I am drawn to the quiet places, the empty mysterious places, where it seems civilization—with bindle in hand—jumped a boxcar to somewhere else. My work, String Quintet No.1, seeks to portray three places as they journey their final steps of the life cycle, from decay, to death, and finally renewal. The first movement depicts Ravenswood, West Virginia a small river town in decline. This opening movement is composed from an overtone chord that is slowly deconstructed, until only the root of the chord remains. The second movement is inspired by Fort Lonesome, which sits at a crossroad of barren fields in South Central Florida. The music is a desiccated husk of sounds, raspy and rust caked, floating through time. Holey Land is a small facet of the Florida Everglades once used by the military as a bombing range. Built on expansive harmonies, the music portrays the limitless horizon and sprawling beauty of nature as it has reclaimed the landscape.

The main focus of this thesis is the composition. The supporting narrative and documentation is intended to further illustrate my compositional narrative. Cartography is supplied to demonstrate geographic seclusion, as well as location in relation to populated areas. A photo journal of each location is included, to add visual representation of the sound world created by the composition. Demographic and historical archival information corroborate my findings. Lastly, I include a sound recording from the premiere of the work.
STRING QUINTET NO.1 GHOST TOWN PORTRAITS

by

Steven Jon Landis, Jr.

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

Greensboro
2013

Approved by

Committee Chair
To Amy with love and thanks.
This thesis written by Steven Jon Landis, Jr. has been approved by
the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of
North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Committee Members

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My String Quintet No.1 for two violins, viola, violoncello, and double bass was composed during the fall of 2012. The composition chronicles my journeys to and experiences at Ravenswood, Fort Lonesome, and Holey Land. Ravenswood is located in West Virginia and Fort Lonesome and Holey Land are both in South Central Florida. The composition is intended as a sound journal, documenting each place as it takes the final steps of its life cycle. Each chapter of this thesis details a movement of the work. Historical information, along with a description of the music and its narrative connection to the place, is included in each chapter. Finally, I have included a photographic journal taken while exploring each destination.
CHAPTER II

RAVENSWOOD

Ravenswood, West Virginia is situated on the east bank of the Ohio River bordering Ohio and is one hour north of Charleston (see Figure 1). The small river town was originally founded in the early 1800s on land once belonging to George Washington.\(^1\) Throughout its history, Ravenswood has remained a small community and has enjoyed economic stability with its participation in the aluminum industry during the second half of the twentieth century. Since the 1990s, that stability has faltered. Due to a combination of union disputes and a closing of one of two aluminum plants, the population of Ravenswood has been in a steady decline.\(^2\) With fading economic prospects, the population has decreased from 4,189 residents in 1990 to 3,876 according to U.S. Census data.\(^3\) Largely what remains of the town today is huddled around U.S. Route 33 that spans the river toward Ohio.

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The opening movement of my quintet seeks to capture the perceived atmosphere of the town, albeit from an outsider’s perspective, as it actively dies.

Figure 1. The red arrow indicates Ravenswood, West Virginia.⁴

This dying process is portrayed musically through the reduction of sonic material as the movement progresses. The movement is built from a sustained chord using the first twenty partials of the overtone series. As the movement slowly unfolds, the chord tones that are densely layered at the outset of the movement are slowly stripped away leaving only the root of the chord (Figure 2). Through a long decay of volume the fundamental chord tone itself fades as it is further distorted. This further distortion is created via the transfer of motion and placement of the bow of the sounding instruments from the string being bowed to the bridge. The technique of bowing near the bridge is termed *sul ponticello* and will be discussed further in Chapter Three. The movement ends with the use of the extreme technique of a solo double bass being bowed directly on the bridge. Bowing the bridge obliterates the focused tone of the fundamental chord tone and creates a noise that randomly exaggerates overtones found in the original pitch. This technique and its end result are also discussed further in conjunction with the second movement during Chapter Three.
Figure 2. Movement I, rehearsal letter C to the end of the movement.
I took the following photographs while exploring Ravenswood on March 10, 2013.

