Common Ground

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COMMON GROUND

by

Cody Christopher-Park Ray

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music
School of Music
Western Michigan University
May 2021

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Lisa Coons, Ph.D, Chair
Dr. Christopher Biggs, DMA
Dr. Robert White, DM
Common Ground

Cody Christopher-Park Ray, M.M.
Western Michigan University, 2021

*Common Ground* is a work that explores ideals of unity through the shared awareness of human mortality. I wrote the majority of this work during the COVID-19 pandemic in the fall of 2020. Throughout this period, including the summer leading up to it, political and social tension was felt throughout the country. This sentiment stemmed from the unjust killings of unarmed people of color at the hands of law enforcement, to blatant errors in the way political figures handled the spread of this newfound disease, leading to more than 400k civilians prematurely dead. In experiencing these external pressures, I found myself trying to discover some point of significance within the moment. Is there anything to our existence that can unify and which allows us to search for greater purpose?

Attempts to answer the immense questions about morality as well as the meaning of life have been made since the beginning of human existence. Some may find their answers to these immense questions through religion or spiritual awakenings. However, I believe that we can find meaning through the universal understanding that life is not permanent. Furthermore, our grasp of this fact can guide our society to be more empathetic and connect on a visceral level. By presenting this reality of limited time, it accentuates the urgency of human connection now. Death being a flower at the end of the grave and the catalyst towards finding common ground.
I would first like to thank those who directly assisted me in my development as a composer. This monumental project could not have been conceived without the guidance of Dr. Lisa Coons and Dr. Richard Adams. My success as a composer would not have been realized without the generous support of my undergraduate mentors at the University of Akron, Dr. Nikola Resanovic and Dr. Robert Brownlow.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis committee members including Dr. Lisa Coons (Chair), Dr. Christopher Biggs, and Dr. Robert White for their time given towards reviewing my work. I am grateful for my peers Jeremey Poparad (Kent State University), Matthew Ridge (Indiana University), Haden Plouffe (Western Michigan University), and Emily McPherson (Pennsylvania State University), who gave their time to provide constructive feedback. My family has given me so much love and support throughout my academic career and I would be remised if I did not acknowledge my mother Shelly (an alumna of Western Michigan University), my four siblings (Courtney, Chelsea, Callie, and Chase), as well as my late father, Dale. Lastly, I want to extend my appreciation to my wonderful significant other, Anna. Thank you for your kindred spirit and abundant love.

Cody Christopher-Park Ray
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COMMON GROUND

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

2021

I. Innocence
II. Trauma
III. Metastasis
IV. Pandemonium
V. Loss
VI. Meaning
VII. with Hope

(Approximate Duration | 22’56’’)

CODY RAY (1996)
PROGRAM NOTES

*Common Ground* is a work that presents ideals of unity through the shared notion of one’s own mortality. As a partial requirement for my master’s degree, I was tasked to write a work of considerable magnitude. To give context, the majority of this work was written in the fall of 2020. When I began to write this piece, it was hard to ignore the worsening state of the political, societal, and public health situation within America. The COVID-19 pandemic had taken a substantial number of American lives with the country plunging into further disorder from mismanaged state and federal actions. Additionally complicating the situation, far too many innocent and unarmed people of color were killed at the hands of law enforcement, and it seemed as though the entire fabric of social stability and civility was at stake.

It was not my goal to write a piece which would give a strict and defined answer to these issues, but one that presents my vision in how we can come together after these anxiety driven times. Separated into seven distinct movements, this work abstractly explores different scenarios where we interact with and think about death. Humans have attempted to answer age old questions of whether there is an afterlife, a final meaning, or an ultimate purpose for living. This work does not attempt to answer these questions, but it was written with the assumption that the life we have on Earth will be the only life we have. Once we take the focus away from notions of a next world, we can concentrate on our tangible, current, and real world through a clearer lens.

Death is often seen as the great equalizer of all life on Earth. It doesn’t matter if you’re rich or poor, bigger or smaller, brighter or duller, we will all face this fundamental truth, “we will all die”. Through this work, I put forward the awareness of this commonality and applying it to how we connect and interact with our neighbors. Seeing our ultimate demise as a catalyst may conjure feelings of grim hesitance, however if we can embrace death and see it for what it really is (an invitation to connect now), we can come one step closer towards realizing that the things in which unite us are stronger than those things which would seem to keep us apart. (*Important note to listeners:* Throughout the work, statements made by performers may not reflect the beliefs held by the performers and/or the composer.)
PERFORMANCE NOTES

As previously stated, this work is separated into seven distinct sections. The first section, *Innocence*, sets the sonic landscape of open quintal chords. In particular an immediate point of tension is the tri-tone relationship between the GQ5 and C#Q5 harmonies in the left and right hands of the piano respectively. The clarinet also introduces the main thematic idea that will be passed throughout the work. As this section progresses, further statements of the theme blossom in the horn, bassoon and viola against conjunct repetitive rhythmic lines. Brass slowly take over the texture introducing secondary thematic material. This section segues continuously into the second section.

