

A Performer's Guide to John Harbison's *Four Songs of Solitude*

by

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ABSTRACT

John Harbison is one of the most prominent composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He has made major contributions in all areas of classical music, including operas, symphonies, chamber music, choral works, and vocal pieces. Among his vast output is *Four Songs of Solitude*, his only composition (to date) for solo violin. Though the piece is beautiful and reflective in nature, its inherent technical and musical difficulties present challenges to violinists preparing the piece.

There is no published edition of *Four Songs of Solitude* that includes bowings and fingerings, and violinists used to practicing and performing the études and repertoire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may have difficulty determining how to successfully navigate the music. This paper examines the piece in detail, providing an analytic description of the music and suggestions for practice. An interview with the composer yielded many insights into the structural and harmonic events of the songs, and the composer's interpretive suggestions are given alongside technical suggestions by the author.

The solo violin has a centuries-long legacy, and some of the most-performed repertoire exists in the medium. *Four Songs of Solitude* is a demanding set of pieces that stands out in late twentieth-century violin music. Providing information about the piece directly from the composer and suggestions for practice and performance increases the accessibility of the work for violinists seeking to bring it to the concert stage.

DEDICATION

To my parents Dennis and Lucy, who got me started on violin and who have supported me in every conceivable way throughout my entire education. I humbly dedicate this work to you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my mentor for lo, these many years, Katherine McLin, who has broadened my horizons and enriched my musical life. I have enjoyed immensely our time working together, and I hope to have many opportunities to do so in the future.

I am also indebted to Gary Hill, Amy Holbrook, Robert Spring, and Jonathan Swartz for their time and input as committee members.

Thank you to John Harbison, for the generous gift of his time discussing *Four Songs of Solitude*. Through the insightful discussion with the composer, I have gained both a deeper understanding of the piece and a richer perspective on music as a whole. A greater gift I could not have asked for.

Thank you to Kevin McGee and G. Schirmer, Inc., for the permission to reprint musical examples from *Four Songs of Solitude*.

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Thank you to my family and friends for all they have done for me. I stand on the foundation of their support and love.

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Thank you to Sam, who weathered this storm alongside me, and who offered love and encouragement throughout this entire journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Harbison is one of the most prolific composers of the latter half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. He has made major contributions to every part of classical music, including four symphonies and three operas, as well as numerous works for large and small chamber ensembles, concertos, choral works, songs, and solo pieces. In the solo genre, Harbison has written well over a dozen pieces for solo piano, but his output for other solo instruments is a bit smaller. It includes pieces for oboe (*Amazing Grace*), viola (*Sonata for Viola* and *The Violist's Notebook*, Books 1 and 2), cello (*Suite for Cello*), and violin (*Four Songs of Solitude*). The subject of this document, *Four Songs of Solitude*, is a significant contribution to solo violin literature. The piece is both lyrical and virtuosic, and is simultaneously beautiful and complex, but appealing to the listener.

Much has already been written about Harbison's music, and writers of dissertations and theses have begun to mine thoroughly the wealth of the composer's output, particularly since the turn of the century. Academic research has focused on Harbison's symphonies,¹ operas,² choral works (*The Flight into Egypt*³ and *Requiem*⁴), woodwind pieces (Concerto for Oboe,⁵ Woodwind

¹ Eric Esko Townell, "The Symphonies of John Harbison" (DMA diss., The Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, 1997).

² Laura Ann Storm, "*The Great Gatsby*: From Novel into Opera" (DMA diss., The Florida State University, 2004).

³ Brian Edward Galante, "John Harbison's *The Flight into Egypt*: An Analysis for Performance" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2008).

⁴ Thomas More Scott, "John Harbison's *Requiem*: An Analysis" (DMA diss., Kent State University, 2008).

Quintet,⁶ *Three City Blocks*,⁷ and *Canzonetta*⁸), piano works,⁹ and vocal music (songs for baritone,¹⁰ *A Simple Daylight*,¹¹ and *Mirabai Songs*¹²). No academic document has yet addressed the composer's widely accessible string music that features violin, which, in addition to the *Four Songs of Solitude* includes his Concerto for Violin (1980) and several chamber works.¹³ (The composer does have other works that feature the violin in a solo or duo capacity but have yet to be made widely [or at all] available for performance or purchase. These pieces include *Crane Sightings* [for violin and strings, 2004], *Double Concerto* [for violin and cello 2009], and *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano* [2011].)

Though the complex beauty of *Four Songs of Solitude* is an accessible listening experience for the audience, the work is quite demanding for the performer, who must evoke a broad array of expressive characters while seamlessly executing the many technical challenges of the piece. The direction of the phrases can be difficult to determine, particularly in the first movement, where the melodic and harmonic content are fused together into one complex linear

⁵ Ann Fronckowiak, "The Oboe Concerto of John Harbison: A Guide to Analysis, Performance, and the Collaboration with Oboist, William Bennett" (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2006).

⁶ Ann Marie Dempsey Sargent, "John Harbison's Quintet for Winds: An Analysis for Performance" (DMA diss., The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2000).

⁷ Robert Joseph Spittal, "*Three City Blocks* by John Harbison" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 1995).

⁸ Jason Walter Worzby, "Music for Solo Bassoon and Bassoon Quartet by Pulitzer Prize Winners: A Guide to Performance" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2002).

⁹ Barbara Bonous-Smit, "John Harbison: His Life and Works with Piano" (DMA diss., New York University, 1996).

¹⁰ Peter C. Keates, "John Harbison's Songs for Baritone: A Performer's Guide" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2011).

¹¹ Amy Duggins Pender, "John Harbison's *Simple Daylight*: A Textual and Musical Analysis" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2011).

¹² Clair Olanda Vangelisti, "John Harbison's *Mirabai Songs*: A Poetic and Musical Analysis" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2002).

¹³ A list of Harbison's works to date for violin can be found in Appendix A.

entity. Additionally, the songs require a very high level of technical preparation, as the music quickly travels around the violin, with sudden shifts of register, thick tangles of double stops, and expressive extremes. To make matters more difficult, the published edition contains no editorial marks; phrasings and articulations are indicated, but all fingering and bowing choices are left up to the performer.

Although the absence of an editor's suggestions empowers the performer to make his or her own choices in this capacity, it can be difficult to begin learning a piece that is not written in the traditional idiom emphasized in the études and repertoire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is the intent of this document, through an analytic description of the piece followed by a performance preparation guide, to aid the violinist in the practice and preparation of *Four Songs of Solitude*.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Composer John Harbison was born on December 20, 1938, in Orange, New Jersey. Surrounded by music from birth, the first works he remembers hearing were those of Bach. His father would play Busoni transcriptions of Bach on the piano and frequently played classical records.¹⁴ The musical environment inspired creativity in the young Harbison, who began composing around the age of five or six.¹⁵ His father taught him a bit about notating music, and Harbison still possesses some of his earliest works from childhood.¹⁶ In addition to Bach, he cites jazz as a lifelong influence on his compositional style.¹⁷

Harbison studied with Walter Piston at Harvard, and with Roger Sessions and Earl Kim at Princeton. He served as composer-in-residence for The Pittsburgh Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and maintained a “close relationship with the San Francisco [Symphony] and, since 1976, with the Boston [Symphony].”¹⁸ He is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship and a Pulitzer Prize. Harbison has taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology since 1969.

He is often recognized for his songs and choral works. Indeed, he won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for his choral work *The Flight into Egypt*, and David St.

George of *Grove Music Online* singles out Harbison’s song cycles, calling them

¹⁴ John Harbison, interview by author, Boston, MA, March 17, 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mike Seabrook, “John Harbison and His Music,” *Tempo, New Series* 197 (July, 1996): 7. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/stable/pdfplus/944429.pdf?acceptTC=true> (accessed November 21, 2011).

“exceptional.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, Harbison has had a lifelong involvement with string playing and composition. He began to play the viola at an early age, and, in the composer’s note for his viola concerto, he recalls:

The viola was my instrument of choice, the one I picked out as a very young concert goer. It had a commanding awkward size, a somewhat veiled slightly melancholic tone quality, and it seemed always in the middle of things, a good vantage point for a composer (which I already wanted to be)...[M]y first summer as a violist was spent in an informal chamber music group playing Haydn quartets. That summer in Princeton, New Jersey, I remember as my happiest, the company of my friend John Sessions in the quartet, the wonderful music we were exploring, and the rich possibilities of the instrument I had always wanted to play.²⁰

By his own admission he never became an “outstanding” viola player,²¹ but he continued playing in chamber groups and orchestras, learning the music from the vantage point of the middle voice. His viola playing would prove to be influential on him as a musician; the instrument “fulfilled its promise as the right place to be, and the beautiful ‘viola notes’ in Mozart and Haydn, the subtle variants and reharmonizations, taught me a great deal about composition.”²² Harbison’s experience playing the viola continues to inform him in his compositional process. He says, “I started playing very young, so...I still can actually imagine where it’s played [on the instrument]...With the strings...I imagine the execution. It’s often different than what I imagine, but that’s fine...I feel internal there.”²³

¹⁹ David St. George, *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Harbison, John,” http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/47252?q=harbison%2Cjohn&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1 (accessed November 21, 2011).

²⁰ G. Schirmer, Inc., “John Harbison: Concerto for Viola,” G. Schirmer, Inc., http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2420&State_2874=2&workId_2874=24173 (accessed March 1, 2012).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ John Harbison, interview by author, Boston, MA, March 17, 2012.

It was while playing viola in the Princeton orchestra that he met his future wife Rose Mary, a violinist. She has “been his ‘most relentless and loving critic’ ...and he has written several of his finest works for her to play.”²⁴ Her impressive technical skill and stylistic playing inspire the way Harbison composes for the violin. In the foreword to the violin concerto, he writes that the “fluency [of the composition process] was probably due to the influence of Rose Mary Harbison, my knowledge of her playing style, and my confidence in her technical daring and musical insight.”²⁵

Four Songs of Solitude was written as a gift for Rose Mary Harbison, and the piece is greatly influenced by her playing style. The composer was working on other things at the time, but found he had some ideas for a solo violin piece and set out on the composition.²⁶ John Harbison recalls, “I was making this as a very personal piece for her so I was constantly hearing her approach...and certain things, like all the high double stops in the last movement, [are] kind of a specialty of hers.”²⁷

The piece occupies a unique place in his prolific output for strings. Among nearly twenty string works that feature the violinist as a soloist or chamber musician, this is the only one for violin alone. It was written in the same year as *Twilight Music* (for violin, horn, and piano), *Concerto for Oboe, Clarinet, and Strings*, and Harbison’s String Quartet No. 1. Out of these pieces, *Four Songs of*

²⁴ Seabrook, “John Harbison and His Music,” 7.

²⁵ G.Schirmer, Inc. “John Harbison: Concerto for Violin,” G. Schirmer, Inc., http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2420&State_2874=2&workId_2874=24179 (accessed March 1, 2012).

²⁶ John Harbison, interview by author, Boston, MA, March 17, 2012.

²⁷ Ibid.

Solitude is the most introverted in nature, both in its lone instrumentation and reflective character.

