

EX NIHILO: AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF MUSICAL CREATION

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Introduction

Humans have created music for as long as they have been human, and yet for an activity whose products are so valuable to mankind, we seem to know very little about how this creation comes about.¹ This project began as a quest to dispel the mystery and misunderstanding surrounding the compositional process in the hopes of making it more accessible to those within and without the field of music.

To this end I dedicated an entire summer to intensive research and writing. During the course of this project I composed two pieces: *Behold the Glories of the Lamb*, an anthem for organ, timpani, brass quintet, and chorus; and *Short and Suite*, a suite for solo guitar (score may be found in Appendix I)—all the while keeping a journal to track my compositional thoughts and activities (the complete journal may be found in Appendix II). The ideas obtained from this study were then combined and referenced with those of others who have similarly pondered this topic. Through this process I gradually came to find consistent themes emerging from the tumultuous chaos that results from trying to define such a human, and thus naturally stochastic, enterprise as composing music.

What follows, then, is an attempt to distill those consistent themes. This paper does not claim to be definitive, nor does it claim to be comprehensive; a full disclosure of this topic, were it possible at all, would be far beyond the scope of this humble project. Luckily, however, this quest is not alone in its aims. It is thus the hope of the author that, even within its limited form, this paper may in some way contribute to the dialogue surrounding this complex activity with the goal that we may someday come to understand the whole through the sum of its parts.

¹ Dave Collins, “‘Getting There’: Do We Need to Study How People Compose Music?,” *Journal of Music, Technology and Education* 4 no. 2 and 3 (2011): 173-75, doi: 10.1386/jmte.4.2-3.173_1.

Method

A chemical reaction is the interaction of multiple chemicals that produces a new compound. For example, when sodium and chlorine gas are combined, sodium chloride, or salt, is produced. In order to begin the reaction, all of the essential reactants—sodium and chlorine in this case—must be present. If either of these elements is removed, the reaction will not take place, and the product, salt, will not be produced. It is possible, however, for the same reaction to take place even with the addition of superfluous chemicals. If, for example, the gas neon is added to the mix, the exact same reaction will take place, and the exact same product, salt, will be produced. This is because neon, being an inert gas, does not participate in the reaction. It is important to notice, however, that to an observer ignorant of this fact it might appear that neon is an essential part of this reaction. The only way to determine which chemicals participate in, and are thus essential to, the reaction, is to systematically remove one element after another until the reaction no longer takes place. Those chemicals that prevent the reaction when removed may be deemed essential to the reaction, and those that do not may be considered superfluous. Musical creation—or any other form of creativity for that matter—can be seen as a chemical reaction of sorts. In a creative activity, products are created through the interaction of diverse entities, media, and processes. There may also be entities, media, and processes that appear to participate in this creative activity and yet are, in fact, superfluous. If we wish to determine the essential aspects of a creative activity, then, we must identify those aspects of the activity that cannot be removed without halting the activity and precluding the creation of the product.

Essential Themes

Motivation

To begin this discussion, we must identify the elements essential to this “chemical reaction” of musical creation. One of these elements is the impetus or motivation to create. As Charlotte Doyle describes it:

the creative process begins with a sense of direction, with the hunch that there is something to go after. Something pulls at the mind. What pulls at the mind may come from an experience, from the lay of divergent thinking, or from hard directed thinking about a problem that interests. . . . There is no creative process without direction.²

In other words, before the creative process can begin, composers must be motivated to create. This motivation may take many different forms. Perhaps the simplest is the innately human desire to create. The composer Steve Reich claims that, “Composing is really the only thing I want to do.”³ People of all genders, races, ages, and times have felt the desire to create in some fashion, many even in the face of fierce opposition with no promise of reward. We may think of Dmitry Shostakovich, who continued to compose despite the threat of censorship or even death at the hands of the soviet regime, and even, “took to sleeping in the corridor outside his apartment so that his arrest would not disturb his family.”⁴

The creative desire itself may stem from many things. For some, creativity seems to provide a sense of pleasure and fulfillment not found in other activities.⁵ For others, creativity is

² Charlotte Lackner Doyle, “The Creative Process: A Study in Paradox,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 32, no. 4 (1975): 351, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42582281>.

³ Ann McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

⁴ Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 89.

⁵ Claude Baker in McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings*, 76.

a way to express oneself or even attract attention.⁶ Still others create not out of desire but some kind of inexplicable “need,” that drives them to create even if they do not enjoy it.⁷ Composers may also feel compelled to create as the result of deadlines imposed upon them by commissions or schedules (see section below for more about the importance of deadlines). Whatever the case may be, composition always seems accompanied by some motivating factor that begins composers on their journey. Without this motivation it would be difficult to imagine anyone beginning work on a process as laborious and draining as composition. In fact, it is the desire to compose that sets the composer apart from others. While surely musical ability and knowledge are important to a composer, these assets are irrelevant if the desire to compose is not strong enough to sustain the composer through the long and arduous journey. Many composers openly detest and lament the difficulties of the compositional process and would not compose if they did not feel compelled to do so.⁸ Motivation, then, whether it takes the form of compulsion or desire, is absolutely essential to the process of musical composition.

Starting Point

The motivation to compose is often accompanied or even created by a conception of the piece in some form. Sophia Reinders, in her study of creativity, found that, “The artist’s artistic desire, once it is awakened, brings with it a vague artistic sense of the intentional object as well as a global artistic intuition of the direction into which he wishes to project his artistic pursuit.”⁹ This global impression of the piece may indeed be vague, carrying with it only the feeling the

⁶ Libby Larsen, Lois V. Vierk, and Bruce Adolphe in *ibid.*, 143, 152, and 192.

⁷ Fred Lerddhal and Christopher Rouse in *ibid.*, 108 and 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹ Sophia Reinders, “The Experience of Artistic Creativity: A Phenomenological Psychological Analysis” (PhD diss., Saybrook Institute, 1991), 62-63.

composer wishes to convey or the role which the piece will fill. The composer Arthur Honegger describes this experience vividly:

Imagine a building that you are constructing, of which you perceive vaguely at first the general plan and which becomes progressively more and more precise in the mind . . . I look first for the contour, the general aspect of the work. Let us say, for instance, that I see outlined in a very thick mist a sort of palace. Contemplation gradually dissipates this mist and allows one to see a little more clearly. Sometimes a ray of the sun comes and lights up a wing of this palace under construction; this fragment becomes by model.¹⁰

From only this hazy image of the structure as a whole it would be quite easy to recognize the complete structure seen in all its detail, yet, by itself, the hazy image cannot provide this minutia. Instead, the vague impression of the piece provides a concept, which may then begin to suggest the finer details of the piece or allow the composer to work them out on their own.

The initial concept of a piece may also take the form of a small fragment in perfect detail, as Oliver Knussen describes:

I usually have a very specific idea of the sound of one moment, like a photograph, which I then write down. It might be just a pair of chords, or a line, or a bit of layered polyphonic texture, but always instrumentally conceived from the beginning—I can't perceive pitch in the abstract divorced from time.¹¹

While this small fragment does not necessarily provide a global concept of the whole piece as with the vague impression described by Honegger, it does provide the composer with a beginning point from which to work. In this way the composer begins to build from the “bottom up,” elaborating upon the ideas present within this “germinal idea,” without a concept of how these details will fit within the piece as a whole.¹² From this work at the small scale, the global scale begins to emerge, which can then begin to work recursively back upon itself to shape the finer details of the piece.

¹⁰ Quoted in Jonathan Harvey, *Music and Inspiration* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 35-36.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 29.

¹² See Stan Bennett, “The Process of Musical Creation: Interviews with Eight Composers,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 24, no. 1 (1976): 3-13.

Thus it is evident that these two processes cannot truly be separated from each other, and, in fact, must converge and be reconciled at some point. Reginald Smith Brindle, in his book on composition, describes a twofold process that captures the necessity of this integration. In this process, the composer first begins working at the small scale, sketching melodies, harmonies, and rhythms etc., and then proceeds to make decisions about the piece as a whole.¹³ In this way the large and small scales of the piece move in a dialogue with each other, the global picture of the piece defining the small details and the small details shaping the course of the piece as a whole. If these processes are allowed to work together in harmony, the end result will be a unified piece, consistent at all levels of organization, that works toward a definite goal. If, however, one of these processes is allowed to dominate, the resulting piece will either lack cohesion or the means necessary to reach its end. It seems clear, in any case, that a composer needs a starting point from which to work, for the composer's task is as much one of shaping as it is generating. Once progress begins, the composer's task is then to reconcile the emerging large and small details of the work into a unified whole. Worthy of note is the fact that reconciliation takes place not by some magical process but rather by experimentation and revision.

Conscious and Unconscious

If composition is understood as a process of shaping rather than simply generating, then it becomes clear that, “the main or essential mechanisms of the composers’ creative faculty are *both* the unconscious inspiration and the conscious desire and effort to produce a musical work.”¹⁴ There seems to be an almost unanimous consensus that musical ideas often arise

¹³ Reginald Smith Brindle, *Musical Composition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4-5.

¹⁴ Eleni Lapidaki, “Learning from Masters of Musical Creativity: Shaping Compositional Experiences in Music Education,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 15, no. 2 (2007): 96 (emphasis added).

unconsciously through a process known as “inspiration.”¹⁵ Many composers are, in fact, often unable to trace the genesis of a piece after the fact. When asked about his compositional process, James Mobberley remarked, “[composition] is always rather mysterious, even in retrospect. Where did all this music come from? I don’t remember!”¹⁶ The origins of these spontaneous and unconscious ideas have been discussed at length in many fine publications (see Harvey, Graf, Katz, and Manier), and to delve into this topic further is beyond the scope of this paper.

