this ramping, Cuong creates a musical energy to help each movement rise and fall. Conversations with Sandbox Percussion, the soloists for whom the orchestral version was dedicated, reveals that *Re(new)al* was written as an "anti-solo," purposely constructed entirely through a hocket, showing everyone how beautiful teamwork can be both in music and when solving one of the world's biggest problems. As Cuong states: "It's about humanity coming together and achieving great things, things they wouldn't really be able to achieve on their own..." An optimistic message living within an ecopolitical landscape, which is typically fraught with terror, brings us the opportunity to do what music does best: bring folks from different walks of life together to make something beautiful. I hope that this dissertation helps aid future performers in their pursuit to perform this piece, and that conductors will continue to program this piece for many years to come.

APPENDIX A

Transcript of Interview with Viet Cuong, Composer of *Re(new)al*

Zoom Interview from April 21, 2021

JANET SONG KIM: So, let's start off with this: What do you do for a living? How long have you been doing it? And What's been keeping you busy lately?

VIET CUONG: Yeah! I'm a composer, I write music for organizations that people think of as classical music, orchestra, wind ensemble, chamber, solo music. I've been doing it- it's hard to say how long I've been a professional composer because I've always made it a goal of mine to do what I call a cross-fade between being a "student-composer" and professional. But I've been writing music for a long time, since I was like... I'd say like eleven? ten or eleven? I thought that the pandemic would kind of give me time, or that it'd be hard to fill it with projects, and it kind of built itself up and I found ways. So I've written a lot of chamber and solo music lately. I just finished this cello octet at like 5 in the morning last night. I'm also working on now getting back into the large ensemble stuff that has plans to be premiered at the end of this year and after.

JANET SONG KIM: Going back to you starting at like ten or eleven years old, we're going to be chatting a bit about your family and upbringing. Where did you do most of your growing up and what was it like?

VIET CUONG: Yeah, uhm, I moved a lot as a kid, or rather, my parents and my family did - wasn't just me. Haha! I was born in California, actually pretty close to LA, in Simi Valley and then moved to Arizona when I was three and then Georgia when I was six. I spent most of my childhood in Georgia, it's where most of my memories are as a kid.... And you know, I had mixed feelings about growing up in Georgia, for some reasons that are probably obvious, but I feel very fortunate that I went to a high school that had a really amazing, incredible band program. Marietta. My parents just, by chance, bought a house in the school district. It wasn't a thing where they were like, "Oh I want Viet to be in the Lassiter band" or anything like that. It was a school with good test scores, apparently, but it wasn't the BEST test scores, but they couldn't find a house in that area that they could afford, so it was third on their list but it was good enough. But obviously, Georgia is a conservative state, and I felt like an outsider in many, many ways growing up. I kind of credit music and the band program where I found my place and my sense of belonging. It was the first time I felt like there was something for me, and that was in band.

JANET SONG KIM: I know that you've likely created a musical family for yourself, but at home with your immediate family did anyone play music? Or are you the first musician to come out of your family?

VIET CUONG: I am the first. My parents were immigrants from Vietnam, and Western Classical Music wasn't a thing they did. I think my mom might have learned a little bit of piano because she went to a French School in Vietnam. But, very little. I think she knew how to play Fur Elise when I was little, and it would drive me crazy as a kid because that's all she would play. *AND NOT THE FULL THING*— just the (insert motif here). But otherwise, no one else in my family did music, not my aunts or uncles, or anyone. My mom put me in piano lessons, because, well, my

mom is an engineer and my dad was a physicist, so they thought that it would stimulate my brain and make me, you know, one day get into science, but obviously, it backfired. *laughter*

JANET SONG KIM: If your family wasn't musical, did they have any reservations about you becoming a full-time composer and pursuing this track?

VIET CUONG: *Oh yeah...* It wasn't until the very end of high school that they just realized that it was what I wanted to do, it was what I was going to do, and that there was nothing else I could do.

JANET SONG KIM: Right, because by that point you'd already put so much time and effort into it...

VIET CUONG: Yeah, it comes from, really, the fact that my parents came here with like nothing. My dad was basically a street kid in Vietnam, and didn't really have a family. My mom had a large family and many siblings, but after the fall of Saigon, it was all gone. And she was one of the boat people. She was at a refugee camp in Malaysia and she came here with a paper bag and some underwear and maybe \$20. That was it! They worked so hard so that my brother and I could have a good life and follow all of our dreams. I think when you do that as a parent, you kind of envision what your kids' dreams will be because you want for them what you couldn't have, and what you couldn't have is what you want. They just didn't know what being a musician was, my dad was like worried that I was going to become a Rockstar, and he was like "Musicians do lots of drugs!" ...which, you know, maybe he's right, but I don't think he fully realized what I envisioned for myself...and my mom wanted me to become an orthodontist or an ophthalmologist. I have a younger brother who's an engineer that works at apple. He did what they kind of envisioned for us, except he doesn't have a doctorate. They had to settle for a Master's from Stanford.

JANET SONG KIM: Oh, my goodness... Asian parents really do have some high, high standards sometimes, don't they?

VIET CUONG: But that really brings it back to the fact that it's their way of showing love.

JANET SONG KIM: Yes, exactly. Let's go back a little bit, we talked about you starting with music at the age of ten or eleven. Is that the age where you started writing or playing music? What was the timeline for that?

VIET CUONG: I started piano when I was five, I think? I was really young, I don't really remember much... the only thing I remember from my piano lessons, which were Suzuki, was that my mom would convince me to take lessons by promising me with something from the vending machine at the Suzuki place...and I always got the Twizzlers! But I mean, what five-year-old wants to practice? It takes a truly exceptional child to want to practice when they're five, and I wasn't that. But it was also because the Suzuki method is so strict; you play lightly row for six months and then you move onto the next thing. You know, I loved Disney movies as a kid and all I wanted to play was Part of your World, Beauty and the Beast, and they wouldn't let me play that music...and I felt that it didn't let me explore what I liked. I think maybe if I got to, I would've liked to have practiced more. The way I'd fool my mom into thinking I was practicing was by making up my own music. I would just improvise on piano, and my first compositions were these horrible A natural minor improvisations. I would have them in my head and I wouldn't write them down. Then when I got to

middle school, I joined band and played percussion. I remember counting rests a lot as a percussionist and I kind of heard how band pieces were put together by listening to the rehearsal. Like the band director would be like, “Flutes and Clarinets” and I’d think to myself: ‘oh they play together a lot.’ and then they would say “horns and Saxophones” and I learned the instruments’ roles by doing that. And then I went to this Lassiter Band Recruiting Weekend Camp for middle schoolers. And Catharine Bushman, she did a workshop on Finale notepad, and I remember thinking to myself, “Oh this is what I’ve been needing!” Because I had all these pieces on piano that I would never write down. So I downloaded Finale notepad, and I had things backed up on a floppy disk. *laughter*

JANET SONG KIM: Oh my goodness, wow!!! *laughter*

VIET CUONG: Yeah *laughter* I would go home and I would try to write out and imitate the pieces we were playing in band. So if we were playing like Robert W. Smith’s “Into the Storm” I would go home and write a piece about a storm that had a lot of ostinatos. I just taught myself a lot of things. I’m teaching instrumental arranging right now, and just taught wind instrument transpositions this past Monday... And the way I learned these transpositions was through this moment: I remember opening up the finale file and asking myself, “Why does the clarinet have two sharps in the key signature? That’s weird.” But I just ignored it and I would just write it as if it were a concert pitch score...but then there were like parallel major seconds everywhere, and then I eventually found that if I put the note on the staff a whole step higher, it would play back correctly. And then I learned that for the alto saxophone, that if I read it in bass clef then it’s the pitches I want. These were the things I sort of just learned on my own...because my parents were supportive of me taking piano lessons and percussion lessons, but they didn’t know anything about composition lessons. I don’t think they knew that was a thing- that you could study with someone on how to compose. So i didn’t have any teachers until I got to college. But it was a hobby of mine, I’d try to go home and write pieces for band. I was a typical band kid who was really into it and just wanted to write music.

JANET SONG KIM: When you were getting started, aside from Robert W. Smith, were there any other composers that you looked up to? Or was it primarily all just what you heard in band class?

VIET CUONG: It was mostly band music, because that’s how I knew that you could be a composer. I knew that most of the composers we were playing music by, they were alive, and wrote pieces, and would have new releases on JW Pepper. I knew that it could be a career for myself. I think if I were in orchestra and we were just playing the classics, I wouldn’t necessarily know. I remember in high school we played Frank Ticheli’s *Apollo Unleashed* and there’s this one lick, *sings lick* with like, triplets in the bassoons and tenor sax, and I remember thinking “that is the most amazing color combination.” and Frank Ticheli is a master of orchestrating. I’d heard things like that and thought to myself, “Oh you can combine instruments like that in ways that are kind of unexpected.” So yeah, I was and still am a very big fan of Frank Ticheli. I remember listening to a lot of Frank Ticheli’s *American Elegy* all the time, back in the day. I remember really liking David Gillingham, James Barnes Chance, and what’s funny is that our Marching Band shows were what exposed me to other music that wasn’t band music, like we did Aaron Copland show my sophomore year. That’s where I learned what *Fanfare for the Common Man* and the *Promise of Living* were. One year, our ballad was “Solitaire” by Malcom Arnold. It’s kind of weird, how like the “bandiest” thing, marching band, is what exposed me to music that wasn’t band music. I remember we did a

Bernstein show, and that was kind of my first exposure to *West Side Story*, as well. Mostly, I was a band kid, I didn't know who Prokofiev was. I mean, I knew who some composers because of piano music, so I was and still am a huge fan of Chopin. I mean, how can you play piano and not appreciate Chopin, you know? Chopin and Rachmaninoff, but I didn't really know orchestral composers as much.

