FIVE EKMOSIKÉS FOR SOLO PIANO

A THESIS IN
Music Composition

Presented to the faculty of the University
Of Missouri - Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree:

MASTER OF MUSIC

by
Trevor Taylor Smith

B.M., Southeast Missouri State University
Cape Girardeau, Missouri, 2014

Kansas City, Missouri
2016
FIVE EKMOUSIKÉS FOR
SOLO PIANO

Trevor Taylor Smith, Candidate for the Master of Music Degree

University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2016

ABSTRACT

“Five Ekmousikés” is a multi-movement work composed for solo piano, dedicated to and to be premiered by my grandmother, Dr. Janet Bass Smith. Each movement in this work is programmatically tied to a piece of extra-musical art by Dr. Smith, consisting of three oil paintings and two poems. Chronologically, the movements are ordered “Sunset on Barren River Lake”, “Alone in Mammoth Cave”, “The Color of Death”, “Winter Peace”, and “Trifid Nebula”.

As a child, I was often struck by paintings of my grandmother. I remember examining them with a sense of wonder - their use of color, substance, and texture leaving a deep impression on me at a young age. In “Five Ekmousikés”, I strove to celebrate the artistic achievements of my grandmother (musical and otherwise), acknowledge her influence on my own aesthetic, and attempt to capture the qualities of her art in musical form.

The word “ekmousikés” is my own adaptation from the term “ekphrasis”, a literary technique used to create a verbal or rhetorical description of another work of art, typically from the visual medium. Each movement is intended as a musical analogue its corresponding work, as opposed to simply existing as music that was inspired by those works.

This may be most obvious in the movement “Winter Peace”. The painting depicts an inhabited cabin, situated in a valley within a range of mountains. The cabin appears to be a small and meek human element in comparison to its rather looming surroundings, and a snowstorm
blurs the landscape. I depicted this musically by writing a simple melody, representing the human element, and placing that melody “inside” of a louder and more harmonically volatile texture, symbolizing the overbearing landscape. The sustain pedal remains down the entire movement to blur the resulting sonorities in the same way the snowstorm blurred the mountainside in her painting. My thought processes in composing the other four movements of “Five Ekmousikés” were similar in manner.

The texts for “Alone in Mammoth Cave” and “The Color of Death” are included prior to each movement in the score.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance have examined a thesis titled “Five Ekmousikés”, presented by Trevor Taylor Smith, candidate for the Master of Music Degree, and certify in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

Chen Yi, DMA, Committee Chair
Conservatory of Music and Dance

Paul Rudy, DMA
Conservatory of Music and Dance

Reynold Simpson, DMA
Conservatory of Music and Dance
FIVE EKMOUSIKÉS

General Performance Notes:

- In the event that a technique requiring the performer to play inside the piano is not possible on the performer’s instrument, contacting the composer for an alternative means of achieving the intended effect is preferable. If this isn’t possible, however, in most cases sounding the note in a different octave to achieve the written timbre is preferable to altering the color of the notated pitch.

- The only way in which the performer will need to prepare the piano is to mark the strings such that they are able to be found quickly and to have a means of holding the sustain pedal down while plucking or muting the strings. “Five Ekmousikés” does not require foreign objects to be inserted into the piano in the nature of a true “prepared” piano.

- When the sustain pedal is marked to be down throughout a section, it is implied that every note is to be left ringing. In “Winter Peace” and “Alone in Mammoth Cave”, this is done during the entire movement.

- In sections without notated meter, dashed bar lines are used to indicate the beginnings and endings of phrases. Solid bar lines are used to distinguish sections.

- In the movement “The Color of Death”, speech is notated under specific sets of rhythms. These words are not meant to be spoken or sung while playing; those rhythms come from transcriptions of the phrases written beneath them, and the notated phrases are pulled directly from the text that the music is inspired by.

- Movements may be extracted and played as individual pieces.

Notes on extended techniques:

- A “+” sign indicates the performer should place the tip of one finger on the relevant string, close to the bridge such that, when struck, the string will make a percussive “domp” sound, while still possessing a resonant, pitched quality.

- The empty notehead notation that implies you finish the gesture ad lib., specifically in regard to the quantity of notes.

- The marking “pizz. f.t.” indicates the performer should pluck the relevant strings with their fingertips (specifically not the fingernail). This is to be contrasted with the technique used in the movement “Alone in Mammoth Cave”, where the performer is instructed to sound the strings by tapping with the fingernail, which achieves a different timbre.
- The notes inside the box are to be played in the order given continuously until otherwise instructed.

- This notation instructs the performer to hit a cluster of notes with their palm, nearly always in the lowest fifth of the piano. The exact notes (chromatic or white-key) and exact range are not particularly important.

- This notation instructs the performer to scrape with their fingernail across the strings inside the piano, beginning roughly in the range of the cluster on the staff and in the direction indicated by the subsequent line.

- An “x” shaped notehead indicates that a percussive instead of pitched sound is intended to be produced. More precise means of producing the sound will be provided in each instance in the score.

- This sound can be achieved by scraping the fingernail along the strings above the bridge in the high register, on the end of the piano farther away from the performer. In terms of how the wire is strung, this is analogous to plucking the strings below the bridge on a cello or close to the tuning pegs on a guitar. The sounds produced should be high and irregular in pitch, like wind chimes, and have a little bit of sustain to them.

Notes on preparation of the piano:

- It is my experience that it is most efficient to simply mark the strings that correspond to the black keys on the piano, from Bb0 to G#6, and to do that such that every string may be found and plucked or muted relatively quickly. If that method is not sufficient, here is the total list of pitches that require touching the string in some form: A0, B0, C1, D1, Eb1, F#1, Ab1, Bb1, B1, C2, C#2, Eb2, F2, Ab2, Bb2, C3, D3, Eb3, F3, F#3, G3, Ab3, A3, Bb3, B3, C4, D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, A4, B4, C5, C#5, E5, G#5, and G#6.