Regardless of their origins, it is important to note that these sudden bursts of inspiration do not constitute the whole of musical composition. As Joseph Church so astutely points out, “Ideation is no more than the having of an idea. Only by way of refinement and development does the idea live, and only through its vitality is it at all meaningful.”¹⁷ Thus inspiration or the unconscious may be looked at as the mine from which musical ideas emerge to be molded and polished into the final product by the conscious faculty. Once again, we find that composition is as much a process of shaping as it is generating.

These processes need not always proceed in this order, however, for it is also true that the act of work itself may begin to inspire new ideas. In fact, many find this an especially effective way to work:

there is one way of stimulating creative fantasy which many composers have remarked on, and that is through the very act of working. The most difficult period in a composition is the first conception, but once this has been accomplished, the act of moulding musical material serves as a stimulus to the imagination and creative ideas leap to the mind in profusion.¹⁸

¹⁵ Harvey, *Music and Inspiration*, 3.

¹⁶ James Mobberley in McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings*, 183.

¹⁷ Joseph Church, “Analysis of Creative Process in the Composition of a New Musical Work: ‘Les Fables’,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1996), 158.

¹⁸ Reginald Smith Brindle, *Serial Composition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.

Just as large and small scale conception must work together to produce a musical work, so too must conscious work and inspiration. The interworking of these two creative faculties is in many ways even more important than the operation of each on its own. Brindle somewhat paradoxically writes that:

Imaginative faculties are naturally a prime necessity for authentic artistic creation, but adequate technical skill is essential if the impulses of creative thought are to be translated into a worthy musical guise. On the other hand, the highest grade of technical ingenuity is of no avail without the fertilizing power of fantasy and inspiration.¹⁹

These two elements of the creative process truly are like reactants in a chemical reaction. They are so intertwined, in fact, that the distinction between them is often a blurry one. Even those ideas that emerge through conscious work often seem to appear out of nowhere like inspired ideas. Bamberger and Schön described this experience:

Unexpected insight *evolves* in the work of making, but makers tend to see it when, *through the evolutionary process of the making, itself*, they can recognize it. And when they do, the transitional objects, the moves on the way seem to disappear. Practicing a kind of ‘historical revisionism,’ they attribute insight to the moment when it occurs, even finding in the moment a sense of certainty . . .²⁰

Thus new meanings in the material are discovered spontaneously through work in much the same way that inspired ideas seem to emerge spontaneously. These new ideas do not burst forth out of some higher plane, then, but instead were always present within the material but unrecognized.²¹ Recognizing the potential within a musical idea is what makes it “good” or “right” and not some innate quality within the music itself. The context is also very important; an idea that might work perfectly in one instance may be terribly awkward in another.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jeanne Bamberger and Donald A. Schön, “Learning as Reflective Conversation with Materials: Notes from Work in Progress,” *Art Education* 36, no. 2 (1983): 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3192667>.

²¹ Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40-50.

Boundaries

Where does context come from, and how is it established? As it turns out, context comes from a somewhat unlikely source: boundaries. This source may at first surprise us because boundaries seem so antithetical to the creative process, yet, as we will discover, boundaries are one of the most essential elements in the creative process. Many composers have remarked on the usefulness of boundaries:

There are certain things I might write for specialist contemporary music solo performances that I feel are not possible in the same way with an orchestra. Over time, I've shifted from thinking about these differences as constrictions in a negative way to becoming very interested in the creative possibilities offered by more bounded situations.²²

Freedom is often viewed as essential to any creative process, and necessarily so, for it is certainly true that following rules and procedures is not creative, yet without boundaries to push against, creativity becomes nearly impossible. Igor Stravinsky even goes so far as to say that, “The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free.”²³ Why is this so? To understand, we must consider what it is a composer must do.

As Leonard B. Meyer concludes in his book *Style and Music*, composition is choice. The Western composer is faced with a finite number of resources (i.e., twelve pitch classes and a limited number of rhythmic values), and the composer must choose which combinations of these resources to use and where to use them. Condensed to its essence, then, a composer's task is simply to choose those combinations of musical elements that create effective results and discard those that do not. The difficulty lies in the myriad musical possibilities a composer is presented with and the lack of consistent standards by which these combinations may be evaluated.

²² Liza Lim quoted in Pamela Burnard, “The Practice of Diverse Compositional Creativities,” in *The Act of Musical Composition: Studies in the Creative Process*, ed. Dave Collins (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 125.

²³ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music: In the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 63.

Although all of Western music is made up of just twelve different pitch classes and roughly that many rhythmic values, these elements combine to create astounding variety. It has been calculated that there are 123,511,210,975,209,861,511,554,928,715,787,036 different *single* measures of music composed using only the twelve pitches of an octave and the six rhythmic values of whole, half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes. Even if a composer were able to write a new measure of music every *second*, it would take roughly 3,916,514,807,686,766,283,344,588,049 *years* to write every possible measure.²⁴ To put this number into perspective, cosmologists estimate the universe is roughly 14,000,000,000 years old. Yet the above number does not even begin to capture the number of possibilities a composer must choose from. Each of these single measures could be played at many different tempi, articulated in many different ways, at many dynamic levels, by many instruments, in many combinations, and with many different harmonies and/or counter melodies. On top of all that, one must remember that this astronomical number represents only a single measure. One minute of music in common meter at a tempo of one twenty to the quarter requires thirty measures. For all intents and purposes, then, musical composition is a choice-making process that deals with infinity.²⁵ How, then, does a composer decide what notes to write? It is through the context imposed by boundaries. As composer Libby Larsen says, “I deal with infinity, so I need the pressure to help me put some kind of structure into infinity!”²⁶

²⁴ Ferrouslepidoptera, August 19, 2000 (2:18 pm), post in, “How Many Melodies Are There in the Universe?,” *Everything2*, <http://everything2.com/title/How+many+melodies+are+there+in+the+universe%253F>.

²⁵ See Leonard Bernstein’s lecture on this topic in “The Infinite Variety of Music,” *YouTube* video, 48:45, posted by “Michael Monroe,” May 11, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRKw8MENoCs>.

²⁶ Libby Larsen in McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings*, 145.

Types of Boundaries

Style

What kind of boundaries do composers utilize? The most widespread and deeply ingrained is that of musical style or tradition. According to Meyer, “the constraints that seem most to influence the compositional choices which shape the course of music history are not those peculiar to the psyche of the individual composer, but those of the prevalent musical style and of the larger cultural community.”²⁷ For nearly all of music history musical convention, or style, has offered composers a solution to the daunting problem of what to write next by defining acceptable musical combinations.²⁸ Musical style was able to take on this function because it was so well defined and universally accepted within each musical age.

To see how this might work, let us consider some of the earliest examples of Western music: Gregorian chant. Because church and state were so intertwined during the Middle Ages, the unification of the church and its music allowed leaders to organize and retain power over their diverse territories. This unification resulted in strict control, both directly and indirectly, over the way music in the church was created and performed. Because instruments were not allowed in church, all worship music was, by default, vocal. These restrictions severely limited the music that could be written, since the singers were all male, often had little training, and musical notation was still in its infancy. The music that emerged from these limitations was thus simple, utilized a very limited range, and consisting mostly of conjunct motion. Music that strayed too far from these conventions and constraints was either condemned or un-performable.

²⁷ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 142.

²⁸ Stephen McAdams, “Problem-Solving Strategies in Musical Composition: A Case Study,” *Music Perception* 21, no. 3 (2004): 427.

The result of all this was music so constrained by tradition that only a handful of choices faced the composer.²⁹

Much of the music of the Renaissance too, especially religious music, faced similar constraints. With the advent of polyphony, came treatises on counterpoint. In these treatises, such as Zarlino's *Le institutioni harmoniche*, clear rules for composition were laid out, and young composers were expected to study and master these rules in order to become composers.³⁰ Many polyphonic pieces also utilized an already existing tune transformed into what is known as a *cantus firmus*. Using the *cantus firmus* as a starting point, music was then written around it such that everything fit with the original melody. In this way, the *cantus firmus* limited the number of choices a composer had to make and thus shaped and constrained the music that was written around it.³¹ Another important constraint of the Renaissance era was the emphasis placed on accurate text depiction. In the Renaissance mind, it was paramount that music served the text and brought out its innate qualities rather than simply be thrown haphazardly onto the text (this can be seen clearly in the guidelines laid out by the Council of Trent regarding music).³² Thus the chosen text also limited the number of choices a composer had to make and, in fact, often directly suggested musical material to accompany it. All of this is not to undermine the creativity or originality of Renaissance music or its composers however. Rather, it simply represents a shift in the locus of creativity; the composer still had many decisions to make, but they were mostly centered on the surface details of harmony and counterpoint.

²⁹ J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 9th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014), 25-45.

³⁰ Ibid., 155.

³¹ Ibid., 103.

³² Ibid., 158 and 228-29.

The Baroque and Classical periods also possessed highly unified musical styles. Though the power of the church had waned considerably by this time, its function was replaced by royal patronage and cultural ideals. The Age of Enlightenment brought with it certain ideas about how people ought to live, think, and how art ought to be understood.³³ By the mid 18th century in Vienna, musical language and form had become so standard that composing was almost a matter of filling a mold with notes. As John Corigliano describes, “Mozart basically had a vocabulary, a set of accompaniment figures, a form—a lot of things he could drop his music into, very beautifully.”³⁴ In a context such as this, a composer is able to produce an enormous amount of music very quickly because there are few decisions to be made.³⁵

The dawn of the 20th century, however, presented composers with a special challenge. As composers began to push musical tradition, and specifically tonality, to the breaking point, they discovered an interesting paradox: the freer their music became, the more difficult it was to write. This is because tonality had, up to this point, provided a vital framework upon which music could be built, as Stravinsky illustrates:

I shall overcome my terror and shall be reassured by the thought that I have the seven notes of the scale and its chromatic intervals at my disposal, that strong and weak accents are within my reach, and that in all of these I possess solid and concrete elements which offer me a field of experience just as vast as the upsetting and dizzy infinitude that had just frightened me.³⁶

With the forays into the realm of atonality at the turn of the century, this sure footing was pulled out from under the composer. Without tonality to guide and constrain, composers were now

³³ See *ibid.*, 462-76.

