

ROGER REYNOLDS

FLiGHT

for String Quartet

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EDITION PETERS

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FLIGHT

While this work is an entirely self-contained and self-sufficient composition for string quartet, it has an alternative life as a component of an evening-long intermedia composition of the same name. I assembled a text that traces the history of human-kind's aspirations to fly, to lift off from the earth and move freely in the air above ... or out into space, beyond our own planet. The written record on the subject is vast, spanning centuries and cultures, but it seemed to me – as I collected the writings of those engaged by the prospect, and later the achievement of flight – that a panoramic perspective could be presented in four large Sections: IMAGINING, PREPARING, EXPERIENCING, and then the PERSPECTIVE gained, once flight had been achieved. In the intermedia version, four actors (YOUTH, MAN, WOMAN, SAGE) read the text, interacting – although they are not instrumentalists – as a quartet of perspectives engaged in a collaborative exploration of and reflection on a subject of interest. The individual component texts that make up each of the larger Sections normally have a single author and a central subject. The authors cited stretch from Plato, Ovid, and Virgil, ancient China and the Indian Epic, the *Ramayana*, through Benjamin Franklin and Shelly, to the Wright Brothers, D. H. Lawrence, Anne Morrow Lindberg, Le Corbusier, Emilia Earhart, Ralph Ellison, and finally to astronaut Michael Collins.

In the string-quartet-alone version, each movement and the component sub-sections thereof has a character, and in a sense a "narrative implication" in the arc of the whole, so I have given each a characterizing name. Although the musical content of each section has been written, so to speak, "in the presence of" a particular historical text, they are never simply "illustrative". The compiled, overall text, the structure and aspirations of the larger work were in my mind as I composed, but, in the end, the result is a musical experience that stands on its own and can also lend its meanings to the other components of the intermedia version.

IMAGINATION is the longest movement, explorative, traversing a wide variety of energies and musical natures. PREPARING is rapid, agitated and articulate. It begins individualistically, but quickly becoming collaborative. EXPERIENCING features massed textures and strongly directed materials, while the final PERSPECTIVE is, in essence, a set of four solos, each with a distinctive musical character. These roles often speak at the same time, but without more than a minimal awareness of what the other quartet members might be doing. There are occasional moments of correlation, but by-and-large, the arc of the work has arrived a state where the distinctive intentions of each musician replace the earlier collaborative unity.

FLIGHT was commissioned by the JACK Quartet, and was premiered by them at the Park Avenue Armory in New York on the 30 and 31 October 2016.

NOTATION:

PERFORMANCE MODES:


NV - without normal vibrato; *straight* and uninflected


ORD. - normal playing; modest vibrato


ESP. - very intense vibrato; expressive urgency

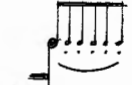
sul pont (S.P.) - placing the bow very close to the bridge in order to produce an edgy sound with fluctuating content, focused on the higher components of a given sonority

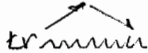
SPAZZAROLE - While the left hand continues to register the positions called for by the specified pitches and rhythms of the music, the right hand "scrubs" the tip of the bow, as rapidly as possible, back and forth over the engaged strings, in a frenetic "windshield-wiper" mode. The result is an unpredictable "sparkling" sound.
[II, p. 18, m 155, vl I]

 - A rasping sound produced by an over-pressure of bow on string(s). Every effort should be made to produce a *controlled* noise that minimizes intermittency. [I, p.8, m 55 vc; p. 27, m. 249, tutti]


 - rapid, unmeasured tremolo


 - an extremely irregular, unpredictable tremolo; constant and marked differences in duration (both sounds and silences), timbre (bow placement), dynamic, and pitch (microtonal adjustments). The result is a compressed (*agitato!*) cadenza [III, p. 27, m 263]

 - *jeté* effect; a rapid succession of bouncing articulations, all produced by a single gesture. [II, p. 19, m 167]

 - a trill with varying rapidity indicated by rising arrow (*accel.*) or slowing arrow (*ritard.*) [I, p. 14, m 118, tutti] [I, p. 14, m 118]

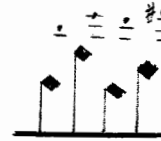
GRACE NOTES:

 - grace notes are either filled (brief) or open (lingered over) and appear in relation to points in time established by measured rhythmic values. Sometimes a grace group immediately precedes a point in measured time. If there is a slash across the beam, the group is as fast as possible while remaining articulate.

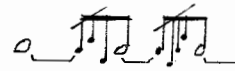
 - Sometimes they immediately follow such a measured moment in time.



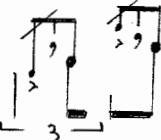
- Sometimes there is a succession of grace notes without a slash across their beam. Here, they are placed in time roughly as they are in space. [II, p. 21, m 183-4, vl I]



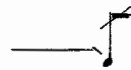
- Evenly spaced grace events without a slash are performed at a pace that allows optimal clarity [I, p. 8, m. 61-2, vl I]



- at times, during an extended time, a sustained pitch is inflected, freely, by indicated grace groupings. [II, p. 22, m 186, vla; II, p. 24, m 212, vl I, vc]



- When (usually) a single grace note precedes a measure value, but there is an intervening comma, the performer should perform the graced event as though it were going immediately on to the measured value, but insert a uniform pause in the manner of a brief, rapid, inhalation, a "catching of the breath" before arriving. [II, p. 25, m 216, vl II, vla]

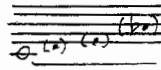


- a filed, single grace with a slash ending a tie, indicates a sudden, accurately placed cessation; no re-articulation or accent. [I, p. 1, m 2]

