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On Remembering, Ceasing To Be: For String Quartet & Chamber Ensemble

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On Remembering, Ceasing To Be: For String Quartet & Chamber Ensemble

Abstract
On remembering, ceasing to be is a four movement work for large chamber ensemble featuring string quartet. The work focuses on the act of remembering and the disorienting sensation this act can produce. The form intends to question, critique, and reconcile the existential detachment of examining one’s present against the romanticized past and memories of the present imagined in the past. The piece centers the string quartet, both as a genre and ensemble, within this form and tasks the quartet with pervasive elements of what I call “group virtuosity;” a virtuosity that is a focused objective (and also a natural result) of countless hours practicing and performing with the same people. Throughout the work the quartet is asked to periodically abandon the temporality and intonation of the winds and harp and cling to their identity as a single instrumental unit. These episodes come in the forms of insertions of historically important and personally meaningful string quartet literature, sudden shifts between disparate performance practice styles, and long, focused timbral and harmonic juxtapositions against the winds and harp. In these ways, On remembering, ceasing to be musicalizes the moments of separation from the present, both brief and lingering, that occur when remembering the past self and the present self the past imagined.

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Anna Weesner

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James Primosch

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ON REMEMBERING, CEASING TO BE: FOR STRING QUARTET & CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

NATHAN DANIEL COURTRIGHT

A DISSERTATION

in

Music

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2022

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ON REMEMBERING, CEASING TO BE:
FOR STRING QUARTET & CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

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ABSTRACT

ON REMEMBERING, CEASING TO BE: FOR STRING QUARTET & CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Nathan Daniel Courtright
Anna Weesner

On remembering, ceasing to be is a four movement work for large chamber ensemble featuring string quartet. The work focuses on the act of remembering and the disorienting sensation this act can produce. The form intends to question, critique, and reconcile the existential detachment of examining one’s present against the romanticized past and memories of the present imagined in the past. The piece centers the string quartet, both as a genre and ensemble, within this form and tasks the quartet with pervasive elements of what I call “group virtuosity:” a virtuosity that is a focused objective (and also a natural result) of countless hours practicing and performing with the same people. Throughout the work the quartet is asked to periodically abandon the temporality and intonation of the winds and harp and cling to their identity as a single instrumental unit. These episodes come in the forms of insertions of historically important and personally meaningful string quartet literature, sudden shifts between disparate performance practice styles, and long, focused timbral and harmonic juxtapositions against the winds and harp. In these ways, On remembering, ceasing to be musicalizes the moments of separation from the present, both brief and lingering, that occur when remembering the past self and the present self the past imagined.
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Instrumentation

Flute
B♭ Clarinet
Tenor Saxophone

Horn in F
Trumpet in C (straight, cup, & practice mutes)
Tenor Trombone (straight, cup, & practice mutes)

Harp

Solo String Quartet
  2 Violins
  Viola
  Cello
Performance Notes

**Accidentals**

All accidentals, including microtones, carry throughout the bar and only at the octave at which they are written.

**Microtonal Accidentals**

Quarter tones symbols are: 1/4 (50 cents) below flat, 1/4th flat, 1/4th sharp, 1/4th above sharp

![Microtonal accidentals](image)

Sixth tones use an arrow attached to the symbol to alter the traditional accidental roughly 1/6th (c. 33 cents) in the direction of the arrow (higher or lower). Sixth tones are also used for approximations of 7th harmonics.

![Sixth tones](image)

“Slightly” altered accidentals use a detached arrow in front of the traditional accidental. The tone should be altered no more than 1/8th and these are used primarily for creating beating or smearing unisons.