Written in 1985, *Four Songs of Solitude* is now nearly thirty years old. Since its composition, Harbison has composed primarily chamber music for the violin, including several string quartets and several works for strings with piano. Most recently he has written his Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano (2011), which will be premiered by Cho Liang Lin and Jon Kimura Parker at Lincoln Center on April 24, 2012.²⁸

²⁸ G. Schirmer, Inc., “John Harbison: Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano,” G. Schirmer, Inc., http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2420&State_2874=2&workId_2874=47232 (accessed March 1, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

ANALYTIC DESCRIPTION

The solo violin has a rich and varied repertoire that spans over 300 years. In the solo literature, such cornerstones as J.S. Bach's *Six Sonatas and Partitas* and Eugene Ysaye's Op. 27 Sonatas immediately stand out, as do works that highlight the virtuosic possibilities of the violin, such as Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's *Six Polyphonic Studies* and Niccolò Paganini's *Twenty-Four Caprices*. Twentieth-century contributions to solo violin literature include Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin Solo, Op. 115, Béla Bartók's Sonata for Violin Solo, Sz. 117, George Rochberg's *Caprice Variations*, Joan Tower's *Platinum Spirals*, and many others. Today, the classical solo violinist can also explore new styles of playing through the music of such composer/performers as Regina Carter, Mark O'Connor, and Daniel Bernard Roumain. The solo possibilities for the contemporary violinist are plentiful.

Four Songs of Solitude, by John Harbison, is an introspective set of pieces for solo violin that features thoughtful, often gentle, writing. The work evokes the solitary nature of practice, the hours spent by the violinist pulling what meaning he or she can from the notes on the page. The movements follow a slow-fast-slow-fast plan, and the piece balances tranquility and agitation while presenting a virtuosic challenge to the violinist. The first movement is peaceful, the second is folk-like, the third is broad and dissonant, and the fourth is virtuosic and showy. (Harbison had intended to include another movement in the set, but removed it; much of the material was used again, becoming the last movement of the

composer's viola concerto.²⁹) In his program note about the piece, Harbison says, “*Four Songs of Solitude* was composed during the summer of 1985 as a present for my wife, Rose Mary, who gave the first performance the following winter. They are songs, not sonatas or fugues.”³⁰

Song 1

“The first song often returns to its initial idea, always to go a different way; the constant lyrical outward flow is balanced by a refrain line that occurs twice.”³¹

The gentle and flowing first song is comprised of alternating verses and refrains. Harbison refers to the “initial idea” (the verse) and twice allows it to develop (measures 1-14 and 25-39) before using it as the basis of a closing section (measures 55-63). Between the verses lie the two refrain lines (measures 15-24 and 40-54). In what Harbison describes as “constant lyrical...flow,” the music wanders over the distance of the fingerboard, encountering brief surges of agitation before ultimately returning to (and closing with) the initial idea. Both the initial idea and the refrain maintain the gentle character of the song through similar melodic content and continuous legato passages of steady sixteenths and quintuplets. Despite the fleeting moments of agitation, the overall mood of the song is one of tranquility.

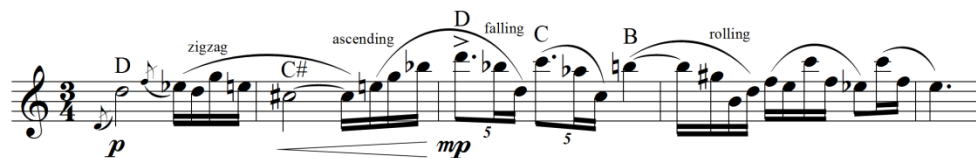
The music in the opening three measures forms the basis of the movement, as the melodic and motivic material recurs throughout. The initial idea begins

²⁹ John Harbison, interview by author, Boston, MA, March 17, 2012.

³⁰ John Harbison, *Four Songs of Solitude* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1985), i.

³¹ *Ibid.*

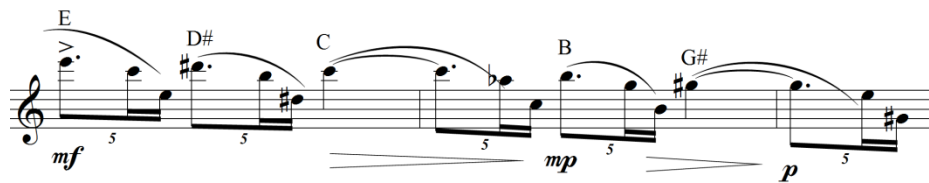
with a grace-note D4 to a half-note D5 followed by alternating sixteenth notes in contrary motion that are in a sort of zigzag shape (Example 1, measure 1). A half-note C-sharp2 is then followed by ascending arpeggiated sixteenth notes (Example 1, measure 2) that lead into three falling figures that recall the octave leap at the very beginning, but downward and filled in with an initial third drop. The principal notes of these falling figures descend by step: D6, C6, B5 (Example 1, measure 3).



Example 1: Song 1, measures 1-5

The step relationship of D/C-sharp in measures 1 and 2 and of the D/C/B descent in measure 3 foreshadows the importance of scalar motion (specifically descending scalar motion) in the song. The falling figures begin with the highest pitch (D6) of the first phrase, measures 1-4, and are enhanced by a louder dynamic level (*mezzo piano*) and an accent on D6, the extension of D4-D5 at the opening and the expressive height of the phrase. As shown in Example 1 above, measure 4 continues the falling figure from B5, but in a new rhythm and followed by a rising arpeggio (B4-D5-F5) that recalls the arpeggio E5/G5/B-flat2 in measure 2. The rest of measure 4 contains the zigzag-shaped sixteenth notes, which lead into the long E5 at the start of measure 5, where the initial idea returns, up a step. As measure 4 illustrates, nearly everything in the movement is generated from the small figures presented in the first three measures.

The immediate restatement of the initial idea follows the same outline as its predecessor, but is more elaborate (Example 2). Beginning this time on a long E5 instead of D5, the zigzag-shaped sixteenth notes that follow lead into a long E-flat2, followed again by ascending sixteenths. This phrase reaches a higher peak (E6 instead of D6), and the falling figures are extended to five occurrences instead of three. The principal notes of the figures again descend, but this time the intervals follow a half-step/minor-third pattern: E, D-sharp, C, B, G-sharp. As this falling figure extends downward, the dynamic decreases first to *mezzo piano* then *piano*.



Example 2: Song 1, measures 7-9

The last falling figure melts into a passage of flowing sixteenth notes that extends until the abrupt silence in measure 14. At first (Example 3, measures 9-10), the sixteenths continue the descent with ascending and descending arpeggios that are related to the rising notes in measure 2. Beginning in measure 11, the sixteenths combine the arpeggios with the zigzag shape, which predominates as the line hits bottom in measures 12-13 and then quickly ascends by octaves (measure 13) that recall the opening octave leap. Although this sixteenth-note passage is new, its motivic relationship to the first two measures causes it to sound like a natural melodic development of the initial idea.

The musical score consists of two staves. The first staff contains measures 9, 10, and 11. Measure 9 starts with a fermata over a quarter note E. Measure 10 contains a descending chromatic line: E-flat, D, C-sharp, C. Measure 11 contains a descending chromatic line: C-flat, B-flat. The second staff contains measures 12 and 13. Measure 12 contains a descending chromatic line: A, A-flat, G-flat, E. Measure 13 contains a descending chromatic line: D, C-sharp, C. The score includes dynamic markings 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano), and performance instructions like 'ascending', 'falling', 'cresc.', and 'zigzag'.

Example 3: Song 1, measures 9-13

Tenuto marks placed by the composer in measures 10 through 12 point out a descending whole-tone group: E-flat, C-sharp, C-flat, A, but a complete chromatic descent from E to A-flat also occurs through these measures as shown in Example 3, above. This chromatic descent may not be readily apparent, but even disguised in the florid sixteenths, it helps to focus the direction of the line. When the zigzag shape takes over in measure 12 and the scalar descent changes from chromatic to whole-tone for a few notes (A-flat, G-flat, E, D) before arriving on C via another small chromatic group (D, C-sharp, C). The more hurried descent of the whole-tone group intensifies the energy of the line and foreshadows other moments of agitation.

While the initial idea strives to achieve greater heights in pitch and ends with the dreamy falling figures, the sixteenth-note passage makes an immediate descent, touching the lowest point of the violin's register in measure 12. Once this descent reaches its lowest point and the loudest dynamic yet (*forte*), the zigzag shape alternates major and minor thirds (C, G-sharp, C, A) as a repeated closing figure, which cycles through three different octaves before tapering off into silence (Example 3, above, measure 13). The repetition of the closing figure

arrests the descending motion of the sequence and provides a sense of closure, thereby preparing the listener for the start of the refrain in measure 15.

The compression of intervals from major to minor thirds in the closing zigzag shape (measure 13) hints at the starting pitch(es) of the upcoming refrain section. The C remains constant in the group while the G-sharp rises to A. The refrain section begins on B, suggesting that the outcome of this figure is a stepwise convergence on B with the voice leading as shown in Example 4.



Example 4, Song 1, Simplified pitches of measures 13 and 15

Beginning at a louder dynamic level after a full bar of rest, the refrain could potentially sound disjunct, but because the pitches are focused in the compressed zigzag motive, and the closing figure is softened through repetition and *diminuendo*, the start of the refrain sounds naturally connected to the verse.

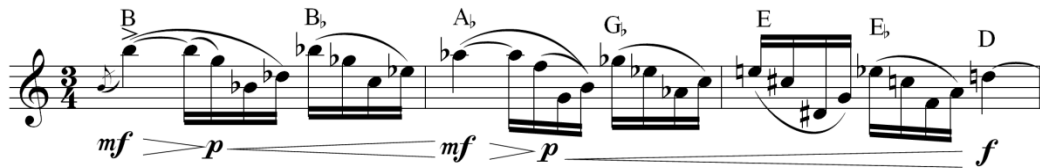
The refrain section (measures 15 through 24) follows the same basic layout as the first section: two statements of the theme followed by a descending sequence. The refrain even begins the same way as the initial idea, with an octave grace note, this time on B instead of D (Example 5).



Example 5: Song 1, downbeats of measures 1 and 15

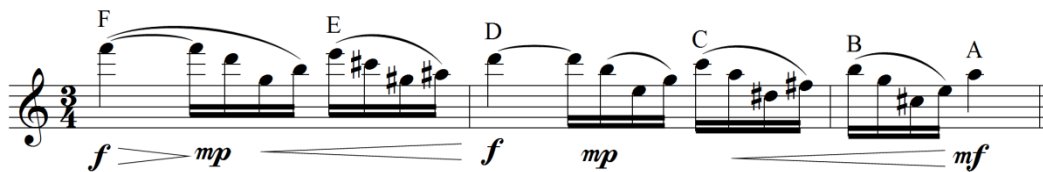
These similarities highlight the close, complementary relationship of the verse and refrain; they are two sides of the same coin. The sound is brighter here than at the beginning, as the refrain begins *mezzo forte* with an accent (Example

6). The rolling sixteenth-note shape persists until measure 18, where the ascending sixteenths take over and lead into a restatement of the refrain theme beginning on F6. As in the verse, this restatement achieves a new peak, here in its first note, thus far the high point of the piece. The refrain melody differs from the initial idea in that it generally descends in pitch, using the rolling sixteenth-note figure from measure 4. The descent in measures 15 through 17 is marked by scalar motion of the pitches on the beats, B, B-flat, A-flat, G-flat, E, E-flat, and D, as marked in Example 6.



