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Testimonies, Flaming Past

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For the Mivos Quartet

Testimonies, Flaming Pasts

for vocalizing string quartet & live electronics

Ben Zucker

About The Piece:

Testimonies, Flaming Pasts is another episode in my exploration of not only the compositional possibilities of the Sacred Harp and shape-note tradition, but also its personal meaning and affect. The desire for otherworldly transportation and subsequent renewal in paradise inspires a complex of beauty and abandon, and the dense effect of dozens of singers is awesome in the old-fashioned sense. The quartet here hopefully begins to approach that, and the process of apocalypse, of freedom from earthly sonic frames; it is an exercise in eschatology, albeit one that, much like eschatology itself, is aware of its own impossibility of fulfillment, but empowered by grand speculation.

Formatting:

The score is laid out such that each string part has two staves: the above staff for the player's voice, and the lower staff for the instrument itself. Most directions for playing are described around the staves by text. Where staves are absent, the voice or instrument is not engaged. Dashed lines indicate a continuation of material from the last instruction or notated bar.

Durations:

Though the score is moved through entirely by cues and text directions, the piece should be approximately 13'. The approximate timing by rehearsal marks is as follows:

A-0'05" B-1'30" C-2'21" D-3'47" E-4'45" F-5'27" G-6'25" H-7'05" I-7'21" J-9'00" K-9'40" M-12"

Technical setup:

This piece uses a Max/MSP patch to create artificial reverb on the amplified strings and voices. The patch is available from the composer. The strings should be amplified with pickups or microcondensers, and the voices should be amplified ideally with headset mics, but placed condensers will function just fine. The strings' output should go to channels 1-4, and the voices' to channels 5-8, in a mixer connected to a laptop running the patch, and may be sent through to a stereo output.

Testimonies, Flaming Pasts

Ben Zucker

A

♩=66

Hum a note you play (the perceivable pitch, in comfortable vocal range), and hold it for the length of a full breath (while continuing to play). At a new breath, hum and hold the next note you play. -----}

Violin I

Violin I musical staff. It begins with a treble clef, a 3/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second measure is a whole rest. The third measure is the start of a new section in 3/4 time, marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The notes and their fingering are: G4 (II), A4 (I), B4 (II), C5 (III), D5 (III), E5 (III), F5 (II), G5 (b II), A5 (III), B5 (IV), C6 (I), D6 (III), E6 (III), F6 (IV).

Violin II

Violin II musical staff. It begins with a treble clef, a 3/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second measure is a whole rest. The third measure is the start of a new section in 3/4 time, marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The notes and their fingering are: G4 (III), A4 (III), B4 (III), C5 (IV), D5 (II), E5 (II), F5 (IV), G5 (III), A5 (IV), B5 (II), C6 (II), D6 (I), E6 (II), F6 (II).

Viola

Viola musical staff. It begins with an alto clef, a 3/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second measure is a whole rest. The third measure is the start of a new section in 3/4 time, marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The notes and their fingering are: G4 (II), A4 (II), B4 (III), C5 (IV), D5 (IV), E5 (I), F5 (IV), G5 (II), A5 (III), B5 (IV), C6 (IV), D6 (II), E6 (II), F6 (III).

Violoncello

Violoncello musical staff. It begins with a bass clef, a 3/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second measure is a whole rest. The third measure is the start of a new section in 3/4 time, marked mezzo-forte (*mf*). The notes are: G4, A4, B4. A dashed line extends from the end of the staff to the right.

Breathe heavily into mic -----}

Intermittent snap pizzicatos on these pitches (approximately 2 every 3 bars)

B Hold out your last hummed note, and descend every few seconds by approximate 3/4 tones (think of it rather as a naively "off" step). When you reach the bottom of your comfortable range, attempt to struggle downward a few times, then stop.

mf

Single long bowed gestures, alternating between on the tailpiece and the bridge

mp

Hold out your last hummed note, and descend every few seconds by approximate 3/4 tones (think of it rather as a naively "off" step). When you reach the bottom of your comfortable range, attempt to struggle downward a few times, then stop.

mf

Single long bowed gestures, alternating between on the tailpiece and the bridge

mp

Hold out your last hummed note, and descend every few seconds by approximate 3/4 tones (think of it rather as a naively "off" step). When you reach the bottom of your comfortable range, attempt to struggle downward a few times, then stop.

mf

Single long bowed gestures, alternating between on the tailpiece and the bridge

mp

Continue heavy breaths until other voices stop, then whisper, acrimoniously:
"Who will see the Judge?"