In continuation with the tri-tone relationships, *Trauma* opens with pitch centers AQ5 and EbQ5. Both the clarinet and violin I further develop the main motive. Characteristically contrasted from the first section, the rhythmic punctuations at mm. 49 and mm. 87 should be firm and violent. Rhythmic lines in the mid to high strings throughout this section are percussive in nature. The ethereal section at mm. 97 is a brief return to the open texture of the first *Innocence* section. Note the clarinet solo is a diminished 5th lower than the original with the line inverted by the bassoon in mm. 102.

*Metastasis* is based off of my personal fears in the elusive nature of certain strains of cancer. Pitch material was derived off of two pitch sets,

- B, F, A, C, G, D, E, F# and it’s slightly modified B, F, A, (D), (B), (G), (C), (E).

*note that the pitch succession changes after the fourth pitch in the second sequence. This is a musical representation of how a cancer genome can mutate. These two sets are further modified through the means of negative harmony. The axis point (figure 1.1) as well as the general pitch map (figure 1.2) is shown below.

![Figure 1.1](image1)

![Figure 1.2](image2)
A trumpet call is built out of these two pitch collections beginning at mm. 130, this serves as a counter character and calls for stability in relation to the chaotic nature of the pitch material thus far. The flute breaks this moment of calm (at mm. 152) to resume the unrest previously established. Really play out the dichotomy of the tension and struggle to control this section between the two forces (winds and strings v. trumpets). This eventually grows to an ultimate climactic point at mm. 181. Once again, this brief moment, recalls the tranquility of the first section.

**Pandemonium** is meant to be the most political of all of the sections. Built off of powerful G power chord punctuations from the piano and strings and two octatonic scales (figure 1.3 and 1.4), this movement attempts to create the most amount of tension. A note to the strings, make sure that the overpressure passages come through the texture. Beginning at mm. 209, this portion of music plays at the ideals of looping and symmetry with the theme in the tuba and low strings. The claps from the brass should not overtake the texture. This movement’s secondary theme begins at mm. 225 in the brass. This secondary theme is built off of an inversion of the work’s primary theme (stated in the clarinet). The phrase should be passed between the 1st and 2nd trumpet seamlessly. Beginning at mm. 259, the piano takes on an ascending secundal line. This is foreshadowing a thematic idea which will be realized later in the work. It was my intention that this line is felt, not deliberately heard.

When arriving to **Loss**, approach this with an immediate shift in character. String harmonics should provide a thin and glassy texture. It is advised to take a few moments before starting at mm. 364. Most important arrival for this section is mm. 389. Take the rit. into mm. 398 with care and thoughtfulness.

**Meaning** is commenced with a quote from the **Metastasis** section in the flute. For all of these ascending two note passages leading up to mm. 405, emphasis should be made on the first note (i.e. tension-release). Measure 405 marks the first time where the horns play by themselves, be mindful of this and allow them to be expressive as they build the cyclical figure, which is taken by the piano at 411. The pianist serves as the motor for this movement however it should never be devoid of character. Harmonically, this section should be treated like a journey as the ensemble starts in B major and ends in Bb major. The arrival into e minor at mm. 440 should not be overly jarring. Save the ultimate climax for the last modulation at 460.

**with Hope,** should be forward looking as much as it is a reflection on the work as a whole. Note that the tri-tone relationship is resolved between the **GQ5 and CQ5** harmonies in the piano. In the final measures, the piano should start from the forefront of the texture, and slowly retire away into the texture.
ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS
(In regards to IV. Pandemonium)

This section is meant to embody the chaotic nature of everyday political discourse occurring within the United States. The word pandemonium means “a wild and noisy disorder or confusion; uproar.” My goal for this moment was to create a soundscape which could serve as the greatest point of tension in the work. To better aid in this exploration, I have made indications within each musician’s part as to where these vocalizations should start (see figure 1.5). The following instructions for this section should be explored with the musicians at the first rehearsal.

I. Chants are encouraged to be politically charged.
   a. Consider using a mixture of shorter chants such as “shut it down” and longer chants like “No return to the status quo!”
   b. These chants do not have to be about something you believe in or you’re against. Just something that is relevant and you feel comfortable bringing up in this space.