JANET SONG KIM: With that said, are there any new or old orchestral composers that you look up to now?

VIET CUONG: Yeah! Dead ones, *laughter* Beethoven- I think everyone says Beethoven but he is as prominent in our field for a reason. Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, Ravel, Stravinsky, Debussy.

JANET SONG KIM: A lot of twentieth century composers...

VIET CUONG: Yeah... I'm not big into Romantic tone poems, but I like Brahms a lot. Living composers, John Adams is one of my favorites, Louie Andriessen, Kaija Saariaho, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and a lot of my teachers as well, like Steve Mackey, Donnacha Dennehey, Kevin Puts, Jennifer Higdon, and I feel very lucky to have gotten to be able to study with a lot of people that I look up to.

JANET SONG KIM: Speaking of the people you look up to, it's really interesting because several people describe your music in very different ways. I don't know if you know that --

VIET CUONG: I don't *laugh* Tell me more!

JANET SONG KIM: Yeah! Like, some will argue that you are very post-minimalist, and some will actually argue that you're inspired by spectralist music, also. Especially because of your studies with Donnacha Dennehey, but also because of how you manipulate the sonority of your pieces. So, could you describe your own style in your own words, regardless of what scholars say about you?

VIET CUONG: I don't know. I think what I've done is pretty eclectic, I like to explore a lot of things with my music so it's kind of hard to categorize sometimes, because I do have some pieces that are more post-minimalist, I have some pieces that are more and very spectral-inspired. I have pieces that combine lots of things, so maybe just eclectic is a good word, or eclecticism or something. My friend Nils Landsberg wrote his doctoral dissertation on a piece that he commissioned from me called *Bull's-Eye*, and I've not read anything people have written about my music other than the occasional concert review, but he did a presentation on me, and I was sitting in the audience like, "Wow this is so weird." But during his presentation he said, "Oh there have been phases in Viet's career so far, he had a phase in his early twenties and now he's in a new one where he's exploring more whimsical things." And I think that's true. Like, my first band piece that caught on is called *Sound and Smoke* and when I hear it, I have a lot of good memories associated with that piece for obvious reasons, but I don't think I could ever write a piece like that today, I just don't know how I would. Even the piece I wrote two years after that, called *Moth*-- if someone said that they wanted another *Moth*, I don't know how I'd do that. I'd probably just tell them to commission someone else! *laughter* Like, when I move on from something I kind of just feel like I've already

done that, so it's time to move on. Now, a lot of my recent pieces I like to explore whimsical things, like my double oboe concerto and I have a lot of fun with extended techniques nowadays.

JANET SONG KIM: Yeah! You absolutely use a lot of extended techniques in *Re(new)al* for sure. With all of your eclecticism, what drives you to compose in the first place? What inspires you the most?

VIET CUONG: I think there are just a lot of things that I want to try out. Like, I come up with ideas for pieces that I have in the back of my mind, like the double oboe concerto. Like for years I had it in my head that I wanted to compose a concerto for two oboes where one of the oboes play a lot of multiphonics while the other one doesn't. Then, I got to do it one day! I just like to surprise people, too, and try to look at things in ways that people haven't looked at a lot. Like, for reference, I take pride in the fact that my orchestration in my wind band pieces sounds like me. Maybe some people like it, but it's me. I also feel inspired by just getting to do what I've always wanted to do. How could I not be inspired if I wanted to be a composer from the time I was fourteen? It was a dream of mine to be commissioned. I remember I went to Midwest when I was fifteen, and it was with my High School Percussion Ensemble, we performed, we were dragging marimbas upstairs and I remember it was my first time going and I remember carrying that heavy ass programs, and seeing all these composers in the book, and thinking to myself, "Wouldn't it be amazing if one day I could have a piece played here and to be in this world?" So how I could I not be inspired by being able to live this dream that I had. It's not the easiest thing in the world to do, you know, to be a musician, but it's really worth it.

JANET SONG KIM: Could you tell me about what you're thinking about when you start a piece, in general? Like, when you receive a commission what goes through your mind?

VIET CUONG: With every piece, I want there to be that one thing that's like a thesis of a piece. It's the thing I want the audience member to walk away thinking and remembering the piece, and remembering it for that reason. So, like, my snare drum solo. I want people to walk away from that thinking, "Oh that's the piece that uses a plastic comb and a credit card." For *Re(new)al*, that's the piece with the wine glasses or the choreography. I try to have some sort of either a memorable concept behind the piece or a very memorable sound, or a memorable visual element that acts as a seed that I plant, and the piece grows out of that. I think if you start with that one idea instead of sitting down at the piano and coming up with chords, people don't remember "that was the piece with those chords," unless it's a trained musician that says, "I remember that piece it uses the neapolitan chord a lot!" But the average listener isn't going to think that way, so I think if you start with something that's really striking and bold, in whatever way, and center a piece around that, that's how I approach it.

JANET SONG KIM: Would you say that you center your piece around trying to make it accessible or memorable to general audiences as well, as opposed to just catering to classical music aficionados?

VIET CUONG: Yeah, it's really important to me to do that. It's a hard thing because your audience is always going to be different based on what concert you're at, what the other pieces are, what the venue is, all that sort of stuff. When you go through so many years of school and you're a trained professional musician you're not the naive kid you once were, so it's kind of hard to sometimes put yourself in the shoes of an audience member who doesn't know much about music

when what you do is think about music most of the day. I try to think of it like I'm writing for an audience of myself, but not of myself as I currently am, but more of myself when I was like thirteen when I knew some stuff about music, but I didn't know really that much at all, but I still loved it and didn't know why. I try to write with the potential to be inspired in mind.

JANET SONG KIM: That's really considerate, I love that. When you wrote *Re(new)al*, I know there are three versions and there were multiple commissions involved with just that piece-

VIET CUONG: There's a fourth version now! I just finished it last week.

JANET SONG KIM: Oh! that's good to know! I'll put that in my dissertation, too.

VIET CUONG: Yeah, it's a chamber-winds version. So, the Vanderbilt Wind Ensemble commissioned it, and they're going to be doing a recording session for it next month. I'm actually going to drive out there and get the COVID test and be there and it's going to be the first time I get to be with a band since a year ago. So yeah, that'll be really fun, it's two flutes, two clarinets, bassoon, sax quartet, two trumpets, two horns, two trombones, two tubas, section percussion piano and double bass. I am excited for it because I think it captures the good stuff, I really like about the original chamber version and combines it with elements from the wind band and orchestral version.

JANET SONG KIM: When writing *Re(new)al*, did you have a specific form in mind or is it all through-composed?

VIET CUONG: I knew that it would be in a three-movement format of Water, Wind, and Solar but it's honestly just all through-composed.

JANET SONG KIM: It's interesting because I've analyzed your piece, and it has very distinct sections, which you knew you were doing because you constructed it after all, but it creates a very specific form, and so I wasn't sure if you were thinking, "I'm going to piece it together like this" or "I'm just going to write it and it's going to turn out the way it does."

VIET CUONG: I'll jump from one section to another, if I get bored writing one thing I'll go to another thing, just to try and not waste time. It's kind of pieced together in that way. I don't really plan pieces out before writing. Some composers will be like, "I'm going to map out the whole piece on paper and color code it" and I just don't do that, because once I start writing a piece, I find that the piece will ask different things of you than you originally thought. That's the cool thing about writing.

JANET SONG KIM: You have three movements, what in each movement do you believe represents the specific concepts you've presented with the titles?

VIET CUONG: Well, the hydro movement, I try to be very clear when I'm trying to represent something. So there's quite literally some water in the wine glasses, but aside from the very literal representation of water... When I think of that movement, I think of when you toast glasses with someone, it's a thing you do to celebrate something together; whether that be to celebrate the fact that you're together, a special occasion, or a milestone, or whatever-- you usually do it with other people. Unless I'm tuning wine glasses and testing them for a piece *laughter* So, in a way, it's symbolic of celebrating not just hydro power, but of renewable energy in general. It's like we're

toasting something for renewable energy. I also think of that movement as them starting off along and then the accompaniment starts to sound like them, gives their sounds to them, and eventually submerges them in their sound. It's like water is gradually flooding in. In the wind movement, more than any sort of sound thing, it's really more of the formation in that they're placed to look like a wind turbine and that they actually spin around the axis of the snare drum that represents wind turbines. There are air signs, of course, but I think you can't underestimate the impact and power of a visual cue.

JANET SONG KIM: It almost sounds like you write a doppler effect in the second movement.

VIET CUONG: Yes, I did that on purpose. That echoing sort-of melody? *plays motif on piano*

JANET SONG KIM: Yes! And the pitch sort of descends with each reiteration and as its echoing...

VIET CUONG: That's just me being inspired by electronic music, and a processed effect you can put on a live instrument, where you play something and it echoes back. So you can make the echo a dotted eighth note, and if you put it against a quarter note it creates a cool cross rhythm so that's what I was trying to achieve with a lot of those echoing things. I mean, the first movement has some of that, too. I think in the first movement it starts with like the dotted eighth sixteenth rhythms, right? That's a dotted quarter note, because it's in a compound meter. And then the echo of each of those parts occurs in maybe the piano and the xylophone parts, the C is echoed with quarter notes, so it's as if I'm setting the echo to be quarter notes against the dotted quarter note. And then when the beat changes to quarter notes, like in the 8/8 bars, where I sneak in a quarter note or the 7/8 bars where I sneak in two quarter notes and eventually becomes a 3/4, then the echo, instead of being a quarter note, because it'd be boring if the echo was a quarter note when the existing rhythm is quarter-note based, the echo becomes a dotted eighth which is what you mention, which is what creates that weird doppler effect. So, I have fun with cross-rhythms and stuff, it ultimately creates a texture around it and it's just a fun way to play with that.