When other players move to tailpiece and bridge: slow circular bowing across III and IV strings, with intermittent left-handed snap pizz. of I and II strings

mp

II III III II II II I IV III III IV

I II IV III IV IV II II III I III

IV IV III II IV IV III I II III III

On cue, when all voices are silent

Whisper this phrase, one word every few bows: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me. My vain hopes.*

Repeat ad lib, all out of sync, accelerating speed and dynamic contrasts becoming greater, into a frenzy

Whisper this phrase, one word within each bow: *It isn't time yet to leave the world below, but when?*
(you should reach the fully accelerated bar shortly after you have said the whole phrase twice or so)

I/II or II/III or III/IV*

Repeat ad lib, all out of sync, accelerating/transitioning into:

Changing fingering and bow positions (gradations of sul tasto and sul ponticello) with each new gesture

Whisper this phrase, a few words within each bow: *The swift passing of moments, the vast expansive blue*
(you should reach the fully accelerated bar shortly after you have said the whole phrase twice or so)

I/II or II/III or III/IV*

Repeat ad lib, all out of sync, accelerating/transitioning into:

Changing fingering and bow positions (gradations of sul tasto and sul ponticello) with each new gesture

Whisper this phrase, one word within each bow: *Oh, had I wings, I did but cut them off*
(you should reach the fully accelerated bar shortly after you have said the whole phrase twice or so)

I/II or II/III or III/IV*

Repeat ad lib, all out of sync, accelerating/transitioning into:

Changing fingering and bow positions (gradations of sul tasto and sul ponticello) with each new gesture

* finger position should be the same throughout: I and II open, and III and IV positioned to play the same pitches as I and II, respectively

E

6 **D**

Retune each string as it is played to the given scordatura. (numbers indicate frequency in Hz)
Repeat until all are fully retuned, then move on together. (from here on out, notation is not indicative of actual pitch)

2x

24 6" G.P.

Violin I: Sing the note of the string played while it is being played, on an open, folkly "hu" (as in hunt), and maintain the pitch of the voice as the string is retuned. Continue singing played pitches, now one of the two notes in a played double stop. Approximately halfway through your breath, move up or down a step and hold to the end of your breath. Then move to the next double stop and sing a new pitch on the notes. After playing through the repeat, move to the next section, independently of other players.

notes ca. 10" each
588.6
425.1
294
196.2
mf *pp* *f*

Violin II: Sing the note of the string played while it is being played, on an open, folkly "hu" (as in hunt), and maintain the pitch of the voice as the string is retuned. Continue singing played pitches, now one of the two notes in a played double stop. Approximately halfway through your breath, move up or down a step and hold to the end of your breath. Then move to the next double stop and sing a new pitch on the notes. After playing through the repeat, move to the next section, independently of other players.

notes ca. 10" each
686.7
490.5
327
196.2
mf *pp* *f*

Viola: Sing the note of the string played while it is being played, on an open, folkly "hu" (as in hunt), and maintain the pitch of the voice as the string is retuned. Continue singing played pitches, now one of the two notes in a played double stop. Approximately halfway through your breath, move up or down a step and hold to the end of your breath. Then move to the next double stop and sing a new pitch on the notes. After playing through the repeat, move to the next section, independently of other players.

notes ca. 10" each
261.6
392.4
196.2
130.8
mf *pp* *f*

Cello: Sing the note of the string played while it is being played, on an open, folkly "hu" (as in hunt), and maintain the pitch of the voice as the string is retuned. Continue singing played pitches, now one of the two notes in a played double stop. Approximately halfway through your breath, move up or down a step and hold to the end of your breath. Then move to the next double stop and sing a new pitch on the notes. After playing through the repeat, move to the next section, independently of other players.

notes ca. 10" each
289.9
163.5
98.1
65.4
mf *pp* *f*

F

Hold out your last note, and descend every few seconds by approximate 3/4 tones, this time by sliding. When you feel as though you're reaching the bottom of your range, slide upwards to a note high in your chest register (sort of belting), and descend again.

