

Greg Sandow

The Remembered Song

for string quartet

*Commissioned by Classical Movements
for the Prague Summer Nights Young Artists Music Festival
as part of the Eric Daniel Helms New Music Program*

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duration: about 11 minutes

for Neeta Helms

Notes on the Score

This piece flows through many short sections, and some silence, before it comes home.

The idea for it came from a passage in *A Course in Miracles*, a well-known spiritual book:

Listen — perhaps you catch a hint of an ancient state not quite forgotten; dim, perhaps, and yet not altogether unfamiliar, like a song whose name is long forgotten, and the circumstances in which you heard completely unremembered. Not the whole song has stayed with you, but just a little wisp of melody, attached not to a person or a place or anything particular. But you remember, from just this little part, how lovely was the song, how wonderful the setting where you heard it, and how you loved those who were there and listened with you.

There could be many ways to understand these words. (Especially since the *Course* never insists that it's the only path to enlightenment.) They could be a vision of heaven, or in at least informal Buddhist terms, of Nirvana. Or, without metaphysics or religion, they could be an image of unity and perfect peace. Imagined — however you understand it — as the memory of a song we all once knew, but now only dimly recall.

The piece begins with this dim remembrance, as we hear the song only in fragments. They fade away, maybe in a cloud of dreams, and then the music brings up scenes from earthly life. We wake up, we stretch. We walk. We run. We dance. There's a horrible war, and then mourning.

And then comes peace. We walk in a quiet park. We go home, get drowsy, fall asleep. The haze returns. And then — maybe in a dream, maybe in our deepest reality — we hear the song. Now fully remembered, the same song we listened to with so many people we loved.

Love, too [says the *Course*], would set a feast before you, on a table covered with a spotless cloth, set in a quiet garden where no sound but singing and a softly joyous whispering is ever heard.

Some purely musical points:

- The opening section, a viola solo with many long silences, should be played expressively, though with the rests counted out in strict time. But the silences should flow. The violist should settle calmly into them, as I hope the audience will.
- During this opening, the cello softly echoes some of the viola notes, overlapping for a moment with the next one, creating a brief, almost shadowy dissonance. There are similar overlaps in the Mourning section, now involving all four instruments. And there are both echoes and overlaps in the Remembered Song at the end. Whenever they occur, these overlaps should last just long enough for the dissonances to be felt. How long is that? The players should judge for themselves, listening to how the sound feels in the rehearsal or performing space. They don't need to play the overlaps precisely as notated. They shouldn't count them out in strict time.
- In places I've asked the musicians to tap on their instruments, instead of playing on the strings. After hearing various ways to do this, I've come to prefer tapping the instruments with the open fingers of the bow hand. Tapping the instruments with a knuckle — one of the alternate methods — produces too much resonance. But here's a caution. The cello, being larger, is more resonant than the violins and viola, no matter how it's tapped. So the cellist needs as much as possible to match the tapping sound of the others, especially in the last section of the piece, when the tapping should be gentle and light. (In an earlier version of this note, I'd said I was open to different kinds of tapping in the two places where it occurs, at letter D and letter P. I now think this wouldn't be right, and that the tapping

always should be done the same way. That helps bring the sections of the piece together, which seems important in a work that's so episodic.)

- At letter J, where the music is marked “ugly, distorting the sound” I want the tone to be greatly distorted. so it's a blend of scrunch and musical notes. It should begin really rough, and get rougher during the crescendo, so that at the *tutta forza* climax it's searing and unmusical. This represents the devastation of war.
- The four silent bars at the end don't have to be taken literally. They're just a way of showing that the music fades into silence. The musicians can hold the silence, without moving, for as long as feels right.

Every section of the piece in some way echoes something in the song. The “Stretching” section, for instance, begins with the song's alternation of A and A flat, and continues with its C to B to B flat descent. The one about walking in the park begins with C, B, and B flat, then echoes the beginning of the song with E, F, and G flat. And there's more. All of it evolved without much conscious thought on my part, and there's no great need for anyone to hear any of it. But I think these echoes help to hold the piece together. And, spiritually, might suggest that the song is present deep within us, all through our lives.

The Remembered Song

Listen -- perhaps you catch a hint of an ancient state not quite forgotten; dim, perhaps, and yet not altogether unfamiliar, like a song whose name is long forgotten, and the circumstances in which you heard completely unremembered. Not the whole song has stayed with you, but just a little wisp of melody, attached not to a person or a place or anything particular. But you remember, from just this little part, how lovely was the song, how wonderful the setting where you heard it, and how you loved those who were there and listened with you.

— *A Course in Miracles*

[The song in fragments, not quite remembered]

Greg Sandow

Slowly and quietly

♩ = 40

5

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

solo

p

Violoncello

10

15

A

Musical score for measures 20-24. The score consists of four staves. The top two staves are treble clefs, and the bottom two are bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many rests and some melodic lines. A dynamic marking *p* is present at the beginning of the fourth staff. The instruction *behind the viola* is written above the fourth staff.

