

quiddities
for string quartet

alexa
letourneau

full score

quiddities

for string quartet
(violin, viola, cello, bass)

7'45"

May 2020

quiddities is a piece that explores the ways musicians can interact in the modern age, particularly during the social distancing of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Unable to collaborate in person, the players utilize technology differently in every movement, allowing for connectedness and collaboration in multiple ways. The piece as a whole focuses on the revision and reiteration of four distinct themes, representing the four individual performers, while every movement embodies a different state of emotion that I personally experienced throughout my time in quarantine, 51 days without seeing another living thing: frustration, fear, grief, and loneliness. Despite these emotions, however, the essence, or quiddity, of the piece is larger than that; while each movement is individually despairing, when put together, they display the hope that can be found in others, even when these interactions are revised and technologized.

Each movement requires a different approach to technology:

- I. **Level Zero:** All four players record their parts separately; these tracks are then edited together
- II. **Reaction and Response:** Players call the coordinator on one group call. Synchronization is achieved through listening and responding. Lag isn't taken into account, as meter isn't the goal
- III. **The Virtual Orchestra:** Players call the coordinator on multiple group calls using different platforms. Players should attempt to maintain a stable sense of meter while being aware of the other players. NOTE: because of different lag times, it is best if players mute all but one call
- IV. **Isolation:** Players call each other on different platforms, creating a chain rather than a group. Players should attempt to synchronize with the lowest voice playing at any given time

Slashed noteheads indicate an approximate pitch.

Throughout passages of extended tied notes, bow freely

A circled tip on a hairpin indicates to or from niente

+ is an indication for left hand pizzicato; when in parentheses, left or right hand may be used, depending on the preference of the player

n.v. indicates non vibrato, and vibrato ad lib. marks a return to normal, expressive vibrato as added by the player

○ indicates snap pizzicato

This commission was made possible by the Steven R. Gerber Trust.

quiddities

For String Quartet

Alexa Letourneau

I. Level Zero

All players record their parts separately,
to be edited together by the coordinator

With Vigor

$\text{♩} = 120$

(2+2+2+3)

Violin *f*

Viola *f*

Violoncello

Contrabass

First system of musical notation for Violin, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The Violin part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The Viola part also begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a similar rhythmic pattern. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts are mostly silent in this system.

Vln. *ff* *p sub.* *mf* *f*

Vla. *ff* *p* *f*

Vc. *p* *f*

Cb. *p* *f*

Second system of musical notation. It includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *p sub.*, *mf*, and *f*. Performance instructions like *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco) are present. The system is divided into measures with time signatures $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$. The Violin part has a *ff* dynamic, followed by *p sub.*, *mf*, and *f*. The Viola part has *ff*, *p*, and *f*. The Violoncello part has *p* and *f*. The Contrabass part has *p* and *f*.

Vln. *p* *f* *mp* *f sempre*

Vla. *p* *f* *mp* *f sempre*

Vc. *p* *f* *mp* *f sempre*

Cb. *p* *f* *mp* *f sempre*

Third system of musical notation. It includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *f*, *mp*, and *f sempre*. Performance instructions like *pizz. arco* and *pizz.* are present. The system is divided into measures with time signatures $\frac{11}{8}$, $\frac{9}{8}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, and $\frac{9}{8}$. The Violin part has *p*, *f*, *mp*, and *f sempre*. The Viola part has *p*, *f*, *mp*, and *f sempre*. The Violoncello part has *p*, *f*, *mp*, and *f sempre*. The Contrabass part has *p*, *f*, *mp*, and *f sempre*.

13

Vln. Vla. Vc. Cb.

This system contains measures 13 through 16. The Violin I part (Vln.) begins with a whole rest in measure 13, followed by a melodic line in measures 14 and 15, and a whole rest in measure 16. The Viola part (Vla.) plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and eighth notes throughout. The Violoncello part (Vc.) features a melodic line with some rests. The Contrabass part (Cb.) provides a steady bass line with eighth and quarter notes.

17

Vln. Vla. Vc. Cb.

This system contains measures 17 through 20. The Violin I part (Vln.) has a melodic line with some rests. The Viola part (Vla.) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes. The Violoncello part (Vc.) has a melodic line with eighth notes. The Contrabass part (Cb.) provides a bass line with eighth and quarter notes.

21

Vln. Vla. Vc. Cb.

arco

This system contains measures 21 through 24. The Violin I part (Vln.) starts with a melodic line, followed by a section marked "arco" (arco) in measure 23. The Viola part (Vla.) has a melodic line with some rests. The Violoncello part (Vc.) has a melodic line with eighth notes. The Contrabass part (Cb.) provides a bass line with eighth and quarter notes.