28

gliss.
loud, open, nasal "hah"

Continue to sing; when you've slid upwards three or four times; after one more descent, slide up to a high note and hold it ecstatically (rearticulating with new breaths as necessary)

f

f

When Violin II begins to play pizzicato: begin to include slow harmonic glissandi on free combinations of strings, moving from the bottom of the fingerboard to the bridge, all out of sync

Murmured, barely comprehensibly, with great pauses, like a reluctant confession:
"On that bright day I was between Heaven and Earth"
"This is a dark land, only to be remade"
"Here in the valley of conflict I stay"

Still murmuring but increasing in volume and rate:
"I have been commanded to improve, I know I must go through great tribulation."
"But grace will support and comfort my spirit."
After speaking, alternate chords with heavy breaths

rests and tones ca. 5"

f *f* *f*

ff

freely play from selection of chords, alternate *quasi chitarra* and arpeggiated snap pizzicatos

Hold out your last note, and descend every few seconds by approximate 3/4 tones, this time by sliding. When you feel as though you're reaching the bottom of your range, slide upwards to a note high in your chest register (sort of belting), and descend again.

gliss.
loud, open, nasal "hah"

Continue to sing; when you've slid upwards three or four times; after one more descent, slide up to a high note and hold it ecstatically (rearticulating with new breaths as necessary)

f

f

When Violin II begins to play pizzicato: begin to include slow harmonic glissandi on free combinations of strings, moving from the bottom of the fingerboard to the bridge, all out of sync

Hold out your last note, and descend every few seconds by approximate 3/4 tones, this time by sliding. When you feel as though you're reaching the bottom of your range, slide upwards to a note high in your chest register (sort of belting), and descend again.

gliss.
loud, open, nasal "hah"

Continue to sing; when you've slid upwards three or four times; after one more descent, slide up to a high note and hold it ecstatically (rearticulating with new breaths as necessary)

f

f

When Violin II begins to play pizzicato: begin to include slow harmonic glissandi on free combinations of strings, moving from the bottom of the fingerboard to the bridge, all out of sync

G

H

Fall into sync (ca. ♩=110)

with variation

ex. bowing, with variation

2nd violin solo on cue

ff

After four glissandi, begin to insert staccato attacks in between legato movements, until all notes attacked (if this leads to a decrease in rate of playing, go with it). Harmonic glissandi continue, two or three more at the same rate as before, and by then all notes should be attacked.

when other players have fallen into sync:

arco. II/III

Deccel.

n.v. ← → molto vib.

f

ffp

with variation

ex. bowing, with variation

ff

After four glissandi, begin to insert staccato attacks in between legato movements, until all notes attacked (if this leads to a decrease in rate of playing, go with it). Harmonic glissandi continue, two or three more at the same rate as before, and by then all notes should be attacked.

with variation

ex. bowing, with variation

ff

After four glissandi, begin to insert staccato attacks in between legato movements, until all notes attacked (if this leads to a decrease in rate of playing, go with it). Harmonic glissandi continue, two or three more at the same rate as before, and by then all notes should be attacked.

