

concert music

colors of early morning, of
clear skies, of salt
for String Quartet

peter gilbert

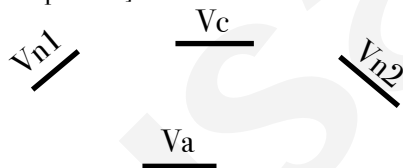
Perusal Copy

colors of early morning, of clear skies, of salt for String Quartet

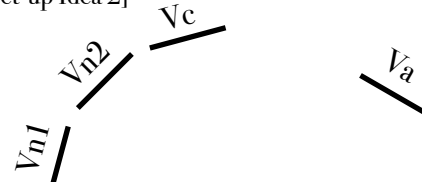
Notes to the Performers:

- This work is based on the poem “Old Salt Woman” by Luci Tapahonso. You are encouraged to familiarize yourselves with this work while preparing this piece. It is in the book *A Radiant Curve* published by the University of Arizona Press.
- Time is given in proportional notation with barlines given in between staves so as to not disturb horizontal spacing. The barlines delineate approximately two seconds. Performance of time can be expressively flexible but should not wildly stray from the given notation. Events in the score that are vertically aligned are roughly simultaneous but need not be executed with absolutely precise coordination.
- The violist acts as a special character in this work: a kind of narrator who “speaks” with the voice of the poet. Consider a special positioning of the quartet, perhaps with the viola standing. The given diagrams should be taken only as examples of the possible set-ups you could do. You can come up with your own positioning or simply use a standard quartet set-up if necessary.

[Set-up Idea 1]



[Set-up Idea 2]



- You are encouraged to explore performing this work with amplification. It is not, per se, necessary for performance but amplification may well enhance the listening experience.
- The sound world of this piece is not a perfectly pure world.

Notes to Violin 1, Violin 2, Cello:

- All harmonics given are natural harmonics. If a string marking is given (II., IV., etc.) all material following is only on that string until a new marking is given. The indication I-IV. indicates that all strings are available as in normal playing.
- The double-stop harmonic-touch passages are done with very light bow pressure and long continuous bow strokes, changing the finger position in an improvisatory manner (sticking

layers
n

lifting one finger to get the open string to sound

- pp*
- lifting one finger to get the open string to sound
- p*

at the frog with heavy bow pressure
bowing across at least two strings

Notes to Viola:

- Notes to Viola:**
- The key to the solo is making the instrument sound as much as you can like a spoken voice. For me this means a perpetual sliding that keeps from sounding like a clearly intoned pitch. The approximate pitch space is given with a three-line staff and a quasi-alto clef.

solo molto espressivo as speech, without a specific sense of pitch

sempre portamento (without stopping or lifting the bow off the string during the marked phrase; with bow noise, ghosting notes in between, though not necessarily all in one bow)

[illegible]

I've increased the vertical size of the clef because so much of the movement is in spaces between half-steps. The middle, upper and lower lines are given as a point of reference and precise pitch is not intended. The notation gives a guide to approximate pitch and a fairly clear

outline of contour and dynamic. A strong sense of gesture is desired. These “spoken” passages are all performed on the C string unless otherwise noted.

- In the spoken passages each “syllable” is articulated with a notehead. Phrases are given with long dotted slurs. Bow changes can be done as needed but during a phrase, the bow should not really leave the string, even during pauses. In gaps between syllables (sometimes indicated with a dotted glissando line), bow pressure and touch simply lighten to the point of loosing pitch, maintaining a quiet bow noise.
- This is, in many ways, an unusual part and is in some ways a solo, even without being terribly soloistic, and should always be discernible. The part forms a figure of constancy, of clarity and calm assurance. It is not so much the story as the storyteller, not outwardly dramatic but rather an axis of reflection amidst the swirling colors of the narrative around it. Nevertheless each gesture should have its own musical, gestural sense and should feel expressive.
- Moments not using the large three-line staff are performed normally.

Program Note:

What you notice when you meet poet Luci Tapahonso is the strong clarity of her personhood. The richness of her interaction with life comes forth from her matriarchal eyes the way I imagine it would from the eponymous mythical figure in Tapahonso’s poem *Old Salt Woman*. I find the poem entrancing for so many reasons but perhaps none more so than the intriguing sense of time. The poem begins at the beginning of human history shortly after the birth of First Baby. The narrative flows forwards full of echoes from Old Salt Woman’s past until the it magically morphs into the ongoing tradition of the First Laugh Ceremony of the Navajos that continues today. The “oneness” of the Navajo worldview (in which all things are manifestations of a unity rather than the obsessive fragmentation of the Euro-American perspective) here relates to time as well, where the ancient and the present slip back and forth seamlessly.