![Slightly altered accidentals](image)

**Abbreviations & Symbols**

bisb. = bisbigliando (timbral trill)  
flz. = flutter tongue  
× = air sounds in woodwinds. Clarinet & Saxophone also indicate whether they should include a closed jaw position for a less diffuse, slightly pitched air sound.  
+ = alternate fingering  
⟶ = an arrow above the staff indicates moving from one performance technique to another.  
= long fermata

W## = “Weiss” Saxophone multiphonic label. These correspond to the Tenor Saxophone multiphonic number in the Barenreiter publication *The Techniques of Saxophone Playing* by Marcus Weiss and Giorgio Netti. Each multiphonic has a fingering chart and an audio clip that demonstrates the sonority at soft and loud dynamics. The QR code below links to the online version.
GO# = “Gregory Oakes” multiphonic label. These correspond to the multiphonic library found on clarinetist Gregory Oakes’s website. Each multiphonic has a fingering chart and an audio clip demonstrating it. The QR code below links to that library.

**String Instructions**

flaut. = flautando
m.s.t. = molto sul tosto
s.t. = sul tosto
p.s.t. = poco sul tosto
ord. = ordinario
p.s.p = poco sul ponticello
s.p. = sul ponticello (close to the bridge but not overwhelmed by high overtones)
m.s.p. = molto sul ponticello (very close to the bridge, lots of high overtones present)

w.n.s.p. = “white noise” sul ponticello. This bowing was worked out in collaboration with the Daedalus Quartet. Most of the bow should be directly on the bridge with just a few hairs on the strings. The resultant sound is a “white noise” with a perceptible pitch (almost as if a vinyl record is being heard without any amplification). All dynamics are written with the resulting volume in mind so “ppp” w.n.s.p. might require “mp” bow pressure. Movement IV uses bowing between w.n.s.p. and ord. extensively. Though as “smooth” a transition as possible between these techniques is the goal, the uneven sound resulting from the impossibility of this is the idea.

Movement IV also moves away from and back to standard intonation throughout the course of the movement. The overall intent is a tonal harmonic progression that stretches the entire movement starting in E-flat and ending in D major. Microtones are used to indicate how far away from standard intonation the quartet should be. The microtones should not be treated rigidly but rather should be altered to tune the chord the way a quartet would naturally do.

Movement II uses a notehead-less gesture paired with fingering indication (1, 2, 3, 4) extensively throughout the movement, and the first instance has an asterisk indicating the performer should play with “fingers as close together as possible.” The player should make the distance between their first and fourth fingers on a single string as small as possible. The 4th finger should be anchored (or always returned exactly to the same spot) so that there is one constant pitch that is being returned to while the descending finger positions will vary microtonally. It is possible to “overlap” your fingers by rapidly lifting the previous fingering such that very narrow intervals are created. This is welcome as long as the resulting sound isn’t too thin. The idea is to “blur” or “smear” a sonority rather than mask it.

Movement III contains six excerpts from string quartet literature that I am particularly fond of. The first three excerpts exist in a different tempo or “time” (and space) than the winds and harp. The tempo markings are as vague as the original composers indicated and the quartet should
draw on their lifetime of performance practice to decide how to best represent these excerpts in contrast to the sonic world around them. The Seeger excerpt should be seamlessly attached to the Beethoven excerpt. Fermatas surround these excerpts and the conductor will follow the quartet for when to move into the next section. The Primosch, Crumb, and Haydn excerpts are integrated into the score and the music that surrounds them augments and interacts with them rather than juxtaposes them. The transition between the altered Crumb excerpt and the Haydn excerpt should be as dovetailed as possible and the quartet has full license to alter notes and rhythms accordingly. The entire movement is played con sordino and the ensemble may adjust their dynamic somewhat for the excerpts but the intent is to have the excerpts sound less vibrant than they normally would.

“[tune to sax multiphonic]” = This indicates that the performer should listen for the saxophone multiphonic happening just before or during their note and tune their note to the partial present in the multiphonic. Some or all of the quartet will be echoing various multiphonics.
I. Look back

Nathan Courtright
Letting notes overlap slightly, gradually separating like a chord breaking apart
always as connected as possible

fragile glowing
fl.

B♭ cl.

t. sx.

hn.

C tpt.

tbn.

hp.

vla.

vc.