JANET SONG KIM: For the second movement, we were just talking about the cross rhythms and creating processed effects for acoustic instruments, and I also noticed that it sounds like drum'n'bass music. Was that intentional?

VIET CUONG: Oh yeah, I just wanted to write a drum'n'bass track, but instead of it being performed electronically, it's performed by an orchestra or a wind ensemble. I love drum n bass music, and it's almost a nostalgic thing for me because it was so big in the 90s. Like you couldn't turn on a TV show with drum n bass not being the background music. So, it's kind of me wanting to explore a type of music from my childhood. What I did was I analyzed a bunch of drum n bass samples, and transcribed like eighty of them? And basically did research. If you want to write music in a specific style, you have to research it so you know what you're doing. So I was researching a lot of this music, and then knowing what characteristics of those drumbeats are that I've heard my whole life, but most of them are just so fast that you just can't know what they're doing. So I basically wrote my own beat based on what I think is a classic drum'n'bass beat, but I made mine a little crazier just because, well, it's a concerto and four people, so I don't have to worry about one

person being able to play. That's also a theme of the piece, too, though- in that there are no solos in the piece.

JANET SONG KIM: Yeah, I mean that was going to be one of my questions - did you mean to make the entire piece a hocket? Was that on purpose?

VIET CUONG: Yes. Because it's also the message behind a hocket. I'll say like when I was writing the original version the Albany Symphony brought me to Schenectady and I met someone working at GE Renewable Energy at their headquarters. They showed me around, they showed me this room that had all these computers that controlled wind turbines all over the world, and it kind of struck me, like "How many people are working together to create clean energy and to make it possible?" I wanted the message of the piece to obviously be about renewable energy, but on a deeper level, it's about how when we work together, we can make impossible things happen. So it's like taking the drumset beat that's impossible, but it's made possible by sharing it with other players. Same with the toasting glasses- it's like when you have your own two glasses, you can only do that, but when you have someone else to toast with you can make it music. It's also the storytelling of the piece: they start with a duo partner that they toast glasses with, but they don't interact with the other two... But then in the second movement, then they come together as four people with one snare drum and they're interacting altogether. Then, in the last movement they share the glockenspiel, as if they've become one soloist together. Instead of having a moment where one of them gets to rock out on something, it didn't seem right for this piece to do that.

JANET SONG KIM: So, we talked about Hydro, Wind, - but we didn't talk about Solar in terms of what makes Solar, well, solar - with musical representation or symbology.

VIET CUONG: I think the soloists create a formation that looks kind of like a solar panel with the vibraphone and the glockenspiel kind of has that look about it and when I think of light, I think of metallic percussion. It's bright, it shimmers, and it sparkles, just like light does. I knew I was always going to use metallic percussion for that movement. There's a lot of stuff in this movement where I try to make it sound like sunlight...There's this G major triad, and it melts basically in half steps- the G goes down to an F#, and the triads continue to melt down with all these glissandi going down, so it's almost like a triad is melting in the sun and is made malleable with all these glissandi. Later on, instead of it melting down, there's all these secondary dominant chords that keep rising up, and I think of that as a sunrise. The chords are climbing and climbing very slowly, and now the glissandi are going up and up and up. So, the whole movement is basically depicting a slow sunrise. As the chords climb, the percussion becomes more active, which makes it more sparkly, which kind of shows that there's more light coming through.

JANET SONG KIM: I've noticed that you use a lot of heterophony/isometric music or repetitions of small motifs in densely orchestrated textures to create walls of sound- is this something that you do often?

VIET CUONG: I use it in a lot of my pieces, I will say though, particularly with this piece that because this piece started off as a chamber orchestra version, comparatively to a wind ensemble, that's a small ensemble, I used a lot of the instruments as one thing, and the soloists were another thing. Because I knew, especially like in the second movement, for their sound to compete with four kick drums, I needed to have a lot of instruments playing the same thing for them to be heard, even with amplification. So this piece is particularly heterophonic or isometric in that way, but I also like

heterophonic music because you can say a lot with very little. Sometimes the simplest stuff can be the most poignant and memorable stuff. Like in the big climax of the third movement *plays climax* there's this big chord progression that's very... "pop" or very simple, diatonic, I think it's really like one of the most beautiful chord progressions, but there's nothing to it really... Like, why try to make it complicated for no reason? And then when you have the sound of a whole band playing these huge chords, it sounds like an organ in a way that if I had the woodwinds doing something else, that would probably make the score look fancier, but it doesn't add anything to the moment.

JANET SONG KIM: What are your personal favorite moments in all of *Re(new)al*?

VIET CUONG: Hmm. No one's ever asked me that! I'd say the big climax at the end of the third movement, when the big moment with the C minor chord comes, I'm really proud of that.

JANET SONG KIM: Yeah, I get chills every time I listen to that moment. You should absolutely be proud of that.

VIET CUONG: Yeah, you know, when you're a composer you write the piece and you know what's coming, but every time that movement comes, when a band plays it - especially, I get chills and I... don't want that. *laughter* I feel like chills are a spontaneous thing where you aren't expecting something, and that unknowing is what's supposed to give you chills. But for this, I'm expecting it so it's weird that it happens. I'd also say that one of my favorite moments occurs in the second movement, where everyone drops out and it's just the double bass and soloists with all those meter changes. That was one of the first times in a piece where I play with time in the way that the eighth notes gets turned into a quarter note triplet so it's slightly longer, but not as long as a quarter note. It's as if I'm pressing the slow-motion button for a second, but just for some of the beats. It's something I've done a lot in my music ever since writing it in *Re(new)al*, so I like that as a device. Also, it's one of the very rare moments in the piece where it pairs down to something really small. I also love the choreography stuff, just because I feel like it's one of the best ideas, I think I'll ever have. *laughter* It was just a thing where I was like, 'Okay- I know that they're going to be in this wind turbine formation but is that obvious enough? Or... I could have them spin!' I remember having the manuscript paper and drawing a snare drum with an arrow going around it at like five in the morning once. In the first movement, I love the beginning of the piece where it's just the quartet playing by themselves. I like to think it tells a story where they start on their own. It's as if they have an idea that other people aren't sold on yet, while everyone else slowly joins in. I also just love the absurdity of four people sitting at a table with wine glasses in front of a large ensemble like an orchestra or wind band. Just imagine not knowing what you're about to experience, and you see that when you walk in.

JANET SONG KIM: I think anyone would just remember that, forever.

VIET CUONG: Every time it's played live, I'm just like—"Man, people must think I'm insane." Also, when you have found percussion, you don't expect it to sound harmonious a lot of the time because if you expect it to sound like whatever that object was originally designed to do. I like to make things that shouldn't be harmonious, well, harmonious.

JANET SONG KIM: If you had any bit of advice to bands looking to perform this piece or conductors looking to program this piece, what would you say to them?

VIET CUONG: So... there's a lot of versions now! *laughter* I'd say that the solo parts are deceptively difficult. I think each movement has a lot of challenges even if they're playing wine glasses, that's a whole challenge in itself because you're learning a 'new instrument.' For the second movement, I think a lot of people think, 'Oh it just grooves and it'll go and it'll be fun,' but it's really hard. *laughter* Any time I speak to a percussionist that has played the solo part for that second movement and it's always the same comment, "It's not easy." I mean, it was written for Sandbox Percussion, and one of the things that they do so well is hockets. I remember when I was first talking to them about writing a piece, almost ten or nine years ago now, I went to their studio and they had just started as a quartet and had just started renting this space in Brooklyn, and I knew them from college but I never worked directly with any of them except for the fact that they were playing some of my band music in college. And so I went, and they had mentioned to me that they really love hockets. They said, "Let us show you something." One of them had a mallet in one hand and the other person had one mallet in their hand, and started striking one marimba bar. They started going back and forth *vocalizes rhythm - quarter notes initially and gradually speeding up* And they got faster and faster until it was just a roll, but then, they slowed down, too. They're so in tune with each other that they can sound like one player. I knew that they could handle hocketing sixteenth notes with their feet on kickdrums. *laughter* And, you know, that's not easy. So, if you're going to program this, just know that the percussionists will have to put in a lot of work to really make it happen... OR just bring in Sandbox Percussion or Epoch Percussion and just have them do it because they're both great.

JANET SONG KIM: Yeah, I'd imagine it's much easier to put together with a Professional Percussion Quartet.

VIET CUONG: Right! Yeah, like if you have the budget just bring them in. And also, the section percussion parts aren't easy, either, especially in the first movement. So like, you need good percussionists all around. If you have your best percussionists on the solo parts then you won't have someone that's able to play the ensemble parts- that can be tricky. So definitely keep that in mind. Otherwise, I think every composer has pieces that they are most proud of, and this is one of them for me... and I think I'll be proud of this piece for forever because it was one of those rare moments where, as a composer, it doesn't feel like you're fighting when you're writing the music. It'll just, like, happen. I wrote this piece really quickly, actually [the original version]. There are moments where a composer feels proud of a piece, but also gave the performers what they wanted. I feel like I got to give Sandbox a piece that they love to play. Also, the orchestra was really happy at how I incorporated the renewable energy stuff because GE Renewable Energy is a sponsor for the Albany Symphony. I wanted to make everyone happy, including myself, and it was one of those times where I was actually able to do that. Sometimes you'll have pieces where you're really happy with it, but people are like, 'I don't get it,' or you have other pieces that people really like and you think to yourself, 'Why do people like this?' It's very rare for all the stars to align like this, so if you're going to play a piece by me and you have really good players, and are looking for something, I'd definitely recommend this one. Do this one. I might change my mind about that in like a year or so, I don't know... *laughter*

JANET SONG KIM: *laughter* Well, for now it works. So now, I'm going to finish off by asking you: What future projects do you have, what's on the horizon, what should we look out for?

