String Quartet No. 2: By-products of mass media

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This is to certify that I have examined this copy of a doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

String Quartet No. 2: By-products of mass media

Greg J. Bowers

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor Diane Thome
Music Composition

As early as 1996, I began envisioning a string quartet in which the ensemble intersected with various dimensions of popular culture in an organic way. I sought to re-imagine the historic ensemble as descendant from 20th century media, relaying the psychology of sound and image imported from commercial cultural ghettos. More recently, as I began to compose, my original concept was further informed by the writings of media theorist Marshall McLuhan. I have attempted, in part, to portray McLuhan’s transformational world, in which mechanized production and history fade away to be replaced by iconic references, psychological and intuitive will, and tribal collectivism.

Movement I imitates the block structures, collage, and “static-frantic” aesthetics of rave music. During the movement, each part loses its individual identity and is assimilated into an unrelenting, unified gesture. Movement II depicts recitative forms that appeared to me during several minutes of channel surfing. Here, collage is drawn from the interplay between simultaneous rhythms of speech and music interrupted by the “click” of a limited attention span. Movement III, in an analogy to online surfing, asks each performer to create a private arrangement of the popular spiritual, “I’ll Fly Away.” While the parts are somewhat traditional and even nostalgic, the unifying presence of a centralized structure is significantly diminished; there is no score for this movement. The collective result is an intuitive, abstracted impression that remains imminently and timelessly accessible.
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LIST OF NOTATION DESCRIPTIONS

Portamento with a given range. The small pitch does not need to sound. If the note is tied, be sure to move away from the note only when indicated.

Bow on the bridge (molto pont.). A mix of noise and pitch is desired.

Portamento with rhythmic bowing.

Respectively: snap pizz., pizz. with the fingernail, left-handed pizz., and pizz. gliss. (during the ring).

This figure recurs throughout mvmt. I. An alternate notation is provided below. Play evenly (as if in another tempo) and pesante.

Changes in vibrato during the duration of the note.

Respectively: bow the side of the bridge (noise only is desired), tap the wood with mallet, knock the wood. The cellist will need a soft bass drum mallet for movement II.

Scratch tone: place bow hairs flat against the string with pressure. Always raspy, coarse, and loud, but not necessarily slow.

Respectively: ricochet bowing (jete), strike the strings with the palm of the right hand.

Respectively: col legno battuto, col legno tratto.

Raise/lower the pitch an additional quarter tone to the accidental indicated.
PERFORMANCE DIRECTIONS

Much of movement II and the opening of movement I are to be played "In Free Time." Each performer should play soloistically, individually interpreting the given *circa* tempo marking, and without regard to the other players. Though the approximate sequence of events is shown on the score, the actual performance may bring about a somewhat different order of events depending on each performer's interpretation of the tempo markings. Each "Free Time" section *begins and ends together* (at the double bar), most often ending on a fermata. The fermata is not intended as a lengthy hold, but rather as a common stopping place. When all performers have finished the section, the next section should immediately commence with minimal pause. In movement II, cue notes are provided in the parts indicating which instrument begins or ends a section. The cues are provided to help performers start and stop each section together, but performers should not attempt to synchronize with the other parts at any point within the sections. "Tutti" indicates the return to traditional meter and tempo.

Also in movement II, because there are few traditional measures, accidentals are *always* indicated with the only exception being that a given accidental holds throughout a beamed group.

Movement III is a structured improvisation around a spiritual. Everyone begins tutti on the unison pickup measure. From that point, each performer repeats the main section of the music three times. On the 1st pass, performers (except for cello) select from one of two different measures as they move through the music in time. For example, violin I might play the first measure (first column) on line 1 followed by the second measure on line 2. Brackets indicate which measures are to be used during each of the three different passes. On the first pass, the cellist should count through the measures on line 1 as rests and enter upon arriving at the 2nd pass (1st repeat). In addition, on the 2nd and 3rd passes, all performers may start from somewhere within the material other than the beginning, noted by markers over the score. In this case, performers would play to the repeat sign, repeat back to the first column, and then play until coming back around to the original starting marker. Performers should take care to play with a mutually common pulse. *Rhythms must be read accurately and each measure varies in total beats; all measures are not in the same meter.* Try not to break the rhythm from one measure to another. If, by mistake, a performer should play the given rhythm incorrectly, s/he should always return to playing in time as perceived by listening to the whole group. Fermatas, which may be encountered on the 3rd pass, should be held to the performer's liking, after which s/he should return to playing in time. When a performer has completed 3 total passes of the material (regardless of starting place), s/he continues on to the 3rd and final page, which is played "In Free Time" (see above).

This score contains the parts to movement III (2 pages each) in the following order: violin I, violin II, viola, violincello.
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DEDICATION

To “FEARnoMUSIC” ensemble, Portland, Oregon.
I. tribal Radio » a night at the gay bar

In Free Time (soloistic and in separate tempi, \( \approx c. \text{c} \))

no vibrato

expressively, free bowing

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

\[\text{VI: } \downarrow \text{ } 120\]
In tutti tempo - 190

molto vibrato

normal vibrato

sul D

Vla.

normal vibrato

Vc.

f

Vln. I

molto vibrato

f

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

pont. ord. pont.

Vln. I

pont. ord. pont.

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

ordin.

pont. ord.

pont.

Vln. I

ordin.

pont. ord.

pont.

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

ordin.

pont. al tallone
II. the opera will not be Televised
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Vita

Greg Bowers earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Music Composition at the University of Washington in 2006. He also holds degrees in composition and organ performance from Yale University, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Lewis and Clark College. He has studied composition with Diane Thome, Sheila Silver, Jacob Druckman, Anthony Davis, and Vincent McDermott and performance art/site installation with Maren Hassinger. From 1998-2002, he was Assistant Professor of Music at Linfield College and currently teaches composition and music theory at Pacific Lutheran University. His music has been performed by diverse artists such as Fear No Music ensemble, soprano Christine Schadeberg, Portland Gay Men’s Chorus, and Ad Libitum Chamber players (Budapest). As a performance artist, he has presented solo and group multi-disciplinary works at venues on both east and west coasts. Awards include grants from the Regional Arts and Culture Council of Portland and the New York Foundation for the Arts.