Example 6: Song 1, measures 15-17

A scalar descent also occurs in the restatement of the refrain theme in measures 19 through 21, here starting up a diminished fifth: F, E, D, C, B, A (Example 7).



Example 7: Song 1, measures 19-21

The sequence in measures 22 and 23 continues the step descent of the second statement of the refrain, emphasizing G, F-sharp, F-natural, and E in a continuation of the rolling sixteenth figure. The ongoing use of the sixteenth-note groups and scalar motion to shape the phrases allows the music to effortlessly

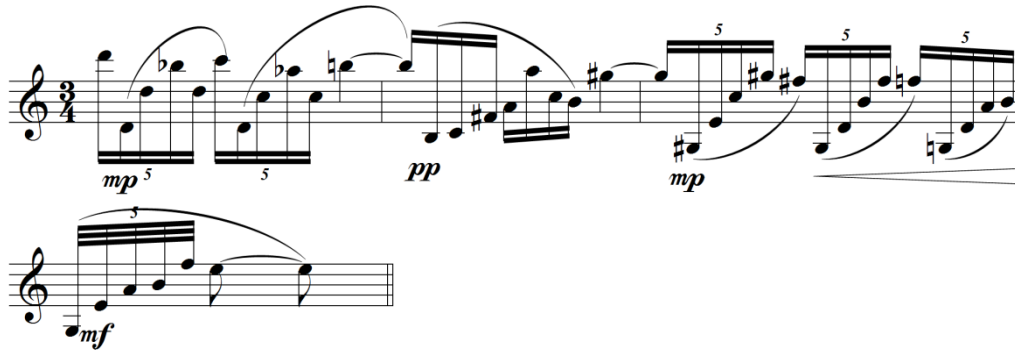
achieve the peaks and valleys that mark the expressive high points. The zigzag shape returns in measure 23, however, breaking off the scale and accelerating the descent of the line. As in measure 12, this sequence reaches the lowest part of the violin's register before making an ascent, this time using the rising arpeggiated sixteenth notes to restore the register of the initial idea.

The return of the initial idea as a second verse begins with the same soft, gentle character of the first measure. The melody is more decorated this time, as grace notes provide small interruptions in the D and C-sharp, which were previously half notes (Example 8, measures 25-26). The effect is not unlike tossing pebbles into a very still pond, creating small disturbances on the surface. The addition of the extra grace notes and the resulting alteration of the rhythm in the opening of the idea might seem slight, but this variation hints at the way the rest of the section will develop and vary the verse: through additional notes and rhythmic alteration. The ascending sixteenths again lead into the falling figure, which here undergoes a transformation as Harbison fleshes out the quintuplet-based falling figures (Example 8, measure 27). This decorated version of the falling figure creates a more expansive and open sound, especially with the reiteration of the open D string, which rings as the violinist plays through the quintuplets.



Example 8: Song 1, measures 25-27

After this return of the initial idea, the transitional section from measure 4 is replaced by a new transition in measures 28-29 (Example 9). This transition begins with ascending sixteenths, followed by the rolling figure, which settles on G-sharp5, rather than the E5 from before. This arrival in measure 28 is at the end of a *decrescendo* and marks the first *pianissimo* of the song, which lends a breathless quality to the unpredictable path the music takes in this section. By not following the exact formula of the first verse, the music continues to develop and evolve, and the effect is akin to a traveller who returns home at different times of his or her life, seeing familiar sights but with the depth of added experience. As in the first initial idea, the D5 at the beginning (measures 1 and 25) rises an octave to D6 (measures 3 and 27), then descends gradually to the E5 that begins the transposed counterstatement of its beginning motive (measures 5 and 30). The new transition (measures 28-29) lengthens the descent by a measure and combines the quintuplet rhythms of measure 27 with a variation of the elaborated scalar descent that closed the first initial idea (measures 9-12). The emphasized pitches D6, C6, B5, A5, G-sharp5, F-sharp5, F5, and E5 are apparent in Example 9. Although there are enough extra notes introduced in these measures to somewhat disguise the scale, the direction of the line is perceptible and makes the arrival of the arrival of the E5 on which the counterstatement begins seem inevitable, though it was delayed.



Example 9: Song 1, measures 27-30

The restatement of the initial idea in measures 30 through 33 begins with an accelerated flourish of thirty-second notes generated from the sequence in measure 29. Whereas the note E was nearly uninterrupted in measure 5, measure 30 introduces a playful sextuplet rhythm to alter the beginning of this thematic statement (Example 10, measure 30). The zigzag-shaped sixteenth notes lead into another sextuplet (Example 10, measure 31), and the ascending sixteenth notes once again steer the phrase into the falling figure, which is presented as a complete quintuplet.

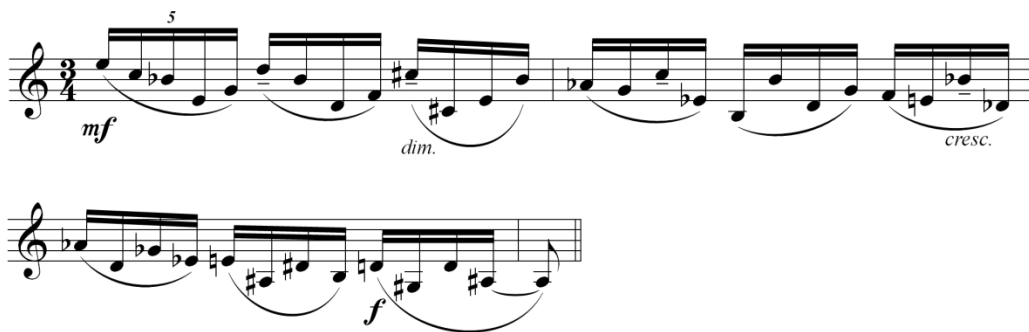


Example 10: Song 1, measures 30-31

As in the first verse, this restatement reaches a new peak, and the more ornate writing introduces an increased layer of complexity. The falling figures in measures 32-34 emphasize the note E, both as an open string and as a stopped note on the A string. The E persists, even as the falling figures follow the descending scale patterns that have been so prevalent (this descent—again E, D-

sharp, C, B, G-sharp, G, E—follows the half-step/minor-third pattern from measures 7 and 8). While the quasi-scale unfolds, the E remains constant, a gravitational center around which the other notes orbit, providing an anchor for the melodic line amidst the more decorated writing.

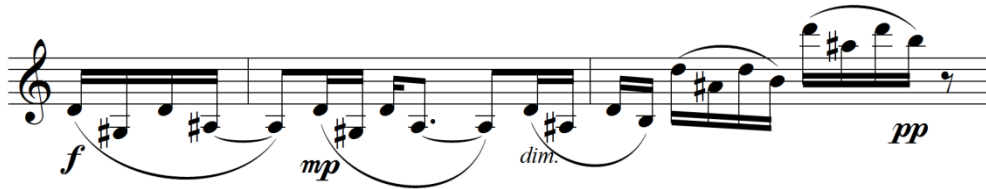
The section once again ends with a descending sequence (Example 11, measures 35-37) containing a step descent similar to that of measures 9-13, arriving agitatedly in the lowest register of the instrument at a *forte* dynamic (Example 11, measure 37). The sixteenth-note shapes in the descent are not patterned as consistently as in measures 9 through 12. Instead, they present a mix of the rolling and ascending figures (measure 35) and the zigzag figure (measures 36-39). Additionally, the articulations indicate a new slur on every group of four sixteenth notes. Although this sequence recalls the one from the first verse, the mix of the sixteenth-note shapes combined with the increased bowing activity add a more fervent energy here.



Example 11: Song 1, measures 35-37

With the ascent from the low point reached in measure 37, the dynamic softens, this time achieving *pianissimo* and pausing for only one breathless eighth rest (Example 12). As the line rises through D4-D5-D6, the zigzag figure once

again closes the section (measure 39). Not all is as peaceful as it had been before, as the zigzag figure grapples with the “wrong” notes in measures 37-38 before arriving on the alternating major and minor thirds closing figure (measure 39).



Example 12: Song 1, measures 37-39

Once again, the rising half-step figure alternating with a static pitch points to the opening pitch(es) of the upcoming refrain; if the figure follows the same formula as it did before, the opening note of the refrain should be C-sharp, a half-step descent from D and a whole-step ascent from B. Indeed, measure 40 begins with a C-sharp; the closing figure has functioned the same way as it did previously. The increased energy of this sequence and the more decorated versions of the initial idea combine to create a second verse that is larger in scope and that gains more momentum than the first verse.

The second refrain begins with two notable changes from its counterpart: it is transposed up one step and the dynamics are all one level softer, which creates a more demure and intimate line as compared to the substantial, self-assured rhetoric of the second verse. Thematically, the two refrains remain the same and present the same descending scalar motion, here with C-sharp, C, B-flat, G-sharp, G-flat, F, E (measures 40-42) and G, F-sharp, E, D, C-sharp, B (measures 44-46). The expected descending sequence begins in measure 46, echoing the sequence from measure 21. It seems as though this sequence will

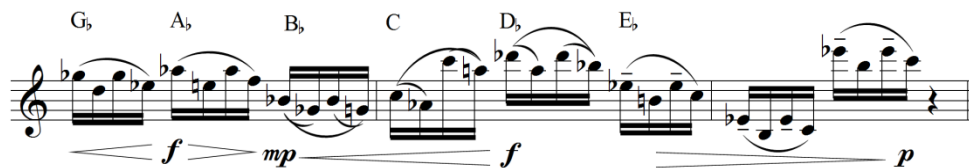
continue in the same way as its predecessor, alternating through the rolling and zigzag shapes and continuing the descending scalar motion of the restatement of the refrain melody. Initially, this expectation is fulfilled as the shape of the scalar motion continues its chromatic descent from A to F (measures 47-48), but a new descending figure interrupts the sequence in measure 48 and again in measure 49 (Example 13). These plainly presented descents add a more directed, determined quality to the otherwise meandering sequence. The line arrives on C-sharp4, and immediately reiterates the note an octave higher, by way of an A-sharp (Example 13, measure 49). The descent and immediate ascent of pitch recalls how the previous sequences have ended, but this is not an ending.



Example 13: Song 1, measures 48-49

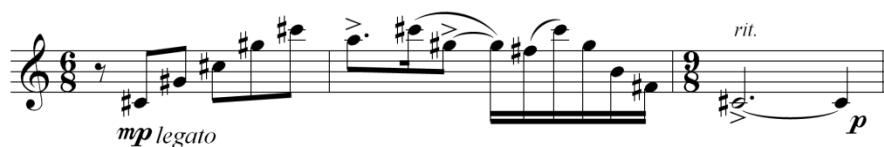
The rolling and zigzag sixteenth-note shapes begin again, this time not in a discernible sequence, but continuing the embedded scalar motion: C-sharp, C, B-flat, G-sharp, and finally arriving on G-flat, wrestling through some rolling quintuplets before alighting on the zigzag closing figure. Although the second refrain adheres closely to the path of its counterpart, the interruption and expansion of the sequence and closing figure reflect the influence of the expanded and agitated second verse. The second refrain becomes more turbulent than the first, reaching the peak of the movement's intensity in the urgently repeated closing figures.