As a sestina, the poem has built into its traditional form numerous repetitions but two of these end words are particularly important to my reading. One is “color”. In addition to the colors of early morning, clear skies and salt, there are colors of laughter, of light effervescence, of sharing, of betrothal and betrayal, as well as the intense colors of

midnight, the ageless colors of stones, and love's radiant colors. This suggested to me a sound world driven by sonic shapes and hues more than by 19th century European melodies and harmonies. Perhaps the most important color is the color of laughter at the heart of the poem. The baby's first laugh is a sacred rite for the Navajo that brings family together to rejoice in the healing power of sharing laughter. It was important for me to get that boisterous guttural explosion out of the quartet.

The other image source I focused on is the river. Water flows through this poem at every turn. In addition to the geographical San Juan river and the thin brown rivers at Dinétah, there are rivers of luminous beads, of baby laughter, of angry words, and the crystal rivers of salt beneath our feet. I attempted to weave that sense of motion into the fabric of the piece the way I enjoy it in Tapahonso's words. Her sentences continue past the ends of each of the sestina's six stanzas moving directly without break into the next, creating a sense of on-going that makes the whole poem into a river.

One last point I think is interesting is the way that age plays into the sense of time. The poem tells us early on of Old Salt Woman that "her true essence became apparent in her autumn years" and it is only over time that "she was able to transform the grief into exquisite songs of beauty." Similarly, First Baby who would ultimately grow up to be the centrally important figure White Shell Girl, guides us to old age with her lilting songs. The songs don't rush to fill an urgent present. Just as it took time for the sorrows of Old Salt Woman to metamorphose into serenity, I've tried to compose this piece with an abiding sense of patience and unfolding.


This piece is a setting of *Old Salt Woman* the way one sets a poem in an art song. The viola performs the role of singer, helping to keep us grounded in the poet's point of view as time shifts around us and the dance of colors envelopes us. The poem is full of magical songs. I've deliberately not tried to recreate or even refer to the magical songs of the Navajo people, but rather to invoke something more strange and unknown that can be its own song of joy and wonder. I have, however, used my analysis of the lilting of Tapahonso's own voice as a point of departure so that this new song, however distantly, still echoes something essential of her.

- Peter Gilbert, 2015


1 Intense but with a sense of stillness...as if infinite...

(2 seconds)

8va -

I.  retake bows freely, varying lengths

p

III.  retake bows freely, varying lengths

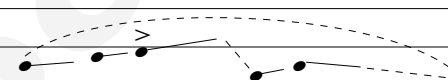
p

solo
molto espressivo

as speech, without a specific sense of pitch

sempre portamento (without stopping or lifting the bow off the string during the marked phrase;
with bow noise, ghosting notes in between, though not necessarily all in one bow)

IV.



p *>* *n* *p* *>* *n*

"'Álk'dáá jini"

III.  retake bows freely, varying lengths

p

2

7

Diagram illustrating a melodic line with a dashed line above it, a solid line below it, and a bracket labeled *p* and *n* with the text "at the beginning".

3

-3-

4

19

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

mp *n*

"journeyed"

p *mp* *n*

"to Huerfano Mesa"

25

5

p

p *n*

"near the shallow river"

31

6

(8^{va})

($\sharp\flat$)

($\sharp\flat$)

($\sharp\flat$)

B

mp *> n*

"They said"

mf *>* *>* *>*

"first baby was"

for string quartet

37

(8^{va})

7

8

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

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469

470

471

472

473

474

475

476

477

478

479

480

481

9

43

8va

(8va)

(#8va)

"or wonder"

n

mf

"Since a baby"

n

mp

"does"

p

10

49

(8^{va})

(^o)

(^o)

B

n

"not know sorrow"

p

n

"Old Salt Woman was called"

n

11

55

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

mp *n*

"They said"

"that the colors of laughter, of light"

pp

I.
II.

flautando; very airy
with spontaneously changing bow placement,
ranging from sul ponticello to molto sul tasto

mp

lifting one finger on and off to get the open string to sound

12

13

61

(8^{va})
(8^{va})

flautando; very airy
with spontaneously changing bow placement,
ranging from sul ponticello to molto sul tasto

III.
IV.

pp

pp

lifting one finger on and off to get the open string to sound

p

mp

"effervescence"

"traveled with her"

mp

n

"she"

p

14

67

The musical score is for a piece titled "colors of early morning, of clear skies, of salt". It is written for a piano and voice. The score is in 13/8 time. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The lyrics are in Chinese and English.