VIET CUONG: I think the LA Phil is still trying to figure out when they can perform again, that's what they need to know before they make plans again. Hopefully that happens, because that was a pretty devastating thing to get canceled last year. At Midwest this year, I might have three premieres which is really exciting! I'm writing a piece for the Army Field Band, it's a piece with a Vietnamese Soprano, which will be really cool. I don't think there's anything for band like that yet- I mean, I don't think there are very many Vietnamese-inspired pieces for band, at all... or there just aren't very many Vietnamese-American composers working today. I'm writing for the group Eighth Blackbird and the Navy Band and that piece will be premiered at Midwest, if it happens, that's a dream project! Keep an eye out for that. You should bring them all to UCLA to do it...

JANET SONG KIM: I'd love that! Yeah! I'll tell Dr. Cross. *laughter*

VIET CUONG: And I probably will be writing a sax quartet concerto for wind ensemble in the next few years, and a few other orchestra pieces. I have things for the next three or four years planned out. Oh! I'm also writing a woodwind quintet for this really amazing wind quintet called WindSync, but we're going to take a movement from that and turn it into a mini concerto that can be played with middle school kids. The one thing that I hope to do, and I feel like I've kinda [sic] been doing this already, but I hope to bring different musical communities together within the classical music world because we think of the band world as its own entity, and then the orchestra world is its own thing, and then there's the contemporary chamber music world. With these concertos, I'm bringing Eighth Blackbird to Midwest - like, bringing one of the world's most prominent contemporary chamber ensembles together with one of the world's most prominent wind ensembles. So just a lot of cross pollination, and that's kind of what I wanted with *Re(new)al*, too. With this Windsync thing, it's like doing that but at the middle school level, so that you can introduce young students to professional musicians, and the fun thing about woodwind quintet is that there's representation of so many of the instruments, so performers can do outreach. It's also a way for me to connect the dots for myself as well, because as a composer I write music for a lot of different types of ensembles. Sometimes it can feel like I have to put on my band hat or my orchestra hat, when I feel like I don't want to think of it that way. I just want to write music and have it be for whatever ensemble I happen to be writing it for. I think it makes music more interesting when I don't try to compose band music for a band. I just want to write a piece. That was kind of hard for me to do because I was a band kid growing up, so I had all these ideas of what a band piece should be or what it should sound like, but writing *Re(new)al* really helped me to push that aside.

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you, again, so much for agreeing to meet with me.

VIET CUONG: Yeah! Thank you for looking at my music so closely, it's quite a humbling experience to have people analyzing your music and to be taking it so seriously; I really appreciate it.

APPENDIX B

Transcript of Interview with Jerry Junkin, Professor of Music at University of Texas, Austin

Zoom Interview on April 22, 2021

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you for being willing to speak with me today, I very much appreciate your time. I'm here to ask you some questions about the wind band version of *Re(new)al* because, well, that's what my dissertation is on. My first question for you is: How did you first learn of Viet Cuong's music and what drew you to it?

JERRY JUNKIN: I don't know, I've known his music for quite some time. I heard one of his earlier pieces and I remember speaking about Viet with several people. *Re(new)al* is the first piece I've done of his, there are other pieces I like very much, but they fit the role of the other groups more and his music was done on our campus a lot. This was the first time I've done a piece of his - I'm trying to remember how I found out about the piece... I think Viet sent it to me, to be perfectly honest. He sent me a recording of the Albany performance and had mentioned the fact that he was very interested in making a Wind Ensemble version, and so we helped to make that commission happen, both the Dallas Winds and the UTAustin Wind Ensemble were a part of that. And then, I think I met Viet for the first time, officially, at Midwest that year which would have been 2017. We had chatted on the phone before and been in e-mail contact, but that's the story of the first contact we ever had.

JANET SONG KIM: Okay! Yes, that makes sense. When we had last spoke, Viet told me that he did specifically reach out to different schools for this work... In your estimation, could you describe or explain Viet's compositional style from what you've experienced thus far?

JERRY JUNKIN: Yeah! I think he has a very interesting yet identifiable personal style in his composition, so that you hear—and this is only a compliment and this is not in any way anything other than a compliment—because you hear his music and it is always so colorfully orchestrated regardless of the medium. So it doesn't matter if it's for a small group or for a symphony orchestra, or whether if it's for wind ensemble, I think he's really a master orchestrator. So there's always a lot of color, there's always a great deal of beautiful use of percussion, whether they're being featured in a piece or not, which is an important part of his orchestration, which made *Re(new)al* a really attractive piece right from the get go. He's a percussionist himself, a clarinetist/percussionist so he understands the sonic capabilities of percussion instruments in a way that not a lot of other people, I think, don't. So as far as his actual style, I would let him describe it a little bit more, except to say that I think that he has an affinity for writing for winds because of his growing up in the wind band medium- he was in marching bands and concert bands, and being a member of a wonderful high school band... He has this wonderful mixture of sonic capabilities, his music is beautifully tonal but yet incorporates contemporary techniques. He's a very eclectic composer.

JANET SONG KIM: You came to the conclusion of eclectic, and it's funny because that's exactly what he uses to describe himself, so that's perfect. I just want to confirm this, my research has told me that you conducted the premiere of this particular version in its entirety, am I correct in that?

JERRY JUNKIN: Yes, that is correct. We did it with Epoch percussion quartet in both Austin and Dallas, and I'm hard pressed to remember which came first. I think the Dallas performance came first, we did them within the same week... It was the last concert of the season for both groups. The Dallas performance came about 4 days earlier or something like that...

JANET SONG KIM: Got it; that matches with my research, so I believe you are recalling correctly! What were some of the major challenges or issues through the rehearsal or interpretation process with this piece, if any?

JERRY JUNKIN: I don't know that there were any because this piece works so well... Any time you do a concerto it doesn't matter what the soloist is, you're always concerned about balance. In this particular piece, there wasn't as much of a concern because it's masterfully scored. I wonder what the transfer would be if there were balance issues, because this piece lives in several formations... You wonder if maybe there might be some inherent balance problems, but there were not; they were all taken care of. It's also not just because it's percussion, because there are some tender moments for the percussion. I think it's so well scored you don't have to deal with that... I guess the only challenges we had were the logistical ones, in terms of how much space the percussion quartet takes on stage because of the way their stations are set up. You have to have the table and chairs mic'd on one side, then you have this center station. For example, at the Meyerson Symphony Center where we did it the first time... that's a stage that doesn't have a lot of depth to it- so we had to reconfigure the way the band was set up, and then the same thing, actually, in Austin. Our stage is not that large in Bates Recital Hall. It was manageable, but we had to give some thought to that so that people wouldn't be falling off the stage as they move and also running into the rows of players... These are sort of mundane things, but those were the only issues that gave us any pause. The percussion quartet was great about their equipment, and they conversed with Viet a great deal because he recommends which aerosol cans to use and all those sorts of things, so he had experience already with Sandbox, so they were able to take that information and go from there. The piece really worked beautifully, and you can say this about a lot of pieces- with a lot of good players it works really well.

JANET SONG KIM: Yes, that's for sure! So, I notice this in a lot of your videos, but this actually brings us to our next question: Besides the set-up of having the percussion quartets on stage, you seem to have straight rows in your ensemble; could you explain a little bit of why you choose to do that?

JERRY JUNKIN: Yes! There are two reasons. So, with Dallas, there's a bit of a curve because there's a built-in riser system on that stage so we have to do that. The dirty little secret about the Meyerson Symphony Center, and anyone will tell you this, is that it's a great hall, a beautiful hall, in which to attend a concert. It's not the most performer-friendly stage that I've ever encountered, and it's difficult to hear from one side to another on that stage. There are other famous hall that have their challenges with the people onstage hearing each other the way that they want to, and unfortunately we don't have a lot of leeway with the set up just because of those built in risers. In Austin, I do like to generally experiment in Bates Hall - I like the overtones of the instruments to all be coming directly out from the same direction because there's a directional aspect to that hall in Austin. So, if instruments are slightly turned, you do perceive, as an audience member, a different sort of sound, so it just works better to be facing out with the horns near a wall so that their bells have some reflection. So that's the only reason for doing it.

JANET SONG KIM: This is my last question for you: Do you have any advice for conductors who will perform this work in the future?

JERRY JUNKIN: *Absolutely*... and that is to DO IT by all means! It is a great piece, and it's one that really resonates with the audience. The audience reaction, every time we've done it, has been *enormous* and people still talk about it in both situations – from the UT Austin performance and Dallas Winds! Some of that is due to the performance of the quartet, which they do it in a very theatrical style which lends itself to this particular piece, but this music is effective, it's masterfully written and orchestrated, and ...and this is a very emotional piece, there's a great deal of emotional impact; just the idea of renewable energy is very “a la mode” right now, too, so people respond to it in an almost visceral way. Every time I'm on a call this evening with the board of the Dallas Winds, and one of the board members wrote me a note saying, “We should do that percussion piece again!” – As you know, they always like to make suggestions... *laughter*

JANET SONG KIM: Yes, I agree one hundred percent; it's an incredible piece and I love it, which is why I've chosen to write about it. *laughter*

JERRY JUNKIN: *laughter* Well yeah, if you're writing a dissertation on it... Quick question for you, have you done it? Will you perform it? Will UCLA be programming it?