The closing figure at the end of the second refrain section (measures 52-54) seems to have a mind of its own, coming to life in a way only hinted at before, in measures 37 and 38, where the descending sequence cycles through two “wrong” versions of the closing figure before settling on the version used to end the verse. In measures 51 through 54, the closing zigzag shape occurs nine times in a row, with six different starting pitches, G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, C, D-flat, and E-flat, as shown in Example 14. This collection of starting pitches creates the only instance of an embedded ascending scale in the movement. Because of this ascent, the quick fluctuations of the dynamics, and sudden changes of register, this section is especially turbulent. When the closing figure finally arrives on the ending transposition to E-flat, Harbison employs several compositional devices to ensure that these figures give a sense of completion. Not only does the group beginning on E-flat occur three times in a row, Harbison places tenuto marks on the E-flats (Example 14, above, measures 53-54); these are notes that are meant to be noticed. The third iteration of the closing figure has tenuto marks on all four notes. This is a signal that the section is finally coming to a close, and if the pitches of the closing zigzag shape are any indication, the next section should start on D. As the closing figure directs the line toward the note D, the change of articulation and dynamic dispel the energy, preparing for the return of the verse.



Example 14: *Song 1*, measures 52-54

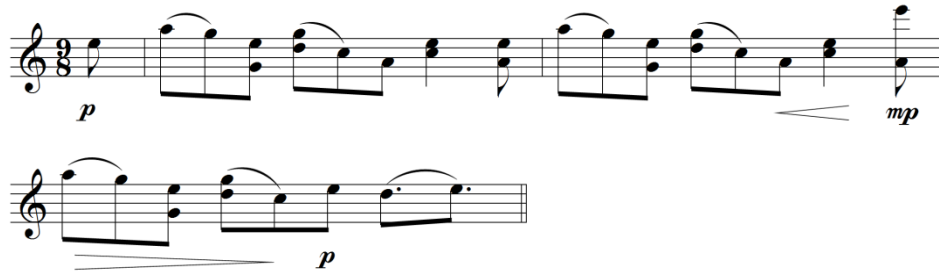
Directly answering the folksong-like melody is the “athletic idea” (Example 17), which at once demonstrates a livelier character through its faster tempo, its more diverse articulations, and its rising and falling arpeggiated lines. It begins by leaping through two octaves of alternating C-sharps and G-sharps, then dwells in its upper register for a few beats and finishes with a flourish of descending sixteenth notes. These arpeggiated patterns provide contrast to the static first theme by creating an arch shape over a much greater range. Like the folksong-like melody, the athletic idea has a limited pitch set: C-sharp, F-sharp, G-sharp, A, and B, adding a half step to the pentatonic collection G-sharp, C-sharp, F-sharp, and B. With his reiteration of the pitch, Harbison implies some kind of C-sharp tonality here, but exactly what quality is unclear. The half step A/G-sharp appears only once, and the arpeggios are in the fourths and fifths of the pentatonic collection. This limited pitch set also recalls folk music, which is often constructed from pentatonic or modal pitch sets. Despite their contrasting characteristics, the shared pentatonicism helps the two melodies relate to and complement each other.



Example 17: Song 2, measures 4-6

The folksong-like melody and the athletic idea are immediately restated, again as a pair. In this restatement the folksong-like melody undergoes a bit of a change, as a new pitch (C) is added to its collection, completing the pentatonic

scale, and the melody is sparingly harmonized with simple double-stops (Example 18). The reiterations G-E in the melody are now filled out to G-E-C, 5-3-1 of C Major, which supplies a triadic C-Major background for the theme, although it still centers on E. The folksong-like melody itself is unchanged, but the addition of simple harmony adds warmth, fullness, and a stronger sense of tonal center.



Example 18: Song 2, measures 7-9

The athletic idea again follows, this time extended by one measure (Example 19). This extension reinforces the C-sharp pitch center twice, on the fourth beat of measure 12 and on the downbeat of measure 13.



Example 19: Song 2, measures 10-13

It is important to note here the relationship of the tonalities of the folksong-like melody and the athletic idea. Harbison himself points out in the program notes that the athletic idea is in a “key a half step higher,” C to C-sharp. This relationship of a half step is constantly recalled throughout the movement. The athletic idea spins into a new section, which begins by outlining a D-minor triad in measure 14 (Example 20). The reinforcement of C-sharp as the pitch

center just before the new section causes the new D-minor harmony to sound fresh and exhilarating, as though it is the resolution of a leading tone. As shown in Example 20, this new melody in measures 14-15 is constructed from three small motives: the triadic head motive, alternating stepwise sixteenth notes, and another zigzag shape that emphasizes the half-step relationship of D/C-sharp. These motives undergo immediate variation. Octave displacements in the alternating sixteenth notes and the zigzag motive, for example, appear in measure 17. The development of the motives provides variety and gives the section a capricious, whimsical character.

The image shows musical notation for Example 20, Song 2, measures 14-17. The notation is in 6/8 time. The first staff contains measures 14, 15, and 17. Measure 14 is labeled 'triadic' and 'mp'. Measure 15 is labeled 'alternating' and 'mp'. Measure 17 is labeled 'zigzag' and 'mf'. The second staff shows a 'zigzag, octave displacement' motive, labeled 'mf'. The notation includes various note values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Example 20: Song 2, measures 14-17

In measure 17 the melody breaks free from D minor and is transposed down a third in measures 17-19, beginning with an outline of a B-flat minor triad. The transposition shifts in measure 19, and a new triad outline, A minor, begins in measure 20 (Example 21). The triads beginning on B-flat and A recall the relationship of the half-step, tying this capricious developmental section to the two melodies from the beginning. As shown in Example 21, a fragment of the athletic idea appears but is disguised in the sixteenth-note commotion.



Example 21: Song 2, measure 20

Insistent, the fragment reappears in measures 21-22 in a sequence that descends by minor thirds. These fleeting fragments of the athletic idea give way to a full statement in measures 25-27 (Example 22). This statement of the idea is the only one not preceded by the folksong-like melody; it is the first instance, however, to show its influence. Harbison injects a G-natural into the athletic idea (measure 25). The G-natural, a pitch pulled from the folksong-like melody, is the first sign of the fusion of ideas. The athletic idea quickly corrects itself, arriving on C-sharp on the downbeat of measure 26. The focus on C-sharp is instantly displaced in the remainder of measure 26. What was previously an extension of the phrase that reiterated C-sharp (Example 19, above, measure 12) occurs here one half-step lower, arriving on C. The C in turn is immediately displaced as the extension moves down one half-step (by way of octave displacement) to land on B (Example 22, measure 27). By immediately displacing the arrival on C-sharp with an arrival on C (and immediately again with an arrival on B), the extension further demonstrates the fusion of the ideas by emphasizing the half-step relationships while beginning the preparation for the return of the folksong-like melody.



Example 22: Song 2, measures 25-27

As the folksong-like melody and the athletic idea again appear as a pair, the influence of one upon the other becomes more readily apparent. Previously, the folksong-like melody was harmonized simply and diatonically. Here in measures 30-32, it is harmonized chromatically (Example 23). The accompanying figures outline the tonic and dominant of C-sharp underneath the melody, which remains diatonic in C. This bitonal combination distorts the restatement of the (essentially unchanged) folksong-like melody, unsettling its lilted serenity with off-kilter harmony.



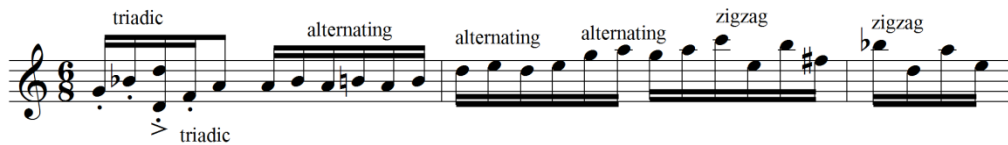
Example 23: Song 2, measures 30-32

The athletic idea shows more influence of its folksong partner when it appears in measures 33-36 (Example 34). It begins in C-sharp, but the notes in the second measure are unexpectedly dropped a half step from their previous iteration. The extension of the athletic idea reinforces the arrival on C before shifting back suddenly to C-sharp (Example 24, measures 35-36). As the athletic idea once again spins into a fantastical episode, the C-sharp arrival in measure 36 resolves up one half step into the D-minor triadic head motive, as it did in measure 14.



Example 24: Song 2, measures 33-36

The three motives (triadic head motive, alternating sixteenth notes, and the zigzag shape) once again comprise the melodic content of this capricious section, and the motives begin to develop more freely and independently. The head motive begins to appear in *stretto*, occurring twice in measure 39 (Example 25). The layered appearances of the triadic head motive are followed by an extended version of the alternating sixteenth notes and two occurrences of the zigzag shape, measures 39-44.



Example 25: Song 2, measures 39-41

The double occurrence of the head motive happens again in measure 41, followed by two zigzag shapes that lead into a triple *stretto* of the head motive (Example 26). The *stretto* treatment of the triadic head motives increases the forward momentum and allows the music to reach a new energetic peak. The *forte* arrival on E (Example 26, above, measure 43) creates a brief pause before the sixteenths push higher with wide leaps.



Example 26: Song 2, measures 43

A descending sequence based on the arpeggiated athletic idea begins in measure 45 (Example 27). The upward fifth leap at the start of each member begins with C-sharp, B, and A. As the rhythm of the sequence speeds up (shifting from a six-note pattern to a four-note pattern), the interval of descent increases as well, to a minor third: A, F-sharp, E-flat (measures 46-47). When the sequence arrives on E-flat, a seven-note pattern is stated three times as if the line has gotten stuck (measures 47-48). Although the rhythm is primarily constant sixteenthths through this section, the rapidly shifting rhythmic groupings (from six, to four, to seven) undermine the stability of the music, which suddenly seems on the brink of spinning out of control.



Example 27: Song 2, measures 45-48

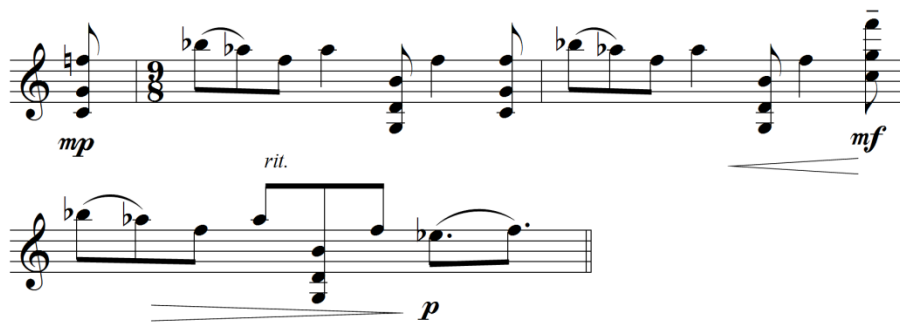
The music is refocused in measure 49 by an appearance of the alternating sixteenth notes, the zigzag shape, and another triple *stretto* of the triadic head motive, which makes a *crescendo* to *fortissimo*, arriving at the most intense point

of the song (Example 28). The *fortissimo* B in measure 50 cuts short another triad outline. Two arpeggios rising from repetitions of this B recall those in measures 27-28, which also prepared a return of the folksong-like melody with a *diminuendo* to a long, high note.



Example 28: Song 2, measures 49-50

The final occurrence of the folksong-like melody reflects most clearly the influence of its athletic-idea counterpart. The pitches of the melody have all been raised by a half step (Example 29), while the accompanying figures have all been lowered by a half step. The result is that the melody is now chromatic and the accompaniment diatonic; the folksong-like melody has been transformed.