The vocal line consists of two phrases:

- "who is the primordial" (谁是最初的)
- "mother of the salt clan" (盐的母亲的氏族)

The piano accompaniment features a series of chords and melodic lines. The first phrase is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and the second phrase is marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The score includes a "sul pont." (sul ponticello) instruction for the piano.

15

73

(sempre sul pont.)

varied bow position

lifting alternating fingers to get alternating open strings to sound

mp

p

p

mp

16

79

I-IV.

n

lifting alternating fingers to get
alternating open strings to sound

(not coordinated or synchronized with Cello)

13

(not coordinated or synchronized with Violin 2)

mp

p

17

85

non vib.

p

pp *n*

p *n*

pp

mf *n*

"But her true essence"

mf *mp*

"became apparant in her autumn years"

pp

18

91

pp *n*

mp *n*

"When 'Áshijh 'Asdzáán was young"

97

19

mp *pp* *p* *n* sul pont.

mf *n* *p* *n*

"she found that the wonderous colors"

"of betrothal"

The musical score is for a string quartet. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 19-20) features a single melodic line on a treble clef staff and a string quartet texture on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The melodic line starts with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and then a series of eighth notes. The dynamics are marked as *mp*, *pp*, *p*, and *n*. The string quartet texture consists of a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. The second system (measures 21-22) features a single melodic line on a treble clef staff and a string quartet texture on a grand staff. The melodic line starts with a half note, followed by a quarter note, and then a series of eighth notes. The dynamics are marked as *mf*, *n*, *p*, and *n*. The string quartet texture consists of a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. The lyrics are in Italian: "she found that the wonderous colors" and "of betrothal".

103

20

21

sul pont. → ord.

p *pp* *ppp*

mp *n* *mp* *p* *n*

"can also contain"

"hues"

"of betrayal"

22

109

mp *p*

mf *n* *mf*

"her pain was like a river" "of luminous beads worn smooth"

115 23

mp *pp* *mp* *ppp*

n *mp* *n*

"by tears" "and intense sorrow"

24

121

p *p*

mp *n* *p* *f* *n* *mp*

"Over time she was able to transform her grief"

"into ex-"

127

25

26

mf *n* *mp*

n

"-quisite songs of beauty"

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, starting at measure 127, includes measures 25 and 26. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The voice part has a melodic line with various dynamics and articulations. The lyrics 'colors of early morning, of clear skies, of salt' are written above the first system. The second system, starting at measure 27, includes measures 28 through 32. The piano accompaniment continues with the same patterns. The voice part has a melodic line with various dynamics and articulations. The lyrics '-quisite songs of beauty' are written below the second system. The score includes a large 'COPY' watermark.

133

27

mf

non vib.

mf

n

mf

mf

28

139

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The voice part is on a single staff with a treble clef. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves: a right-hand staff with a treble clef and a left-hand staff with a bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/8. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The voice part begins with a melodic line starting on a middle C, moving up and then down, with various dynamics and articulations. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex melodic line in the right hand. The score includes a large, faint watermark that reads 'Early Stage Copy' diagonally across the page. The lyrics 'You can still hear traces of her sadness' are written below the voice staff in the final measure.

mf *n* *p* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

mf *n*

"You can still hear traces of her sadness"

29

145

mf *n* *mp* *n*

mf *n*

"in the songs of doves on still desert mornings"

II.
III.

30

151

The musical score is written for piano and voice. The piano part consists of two staves: a treble staff with a treble clef and a bass staff with a bass clef. The voice part is written on a single staff with a soprano clef. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with a treble staff and a bass staff. The second system shows the voice part with a soprano clef. The lyrics "But that day at Huerfano Mesa, her" are written below the voice staff. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *mf*, *n*, and *mp*. There are also slurs and accents over the notes.

ppp

mf *n* *mp*

"But that day at Huerfano Mesa, her"

157

31

→ sul pont. → norm.

pp

13

"cheerful arrival made it clear that all sorrows were in the past"

n

163

32

sul pont.

