

Little Monument

for oboe and cello

Matthew Chamberlain | February 2015 | Buffalo, NY

Notational Idiosyncrasies

(Dynamics) Throughout the piece, the dynamics should be understood as dividing into the simple categories of (very) loud and (relatively) soft. Given the generally low registration of the oboe, quiet dynamics should be judged only in light of a given phrase's technical reality. Thus, an indication of **pp poss.** in the oboe part may, in reality, sound a **mp** or **mf**. In moments where balance between the oboe and cello is particularly important, I have referenced the oboe part in the cello's dynamic instructions with the annotation **:ob.** Specific explanations of certain dynamics now follow:

fff Play *almost* as loudly as possible, holding back just enough to maintain a certain tone-quality; the result is crass but not savage.

poss. Applied to a dynamic, crescendo, or diminuendo, this means to do so as much as is possible, given the context.

^ When applied to **fff** passages, this sign means to play as loudly as possible, with all of the (potentially misplaced) bravura connoted by *con tutta forza*. When applied to quieter passages, this sign indicates a rather effortfully inflated dynamic, something like a sustained **sfz**, but still in context of the relevant dynamic. In both cases, the sign implies a crucial *non diminuendo*, and never connotes *staccato*.

:ob. This instruction, only applied to the cello part, indicates that a given dynamic or fermata should be judged in terms of the oboist's ability to execute the instruction. For example, **p:ob.** means to play at the same **p** dynamic that the oboe is currently performing. A crescendo or diminuendo to an **:ob.** indicates that the cellist should balance with the oboe.

(De-tuned pitches) Accidentals with downwards-pointing arrows should be understood as indicating a pitch that is ‘a bit flatter’ than the normal form of the accidental would describe. This detuning needn’t be precise, but should be less than or equal to 31¢.

(The Cello Part) The cellist, scrambling always from one impractical double-stop to another, should think of the score as a kind of tablature. I have tried to write these progressions so that, while every chord is certainly possible to play, any actual attempt at realizing them will include many imperfections. Put simply, the music should sound like it’s very hard to play. Moreover, the cellist should strive not only to accept a degree of imperfection in her realization of the score, but also to listen to results of such apparent failures with an appreciative ear.

(Bowling and Breathing) Throughout this piece, the oboe and cello strive to create an almost entirely continuous sound, like a stressed-out organ. This score should, to some extent, be understood as describing that ideal, rather than the literal surface of a performance. Along these lines, there are very few rests in the oboe part, and so the oboist must decide where to add breaths. Such decisions should naturally be made in consultation with the cellist, to avoid undesired seams in the sound. It is very possible (even desirable) that performers of this piece might, however, decide to engineer some such seams into their performance.

The cellist should take time to study the phrasing ideas implied by the provided bowings, but then may disregard them at her discretion. I have used standard abbreviations for bow-position, and have always presented them underlined and in small-caps. The indication ‘ord.’, when not in small-caps, should be understood as describing a return to normal bow-speed.

(Tempi) All tempi should be understood as approximate. Special attention should be paid to the final section of the piece (D), in which tempo plays a particularly crucial role in determining the import of events.

To the Performers

There are a few ideas I'd like to share with you now, in the hope that a little bit of contextualization up-front will help you to more pleasantly find a way to care about this piece.

The first thing you should know is that I didn't really write the harmonies. Via statistical machinations too abstruse to bear explanation here, they more or less wrote themselves one day in response to a challenge that I issued my computer. The results were very realistic, inasmuch as they often, but not always, sucked. They were never truly random, which I think would have felt better; instead, they were just consistent-seeming enough to foster the hope that they might eventually do something nice. But I could never tell if what I just heard was the nice part or not. It was distracting like an unexpected mirror, yielding self-consciousness where you'd expect entertainment.

This piece is something quite different from that original progression, but it has grown directly from it. I have cut and prodded the material into something that approximates familiar musical form, and I have tried to imagine a manner of performance for the oboe and cello that is so emphatically atypical, and yet also undeniably earnest and good-natured, that we might have a chance of suspending our dissatisfaction with this perfunctory harmony.

Irony, bad taste, fear, and inexpertness are all topics here, but they are red herrings. At the heart of this piece is a simple hope for acceptance and the belief that, with good will, we can come to love almost anything.

for Duo Parvenue

A ♩ = ca. 60

OB *fff* *poss.* *fff (sub.)*

VC *fff* *ob.* *fff (sub.)*

*this vib. only momentary
but clearly premeditated.*

vib. (non vib.)

5

p *fff*

f *l.r.* *fff* III II

(a:) *p*

9

mp *fff* *p*

13

mf sub. *late* *p* *legato, generally conserving bow* *peculiarly bright, but never glassy*

19

ORD *ff* *fff* *fff* *fff* *sonorous, using a lot of bow* *back to the harsh, pressed sound of the beginning*

a sudden, seemingly digital silence, reflecting a kind of tension.

23

(fff) *(fff)*

4

B

27

p

PSP (never glassy)

ST

mp sost.

while realizing dynamics, taking great care to compensate for register.

(*p*)

32

fff

mp

p

mp
queerly intense

PSP

(V)

(□)

35

pp

p

ORD

fff (sost.)

pp:ob.

(□)

PSP

39

fff

ORD V *legatiss.*

ff *sonorous* (cf. bar 20)

fff

PSP

43

opt. (V)

46

very pure

pp *fff*

(ord.)

flaut. *pp :ob.* *fff*

PSP

ORD

PST

6

C

49

pp poss. *p* *pp poss.*

p *poco flaut.* *ord. (□)* *PSP* *PST (V)*

pp :ob. *p :ob.*

55

(pp poss.)

mf sonorous *pp :ob.*

ORD *PSP sempre legato poss. (V)* *V*

60

p *mp*

(PSP) (□) *(V)* *a bit brighter...*

:ob.

D Rubato
rather impatiently

Slower

65

(mp)

(PSP)--->ORD

mp:ob.

p

{very in-tune

The oboist beginning to rush
in response to the cello's low diad

a Tempo (♩=60)

69

mp

p

mp:ob.

p:ob.

75

pp

p

pp

p

80

breath

ob.

(V)

pp

pp

♩=70