Figure 3. Abandoned building located on Walnut Street in Ravenswood.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{5}All photographs were taken by the author.
Figure 4. Building for lease located downtown at the intersection of Walnut Street and Washington Street.

Figure 5. The bridge crossing the Ohio River in Ravenswood.
CHAPTER III

FORT LONESOME

Fort Lonesome, Florida is located in southern Hillsborough County at the crossroads of State Road 674 and County Road 39S.\textsuperscript{6} As cartography indicates in Figure 7, it is an isolated area of rural Florida approximately thirty-five miles southeast of Tampa. According to a Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report, the facts surrounding the founding of Fort Lonesome are somewhat obscured, with several possible narratives. The story often cited concerns the establishment of a produce inspection site during the late 1920s. The site inspected all produce entering the United States through South Florida attempting to guard against a Mediterranean Fly epidemic. Two of the inspectors at the station hung a sign on the door that read “Fort Lonesome.” In short time a small farming community, two general stores, and a mill had been built in the area. Once again accounts are hazy, but by the late 1930s, the inspection site closed and the mill had burned down. Shortly, all that remained was Haywood’s General Store, until the 1960s, when phosphate mining was introduced to the area. Today, the lone

\textsuperscript{6} Hillsborough County Planning & Growth Management, Excerpt “Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report: Fort Lonesome, Hurrah Creek, and Lewis Branch Creek;” http://www.hillsborough.communityatlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/HILLSBOROUGH_COUNTY_Historic_Resources_Excerpts_Fort%20Lonesome.pdf [accessed December 5, 2012]. The Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey report submitted by the Florida Department of State Bureau of Historic Preservation labels the roads as State Road 39 and State Road 674.
general store and a power substation is all that mark the barren landscape that is marred from clear cutting, phosphate mining, and citrus farming. Portraying this ghost town musically is accomplished through a variety of techniques centered on the concept of decay.

Figure 6. The red arrow indicates location of Fort Lonesome at crossroads.

Within this movement I explore how to decay the fundamental of pitch. With an emphasis on the textural and timbral quality of sound, I also explore the concept of decay through the parameters of melody, harmony, and rhythm. A static temporal sense is

---


created with rhythm in this movement. Pedal tones drone on through a majority of the movement, with only slight variations in volume or texture. This deceptive monotony obscures the sense of time. The sparse melodic fragments that do occur divide in odd ratios across beats, as well as barlines, further blurring the pulse (Figure 7). As in the rest of the work, there is very little use of melody within this movement. Melodies are fractured and sparse, moving in chromatic increments, in many cases smaller than a half step also illustrated in Figure 7. There is no linear narrative per se, only a disjunct and fractured collection of incomplete ideas.

![Figure 7. Movement II, violoncello, mm. 17-18.](image)

The role harmony plays within this movement is that of intermediary between rhythm and melody. The verticality of pitch material is often organized in a highly chromatic fashion, just as the horizontal melodic motion. Pitch clusters are stacked to create, like the rhythm, a sense of stasis. In direct contrast, the verticality of material is at times organized in unisons or octaves depicting the vast openness of the subject being portrayed. The unisons and octaves further represent a form of harmonic decay, with no polyphony to support the sound world, the clouds of pitch material seem to float aimlessly and empty.
Obfuscating pitch itself is the primary compositional concern of this movement however, and by manipulating texture and timbre, I seek to create a mental picture of weather beaten street signs, rust-caked fences, and windswept fields that stretch to the horizon. The crux of this focus begins at the outset of the movement with the bridge of the double bass being bowed. This extended technique creates a semi-uncontrollable noise texture that is scored as a pedal tone and serves as the basis for the entire movement (Figure 8).