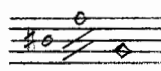


- and open grace occurring before a measured value indicates a freely placed anticipation of the measured value that follows.

tr



- traditional trill, with indicated auxiliaries in parentheses. [I, p. 14, m 121, 123, vc]



- a cross-string tremolo, quasi-trill [I, p. 8, m. 66, vl II, vla, vc]

TIME:

⋄ - a brief, breath-like, pause

⋄ - an extended pause

⋄ - a very extended pause



- A pause during which tempo ceases. Hold for as long as possible while remaining "on-going" [I, p. 4, m 27, tutti]



- Such brackets set off a passage as being unlike its surroundings: as though a sudden substitution of contrasting material that replaces the nature of what would otherwise have occurred. [I, p. 3, m 20, vl I; p. 6, m 41-2, vl I]

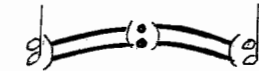
GLISSANDI:



- All glissandi consume the full extent of their indicated duration. Avoid the feel of a portmanteau.



- Normally, a glissando has a linear change of pitch over time, but occasionally there is a gesturally-dynamic indication. [IV, p. 36, before D, vla]



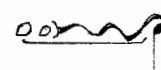
- some suggest a "vocal keening" [I, p. 4, m 28-9, vla, vc]



- at some points, the glissando (either an harmonic succession, or stopped pitch shifts, occur with break points shown as exact pitches. [II, p. 22, m 190, vl II-II, vla]



And at other times, these gestural break points are freely determined. [I, p. 11, m 81-2, tutti]



- at times, there is a sustained pitch while a second, closely placed pitch on a neighboring string wavers in an expressive way, in and out of unison.



- this indication specifies a period of time within which freely placed embellishing figures indicated can be repeated as desired. [I, p. 13-4, m 104-9]

SPECIAL SOUNDS:



- 4-part, tutti chords, beginning and ending suddenly, always maximum intensity, unchanging dynamic throughout, as though a "slice" of an ongoing monolith had been extracted. Single bows, approximately 4-second duration. [beginning II, p. 22, m189 and ending III, p. 27, m 244]

SENZA TEMPO passages usually have a designated duration (e.g., 38", 23.5" seconds.

- ST I, p. 4, m 27, 38": Each part has a cross-string trichord. The task here is to grow from irregular, lazy, but clearly sounding successions (forward and back over the same 3-string tri-chord), gradually becoming a very rapid, 3-string tremolo (a quasi-triple-stop), and then gradually returning to the original leisurely paced, recursive sequences. [This texture returns at I, p. 8, m 65-7.]

- ST I, p. 14, m 118, 23.5": An underlying harmonic structure of 10 pitches is scanned by the quartet members, using single-string or double-stop events. The otherwise placid and only slightly swelling sonority, is marked successively by variable speed trills passing from vla -> vl II -> vc -> vl I]

- *ST III*, p. 27, m 244 >60": This constant interplay of very intense, single-string and double-stop events, should produce a virtual "wall of sound" with shifting spectral character, but unrelenting, implacable intensity.

- *ST III*, p. 27, m 249: The very gradually refocusing harmonic identity should move at the same time towards a maximal noisy state, first through a *molto sul ponticello*, then with increasing bow pressure, to a noisy roar that is continuous (Avoid intermittency!).

- *ST III*, p. 29, m 263, 23.5": A *ff*, 4-part sonority gradually loses force and drops towards a lower resolution at the same time. After reaching its terminal harmonic stability, the individual pitches continue sounding with urgent, but constrained variability, a total state of irregularity where each micro-event is different from its predecessor, remaining always *pp*.

PERSPECTIVE

The task in this movement is for each member of the quartet to achieve a "split mind", where the majority of one's attention is focused on achieving the most personal and expressively communicative presentation of his/her line. A modicum of awareness remains for the progress of any simultaneously occurring lines in when a desire for synchrony/alignment has been indicated.

For example, just after "A", the *vla* line has just entered, coming in on its own volition in relation to its perception of the *violin II.*, but now, with the *viola* in the picture, *vl II* may need to slightly modify the presentation of its line until the 3rd beat of the *vla*'s second 3/4 bar so that there might be a break just before these two instruments begin their simultaneous, but not coordinated, 1/32-note runs.

Similarly, on *IV*, p. 35, after "B", the *vla* and *vc* need to be somewhat aware of what *vl II* is doing so as to reach the last beat of their common 4/4 bar (though not precisely aligned) just after *vl II*'s 1/32-note passage-work is completed.

In short, the quartet members need to work out protocols in order to maximize both the sense of independent lines occurring simultaneously, *and* optimizing the probability of the indicated alignments.

FLIGHT

Dedicated to JACK Quartet

Commissioned by JACK Quartet with The National Gallery of Art

R. REYNOLDS

I. $\text{♩} \approx \text{ca. } 60$ IMAGINING

[WINGS]

NV

STOP BOW
ON STRING

ESPRESSO

mp

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the second in treble clef, the third in bass clef, and the fourth in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The music is marked with dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, and *mp*. Performance instructions include *Poco*, *Poco*, and *ESPRESSO*. There are also circled plus signs above the staves, likely indicating bowing techniques.

7.

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the second in treble clef, the third in bass clef, and the fourth in bass clef. The music is marked with dynamics such as *pp*, *p*, and *mp*. Performance instructions include *MENO MOSSO*, *RITARD.*, and *ADD SECOND PITCH GRACEFULLY*. There are also circled plus signs above the staves. The system concludes with a double bar line.