Title
Plum Blossom Warm Gentle Wind Shimmering Stillness (for Bass Trombone and Ensemble)

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/50s5s1c0

Author
Levis, Jason L.

Publication Date
2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Plum Blossom  
Warm Gentle Wind  
Shimmering Stillness  

for Bass Trombone and Ensemble  

by  

Jason L. Levis  

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Music  
in the  
Graduate Division  
of the  
University of California, Berkeley  

Committee in charge:  
Professor Cindy Cox, Chair  
Professor Edmund Campion  
Professor Myra Melford  

Fall 2012
Abstract

Plum Blossom Warm Gentle Wind Shimmering Stillness
for Bass Trombone and Ensemble

by

Jason L. Levis

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Cindy Cox, Chair

Plum Blossom Warm Gentle Wind Shimmering Stillness is a composition for solo bass trombone and accompanying ensemble. It is in six movements and is approximately 12 minutes long. The piece is dedicated to my grandfathers Benjamin A. Levis, and Harbert S. Gregory, who have passed away in recent years. I initially began work on concepts for the composition while studying with Professor John Thow, and then with Professor Jorge Liderman, but put it away after their untimely passing. Movement four is dedicated to both of them. The composition was written for my good friend and unparalleled bass trombonist, Marc Bolin.

The title reflects my interest in haiku, and the possibility of containing in a brief statement, a moment of total clarity and harmony. While reflecting on Professor Thow’s passing, sitting on my front porch, watching the blooming plum tree in front of my house shake and stir ever so gently when the wind would pick up, I experienced one of these moments of deep quietude. Even as the title is not a haiku in its traditional form, it contains a moment for me where something brief and subtle can have a sudden impact and lasting resonance. Even though the composition is inspired by this moment, it is not an impressionistic, sonic image of the natural world. Rather, it is a metaphor for the complex relationships that make up our human experience, the impact those relationships have on us, and the lasting effects and reverberations they create.

The work employs a myriad of extended techniques, engendering layers of timbral commonality. This allows the ensemble to fuse into blended “meta-instruments”, and magnify the sonic landscape of the bass trombone. The composition is influenced by my interest in the sometimes antagonistic aims of post-spectral harmony and orchestration, self-similarity modeling of the new complexity school, and large-scale architecture in improvisation.

The instrumentation for Plum Blossom Warm Gentle Wind Shimmering Stillness is bass trombone, four percussionists, piano, two violins, viola, violoncello, and contrabass.
**Plum Blossom Warm Gentle Wind Shimmering Stillness** (2012) for Bass Trombone and Ensemble
for Marc Bolin

Dedicated to my Grandfathers, Benjamin A. Levis and Harbert S. Gregory

**Instrumentation**

Bass Trombone (with plunger mute, straight mute, and harmon mute with stem)
Four Percussionists
- Piano
- Two Violins
- Viola
- Violoncello
- Contrabass

### Percussion Instrumentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percussion 1</th>
<th>Percussion 2</th>
<th>Percussion 3</th>
<th>Percussion 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>resting on a table, slightly muted</td>
<td>Large Suspended Cymbal with sizzles</td>
<td>Large Suspended Cymbal Bamboo Chimes</td>
<td>Tambourine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Small Temple Block</td>
<td>Small Cowbell</td>
<td>5 Temple Blocks (forming a single “pitch scale”)</td>
<td>Snare Drum (tuned slightly higher than the field snare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Med/Small Wood Block</td>
<td>Medium Cowbell</td>
<td>Log Drum</td>
<td>Bass Drum (tuned slightly lower than perc. 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Medium Temple Block</td>
<td>Large Cowbell</td>
<td>Snare Drum (tuned slightly lower than perc. 2)</td>
<td>Small Tam-Tam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Large Wood Block</td>
<td>(forming a single “pitch scale”)</td>
<td>Thunder Sheet</td>
<td>Medium Tam-Tam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Medium Cowbell</td>
<td>Snare Drum (tuned highest)</td>
<td>Small Thai Gong</td>
<td>Large Tam-Tam (larger than perc. 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Large Cowbell</td>
<td>Field Snare</td>
<td>Medium Thai Gong</td>
<td>(forming a single “pitch scale”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Small Thai Gong</td>
<td>Bass Drum (tuned slightly higher than perc. 4)</td>
<td>Large Thai Gong</td>
<td>Vibraphone (shared with perc. 2, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Med/Small Thai Gong</td>
<td>Large Tam-Tam (smaller than perc. 4)</td>
<td>Medium/Large Tam-Tam (forming a single “pitch scale”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(forming a single “pitch scale”)</td>
<td>Crotales (sounding 2 octaves higher than written)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Bongo</td>
<td>Marimba (shared with perc. 1)</td>
<td>Small Thai Gong</td>
<td>Vibraphone (shared with perc. 2, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Bongo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium Thai Gong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Large Thai Gong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snare Drum (tuned slightly higher than perc. 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium/Large Tam-Tam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Tom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marimba (shared with perc. 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vibraphone (shared with perc. 3, 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Percussion Key**