JANET SONG KIM: No, unfortunately. I actually wanted to do it, the chamber version, for my recital, and ask a local quartet in Los Angeles to do it—but I won't get to have one, now, because, well, COVID.

JERRY JUNKIN: You know, it's really a shame. Both quartets, Sandbox and Epoch, had multiple performances and residencies centered around this piece set up for the 2021 academic year, and I know Epoch had a couple at the end of last year that they had to cancel because everything out the window. For those groups, it's hard to pick right up again, because people move onto other projects or the funding they had available two years ago no longer exists, all that sort of stuff. I feel bad for this piece because it does take a good quartet and it takes a lot of preparation on the part of the quartet. I hope that people will do it. You know, I have plans to do it again just to get the interest level back because this piece really deserves it.

JANET SONG KIM: Yes, absolutely. My goal, with this document, is to also encourage to people to play it and program it. I don't want it to look too daunting just because it has four percussion soloist, and also with it being a newer piece. I'm hoping that having this kind of guide might lessen that blow a little bit.

JERRY JUNKIN: Well, hats off to you too for thinking to reaching out to a different quartet, because sometimes people don't have that imagination either; they'll only think that only two quartets have played this and won't program it because the dates won't work or whatever it is. That's not what Viet would want, and that's not what those quartets want; they would love for more quartets to do it. Hopefully, that will happen, too, in the future. I was texting with Andrew and Nigel from Epoch and you'll be talking to them soon?

JANET SONG KIM: Yes! I reached out to Epoch as well to hear their experience with Re(new)al and I'll also be talking to Sandbox, for hopefully obvious reasons. *laughter*

JERRY JUNKIN: Excellent, yes. *laughter*

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you so much, again, for your time, I really appreciate you meeting with me to go over this information, and if I have any other questions, I might be emailing you!

JERRY JUNKIN: Yes, please do! I'm happy to help, and you should text me, too.

JANET SONG KIM: Will do!

APPENDIX C

Transcript of Interview with Johnny Allen and Ian Rosenbaum, Sandbox Percussion

Zoom Interview on April 2, 2021

JANET SONG KIM: Hello Sandbox Percussion! Or, rather, Ian and Johnny from Sandbox Percussion... It's really nice to meet you and talk to you. Thank you, again for lending your time for this interview, I very much appreciate it. I hope you have been well, too. Before we begin with the group interview, I was hoping that you could each tell me about yourselves, personally and tell me about your musical background.

IAN ROSENBAUM: Yeah! Sure! So, I'm Ian, I'm one of the members of Sandbox and have been a member of it since it was founded back in 2011, and Sandbox as a group - we all met through grad school at Yale. We weren't all there at the same time, but it's a small community so we met through the experience of being there. A couple of guys were still in school, I had just finished school- and we started this group just because we really enjoyed playing together and we really wanted to explore the repertoire for percussion quartet together. The group started out very small, we had no concerts, just a couple pieces we wanted to play... We lived in three different cities when we started and we would just get together for these long weekends and just rehearse this work. Viet, who of course we're going to talk a lot about, he was one of the first composers that we were talking with. A couple of us went to undergrad with him, and we dreamed of a piece for the four of us and orchestra for the future - and it's amazing how this idea actually happened.

JOHNNY ALLEN: Yeah, it's kind of funny because right from those early days, we started back in 2011, and it was in 2012 or 2013 where we started talking to Viet about his dream about writing a percussion quartet concerto. You know as most ideas go, it's great to have the idea but making it actually happen is a very different thing. One day, about five or six years later Viet was like, "hey! Remember that piece we talked about? I think I have a way to make it happen." And we can talk more about that later, but yeah, I'm Johnny. I joined Sandbox not from the very beginning, unlike Ian and Victor and I think I missed one concert? *laughter* But I did miss hundreds of hours of rehearsal so I had some catching up to do on that front. It was still those early days, those formative years, that I got to spend with the group. As far as my musical background, I probably started hitting pots and pans when I was three or something like that and my mom hoped that I would grow out of it, but I did not! I just kept finding more things to hit and now... Here I am, still doing it! So, I met Victor at Yale and I met Ian through Victor at Yale, and the rest has been our last ten years together.

JANET SONG KIM: That's so lovely! I love that you all have so much time and history with one another... You mentioned Viet a lot but I'm curious to know how you actually met Viet and how you came to know his music in the first place?

IAN ROSENBAUM: Yeah! So, all of us except for Johnny went to undergrad at Peabody in Baltimore, Maryland. Viet was there as well; I'm trying to remember properly since I'm a little older than the rest of the guys in the group but I can't remember if I was actually in undergrad when I met Viet or if I met him through the fact that Victor and Terry knew him from being there. In any case, I remember Viet sending me some of his work and being really impressed by it. I remember in grad school, I was subbing with the Yale Band, which is an undergrad group but they sometimes needed

extras from the grad school, so I was there, and we played one of his pieces there. As I'm sure you know, he's very well-known in the band world, he's sort of become a star very early on and as we were playing one of his pieces and I remember kind of being blown away by the writing in that piece and thinking to myself, "It would be such a wonderful thing to work with him some day." As Johnny mentioned, the five of us had been talking about this idea for a larger work, but commissioning a piece with an orchestra is a financial and logistical hurdle. At that point, Sandbox was such a new group that we didn't have any way to do that - it was just an idea, and I think we were really drawn to the band music that he had written, and because of it we thought he would orchestrate a really wonderful piece. We sort of let that be for a while, and we returned several years later to this quartet that he wrote called "Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine" which eventually ended up becoming the first movement of the concerto that we're going to speak about. He wrote this piece when he was in grad school at Princeton, for the other great quartet. We were asked to play this piece on a concert in 2015, so we got to work with the wine glasses and started to work around and figure out what the technique for playing them is, and then when it came time for the concerto, Viet was like, "Well I took the first few measures of that piece and wrote it out into the first movement of the concerto," and we felt ready for it because we had spent all this rehearsal time playing with the wine glasses.

JOHNNY ROSENBAUM: Yeah! I also remember there was this video of Viet playing a xylophone rag or something, cause obviously we know Viet as the composer now, but he was a percussionist in high school, as well as a clarinetist! You know how composers have their "rooted" instruments, for Viet, percussion was one of them! Which I think is really interesting and I think Terry remembers watching that video of Viet coming out on the Vic Firth YouTube channel and thinking to himself, "Wow this kid can really shred on the xylophone and he's only in high school." So I feel like we had a lot of different areas of overlap with him, but probably the most prolific one was the fact that he and Victor were in the dorms together and were really just students learning about the college experience together. There's an interesting bond that can really bond between people during that time.

JANET SONG KIM: For sure! Speaking of bonds forming between people, Viet told me that he came to all of you to explore different sounds for this "new" commission. When he got the commission in the first place, he thought to himself, "I'm going to go to Sandbox, and talk about sounds with them." And then he told me that the two of you were striking something back and forth until it became a roll, and then he went on to tell me that he thinks that hockets are one of your biggest specialties. As a group, would you agree with that? And how did that come to be? I noticed in your other recordings, as well, that you love Andy Akiho's works, and there are a lot of hockets in his music, too.

JOHNNY ALLEN: Yeah! That's true! It has kinda[sic] turned into, I guess, something like a specialty of ours. I feel like it comes from the chamber music underpinning; when I think of how hockets work really well, it's not just an athletic thing, unless you're spinning around a snare drum in a circle and going faster and faster. Hockets are also this idea of reading someone else's mind and playing as, no longer just part of the equation, but playing as if you are everyone, and everyone is you. I think we spent a lot of time rehearsing in those early days. I mean, I lived in Brooklyn with one of the members of Sandbox and I think three years in the same apartment and rehearsing in the same space did that for us. A fun Friday night for us was playing some phasing music or something like that, and so I really feel like the hocketing is like an amplified chamber music skill. Like the way a string quartet can play *really* in tune, a percussion quartet can play really fine-tuned rhythms that

pass around. I guess I was glad that Viet was drawn to that because that felt like something that was not only impressive to see, which is fun, but he stretched us. He took us to a whole other level of how plugged in we have to be when we're playing, specifically his second movement comes to mind. We couldn't even play it at half-tempo when he gave it to us, and we're still discovering new nuances of like, "Okay if I play this note just a little bit less and you play that note just a little bit more then it'll groove a lot more." Like, there's just so much to discover in there. Does that kind of cover it? I feel like I went on a tangent a little bit...

JANET SONG KIM: No! That was a lovely explanation!

