

PIECE BY PIECE

BENJAMIN MUIR



August 2022

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for Violin, Bb Clarinet, Cello, & Piano

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Piano Score

Duration

cc. 7:30”

Instrumentation

Violin
Bb Clarinet
Cello
Piano

About the work

At the midpoint of Sylvia Plath’s novel, *The Bell Jar*, protagonist Esther Greenwood stands on the roof of a hotel in her bathrobe and throws her clothing into the night air. It’s profoundly dark, beautiful, and unexpected—a subterranean, semiconscious urge to let go of oneself inexplicably made physical.

In the early stages of this piece’s composition, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the constitutional right to an abortion established in *Roe v. Wade*. It seemed fitting that I was reading a novel considered to be a feminist classic and a woman’s rite of passage. To me, living in America now feels like that scene in *The Bell Jar*. Like a chasm is growing under us, opening into somber depths, while things anxiously creep toward a resolution that is always just out of view.

In this country, in this time, writing and playing music can feel almost

meaningless. Why even try and make sense of anything, when everything makes no sense? I know those thoughts are counterproductive, that creativity is more important now than ever. But it still feels like the classical world is becoming increasingly irrelevant and obsolete as time ticks forward.

Piece by Piece, then, draws a connection between this social and musical anxiety. The phrases dissolve into whizzing particles, reform into a familiar melody, and dissolve again. Rhythms and harmonies are unsteady and lopsided until they suddenly become regular. The piece ends suddenly, implying a continuation or resolution “out of frame.” But it’s not without sympathy—in fact, the most essential aspects of the music remain its beauty, expression, and lyricism.

Performance instructions

Glissandos (*gliss.*) take the entire value of the starting note, while portamentos (*port.*) indicate faster, more expressive slides that retain the written note values.

“Poco” is always used to mark crescendos/diminuendos less than a single dynamic level.

Performance instructions (continued)

s.p. = sul ponticello

s.t. = sul tasto

 = let ring (l.v.)

 = snap pizz.

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Musical score for "Anxious, manic" (Tempo: ♩ = 100). The score is for Clarinet in B $\flat$, Violin, Cello, and Piano.

Clarinet in B $\flat$: Starts with *mp*, *p sub.*, *espress.*, and ends with *mp*.

Violin: Starts with *p*, includes the instruction "jeté, let bow bounce", *sfz*, *pizz.*, and *arco*.

Cello: Starts with *mp* and ends with *mp*.

Piano: Starts with *mp* and includes the instruction "Pedal freely".

The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings (*mp*, *p*, *f*, *sfz*).

18 B $\text{♩} = 126$

f *ff* *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

B $\text{♩} = 126$

mf *ff*

molto rit. A tempo ($\text{♩} = 126$) molto rit.

22 *tr* *mp* *mp* *p* *f* *ff*

port. *mp* *p* *f* *ff*

pizz. *ff* *arco* *f* *ff*

molto rit. A tempo ($\text{♩} = 126$) molto rit.

mp *f* *ff*

3

27 C Tempo I ($\text{♩} = 100$)

mp *mp* *pp* *poco* *pp* *sub.* *mp*

gliss. *pp* *mp* *poco* *p* *sub.*

mp *f* *p*

C Tempo I ($\text{♩} = 100$)

mp *mf* *mp*

3

[illegible]

54

Andante sostenuto

poco rit.

f *p sub.* *f* *f*

f *p* *f* *f*

arco s.p. ord. (arco) *f*

pp *mp* *p* *f*

rubato *p* *pp*

f

8vb

poco rit.

(u.c.)

59

G

ff

gliss.

ff

mp

mp

ff sempre

poco accel.

G

ff

f

poco accel.

(8)

69

H

Emerging from cello resonance

mf *ff* *pp* *poco*

s.p.

pp

f *pizz.* *arco* Heavy, resolute *ff*

mp *mf* *3* *mp* *mf* *espress.* *mp* *mf* *sempre legato* *3*

(8)

75

pp

ord.

sempre pp

ff

ff

ff

pizz.

p

mf

p

mp

80 **I**

pp sempre *mp*

f *arco* *fp* *f*

I

f *mp*

84

mf *ffz* *f* *(arco)* *ff* *mp*

mp *8va* *ffz* *f* *mp*

3

88

mf *poco* *ff* *pp*

ffz *f* *pizz.* *p* *p* *p* *p*

f *ffz* *f*

3 *f* *ff* *mp* *espress.* *pp*

8va

93

espress.