³⁴ John Corigliano in McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings*, 34-35.

³⁵ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 5.

³⁶ Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 64.

faced with the terrifying reality that every single musical combination was a viable possibility.

The blank page now yawned before composer as a chasm of infinity:

I experience a sort of terror when, at the moment of setting to work and finding myself before the infinitude of possibilities that present themselves, I have the feeling that everything is permissible to me. If everything is permissible to me, the best and the worst; if nothing offers me any resistance, then any effort is inconceivable, and I cannot use anything as a basis, and consequently every undertaking becomes futile.³⁷

As one might imagine, the terror Stravinsky describes was enormously crippling. So crippling, in fact, that a striking difference between the duration of pieces written during this transitional period and other, more stable, periods was noted by Anton Webern:

All the works created between the disappearance of tonality and the formulation of the new twelve-note law were short, strikingly short. The longer works written at the time were linked with a text which ‘carried’ them (Schoenberg’s ‘Erwartung’ and ‘Die Glücklichliche Hand,’ Berg’s ‘Wozzeck’), that’s to say, with something extra-musical. With the abandoning of tonality the most important means of building up longer pieces was lost. For tonality was supremely important in producing self-contained forms.³⁸

According to Webern, then, boundaries are so vital to composition that when tonality—one of the most important musical boundaries—was lost, something had to take its place in order for composition to continue. As Webern describes, composers were able to use motivic relations, extra-musical sources, and sheer novelty to hold their pieces together for a short time, but it was only with the advent of a sort of “pseudo tonality” that large-scale composition was once again possible. This “pseudo tonality” came in the form of Arnold Schoenberg’s so called “twelve-tone method” in which a pre-determined ordering of the twelve chromatic pitches takes the place of a tonal center.³⁹ This method provided a means of organizing the chaos of musical possibilities by limiting choice, as tonality had, while still making it possible to write atonal

³⁷ Ibid., 63.

³⁸ Anton Webern, *The Path to the New Music – Primary Source Edition*, ed. Willi Reich (Bryn Mawr: Theodore Presser Company, 1963), 54.

³⁹ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 820.

music. This method proved to be “salvation” for many composers and allowed atonal music to flourish for the remainder of the century.⁴⁰

Rather than being ultimately liberating, then, freedom is instead ultimately crippling. This explains why virtually all of the exceptionally prolific composers lived during a time of well-established musical tradition. Consider, for example Lassus, Vivaldi, Telemann, J.S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert, or contrast the one hundred four symphonies of Haydn with the four of Brahms, or the twenty-six string quartets of Mozart to the four of Schoenberg.⁴¹ The important thing to notice is that the boundaries of musical tradition were not self-imposed. In fact, these styles and traditions were so ingrained within the composers that they most likely would not have been consciously perceived at all, but instead would have become a sort of tacit knowledge that actually filtered ideas as they emerged such that, “[only] ideas and images within a more or less limited range [came] to mind on a given occasion.”⁴²

Venue

Musical style is, indeed, an important boundary on musical composition, and as a result many have noted its importance.⁴³ Yet musical style is only one of the many limitations composers constantly interact with on a daily basis, and to halt the discussion here would be to consider only one facet of the subject. One important subset of musical style—or perhaps something that helps to define it in an age that otherwise lacks a unified musical style—is the constraints imposed by the context of the musical setting. Music written for a church service,

⁴⁰ Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, 54.

⁴¹ See Meyer, *Style and Music*, 109-10.

⁴² Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Work of Making a Work of Music,” in *What is Music? : An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 114.

⁴³ See Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 40-50; Pamela Burnard and Betty Anne Younker, “Mapping Pathways: Fostering Creativity in Composition,” *Music Education Research* 4, no. 2 (2002): 245; McAdams, “Problem-Solving Strategies in Musical Composition, 395 and 427.

modern music festival, film, or funeral would, of necessity, vary if it were to be appropriate for the context. This is because each of these situations has a different atmosphere and a different set of assumptions about what music fits that atmosphere. While dissonant and energetic music would be perfect for a modern music festival, it certainly would not be appropriate for a church service. Similarly, the heroic and triumphant music for the latest Superman film would not be appropriate for a funeral. This imposes yet another constraint upon the composer by dictating temporary stylistic restrictions, which are more specific than those implied by the prevailing musical culture or style. Thus even in the Classical era, which already possessed a very unified musical culture, a funeral suggested very specific texts, musical moods, and even musical figures that should be used beyond what was already dictated by the musical language of the day.

Audience

A good composer must also consider the needs, abilities, and expectations of the commissioner and/or audience. To put oneself in the position of the audience is what Frederico Macedo terms the “listening mode”:

The *listening mode* means changing the focus from the mentioned problems to the aural results. In different stages of the composition, to have this twofold approach means, as often as possible, to listen and let the ear be the final judge in the process of decision of what the final work will be. . . . It means also to take into consideration the responses of different kinds of listeners to the work, in order to assess to what extent the composer’s intentions can be heard in the composition.⁴⁴

This, “listening mode” helps to dictate details at all levels of organization by forcing the composer to ask questions like: Will this theme be recognizable when it returns? Will the audience grasp the concept I am trying to portray? Each of these considerations will have a direct impact on the music itself and will aid the composer in decision-making.

⁴⁴ Frederico Macedo, “Phenomenology, Spatial Music, and the Composer: Prelude to a Phenomenology of Space in Electroacoustic Music,” *Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference* (2011): 30.

Performers and Instruments

A related consideration is the abilities and capabilities of the performers and instruments the composer is writing for. This includes physical considerations like the ranges and abilities of the instruments. Each instrument has a defined range of notes that it can play. A violin in standard tuning, for example, cannot play below the pitch G3. Similarly, instruments also have technical limitations innate within them because of their construction and the way in which they are played. For example, a guitar cannot sustain a note without re-articulating it, and a pianist with normal-sized hands simply cannot play notes two octaves apart simultaneously with one hand. There are also certain practical concerns to take into account as well. While a professional string ensemble may be able to play a piece in the key of Gb major, it will certainly be difficult for the ensemble because of the tuning of the instruments, and an amateur ensemble will likely struggle substantially with intonation. Similarly, a soprano in an average church choir will likely have difficulty singing a C6 although there are certainly sopranos who can do so. If music is to be performed, these considerations must be taken into account, and this often imposes quite a number of limits on the composer.

As an example of the way in which performers and instruments can affect the music being composed, we turn to *The Angel of Death*, a work for piano, chamber orchestra, and computer-processed sound by Roger Reynolds. Because of formal and instrumental decisions made early on in the conception of the piece, Reynolds was forced to take several practical matters into consideration while composing. One of these was the need to write musical material that could be played idiomatically by both the piano and the orchestra since both these groups utilize the same thematic material.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ McAdams, "Problem-Solving Strategies in Musical Composition," 399.

Reynolds (who is a pianist) felt that he started with the piano as an unconscious focal point, using the body image of piano playing to impose boundary conditions on the conception of the thematic textures . . . He nonetheless also recognized that already present in his mind was the fact that the materials would have to be adapted to the orchestra, producing a double set of constraints on their formulations: their ‘instrumental plausibility’ was always in the background when doing the initial texture maps.⁴⁶

Thus the instrumentation of the piece had an enormous impact on the actual musical material that was created. In this instance the boundaries were self-imposed by the composer, yet this is not always the case. Music written for any occasion with the hope of being performed must take the performers into consideration.

Deadlines

Still another possible constraint often imposed on composers is deadlines. Many composers, in fact, find deadlines quite inspiring and will often place them upon themselves even when they are not otherwise required.⁴⁷ Composer Dan Welcher says that, “I think I write better music when I’m under a huge amount of pressure, a deadline, because I don’t have time to fuss.”⁴⁸ Deadlines are useful because the pressure forces a composer to make decisions. Bruce Benson argues that deadlines are not only helpful but actually necessary for a composer to finish a piece: “We tend to think of works as being finished in the sense that nothing further could be done to them, but the reality is more often the case: that they are finished in the sense that the composer simply has no more time to work on them further.”⁴⁹ If this is true, then deadlines are just as vital to the end of the process as impetus is for the beginning.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 400.

⁴⁷ Dan Welcher in McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings*, 89.

⁴⁸ Daniel Godfrey in *ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁹ Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 67.

Emerging Musical Structure

The final, and perhaps most important, constraint discussed here is the emerging music itself. As music is created, especially within a specific musical tradition, it tends to suggest certain musical ideas that should follow it. Many composers will speak of “listening” to the material and letting it lead them along. As John Zorn says, “I’m not exactly sure what the next section will be. Part of the fun is in exploration. There’s always interaction, a give-and-take with the sounds that you’re dealing with.”⁵⁰ Each new idea suggests further ideas or eliminates those that no longer fit with the direction the music is taking. When the composer is able to “let go,” this effect can snowball such that the creator achieves what Doyle terms “total centration.” In this state, “the organization, the flow and change, is determined by the object or the task on which attention is centered. Actions and thoughts interact directly with that which attention is centered on without being distracted, or narrowed, or redirected by other concerns.”⁵¹ When this happens, “the melodies flow without forcing.”⁵² In this way a composer is able to create an entire work from a small starting point: “Rather than being suddenly revealed, whole, a musical work is achieved gradually over time . . . part discovery, part construction, even, admittedly, part contrivance . . .”⁵³

⁵⁰ John Zorn in McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings*, 165.