25

Vln.

Vla. arco

Vc. arco

Cb. arco

28

Vln. pizz.

Vla. sul C pizz. arco

Vc. pizz.

Cb.

31

Vln. arco pizz.

Vla. pizz. arco pizz.

Vc. arco

Cb.

34

Vln. *ff* arco

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *ff*

Cb. *ff* *sfp*

Suddenly Melancholy

♩ = 54

con sord.
arco

38

Vln. *mp dolce*

Vla. *mp dolce* *p*

Vc. *mp dolce* *p cantabile*

Cb. *(p)*

42

Vln. *p cantabile* *pp* senza sord. pizz.

Vla. *pp* senza sord. pizz.

Vc. *pp* senza sord. pizz.

Cb. *p dolce* *pp* *6* pizz. (+)

9

Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

11

Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

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

quasi cadenza
vibrato ad lib.

13

Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

f
sfp
sfp
sfp

14

Vln. *sfp*
quasi cadenza

Vla. *f*

Vc.

Cb.

15

Vln. *sfp*
quasi cadenza

Vla.

Vc. *f*

Cb.

16

Vln. *f* *mp*
do not synchronize

Vla. *f* *mp*
do not synchronize

Vc. *f* *mp*
do not synchronize

Cb. *f* *sfp* *ff* *sfz*
quasi cadenza

III. The Virtual Orchestra

All players call the coordinator on a minimum of three platforms (Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Snapchat suggested)

Helpless
♩ = 60

Violin *f calma* con sord arco

Viola *f calma* con sord arco

Violoncello *f calma* con sord pizz. arco

Contrabass *f calma* con sord arco

4
Vln. *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

Cb. *mp*

7
Vln. *p* *mp* delicately

Vla.

Vc. *p*

Cb. *p*

Urgently

$\text{♩} = 152$
(2+3)

10

Measures 10-12 of the score. Measure 10: Vln. (pp), Cb. (pp). Measure 11: Vln. (f), Cb. (pp). Measure 12: Vln. (f), Vc. (pizz., mf), Cb. (f). Time signatures: 3/4, 3/4, 5/4.

13

Measures 13-16 of the score. Measure 13: Vln. (pizz.), Vc. (mf). Measure 14: Vln. (pizz.), Vc. (mf). Measure 15: Vln. (pizz.), Vc. (mf). Measure 16: Vln. (pizz.), Vc. (ff), Cb. (f, ff). Time signatures: 3/4, 3/4, 3/4, 3/4.

17

Measures 17-20 of the score. Measure 17: Vln. (arco, sfz), Vc. (arco, mf), Cb. (pizz., mf). Measure 18: Vln. (arco, sfz), Vc. (arco, mf), Cb. (pizz., mf). Measure 19: Vln. (arco, sfz), Vc. (arco, mf), Cb. (pizz., mf). Measure 20: Vln. (arco, mp), Vc. (arco, mp), Cb. (pizz., mp). Time signatures: 3/4, 3/4, 3/4, 3/4.

21

Vln. *mp* *p* *ff*

Vla. *p* *ff* arco

Vc. *ff* arco

Cb. *mp* *ff*

24

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

27

Vln. *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Cb. *mf*

30

Vln. *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *sfz*

Cb. *f*

33

Vln. *p* *fff*

Vla. *p* *fff*

Vc. *p* *fff*

Cb. *p* *fff*

Resigned

35

$\text{♩} = 60$

Vln. *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

Cb. *f*

IV. Isolation

Bassist calls viola (FaceBook Messenger suggested.) Viola calls cello (Skype suggested.) Cello calls violin (Zoom suggested.) Violin calls coordinator. (Google Hangouts suggested.) This creates a filtering effect, in which the violin is the least distorted, followed by cello, viola, and bass, which is most distorted. The effect is enhanced if each of the three upper string players is able to use two devices in close proximity to each other for their two calls, e.g. a Skype call on a phone and zoom on a laptop.

Empty
♩ = 40

Violin: *p sempre*, *n.v.*, *arco*, *vibrato ad lib.*

Viola: *p sempre*, *n.v.*, *vibrato ad lib.*

Violoncello: *p sempre*, *n.v.*, *vibrato ad lib.*

Contrabass: *p sempre*, *arco*

5

Vln.: *n.v.*

Vla.: *n.v.*

Vc.: *n.v.*

Cb.: *n.v.*

9

Vln.: *n.v.*

Vla.: *cresc. poco a poco*, *n.v.*

Vc.: *cresc. poco a poco*, *n.v.*

Cb.: *n.v.*

13

Vln. *f*

Vla. *(cresc.)* *f*

Vc. *(cresc.)* *mf*

Cb. *cresc.* *f*

16

Vln. *pizz.* *mp*

Vla.