I violin II solo; set new tempo (ca. ♩=82)

mf

p

f

p

In sync with violin II tempo (ca. ♩=82)
 All repeats 3-5x, need not match exactly as long as you end reach the
 last decelerating notes by the time Violin II is playing held notes

IV

p \swarrow *f* \searrow *p* *dynamic swells should occur over the arc of each bar including its repeats. sim. throughout*

Freely recombine chords,
 play as in previous bars.

p \swarrow *f* \searrow *p* *sim.*

In sync with violin II tempo (ca. ♩=82)
 All repeats 3-5x, need not match exactly as long as you end reach the
 last decelerating notes by the time Violin II is playing held notes

I

p \swarrow *f* \searrow *p* *dynamic swells should occur over the arc of each bar including its repeats. sim. throughout*

In sync with violin II tempo (ca. ♩=82)
 All repeats 3-5x, need not match exactly as long as you end reach the
 last decelerating notes by the time Violin II is playing held notes

III

p \swarrow *f* \searrow *p* *dynamic swells should occur over the arc of each bar including its repeats. sim. throughout*

The first system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a sequence of rhythmic patterns: eighth notes, quarter notes, and eighth notes, with repeat signs. The middle staff is in alto clef and contains a sequence of rhythmic patterns: eighth notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and quarter notes, with repeat signs. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a sequence of rhythmic patterns: eighth notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and quarter notes, with repeat signs. A dashed horizontal line is positioned between the top and middle staves. A double bar line is located to the left of the bottom staff.

The second system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a sequence of rhythmic patterns: eighth notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and quarter notes, with repeat signs. The middle staff is in alto clef and contains a sequence of rhythmic patterns: eighth notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and quarter notes, with repeat signs. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a sequence of rhythmic patterns: eighth notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and quarter notes, with repeat signs. A dashed horizontal line is positioned between the top and middle staves. A double bar line is located to the left of the bottom staff.

The first system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is in Treble clef and contains five measures of music with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and repeat signs. The middle staff is in Bass clef and contains five measures of music, starting with a triplet of eighth notes marked with a 'III' above it, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes, and repeat signs. The bottom staff is in Tenor clef and contains five measures of music with eighth and sixteenth notes, and repeat signs. A dashed horizontal line is positioned between the top and middle staves.

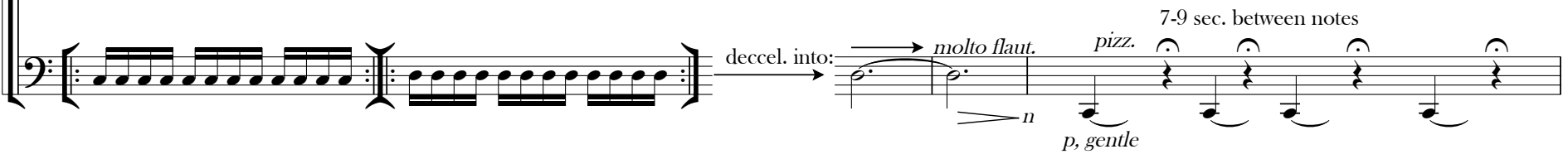
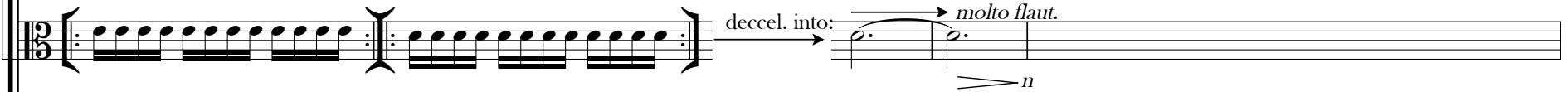
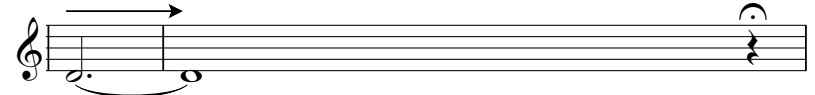
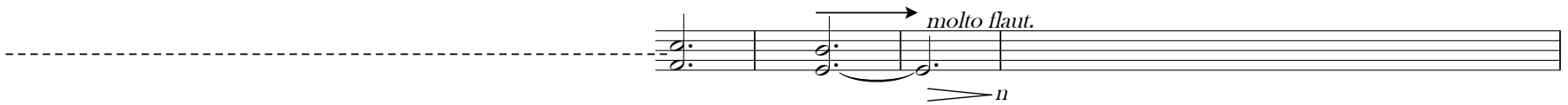
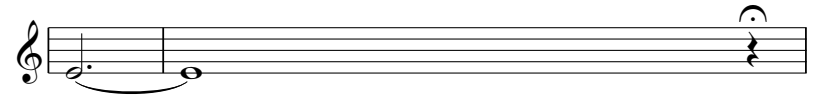
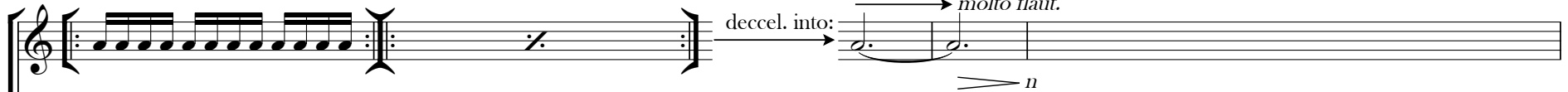
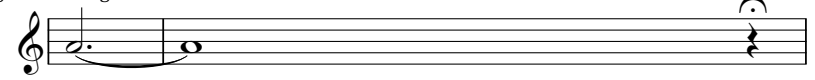