⁵¹ Doyle, “The Creative Process,” 356.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 355.

⁵³ Roger Reynolds, *Form and Method: Composing Music: The Rothschild Essays*, ed. Stephen McAdams (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

Conclusions Regarding Boundaries

While, clearly, style, venue, audience, performers and instruments, deadlines, and the emerging musical structure are not the only boundaries a composer may come up against during the compositional process, I believe that the boundaries discussed here are sufficient to demonstrate the important and far reaching effects boundaries have upon musical composition.

The important theme to notice in all of this is the interaction between the composer and various aspects of the music and the boundaries surrounding it. As Benson puts it, “the compositional process . . . tends to be a kind of improvisational process: one begins with certain ideas or themes [one might also add boundaries or limitations] and improvises on them until something results.”⁵⁴ Rather than a superhuman effort by which the composer draws a musical work out of the subconscious, composition is a much more human effort of trial, error, and experimentation.⁵⁵ Many composers speak of choosing a certain musical combination because “it worked,” “it was right,” or “it sounded good.” These value statements are possible not because of an innate quality in the musical figure itself but because of the context within which the composer is working.⁵⁶ Within a given context there may, indeed, be musical combinations that are more effective than others even though they are of no more value in and of themselves. Thus musical value is defined contextually, and it is this context that allows composers to make choices from the myriad alternatives available to them. An essential aspect of the compositional

⁵⁴ Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 55.

⁵⁵ See “Trent Reznor, Hans Zimmer, Danny Elfman and more Composers for THR’s Roundtable: Oscars 2015,” *YouTube* video, 29:37-30:58, posted by “The Hollywood Reporter,” December 23, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSAF9_ZHjfc; Blake Henson and Gerald Custer, *The Composer’s Craft: A Practical Guide for Students and Teachers* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2013).

⁵⁶ See Josh H. McDermott et al., “Indifference to Dissonance in Native Amazonians Reveals Cultural Variation in Music Perception,” *Nature* 535 (2016): 547, doi:10.1038/nature18635. Even those musical qualities, which Westerners might assume to be universal—the association of consonance with pleasure and dissonance with displeasure for example—do not, in reality, translate across cultures.

process, then, is defining the context of the work. As Reginald Smith Brindle recounts, “How often have I shown students exactly what language they have unconsciously used, sometimes wasting hours fumbling at the keyboard, trying to find the right notes?”⁵⁷ Immanuel Kant summarizes this whole process very nicely when he says:

The artist, having practiced and corrected his taste by a variety of examples from art or nature, holds his work up to it, and, after many and often laborious attempts to satisfy his taste, finds that form which is adequate to it. Hence this form is not, as it were, a matter of inspiration or of a free momentum of the mental powers; the artist is, instead, slowly and rather painstakingly touching the form up in an attempt to make it adequate to his thought while yet keeping it from interfering with the freedom in the play of these powers.⁵⁸

General Conclusions

In order for the process of musical composition to work, each of the “essential elements” we have discussed over the course of this paper must not only be present but also able to interact freely. Thus the composer must have a drive to compose, possess an idea of the piece in small or large scale and work to reconcile these details, allow the conscious and unconscious to work together in harmony, and have some sort of boundaries to push up against. It is equally important, however, that all of these “reactants” be allowed to work together. Many chemical reactions can be halted by the addition of some other chemical or material, known as an inhibitor, which prevents the interaction of the reactants. Even with all of the reactants present, the reaction will not begin until this inhibitor is removed. In the same way, many different things may also halt the compositional process. Self-consciousness, fear, and doubt are common inhibitors of musical composition because they do not allow all of the parts in this process to work together smoothly. When a composer is overly self-critical or critical too early in the

⁵⁷ Brindle, *Musical Composition*, 5.

⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 180-81.

process, the conscious faculty dominates and perfect interplay is disrupted, or, as Stephen Nachmanovitch puts it, “The artist judges his work before there is yet anything to judge, and this produces a blockage or paralysis. The muse gets edited right out of existence.”⁵⁹

The issue here is imbalance. If one facet of the compositional process is too dominant or is not allowed to interact freely with the others, the composer is crippled. The compositional process is like a delicately tuned machine, and, just like the machine, each little piece must work perfectly together in order for the entire process to function at all. In order to achieve balance, the composer must “surrender,” as it were, to the process and relinquish some of their control. Just as composers must sacrifice freedom in order to receive it back, so they must also “let go” of a piece for creation to be possible. Though surrendering to the process is often difficult, it is essential, for, “surrender is not defeat but rather the key to opening out into a world of delight and nonstop creativity.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (New York: Tarcher/Putnum 1990), 133.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

Appendix I*Score of Short and Suite*

Short and Suite

*A suite for solo guitar in six movements****David Orvek***

Note on interpretation:

In accordance with the Baroque style of this work, most decisions regarding the surface details of the piece—dynamics, articulation, ornamentation etc.—have been left un-notated. This is not out of carelessness or a desire for uniformity; to play the piece literally as notated—at the exact tempi suggested with no changes of articulation or dynamics—would be to miss the intentions of the composer entirely. Rather, it is the hope of the composer that the piece as notated will serve as a starting point from which the performer may build his or her own interpretation. The composer hopes to leave freedom not only for individual variation but also for spontaneous invention, and because of this the piece may vary substantially from performance to performance. The only incorrect performance of the work would be one in which the performer did not actively seek to make the piece as musical as possible.

—David Orvek

Suite for Guitar

Prelude

David Orvek

Freely, as an improvisation ♩ = c. 50

Guitar

attacca

Allemande

Lively ♩ = c. 120

Courante

Persistently ♩ = c. 130

The musical score for the Courante consists of seven staves. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and a key signature change to one sharp (F#). The music is written in 3/4 time. The first three staves contain the main melody and accompaniment. The fourth staff has a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The fifth staff continues the melody and accompaniment. The sixth staff has a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The seventh staff concludes the piece with a double bar line.

Sarabande

Mournfully ♩ = c. 65

The musical score for the Sarabande consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) and a tempo marking of 'Mournfully ♩ = c. 65'. The music is written in 3/4 time. The first two staves contain the main melody and accompaniment. The third staff has a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The fourth staff concludes the piece with a double bar line.

Pompously ♩ = c. 130

Bourée

5-staff musical score for Bourée. The music is in 4/4 time and features a pompous character. It includes first and second endings. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Gigue

Merrily ♩ = c. 60

5-staff musical score for Gigue. The music is in 6/8 time and features a merry character. It includes first and second endings. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Appendix II

Composition Journal

March 20, 2016, 5:25-6:15 pm.

Location: Music office and piano practice room.

I started out trying to write an Allemande but I ended up writing more of a march. I read the Wikipedia article about Allemandes and copied down the rhythm provided as an example. I took this rhythm as a starting point and tried to hear music to go along with the rhythm. Instead of simply writing exactly what I hear, I tried to push my thoughts toward a more modern approach in the vein of Prokofiev's classical symphony. I tried to include abrupt modulations and use of borrowed chords while still retaining a very traditional rhythm. I wrote out my initial ideas with pencil and paper without the aid of any instrument. After this, I went to the piano and played my ideas and modified them slightly after hearing them. I did not feel particularly inspired. No ideas grabbed me. I simply worked out my thoughts methodically. Other people were in the room and I was distracted periodically.

May 16, 2016, 6:07-6:50 pm.

Location: Dining room table at home.

After listening to Ola Gjeilo's new album, with music for choir and strings, I had the idea to write a piece for choir and strings. I wanted to write a piece that could be used for a worship service. I wanted to use Howard Helvey's piece for choir, brass, and organ (I can't remember the name) that I sung for ACDA as a model. This piece was very simple and straightforward but very effective. It was essentially just a setting of an original hymn tune. I thought the interludes and arrangement of the form was especially effective. The harmonic language also jumped out at me. It has a new sound to it because of the key relations it uses. Lots of abrupt modulations to third related keys. These were aspects I wanted to incorporate into my piece. I like the poetry of Isaac Watts so I chose one of his poems I thought would work well as an introit for a worship service: his Hymn 1.

Once I had copied out the text, I determined the meter of the poem to be common and then set about trying to sing the words to whatever music seemed to fit them. I came up with an initial gesture in E major (because I know it is a good range for voices) that I liked and then tried to answer it. Any of my attempted answers were either too cliché or did not fit the mood I was working toward. I finally wrote down something that fit well enough, though I was not happy with it, and tried to move on. I came up with the idea to end the phrase on the dominant pitch and use that as a pivot to G major for the next phrase.

During my time composing I was interrupted often by texts and by having to put things into the oven. Aside from these distractions, the room was virtually silent and a comfortable temperature. When I first began to sing the words I had many ideas but I lost them when I attempted to notate them. This was not a particularly productive session and I do not think I achieved flow.

May 17, 2016, 9:59-11:55 am.

Location: Dining room table at home.