IAN ROSENBAUM: No! It was fine! Yeah, I was just going to throw in that as a percussion quartet, one of the things we think about and talk about all the time is feeling the group pulse, trying to figure out how to feel time exactly the same amongst our group so that no matter who has whatever note in the melody, or composite rhythm, or whatever texture is going on, you're able to, like Johnny was saying, read the minds of the other people in the room with you and fit your note in as if we're all one player. I think, oftentimes, certainly in the piece we're talking about right now, it should sound like it's just one superhuman person with many limbs playing all of these instruments. I honestly think that we rehearse this way and think this way, even if it's not a hyper-rhythmic hocket-y piece, it's still important to of course know how you fit into the whole texture that the whole group is playing. There's one piece that comes to mind that we played early on in our group, a piece called "Pattern Transformation" by Lucas Ligeti. This was the second or third piece that Sandbox had ever played, which is kind of crazy because it remains one of the most difficult pieces that we've ever played. It's one of those pieces that's three and a half minutes long, it's completely tonal, so if you play it correctly it sounds like this beautiful little etude, like it sounds like the easiest thing in the world, and we've probably spent about 300 hours working on it together. It's absolutely insane how difficult it is, it was just passing around sixteenth notes one per player in all kinds of different ways, at an incredibly fast rate. Through the experience of doing that, we had to invent these ways of learning these kinds of pieces, and we realized that just learning your own part was meaningless, cause your own part was sight-readable- you just play one note every once in a while, and it was super easy. Trying to figure out how to fit this into the whole was really eye-opening for all of us, and radically changed how we learned every piece after that. So, with the second movement of *Re(new)al*, I think that those skills were an extension of what we were working on, each of us had to play one or two notes and had to fit it into the texture. And Like Johnny said, in the beginning we couldn't play it at half tempo – and even at the premiere of the piece we played it quite a bit under tempo. One of the last performances we did, we played it over tempo. So, it's been like a trajectory or a journey with that piece. I'll also say that Viet as a percussionist knows really well how to notate these composite rhythms, to split up the total number of notes among the four of us to actually make them quite easy to play. There's another piece I'm thinking of, the Evan Chapman piece "Night Lightning" - that's a quartet, that before Viet, that had the fastest sixteenth note/bass drum hockets that we'd ever done, and those were just down a line. Like we're standing in a line, and that was a really challenging skill... but the way Viet wrote it in his concerto, each of us actually plays the exact same rhythm, just offset by a sixteenth note so that in the end everyone actually has quite an easy part to play. Of course, when you combine them you get this steady stream of notes, but he could've written in twelve other ways that could've made it much more challenging to play. On one hand I'm glad that we've had all these experiences working on this stuff so that we were ready for it, but on the other hand I'm glad it was in the hands of someone like Viet who really knew how to notate it and how to split up the notes so that it wasn't going to be as challenging as it could've been.

JANET SONG KIM: Absolutely! I'd say that Viet is probably one of the most original orchestrators that exists right now, in wind band music, and I'm sure in orchestral and chamber writing, too. I mean, the NY Phil and LA Phil have both commissioned him, and whatnot. In addition to the challenges of the second movement's hockets, I know that there's some choreography involved? And I was wondering what your experience was like in terms of coordinating the choreography aspect of the second movement. I am also curious to know if you've ever had to perform a piece with choreography like this before...

IAN ROSENBAUM: Yeah, I feel like we rehearsed the part that he wrote for a while, and we had taken so long to get it right and were so excited to play it for him and then he was like, "Cool cool cool- now you guys have to run in a circle while you guys are doing it." And we were like "WHAT?! Are you kidding me?!" It was challenging, and it's very planned out, it's not improvised. I don't know if I know how many steps we took, but we do know that there are some check points in your way around the circle and so every time we do it, you know exactly how far you're moving. One of the biggest challenges for me is that I'm pretty dizzy by the time that we finish, especially the second one where we go a little faster, and then you have to get back where you're going and immediately play the bass drum hocket - like the hardest part in the entire piece, so it's a challenging thing. Johnny, do you maybe want to talk about our history with that kind of playing?

JOHNNY ALLEN: There is a decent body of percussion repertoire that does demand a little extracurricular activity. The first piece I ever did that required it was from when I was in a percussion trio back in college, before Sandbox, we would play a piece called *Stubernick* which asks players to walk around the Marimba and play on both sides of it or things like that, and I'm thinking of Vogel. This piece is almost more about the choreography than about the playing. The playing is almost incidental to the drama that's happening onstage, and obviously Viet doesn't go quite that far into it, but I think we've all had experiences with music that calls on us to bring more than just the raw aural material to the performance, and asks us to bring this visual material. It also helps that percussion is a very visual instrument, just to make a sound it demands a certain amount of motion. I think when I realized that, it was a lot easier for me to then go and say, "Okay, so then why don't I run around the drum and do it?" The worry is that something like this could become kitschy or too much like performance art, not that that's a bad thing, but some music purists would say that it shouldn't be about any of that drama. I guess I land somewhere a little different than that; I think if it's sacrificing the music, that's likely a bad thing, but if you have an opportunity to enhance the listener's experience of what's happening then why not? If this can be a better performance for the audience as a result, then we should do it. I think that's actually what happens here- I think if we just stayed at our stations and played this rhythm that builds in intensity and gets louder, but when you see us also spinning around and spinning faster and faster- then it adds this exciting element for the audience. They might think, "Are they going to trip? What if they fall?!" And that does a better job of conveying the music than just our straight sixteenth notes ever could. We talked about how we wanted there to be this "sigh of relief" at the end of that section. I'll admit, I was wondering "What's this spin really going to do?" But now that we've done it and do it, I couldn't imagine it any other way.

IAN ROSENBAUM: Yeah! And he's creating the wind turbine which is what that movement is about it. This theme exists in a bunch of other places in like all the wind noises that the instruments are making and the compressed air cans that we play, but in the end it's such a literal version of what the piece is about and I think what Johnny says is spot on. Like, all of us have seen

this version of something that just gets in the way of the performance, like the performer is moving and emoting so much that all you can do is focus on their movements and then you're not actually listening at all... And that's the worst, that's not helpful at all. However, if you can find a way to let your body amplify the effect of what you're trying to play, that's why most people even go to a live performance. I think when you're listening to a CD, you're not getting that and that's fine, but that's why I go to a live performance to see the synthesis of what the performer is doing physically and how that's affecting the sound that they put out.

JANET SONG KIM: That's such a beautiful way to put it - that it should amplify the music. With all of that said, the choreography and the second movement, and this might be an obvious question—what were some of the most musically challenging aspects of putting *Re(new)al* together as a group?

JOHNNY ALLEN: I'll start with kind of the macro in that practicing any of the movements by yourself is worthless. If I was just in a room with my part, trying to play the first movement, I could play the first note, but I couldn't play the second note... and THAT is a crucial part, you know?

IAN ROSENBAUM: *Pretends to dance with wine glasses by himself*

JOHNNY ALLEN: *Laughter* I can't even do just that and mime it. Everything about that second notes depends on the other person. I guess that's more of a microcosm, but that spans the entire piece. Second movement is the same, I can play just my part but it would sound like, I don't know, it just wouldn't sound good. It would be this very weird, disjointed rhythm and everyone would just kinda be scratching their head... And the same thing for the third movement, it's this melody line that gets passed along and I'm playing an F# and as far as I'm concerned maybe that's the tonic, but in reality that's the third and suddenly it's interpreted differently and everything about that changes the way I play it. So there was this necessity for us to learn the piece and rehearse the piece together, always. We all had to be in the room for it to be worthwhile. It wasn't a problem because we all live in Brooklyn, we all share the studio together, it's not like it was hard to do that, but most pieces you can do some of the leg work ahead of time and that just really wasn't the case with this. You could come in as prepared as you wanted, but you'd still be at square one when you were with everyone else and when it started off.

IAN ROSENBAUM: This is definitely a piece where learning your own part isn't very challenging. You still want to learn your notes before you show up but it's not going to take you a month to be able to do that, but also in our experience the time between Viet calling us being like "Do you guys want to play this concert" to when we were literally on stage playing with the orchestra was not very big.. And the time when he had finished the piece and we were at the first rehearsal was even much smaller, so we just didn't have the time to do that. When he sent the music, we all just showed up and started learning it together at once so that was really our experience of the piece. I was going to say that two things are particularly challenging. The third movement is so hard because of the technical challenges of what each of us are doing. Like Johnny and Terry are in the back are dipping these instruments in water to bend the pitch. Victor and I are bowing while we're holding mallets and doing all of this other stuff, and then you also have to play a rhythmic hocket that is just about as challenging as the one in the second movement, except it's on pitched instruments. Balancing the logistical and technical challenge while creating this beautiful sustained long melody from all of us that grows from the first bar until the last bar of the movement is a really

challenging thing that the four of us are still working on. I would say that movement in particular is the one that we're still really working on. And then with the second movement, we spent so much time playing that really fast hocketing stuff with just the four of us and have not spent a lot of time doing that with the full ensemble. It's really hard to sort of negotiate with the conductor, who of course is listening to us and is trying to catch our tempo as much as they can, and then communicate that to the orchestra, and given how fast the piece goes - to negotiate that line of dialogue - between the four of us, the conductor, and the orchestra, is a really tough thing. I think we've gotten really close in some of the performances we've had, and that's another thing... I just need more time with an orchestra to figure out how to do that, but that's a really hard thing to get a whole orchestra in there.

JANET SONG KIM: I feel like that's one of the things I've been considering all of Viet's versions of Re(new)al, like how the orchestra reacting to the percussion ensemble reacting to the percussionists in the back reacting to the conductor all work together. I think you've just explained that beautifully. On the flip side of the challenging aspects, what were some of the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of putting this piece and working with Viet and the Albany symphony?

JOHNNY ALLEN: What you just mentioned about how there are now four versions of the piece, and watching it develop in a way, I almost think of the first version of the piece being Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine. And then going from us playing that, to then adding first a chamber orchestra to that, it was just like, "Wow that really - is it the same piece anymore?" And then even going from that first chamber orchestra version and then he started adding new things to it, like maybe a new bass note or new decorations in the flutes, and the way he adds the strings to the orchestra, it seems like a weird thing for me to find most rewarding, but listening to Viet's own creative process through all these different versions and how it continues to evolve is incredible. He didn't just copy paste - each one has a new expressive element and could be a "different piece" in a way, because there's so much extra that he adds to it each time. Of course, there's enough retained from the previous version that it's not, but that's always been sort of fascinating to me in watching his creative process and watching it blossom has been great throughout the years.