Example 29: Song 2, measures 53-55

The athletic idea appears one last time, somewhat surprisingly in its original form. The influence of the folksong-like melody appears in the extension of the melody (measures 58-60) where diatonic sixteenth notes from the pitch collection of the original melody alternate with the long C-sharps arrivals that close the movement (Example 30).



Example 30: Song 2, measures 58-60

Thus, the two contrasting ideas are paired one last time at the end of the song (measures 53-60). In a final, subtle merger of the two, the repeated A-flat/Fs in the new folksong-like melody connect to the closing C-sharps as a triad outline, G-sharp, E-sharp, C-sharp; the two themes are now in the same “key.” C-natural in alternation with C-sharp in measure 58 is a final reminiscence of the original C-natural/C-sharp tonal centers.

Song 3

“The most intense piece is the third song, its melody carrying large intervals and leading toward increasingly brief and intimate reflections upon itself.”³³

The third song has the most structural and emotional complexity. It begins with an expansive melody comprised of large leaps. As the melody progresses it gains and loses intensity as the dynamics fluctuate from *forte* to *mezzo forte*, then to *mezzo piano* and *piano*. A restatement of the melody expands on the initial statement, reaching a new peak in register and dynamic. A new section introduces halting, reflective material that leads into more grandiose statements of the opening melody. As the song progresses the structure becomes less clear as the

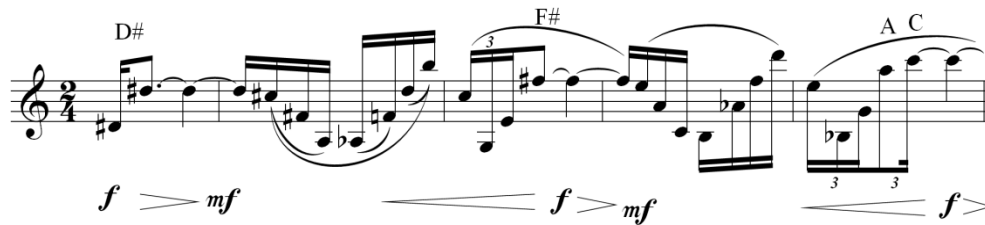
³³ John Harbison, *Four Songs of Solitude* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1985), i.

“brief and intimate reflections” occur. The sweeping opening melody becomes punctuated by rests, resembling the halting figure. Brief snippets of the halting figure begin to connect with fragments of the opening melody. By the end of the movement, the melodic ideas and motives enmesh, becoming fragments of deep, inner contemplations. The song evokes loneliness, passion, and longing.

Arpeggios of diminished harmony are prevalent throughout the third song: forty-two of the fifty-nine measures feature some kind of diminished harmony outline, from tritones to fully diminished seventh chords. The continuity of interval content is helpful to the listener in this movement, which has the least discernible form. Though the different melodic ideas appear, disappear, and finally return as an equal force, they share a common harmonic origin, allowing the listener to interpret the movement as a coherent whole.

The beginning of the opening melody recalls the initial idea of the first song; a bold statement of a D-sharp octave sustains for just a moment before launching into the large intervals of the melody. The large intervals (a perfect fifth followed by major sixths) form an inverted arch shape, the last four sixteenth notes of which outline a fully diminished seventh chord (Example 31, measure 2). Observing the sustained notes in Example 31, one may note that the melody continues, restated up a minor third in measures 3-4 (sustaining F-sharp), and up by two minor thirds in measure 5 (sustaining A and C). The triplet figure that propels the line from A to C in this measure seems trivial at this point but gains prominence as the movement progresses. As the melody rises by minor thirds, it outlines a diminished seventh chord in its sustained notes: D-sharp, F-sharp, A, C,

as marked in Example 31. The incorporation of diminished harmony into the melody and the use of it to structure how the melodic statements rise in pitch create continuity in this seemingly abstract section.



Example 31: Song 3, measures 1-5

From the highest note, C, the melody descends through a varied sequence of sixteenth-note sextuplets and quarter notes, which then breaks off into another varied sequence of sextuplets (Example 32). These descending sequences also outline a descent by thirds, but major thirds rather than minor: C, G-sharp, E, C. (The problem with sequencing through thirds is that they quickly cycle through the same notes. By outlining the ascent of the melody with minor thirds and the descent with major thirds, some harmonic variety is gained.) At the end of the sequence in measure 8, the flow of triplets slows slightly with the marking *rubato, poco movendo*. Measure 9 picks up the *poco movendo* character and regains the sweeping momentum of the song as the restatement of the opening melody begins in measure 10. The momentum is helped by the descending, quasi-scalar motion outlined in measure 9 (A, G-sharp, F, E), which focuses the pitches toward the D-sharp that begins the melody again (Example 32, measure 9). The push-and-pull nature of the *rubato, poco movendo* intimates hesitation versus decision, some kind of subtle internal conflict.



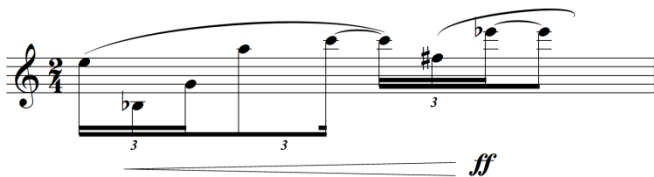
Example 32: Song 3, measures 6-9

Because of this *poco movendo*, the second statement of the melody begins as before, but with more momentum and confidence. The triplet figure from measure 5 occurs early this time, happening twice in a row in measure 12, causing the line to leap up to A rather than sustain an F-sharp, as in measure 3 (Example 33).



Example 33: Song 3, measure 12

Similarly, the triplet figure happens as before in measure 14, but the line springs up to E-flat instead of sustaining the C, as in measure 5 (Example 34).



Example 34: Song 3, measure 14

Thanks to these injections of the triplet figure, the diminished chord that outlines the general ascent of the melody reaches higher: D-sharp, F-sharp, A, C,

E-flat. More intense dynamic fluctuations swell from *mezzo forte* to *fortissimo*. Though this is a fairly straightforward restatement of the opening melody, the slight alterations and decorations propel it to a new height, allowing the music to reach a more expressive peak.

The descent from E-flat again goes through two descending varied sequences, but as the transitional material begins no extra tempo indications are given. Instead, the transitional measure becomes its own sequence in measures 18-21, ascending instead of descending (Example 35). Duple sixteenth-note octaves contrast the falling motion of the sixteenth-note triplets, pulling the line higher and higher. The rising octaves seem to come to rest on a D-sharp octave (reminiscent of the opening), but enough momentum remains that one more ascent (to E-sharp) occurs. The D-sharp octave has been transcended and the music reaches a new height; out of this, perhaps inevitably, is born the new melodic material.

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The first staff contains measures 18 through 21, featuring sixteenth-note triplets that ascend in pitch. Dynamic markings include *mp* (mezzo piano) and *mf* (mezzo forte). The second staff contains measures 22 and 23, showing a melodic line with dynamic markings *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo forte).

Example 35: Song 3, measures 18-21

Measure 22 begins this new material, the first appearance of the halting figure. It takes two forms, one with seven notes (Example 36, measure 22) and one with five (Example 36, measure 23). The diminished harmony is chordal

rather than linear in the halting figure, causing it to sound brash and striking compared to the sweeping opening melody.



Example 36: Song 3, measures 22-24

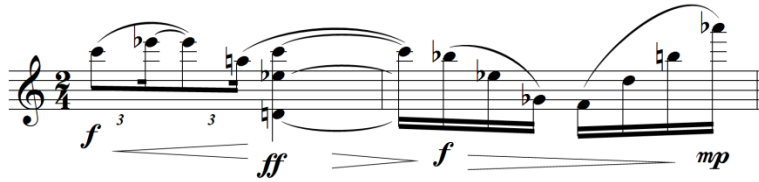
The halting figure finds its footing by managing to sound twice in a row without the punctuation of rests, but the triplet figure interrupts (Example 37). Now stacked in triple stops, the triplet figure reflects the influence of the chordal halting figure.



Example 37: Song 3, measures 26-27

The chordal triplet figure persists, now incorporating flourishes of expression demonstrated by the wildly fluctuating dynamics. The long melodies begin to break down, giving way to the “increasingly brief and intimate reflections.”³⁴ A fragment of the opening melody breaks through in measures 30-31, beginning on a dissonant *fortissimo* chord, which springs from the triplet figure and sweeps into the large-interval arch (Example 38).

³⁴ Ibid.



Example 38: Song 3, measures 30-31

After a pause, a variation of this melodic gesture follows, and a succession of triplet figures leads into a more assured version of the opening melody, which begins in measure 36. The diminished harmony starts to become denser in the triplet figures of measure 35 (Example 39). Harbison layers an outline of a D-diminished arpeggio over that of an F-sharp diminished arpeggio, leading into the upcoming restatement of the opening melody.



Example 39: Song 3, measure 35

As the melody begins, the pitches are different, but the shape closely resembles the opening measures, giving a sense of return. The return is short-lived, however, as the inverted arch of the opening melody becomes a point of fixation, reiterated twice and harmonized by a colorful mix of double-stops. Bursting out of these dissonant arch shapes is a *fortissimo*, the high point of the movement (Example 40). As he did in measure 35, Harbison again layers arpeggios of dissonant harmonies atop one another, creating some sharp dissonances in a series of descending triplet figures. The triplet figures give way to heavy, angular sixteenth notes related to the descending portion of the opening

melody's arch (measure 42). As if struggling to find itself amidst the melodic fragments, the music depicts an anguished view of isolation.



Example 40: Song 3, measures 40-43

The halting figure emerges from the wreckage of the descent. Presented twice in a row, it first displays some strength, but upon repeat ascends an octave and echoes in a softer dynamic. After the song's expressive high point, these halting figures give way to dreamy, *dolce* versions of the opening melody's arch (Example 41). Though they are still harmonized with colorful dissonances, the character of these arches is calm. They are but shadows of the intense dissonance in the previous measures.



Example 41: Song 3, measures 45-47

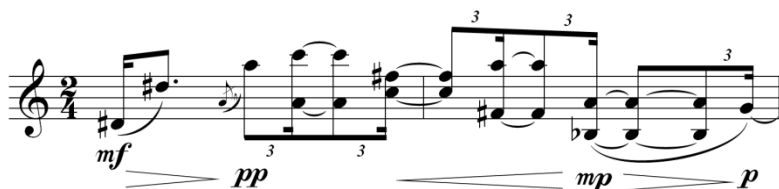
A new rhythm emerges in measures 48-50. The melodic content is familiar, however. It is from the sequence of measure 8 and the transition of measure 9 (Example 42). As the transition did before, this sequence leads into

octave D-sharps. This suggests a sense of return, that the opening melody will close out the movement.



Example 42: Song 3, measures 49-50

The last nine measures do not present the opening melody, but rather an amalgamation of the melodic material of the movement. The octave D-sharps give way immediately to triplet figures. Though they are presented in double-stops, the double-stops outline the same harmonies: F-sharp diminished in measures 51-52 (Example 43), E diminished in measure 53, and D diminished in measure 54. The emphasis on one diminished harmony (rather than two layered harmonies) has less tension, and combined with the triplet figures this line has a comforting, sing-song quality.