This was a much more productive session. I could hear the music well in my head, even with the modulations. I used the piano a few times to check things but rarely had to change anything. I took the idea I had for a melody from the night before and almost immediately came up with a much better answer to my initial gesture. By 10:19 I had written a 16 bar melody that encompassed the first and second verses of text. The big picture I was hearing in my mind now did not fit with strings. I began to think this music would be better with brass and organ much like the Howard Helvey piece. Since my melody encompassed two verses, I grouped the verses into pairs, omitting the 3rd verse, which did not seem to fit. Since this resulted in 7 verses, I decided I would return to the opening verse at the end, possibly over a pedal point in the organ. I thought perhaps I could also change the harmony on the final verse and wrote an alternate cadence for the final verse. After this (at 10:30), I wrote a bass line to accompany the melody. This was not so much composing as working out a counterpoint exercise. With small breaks I finished the bassline by 11:08. From here I added the two remaining parts filling out the implied harmonies. I was not always terribly pleased with the voice leading in the inner parts but I continued with the best compromises I could find. This was finished by 11:26. I then entered this into finale so I could hear it played and made only minor corrections. This was a very productive session. The melody came quickly and I had almost no trouble hearing the ideas or whistling them. Whistling, singing, or humming is actually a very important part of my process. Even if I whistle so quietly that I can hardly hear it, it still helps me. The room was not distraction free. My family was in and out

and I stopped to talk to them on multiple occasions. These distractions did not break my focus or creativity however. Especially with the four-part harmony, I could leave and come back without any problem.

May 17, 2016, 4:00-4:42 pm.

Location: Outside and at dining room table.

I took a walk outside and my mind mulled over what I have so far of the piece. I began to wonder if the melody was really worthwhile. Should I modulate so soon? Is the ending phrase right? I thought about the piece as a whole too and wondered what key I should end in. I want to end on a high tonic but a high E is way too high for a trumpet. I could end in G since I suggested that key earlier. That means I need to come up with a version of the melody that doesn't modulate. I had a few ideas for this modified melody and came inside to write some of them down. I captured what I had but the ideas never went anywhere. I became somewhat sleepy. Nothing I thought of seemed right. I would try one note after another and none would work. I felt constrained somehow. Like the melodies were trapped inside me or I could not find them. They weren't free to come out of me but were held back by my effort. I felt like the melody was right there just waiting to come out but I couldn't find it. After a while, I left what I had on the page and left it.

May 17, 2016, 7:59-8:06 pm.

Location: Outside and at dining room table.

After dinner as we were getting ready to watch TV, I was whistling the tune trying to figure out a solution to where I was stuck. Suddenly, I had an idea and I quickly ran over to the table as I whistled the idea over and over again so I would not forget it. I wrote down this short fragment, which was the end of a phrase. From here, I had an idea for the question that I had just written the answer to and then determined that this new phrase would be the second phrase of the 1st G major phrase I had written earlier that day. All of this took about 7 minutes.

May 19, 2016, 7:18-8:07 am.

Location: My room.

I determined that I should have a contrasting theme for some variety. After about 10 minutes of thinking I sketched out an 8 bar theme in G# minor that then modulated to B major. I then joined this to my initial G major theme with a new ending to create a 16 bar phrase. After looking at the texts of the verses I determined that this could work with the 4th verse.

May 19, 2016, 2:45 pm.

I walked around outside to brainstorm about the big picture of the piece. I was having trouble concentrating for some reason and I really wasn't able to come up with anything. After coming back inside, I sat down with my papers and tried to decide which verses to use, in what order, and in what groupings. I was still unable to concentrate and left it for a while. At some point later (I did not mark the time) I decided to write out the first verse in full score with orchestration. I determined that this would be a big triumphant verse and so I placed the melody in octaves in the choir with the 4-part harmony in the organ doubled by the brass. I added slight embellishments to some of the harmonies in the brass but left it the same in the organ. It felt really boring to just double the organ and the brass and I began to wonder how Howard Helvey handled the brass and organ in his piece (called Hark, Creation's Alleluia). After some internet searching, I found the piece is not yet published and so I emailed the composer and asked for the score to study.

I felt that writing out this verse was somewhat pointless but I didn't know what else to do so I continued with it anyway. I also realized that E is a very bad key for transposing brass instruments and so I may have to consider a different key. Eb could work but it would have a different sound.

As I work on the piece, I am not always very confident of the piece but I am excited and motivated when I think of the end result. While I can't visualize the whole piece in my head in detail, I have an idea of what I want it to be and I know the effect and impression I want to give. I began to think that it is important to be able to have a concept of the whole piece in mind so that I can determine what fits with the piece and what doesn't. There are many things that might work in another context but in order to determine what is "right" I have to have a concept of the of the piece. I may not know exactly what notes I need but I know the feeling I want as Delius says. As long as I can keep this feeling in mind then I can figure out what notes are right by trial and error. I can discover the details that will create the overall picture I have in mind.

I want a glorious, triumphant kind of piece, almost like a procession.

May 20, 2016, 9:00 am.

Location: My room.

I was reading Harvey's book "music and inspiration." I am beginning to think more and more about the importance of conceiving the work as a whole. I have often heard this emphasized by many composers but could not understand how this could be done. I think I am beginning to understand. It is not conceived as a whole in detail. There are not notes, rhythms, or harmonies necessarily, but there is an impression, a feeling. There is a big picture. As Honegger says:

Imagine a building that you are constructing, of which you perceive vaguely at first the general plan and which becomes progressively more and more precise in the mind . . . I look first for the contour, the general aspect of the work. Let us say, for instance, that I see outlined in a very thick mist a sort of palace.

Contemplation gradually dissipates this mist and allows one to see a little more clearly. Sometimes a ray of the sun comes and lights up a wing of this palace under construction; this fragment becomes by model (Harvey 35-36).

Because of this big picture, small details can be decided for certain and a composer can know "There was no other solution" (Harvey 36).

I have often come to a point in my working on a piece that I will have a passage that exists in several possible versions. I could have these notes or these, this cadence or that, this instrumentation or that. Often these competing ideas seem equally fitting and I have no way to decide which to use. I wonder if perhaps this results from a lack of vision. Perhaps I do not have a clear enough picture of the work as a whole to determine which is the right answer. For, surely, if I have a goal in mind, there must be one answer that would help me achieve that goal better than the other. Or perhaps there are some details small enough or similar enough that both could lead to the same goal. Is it possible that there could be more than one "right" solution to a problem? Can multiple paths lead me to the same destination? If a work is conceived as an impression or a feeling, it seems conceivable that there could be multiple ways to achieve that impression or feeling.

What about if a composer starts not from a big picture but from a small fragment in perfect detail? Strauss speaks of receiving a complete melodic idea (Harvey 26), and Knussen says:

I usually have a very specific idea of the sound of one moment, like a photograph, which I then write down.

It might be just a pair of chords, or a line, or a bit of layered polyphonic texture, but always instrumentally conceived from the beginning—I can't perceive pitch in the abstract divorced from time (Harvey 29).

This sounds like the "ray of the sun" that "comes and lights up a wing of this palace under construction." I would seem that it would be possible to work backwards, as it were, from this point. If a composer can know in exact detail what one part of the piece looks like then perhaps they can reason from this point to the entire work. This snapshot of detail would allow them to compare other future ideas to see if they match with the big picture as revealed in this snapshot. If I was trying to build the whole palace from a snapshot, I would have a pretty good idea of the style and other elements of the palace just from this snapshot and thus would be able to know what would fit and what wouldn't.

It seems that a composer needs some way of conceiving enough of the work to be able to create a unified whole. This is really the problem isn't it? Anyone can "write" music. Writing notes or even a melody is not that difficult. What is difficult is constructing a piece of any substance that belongs together and that "works."

May 20, 2016, 9:40 am.

Location: My room.

I noticed something that I had done earlier on the piece and not taken note of. The ending phrase of the original choral tune did not quite sit right with me as I thought about it later (on my walk on May 17 I think). Since I had just come down from the fourth scale degree it didn't really make sense to go right back to it. I needed a fresher note. So I wrote out an alternate final bar in which I jump up to the fifth scale degree and then I do not need the repeated note. I have these two versions now. I am not totally convinced which one is better. The new one sounds very much like some hymn I cannot quite identify and sounds pretty cliché. The old one sounds fine when I listen to the choral in finale but when I sing the melody to myself and think about it I don't really like it. They do have a strikingly different character to them for being so similar. I can't decide which one I like better. There seems to be no reason to choose one or the other.

May 20, 2016, 2:58-6:25 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

I started by trying to harmonize the minor melody I had written. I harmonized it in the way I normally would in four-part harmony. I started with a bassline and then added the inner voices. After putting it into finale to hear it, I really didn't like it. Then I thought about using more static harmony instead of the chorale like harmonization I had now. I then began to work on the introduction. As I worked on the introduction, I heard an idea for an exciting fanfare like introduction. I thought it sounded familiar but I couldn't think of what it was. As I wrote, I realized that it was the opening of John Rutter's Gloria. I decided I couldn't use this material as I had been writing it almost verbatim. After discarding that material, I came up with a fanfare in a similar vein. This material seemed a little familiar and I wondered if it wasn't the intro that was used for brass for the hymn "When in Our Music God is Glorified" that we sang at ACDA. I really wasn't sure.

Thoughts afterward: I feel as if I'm waiting for something. I keep chipping away at little parts of the piece but I am hesitant to dive in and really trying to write it. I am waiting for something to click, some idea. I have a big picture now. I have split the work up into definite sections and I know what I want to happen in those sections. Now I just need to fill in the details. This is where it is hard. This step is when I need notes, harmonies, and rhythms. I am almost apprehensive of starting to work on the details because I know it will be laborious and tedious. Because of this, I am procrastinating by working on little things that I know I can accomplish in a short time. It's like when you have a big project due in a few weeks but instead of working on that you work on all the assignments that are due tomorrow or later that week. I need to just start. I just need to go. I need to quit waiting around and start. Ideas will come if I start. I can't wait for ideas. Maybe a Sabbath rest will be good and then I can start after that.

May 22, 2016, 8:35-11:23 am.

Location: Dining room table.

I attempted to write out the 4th and 5th verses with the organ accompaniment. I was able to come up with what looks on paper like a good accompaniment. After putting it into finale, I wasn't totally pleased with the sound of it. It seemed a little busy or something and all the passing tones created an odd sound. I think if I were to hear it in real life with a better balance I might like it better. So for now, I am leaving it as is.