(sul pont.)

33

IV.

sul pont.

pp

mf
"Old Salt"

ppp

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line with notes and dynamic markings. The middle staff is a piano line with a wavy line and a final note marked *pp*. The bottom staff is a piano line with a continuous eighth-note accompaniment marked *ppp*. Measure numbers 163, 32, and 33 are indicated. Performance instructions include 'sul pont.' and 'IV.'

34

169

III.
IV.

"Woman held the baby, then put a bit of 'áshijh into her mouth"

175

35

f *p* *mp*

p *mp*

III.

mf *f* *f*

"Then she said," "Wooshí Wooshí"

for string quartet

181

36

overpressure → norm.

overpressure → norm.

→ o.p. → n.

ricochet

o.p. ric.

o.p. → norm.

ric.

o.p. → norm.

ric.

(number of attacks indeterminate)

IV.

f *n* *f*

"and a radiant river"

"of baby"

187

at the frog with heavy bow pressure
bowing across at least two strings

37

thrown bow/ricochet

ric.

continue in a similar manner

mf

hand across all four strings (to dampen clear pitch) using D, A & E strings

at the frog with heavy bow pressure
bowing across at least two strings

o.p. → norm. ric.

I-IV.

ricochet

ric. ric. ric. ric. ric. ric. ric. ric.

continue in a similar manner

mf

hand across all four strings (to dampen clear pitch) using D, A & E strings

13

"laughter filled the hoogan"

n

at the frog with heavy bow pressure
bowing across at least two strings

I-IV.

continue in a similar manner

p

hand across all four strings (to dampen clear pitch) using G, D & A strings
short intense bow strokes often using ricochet for extra articulations
varying timing and vertical hand placement

193

This block contains the musical notation for measures 193 through 196 of a string quartet score. It consists of four staves, each with a treble clef. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The second and fourth staves also begin with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The third staff begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. Each staff has a single horizontal line with an arrow pointing to the right, indicating a sustained note or a specific pitch. Vertical bar lines are present at the end of each measure, dividing the four measures. A large, light gray watermark reading 'Perusal Copy' is diagonally across the page.

38

199

f

f

f

39

205

ff

ff

13

ff

40

I.
II.

211

pp

III.

p

13

n

41

217

mp

Retake bows freely, varying lengths
(need not be imperceptible)

sul pont.

f

(in time with cello)

IV.

f

"It was like the colors of early morning, or clear skies, of

IV.

(in time with viola)

ppp < f

42

223

mp *mp*

(8^{va})

pp

"salt"

f "like the intense colors of midnight"

f

43

229

mp *pp*

8va—
(with Cello)

mf *mf*

overpressure;
ricochet

IV.

mf

"Thus the laughter of relatives eating toge..."

espress. Retake bows freely, varying lengths
(need not be imperceptible)
(with Violin 2)

f *mf*

44

235

The musical score is written for piano and voice. The piano part is in 12/8 time, featuring a continuous eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a melody in the left hand. The voice part is in 12/8 time, with lyrics in English. The score includes dynamic markings such as *n* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The lyrics are: "...ther became a song", "for the First Laugh meal", and "It was there just". The score is marked with a large '13' at the beginning of the voice part. The page number 44 is in the top right corner.

8va -

n

13

n *mf* *n*

"...ther became a song"

"for the First Laugh meal"

1.

mp

"It was there just"

45

241

approximately matching the speed and dynamic of Violin I

II.
III.

p

n *mp* *n* *mp*

"above the San Juan River" "that First Baby first kicked and laughed" "Everyone watched"

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

I.
II.

mf *pp* *n*

(allowing lower strings to ring)

247

"her eyes glitter with happiness."

mf *pp* *n* *mf* *pp* *n*

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

"Her small chubby hands"

47

48

approximately matching
the speed and dynamic of Violin 2

253

II.
III.

pp \triangleleft *mp*

mp

n *mf* *n* *mp* *n*

"pressed áshijh" "into each person's palm" "as they whispered wishes to her"

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

f \triangleleft *p* *n* *f* \triangleleft *p* *n*

49

50

259

mp

I-IV.
mp

mf *n*

"In this way, sorrow would turn from our kinfolk."

