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Embers from the Void

A Dissertation Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

(Music Composition)

Stony Brook University

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Abstract of the Dissertation
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Embers from the Void for string quartet and voice is a work centered around the idea of transition, specifically the transition state of death. Each moment explores this idea through imagery of landscape, season, and space or, more precisely, forest, winter, and emptiness (the void). The poetry, self-authored, was written for and in conjunction with the music. The two are inseparable.

A running theme that will be apparent in the text is “what lies beneath the surface.” An aspect of this theme will be present in each movement and is itself a metaphor for both literary ideas and the theoretical foundation of the music.

Musically, this work is at times sparse and relentlessly singular in process. In contrast, it is at times lush and complex. Within, there are moments in which the music could be classified as minimal, spectral, atonal, and quasi-tonal. Underlying all of this is a sole foundation that is the genesis of the entire work. This work, in practically every aspect, is formed from the geometry inherent in golden arithmetic. Proportions are guided by the golden ratio. Pitch, with rare exception, is derived from the Fibonacci sequence and similar additive number patterns that are themselves approximating, with ever increasing accuracy, the golden or “divine” proportion.

On the surface *Embers from the Void* is seemingly simple and transparent, however, this simplicity is the result of golden geometry that is intricate and other-worldly yet familiar, and this transparency is the result of crystalline structures at the foundation of that very geometry. To understand this work, one must look *beneath the surface* of the unassuming façade to the glint of gold that lies beyond.

Event Horizon

Right out of reach, High above,
a star shining black draws near.

In the night sky turning slow,
offering to the blind eternal sight, endless sight

Here is not life,
it's death in disguise

Still, this single point of light shines
dim and still.
This single point of light
cast cold from the void.

Clear Stream

Clear stream that bends,
tell me which way.

The sun sets soon,
 ...too soon.
 ...too soon.

I see a hawk in the night sky,
an oddly black hawk.

I need some time to rest my eyes.
I need just a moment to rest my eyes.

Traveler's song

In those great woods that carry my heart
I fall and let you entwine
this body curled like a newborn
And sink beneath the warm soil.

The stars have bled the night sky
of blackest aether.

Please watch my loved ones here,
I set sail against the void.
A traveler ever wandering
through countless dark worlds.

I cross what's empty
and light a small fire.

There's a Light

M. Vandegriff

♩ = 87

Score for the first system, measures 1-9. The staves are labeled Voice, Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line in the strings and a vocal line that is currently silent. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano) with a hairpin.

Score for the second system, measures 10-17. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "There's a light from". The dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) with a hairpin. The instrumental parts continue with their melodic and harmonic support.

There's a Light

19

far a-way it shines on a red wood tree and in it's wake, si-lence, loss,

19

28

end-less-ly but there's a light... a lit-tle light shin-ning

mp

28

There's a Light

36 *rit.*

36 *rit.*

mf *mp*

$\text{♩} = 96$

45 *mf* *f*

Em - ber from the void wan - der - ing hope - less - ly lost ev - er - last - ing.

45

There's a Light

The musical score for "There's a Light" begins at measure 54. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a treble clef and consists of three measures of half notes: G4, A4, and B4. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and consists of four staves. The first two staves are for the right hand, and the last two are for the left hand. The piano part features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, with a prominent bass line in the left hand. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is enclosed in a double bar line at the end of the third measure.

Under the Snow

♩ = 102

rit. Tempo.

rit. Tempo.

rit. Tempo.

p *mp* *p* *p*

p *mp* *p*

7

7

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

Under the Snow

14

14

f

mp

mp

rit. Tempo.

21

21

p

p

rit. Tempo.

rit. Tempo.

rit. Tempo.