When I am simply trying to solve a counterpoint or part writing problem, I usually can progress quite quickly. Very rarely do I sit and stare at the page for a long time. This is in contrast to the times when I am trying to create new melodies or themes. When I am creating from scratch it is a very slow process. When I can work on or from something I already have I can move much faster. I still have not written any of the interludes. Probably for this very reason because I would have to create new material or at least create something new out of the material I have. When I put things into finale and try to modify my material there, I feel disconnected. It feels like nothing I do finale matters because I can change it so easily. It no longer feels like I am composing but just messing around. If I put a note down on paper it feels like it means something. If I put a note into finale it feels like I'm just shooting in the dark or "well why not try that note."

May 22, 2016, 6:35-7:04 pm.

Location: Dining room table?

[I am adding this later as I look at my manuscripts.] It looks like I made a few modifications to the 5th verse and then tried to come up with an ending to the piece. I think this is where I first wrote down the idea to cadence on a deceptive cadence on C and then have a fanfare ending back to E major. This is definitely the germ of what I ended up using later.

May 23, 2016, 10:23 am-12:25 pm.

Location: Dinning room table.

This was a very frustrating session. I was trying to write an introduction and I know kind of what I want but nothing I would write down was right. I was trying to force it out. I know little bits and pieces and I was making up filler sections to get to those bits and pieces. I hated all of the filler stuff I wrote. Nothing was right. I didn't even like they way my notes looked on the page. Everything was sloppy and messy. I had spent a lot of time brainstorming and figuring things out in my head. I thought I had it figure out and it would just be a matter of writing it down. But when I went to write it wasn't working. The idea in my mind wasn't specific enough maybe. But I was trying to play it out in my head and I thought I had it worked out. There are little gaps that are making everything fall apart I think. I know I want to start with a fanfare in C major and then abruptly go to E major and conclude with the fanfare I had written the other day with some small modifications. I don't know what to do in C major and how to

get to E major. Those are the gaps. I know where I want to be I just don't know how to get there. I spent a bit of time playing things at the piano and that didn't seem to help. The original idea came from what I was thinking of for the ending and I thought maybe I should do something similar at the beginning. I wanted to make the beginning more complicated or at least longer though. Maybe I should just write down the short and simple idea I had. I can always go from there.

May 23, 2016, 4:46-5:31 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

I tried to come up with introductory material, and some transitional material. I was very stuck and nothing I came up with worked. I was very frustrated.

Thoughts after: Sometimes I have ideas in my mind and when I try to grab hold of them and hear them again they disappear. It's like trying to grab at a cloud. It's right there in front of you and it looks solid but when you try to grab at it your hand goes right through it.

May 24, 2016, 8:30-9:40 am.

Location: Dining room table?

[I am adding this later as I look at my manuscripts.] I tried to harmonize the main tune in a more chromatic manner like I had been thinking about doing. I tried to modulate and cadence in different keys. After I put it into finale to hear it, I totally hated all of it and decided to just leave the harmony the same for the last verse.

May 24, 2016, 9:53 am-12:54 pm (with lunch break in middle).

Location: Dining room table.

[I am adding this later as I look at my manuscripts.] I wrote out a draft of the final verse in full score. I tried to think of something to do with the brass besides just double the voices. I added some fanfare figures in the brass at the ends of phrases. Other than that, I just had them double the voices.

May 24, 2016, Evening and night.

Location: Living room and my room.

I worked most of the evening putting the fragments and sketches into finale so that I could see the piece as a whole. Much of this was done while watching TV. It was good to see how everything fits together. I definitely don't need any transitions between a few of the sections and there definitely needs to be one before the last verses. After putting everything into finale I decided to try out some of my ideas for an ending, to see how they sounded. I wrote out an ending and listened to it and it wasn't bad but not quite right. I lay down and went to bed but I continued to play over the ending in my mind. I thought of some better ideas and got up and wrote them down into finale. This was better and I lay down to go to bed and continued to play the piece over in my mind. I thought of still more ideas, got up to put those into finale, and finally was satisfied enough to actually go to sleep. I am still not sure if the ending is long enough. It seems a little abrupt. Sometimes that can be good though.

May 27, 2016, 9:45 am.

Location: My room.

I've reached the point where I am starting to dislike this piece. The big picture is finished and I really like about 90% of what I have. But there are these little sections that just aren't right and they are killing the piece. It's the details that aren't working. There are two sections where I just can't get the harmony quite right and I hate the way they sound. Then there is the final transition into the last section. As it is now it works but it just doesn't quite seem right. I feel like there is a better solution but I don't know what it is and I don't feel like working to find it. I just want to be done with this thing. It's so close and yet so far. I'm tired of working on it and tired of thinking about it. I'm tired of trying all the different combinations and listening to it again and again, tweaking a little with each time. When I compose this way by trial and error it seems like I'm cheating or not really composing. It feels ugly. It seems like I should just get it right and not have to try a million different things first. I have been working on the piece in finale and I think this may be part of the problem. It's hard to see everything when it's on the computer and I can just play it back after I make each change. There was one section of harmony in particular I was struggling with and so I wrote it out on paper and worked on it that way. This was helpful I think because I could see it better and manipulate it with my hands. I need to completely redo the harmony in the G# minor section. It's awful the way it is. I'm starting to wonder if it should even be in a minor key at all. It does provide some nice contrast. Part of the problem with the harmony in general is that I wrote the outer two voices first and then filled in the middle voices. I really like the two outer lines but it results in some atrocious part-writing in the inner voices. It actually

pains me to have all those awkward skips but I can't fix it without changing the outer voices. It's kind of sickening to work on. I felt similarly about the second movement of the string trio I think. I was so sick of that thing by the time I finished it. I think I just got to the point where I said it was good enough and moved on.

May 27, 2016, 3:00-5:04 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

I wrote out the two themes that I wanted to re-harmonize and worked with pencil and paper. After some doodling at the piano, I came up with a solution for the G# minor theme that I really like and think works quite well. I also tried re-harmonizing the men's theme so that I could have a counter melody like in an earlier draft but I could never quite get it to work perfectly. There is just too much empty space and odd intervals. I wonder what Bach would have done? He may be a good place to look for some ideas. As of now, the harmony I wrote earlier works better but I would kind of like a thinner texture.

As I was working I felt like ideas were coming faster or at least I was having ideas. I liked most of what I was doing instead of hating everything and the process was overall more pleasant and encouraging. I do not know if this has to do with working with pencil and paper, working at the dining room table, or the fact that I had just listened to some music by Christopher Rouse that I really liked. My mental state seemed much different. I was more optimistic, less critical, and enjoyed the process more. I was trying to whistle tunes and hear them in my head and write them instead of just putting them into finale and having it play back. Maybe instant feedback isn't a good thing. Maybe it's better to think about it for a while first before hearing it back.

May 27, 2016, 5:54-6:09 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

After looking at some Bach cantatas I realized I was going about it all wrong. I didn't have to get rid of all the accompaniment or make the low melody the new bassline. I could literally just transpose the whole chorale to B and just make sure the bassline stayed below the melody. I did this and it seems to work perfectly. I even found a different note in the bass that makes a better doubling. I may want to use this same alteration everywhere. I also wrote out a horn counter melody that I may or may not actually end up using. In any case, I think I've finally solved this section. It doesn't have to be complicated or even very different. Sometimes you have to dare to be simple.

May 29, 2016, 6:15 pm.

Location: My room.

I still wasn't happy with the transition into the last section so I decided I would work on it again. I came up with a better way to modulate but after playing listening to it, it just didn't seem right. I would look at the music and change things here and there. All of the changes I tried were "head" changes. What I mean by that is these changes weren't what I heard but were academic or technical ideas of how to solve the problem. Many of them worked well but none of them was quite right. Finally what I did was close the computer for a minute and walk around and think. I tried to play or hear a transition in my head. Instead of just thinking about what worked I tried hearing what came naturally. I then went and found what this was on the piano. This worked so much better. Or at least it matched what I was hearing and sounded "right." Even if things are technically correct, I still need to hear them. My ear needs to be involved in the process. It can't simply be a matter of solving problems technically. There may well be more than one right answer but not as many that sound right. This is why my ear needs to be involved. It needs to be a joint process between my mind and my ear.

May 31, 2016, 12:25-3:28 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

Today I started on the guitar suite. I listened to a lute suite by de Visee during lunch. I already knew I would be writing a suite in the Baroque style binary form dances. Because of this, I already knew the form I would be writing in and the kind of phrase structure and key relations I would have. This gave me a mold to pour notes into. After lunch I simply sat down and started writing what was in my head. I started with a melody and just wrote whatever came to mind. I did not worry if the melody was cliché, or if it sounded too familiar. I did not worry about being repetitious or boring. Basically, I did not criticize the music as I wrote it. I simply wrote. In ten minutes, I had the first 16 bars of the melody, which I then had to modify in order to modulate to C major for the B section. After this modification, I started to write the B section and within 15 minutes I was finished. This melody was written within 25 minutes. It was very easy going and I had very little trouble. The only time I slowed was when I began to criticize the music. What I heard next in my head at one point was a phrase from a dance by Susato. Because I didn't want to copy that piece, I had to stop and think a moment. Once I got through that point, the rest was smooth

sailing. After finishing the melody, I turned to harmony. I started by adding a bassline and I decided to keep the texture very thin and use lots of open 5ths. The harmonizing was a relatively easy task and I was finished quickly without too much trouble. I did all of this work away from the guitar and did not worry about playability. I only used the piano once or twice to check some harmonies. After finishing the piece, I put it into finale and then printed it to try out on the guitar. After trying it out, I made some corrections and added notes to thicken the texture. I then entered these corrections into finale and modified one phrase that I did not like. In total, the piece took about 2 hours to write from start to finish.