B

Musical score for measures 25-29. The score consists of four staves. The top two staves are treble clefs, and the bottom two are bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many rests and some melodic lines. The instruction *behind the viola* is written above the fourth staff.

C

30 *melody*
pp

melody
pp

with the full quartet *melody*
pp

with the full quartet
pp

35 40

silence

silence

[Episodes in life]

D

[Waking up]

A little faster [Stretching]

♩ = 48 45

pizz. freely, tentative

arco not detached

p

p

p

not detached

interrupting tapping on the violin

50

[Taking a few steps]

E

interrupting tapping on the violin

f

mf

f

mp

mp

mp

mp

[Walking]

55

F

very rhythmic

mf

very rhythmic

mf

very rhythmic

tapping on the viola

mf

[Running]

G

60

very rhythmic

tapping on the cello

H

[Dancing]

I

Fast, savage

♩ = 100

65

mp *ff*

mp *ff*

mp *ff*

mp *ff*

70

75

mp *ff*

Musical score for measures 78-83. The score consists of four staves (treble and bass clefs). The time signatures change from 5/16 to 3/8, then 7/16, 5/16, 3/16, and finally 5/16. The music features complex rhythmic patterns with many sixteenth notes and rests.

J

Slowly, more savage

♩ = 40

Musical score for measures 84-87. The score consists of four staves. Measure 84 starts with a tempo marking of ♩ = 40. The time signatures change from 5/16 to 5/16, then 5/8, and finally 2/4. The music features sustained chords with dynamic markings of *ff*, *ff* <, and *ff*. Performance instructions include *rough* and *ugly, distorting the sound*. The score includes slurs and accents over the notes.

L

[Walking in the park]

Andante ♩ = 48 100

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a 5/8 time signature change, a quarter rest in the second measure, and a quarter note in the third measure. The second staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature, featuring a series of chords. The third staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature, also featuring a series of chords. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature, containing a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p* and *gently*.

pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature. It contains a series of eighth notes and a triplet. The second staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature, featuring a series of chords. The third staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature, also featuring a series of chords. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature, containing a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *lightly stressed*, *freely*, and *gently*.

pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco pizz arco

M

lightly stressed

rit.

110

Violin I: *lightly stressed*, *molto*, *p*

Violin II: *lightly stressed*, *molto*, *p*, pizz

Viola: *lightly stressed*, *molto*, *p*, pizz

Cello/Double Bass: pizz arco pizz arco, *sf*

N

[Getting drowsy]

a tempo

115

Violin I: *very quiet*

Violin II: arco, melody, *very quiet*

Viola: arco, *very quiet*

Cello/Double Bass: pizz, arco, *very quiet*

120

melody, with violin 2

C is the melody note

[Falling asleep]

O

rit. Very slowly

As before ♩ = 40

125

130 arco

pizz

arco

pp

pizz

arco

pp

pizz

arco

pp

*Love, too, would set a feast before you,
on a table covered with a spotless cloth,
set in a quiet garden where no sound
but singing and a softly joyous whispering
is ever heard.*

-- A Course in Miracles

P [The remembered song]

Very quietly

135

silence

silence

melody

p

melody

p

tapping on the cello

p

140

melody

p

tapping on the violin

melody

tapping on the violin

tapping on the viola

melody

melody

145

melody Q

behind the first violin *behind the viola*

behind the first violin *melody*

150

behind the viola

melody

behind the second violin *behind the cello* *melody*

melody

R

behind the viola

155

dolciss.

from a great distance

This block contains the first system of music, measures 155-158. It consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature, changing to 3/4 and then 7/8. The second staff is also in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature, changing to 3/4 and then 7/8, and includes the dynamic marking *dolciss.* and the instruction *from a great distance*. The third staff is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature, changing to 2/4 and then 7/8. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature, changing to 2/4 and then 7/8, and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked with 'x'.

melody

behind the viola

behind the viola

behind the first violin

melody

This block contains the second system of music, measures 159-162. It consists of four staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature, changing to 5/8, 3/8, 2/4, and 3/4. The second staff is in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature, changing to 3/8, 3/8, 2/4, and 3/4, and includes the instruction *behind the viola*. The third staff is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature, changing to 5/8, 3/8, 2/4, and 3/4, and includes the instructions *behind the first violin* and *melody*. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature, changing to 5/8, 3/8, 2/4, and 3/4, and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked with 'x'.

S

dolciss.

160

Violin I: *dolciss.*
from a great distance

Violin II: *melody*

Viola: *behind the second violin*

Cello/Double Bass: Rhythmic pattern with 'x' marks.

T

behind the second violin

pizz

165

Violin I: *behind the second violin*
pizz

Violin II: *behind the viola*
melody

Viola: *melody*

Cello/Double Bass: *melody*

U

V

170 *melody arco* *pp* 175

melody arco *pp* *melody* *pp* *melody* *pp*

180

180

185

silence

silence

silence

silence

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