Under the Snow

28 *Slight rit.* *Tempo.*

28 *Slight rit.* *Tempo.*

Slight rit. *Tempo.*

Slight rit. *Tempo.*

Slight rit. *Tempo.*

p *mf* *p*

p *mf* *p*

35 *rit.* *Tempo.* *p*

A seed falls from a tree

35 *rit.* *Tempo.* *p*

A seed falls from a tree

rit. *Tempo.*

f *p* *mp*

rit. *Tempo.*

f *p* *mp*

rit. *Tempo.*

f *p* *mp*

Under the Snow

41 *mp* *mf*

Help - less. Storm clouds paint the sky - in black char - coal.

47 *f* *f*

Light - ning strikes. Un - der the snow

Under the Snow

52

a dead phoe-nix lies un-der the snow a dead phoe-nix wait - ing

p

52

p

p

p

p

57

and coun - ting our re - mains. Our re - mains.

f *mp* *p* *mf*

rit. *Tempo.*

57

f *p* *rit.* *Tempo.*

f *mp* *mf*

rit. *Tempo.*

f *mp* *mf*

rit. *Tempo.*

f *p* *rit.* *Tempo.*

Under the Snow

64 *mp* *Slight rit.* *Tempo.*
Not e-nough.

64 *Slight rit.* *Tempo.*
p

Slight rit. *Tempo.*
f p *p*

Slight rit. *Tempo.*
f p *p*

Slight rit. *Tempo.*
p

70 *rit.* *mp*
it's not e-nough.

70 *rit.*

f

f *rit.*

f *rit.*

f *rit.*

Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds

$\text{♩} = 55$ *p* *mp* *mp* *mf*

Voice
 Slow - ly cold bites my bo - dy still. Sink - ing to ev - er dark - er worlds.

Vln. I
pp *p* *pp* *p*

Vln. II
pp *p* *mp*

Vla.
p *p* *p* *mp*

Vc.
p *p* *p* *mp*

5 *mp* *mp*

Riv - er ice hides ev - er chang - ing flow - ing streams. Nev - er still.

pp *mp* *pp* *pp*

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

p *mp* *pp* *p*

mp *p*

Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds

Musical score for measures 9-15. The score consists of five staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and three additional staves. The music is written in a key with one flat and a 4/4 time signature. Measure 9 begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody in the upper staves features a series of notes with dynamic markings: *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*, and *p*. The accompaniment in the lower staves includes chords and moving lines with dynamics such as *pp*, *p*, and *mp*. The bottom-most staff contains a series of notes with dynamics *mp*, *p*, and *p*.

Musical score for measures 16-22. The score consists of five staves. The melody in the upper staves includes lyrics: "I met the weak-ness in the ice. Fought to reach the sur-face. Float-ing". The dynamics for the melody are *mp*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it. The accompaniment in the lower staves includes chords and moving lines with dynamics such as *p*, *mp*, and *p*. The bottom-most staff contains a series of notes with dynamics *mp*, *p*, *mp*, *mp*, and *p*.

Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds

22 *mf* *p* *mp* *f*

fur - ther down be - low the ice. Slow - ly. Fur - ther. Fur - ther down.

22 II. *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *mf* *p* *mp* *f* *mp*

III. IV. *mp* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

Detailed description: This system contains the first vocal line and the beginning of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 22 with a melody in 6/4 time. The piano accompaniment consists of four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. It features various dynamic markings such as *mp*, *p*, *mf*, and *f*, along with crescendo and decrescendo hairpins. Rehearsal marks II, III, and IV are placed above the piano staves. The system concludes with a double bar line and a 6/4 time signature.

28 *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

The wat - er's get - ting cold - er. The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.

28

Detailed description: This system contains the second vocal line and the continuation of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins at measure 28 with a melody in 6/4 time. The piano accompaniment continues across four staves, maintaining the same dynamic markings and hairpins as the first system. The system ends with a double bar line and a 6/4 time signature.

Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds

mf $\text{mf} \rightarrow f$ $\text{mf} \rightarrow f$

31 The wat - er's get - ting cold - er. The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.

31 *mf* $\text{mf} \rightarrow mp$ *mf* $\text{mf} \rightarrow mp$ *mf* $\text{mf} \rightarrow mp$ *mf* $\text{mf} \rightarrow mp$

mf $\text{mf} \rightarrow f$ $\text{mf} \rightarrow f$

34 The wat - er's get - ting cold - er. The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.

34 *f* $f \rightarrow mf$ *f* $f \rightarrow mf$ *f* $f \rightarrow mf$ *f* $f \rightarrow mf$

Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds

mf ————— *f* >

37 rit...
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.

37 rit... *f* >

rit... *f* >

rit... *f* >

rit... *f* >

rit... *f* >

Event Horizon

♩ = 100 *

Voice

mp

Right out of reach, high a - bove a

Vln. I

mp

Vln. II

mp

Vla.

mp

Vc.

mp

8

star shin - ing black draws near. In the night sky

8

mp

* Repeat only once (classical repeat).

Event Horizon

16 *smf* *mf*

turn - ing slow off - ering to the blind e - ter - nal sight end - less

23 *mp*

sight. Here is not life, it's

Event Horizon

31 *smf* *mp* *mp* *p*

death in dis - guise. Still, this sin - gle point of light shines

38 *mf* *mp* *p* *mf*

dim and still. This sin - gle point of light cast cold from the void.

Event Horizon

45

45

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

Clear Stream

♩ = 65

Score for the first system, measures 1-7. The score includes staves for Voice, Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 and then to 5/4. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, *mf*, and *f*.

Score for the second system, measures 8-14. The score includes staves for Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 and then to 5/4. Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, *mf*, and *p*.

Clear Stream

15 *mp* *mf*

Clear steam that bends,

22 *mf* *mf* *mp* *mf*

tell me which way. The sun sets soon. Too soon.

Clear Stream

30 *p*
Too soon.

p *mp* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *mf*

p *mf* *mp* *mf*

p *mf* *mp* *mf*

p *mf* *mp* *mf*

38

mp *mf* *mp* *f* *mf* *p*

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *p*

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *p*

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *p*

Clear Stream

45 *mp* <

I see

51 *mf* > *f* *mp*

a hawk in the night sky, an odd - ly black hawk.

Clear Stream

57 *mp* *mf* *mf*

I need some time to rest my eyes. I need just a mo - ment to rest my eyes.

57 *mf* *mp* *mf* *mf*

62

62

p

Traveler's Song

$\text{♩} = \text{III}$

Score for the first system of "Traveler's Song". The staves are labeled Voice, Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music is in 3/4 time, as indicated by the tempo marking $\text{♩} = \text{III}$. The first six measures show the beginning of the piece. The Voice, Vln. I, and Vln. II parts are silent (indicated by a horizontal line). The Viola (Vla.) and Violoncello (Vc.) parts play a melodic line. The dynamic marking *mp* (mezzo-piano) is present at the beginning of the Viola and Vc. parts.

Score for the second system of "Traveler's Song", starting at measure 7. The staves are labeled Voice, Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music is in 3/4 time. The first six measures of this system show the continuation of the piece. The Voice, Vln. I, and Vln. II parts are silent. The Viola (Vla.) and Violoncello (Vc.) parts continue their melodic line. The dynamic marking *mp* is present at the beginning of the Viola and Vc. parts.

Traveler's Song

13 *mp* *mf*

In those great woods that carry my heart I fall and let you en -

18 *mp*

twine this body curled like a new born and sink beneath the warm soil. The

Traveler's Song

23

stars have bled the night sky of black - est ae - ther. Please watch my loved ones

23

28

here, I set sail a-against the void, a trave-ler ev - er wan-der - ing through

28

Traveler's Song

33 *f* *f*

count - less dark worlds. I cross what's em - pty and light a sm - a - ll

38

fire.

38 *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *mp* *mf* *f*

Traveler's Song

44

cresc... (throughout)

44

cresc... (throughout)

cresc... (throughout)

cresc... (throughout)

50

50

Traveler's Song

55

55

f *f* *f*

f *f* *f*

f *f* *f*

f *f* *f*