IAN ROSENBAUM: Yeah, I completely agree, the first time that we played this was with the Albany Symphony's Chamber version of the ensemble called "Dogs of Desire" which is the first orchestration. It's way fewer players, and that was amazing - it was cool for us to see how he harmonized Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine and the things that he did, but I remember standing on stage the first time we did the full orchestral version with the Albany symphony a year later. Hearing what Viet had done to continue to grow the excitement and the emotion in this piece was amazing; he never considers the piece done. There's always another layer another thing that he could add, even when we last played this piece at Curtis, which was the full orchestral version we had done before, he still made all kinds of changes and added elements that he had first written for the band version and then added back into the orchestral version. It's just so nice to see someone who never feels like the work is done, because that's totally how the four of us feel. After we play a piece, that's just the beginning of our journey with the piece. To see that he feels the same way, and that every decision he makes is the right decision. He picks the perfect bass note, the perfect chord to add in. It's just such an amazing process.

JANET SONG KIM: I absolutely agree!

JOHNNY ALLEN: The other thing I find very rewarding, and this might be an unexpected or out of bounds, but it's just showing up to play another performance of the piece and often Viet will actually be there. And he'll meet us in town and we get to see him again and often, the last time we saw him was the last time we played the piece. To be able to catch up with a friend, and for this reason of getting to play beautiful music, and to spend that time together, I can't overstate how important that collaboration was for all of our careers. To maintain that interpersonal contact and have that as kind of the foundation for this work of art we get to share with so many people, it really does mean a lot. I enjoy that aspect of it as much as the playing of it. It's just such a nice thing and especially, you know, his career is taking off and every time we see him there's a new incredible opportunity in front of him and behind him, and it's great to see that happening to someone who really deserves it.

JANET SONG KIM: It's interesting you say that it's about human connection and that interpersonal relationship, because he talks about that when he talks about the first movement of *Re(new)al* and how it's about human connection and celebrating that sort of humanity and coming together. I love that, and speaking of coming together, with future versions of this piece, I'm wondering if you have any advice to a future quartet that will perform this piece because I presume that this piece will be performed in the future by other people. What would your advice be for those people?

JOHNNY: My advice would be that hopefully they have the opportunity to play it multiple times, and in multiple different situations, and all the different versions. That's been our great asset, going through all of this, like Ian had mentioned, our first performance compared to the most recent one, just the way a piece changes under your hands with time and with that mental space. There's no amount of practicing that can do it. You kinda just need the audience and the pressure of a situation to gain that experience. I don't know if that's advice, but yeah, find as many opportunities to play it as possible.

IAN ROSENBAUM: I would just say that it's such a great piece, it's the rare kind of piece that elevates the level of the group that's playing it. It forces a group to get better, unless there's a group that happens to have these skills - we certainly didn't when we started playing it - it elevates the level of the group by playing it. Enjoy that process, and take the time that you need to with that process. This is also the kind of piece where cramming doesn't work, you can't learn the notes the week before and hope it works. It just takes hours and hours of work with the four people in the room to make it happen. That's such a helpful thing, and we're so happy that we went through that process because it permeates pretty much everything that we play. So, to just, enjoy that process and use it as a springboard to develop these skills in your group.

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you, so much! My last question for you is just, is there anything about the piece that must be mentioned within the dissertation about the piece?

JOHNNY: The first one is probably what you probably already know, which is just the connection between the team-work element of the four of us on stage and how it's almost like the anti-solo. My part is worthless on the stage, it's only when you combine my part with the three others and with the full orchestra that it becomes something truly beautiful, and I think the parallel between that kind of 'we're in this together' mentality and the overall theme of the piece being about renewable energy and about the environment and how we all have to share this space, and we

should be the best versions of ourselves that we can and work together to make this the best space we possibly can. I think that link is really strong.

IAN ROSENBAUM: I was going to say the same exact thing, that it's such a beautiful version of this story. It's a pretty dark place in our timeline, in terms of the environment, and we all have a lot of work to do in order to help but it is something that has to be done together, on the micro-level, like each of our families and friends have to do it together. On the macro level, all of our countries have to work together on it. So it's just such a great lesson in the collaborative aspect of fixing this, because no one person can fix it; it literally has to be all of us. I love that Viet ends on a hopeful note, he could have chosen to end it very differently. He believes in the power of that collaboration, and I think that's an inspiring thing to take in our lives as we all try to think of that.

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you again, so much, for this interview; this was such a nice note to end on.

IAN ROSENBAUM: Yes! It was so great to meet you!

JOHNNY ALLEN: Agreed!

APPENDIX D

Transcript of Interview with Andrew Lynge, Epoch Percussion Quartet

Zoom Interview on April 22, 2021

JANET SONG KIM: Hello Epoch Percussion, or Andrew! *laughter* It's very nice to meet you and talk to you, thank you for lending your time for this interview; I very much appreciate it. I hope you've been well?

ANDREW LYNGE: Yeah! Things are great! Thanks for having me, I'm excited to talk about this wonderful piece.

JANET SONG KIM: Before we begin this interview, could you tell me a little bit about yourself and your musical background?

ANDREW LYNGE: Yeah! I grew up in Duncanville, Texas; it had a lot of big name high school band directors. So, I did the whole Texas band thing and got my undergraduate degree in Texas. I got my master's at Colorado State and my Doctorate was with Tom Byrd at UT Austin and I'm very close to Jerry Junkin, as well. I marched a couple years of drumcorps, taught a lot of years of drumcorps and I have a big marching band background. I got my first gig as an adjunct at AandM Commerce. I got my first tenure track position at a school called Jacksonville State University in Alabama, and I got this job - this is my second year here at the University of Alabama as the director of percussion studies. That's just about it, I think!

JANET SONG KIM: Perfect! Thank you so much. I'd like to ask you how you came together as an ensemble Epoch

ANDREW LYNGE: It was actually through Jerry! Jerry is the catalyst for this group existing. For me, he's probably one of my top three musical influences; I'm going on a tangent, that's not the point. *laughter* But all four of us, Nigel Fernandez, Oni Lara, Corey Fica and myself make Epoch. Jerry wanted to commission a piece for percussion quartet concerto from the composer Dinuk Wijeratne, and that was the piece that got us together. So, we had our large ensemble auditions at UT Austin, I was getting my doctorate, Nigel was getting his undergrad, and Oni and Corey were getting their masters' degrees. I won that audition process and basically said to me, "I want to do this concerto - can you pick three people that you feel would be a great fit for these parts? And I don't know if you know this piece, but it's very different from *Re(new)al* in that we play separate instruments instead of sharing the same instrument. I thought about several colleagues in the studio for those specific instruments for that concerto, and their skill sets, and from there we worked really hard and had a lot of outside rehearsals. The performance went fantastic, and right after I graduated, he invited us to play with Dallas Winds and then again with Interlochen. Then, he kept inviting us to play these gigs with him and it turned into a thing. We're not commissioning new works like other quartets, but we really like specializing in this percussion concerto type situation. We really do like that a lot, and we really like playing with wind band. So, yeah, Jerry was the catalyst for that and I think we did really well as students for that first *Invisible Cities* performance. He handed us the ball, and we just started running with it.

JANET SONG KIM: Well, that was a serendipitous situation! Your answer actually brings me to my next question, which will let you go on your tangent a little bit: what was your relationship with Jerry Junkin and how did you get involved in the Wind Ensemble premiere of *Re(new)al*? I presume it's a very similar story, but I'd like to hear about your relationship, either way.

ANDREW LYNNGE: Of course! My relationship with Jerry is fantastic. It's one that grew over the course of two years as a student. I started my adjunct job my third year, so I was only on campus for the first two but I was still able to build my relationship with him while I was gone. If you audition well, you make this thing called "rotation" which consists of Jerry's wind ensemble, the orchestra, and the new music ensemble. Essentially, the players that make "rotation" are the top players in the studio. There are three rotations per semester and you get to cycle through each ensemble. The fall semester, I did the rotation and played in all three and it was great, the orchestra and new music ensemble were great, but Jerry's wind ensemble was a different experience. His literature selection, his musicianship, his professionalism, was really different. He treated us like pros, and you know, his personality, he's just such a joy to be around. I sent Jerry an email saying, "I just want to play in your wind ensemble," and he loved that, so I played in his wind ensemble for the rest of those two years before I left for the adjunct position. I also received the Teaching Assistantship to write for the drumline. As you know, the Longhorn band is all-encompassing and so I spent a lot of time with Jerry, Scott Hana, Rob Carnochan, and Ryan—all these great band directors. I think it was really my interest in his band and my interest in him as a musician; that helped our relationship. He really took to that email, and for whatever reason, he really likes my timpani playing. I quickly realized that Jerry is the type of person who really feeds off students and gives students that really go for it all the opportunities; especially to the students that have great attitudes, and really go for it. That's how our relationship really blossomed.

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you for that! Do you happen to know Viet, as well? Or did you learn about him through Jerry Junkin and through this premiere?

ANDREW LYNNGE: Yeah! After we did the string of concerts with *Invisible Cities*, I think Viet reached out to Jerry to let him know that he was arranging a new piece for the wind ensemble. Jerry forwarded us that conversation with Viet, and said, "Hey, this piece looks really hip, what do y'all think? Do y'all want to have another go around with this concerto thing?" Of course, we said yeah! So it was really Jerry that introduced the piece to us.

JANET SONG KIM: Speaking of Viet, let's delve into some of the piece and the musical stuff. To me, there are a lot of fascinating parts in this piece. Throughout the multiple times you've practiced and performed this piece, what has become your favorite movement and why?