Example 43: Song 3, measures 51-52

Two instances of the opening melody's arch shape, each ascending to C-sharp, trail out of the triplet figures. The halting figure closes the movement, ending on one last dissonant harmony, and simultaneously achieving the highest pitch and softest dynamic in the movement. In this sense, the end of the movement does not portray a traditional sense of closure. Instead, it is open-

ended, as a question unanswered or a feeling unrequited. In this way, the third song conveys the emotions of the most private of human struggles without speaking a word.

Song 4

“The last song is the most virtuosic and intricate. Starting from a slow emblem, which is often restated, it begins a dance with an obstinate lower voice as accompaniment. This cycles out of control twice, but manages a fragile reconciliation at the end.”³⁵

The fourth song has three large sections, each of which begins with the slow emblem followed by the dance and “obstinate” accompaniment. In the first two sections, when the music “cycles out of control,”³⁶ it does so into fast and furious sections of passage work in 5/8 that feature large leaps, sudden changes of register, and virtuosic arpeggios. The third section begins with the slow emblem followed by the dance, but does not cycle out of control. Instead, the slow emblem and dance continue their dialogue, and the music finally comes together on a unison D, marking the “fragile reconciliation.”³⁷ The slow emblem is calm but tense, full of potential energy. The lilting and sweet dance is contrasted by the angular, obstinate lower voice. The virtuosic sections are wild and free.

The slow emblem that begins the movement (and each section) is comprised of double stops that move in a homorhythmic motion (Example 44). The melody is calm and the double stops are in contrary motion. This motion

³⁵ John Harbison, *Four Songs of Solitude* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1985), i..

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

creates expansion and contraction in the intervals, almost as if they are the breathing of the movement. As shown in Example 44, the top notes of the double stops (G-flat, A-flat, B-flat) have a stepwise relationship with one another, while the bottom notes are triadic, outlining a G-major chord. The bitonality causes the harmony to have a tense uncertainty, and the overall effect of the slow emblem evokes an ominous chorale.



Example 44: Song 4, measures 1-6

The gentle, triplet-based dance begins in measure 6 (Example 45). Each rising and falling figure is followed by the angular, obstinate accompaniment in duple eighth-notes. The dance outlines triads as it rises and minor sevenths as it falls, while the accompaniment punches out perfect fifths. Because of its speed and shifting accents, the dance has more energy than the slow emblem and introduces new motion and character to the song. The dance descends through a sequence, each triadic figure punctuated by the accompaniment. The obstinate nature of the accompaniment increases as the duple eighth notes become insistent and repetitive in measures 9-10 (Example 45).



Example 45: Song 4, measures 6-10

The music accelerates and grows louder here, as the accompaniment attempts to instigate change. After a pause the dance begins again, this time reaching higher in pitch, which increases its sweet, expressive nature. The dance and accompaniment once again descend sequentially, their contrasting characters evoking the charm of a mismatched pair of dancers.

The obstinate accompaniment again tries to start something new by accelerating, making a *crescendo*, and insistently repeating. Again, its efforts are for naught, as the dance begins again in measure 16. Like the previous appearance of the dance melody, this one again achieves a new height in pitch before the descending sequence begins. As the *accelerando* begins in measure 20, and the obstinate accompaniment begins its stubborn repetitions, something is different. Instead of repeating the same notes, the accompaniment starts to cycle through different pitches, but still outlining perfect fifths (Example 46). The new idea takes hold and the music begins to grow out of control, giving way to the new virtuosic section.



Example 46: Song 4, measures 21-25

The virtuosic section, a wild 5/8 ride in a new, faster tempo (*Più mosso, pressando*), begins in measure 24 (Example 47). The calmness of the slow emblem and the lyrical qualities of the dance disappear as *marcato*, alternating eighth-note motives comprised of large leaps appear. Half-note interjections act as landing points for this high-energy section.



Example 47: Song 4, measures 24-28

For the first eleven bars (measures 24-34) of the virtuosic section, variations of the alternating eighth-note motives alternate with the half-note landings. The chaotic character of this section mightily contrasts with the controlled opening emblem and the organized sequential dance melody, creating a free, untamed rhetoric for the violinist. A descending sequence breaks out in measures 35-37, and a new eighth-note arch shape appears (Example 48). The arch shape and descending sequence tame the music, channeling its energy into a four-measure varied repeat that has a rising/falling shape (Example 48).



Example 48: Song 4, measures 35-41

Out of these repeated measures explodes the first fiery arpeggio (Example 49). A half-note arrival point at the apex of the arpeggio (measure 43) bursts into a *staccato* descending chromatic scale colored by double stops. As the scale descends Harbison dispels the vivaciousness of the eighth notes of this section by augmenting the rhythm, using four eighth notes to fill the 5/8 bar, and simultaneously indicating for the violinist to make both a *ritardando* and a

diminuendo. Though the nearly constant eighth notes of the virtuosic section seem unstoppable, the relaxation of the tempo, the expansion of the rhythm, and the lessening of the dynamic cause the music to lose steam as it winds down into a full bar of silence.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in 3/8 time and contains a sequence of notes with dynamics *ff*, *stacc.*, and *rit.*, along with a fermata and a 7-measure rest. The bottom staff is in 3/8 time and contains a sequence of notes with a 4-measure rest and a dynamic marking *mp*.

Example 49: Song 4, measures 42-48

The measure of rest allows the energy and sound to dissipate as the slow emblem begins anew in measure 49. Harbison makes some small changes, removing a *tenuto* mark that appeared in measure 3, and lengthening the duration of the note at the end of measure 51, causing it to cross the bar line onto the downbeat of measure 52 (Example 50). Though the emblem has been transposed up by a perfect fifth, the melodic and harmonic content follow the same pattern as before.

The image shows a single staff of musical notation in 3/4 time, with notes and rests across two measures.

Example 50: Song 4, measures 3-4; measures 51-52

The dance with the obstinate accompaniment follows, as it did before. As the music descends through the sequence it still moves by thirds: F, D-flat, B-flat,

G-flat, and E-flat. During the G-flat versions of the dance figure the line becomes stuck, as the obstinate figure wrestles to gain prominence (Example 51).



Example 51: Song 4, measures 57-59

The dance figure prevails as it descends to E-flat, but the accompaniment figure takes hold, increasing the momentum and energy of the song as it makes an *accelerando* and a *crescendo* before coming to an abrupt halt in measure 64. After a silence the dance figure restarts, and in this instance the accompaniment figure cycles out of control into a new virtuosic section.

The second virtuosic section (measures 71-113) is significantly larger than the first, forty-four bars instead of twenty-four. The marking of *più mosso*, *marcato* indicates a faster tempo and rougher character than the dance. The alternating eighth-note shapes and the half-note landings begin the section, but a new shape appears very quickly. This new shape, a kind of descending zigzag, can be seen in Example 52, where it precedes a half-note landing and then appears in a two-bar sequence. Though the descending zigzag figure replaces the arches from measures 35-37, its downward sequence focuses the line as the arch-shape sequence did, giving it a clear and precise direction. The varied repeat in measures 80-84 recalls that in measures 38-41, but here uses primarily the alternating eighth-note shape instead of the rising/falling-shape.



Example 52: Song 4, measures 76-79

In the first large section of the piece, the rising arpeggio (measure 42) directly followed the repeated rising/falling figures (measures 38-41). Here in measure 85 Harbison inserts a *Furioso* section that employs the descending zigzag eighth notes, the rising/falling eighth notes, and the half-note landings. Both of the eighth-note shapes appear in altered forms: the rising/falling figure appears in retrograde (measure 101) and inverted retrograde (measures 88-89), while the descending zigzag figure has a retrograde appearance (measure 97). Because of the very clear directions of these eighth-note figures, the *Furioso* section becomes a fiercely pointed discourse that leads into the peak of the movement's intensity.

This peak arrives as the rising arpeggios begin in measure 102 (Example 53). The previous section had only one arpeggio (measure 42); here there are four. The first, beginning on the open G string, is the same as the arpeggio from measure 42; it has the same set of notes and arrives on the same A. Here, the chromatic descent does not follow. Instead, a new arpeggio begins, spanning from B3 to C6. Two more arpeggios follow, the second right on the heels of the first. The compression of these arpeggio entrances brings the passage into a nearly unrestrained frenzy as it escalates in pitch, finally arriving on G6.



Example 53: Song 4, measures 102-107

Directly after the G arrival point, G and F-sharp begin to sound together, signalling the start of the descending chromatic scale. The *staccato* descent begins, and once again the energy of the scale is dissipated through the augmentation of the eighth notes, the *ritardando* indication, and the *decrescendo* to *mezzo piano*.

A full bar of rest divides the second large section from the third, allowing the return of the slow emblem to emerge from silence. The emblem here is transposed up a fifth from its previous incarnation (measure 49) and begins the same way (Example 54). This version soon differs from the others as it begins to progress and develop. After three bars it begins an ascending sequence based on the material from measures 117-118. The sequence breaks off as the E/C-sharp tenth resolves up to an F/D tenth.



Example 54: Song 4, measures 116-123

The dance and accompaniment follow, but here they appear in a very high register, *pianissimo*, and still in the tempo of the slow emblem. Though the

obstinate nature of the accompaniment persists through the spiky accents, the timbre is softened through the use of harmonics. The melodic content here is similar to what has come before, but the changes it has undergone (development of the emblem, softening of the dance motive) cause the music to become much more tender and fragile than it has yet been in this movement. The accompaniment figure begins to repeat and accelerate in measure 126, but it quickly disappears into another measure of silence.

An abbreviated version of the emblem begins in measure 129, beginning on the E/C-sharp tenth with which the ascending sequence broke off in measure 122. This version of the emblem begins to sequence in the same way but is interrupted by two beats of rest. Two pairs of the dance/accompaniment figures appear, separated by eighth rests. The increasingly frequent silences in this section gently disrupt the development of the lines as the musical ideas begin their fragile reconciliation. A single last appearance of the dance figure leads into the final version of the slow emblem at measure 136 (Example 55). Like its predecessors, the voices of this slow emblem's double-stop lines follow a stepwise or a triadic path. The voices switch roles here, and the top line begins triadic movement as the bottom line begins movement by step.



Example 55: Song 4, measures 136-138

This role reversal allows the music to ascend to the highest point of the entire piece, a gently rolled chord topped by a stratospheric E-flat7. Though this is

the highest note of the piece, the gentle roll of the chord and the *pianissimo* dynamic cause this moment to sound introspective and meditative rather than emotionally intense.

From this reflective, registral high point the music begins a sequential descent. The top voice moves in triadic motion while the bottom voice moves in stepwise motion until the downbeat of measure 140, where both voices drop a perfect fourth in parallel motion (Example 56).



Example 56: Song 4, measures 139-140

This formula repeats in measures 141-142: contrary triadic and step movement to a short parallel descent. The music begins to gain strength as a small *crescendo* leads to a *mezzo piano* as the second part of the sequence begins (measure 141). With the third and final part of the sequence, the dynamic increases to *mezzo forte*. Here in the closing measure of the piece, the sequence continues its contrary triadic/step motion in lieu of the parallel descents from measures 140 and 142 (Example 57). The top voice descends by thirds, E-flat, C, A-flat, F, while the bottom voice ascends by steps, G, A, B, C-sharp. The dynamic increases to *forte* as the voices come together on unison D.