Vc. *pizz.* *mp*

Cb. *mp*

Otherworldly
♩ = 46

19

Vln. *mf*

Vla. *mf* arco

Vc. *mf* arco sul pont.

Cb. *mf*

22

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

25

arco

sul G
sul tasto → sul ponticello

molto sul tasto

ord.

sul C
(open harmonic glissando)

sul E
(seagull effect)

gliss.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Parts

II. Reaction and Response

All players call the coordinator on one platform (Google Hangouts suggested)

arco
sul tasto
n.v.

p sempre

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

4

molto vibrato

n.v.

pp

pp

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

7

f

p

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

10

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

mp

f

(5/4)

quasi cadenza
vibrato ad lib.

13

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

f

sfp

(6/4)

6 6 3

15

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

do not synchronize

f

mp

6 3 6

V 3 5 6

III. The Virtual Orchestra

All players call the coordinator on a minimum of three platforms (Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Snapchat suggested)

Helpless
♩ = 60
cello con sord arco
Violin *f calma* *p*

8
Vln. *mp* *delicately* *pp*

Urgently
♩ = 152
(2+3) pizz. arco
Vln. *f* *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *mp*

21
Vln. *ff*

26
Vln. *mf* *f*

Resigned
♩ = 60
Vln. *p* *fff* *f*

The musical score consists of six staves for Violin (Vln.).
- Staff 1: Labeled 'Violin', 'Helpless', tempo '♩ = 60', 'cello con sord arco'. It starts in 6/4 time, moves to 3/4, and then to 2/4. Dynamics include *f calma* and *p*.
- Staff 2: Labeled 'Vln.', starting at measure 8. It is in 3/4 time. Dynamics include *mp* and *pp*. The instruction 'delicately' is present.
- Staff 3: Labeled 'Vln.', starting at measure 11. It is in 3/4 time, then changes to 5/4 and back to 3/4. Dynamics include *f*, *sfz*, and *mp*. Instructions include 'pizz.' and 'arco'.
- Staff 4: Labeled 'Vln.', starting at measure 21. It is in 3/4 time. Dynamics include *ff*.
- Staff 5: Labeled 'Vln.', starting at measure 26. It is in 3/4 time. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*.
- Staff 6: Labeled 'Vln.', starting at measure 32. It is in 3/4 time, then changes to 5/4. Dynamics include *p*, *fff*, and *f*. The instruction 'Resigned' and tempo '♩ = 60' are present.

IV. Isolation

Bassist calls viola (FaceBook Messenger suggested.) Viola calls cello (Skype suggested.) Cello calls violin (Zoom suggested.) Violin calls coordinator. (Google Hangouts suggested.) This creates a filtering effect, in which the violin is the least distorted, followed by cello, viola, and bass, which is most distorted. The effect is enhanced if each of the three upper string players is able to use two devices in close proximity to each other for their two calls, e.g. a Skype call on a phone and zoom on a laptop.

Empty

$\text{♩} = 40$

vibrato ad lib.

Violin

n.v.
p sempre

Vln.

5 9
viola
f

Vln.

17 2
pizz.
mp *mf*

Otherworldly

$\text{♩} = 46$

Vln.

22 arco

Vln.

26 sul G
sul tasto → sul ponticello

Viola

Quiddities

For String Quartet

Alexa Letourneau

I. Level Zero

All players record their parts separately, to be edited together by the coordinator

With Vigor

$\text{♩} = 120$

(2+2+2+3)

2

pizz.

Viola

Measures 1-6 of the Viola part. Measure 1 is a whole rest. Measure 2 starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Measure 3 has a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 4 has a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 5 has a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction. Measure 6 ends with a whole rest.

Vla.

Measures 7-11 of the Viola part. Measure 7 has a forte (*f*) dynamic. Measure 8 has a piano (*p*) dynamic. Rhythmic markings include (2+2+2), (3+3), and (2+2+2+2+3).

Vla.

Measures 12-16 of the Viola part. Measure 12 has a forte (*f*) dynamic with the instruction *f sempre*.

Vla.

Measures 17-21 of the Viola part.

Vla.

Measures 22-26 of the Viola part. Measure 24 has an arco instruction.

Vla.