I did not do any pre-composition thinking or brainstorming. I think the piece came so fast because I had a pre-decided form, I used a very simply harmonic language and one that I know well, and I did not critically evaluate the music as I wrote it. I was able to think quite clearly. I was focused but I do not remember being overly excited or ecstatic.

June 2, 2016, 5:07-5:45 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

This was a frustrating and discouraging session. I did not get much done. Anything I wrote just didn't sound right or sounded familiar. Most of the melodies I could think of did not lay out in a normal phrase structure. Nothing worked. I was even having trouble dictating what I was whistling. I felt like everything had been done before. How many different ways are there to combine the 7 notes of the diatonic scale? How has everything not been done already? What could I add at this point? Especially writing in this old style. This old style is the only one I know how to write in though. If I try to write in a newer style I am totally lost. There seems no reason to write one note over any other and I don't know how to organize melodies or harmonies. I like this kind of music but I don't know how to write it. Today has been a frustrating day in general. I have not really gotten much of anything done and I am in a bad mood. I'm sure this had something to do with how I was feeling while composing. The piece I have already written is kind of nagging at me. Something doesn't seem right about it. It's too simple or sounds too familiar or something. Some of the harmonies aren't quite right either.

June 2, 2016, 6:49-7:14 pm.

Location: My room.

I decided to give it another try. I was encouraged by my reading of *Trust the Process*. I decided to just write. I tried not to be too critical of what I wrote. I wanted to try to get out of the box I feel I'm stuck in so I tried to write more freely. As I wrote, I found a small fragment that I liked. I tried to do something with this but never found anything quite right. I think I will have something to work with now.

June 3, 2016, 1:12-3:07 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

I attempted to write again. I was trying to think of a sarabande but I had no ideas so then I turned to a gigue. I find writing pieces with strong rhythms easier and giges have very strong rhythms. After a bit of doodling, I looked at and played a bit of the gigue from Bach's lute suite in E. Partly because I had been hearing part of this theme in my head as I tried to write and also to see how Bach wrote giges. After looking at the gigue, I had an idea for a melody. I quickly wrote down 4 bars that I really liked. I could not figure out how to follow these four bars however. After lots of dead ends, thinking, and doodling, I eventually came up with something that was passable. I then modulated to C major and continued from there. Eventually, I came up with a complete gigue of about 50 bars or so with repeats. I am not very happy with it. I wasn't happy with it while writing it but I figured I might as well finish it just to see. It all felt very cliché and I kept hearing fragments from melodies I had written in the past. I had a very hard time keeping these out of this new melody. I didn't like anything I wrote nearly as much as that initial 4 bars. Those 4 bars came quickly and naturally. They just sang themselves. Everything else was a bit forced and contrived. The melody also has a lot of repetition. There is very little material. I feel like I should be able to write more or at least vary the material instead of just repeating it. I remember spending a lot of time thinking trying to hear the right solution in my head. I almost fell asleep a few times doing this. Most things I wrote were just throwing things out there. It's kind of a "what the heck" melody.

June 3, 2016, 5:56-7:00 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

As I was listening to some minimalist music while reading this evening, an idea struck me: what if I made a minimalist dance suite? Dances are very repetitive by their very nature and very rhythmic. This is the essence of minimalist music. I could try to create a minimalist version of each of the dances of the baroque suite. The rhythm

would be very key. I would have to capture the essence of each dance. This would be a very fresh and new way of thinking about the dance suite. I jotted down some rhythmic ideas and a set of chords I was hearing (I don't know if I will use them, I think they were still ringing in my ears from what I was listening to). I also copied down the rhythms given for each dance on Wikipedia to potentially use as a basis. I think I will also try to watch videos of people doing these dances to get some ideas. I may also listen to many examples of these dances and choose some particularly prominent or strong rhythms and use those as a basis. I am not sure what the melodic or harmonic material will be yet. I don't know if this idea will go anywhere but I am very excited by the prospect. I feel like I've hit a wall with the traditional suite I was trying to write and I want to write something new and not something that sounds like it could have been written in the 17th century. We shall see what happens.

June 5, 2016, 7:36-8:16 am.

Location Dining room table.

The other night just before bed (10:29 pm) I had an idea for this gigue melody I had been working on. I had been listening to dance suites by Vaughan Williams, Holst, and Grieg in the evening and I think this idea was probably prompted by those pieces. It also encouraged me to keep going with the traditional suite I had started out with. Today, I started to work with this new idea I came up with before bed. I tried arranging the material I already had and tried to fit this new piece in. After a few tries, I figured out a configuration that resulted in a very symmetrical 16 bar phrase. I was happy enough with this to keep going. I then wrote a section in C major. I tried not to worry about clichés and just wrote. Before too long and without too much trouble, I came up with an 8 bar phrase in C major and then decided I would return to the A minor section.

June 5, 2016, 4:00-5:01 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

I now turned to the task of harmonizing the melody. I knew I wanted simple, open harmonies. I decided to just try putting a chord on each strong beat and see what I thought. I knew it wasn't very exciting and not complicated or technically difficult at all but it worked and it seemed to fit with the melody. After I finished the harmonization, I put the result into finale and printed it out. After trying it on the guitar I made a few modifications and then continued to practice it. It really isn't too bad. If I could play it up to tempo it might not be bad at all. It really is so simple though. And there is so much repetition. It concerns me. It feels too simple. Like I am cheating. I'm going to leave it be for the time being.

June 6, 2016, 12:41-1:03 pm and 4:30 pm?

Location: Dining room table.

I tried to compose two separate times this afternoon. The first time I sketched out a melody but did not like where it was going and gave up because I didn't have any ideas. Later in the afternoon, I tried brainstorming, listening to music, and going outside but nothing really seemed to help. I didn't have any ideas. Any ideas I did have would leave right away and I could never find them again. In the later afternoon, I was not in a good mood for composing and I knew I wouldn't get anything done. I was frustrated and a bit agitated. I couldn't think clearly and I had the gavotte from Bach's suite in E minor stuck in my head. I know I need to work to get ideas sometime and I can't just sit around waiting for ideas to come to me but I really don't feel like working. I don't like this suite and I don't like writing for guitar. It is hanging over my head and I know I need to finish it and make some progress but I dread working on it.

June 6, 2016, 7:14-8:02 pm.

Location: My room and living room.

Last evening without any prompting or intentional thought, I was whistling aimlessly and came up with a tune I really liked. I quickly whistled it over and over again until I could get to some paper and write it down. After writing it down, I slowly added more to it while watching TV. This melody really just seemed to appear out of nowhere. It was almost as if I had to not be consciously working on it and forcing it out so that the melody was free to come out in its natural form. Before this melody came to me, I was watching a video and reading an article about some of the composition faculty at the University of Chicago and how they compose and how they are inspired. I don't know if this prompted or inspired the melody or not. I do remember it got me thinking about my piece.

June 7, 2016, 9:27-10:46 am.

Location: My room and living room.

This morning, I continued working on the melody and added section in C major. After finishing the melody, I harmonized it using Bach's Bouree from the suite in E minor as a model. I used a two-voice texture throughout and made some modifications to the melody once I tried to put harmony to it. I had quite a bit of trouble harmonizing the melody because it did not directly imply harmony always. After I finished, I played it on the guitar and made some further modifications.

June 8, 2016, 3:14-4:41 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

After listening to Bach cellos suites, and improvising at the guitar, I sat down to try to write a sarabande. I tried to use the fragments I had come up with before but eventually ended up coming up with something different that worked. I came up with a 16 bar melody that had good things in it but was not quite right. I then wrote out different iterations of the melody, tweaking something small each time. I continued to add new things that made the melody better. I got to the point where I liked the first and second phrases pretty well but then I was stuck. This happened after probably about an hour of working. I was then stuck for the next half hour or so and eventually gave up. I am sure some solution will strike me later when I am not thinking about it and my mind has time to clear and be free. Right now I am concentrating so much on trying to figure out what the next phrase should be that I don't think my mind is free to create anything. I am just trying to bring something out by force of will and nothing good is coming from it. Maybe I am concentrating too much on the melody. Maybe I need to think about something else so that my "subconscious" can work on it.

June 9, 2016, 7:21-7:30 am.

Location: Dining room table.

I tried working on the sarabande melody again. There is still a gap I need to fill. I thought maybe I would have come up with something over night but I still couldn't think of anything. As I looked at the melody, the strict phrase structure really started to bother me. Basically all of my melodies work this way: there are two to four measures of material and then it comes to rest on a long note on a half or authentic cadence. This same idea continues on to create a complete melody. This is how I always write melodies. I must be able to do something different, right? I just have a formula I'm following. What was really bothering me in this melody were the long notes at the end of each phrase. This just totally halts the motion. It seems like music by great composers doesn't have this. There aren't awkward pauses every four measures. I don't know how to not do this though. That's just the way I hear the melodies or how I know to construct them. It doesn't seem right though. I listened to the sarabande from Bach's 6th cello suite, which is marvelous, and he doesn't have these awkward pauses at the end of phrases. I don't know how he does it. His melodies are very different from mine. They seem to go on forever whereas mine breathe. Maybe this is ok. Maybe this is just a stylistic trait of mine. It's hard for me to believe that though. Even if it is a stylistic trait, I should be able to do something different now and again. I don't know how though, I am stuck in a rut.

June 9, 2016, 8:33-9:02 pm.

Location: My room.

I tried to re-write my sarabande melody so that there weren't any pauses between phrases. I tried to keep the music moving. I tried a few different ideas but eventually came up with something I think I like. I also think in general I need to have more modulations in my melodies. Especially in the B section I need to move to different key areas. In most of Bach's suites, the only time he comes to a pause in the melody is at the end of sections and when he modulates to a new key area. Otherwise, he tends to keep the music moving.

