THE FIELDS WE WATCHED

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A Thesis

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The Fields We Watched is a fifteen-minute composition in four movements for string quartet, percussion quartet and piano. It is a tour of nighttime memories, juxtaposing themes of light and dark. The contrast between these two elements is the central theme of the work. The form of the piece is extracted from some of my original poems with each movement bearing a title that corresponds to the poem that inspired it: I. you could see every star, II. Cicadas. Fireflies., III. we built a fire, and IV. Coyotes. Doves. Each movement sonically encapsulates the behavior of light and dark in a way that is reflective of its title.

Certain sections of the piece are written without the use of conventional bar lines, time signatures, or other metric musical tools. The result is “proportional time” in which the sounds are presented in relation to the continuum of time rather than to a metric pulse. In these sections, the timbral qualities of the instruments become more important than the accuracy of the notated pitches and rhythms.

The percussionists are called on to work inside the lightly prepared piano —striking and bowing the strings as well as the iron frame. The use of the piano in these non-traditional ways led to the decision to include acoustic guitars as a percussion instrument. The guitar strings can be bowed with a cello bow on harmonics to produce a unique sound. This produces unusual sounds on a folk instrument, which is reflective of the sometimes-hazy recollections of my youth.
The fluidity of style, to evoke the disjointed or incomplete nature of memory, is also utilized. As *The Fields We Watched* shifts on the spectrum of tonality and atonality, so too do the affects of electroacoustic music, folk music, minimalism, and the language of traditional contemporary concert music. This creates a fragmented aural surface with some shards seeming clearer than others, a sonic representation of the “gallery” of my memories.
To my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Marilyn Shrude for her keen eyes and keener ears. Her unwavering attention to detail and adept artistic sensibility were indescribably helpful throughout the creation of this work.

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Many heartfelt thanks to my family, whose support throughout my education has been truly remarkable.
Performance Notes - Ensemble Setup

vibraphone  snare  hi-hat

large gong  bass drum  hi-hat

Maracas & Castanets

sm. gong  med. gong  tam-tam

String Quartet

Guitar Area

Conductor
Performance Notes - Constructing Implements

Piano Bows - Assemble pairs of color-coded guitar picks (see “Preparing the Piano” for list of colors). Using a drill, place a hole in the middle of each one. Next, find a length of wood that is 5’ long. Hammer two nails into the same side of the board 4’ apart. Loop monofilament fishing line (any brand will do) around the two nails approximately twenty-five times, keeping the tension along the line even. Cut off the spool and tie the two ends of your loops together. To attach the guitar picks, pull one end of the loops through the middle of the guitar pick, forming a new loop on the other side. Pass the opposite end of the loops through this new loop to form a slip knot. Repeat this process to attach a pick to the other end of the loops. Rosin generously with cello rosin. Store by hanging.

Friction Mallets - Collect an array of bouncy balls (large and small). These can usually be found in craft stores and gumball machines. Hold the ball firmly and push a 6” fine-toothed jig saw blade into the center of the ball. “Friction mallet” is abbreviated “FM” throughout the entire score.

Performance Notes - Preparing the Piano

Piano Bows

Use the table below to match the appropriate colors with the appropriate strings. To install the bow, drop the guitar pick on one side of the string you wish to play with that bow. Using a small comb, reach below that string from the opposite side to retrieve the end of the bow you dropped and pull it back out. The hair of the bow should be in contact with only the desired strings when the guitar picks are held in playing position. For bows playing more than one note, repeat this process, dropping the same pick below the strings both times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Strings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>E₄, F₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>D₄, E-flat₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>C₄, D-flat₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>A-sharp₃, B₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>D₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>D₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>A₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>C₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicolor</td>
<td>E₂</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Notes - Preparing the Piano (cont’d)

Fixing the Pedal

Hold the sustain pedal down. From the back of the lyre (pedal box), jam a rubber wedge into the space created by the lever activated by the sustain pedal being used. The instrument should now continually sustain without a performer depressing the pedal. Note: erasers work well as rubber wedges, but they may need to be resized in order to fit into the pedal box.