II. Chants must not contain racial/ethnic slurs.
    a. Be mindful of the audience you’re presenting this to and feel out the political and social climate.

III. Chants should be approved by the ensemble collectively.
    a. Or at the discretion of an ensemble leader.
    b. Vulgarity may be permitted at the discretion of the ensemble. (if it is, please include an appropriate warning to your audience before the work begins)

IV. Follow the intensity and entry shapes given.
    a. Some moments will be loud and sustained, others will ask you to start quietly and grow. Your dedicated participation in following these shapes will enhance the listener’s perception of space.

V. You will never be alone
   a. The way I’ve structured this section was in a manner that doesn’t allow one person to shout by themselves or singled out. Let this be your invitation to be as convincing as possible.

---

![Figure 1.5 Begin politicized chants further directions in score*](image1)

![Figure 1.6 End chant](image2)
INSTRUMENTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Flute</th>
<th>Trumpet 1 in B</th>
<th>Violin I</th>
<th>Oboe</th>
<th>Trumpet 2 in B</th>
<th>Violin II</th>
<th>Clarinet in B</th>
<th>Horn in F (B)</th>
<th>Viola</th>
<th>Bassoon</th>
<th>Trombone</th>
<th>Cello</th>
<th>Horn in F (A)</th>
<th>Tuba</th>
<th>Double Bass</th>
<th>Piano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The composer’s original stage set-up was to place strings and winds on stage with the brass acting in an antiphonal role, behind the audience. This set-up was to provide the most opportunity to socially distance however, if this doesn’t work logistically for your ensemble, it is perfectly acceptable to move the brass on stage.

If the ensemble performs this work with one string per part, it is suggested that the strings are amplified. Additionally, it is appropriate to double up parts if social distancing is not an issue. Please be safe and follow any and all government health protocols regarding social distancing when attempting to make music.

SUGGESTED SET-UP

Strings/winds

Piano

conductor

AUDIENCE

Brass (preferably in balcony)
COMPOSER BIO

CODY RAY is a freelance composer, conductor, performer, and educator based in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Born in South Korea and raised in Wadsworth, Ohio, he has established himself as an emerging Midwest composer. He currently serves as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Western Michigan University and holds a Bachelor of Music Composition degree from the University of Akron.

His bold, energetic and athletic musical style has been featured throughout the United States. Cody has had works performed and/or recorded by ensembles including the Grammy Award winning Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Arizona State University Wind Ensemble, Western Michigan University Symphony Orchestra, The Oberlin Conservatory Brass Ensemble, The University of Akron Brass Choir, and The University of Akron Symphony Orchestra to name a few. His pieces have been featured at the 2020 North American Saxophone Alliance Biennial Conference, the Akron New Music Festival, and Cleveland's NEOSONIC fest. He has had the pleasure of receiving numerous commissions throughout his undergraduate and graduate career from both student and professional groups. Cody was the winner of the University of Akron's Composition Competition, the recipient of the James P. and Maureen C. Kovach Scholarship for the Performing Arts, a semifinalist for the American Prize, and a recent finalist for the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Award. He is fortunate to have studied under distinguished composition professors including Lisa Coons, Richard Adams, Nikola Resanovic, Robert Brownlow, and Daniel McCarthy. In addition, he has participated in masterclasses with Jordan Pal, Anthony Donofrio, Andrew Boysen, and Mark Camphouse.

Still maintaining an active trumpet career, Cody has performed in various chamber and orchestral settings, including the Bronson Brass Quintet, the Academy Street Winds (Kalamazoo, MI), the University of Akron (Symphony Orchestra, Jazz Ensemble, Symphonic Band, Chamber Orchestra, Brass Choir, and New Music Ensemble), the Cleveland Philharmonic, the Avenue Brass Quintet, and the University of Akron Faculty Brass Quintet. Cody has enjoyed the opportunity to perform with guest musicians including Nestor Torres, Alexis Cole, Joseph Alessi, John Fedchock, and others. He has competed as both a quarter and semi-finalist in the National Trumpet Competition. Cody's primary trumpet instructors have included Robert White, Joshua Ganger, Mark Maliniak, Jack Schantz, Scott Johnston, and Mark Dulin. He has also had the privilege to participate in numerous masterclasses with preeminent artists such as Justin Emerich, Michael Sachs, Jack Sutte, Mark Hughes, and Hunter Eberly.
This work is dedicated to the memory of those who have lost their lives to COVID-19. Their struggle will not be forgotten and their lives will not have been in vain. Everything in which they have collectively given our world will continue to aid us in creating a more accepting and just society.