Measures 27-30 of the Viola part. Measure 27 has a *sul C* instruction. Measure 28 has a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction. Measure 29 has an arco instruction. Measure 30 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Vla.

Measures 31-34 of the Viola part. Measure 31 has a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction. Measure 32 has an arco instruction. Measure 33 has a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction.

Suddenly Melancholy

$\text{♩} = 80$ bass

con sord.

Vla.

Measures 35-39 of the Viola part. Measure 35 has an arco instruction. Measure 36 has a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 37 has a mezzo-piano (*mp dolce*) dynamic. Measure 38 has a *con sord.* instruction.

Vla.

Measures 40-44 of the Viola part. Measure 40 has a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 44 has a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and a *senza sord. pizz.* instruction.

II. Reaction and Response

All players call the coordinator on one platform (Google Hangouts suggested)

Violin (4/4) arco sul tasto n.v.

Viola (4/4) *p sempre*

Violoncello (4/4)

Contrabass (4/4)

This system contains the first four staves of the score. The Violin part is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The Viola part is in alto clef with a 4/4 time signature. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts are in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The Viola part includes the instruction 'arco sul tasto n.v.' and 'p sempre'. Vertical dashed lines indicate rehearsal marks.

Vln. molto vibrato

Vla. n.v. *pp*

Vc.

Cb.

This system contains the next four staves. The Violin part includes the instruction 'molto vibrato'. The Viola part includes 'n.v.' and '*pp*'. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts continue the rhythmic pattern. Vertical dashed lines indicate rehearsal marks.

Vln.

Vla. *f* *p*

Vc.

Cb.

This system contains the final four staves. The Viola part includes dynamic markings '*f*' and '*p*'. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts continue the rhythmic pattern. Vertical dashed lines indicate rehearsal marks.

10

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

p *f* *sfp*

vibrato ad lib.

14

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

quasi cadenza

f

15

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

sfp *f* *mp*

do not synchronize

III. The Virtual Orchestra

All players call the coordinator on a minimum of three platforms (Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Snapchat suggested)

Helpless

$\text{♩} = 60$ arco
con sord

Viola

f calma *mp*

Urgently

$\text{♩} = 152$
(2+3)

Vla.

mf *sfz mf* pizz.

Vla.

mp *p* *ff* arco

Vla.

mf

Vla.

f *p* *fff*

Resigned

$\text{♩} = 60$

Vla.

f

Cello

Quiddities

For String Quartet

Alexa Letourneau

I. Level Zero

All players record their parts separately, to be edited together by the coordinator

With Vigor

$\text{♩} = 120$

(2+2+2+3)

4

pizz.

(2+2+2)

(3+3)

Violoncello

p *f*

Vc.

p *f* *mp* *f sempre*

Vc.

Vc.

Vc.

Vc.

arco

Vc.

pizz arco

Vc.

ff

Suddenly Melancholy

38

$\text{♩} = 54$

con sord.

senza sord.
pizz.

Vc.

mp dolce *p cantabile* *pp*

II. Reaction and Response

All players call the coordinator on one platform (Google Hangouts suggested)

Violin (4/4)

Viola (4/4)

Violoncello (4/4) *arco sul tasto n.v.* *p sempre* *molto vibrato*

Contrabass (4/4)

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The Violin and Viola parts are in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts are in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The Violoncello part includes performance instructions: 'arco sul tasto n.v.' above the staff, 'p sempre' below the staff, and 'molto vibrato' above the final measure. Vertical dashed lines indicate measure boundaries.

Vln. (5)

Vla. (5)

Vc. (5) *n.v.* *pp* *pp* *f* *p*

Cb. (5)

Detailed description: This system contains measures 5 through 8. The Violin and Viola parts are in treble clef. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts are in bass clef. The Violoncello part includes performance instructions: 'n.v.' above the staff, and dynamic markings 'pp', 'pp', 'f', and 'p' below the staff. Vertical dashed lines indicate measure boundaries.

Vln. (9)

Vla. (9)

Vc. (9) *p* *f*

Cb. (9)

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 through 12. The Violin and Viola parts are in treble clef. The Violoncello and Contrabass parts are in bass clef. The Violoncello part includes dynamic markings 'p' and 'f' below the staff. Vertical dashed lines indicate measure boundaries.

13

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

vibrato ad lib.

sfp

15

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

quasi cadenza

f

16

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

do not synchronize

f *mp*

III. The Virtual Orchestra

All players call the coordinator on a minimum of three platforms (Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Snapchat suggested)

Helpless

♩ = 60

con sord
pizz. arco

Violoncello

f calma

Vc.

p

Urgently

♩ = 152

(2+3) pizz.