Draping the Beads

Pass a 4-foot string of beads behind the piano leg to the piano player’s right. Pull both ends to the same side to make a U-shape with the beads. Leave the beads on the floor, both ends pointed toward the audience. From the piano player’s left, pass a 4-foot string of beads underneath the pedals. Pull the beads back across the tops of the pedals so that from position 6, the beads can be sawn on the far side of the sustain pedal to create a granular metallic sound.

Screws

You will need seven (7) one-inch zinc-plated self-drilling screws. Starting with Cₗ, twist the screws down 1/2 inch into the gap between the strings. Be sure that the strings on either side of the screw are both Cₗ. The screw should be placed approximately 1/3 of the length of the string away from the end of the string nearest the piano player. Continue placing screws using this technique for Dₗ, Eₗ, F-sharpₗ, G-sharpₗ, A-sharpₗ, and Cₘ.
Preparing the Guitar Tables

Rest the bodies of the guitars on non-skid placemats. Rest the tip of the head stock on a book to keep the instrument level when fingers are pressed on the fretboard. The guitar should be able to be bowed briskly with a cello bow without moving around on the table. There should be two tables with two guitars each, arranged so that both guitars can be bowed at the same time. (See “Ensemble Setup” for table placement). The guitars should be tuned according to the table.

| Percussion 1 | standard guitar tuning |
| Percussion 2 | one quarter tone below standard guitar tuning |
| Percussion 3 | minor third below standard guitar tuning |
| Percussion 4 | minor third and one quarter tone below standard guitar tuning |

The Percussion Area

Instruments

- vibraphone
- small gong
- medium gong
- large gong
- medium tam-tam
- bass drum
- 2 hi-hats
- snare drum
- small triangle
- 2-3 maracas
- 2 castanets (mounted)
Below is a diagram of a grand piano as seen from above. Shown are the names of referenced parts of the piano as well as the playing positions indicated in the score.
Performance Notes - General

Indicates standing position for players who are required to move throughout the performance. Numerals refer to positions around the piano. P refers to the percussion area, S refers to string players’ seats, and G refers to the guitar area.

Indicates that the given measures are to be played outside of any meter. Each dotted bar line represents five seconds of elapsed time, with notation arranged proportionally in each dotted measure. Measures with meters and solid bar lines are played normally.

Extend the preceding note for the duration of the line proportional to the 5” bar.

Repeat the preceding boxed or repeated figure for the duration of the wavy line proportional to the 5” bar.

Accelerando.

Ritardando.

“Skim large FM across strings.” Begin with friction mallet on initial cluster. Drag the mallet back and forth across the strings, widening the range until at least and octave is reached. Then, decrease the range back down to the final cluster.

Drag the plastic mallet over the steel core of the lower strings (see piano map), approximating the contour of the jagged line proportional to the 5” bar. The frame breaks on each instrument will differ, so the notes and line contour are approximate.
Performance Notes - General (cont’d)

Dangle a string of beads onto tuning pegs in the approximate range of notes indicated. Jiggle the beads loosely on the tuning pegs, to creating a sustained twinkling sound.

Hold a string of beads with your hands at both ends. Drag the beads back and forth across the indicated surface. Try to sound as much like an insect as possible.

Black keys - Hold beads horizontally above the black keys. Allow the beads to slacken until they rest on the keys. Drag the beads across the tops of the keys.

Leg - Hold the beads wrapped around the piano leg. Saw the piano leg with the beads. Take care not to damage the varnish.

Pedals - Hold the beads looped around pedals. Saw the pedals with the beads. Take care not to damage the varnish.

Fluidly vary the tempo with accelerandi and ritardandi for the length of the phrase or wavy line. Keep tempo inside the indicated range.

Glissandi.

When two players share similar material to be repeated ad lib., they should play independently of one another. Do not match tempo, rhythm, pitch, pedaling, etc.
Performance Notes - Strings

ord.

Play with standard technique. Produce sound with bow on strings in normal playing position.

sul pont.

Sul ponticello. Play with the bow very close to the bridge of the instrument.

pizz.

Unmeasured pizzicato tremolo.

Begin with your instrument parallel to your torso, resting on your lap. Place bow hair against the back of the instrument and press the wood gently, but firmly into the hair and wiggle it to produce a dry, crunching sound. Notes on the lowest line indicate that the bow should be pressed near the bottom of the instrument; Notes on the highest line indicate that the bow should be pressed near the top of the instrument, and so on.