Example 57: Song 4, measures 143-147

The dance figure and obstinate accompaniment manage their fragile reconciliation, and the contrary lines of the slow emblem merge into one. The journey for the listener and performer is complete.

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMANCE GUIDE

“The solitude is the composer’s, but even more the performer’s. The player’s world is like that of the long distance runner, especially in challenging pieces like these, and I wanted our conversation in those hours of preparation to contain subjects of equal interest to both. The listeners can, if they wish, add in their own inner distances.”³⁸

Four Songs of Solitude is a demanding piece for the soloist. The comparison to distance running is apt; both the runner and the musician train themselves to move past physical and mental limitations, aiming to achieve goals that at times may seem out of reach. The journey for each is personal; while the musician may be surrounded by others in neighboring practice rooms and the runner may train in a group, only they are privy to their inner personal struggles and triumphs. It is in this solitary, personal space that Harbison seeks to engage the violinist in the dialogue of preparation. The addition of an editor’s marks would assist the violinist, but would create a filter between the composer and violinist, adding another voice to the conversation and disrupting the piece’s underlying theme of solitude. In fact, it is at the request of the composer that no edited score accompany this document, and for this reason the performance guide does not discuss editorial markings (i.e., fingerings, bowings) in depth.

The absence of an edited part is the first obstacle for the violinist, who must consider how to execute the technical challenges and musical gestures of the

³⁸ John Harbison, *Four Songs of Solitude* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1985), i..

piece. The performer must not be daunted by this, however, as the process of trying out many different fingers and bowings is the beginning of the dialogue with the composer. The violinist certainly has to be creative with fingering choices, and may have to try several different options to find what works best for the left hand. Some bowings may need to be altered to accommodate the needs of the violinist. Harbison does not mind bowing alterations, as long as the musical gesture is successful:

There are a lot of ways that players have accommodated [bowing] issues. One expects that. There are composers in the past for whom paying attention to the bowings is very important. There are composers for whom slurs are not necessarily bowings. Beethoven does that a lot. You really have to work with that and try to figure out what it's conveying to you. But in a very fancily prepared manuscript like the Bach solo sonatas where there's a lot of information (in the violin pieces, not so much the cello) you have to...at least try everything, to see what [Bach] has offered.³⁹

Violinists should try out the bowings indicated by the articulations in the score to try to capture the sound of the musical gesture, but make changes where needed to ensure their comfort in performance. At times, the music may seem to resist the violinist's best intentions, but perseverance in the practice room results in a deeply rewarding musical experience.

Song 1

The first song, though technically not the most challenging of the set, has a major difficulty: interpreting the harmonies. As discussed in the analytical description of the movement, step motion has importance in the shapes of the phrases, and the performer uses these instances to help direct the overall shape of

³⁹ John Harbison, interview by author, Boston, MA, March 17, 2012.

the line. The harmony must not be neglected, however; simply paying attention to the general shape of the line may cause the violinist to play the harmonically supportive notes too quickly or with too much release. Learning about the underlying harmony will strengthen and enrich the performance.

Interpreting the harmonies of the first song is particularly challenging. Chordal outlines are clearly present, but the chords are not presented in a traditional progression, nor are they intended to function as they would in tonal music. The composer emphasizes that note groupings that can be formed into chords should be recognized as such. He says, “If you’re suddenly seeing a D-flat seventh chord, it’s there. It’s being willfully moved into functions where it wouldn’t have appeared in the tonal period but it’s still there as a recognizable entity. And deliberate.”⁴⁰ The chords do not necessarily need to be fully realized for the harmonic intent to be present. Harbison says that the chords “are functioning the way the chords do in...Baroque music, where the outline of the chord doesn’t [necessarily] mean that, if you were playing continuo, that you want the whole chord, but it would certainly mean that the reference momentarily is very intended.”⁴¹ Two highly recommended strategies for the violinist to work out the harmonies are practicing the song very slowly and blocking out chords at the piano.

In the interview with the author, Harbison sat at the piano and played the opening section of the piece (measures 1-12) by blocking notes together as chords

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and employing liberal use of the pedal. An approximate transcription of the result is shown in Example 58. (The transcription is approximate because Harbison did not adhere to a strict time signature, tempo, or rhythm as he played; this is meant to serve only as a recreation of his pitch groupings.)



Example 58, Song 1, measures 1-12, Chord reduction as played by the composer

One can see in this example a broad selection of chords that are really quite traditional, presented in an unusual order. The harmonies are extremely localized and shift rapidly, but it is important to know where notes can be grouped together as chords so that these rapid harmonic shifts can be played with good intonation and a well-planned expressive intent. Any violinists preparing the piece are themselves encouraged to explore the harmonies on the piano.

Bringing out the notes that offer harmonic support is an important aspect of performing this song. It is easy to overlook them in favor of the notes that comprise the melodies or that outline the overall direction of the line, but to do so minimizes the lyrical beauty of the movement. The composer advises:

[I]n the compound lines, when things are divided and there's an upper melody and under notes, both in terms of the timing and in terms of where your concentration is, to be more with the under voice, with your ears and your concentration, and feel you have plenty of time. For what seems to be seen as just harmonic support, sometimes is a change.⁴²

The violinist should take time to bring out the harmonies, never hurrying and maintaining good bow contact with the string.

Intonation is also influenced by recognition of the background harmony. Knowing the chords and understanding the harmonic events will allow the violinist to develop a keen sense of exactly where to place pitches inside local harmonies. Says Harbison, "The tunings are not so objectively placed anyway...they're all harmonically influenced, so that, when there's kind of a chord expressed locally, whenever I feel like [the] ear's hearing it, it has a totality; everything's right on."⁴³

After taking the time to work out the harmonies, Harbison advises that the violinist should take care to really hear them while playing. The quick and unusual harmonic shifts can make that difficult, however. Harbison acknowledges the difficulty of identifying which notes belong in which harmonic contexts, saying:

[T]he problem of course in the way this whole language is working is that those little [harmonic] contexts are pretty short-lived. And [the] ear is sort of focusing in a different way...The question is, in terms of the way these melodies unfold...how is your ear tracking [them] in terms of little [harmonic] groups? Are you hearing the harmony or are you only hearing the quick moving line?⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

To help incorporate this kind of listening into the interpretation of the song, Harbison suggests very slow practice, a tip supplied to him by violinists who have learned the piece for performances and recordings. Harbison says, “I’ve certainly heard from very experienced players that slowing everything down so that the ear is accepting every detail is the biggest sort of performance hurdle. Joe Silverstein...said that was the key for him to learn this piece. To wait until his ear was taking in the content of the harmony.”⁴⁵

In all of the weaving and wandering sixteenth notes, the violinist may have a difficult time determining the directions of the lines and phrases. As discussed in the analytical description, a great deal of scalar motion is embedded in the lines. In a place such as measures 9-13, if the violinist has determined the underlying rhythmic motion of the chromatic scale and how the sequence functions, he or she may easily make a choice about how to direct the phrase. The violinist may try playing just the embedded chromatic scale, following the rhythm of the scale and excluding the other notes, as shown in Example 59.



Example 59, measures 9-13, chromatic scale only

A consistent, lopsided rhythmic pattern becomes clear throughout the bars that contain the sequence (measures 9-12). Where the sequence breaks off, the descent of pitches accelerates, occurring regularly on the eighth notes until the arrival on C. Playing through this scale (without the other notes) with the printed dynamics

⁴⁵ Ibid.

may help to give the violinist a clearer picture of how to execute the line effectively and to achieve the desired expressive quality. It is useful to examine other parts of the movement with these embedded scales in the same way. After doing this, however, the violinist must take care not to gloss over the harmonically-supportive notes; if the underlying notes begin to sound like they lose importance, a slower, heavier bow will help to bring them out.

Song 2

The difficulties in the second song have to do with character and articulation. The movement's signature pair of melodies (the folksong-like melody and the athletic idea) contrast each other in content and character, and the larger sections with the motivic sixteenth notes are easy to overplay. The overall character of the piece is "light and thoughtful"⁴⁶ and so the *legato* playing must not be too maudlin and the *détaché* sixteenth notes must not be too aggressively virtuosic.

The folksong-like melody should be played just that way: like a folk song. The violinist must take care to observe the marking *semplice* indicated at the beginning. Harbison notes that the *semplice* "means not only the basic sound but means the style and it should not sound too...violinistic...Sound more like a folk player. I think that sets up the character of the piece very clearly, if you can find a way to almost be...predictable in the phrasing."⁴⁷ Playing in first position and using open strings is an easy way to begin *semplice* in sound. To achieve a

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

simpler style, the violinist should not play too slowly and should not play with too much connection.

As the athletic idea begins it is marked *legato*, and the violinist should play those notes with ease. The accents in measure 4 (and throughout) may be struck firmly, as they also provide a nice contrast of articulation and often highlight the half-step tonal arrangement of the two main melodic ideas of the movement.

The new figure in measure 14 begins a section that the composer describes as “melismatic.”⁴⁸ Though the notes are generally *détaché*, the performer must keep in mind that these are songs and should generally seek to bring out the vocal qualities of the running sixteenths with smooth bow changes and a consistent sound quality. The sounding point of the bow should be somewhat neutral in these passages, not venturing up to the bridge except when achieving the loudest dynamics. Where the bowing may become a bit more proactive is where the violinist must play the triadic head motive of the section. Though only marked *mezzo forte*, the motive is often presented with an accent, and nearly always with dots. The accented note should begin from the string, then the separation implied by the dots may be accomplished by releasing the bow stroke of the string ever so slightly, achieving a light brush stroke. Though dots in violin music only imply separation and not necessarily an off-the-string bow stroke, a little bit of lift here will provide a subtle contrast that highlights the motive.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Clearly articulating this motive becomes more important (and more difficult) as two or more of the motives appear in *stretto*. In an endeavor to keep a steady tempo, the violinist may gloss over these layered motives, but they must all be brought out. Harbison expresses this point clearly, saying, “The octave’s important to catch with enough traction so that the motive is complete, both forms of the motive. And that means catching the octave very firmly.”⁴⁹ He suggests practicing the layered motives under tempo, saying, “You want to display the motive, and that just means being a little bit more...insistent about giving each octave a chance to come through. And that actually happens again at measure 49...we’re going to hear the motive three times in a row if the octaves all come out.”⁵⁰ As the motives become layered, the violinist must work harder to bring them out. Beginning each octave from the string, using flat bow hair, staying close to the frog, and using enough bow to fill out the duration of the sixteenth note will help clearly display the beginning of each motive.

Harbison suggests that the violinist should also be sure to highlight the zigzag-shaped sixteenths that first appear in measure 15, as they play a role in directing the harmony. At the beginning of this section (measure 14), the D-minor head motive is preceded by a C-sharp. The zigzag sixteenths in measure 15 highlight D/C-sharp in the upper notes, bringing the focus (momentarily) back to C-sharp. Harbison says:

[It] goes back to C-sharp...So again, it’s the juxtaposition of the half step...[T]he new idea is a D center, and then there’s the persistence of the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

C-sharp. And that happens again, reiterated in 16. And then [referring to the injection of the C-sharp ascending sixteenth notes in measure 20] measure 20 is...kind of a compression of the basic set of issues. This little development that's going to take off here sort of springing from that triadic idea is going to also be about this half step.⁵¹

The first two instances appear with both a *tenuto* mark and an accent, indicating that though they are at dynamic low points, they have some importance. As the violinist develops an awareness of the motives and what roles they play in the music, the movement will begin to take a coherent shape.