June 10, 2016, 8:29-9:38 am.

Location: Dining room table.

I took the A section I had finished last night and then tried to write a B section that used more modulations and didn't have pauses between phrases. I came up with something but it really wasn't very good. After trying to harmonize it and play it on the guitar I decided to give it up. The only thing I really still like is the opening phrase. Everything else really isn't very worthwhile. I listened to a suite by Robert de Visée while following along in the score. It is so simple and yet so effective. Most of them are only 16 bars long and they hardly modulate. Maybe I've been trying to do too much. Maybe I should just go for something simple, straightforward, and effective.

June 10, 2016, 10:02-11:01 am.

Location: My room at the guitar and in the car.

I basically started over using the small fragment that I did like and using the de Vissee suite as a model. I made it much simpler stuck to only 8 bar sections. I composed at the guitar. I would write down small fragments and then play them on the guitar. I kept changing the bassline and harmony. I am much happier with what I have already.

June 12, 2016, 3:10-4:42 pm.

Location: My room.

I tried to write the final four measures of the B section. I initially thought of using the melody from the first four measures as the bassline but decided to abandon this after a few tries. I began to think that I needed a climax for this movement. With what I had written so far, the highest note came in the second measure. I wrote a phrase that cadenced in C major and had a higher note that would serve as a climax. I then determined this should come before the phrase I had written on Friday. After modifying the phrase from Friday, I now had all the material I needed. I tried most things out on the guitar and experimented with different versions and sometimes came up with ideas on the guitar. After finishing, I put everything into finale, printed it out, played through and made corrections, and printed the final version. I am pretty happy with what I have here. It is simple and yet works well and gets the point across I think.

June 13, 2016, 11:55 am-1:20 pm.

Location: My room.

The events of yesterday's shooting in Orlando brought to mind a piece I thought of in November. My friend posted a quote from Leonard Bernstein on Facebook that said: "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than every before." This quote had a big impact on me. It got me thinking about how to respond to the shooting. This brought to mind the piece I mentioned before. Last November, the daughter of one of the professors in the music department died suddenly. The entire department was shaken. I remember when I came upstairs and first heard the news. Everyone was sitting or standing still, staring blankly. There was a terrible silence. No one had anything to say, no one moved. I wanted to try to capture this moment and feeling in music. That blank, empty feeling. On the 18th of November I sketched out some open chords using lots of half-steps. I never ended up doing anything with this piece. Today, this idea was brought to my mind again. And so I began to write in full score. I want to write this piece for string orchestra. As I began writing, I imagined a solo cell line emerging from the orchestra. As I wrote, this melody became very chant-like. I then went and read about organum in my music history textbook to see about ways of "harmonizing" this melody later on. After stopping for lunch, I determined that I needed to write out the "chant" on its own. Once this is finished, I can figure out how I want to handle it in the piece. I cannot quite envision the piece as a whole at this point. However, I do know the overall impression and feeling I want to give. I also know that I want many open harmonies utilizing the total range of the string orchestra. I want half-steps sliding in and out of these open harmonies. After I chose the key of E, I thought how the note E4 fits into the range of every instrument in the string orchestra except the double bass (which it could play with harmonics). This made me think of having a section where the entire orchestra plays this single note in unison almost like the Elliott Carter etude for wind quintet. I am excited by the prospects of this piece. Music attached to such a tragic event is bound to be very powerful but it also must be handled very carefully.

June 13, 2016, 5:42-6:48 pm.

Location: Dining room table.

I started work on the guitar suite again. I started working on a courante. I listened to some of the courantes from Bach's cello suites and then wrote down some rhythms that I was hearing. Using these rhythms, I started to write notes that I heard with the rhythms. The first melody I was able to capture was the ending phrase. After writing this down, I then tried to write a sequential passage that I envision be somewhere in the second phrase and then thought of a phrase to precede the ending that I had written before. I wrote the sequential passage more or less theoretically making sure that it outlined a good harmonic progression. When I have a strong rhythm in mind, melodies form in my head easier I think. If I get the rhythm in my mind, notes and phrase structures will start to attach themselves to the rhythm.

June 14, 2016, 7:45-7:56 am and 8:42-10:00 am.

Location: My room, dining room table, and the piano.

I tried to continue with the ideas for a courante I had come up with last night but I think I was not hearing the 3/2 meter correctly. All of my ideas were laying out in four instead of three. So I decided to listen to all of the courantes from Bach's cello suites while following along in the score to see what he did. Only one of the courantes was in 3/2, all of the rest were in 3/4 with an eight-note pickup. After this, I tried writing in 3/4 and very quickly had some ideas. I tried to think of an A minor theme and as an idea came to me, the B section or second phrase or something came to me very clearly and strongly. In my head I heard it played by a cello. This idea was so clear and so perfect. It sounded like I was listening to something I had heard before. There was even harmony and echo figures. It took me a bit of time at the piano to discover exactly what I was hearing and it turned out I was not hearing a complete phrase so I had to work out the phrase ending. This was great! I loved this theme I was hearing. It was so very Bach-like. It was a sequential phrase with a circle of fifth progression just like Bach would have written. I almost wondered if this wasn't from one of Bach's suites but I am quite sure it isn't. Now that I have this phrase written out, I am trying to figure out where it falls in the form of the piece. I think it might be the end of the B section but I am not really sure. I am going to look at some Bach cello suite movements again to see how an idea is used. I feel like this needs a form similar to the gavottes or bourees from the cello suites. These movements are slightly more repetitious than some of the others. I feel like I have caught a snapshot of a movement from a suite. A lightning bolt has illuminated a section of the score in almost perfect detail and now I have to figure out what the rest is. This may be slow going but the piece I have is so great that I have to find out what the rest is. This is like Graf's description of Beethoven's sketches for the 9th Symphony: "Bars 63 and 64, with the agitated accompaniment in the second violins and violas, seem to be separated from their context, as though illuminated by lighting" (Graf location 2872). This is exactly what it feels like. I just dearly hope I can find the rest of the movement that this piece belongs to.

June 15, 2016, 9:52-10:45 am.

Location: Dining room table.

I began work on a courante. Pretty quickly I came up with a figure that I liked and then I started writing. Before long I had eight bars that I liked pretty well and then I started on the B section. I determined this section needed to be at least 16 bars long or this whole piece would be less than a minute long. I wanted to try to write something that would modulate to a new key and cadence there and then work its way back like in Bach's suites. I used the piano a lot since I was writing sequential passages and I needed to hear the harmonies. I managed to modulate to E minor and then was able to get back to the home key by the end. I am pretty satisfied with this. It is quite unlike most of my other melodies. It has almost constant motion. I was even able to work on this while my brother was practicing viola. Normally this would have been quite distracting but I was still able to write. Now I need to turn to the task of harmonizing the melody, which could be quite challenging.

June 16, 2016, 8:36-9:50 am.

Location: Dining room table and my room.

I harmonized the courante melody I wrote yesterday. There were a few tricky passages but overall it wasn't terribly difficult. After putting it into finale, I printed it out and tried it on the guitar. I made a few small changes after hearing it. There is one passage I am just not sure about. It doesn't sound quite right but it isn't bad either. I played it over and over again to see if it was alright and I could never come to a solid conclusion. I decided to keep that passage for now.

June 20, 2016, 6:19-8:03 pm.

Location: Dining room table and my room.

I realized I still need a prelude so yesterday evening I tried to compose for a bit but never got anywhere. Today I started writing some ideas I had been playing around with and came up with some good material. I listened to a de Visee's prelude just to see how substantial it was. After seeing that it was only 1 minute long I decided mine could be short as well. After some playing around I got something that was exactly a minute long and that seemed to lead well into the first movement. I decided to have it go straight into the first movement without a break. I worked some at the piano trying to figure out a sequence I was hearing and then I worked at the guitar. The piece is very simple but I just want to be done with this piece so I think it is good enough. Now I have to go back to all of the movements I have written and do any revising that is needed. While writing the sequence I could hear what I wanted but I had trouble finding it at the keyboard. Even once I found the right notes, I could not figure out how to get the rhythm to line up correctly. I had to write it out by trial and error to find it. The initial version I had

modulated and at first I tried to figure out where to take this but everything I could think of was finishing in this new key so I decided to modify the sequence so it stayed in A minor so I could use this material I was finding and finish in the right key.

June 23, 2016, 8:00-11:15 am.

Location: My room.

I went over each movement of my guitar suite at the guitar and made revisions. Some movements needed little or no revision, others needed quite a bit. The Allemande needed the most. I redid a lot of the harmony and it was slow going at times. I went by trial and error most of the time, playing different harmonies and seeing which worked best. Eventually, I got to the point where I was happy enough with everything and then put everything into finale and combined some of the movements so that the entire piece would fit on three pages. I will now start to try to learn the piece and I am sure I will continue to make revisions as I am able to play the piece better.

June 24, 2016, 10:00 am.

Location: My room.

Today as I was practicing the Sarabande, it seemed to me the ending I had was too abrupt. It seemed like it needed to return back to the opening material. So after I finished practicing, I added a return to the opening section after the B section. I made a few small changes to the section so that it would come to a cadence and also so that it stayed more in A minor. It seemed like the piece “needed” this. This departs from the form I followed in all of the dance movements. Some of them have a return to opening material but it is in both repeats of the B section. In this movement, it only happens after the second repeat. Though it doesn’t match with the form or follow what I did in the rest of the movements, I think it works well and is much better than I had before. Like I said, it seemed like the movement needed it to be right. Something was missing before. This was an intuitive decision. It was not something the form or genre “required” or something that made sense technically (not that it doesn’t make sense) but it was something I felt needed to be there.

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