Along with the bowed bass bridge, two other techniques figure prominently to create the ambient web of sound in the movement, *sul ponticello* and *flautando*. Both are string techniques that have long been found in the repertoire. *Sul ponticello* is an Italian indication directing the string player to move the bow closer to the bridge while playing. This technique alters the timbre from a full fundamental pitch to a metallic rasp containing many upper partials of the fundamental pitch. The indication of *flautando* instructs the performer to decrease the bow pressure upon the string, creating a wispy

---

Figure 8. Movement II, double bass, mm. 1-2.
flute-like sound. This timbre can be performed to varying degrees of intensity depending on bow pressure, speed, and proximity to the bridge (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Illustrates bow placement in relation to strings with resultant timbral qualities.

These two techniques are combined in this movement for the expressive purpose of forcing random overtones to speak when a note is bowed (Figure 10). Using these techniques together creates a wide spectrum of unfocused yet colorful sound.

Figure 10. Movement II, violin II, mm. 8-10.
Taking the philosophical concept of decay further, the performers are instructed to use their bows in an unconventional and nontraditional manner with the use of *col legno tratto* or bowing with the stick of the bow. The technique of *col legno battuto*, traditionally indicated in a score as *col legno*, is a traditional extended bowing technique where the performer is instructed to play the string percussively with the stick of the bow, as opposed to bowing the string with the hair. *Col legno tratto*, is used throughout the second movement of the quintet as yet another solution for blurring the fundamental of pitch through lack of frictional contact with the string (see Figure 11). The use of this technique renders the volume of sound produced very quiet and the focus of pitch extremely eroded. Consequently, being instructed to perform in this manner, the performers concept of performance norms, training, and expectations are also de-constructed.

![Figure 11. Movement II, violin II and viola mm. 32-33.](image-url)
Finally, ornamentation using trills, tremolos, and various vibrato styles are employed to distort the atmosphere of this movement (see Figure 12). Through the subtle and not-so-subtle combination and development of these many techniques, I set out to create, in sound, the image of a desolate, windswept, husk of land cradled at a lonely four-way stop.

Figure 12. Movement II, mm. 36-40.

My wife, father-in-law, and I accidentally “discovered” Fort Lonesome on a family trip to Sarasota in 2010. There was a traffic jam on the interstate due to an accident and we elected to take a detour around the greater Tampa area. Our route brought us through Zephyrhills, Plant City, Fort Lonesome, Duette, and back west to
Sarasota. The following photographic journal contains shots taken during a return visit to Fort Lonesome during December 2012.

Figure 13. County Road 39S, facing south.
Figure 14. County Road 39S, facing North, photographer’s back is to Fort Lonesome.
Figure 15. Southeast corner of intersection at State Road 674 and County Road 39S.
Figure 16. Fort Lonesome Grocery Store, located on the Southwest corner of Intersection at County Road 39S and State Road 674.

Figure 17. South of County Road 39S and State Road 674 intersection, facing east.
CHAPTER IV

HOLEY LAND

Holey Land is a 35,350 acre tract of sawgrass marsh, located in the northern portion of the Florida Everglades. Holey Land Wildlife Management Area is on the border of Palm Beach and Broward Counties, thirty miles west of Boca Raton (Figure 18). The name is derived from when the U.S. military used the area as a practice bombing range during the 1940s. Due to the large number of bomb craters, the area was named Holey Land. Adding further abuse, the Everglades were dredged during the first half of the Twentieth century and a large series of canals and levees were built to control the flow of water draining from Lake Okeechobee. Large sugar plantations and cattle ranches quickly rose to take over the newly drained land. Despite gross misuse and misunderstanding of the ecological importance and fragility of the Everglades ecosystem, the combined efforts of the 1994 Everglades Forever Act and nature’s resilience are stabilizing and attempting to reverse the severity of the situation.

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The final movement of the quintet was composed in humble awe of the Everglades desolate and fragile beauty. The music seeks to capture the emotions of my first visit to this land, stepping out of the safety of the boat and climbing up over the levee and experiencing what author Marjory Stoneman Douglas described as a “river of grass.”

Figure 18. The red arrow indicates location of Holey Land Wildlife Management Area.