mf *mp* *espress.*

arco *mp* *espress.* *port.* *poco*

8va

mp *espress.* *mf* *p*

99

f *p*

port. *s.p.* *f* *molto vib.* *mp* *f* *p*

mf *mp* *ord.* *p* *poco*

3 *mf* *p* *3* *mp* *p* *pp* *mf* *p*

105

rubato

s.t. *ord.* *p* *3* *ord.* *mf* *p*

s.p. port. *mp* *f* *molto vib.* *p* *ord.* *mf* *p*

mp *poco* *mp*

8vb

129 **M** ♩ = 126 - Suddenly faster, like a memory

Musical score for measures 129-132. The score is in 3/4 time. Measures 129 and 130 are whole rests for all staves. In measure 131, the violin part begins with a half note G4, marked *f* and *espress.*, with the instruction "arco Solo" above it. The piano part begins in measure 131 with a half note G4, marked *mf*. In measure 132, the piano part continues with a half note A4, marked *mf*. The tempo marking "♩ = 126 - Suddenly faster, like a memory" is placed above the piano part in measure 132. A box containing the letter "M" is placed above the piano part in measure 132.

Musical score for measures 133-136. The score is in 3/4 time. In measure 133, the violin part has a half note G4, marked *mf*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note G4, marked *mf*. In measure 134, the violin part has a half note A4, marked *mf*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note A4, marked *mf*. In measure 135, the violin part has a half note B4, marked *mf*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note B4, marked *mf*. In measure 136, the violin part has a half note C5, marked *f*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note C5, marked *f*. The tempo marking "♩ = 126 - Suddenly faster, like a memory" is placed above the piano part in measure 136. A box containing the letter "M" is placed above the piano part in measure 136.

Musical score for measures 137-140. The score is in 3/4 time. In measure 137, the violin part has a half note G4, marked *mf*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note G4, marked *mf*. In measure 138, the violin part has a half note A4, marked *mf*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note A4, marked *mf*. In measure 139, the violin part has a half note B4, marked *mf*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note B4, marked *mf*. In measure 140, the violin part has a half note C5, marked *f*, with a trill ornament. The piano part has a half note C5, marked *f*. The tempo marking "♩ = 126 - Suddenly faster, like a memory" is placed above the piano part in measure 140. A box containing the letter "M" is placed above the piano part in measure 140.

141

141

142

143

144

145

145

146

147

148

149

149

150

151

152

175

mp

mf *mp* *mf* *mp* *poco*

mf *mp* *mf* *mp* *poco*

p *mf* *mp*

182

f *poco* *f*

f *ff* *mf* (arco)

mp *f* *mp* *mf* *poco* *f*

(Pedal freely)

186

ff *fp* *ff* *poco* *fp* *jeté* *f*

port. *ff* *p* *f*

mp *p* *mf* *p*

R Solo 5

7

191

Violin I: *f*, *ff*, *pizz.*, *arco*, *pp*

Violin II: *f*, *ff*, *arco*, *gliss.*, *f*

Piano: *f*, *ff*, *p*

Crashing! *8va*

poco

196

Violin I: *mf*, *ff*, *mf sub.*, *poco*, *mp*

Violin II: *mf*, *ff*, *mf sub.*, *poco*, *p*

Piano: *mf*, *ff*, *pizz.*, *mf*

S

8vb

mp, *poco*, *p*

202

Violin I: *ff*, *mf*, *poco*

Violin II: *ff*, *mf*, *poco*

Piano: *ff*, *mf*, *poco*

T molto accel.

poco

arco

T molto accel.

sim.

8vb

206

A Tempo (♩ = 100)

Violin I: *f*, *p*, *sfz*
 Violin II: *f*, *molto*, *sfz*
 Cello/Double Bass: *f*, *molto*, *p*

A Tempo (♩ = 100)

Violin I: *f*, *molto*, *p*
 Violin II: *f*, *molto*, *p*, *8vb*

U

♩ = 126 - Suddenly Faster

A Tempo (♩ = 100)

Violin I: *f*, *molto*, *p*
 Violin II: *f*, *molto*, *arco*, *ff*, *Interjecting again*, *f*
 Cello/Double Bass: *f*, *molto*, *p*, *ff sub.*

U

♩ = 126 - Suddenly Faster

A Tempo (♩ = 100)

Violin I: *mp*, *f*, *p*, *poco*
 Violin II: *f*, *molto*, *p*

216

V

Violin I: *mf*, *p*, *mp*, *port.*
 Violin II: *p*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *espress.*
 Cello/Double Bass: *f*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*

V

Violin I: *sfz*, *mf*, *p*, triplet *mf*
 Violin II: *p*, *mf*, *8vb*

223 W poco rit.

ff fp pp port. gliss. s.p. ord.

W poco rit.

Solo

una corda

230 X

pp pp s.t. port. pp pp

X

pp mp p espress. poco

8vb

236

pp pp s.t. s.t. sempre pp pp

p p

8vb