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

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practice mute

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practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

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practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

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practice mute

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gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down

up

practice mute

practice mute

practice mute

gradual lip

slow glissando

down
II. Return to the painful present

\( \frac{\text{\(\Rightarrow\)}}{\text{\(\Rightarrow\)}} = \text{ca. 132} \)

* fingers as close together as possible
continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending

continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending

continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending

continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending

continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending

continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending

continue similarly, varying the pattern but always descending
right on threshold of next partial
III. (dis)Connect

in memory of James Primosch

\( \dot{=} \text{ca. 68} \)

\( \text{fl.} \)

\( \text{B. cl.} \)

\( \text{t. sx.} \)

\( \text{hn.} \)

\( \text{C tpt.} \)

\( \text{tbn.} \)

\( \text{hp.} \)

\( \text{vln. I} \)

\( \text{vln. II} \)

\( \text{vla.} \)

\( \text{vc.} \)

\( \dot{=} \text{ca. 68} \)

\( \text{con sord. (sempre)} \)

\( \text{pizz.} \)

\( \text{cup mute} \)

\( \text{sing softly} \)

\( \text{bisb.} \)
move freely to
vla. Mozart quotation
entrance
hold until your
Mozart quotation
entrance
hold until your
Mozart quotation
entrance
hold until your
Mozart quotation
entrance

Mozart String Quartet No. 19, K. 465

Adagio

rit. molto

\[ \text{fl.} \]

\[ \text{Bb cl.} \]

\[ \text{t. sx.} \]

\[ \text{hn.} \]

\[ \text{C tpt.} \]

\[ \text{tbn.} \]

\[ \text{hp.} \]

\[ \text{repeated until conductor cues rehearsal B} \]
B = ca. 60
fl.
B♭ cl.
t. sx.
hn.
C tpt.
tbn.
hp.

= ca. 60
vln. I
vln. II
vla.
vc.

straight mute
(cup mute)

p.s.p.
ord.

e.s.t.
Crawford-Seeger “String Quartet 1931”

Andante ($\lambda = 116$)

accel. molto to fermata

held until conductor cues rehearsal "D"
D = ca. 80 poco rit.

ffl.

B♭cl.

t. sx.

hn.

C tpt.

tbn.

hp.

vln. I = ca. 80 poco rit.

vln. II

vla.

vc.

poco rit.
J. Primosch String Quartet No. 2

\( \text{E} \) \( \text{\( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{}} \)} = 50 \)

\( \text{fl.} \)

\( \text{Bb cl.} \)

\( \text{t. sx.} \)

\( \text{hn.} \)

\( \text{C tpt.} \)

\( \text{tbn.} \)

\( \text{hp.} \)

\( \text{vln. I} \)

\( \text{vln. II} \)

\( \text{vla.} \)

\( \text{vc.} \)
$\frac{q}{\pi} = \text{ca. 60}$
Crumb Black Angels

"subito piú
lento (♩ = 50)"

fl.
B♭ cl.
t. sx.
hn.
C tpt.
tbn.
hp.
vln. I
vln. II
vla.
vc.

(errato)

(der Tod und das Mädchen)

m.s.t.

f

PP

PPPPP

PPPPP

PPP

subito piú
lento (♩ = 50)
ancora piú
lento (\( \cdot = 40 \))

fl.

Bs cl.

t. sx.

hn.

C tpt.

tbn.

hp.

vln. I

vln. II

vla.

vc.

- fading in and out until conductor cues rehearsal "G"
- practice mute
- play sparsely and randomly until conductor cues rehearsal "G"
- (al niente)
- (al niente)
- (al niente)
Adagio

Haydn String Quartet No. 63, Op. 76
Adagio
IV. Remember your past self looking to the future

\[ \text{\textbullet} = \text{ca. 76} \]

* All dynamics are sounding volume.
air, moving to inside the flute

fl.  
P PPP P PPP

B♭ cl.  
P PPP

t. sx.  

hn.  

C tpt.  

Tbn.  

hp.  

vla.  

vc.  

PPP PP mp PP PPP