---

The music serves as the redemption or cathartic release of the two preceding movements, attempting to portray what I perceive as the “magical” or “supernatural” qualities of Holey Land. In opposition to the other two movements, this movement builds by layering sonic material, increasing in density and volume throughout, using consonant, bright, and high-pitched sounds to create an ever cascading gossamer texture.

The movement builds from the simple texture of what sounds like a soft breeze. The texture is created in the cello and bass parts, by the instruments being rubbed with the palm of the hand. Pitched sound is slowly introduced by pizzicatos in the upper register of the violins and viola. The subtle sparkle of pizzicatos is passed from instrument to instrument and slowly the density of sound is built up through repetition and addition of harmonics and tremolos (Figures 19 and 20).

Figure 19. Movement III, mm. 6-11.
Figure 20. Movement III, mm.17-22.

The grand scope of the scene is first realized in the music at rehearsal B, where the sparse material of the introduction is gathered up and climaxes on a widely spaced quartal-quintal chord (Figure 21).
Wide-spaced consonant chords sounding in the high register of each instrument, is intended to imbue the listener with the vision of a limitless horizon. The rhythms between voices are offset to blur any sense of meter and create the illusion of timelessness. The staggered rhythmic web of consonance culminates with a rhythmically unison quintal chord (D-A-E-B-F#) at rehearsal letter E, giving a sense of resolution to the movement (Figure 22). Further, the short coda at letter E, one of the brief moments during the entire work in which the ensemble is in rhythmic unison, serves the function of giving an overall finality to the work.
Figure 22. Movement III, mm. 51-54.
The following photographs of Holey Land were taken during the late summer of 2008.

Figure 23. My first view from the top of the levee.
Figure 24. Standing on the levee at pump station G-381A, bordering Holey Land and Rotenberger Wildlife Management Areas.
Figure 25. Traveling in the canal bordering Rotenberger and Holey Land.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As a composer, my goal for this work was to cultivate an environment that stimulates in the listener the desire to inhabit and experience each location on his or her own terms. In doing so the listener might also experience the desolation, sadness, wonder, and hope that I have felt while visiting these places. This environment is created in the music through the decay of sound and a sense of temporal stasis over the course of the first two movements. The dystopic nature of the first two movements is then balanced in the third movement by consonance, clarity, and resolution.

The quintet premiered on my graduate recital at the University of North Carolina Greensboro on February 8, 2013. Through continued live performance and recording, I attempt to challenge the listener’s definition of beauty through presenting a work composed upon the premise of deconstruction and decay of not only sound, but also in how the sounds are produced. Lastly, I want to communicate that beauty is boundless and can manifest anywhere, even amongst decay, death, and disuse and that beauty’s facets are endless.


http://maps.google.com/maps?q=florida&hl=en&ll=27.684744,82.207947&spn=0.756393,0.913239&geocode=+&hnear=Florida&t=m&z=10 [accessed January 12, 2013].

http://maps.google.com/maps?q=the+holey+lands+florida&hl=en&ll=26.362342,80.69458&spn=0.765351,0.909119&sll=36.100259,79.833378&sspn=0.345086,0.454559&hq=the+holey+lands&hnear=Florida&t=m&z=10 [accessed February 3, 2013].

http://maps.google.com/maps?q=west+virginia&hl=en&ll=39.516755,82.63916&spn=2.635737,3.652954&sll=27.684744,82.207947&sspn=0.756393,0.913239&hnear=West+Virginia&t=m&z=8 [accessed January 12, 2013].
Hampson, Rick. “New ghost towns: Industrial communities teeter on the edge.”


APPENDIX A

SCORE

String Quintet No.1

ghost town portraits

Steven Jon Landis, Jr. © 2012
Performance Notes

\[ \flat = \text{quarter tone flat} \]

\[ \sharp = \text{quarter tone sharp} \]

**fingernail pizzicato**
Perform a pizzicato plucking the string with your fingernail.

**glissando**

**unpitched texture**
Using varied speeds, rub flattened palm in a circular motion on table or back of instrument.

**bowing on top of the bridge**
This work may be performed acoustic or amplified via close microphones. The work may also be performed with a string orchestra (acoustic only).