– Cody Christopher-Park Ray
Common Ground
Common Ground
Common Ground
Common Ground

II. Trauma

Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn. (A)
B♭ Tpt. 1
B♭ Tpt. 2
Hn. (B)
Tbn.
Tuba
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
Common Ground

Ethereal $\frac{3}{8} \cdot 66$

- Fl.
- Ob.
- Bb Cl.
- Bsn.
- Hn. (A)
- Bb Tpt. 1
- Bb Tpt. 2
- Hn. (B)
- Tbn.
- Tuba
- Pno.
- Vln. I
- Vln. II
- Vla.
- Vc.
- D.B.

Cup mute

Slowly dissipate out as string drones grow
(rearticulate and stagger breathe)

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Common Ground

Ethereal $\frac{3}{8} \cdot 66$

- Fl.
- Ob.
- Bb Cl.
- Bsn.
- Hn. (A)
- Bb Tpt. 1
- Bb Tpt. 2
- Hn. (B)
- Tbn.
- Tuba
- Pno.
- Vln. I
- Vln. II
- Vla.
- Vc.
- D.B.

Cup mute

Slowly dissipate out as string drones grow
(rearticulate and stagger breathe)

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

Cup mute

32
Common Ground

Fl.

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. (A)

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2

Hn. (B)

Tbn.

Tuba

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.
Common Ground
Common Ground
Common Ground
Common Ground
IV. Pandemonium

Anxious with energy $q = 132$

Common Ground

190

Page 55
Common Ground
Common Ground
Common Ground
Begin politicized chants
*Further directions in score*
Common Ground
Common Ground

Fl.

Ob.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. (A)

B. Tpt. 1

B-Tpt. 2

Hn. (B)

Tbn.

Tuba

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Begin politicized chants
*Further directions in score*

Clap (obscure the bass)

Gliss.

Begin politicized chants
*Further directions in score*
Begin politicized chants
*Further directions in score*

Clap (obscure the bass)
Common Ground

Fl.

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. (A)

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2

Hn. (B)

Tbn.

Tuba

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Clap (obscure the bass)

End chant

End chant

End chant

End chant
Common Ground
Common Ground

Fl.

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. (A)

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2

Hn. (B)

Tbn.

Tuba

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.
Common Ground

- Fl.
- Ob.
- B♭ Cl.
- Bsn.
- Hn. (A)
- B♭ Tpt. 1
- B♭ Tpt. 2
- Hn. (B)
- Tbn.
- Tuba
- Pno.
- Vln. I
- Vln. II
- Vla.
- Vc.
- D.B.

Notations include:
- "a little accel." markings
- Tempo indication "\( \mathbf{J} = 52 \)"
- Dynamics like "mp" and "p"
- marcato articulation symbols
- "niente" (Italian for "nothing")

A little accel. notation is written at the beginning of each section.

Tempo indication is written at the beginning of each section.

Dynamics are indicated throughout the music.

Articulation symbols like marcato are present.

"niente" indicates the passage should be played without any sound.

Overall, the score presents a harmonious arrangement of instruments with coordinated crescendos and diminuendos.
Common Ground

\(\text{Fl.} \quad \text{Ob.} \quad \text{B黑 Cl.} \quad \text{Bsn.} \quad \text{Hn. (A)} \quad \text{B黑 Tpt. 1} \quad \text{B黑 Tpt. 2} \quad \text{Hn. (B)} \quad \text{Tbn.} \quad \text{Tuba} \quad \text{Pno.} \quad \text{Vln. I} \quad \text{Vln. II} \quad \text{Vla.} \quad \text{Vc.} \quad \text{D.B.}\)
Common Ground
Common Ground
VII. with Hope

Common Ground

Ethereal \( \frac{47}{4} \) \( \frac{66}{66} \)

\( \text{Fl.} \)
\( \text{Ob.} \)
\( \text{Bb. Cl.} \)
\( \text{Bsn.} \)
\( \text{Hn. (A)} \)
\( \text{Bb. Tpt. 1} \)
\( \text{Bb. Tpt. 2} \)
\( \text{Hn. (B)} \)
\( \text{Tbn.} \)
\( \text{Tuba} \)
\( \text{Pno.} \)
\( \text{Vln. I} \)
\( \text{Vln. II} \)
\( \text{Vla.} \)
\( \text{Vc.} \)
\( \text{D.B.} \)

Ethereal \( \frac{47}{4} \) \( \frac{66}{66} \)

Cup mute

sal tasto