The second system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is in Treble clef and contains four measures of music with eighth and sixteenth notes, and repeat signs. The middle staff is in Bass clef and contains four measures of music with eighth and sixteenth notes, and repeat signs. The bottom staff is in Tenor clef and contains four measures of music with eighth and sixteenth notes, and repeat signs. A dashed horizontal line is positioned between the top and middle staves.

J

Hum your note in a comfortable register, and roll it around in your mouth, changing the shape of your throat and slightly altering the pitch--this should be relaxing and healing after the high notes.

After 4th cello note, G.P. then reenter together:



75 **K** slow, free, unison (ca. ♩=66)

1x: as is, IV string
2x: 16va, I string
3x: as is, but with artificial octave harmonics throughout, IV string

Musical staff 1: Treble clef, mp dynamics, gliss. marking. The staff contains a melodic line with various rhythmic values and articulations, including a glissando marking.

1x: as is, IV string
2x: 8va, IV string, *alto sul ponticello*
3x: 16va, I string

Musical staff 2: Treble clef, mp dynamics, gliss. marking. The staff contains a melodic line similar to the first staff, with a glissando marking.

1x: as is, III string
2x: as is, but with artificial octave harmonics throughout, IV string
3x: as is, IV string

Musical staff 3: Bass clef, mp dynamics, gliss. marking. The staff contains a melodic line with a glissando marking.

1x: as is, II string
2x: 8vb, III string
3x: 8vb, IV string, *alto sul ponticello*

Musical staff 4: Bass clef, mp dynamics, gliss. marking. The staff contains a melodic line with a glissando marking.

14 **L** like a fond fingerpicked guitar ballad (ca. ♩=86)

Slowly sing your recollection of the previous melody, on a round "oo", at your own pace, in sync with no one. -----

Pizz.; all open strings, except where specified

Slowly sing your recollection of the previous melody, on a round "oo", at your own pace, in sync with no one. -----

Pizz.; all open strings, except where specified

Slowly sing your recollection of the previous melody, on a round "oo", at your own pace, in sync with no one. -----

Pizz.; all open strings, except where specified

Slowly sing your recollection of the previous melody, on a round "oo", at your own pace, in sync with no one. -----

pizz.

arco.

Freely alternate between pizzicato notes and double stops

M

3x

The musical score consists of five staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a melodic line. The second staff is a treble clef with a more complex melodic line. The third staff is a bass clef with a bass line, including fret numbers IV and III III. The fourth and fifth staves are empty with dashed lines.

As the electronics fade away, all speak, unsynchronized, bleakly yet at peace,
 to no one in particular:
*Wheels within wheels grind us into the narrow way, yet as I was enclosed
 there was suddenly more light than I had ever seen before, and without
 choice I went on. Our parting is needful and we must obey.*

||
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