Performed as a quintet, the performers are to be spaced as far apart as possible on the stage to create as much diffuse ambience as possible. If the work is performed with a string orchestra, then traditional seating placement may be used.

quintet stage configuration

(audience)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{X} \\
\text{conductor} \\
\text{X} \\
\text{violin II} \\
\text{X} \\
\text{violin I} \\
\text{X} \\
\text{violoncello} \\
\text{X} \\
\text{viola} \\
\text{X} \\
\text{double bass}
\end{array}
\]
Program Notes

Cast in three-movements, this work is a sound journal recalling the wide array of feelings experienced while traveling the Eastern United States through places where desolation, openness, claustrophobia, hope, hopelessness, and isolation are common residents.

I. Ravenswood
Through the slow decay of a river town, the American dream fades as it is fulfilled.

II. Fort Lonesome
During the 1930s, Fort Lonesome hosted a mill, a general store, and an inspection station for all produce entering south Florida. The inspection station closed, the mill burned, and at a lonely crossroads sits a general store patiently waiting for its front door to chime.

III. the Holey Lands
A small facet of the Florida Everglades once used by the U.S. military as a bombing range, The Holey Lands are as beautifully remote as they are harshly desolate.
I. Ravenswood

senza misura
non vib. hold for 1' 27"
bow as necessary

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla

Vc

D.B

senza misura
non vib. hold for 1' 27"

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla

Vc

D.B

$\frac{d}{60}$ measured

Steven Jon Landis, Jr.
senza misura

C

hold for 34" sempre poco a poco molto flautando e sul ponticello

Vln. I

ff

hold for 34" sempre poco a poco molto flautando e sul ponticello

Vln. II

ff

hold for 34" sempre poco a poco molto flautando e sul ponticello

Vla.

ff

hold for 34" sempre poco a poco molto flautando e sul ponticello

Vc.

ff

hold for 34" sempre poco a poco molto flautando e sul ponticello

D.B.

ff

hold for 34" sempre poco a poco molto flautando e sul ponticello
II. Fort Lonesome

Vln. I

gritty, hazy, and worn

Vln. II

molto flautando e sul ponticello

Vla.

col legno tratto (performer may want to substitute the use of a wooden dowel in place of bow)

Vc.

improvise erratic vibrato

D.B.

bow open C string on the bridge

A

molto flautando e sul ponticello
molto flautando e sul ponticello

molto flautando e sul ponticello
play fundamental and force upper harmonics to speak

molto sul ponticello e punta d' arco

a poco ord. --------------- ord.
Vln. I
ord. punta d’arco

Vln. II
ord. punta d’arco

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

 senza col legno
(arco ordinario)

molto sul ponticello

molto flautando e sul ponticello
play fundamental and force upper harmonics to speak

bow open C string on the bridge.
molto flautando e sul ponticello

poco a poco senza sul pont.
Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

26

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

30

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

poco a poco sul pont.

poco a poco sul pont.

poco a poco sul pont.

poco a poco sul pont.

poco a poco sul pont.

poco a poco sul pont.

col legno tratto (performer may want to substitute the use of a wooden dowel in place of bow)

col legno tratto (performer may want to substitute the use of a wooden dowel in place of bow)
molto flautando e sul ponticello
play fundamental and force upper harmonics to speak

senza col legno
improvise
erratic vibrato

molto sul ponticello
play fundamental and force upper harmonics to speak
molto flautando e sul ponticello

PPP sul. pont.
sul ponticello
push bow
toward bridge
to force overtones

sul ponticello
push bow
toward bridge
to force overtones

sul ponticello
push bow
toward bridge
to force overtones

sul ponticello
push bow
toward bridge
to force overtones

sul. pont.

sul. pont.
III. the Holey Lands

Using varied speeds, rub flattened palm in a circular motion on table or back of instrument

Using varied speeds, rub flattened palm in a circular motion on table or back of instrument

Using varied speeds, rub flattened palm in a circular motion on table or back of instrument

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