

I sat, I listened...
for string quartet and lockdown soundscape

Sam Cave

During the Covid-19 UK lockdowns in 2020-21 I took some field recordings from the window above my composing desk as I was fascinated by the absence of the normally prolific human sounds of everyday life. This piece is built from one of those recordings with the live string quartet melding with the recorded soundscape. I have tried to capture the natural beauty of the wind in the trees, the birdsong and, in the distance, the trains going by.

The more I listened to the sounds I was hearing and capturing in these recordings the more I realised that many things we think of as 'musical constructs' were present and, in fact, optimally expressive, in these natural soundscapes. In this piece phrasing, structure, contour and pacing are all derived from the flow of the natural events I captured in my field recording.

Some of the birdsong transcriptions are my own and others were adapted from the extraordinary transcription work of Alexander Liebermann.

S.C, London, 2021

Violin 1 starts the pre-recorded soundscape on the downbeat of b.1 and, if necessary, beats the remainder of b.1 to establish the tempo. The synching of the quartet with the recording does not need to be absolutely precise but try to stay within 2-3 seconds of the timecode of the recording. Timecode markers have been added to the score to aid rehearsal. The balance of the quartet and the recording should be such that the quartet 'inhabits' the soundscape, blending with it, rising out of it, and disappearing into it. Aim for some 'distance' in the overall feel of the piece, as if the audience is listening through an open window.

Notes with round bracketed noteheads are lightly muted with the left hand as close as possible to the notated pitch. For open strings, mute the string as close to the nut as possible. For fingered pitches, finger the note as usual and then use the next finger of the left hand to lightly mute the string as close as possible. The resulting sound should be a blend of the notated pitch and some 'white noise' from the muting finger.

Notes with square bracketed noteheads are performed with the bow so close to the bridge, or perhaps on it, that the bow acts as a mute and almost no pitch is produced.

'Col legno battuto' is usually accompanied by an instruction of where to strike the string with the bow (e.g. bb.13-27). In these diagrams the vertical dotted line represents the entire string length from the nut at the top to the bridge at the bottom. The solid horizontal line represents the position of the bow on the string. The three main striking positions are: in the middle of the string (around the node of the 2nd partial), a 'sul pont.' position, and a 'molto pont.' position. This technique is usually combined with the round bracket muting described above and the resulting sound should be a blend of the muted open string and the very high pitches produced by the wood of the bow bouncing off the string.

I sat, I listened...

written for the Ligeti Quartet's Workout scheme

Sam Cave

Start Track
00:00:00:00

00:00:00:00 | 00:00:05:00 | 00:00:09:00

$\text{♩} = 60$

A

fluttering

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

ricochet, quasi gliss. on natural harmonics I

touch the node shown (7th partial) but bow so close to the bridge that almost no pitch is produced

ad lib. but slow gliss. between the 7th partial node and the nut IV

touch the node shown (7th partial) but bow so close to the bridge that almost no pitch is produced IV

pp

p

mp

pp

cont. sim.

vary dynamics in response to Vc. but do not change bow position

00:00:13:00 | 00:00:17:00

4

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

sim.

cont. sim.

move bow to allow partial to speak

sim.

00:00:21:00 | 00:00:25:00

Vln 1 ⁶

Vln 2 *mp*

Vla cont. sim.

Vc. *sf*

00:00:29:00 | 00:00:33:00 | 00:00:37:00

Vln 1 ⁸

Vln 2

Vla cont. sim.

Vc. *sf*

00:00:41:00 00:00:45:00 00:00:49:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

11

col legno battuto *mp* 3

mute string just past the nut

00:00:53:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

14

p 3

3 3 3 3

00:00:57:00

Vln 1

15

pp

Vln 2

col legno battuto

mp

Vla

Vc.

00:01:01:00 col legno battuto 00:01:05:00 00:01:09:00 00:01:13:00

Vln 1

16

mp

Vln 2

I arco

pp

Vla

Vc.

00:01:17:00

20

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

Musical score for measures 20-21. The score is for four instruments: Violin 1 (Vln 1), Violin 2 (Vln 2), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte). The score shows rests for Vln 1 and Vln 2. The Viola part has a triplet of eighth notes starting at measure 20, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in measure 21. The Violoncello part has a triplet of eighth notes starting at measure 20, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in measure 21. There are vertical dashed lines above the notes in measures 20 and 21, indicating bowing or breath marks.

00:01:21:00

21

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

col legno battuto

Musical score for measures 21-22. The score is for four instruments: Violin 1 (Vln 1), Violin 2 (Vln 2), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte). The score shows rests for Vln 1. The Violin 2 part is marked 'col legno battuto' and has a triplet of eighth notes starting at measure 21, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in measure 22. The Viola part has a triplet of eighth notes starting at measure 21, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in measure 22. The Violoncello part has a triplet of eighth notes starting at measure 21, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in measure 22. There are vertical dashed lines above the notes in measures 21 and 22, indicating bowing or breath marks.