Percussion I
- Large Tom
- Snare Drum
- Conga
- Low Bongo
- High Bongo
- Medium/Small Thai Gong
- Small Thai Gong
- Large Cowbell
- Medium Cowbell
- Large Wood Block
- Medium Temple Block
- Medium/Small Wood Block
- Small Temple Block

Percussion II
- Large Tam-Tam
- Bass Drum
- Field Snare
- Snare Drum
- Large Cowbell
- Medium Cowbell
- Small Cowbell
- Large Suspended Cymbal with Sizzle

Percussion III
- Medium/Large Tam-Tam
- Large Thai Gong
- Medium Thai Gong
- Small Thai Gong
- Thunder Sheet
- Snare Drum
- Log Drum
- Large Temple Block
- Medium/Large Temple Block
- Medium Temple Block
- Medium/Small Temple Block
- Small Temple Block
- Bamboo Chimes
- Large Suspended Cymbal

Percussion IV
- Large Tam-Tam
- Medium Tam-Tam
- Small Tam-Tam
- Bass Drum
- Snare Drum
- Tambourine
Percussion Set-up

Percussion I
- low basso
- high basso
- small toga
- medium toga
- large toga
- suspended cymbal

Percussion II
- large cymbal
- medium cymbal
- small cymbal

Percussion III
- medium large toga
- large toga
- suspended cymbal
- large snare drum

Percussion IV
- large snare drum
- medium snare drum
- large tam-tam
- medium tam-tam
- large tam-tam
Performance Notes and Special Markings

All Instruments
Accidentals apply only to the notes they preceed with the exception of tied notes.
All grace notes lead into the beat and as fast as possible.
Dynamics are absolute, and will occasionally require a player to play more or less forcefully than the written dynamic to produce the proper resultant sound. For example, air sounds in the bass trombone (m. 5), left hand fingering with out the bow in the violin (m. 15), etc.
No vibrato except where indicated.
Tempi are consistent through meter changes.
Quarter tones ( )
Duration is approximately 12 minutes.

Bass Trombone
Mutes required: plunger, straight, and harmonic with stem.
blurry Extremely legato articulation so that the attack becomes as imperceptible as possible.
brassy A rough, almost distorted tone.
Gradually change from one state to the next.
Breath mark: Make a slight pause before continuing on. There should be no decrescendo, unless otherwise indicated.
Small decrescendo: A slight decrescendo at the end of the sustained sound. Indicates a gentle rather than abrupt release.
non-decrescendo Sustain sound at given dynamic for the entire duration indicated.
Flutter within given dynamic range, following the graphic information.
Glissando: When tied, the arrival pitch should not be re-articulated. When not tied, the arrival pitch should be articulated.
Slight glissando: A short glissando leading into or falling away from the indicated pitch.
Air sound: Contains all the elements of normal pitch production except for buzzing the lips.
Flutter Tongue (fl): Roll the tip of the tongue as fast as possible.
Glottal growl (gl gr.): Growl in the back of the throat.
Tongue stop.
Wide vibrato, follow graphic information.
Singing Multiphonics: Sing diamond-shaped note heads while playing normal note heads.
Fast glissando up the overtone series using the lips rather than the slide.
I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII: Slide positions (first, second, third, etc).
valve I: First position with F-valve engaged.
1-, II-: Slide pushed slightly further out than normal positioning to accommodate quarter tones.