Care should be taken not to damage the varnish on the instrument: the sound can be produced without much force.

For players who are concerned about damage to the varnish of their instrument, a paper bag can be crumpled instead.

Tap the body of the instrument with flat fingers. Experiment by tapping different areas of the instrument’s body.

HARMONICS: All harmonics are indicated with a small circle above the note and the string on which the harmonic is to be produced. Sounding tones are NOT displayed. The string numbers are I-IV, I being the highest string on the instrument and IV being the lowest.
Performance Notes - Percussion

Hold the implement firmly. With loose wrist, make a motion similar to dealing a deck of cards: the tip of the implement should trace arcs back and forth on the playing surface.

Press the tip of the implement onto the playing surface. Pull the implement smoothly across the surface, tracing figure eights to sustain the sound evenly.

Hit the playing surface with implement once.

Hold the friction mallet firmly and strike the playing surface, allowing the head to bounce with the springiness of the handle.

Think of the heads of the screws in the highest octave of the piano strings as a small xylophone played by the pointy end of knitting needles. From Standing Position 4, the strings of the piano are upside-down, so the notation has been similarly reversed (see figure to the left).

The lines indicate the strings of the guitar with the top line as the highest string and the bottom line as the lowest string. The numbers indicate the fret(s) at which the string is stopped. Always use a harmonic touch while playing the guitars. The chords occur only when the guitar is being bowed with a cello bow.

Shows the rhythmic structure of metered sections for bowed guitar. The chords are aligned with the eighth note stems above the staff across all players who have guitars.
The Fields We Watched
for string quartet, percussion quartet and piano

I. you could see every star
“Ageless / The concave curtain of night.”

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Percussion 3

Percussion 4

Piano

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Jon Ginder
strike soundboard with large FM
strike string with knitting needle

red piano bow

yellow piano bow

blue piano bow

strings enter together

drag large FM along indicated strings

strings enter together

skim large FM across strings

skim large FM across strings
Perc. 1: Drag small FM on soundboard

Perc. 2: Drag large FM on soundboard

Perc. 3: Blue piano bow

Perc. 4: Yellow piano bow

Pno.: Red piano bow

Vln. I: Purple piano bow

Vln. II: Navy piano bow

Vla.: Strike soundboard with large FM

Vc.: Strike string with knitting needle
skim large FM across strings

drag small FM on soundboard

= 54-66
vary tempo

f

f

f

f

f

sfm

skim large FM across strings

drag small FM on soundboard

= 54-66
vary tempo

f

f

f

f

f

sfm

skim large FM across strings

drag small FM on soundboard

= 54-66
vary tempo

f
II. Cicadas. Fireflies.

"The soil finds a half-forgotten voice."

*The frame of the piano might interrupt a smooth skimming motion across the steel core of the strings. If this is the case, you may shrink the range of the contour line to fit inside the range allowed by the frame.*
Floating, mysterious \( \frac{4}{4} \times 60 \)

“They shine within the sleepy cluster”
III. we built a fire

“It takes fuel. / And heat. / And time.”

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Percussion 3

Percussion 4

Piano

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

black piano bow

white piano bow

green piano bow

orange piano bow

highest possible note vib.

Folk style, languid, do not coordinate

It takes fuel. / And heat. / And time.
Prismatic \( \mathfrak{q} = 72 \)

- Perc. 1
- Perc. 2
- Perc. 3
- Perc. 4
- Pno.
- Vln. I
- Vln. II
- Vla.
- Vc.

- plastic mallet on frame holes
- knitting needles on frame
- large FM hit soundboard
Bowed (bouncy stroke)
"An evening prayer / for primitive fury."

IV. Coyotes. Doves.
“the folded-paper sound / at last comes to rest / in the Buddha of a wheatgerm.”

Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Pno.
Vln. 1
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

bowed, lowest string only
bowed, lowest string only
bowed, lowest string only
bowed, lowest string only

pizz.

sim.

bend

p

multicolor piano bow

play on keyboard

bowed, lowest string only

"the folded-paper sound / at last comes to rest / in the Buddha of a wheatgerm."