00:01:25:00

22

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

00:01:29:00 | 00:01:33:00

23

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

00:01:37:00

25

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

00:01:41:00

26

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

00:01:45:00 | 00:01:49:00 | 00:01:51:00

B light and dancing ♩ = 120

Vln 1

27 **3**

Vln 2

mp

Vla

Vc.

arco

p

00:01:53:00 | 00:01:55:00 | 00:01:57:00 | 00:01:59:00 | 00:02:01:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

col legno tratto

mp

Vc.

00:02:03:00 | 00:02:05:00 | 00:02:07:00 | 00:02:09:00

Vln 1

35 arco *pp* *p*

Vln 2

arco *mp* *pp*

Vla

Vc.

00:02:11:00 | 00:02:13:00 | 00:02:15:00 | 00:02:17:00 | 00:02:19:00

Vln 1

39

Vln 2

p arco *mf*

Vla

Vc.

00:02:21:00 00:02:23:00 00:02:25:00 00:02:27:00 00:02:29:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

00:02:31:00 00:02:33:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

00:02:35:00 | 00:02:37:00 | 00:02:39:00 | 00:02:41:00

Vln 1

51

Vln 2

Vla

col legno tratto

Vc.

00:02:43:00 | 00:02:45:00 | 00:02:47:00 | 00:02:49:00 | 00:02:51:00 | 00:02:53:00

Vln 1

55

sul pont.

mp

mf

pizz.

Vln 2

sul pont.

mp

mp

Vla

sul pont. arco

mp

Vc.

mp

00:02:55:00 | 00:02:57:00 | 00:02:59:00 | 00:03:01:00 | 00:03:03:00

61 ord. arco

Vln 1 *pp* *pp*

Vln 2 ord. *pp*

Vla

Vc. *ppp* *p* 3

00:03:05:00 | 00:03:07:00 | 00:03:09:00 | 00:03:11:00 | 00:03:13:00

66

Vln 1

Vln 2 *mp*

Vla ord. *pp*

Vc. ord. *pp*

00:03:15:00 | 00:03:17:00 | 00:03:19:00

Vln 1 71 *mp* *mf* pizz. *col legno tratto*

Vln 2 *p* pizz. *pp* *col legno tratto*

Vla *mp* *pp* *col legno tratto*

Vc. *mp* *ppp* *p*

00:03:21:00 | 00:03:23:00 | 00:03:25:00 | 00:03:27:00 | 00:03:29:00

Vln 1 74 *mp* *batutto* *tratto*

Vln 2 *mp* *batutto* *tratto* pizz. *pp*

Vla *mp* *batutto* *tratto*

Vc. *3* *p*

00:03:31:00 | 00:03:33:00 | 00:03:35:00 | 00:03:37:00 | 00:03:39:00 | 00:03:41:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

79

arco

pp

Detailed description: This system covers measures 79 to 84. The Vln 1 and Vln 2 staves contain rests. The Vla and Vc. staves also contain rests. The Vln 2 staff has two notes in measures 80 and 81, both marked 'arco' and 'pp'. The notes are G4 (flat) and A4 (sharp) in measure 80, and G4 (flat) and A4 (sharp) in measure 81.

00:03:43:00 | 00:03:45:00 | 00:03:47:00 | 00:03:49:00 | 00:03:51:00

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

85

arco

mp

Detailed description: This system covers measures 85 to 89. The Vln 1 and Vln 2 staves contain rests. The Vla staff has a melodic line starting in measure 85 with a triplet of G4 (flat), A4 (sharp), and B4 (flat), marked 'arco' and 'mp'. The line continues with notes in measures 86, 87, 88, and 89. The Vc. staff contains rests.

00:03:53:00 | 00:03:55:00 | 00:03:57:00

Vln 1: *arco* *pp* *90* *3* *pizz.*

Vln 2: *arco* *pp* *3* *ppp*

Vla: -

Vc: -

00:03:59:00 | 00:04:01:00 | 00:04:03:00 | 00:04:05:00

Vln 1: *93* *C* $\text{♩} = 60$

Vln 2: *pizz.* *ppp*

Vla: *pp*

Vc: *pp*

00:04:09:00 | 00:04:13:00 | 00:04:17:00 | 00:04:21:00 | 00:04:25:00 | 00:04:29:00

Vln 1

97 arco I *ppp*

Vln 2

arco I *ppp*

Vla

ord.

Vc.

ord.

00:04:33:00 | 00:04:37:00 | 00:04:41:00 | 00:04:45:00 | 00:04:49:00

Vln 1

103

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.