Percussion
Continue in this manner for the duration indicated.
Gradually change from one state to the next.
Breath mark: Make a slight pause before continuing on. There should be no decrescendo, unless otherwise indicated.
Small decrescendo: A slight decrescendo at the end of the sustained sound. Indicates a gentle rather than abrupt release.
non-decrescendo Sustain sound at given dynamic for the entire duration indicated.
ls Let vibrate.
ds Dead stroke: Leave mallet head on surface after striking, so as to partially mute the surface.
secco Dry,
sempre Always, continue in this manner.
arco With bow.
secco Brush in a circular motion with the indicated implement.
Mute completely.
Catch. Mute cymbal completely immediately after striking.
Flutter within given dynamic range, following the graphic information.
Cross stick, stick on stick: Hold one stick the drumhead, tip roughly 2/3rds of the way to the edge. Strike the shaft of this stick with the shaft of the other stick, roughly halfway down both sticks, producing a clean and heavy staccato “crack”.
Depress and hold pedal for the duration of the line.
Clear and immediately depress pedal.
Repeat chord.
Roll chords upwards or downwards according to direction of arrow.
Ricochet: The stick is made to bounce on the drumhead in a rapid unmeasured manner. Use a loose grip in such a way as to sound a group of attacks gradually increasing in density and proximity. Longer durations will by definition have to begin with a less dense group, and may need to be artificially controlled to last the entire duration indicated. The end result should be an unmeasured accelerando.

Piano
blurry Extremely legato articulation so that the attack becomes as imperceptible as possible.
secco Dry.
secco Depress and hold pedal for the duration of the line.
Clear and immediately depress pedal.
Pluck inside piano.
Repeat chord.
Roll chords upwards or downwards according to direction of arrow.
Scrape a plastic card along the ridges of the string inside the piano producing a raspy tone.
Performance Notes and Special Markings (con’t)

Strings

Ordinario (ord) Normal: play in the normal fashion, referring specifically to the placement of the bow on the strings.
sul tasto (st) On the fingerboard: bow over the fingerboard, emphasizing the fundamental harmonic.
sul ponticello (sp) On the bridge: bow very near to the bridge, emphasizing the higher harmonics.
tratto ordinario (t.o.) Bow in the normal fashion, referring specifically to the use of the hair as opposed the wood of the bow.
col legno tratto (clt) Bow with the wood of the bow.
1/2 col legno tratto (1/2clt) Bow with both the wood and hair of the bow.
battuto (batt) Strike the strings with the hair of the bow.
col legno battuto (clb) Strike the strings with wood of the bow.
1/2 col legno battuto (1/2clb) Strike the strings with wood and hair of the bow.
grind bow hair (grind) Grind bow hair into the strings with heavy pressure and a twisting motion in the wrist.
pizzicato (pizz) Pluck string with finger.

\[\text{Bartok pizzicato: Pull the string away from the fingerboard so that it snaps back percussively.}\]
\[\text{Bow side of bridge (bsb): Bow perpendicularly along the side of the bridge. Produces a “white noise.”}\]
\[\text{Bow tailpiece (btp): Bow directly on the tailpiece. Produces a quiet, low hum-like tone.}\]
\[\text{Vocal fry: Bow sul tasto with heavy bow pressure and a slow bow speed. Left hand fingering is almost muted, slightly heavier than a harmonic, and not quiet fingered. Produces a raspy, almost un-pitched tone.}\]
\[\text{Scratch: Heavy down bow stroke near the frog, leave the bow on the string. Produces a brittle, raspy percussion attack.}\]