- Nearly all of the extended techniques inside the piano require the sustain pedal be down at the same time. Every performer’s situation is different, however it is my experience that adding a handle to a tuning wedge and inserting it above the sustain pedal is the least stressful way of accomplishing this. This allows the performer to move more freely while reaching the necessary locations inside the piano and can be taken out quickly.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT........................................................................................................iii-iv

PERFORMANCE
NOTES........................................................................................................vi-vii

SCORE.............................................................................................................1

   Sunset on Barren River Lake.................................................................1
   Alone in Mammoth Cave.................................................................9
   The Color of Death.................................................................13
   Winter Peace.................................................................26
   Trifid Nebula.................................................................31

VITA.............................................................................................................51
Five Ekmousikés
I. Sunset on Barren River Lake

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{d}{d} = 58$

For Janet

©2016 by Trevor Smith
Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$

$pizz. f.t.$

Freely, Suspended c. $\frac{j}{2} = 58$
“Alone in Mammoth Cave”

The dim trail disappears into a void,
Looking back it emerges out of the inky dark.
Creatures of her light dance on the walls and ceiling,
Moving as she moves.
Stone sentinels guard silence.
Who were those people who came before?
Did they have names?
“She who walks far”
“He who chips stones”
“She who finds water”
Did they call to each other
As they chipped away crystals of stone?
Her light flickers – almost dies.
There! In the shadows – a movement!
Listen! Can’t you hear them?
Her light brightens again, pushing back against the dark.
II. Alone in Mammoth Cave

Freely, Suspended

Piano

pizz. pluck w/ thumbnail

f

sempre pedal

n

mf

mp

alternate finger and palm hits

roll fingers on brace, ad lib.

n

mp

n

p

mf

p

as before

n

mp

n

p

mp

pp

as before

palm slap on brace
(lower pitch)
fingernail across strings behind the bridge,
from brace to brace in a high register

palm slap on brace
(lower pitch)
roll fingers on brace, ad lib.
pizz. pluck w/ thumbnail

on keys

fingernail across strings behind the bridge, from brace to brace in a high register

rub any surface of piano with palms to create airy sound
Text:

“The Color of Death”

Snow-covered granite peaks
beautiful clear blue lake red cup
dipping into dark container again
and again young man now part of
the water gray ashes swirling and
tumbling over pink, gray, green
granite disappearing under the
dark road into oblivion—
mischievous red-head moving
toward the sea no peace in life—
peace in death?
III. The Color of Death

Grave, with much rubato
c. \( \frac{3}{4} = 42 \)

Piano

\( \text{p} \)

\( \text{pppp} \)

\( \text{pp} \)

\( \text{mp} \)

\( \text{mf} \)

\( \text{mp} \)

\( \text{f} \)

\( \text{f} \)
moving toward the sea

again and again into oblivion

15

22

25
life, peace in death?
IV. Winter Peace

Very Freely, with a depth of texture

as rhythm increases, move the muting finger up the string (away from the bridge) while pressing down on the string to raise the pitch, reverse as rhythm decreases, sempre

Piano

sempre pedal

Very Freely, with a depth of texture

as rhythm increases, move the muting finger up the string (away from the bridge) while pressing down on the string to raise the pitch, reverse as rhythm decreases, sempre

2

3

4
V. Trifid Nebula

Atmospheric, motion without steady pulse

Piano

cont. tremolo

sempre ped.

play notes as fast as possible, like a tremolo

blend four note tremolo into this run, play as fast as possible
gradually mute such that last eighth is more percussive than pitched
Freely, Mysterious

C. \( \dot{=} \ 60 \)
cantabile

As before

\( f \) subito \( p \)
start very slowly, molto accel.

\[ \frac{\Omega}{\sum} \]

\( \mathbf{P} \) niete

\( \mathbf{mp} \)
keep playing ostinato, let drift out of tempo, played as fast as possible
let clust ring approx. 7 sec. Freely, Suspended
mute more as rhythm decreases
\( \text{tremolo as fast as possible, like an alarm (one hand)} \)

\( \text{(stay fff in R.H.) rit.} \)

\( \text{start very slowly, molto accel.} \)
gradually mute such that last eighth is more percussive than pitched
Flowing, with much rubato
c. $\frac{4}{4} = 76$
(pedal cont.)
As a performer, Trevor Smith has achieved many honors in both classical and jazz music competitions, winning outstanding soloist awards on saxophone at the MAC Jazz Festival, Truman Jazz Festival, Chicago’s Heritage Music Festival, and at the Elmhurst Jazz Festival, where he also presented original music in both jazz combo and big band form. Smith has also won several honors at the state level in Missouri, performing with the All-State Band in 2009 and 2010 on alto saxophone and with Missouri’s All-Collegiate Orchestra in 2013 on oboe.

Smith’s work as a composer is also not limited to any single genre, drawing from a wide range of both popular and avant-garde musical traditions and often informed by his varied work as a performer. He has written and recorded music for jazz and R&B drummer Bo Lamar’s collective “Sanctuary”, performs original compositions with the aid of live electronics, and composes acoustic works for chamber ensembles, particularly those which feature winds. Smith self-published his album “Isolation Chamber” in December of 2015.

Smith’s primary composition instructors have been Dr. James Mobberley, Dr. Paul Rudy, Dr. Zhou Long, and Dr. Chen Yi at the UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance, as well as Dr. Robert Fruehwald and Dr. Robert Conger from Southeast Missouri State University, from which he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Music in Composition in 2014.