12-2015

String Quartet, *brut*

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STRING QUARTET, *BRUT*

by

Bernie Walasavage

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Music
Music Composition
Western Michigan University
December 2015

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STRING QUARTET, *BRUT*

Bernie Walasavage, M.M.
Western Michigan University, 2015

*l’Art Brut*, also commonly referred to as “outsider art,” is comprised of a variety of visual media by untrained or mentally ill artists. The string quartet is subtitled this because it takes inspiration from the work of these artists; with its jagged edges, vibrant colors, and horrid scenes, there is an organic beauty inherent in such eclectic and divergent art. Another factor which drew me to the artwork of the mentally ill was the commonality of Kenophobia: an abnormal fear of empty spaces. Schizophrenic, Swiss artists, Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) and Aloïse Corbaz (1886-1964) were noted for suffering this phobia and realizing it through their art. Every inch of canvas on a Wölfli or Corbaz painting is covered with color and intricate design. I channeled this phobia in regard to timing and development of my work. Each section is timed precisely, so the cohesive whole, much like a painting, is a journey of density, texture, timbre, atmosphere, and character.
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Duration: 18' 00"

## Program Notes

My string quartet is subtitled *Brut* because it takes inspiration from the *Art Brut* movement. *Art Brut*, also referred to as "outsider art," is the work by untrained or mentally ill artists. What drew me to the artwork of the mentally ill was the commonality of xenophobia, which is an abnormal fear of empty spaces. Schizophrenic Swiss artists, Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) and Aloïse Corbaz (1886-1964), were noted for suffering this phobia and exorcising it through their art. Every inch of canvas on a Wölfli or Corbaz painting is covered with color and intricate design. I channeled this phobia in regards to timing and development for my string quartet. Each section is timed precisely, so the cohesive whole, much like a painting, is a journey of density, texture, timbre, and character. It was this general and open-ended idea which drew me closer to the paintings of schizophrenic artists and how such horrid, eclectic, and bizarre imagery can indeed be beautiful as well. This served as a credo during composition: that form can be jagged and uneven, content can develop organically or mechanically and then be deliberately broken, and pitch material need not convey a message, but work in tandem with structure as if the string quartet itself was a living and breathing organism.

## Key/Definitions

**Bow Placement**

- **ord.** ordinario bowing
- **s.p.** sul ponticello
- **s.t.** sul tasto
- **o.b.** on bridge

| o.b. -------molto s.p. ------- s.p. ------- ord. ------- s.t. ------- molto s.t. |

**Bow Pressure**

- **norm.** normale
- **scr.** scratch tone (also notated with a boxed notehead)
- **fl.** flautando

**Bow Action**

- **j.n.** jeté normale (with hair)
- **j.b.** jeté battuto (with wood)
- **cl. batt.** col legno battuto (controlled strike with wood, notated with an X notehead)

Dotted lines between techniques indicate a transition of bow placement or pressure.

*Accented pizzicato should be played 1/2 dynamic level louder.

*Marcato pizzicato should be played as forceful as possible without snapping against the body.

TEMPI and timings are precise!
brut.

Section I - Pointilism that builds, interrupted by violent streaks

String Quartet
Bernie Walasvage (*1989)
(*) - Glissando pizz., gliss between pitches but not indicate arrival pitch. This is signified by marcato markings on each note.
Section II - Shimmering timbral canon in descending motion

All natural harmonics noted by string in regard to the harmonic series as the open strings as the fundamental tone.

G.B. (on bridge) & molto Ponticello markings are to be played with less bow pressure than one would normally use. This is not the case when transitioning to the standard (soft) placement of the bow. "Ord. is to be played with a normal bow pressure unless otherwise indicated.
All natural harmonics noted by string in regard to the harmonic series as the open strings as the fundamental tone.

\[ \text{\textbf{Vln. I}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Vln. II}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Vla.}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Vc.}} \]

\[ \text{\textbf{Vln. I}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Vln. II}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Vla.}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Vc.}} \]
All voices, gradually increase

bow pressure.

accel.
Section II - String Quartet

\[ \text{Vln. I} \]

\[ \text{Vln. II} \]

\[ \text{Vla.} \]

\[ \text{Vc.} \]
Section III - breaking down through descending streams

Mechanical, scratch noises juxtaposed with pizz. and decending, flautando harmonics. Scratches should be played with harshness and violence in order to contrast moments with quiet harmonics.

Marcato = more force behind scratch,
Spiccato = scratch played very quickly

= left hand pizz.

\[ \text{\textbf{Vln. I}} \]

\[ \text{\textbf{Vln. II}} \]

\[ \text{\textbf{Vla.}} \]

\[ \text{\textbf{Vc.}} \]
Section III

(*) Increase bow pressure down the line, though not as harsh as the boxed-notehead scratch tones.

Increase bow pressure*
Section IV - Interrupted stasis with moving bits

For long tones, the differentiation of timbres should synthesize as they eb and flow in and out of one another.
(*) - the fast, harmonic passages need not "speak" clearly (in regards to the 7th partial). It is more a timbral effect.
Section IV
Section IV

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

IV.

Section IV
Section V - Smeared counterpoint which flows and suspends

Each voice, only go one dynamic level up unless otherwise indicated.
The composite is like a "broken record" affect, achieved through rapid
dynamic swells with an immediate drop to the starting dynamic on the
next pitch. Strick adherence is essential - lowest common division is
costant (eighth note, or sixteenth note in s/16 bars).

$\downarrow^\uparrow \text{ at } \text{Ord.}\quad \text{Volto, s.p.} \quad \text{a.b.}$

 Soloistically ab. lib. minimal use of vibrato.

Ord.
Hairpin swells: no more than one dynamic level up and return, careful attention.
To control of the bow as one transitions from: sul pont - ord - sul tasto - ord - sul pont.
No vibrato, stagnant.
Crescendi become more and more exaggerated.