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

f *p* *n* *mf* *p* *mp*

265

51

52

pp

*espress.
con vibrato*

f

mp

" 'Áshjñh 'Asdzáán Sání remembered such sorrow,"

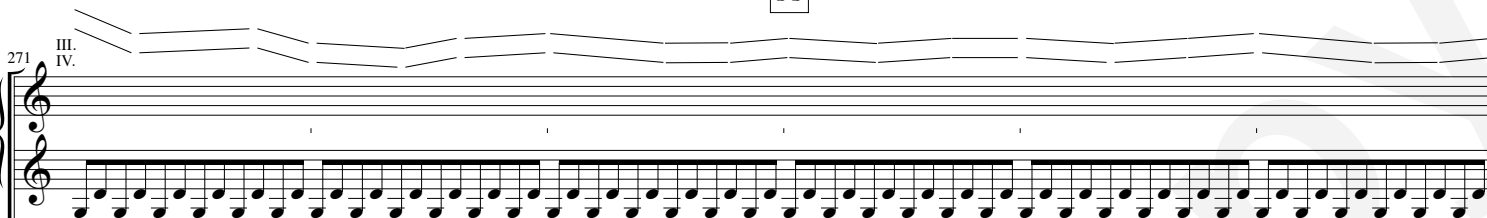
overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

mp *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

53

271

III.
IV.



mp *p*



mp *p*

13



mf

"So she invoked the melodious names of mountains"

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet



pp

mf

p

mf

p

n

54

becoming increasingly high and distorted. . .

277

mf *p*

mf

n *mf* *n*

"and the ageless colors of stones"

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

mf *p* *mp* *mf* *pp* *mp* *p*

283

55

56

mf *n*

f

mf *n*

"She invoked the taste of fresh corn"

mf *n*

"Then the ba-"

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

mp *mf* *n*

57

289

"-by offered ashiih, a box of Cracker Jacks, and some fruit."

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet —————

pp

58

295

mf *n* *mp*

"These became the ritual songs that keep families together and loneliness away."

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

f *p* *mp* *f* *pp*

59

I.

301

pp

n

mp

IV.

mp

"Perhaps it was her radiant smile"

overpressure;
bounced bow

f *pp*

overpressure;
bounced bow

f *p*

f

61

62

307

61

62

n

n

p

13.

n *mp* *n* *mp*

"or tender baby touch" "in our palm that told us" "crystal rivers"

mp *pp* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *f* *p* *f* *f* *p* *f*

313

pp *n* *p* *ppp*

n

n

"of salt flow unseen beneath our feet"

f *p* *f*

f *p* *f*

63

319

ppp *p* *ppp* *p* *p* *ppp*

p *n*

f *p* *f* *f* *>* *p* *mf* *>* *p* *p* *>*

64 65

325

p *ppp* *p* *ppp*

mf *n* *mp*

"The hot sun and thin, brown rivers at Dinétah"

"remember the day"

overpressure;
bounced bow—quasi-ricochet

p *mf* *pp* *n*

66

331

p *ppp* *n*

13

"when Old Salt Woman arrived without sorrow."

mf

"They watched as the baby

67

337

337

f

ff

mf

ff

"became White Shell Girl"

"She emulated the colors of sharing, laughter,"

68

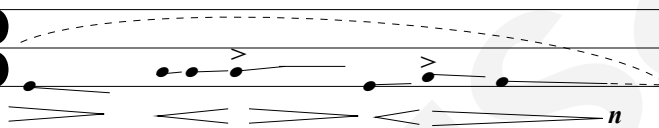
8^{va} -

I. Retake bows freely, varying lengths

343



III. Retake bows freely, varying lengths



"and the joy of stories"



III. Retake bows freely, varying lengths



69

349

13

mp

"She was surrounded by her family and relatives,"

"encircled by"

355

70

71

(8^{va})

n

"love."

mp

"Today her liting"

-61-

367

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

13

mp *n*

"we cannot live without áshijh."

mf *n*

"Yes,"

75

373

8va

it's true that a river of angry words

can darken love's radiant colors.

379

76

77

8^{va}

n

mp

"And one can't say 'I'm sorry'"

78

385

(8va) -

(^o)

(^o)

"in Diné;"

mp

"But careful words and old songs"

sul D

p

79

391

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

13.

n *mp* *n* *mp* *n*

"can recall the joy granted"

"White Shell Girl"

espress. (with Viola)
II.

p *p*

397

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

mp

"who first blessed us with ashiih."

p

n

n

403

(8^{va})

(8^{va})

n

13

Perusal Copy