For almost the entirety of the piece, the dynamics range from *piano* to *mezzo forte*. Only in three places does the music grow louder. Measure 25, which contains the first statement of the athletic idea in which altered pitches appear, has the first *forte* dynamic. Another *forte* appears in measure 43, but this one is brief and immediately followed by a *diminuendo*. A *fortissimo* arrival in measure 50 is the loudest point of the piece, and according to the composer, "There's only really one place that needs to be loud...the one *fortissimo* there in 50. It needs to be forceful enough so that it can feel like that long kind of melismatic passage arrives there."⁵² The violinist should consider how strong the *fortissimo* arrival will be, and should adjust the *forte* dynamics accordingly.

Song 3

The third song is the deepest and most abstract of the set. There are some exceptionally difficult passages in this movement. The music in the opening bars is comprised of broad, *legato* gestures that involve many string crossings. At the

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

indicated tempo the gestures can be accomplished in the long bowings suggested by the slurs, but the violinist may need to make slight alterations in this passage to accommodate the bow arm. No matter the decision made by the violinist in terms of bowing accommodations, they must not affect the rhythm or the duration of the longer notes.

As in the first movement, this song is harmonically dense. It is very easy to turn the ear toward the top of the lines and consider the underlying note details as supporting, but the violinist must consider that the harmonies are the very foundation of the music. Harbison says:

[W]ith solo violin music...when you're supporting the whole harmonic edifice yourself—string players, probably cello players and bass[ists] are a little different, but violinists and violists are not used to...supplying their bass notes in the same way they are. We gear ourselves toward the top note, and we hang our line that way. And we make our continuities there. And constantly when playing solo music we need to put ourselves as the bass player, putting our ear down to whatever's happening on the bottom. I think it's a really key thing. And then you really begin to structure all the harmonies that way. And I think it goes in the Biber sonatas, and the Bach sonatas, that playing off the bass line is such a big deal and it changes the pace of the music.⁵³

Turning the ear toward the bass allows the violinist to explore the movement more objectively, without placing all of the emphasis on the melodic content, and once again Harbison advises, “to keep going back and doing everything very slowly so that no detail ever becomes part of the fabric.”⁵⁴

It is vital in this movement for the violinist to comprehend how various things are related throughout the song, where small changes occur, and why these

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

small changes are important. The observant violinist will discover that, even in the densest and most developed textures, the music adheres to consistent melodic shapes. The material from measure 2 appears several times throughout the song, and its variations have a strong allegiance to the original. The sextuplet version in measure 34 begins and ends with the notes that outline the diminished chord. The *pesante* double-stop versions in measure 38-39 follow the shape of the gesture in the top notes while the bottom notes harmonize. When these variations occur, or when a new idea is injected into the music, if the player understands that this series of events is related, not random, the piece will develop an underlying coherence. This general coherence will then allow the violinist to highlight the small changes that happen throughout, which Harbison describes as sounding like “a big long improvised thing. You know when you go with the new idea it’s like the same character but a very different detail.”⁵⁵

Out of the four, this movement contains some of the most difficult places for the left hand, which is asked to navigate some particularly tricky double stops. The previously mentioned *pesante* bars begin a long stretch of music in which it seems the left hand is required to twist, turn, expand, and contract itself in order to accomplish the required tasks. The violinist must make a conscious effort to keep the fingers from pressing too hard. This is counter-intuitive in a place like the *pesante* measures and the ensuing *fortissimo* bars, where it seems everything is heavy, loud, and downward in motion. The left hand naturally wants to tighten and grab in music like this, so an awareness of the wrist, knuckles, and base joint

⁵⁵ Ibid.

of the thumb, as well as an effort to keep the fingers as light as possible, will help the performer successfully navigate this difficult passage. All shifts should be released, allowing the fingers to maintain the lightest contact with the strings as they make increasingly large leaps. To practice this, the violinist may try playing the passage very much out of time, releasing the stopped notes quickly, releasing the fingers to harmonic pressure, and then shifting very slowly and smoothly. This will train the left hand, even in a slow tempo, to release the stopped notes right after they sound, thus preparing it for the inevitable faster tempo.

Song 4

“This is the one that all the players complain about. It’s too hard,” muses Harbison.⁵⁶ And indeed, it is difficult, right from the start. As previously discussed, the slow emblem in the first five bars pairs a top voice that moves in steps with a bottom voice that outlines a triad. In addition, the pitches of the top voice occur in a kind of G-flat group while the bottom voice outlines a G-major triad. An effective way to work out the intonation here is to have the left hand play both lines but angle the bow so that just the bottom notes sound. The violinist should then repeat this process, but angling the bow to play just the top notes. This will allow the ear to hear each line as its own tonality and will allow the left hand to learn the placement of the fingers in relation to each other in these separate tonalities.

As the dance begins, it is advisable for the duple eighth notes of the accompaniment to be a little bit expansive, slightly out of the regular time of the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

movement. This should not be so exaggerated as to sound like an affectation; it should be just enough to provide a slightly jarring interruption, almost as if a second violinist jumps in to play for the duple eighth notes. The dance melody is lilting and legato, and to bring out the accents of the accompaniment, the violinist should employ a marked bow stroke. Even near the end, in measure 123, the accompaniment should maintain its character. About these measures Harbison says, “One of the things in performances that’s important to convey somehow is that at the end of the piece when the accompanying voice has gone very high, in those harmonics, it should still be pretty spiky. Not too much influence by the other character. It should still have a kind of sharpness.”⁵⁷ As the interruptions persist, and the accelerations start, Harbison cautions the violinist to “try not to accelerate too soon. A little bit more gradually is going to be more effective.”⁵⁸ The violinist should remember that the *accelerando* begins in the tempo that was already occurring, and should not immediately go faster.

The fast, virtuosic sections are born out of the accompanimental figure, and Harbison wanted to “weave into the...passage the sense of its kind of constant allegiance to that motive. The lower voice...The agitated voice is the one that’s continuing on.”⁵⁹ If the high energy of the motive spawns a constant forward motion as the violinist arrives at the *Pressando* section (measure 24), the composer approves, saying, “There will probably naturally be a slight gain in tempo in that section. I think it’s a natural thing but I think it’s important to

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

encourage it...[T]hat means in the course of the section it can push a little bit.”⁶⁰ When this section develops into a *Furioso* in measure 85, the composer says, “The *Furioso* should sound like whatever that force was from that little voice [the accompaniment eighth notes] is a whole thing now.”⁶¹ This section is the complete realization of the obstinate figure, and the violinist should play with abandon. The violinist should take care, however, not to become too inspired by the *Furioso* indication and end up with a tight bow arm that presses the sound out of the instrument. Keeping the fast eighth notes as much as possible in the lower half of the bow will allow for an energetic articulation, and playing in the naturally heavier part of the bow while employing some arm weight will create the strong sound necessary. The violinist should remember here that the dynamic is only *forte*; the *fortissimo* does not occur until measure 102.

There are a few bowing suggestions that may assist the violinist learning this movement. The accompaniment figure (the obstinate duple eighth notes) is initially presented with a slur marking. This slur marking could cause the violinist to soften the “spiky” articulation the composer suggests, so playing these duple eighths on separate bows is an option to help them attain a consistently energetic articulation. If the violinist decides to play the duple notes on one bow, a healthy amount of bow speed must be employed at the beginning of each note to bring out the accents. Either bowing is successful as long as the duple eighth notes sound as one gesture. In the *Pressando* section, it will cause a certain level of consistency

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

to arrange the bows so that the half-note landings always occur on the same bow direction. Finally, in measures 106-107, Harbison writes the rising arpeggios without the slurs that occur on all the previous incarnations. If the violinist decides to separate the bows, the added articulations will increase the intensity as the music reaches its peak. In a section that is already marked *fortissimo* and *Furioso*, this added intensity might effectively usher in the climax of the section in measure 108. If the violinist continues to employ slurs in these arpeggios, well thought-out bow distribution will achieve the same goal. The violinist should start this pair of arpeggios with a slower, heavier bow and increase speed throughout the arpeggio. This will provide a solid, well-paced anchor for each arpeggio, and the increased bow speed will create a naturally forward-sounding direction.

The last section of the movement, though almost entirely written in very soft dynamics, has some of the most difficult double-stop work in the piece. The violinist could again employ the strategy of fingering both lines with the left hand while focusing the bow toward one or the other. Very important here is for the violinist to keep the left hand, arm, and shoulder as relaxed as possible. The mix of intervals on this page (thirds, sixths, sevenths, and tenths) can be very taxing, especially as the register ascends. The bow arm should also remain calm here, not hurrying through the chords. If the bow hurries, it may cause the left hand to hurry. Instead, the bow should follow the left hand, allowing it to set itself into its chords and double stops before beginning motion on these notes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The repertoire for solo violin extends back centuries, and violinists are fortunate to have a sizable repertoire from which to choose. The medium allows the violinist to perform simply and unapologetically as an individual. Even in the pieces that are the cornerstones of the solo repertoire, Bach's Sonatas and Partitas, performers all make individual interpretive choices. Because of this individuality, no two violinists play the same solo piece alike; hearing a dozen different violinists playing a piece such as Bach's Chaconne, a listener hears a dozen interpretations, some dramatically different from others. Contemporary audiences may not yet have the level of familiarity with pieces like *Four Songs of Solitude* as they do with the Chaconne, but as twentieth- and twenty-first-century solo violin repertoire gains prominence, the solo music of composers such as John Harbison will increasingly be heard in concert.

Four Songs of Solitude is a major piece by a prominent twentieth-century composer, and yet its inherent technical and musical difficulties provide barriers for many violinists who might be interested in performing it. Violinists may hear this piece, develop a desire to play it, and then (due to the technical difficulties combined with the lack of an edited part) encounter puzzling challenges in the preparation process. The analytic description provided in this document sheds light on how the piece is constructed in form and musical content. The practice suggestions and comments by the composer help violinists to prepare and interpret the piece. It is the author's hope that the combination of these elements

increases the accessibility of *Four Songs of Solitude* to violinists seeking to bring its beauty to the concert stage.

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APPENDIX A

SELECTED LIST OF WORKS FOR VIOLIN BY JOHN HARBISON

Piano Trio (violin, cello, and piano, 1969)

Concerto for Violin (violin and orchestra, 1980)

Piano Quintet (string quartet and piano, 1981)

Four Songs of Solitude (violin, 1985)

String Quartet No. 1 (1985)

String Quartet No. 2 (1987)

Fantasy Duo (violin and piano, 1988)

November 19, 1828 (violin, viola, cello, and piano, 1988)

Fanfares and Reflection (two violins, 1990)

The Rewaking (string quartet, 1991)

Variations in First Position (string quartet, 1992)

String Quartet No. 3 (1993)

Thanks, Victor (string quartet, 1994)

Trio Sonata (violin, viola, and cello, 1994)

String Quartet No. 4 (2002)

Trio II (violin, cello, and piano, 2003)

Crane Sightings (violin and strings, 2004)

Double Concerto (violin, cello, and orchestra 2009)

Finale, Presto (string quartet, 2011)

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano (2011)

String Quartet No. 5 (2011)

APPENDIX B
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