ANDREW LYNNGE: Oh man... I was about to give a very confident answer and then I thought about the other movements. *laughter* Yeah, this might be such a stock answer, but I don't know if I can pick one thing. There are certain things within each movement that are really incredible. If I had to pick a movement, it'd be the third movement. I think the sounds he creates with the foiled vibraphones and the bowing plus the inverted sound with the crotale on the snare drum and playing a tone backwards, dipped crotales, etc., —the sound scape he created are just really incredible. When the glock splits start to come in, and the moment where the full band comes in, and there's a hit and the build keeps happening, we're splitting those sextuplets and just raging on those instruments and Jerry's sweat is hitting me in the head; that's the best part. You can't beat that. Now the other two movements are spectacular, but the third movement's big build and getting into

that movement, and everything cuts off, and the glockenspiel is still playing. It's just the best. I'm going to speak for the four of us: I think they would agree that that part is their favorite moment, as well.

JANET SONG KIM: I one hundred percent agree, it's just an incredibly emotional moment and the music is just so beautiful. I do want to talk about interpretation for a second, because this piece is written in such an idiomatic way, even in where Cuong chose to split up the hoquet among the soloists. So, with that said, do you think this piece is pretty prescriptive? Or do you feel like you and the group actually had liberty to interpret phrases in a way, or put emphasis in different areas? And if these two things are put on a spectrum - from prescriptive to liberating - where do you think this piece exists within that space?

ANDREW LYNNGE: I think it definitely depends on the movements. Like, in the first movement, there's less room for that because we're just holding this mixed meter groove and we're trying not to spill water. The liberties we took were more on the micro side, all four of us really like the drum set and the second movement is such a blast. There's this Jojo Mayer-esque drum set groove in the second movement, but within the music there's not a lot of accents or tenuto markings. When you hear the very fast, super pocketed drum set grooves, though, there are a lot of these things we call ghost notes. On the snare drum, we'll emphasize different notes and on the hi-hat, we went in together, as a quartet, to give it as much style as possible. There's a moment where we're groovin', and then we have this composite snare drum line at the end of the eight-bar phrase, and we decided to play that with a certain musical direction all the way through to lead us into the next phrase. At one point, Corey had a different rhythm in the hi-hat so we made sure to emphasize the upbeat before that section to highlight that, while Nigel emphasized the hi-hat openings on another sixteenth note. That way, the audience can hear us emphasize the syncopations more rather than hearing us play it flat, as written. We spent a lot of time on the second movement to figure out when we have the composite rhythm, which instrument it's in, considering how to bring out the composite rhythm to propel us through the phrase, and how to make it as groovy as possible. We listened to a lot of drum set tracks: Nate Smith, Jojo Mayer, drum'n'bass music, in general. It gives you the idea of syncopated drumming with a lot of notes, and helps to make some clarity out of the madness. The beginning of the third movement's complexities and making sure that the pitch bending was just right, we spent time making sure that Corey's dipping of the crotale was dipping down a quarter step and releasing perfectly into my half-step right. A lot of that is timing-related, and also determining mallet choice was, of course, a huge topic with that third movement.

JANET SONG KIM: We talked a lot about the second movement, but one thing we haven't mentioned yet is the choreography involved. I was wondering: What was it like to coordinate the choreography of the second movement? What were the most challenging aspects of putting that together?

ANDREW LYNNGE: The most difficult part was definitely the spin in the second movement, getting that together and making it correct is hard. We looked a lot at Sandbox; those guys are incredible. At Vanderbilt, Ji-Hye is one of the best performers in my field, and she did a little snippet of the spin and it looked very similar to us as well. When we started rehearsing *Re(new)al*, we got together during Midwest and we learned the whole concerto in two days. Jerry and Viet skyped in from Midwest from Jerry's hotel room, which was a really weird scene, and we played it for them. Viet gave us a couple notes, and Jerry saw us play it. After the new year, Jerry decided to hire a choreographer, Andrea Ariel, for our rehearsals, which was really hip, and she was with a

dance studio in Austin... We really worked on transitioning together between movements. We talked a lot about what vibe we were trying to create visually. All four of us [in Epoch] are very visual, so if you see the second movement, you'll see us all bobbing our heads up and down to the music, but we obviously can't do that in the first movement, because we'd spill water. We asked ourselves: "What can we do with these wine glasses? We can't bob up and down..." We worked on our posture, simple head movements, eye-contact, and expressions with her to try and draw out as much from that performance as possible. Andrea made us realize that it starts with how we pick up the glasses, and we were told to pick them up as if we were at a very fancy banquet. The second movement was party time — the total opposite! She recognized that and she is a great artist. The biggest thing she did for us in the second movement was to help us with the air cans; she encouraged us to do some visual movements with the air cans while we played to try and accentuate those rhythms and also look at each other. If I have an upbeat triplet, then Nigel and I would lean back and look at each other and make it look like the beat drops and the party's on, if you will. Now, she didn't help us out with the Spin. We didn't bring that up with her because we know that it was really limited, because there's only so much you can do with that regarding playing in time on one snare drum shared by four players, coming up with the correct rate. Initially, we were just going for it, and we realized that wasn't going to work. So, we started really slow, and to mimic a wind turbine we started the spin slow and went faster and faster. The first iteration of that, we tried to run as fast as we could and couldn't get to our bass drums evenly and clearly or play those rhythms correctly. We ended up creating check-points around the drum, so by so-and-so measure, we'd be at this kick drum, or someone would be in between kick drums, and to get faster and faster, we had to figure out how to walk while keeping the tempo the same in all of our hocketed parts. We do this cool little thing on one of them where we end on the opposite bass drum and then we jump around - but that last bit was the Andrea's idea. We had a lot of questions, do we hit that impact and spin towards or away from the drum? How many steps do we take? We got really detailed, because we wanted it to be consistent because it's a really nerve-wracking part. For the transition from the second movement into the third movement, where we pick up the air cans and play with the bassist, Andrea encouraged us and worked with us to do some flowing movements with the air cans to further accentuate the rhythms we were playing. She also encouraged us to look at each other as we passed rhythms off to each other, and that really helped us to feel like we were one soloist, together, even when playing something like spray cans...She told us to make it as graceful as possible. For the third movement, she watched us, and once the glockenspiel was really going and cranking along, we can only do so much, but she had us really move our bodies to emphasize the music at hand, she asked us to think about the beautiful big chords and the long tones that come out of that piece. It was interesting coming from a non-musician, but everything she said made so much sense and just added more to the performance. She told us to be thoughtful about how we pulled the sound out of the instruments we were playing, to dip the crotales carefully, to pull the sound out of the mallets with the bow. It made a big difference, visually, too, looking back at it. I think that's what made the performance really unique to us, and it was all Jerry's vision.

JANET SONG KIM: Yes! I think that the choreography made the piece even better, because the way you transitioned between movements was so beautifully finessed. I've been watching all these recordings over and over again, and that's something that really stood out to me from Epoch, as a quartet, in that you really took the time to think about that and what that was like. Let's step back a bit and I wanted to ask you about the Dallas Winds performance in comparison to the UT Austin performance. What did you feel like were the biggest differences?

ANDREW LYNAGE: We were in the Myers Center with the Dallas Winds and it was the FIRST performance, and I couldn't help but think to myself "Am I really going to be running in a freaking circle in front of the Dallas Winds?!" I think there were a lot of nerves there. We started rehearsing with UT Austin's wind ensemble first, and then for the Dallas Winds we just rehearsed two days prior. The big difference between those two ensembles was the level of comfortability of the quartet playing with the ensemble. It's hard for us as a quartet to play that together, you have to be on the same page; Jerry's connecting the dots between us and the band. Dallas was really good, but it didn't hit quite as well because it was probably the first time we were doing it, and by the time we got to the UT Austin wind ensemble, they had already been rehearsing *Re(new)al* for several weeks, so that helped as well. When you're splitting sixteenth notes and running around a snare drum, the tempo needs to be really consistent in rehearsal. The togetherness of our performance with the UT Austin wind ensemble was perfect, we were laughing and it's because we had gotten the first performance under our belt. Viet came up to us after the performance and said, "well, that was exactly how I envisioned it." It felt really good to hear that.

JANET SONG KIM: Your performance was captivating; I was doing some homework the first time I heard this and the YouTube algorithm was just going. I just stopped doing my homework and my jaw dropped. Your performance is stunning, so thank you for that gift!

ANDREW LYNAGE: Thank you! *laughter* Yeah! It was great to make music with great people.

JANET SONG KIM: Speaking of making music with great people— do you have any advice for the future quartet that are going to perform this piece?

ANDREW LYNAGE: Rehearsal dynamic is a big part of the process. The whole thing is four different pieces of a composite part, you all equal one part. It took a little while for us to get on the same page with rehearsal dynamics in regards to tempo, openness to ideas, since you're playing the same part, mallet stick part selection, velocity, balance, musical direction—the details are so fine. With us, as individuals, we really needed to take a step back. You have to be open to ideas and interpretations. You can't have the "my way or the highway mentality." Not that it was ever bad with Epoch, but we immediately realized that our preconceived notions for our own personal ways of playing were such huge parts of us. It was really great in that we learned a lot about each other, and once we realized that we had to really collaborate as much as possible. Everyone put their two cents in on every detail. We had to agree on what kind of snare drum to use, where to hit it, whether we should use a towel or not, bass drum tuning, the list goes on and on. Be open to those conversations, and realize that those conversations are going to take time. It will not always be playing in rehearsal settings, and while that might feel counterintuitive and like you're not getting anything done, communicating is really important for the success of this piece; I really think that's the essence of *Re(new)al*. When you get a group that's on the same page with the balance, shaping, and direction is when it really does well. The parts themselves aren't super challenging, aside from the running around the snare drum things. The difficulty comes in finding the perfect chemistry between you and the rest of the soloists to come together for the greater whole.

JANET SONG KIM: Thank you, that's a wonderful answer. Thank you so much for your time! If I do have more questions, I will absolutely email you!

ANDREW LYNAGE: This was a great conversation! I had a lot of fun, thank you. And yes, hit me up! Email me!

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