Vc.

mf *ff* *mf*

Vc.

mp *ff*

Vc.

mf

Vc.

sfz *p* *fff*

Resigned

♩ = 60

Vc.

f

IV. Isolation

Bassist calls viola (FaceBook Messenger suggested.) Viola calls cello (Skype suggested.) Cello calls violin (Zoom suggested.) Violin calls coordinator. (Google Hangouts suggested.) This creates a filtering effect, in which the violin is the least distorted, followed by cello, viola, and bass, which is most distorted. The effect is enhanced if each of the three upper string players is able to use two devices in close proximity to each other for their two calls, e.g. a Skype call on a phone and zoom on a laptop.

Empty
♩ = 40 n.v. vibrato ad lib.

Violoncello

p sempre

7 **2** n.v.

Vc.

cresc. poco a poco

13

Vc.

(cresc.) - - - mf *mp*

pizz.

Otherworldly
♩ = 46

20

Vc.

mf

sul pont. arco

24

Vc.

ord. *sul C (open harmonic glissando)*

Bass

Quiddities

For String Quartet

Alexa Letourneau

I. Level Zero

All players record their parts separately, to be edited together by the coordinator

With Vigor

$\text{♩} = 120$

(2+2+2+3)

Contrabass

5

pizz. (2+2+2) (3+3) (2+2+2+2+3)

p *f* *p*

Cb.

10

f *mp* *f sempre*

Cb.

Cb.

Cb.

26

arco

Cb.

Suddenly Melancholy

$\text{♩} = 54$

Cb.

36

ff *sfz* (*p*)

Cb.

40

2

p dolce *pp* pizz. (+)

II. Reaction and Response

All players call the coordinator on one platform (Google Hangouts suggested)

Violin (4/4)
Viola (4/4)
Violoncello (4/4)
Contrabass (4/4)

arco
sul tasto
n.v.

p sempre

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the piece. It features four staves: Violin (treble clef), Viola (alto clef), Violoncello (bass clef), and Contrabass (bass clef). All staves are in 4/4 time. The music consists of sustained notes with fermatas. The Contrabass part includes the instruction 'arco sul tasto n.v.' and a dynamic marking of 'p sempre'.

Vln. (4/4)
Vla. (4/4)
Vc. (4/4)
Cb. (4/4)

molto vibrato

n.v.

pp

pp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 5 through 8. The Violin staff starts with a measure rest for the first measure, then has a note with 'molto vibrato' in the second measure. The Viola and Violoncello parts have notes in measures 5-8. The Contrabass part has notes in measures 5-8, with a dynamic marking of 'pp' at the end of measure 8. The instruction 'n.v.' is placed above the Contrabass staff in measure 6.

Vln. (4/4)
Vla. (4/4)
Vc. (4/4)
Cb. (4/4)

f

p sub.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 through 12. The Violin staff has notes in measures 9-12. The Viola and Violoncello parts have notes in measures 9-12. The Contrabass part has notes in measures 9-12, with a dynamic marking of 'f' at the end of measure 9 and 'p sub.' in measure 10.

11

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

p *f* *sfp*

vibrato ad lib.

14

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

16

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

quasi cadenza

f *sfp* *ff* *sfz*

III. The Virtual Orchestra

All players call the coordinator on a minimum of three platforms (Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Snapchat suggested)

Helpless

$\text{♩} = 60$

con sord
arco

Contrabass

f calma *mp*

Urgently

$\text{♩} = 152$

(2+3)

4

Cb.

p *pp* *f* *ff*

Cb.

mf *mp* *ff*

pizz. arco

Cb.

mf

Cb.

f *p* *fff*

Resigned

$\text{♩} = 60$

Cb.

f

IV. Isolation

Bassist calls viola (FaceBook Messenger suggested.) Viola calls cello (Skype suggested.) Cello calls violin (Zoom suggested.) Violin calls coordinator. (Google Hangouts suggested.) This creates a filtering effect, in which the violin is the least distorted, followed by cello, viola, and bass, which is most distorted. The effect is enhanced if each of the three upper string players is able to use two devices in close proximity to each other for their two calls, e.g. a Skype call on a phone and zoom on a laptop.

Empty
♩ = 40

arco

Contrabass

p sempre

6 n.v.

Cb.

cresc. - - - - - f

16

Cb.

mp

Otherworldly
♩ = 46

20

Cb.

mf

25

Cb.

sul E
(seagull effect)

gliss.