R

Ricochet: The bow is made to bounce on the string in a rapid unmeasured manner with a down bow stroke in such a way as to sound a group of attacks gradually increasing in density and proximity. Longer durations will by definition have to begin with a less dense group, and may need to be artificially controlled to last the entire duration indicated. The end result should be an unmeasured accelerando.

\[\text{Natural harmonic: Touch lightly at the pitch indicated.}\]
\[\text{Artificial harmonic: While finger the lower pitch, touch lightly at the indicated upper pitch.}\]

I, II, III, IV: String indication, highest to lowest.

noisy Slightly more bow pressure than normal.
distorted Add bow pressure to create a distorted tone.

\[\text{Continue in this manner for the duration indicated.}\]
\[\text{Gradually change from one state to the next.}\]
\[\text{Breath mark: Make a slight pause before continuing on. There should be no decrescendo, unless otherwise indicated.}\]
\[\text{Small decrescendo: A slight decrescendo at the end of the sustained sound. Indicates a gentle rather than abrupt release.}\]
\[\text{non-decrescendo Sustain sound at given dynamic for the entire duration indicated.}\]
\[\text{Let vibrate.}\]

\[\text{Wide vibrato: Follow graphic information.}\]
\[\text{Brush strings in a circular motion with the bow.}\]
\[\text{Mute strings completely with the left hand.}\]
\[\text{Fluctuate within given dynamic range, following the graphic information.}\]

blurry Extremely legato articulation so that the attack becomes as imperceptible as possible.

sempre Continue in this manner.
ambient, breathing  \( \dot{=} \ 68 \)

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

** a slight decrescendo at the end of the sustained sound, indicates a gentle rather than abrupt release

* make a slight pause before continuing on, there should be no decrescendo unless otherwise indicated

+ allow for harmonic to be unstable as bow position and playing technique changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sul ponticello (sp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tratto ordinario (t.o.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>battuto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>col legno tratto (clt)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**JaLeVMusic 2012**
disquieting, with momentum \( \sim 80 \)

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
freely \( \frac{j}{52} \)

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

ambient, breathing \( \frac{j}{68} \)
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

©JaLevMusic 2012
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

sudden \( \Rightarrow 70 \)
ambient, breathing \( \text{d} = 68 \)

**pizz**
- Bow sul tasto with heavy pressure and slow bow speed.
- Left hand fingering is almost muted.

**batt**
- Battuto.
- Hard mallets share with perc. 1.

**plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness**

1. Allow fee hands to be stationary in free position and playing techniques change
2. Pluck (plumb blossom)
3. Mar - upper register
4. Mar - lower register
5. Slightly more bow pressure
6. Noisy
7. Ambient, breathing

©JaLevMusic 2012
disquieting, with momentum ṣ / 80

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
propulsive $z = 104$

III

spacious $z = 72$

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
driving $\mathbb{S} = 88$

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

©JaLevMusic 2012
spacious \( \frac{1}{4} = 72 \)

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
spacious \( \frac{1}{2} \approx 72 \)  

Driving \( \frac{1}{2} \approx 88 \)
g gentle, seamless $\frac{3}{8}$

dedicated to Professors John Thow and Jorge Liderman
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

©JLevMusic 2012
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

freely = 52

©JaLevMusic 2012
sudden \( \nu = 80 \)

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
freely $= 64$

©JaLevMusic 2012
The image contains a musical score with various elements such as notes, rests, and dynamics indicated by symbols and text. The score includes sections for various instruments such as violins (Vln.), viola (Vla.), cello (Cb.), trumpet (Tbn.), piano (Pno.), and percussion (Perc.). The notation includes dynamics like 'pianissimo' (pp), 'fortissimo' (ff), and various articulations and techniques. The score is labeled with sections like 'turbulent' and 'calm' with tempo indications. The musical style appears to be contemporary or experimental, with complex notations and symbols.
calm $\mathit{\dot{k}} = 84$

plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

**driving \( \frac{\text{♩}}{\text{♩}} \) \( \text{♩= 88} \)**
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness

VI
plumb blossom warm gentle wind shimmering stillness