

THESIS

A CONDUCTOR'S GUIDE TO THE USE OF
ENSEMBLE PEDALING AND ACOUSTIC RECREATION OF ELECTRONIC DELAY PROCESSING
IN THE WIND BAND MUSIC OF VIET CUONG

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to provide a conductor's analysis of two unique orchestration techniques utilized in Viet Cuong's wind band music. Viet Cuong (b. 1990) is an award-winning contemporary American composer whose eclectic sound has been described as "alluring" and "wildly inventive" by *The New York Times*.¹ Two approaches to orchestration have been identified by the composer as distinctive elements of his compositional voice: ensemble pedaling, and the acoustic recreation of electronic delay processing. *Sound and Smoke* (2011) is Cuong's earliest available work for wind band and exemplifies early application of these techniques. Over the course of his career, Cuong has continued to employ and develop these approaches in select works, including *Vital Sines* (2022). Therefore, this document provides detailed examination of ensemble pedaling, and the acoustic recreation of electronic delay processing appearing in Cuong's *Sound and Smoke*, with select examples provided from *Vital Sines* to serve as a comparison of these techniques in the composer's recent body of work. The research conducted was completed concurrently with the Colorado State University Wind Symphony's performance preparation of *Sound and Smoke* in the 2023 spring semester. The information presented serves as a resource for the preparation and performance of Viet Cuong's music for wind band.

¹ "Press," Viet Cuong Music, accessed March 7, 2023, www.vietcuongmusic.com.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Viet Cuong (b. 1990) is an American composer whose music has been commissioned and performed on six continents by internationally acclaimed ensembles, such as the New York Philharmonic, Eighth Blackbird (Chicago, Illinois), the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (St. Paul, Minnesota), the Atlanta Symphony, the United States Navy Band (Washington, D.C.), and the Dallas Winds, among many others. International performances include those by the Queensland Wind Orchestra (Brisbane, Australia), the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), and ensembles in Canada, Brazil, Portugal, Italy, and Japan. At age thirty-two, Cuong was lauded as a leading contemporary composer and had already amassed numerous accolades, including the Walter Beeler Memorial Compositional Prize presented by Ithaca College, the Theodore Presser Foundation Award, the ASCAP Morton Gould Composers Award, and most recently, the 2023 ASCAP/CBDNA Frederick Fennell Prize for *Vital Sines* (2022). Over the past five years, Cuong and his music have begun to emerge as a topic of scholarly writing. This is attributed to his unique and creative compositional voice, a result of brilliant orchestration constructed from two areas of interest: his technique of pedaling the ensemble, and his interest in “recreating” electronic sounds with acoustical instruments.²

Cuong states that pedaling the ensemble is “one of my orchestrational tricks I’ve developed over the years.”³ He equates the concept to that of a sustain pedal on a piano. When pressed, the sound of the instrument becomes “very lush, like you are under water.”⁴ Thus, Cuong’s application

² Viet Cuong, “Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Renewal*” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2022), 9.

³ Viet Cuong, “*Vital Sines*: The Making of a Commission” (presentation, The Midwest Clinic: An International Band and Orchestra Conference, Chicago, IL, December 20, 2022).

⁴ Viet Cuong, “*Vital Sines*: The Making of a Commission.”

of this same effect, through orchestration, results in the ensemble sounding like it is performing in a large concert hall, even when playing in a non-reverberative space. Cuong also indicates that electronic sound “delay effects” has fascinated him since his early compositional stage (2011–2015).⁵ A delay effect is an electronic manipulation of an input signal that has numerous variations in frequency, length, and sound quality.

At the simplest level, a delay does just what the name implies: it delays an incoming signal. [Older] units used tape or digital sampling technology, whereas modern plug-ins operate by recording the incoming data and storing it in a buffer. Normally, the length of delay is determined by the user and the buffer will [export] the signal after the specified length of time. Some plug-ins provide a number of interesting ways to manipulate the buffer’s output, however, resulting in backwards signals or any number of odd, glitchy effects.⁶

Cuong’s first use of delay effects can be heard in *Naica* (2011), written for solo alto saxophone and electronics. This piece prompted the composer to later employ compositional techniques to imitate these electronically manipulated sounds through the use of acoustic instruments in his work for wind band, *Sound and Smoke* (2011). He further developed aspects of these techniques in subsequent works, including his work for solo sextet and wind ensemble, *Vital Sines*. In his dissertation, “Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Renewal*,” Cuong says the following regarding the use of these techniques in his percussion quartet *Re(new)al*, “And I am certainly not the only composer who has emulated delay. . . . However, to the best of my knowledge, the particular scoring strategies I have devised to achieve this effect are unique and personal to my music.”⁷ In Cuong’s transformation of “scoring strategies” he includes rhythmic considerations and specific timbral decisions that manifest a sophisticated and fascinating soundscape in the achievement of the desired sound delay effects.

⁵ Cuong, “Adaptation as Composition,” 9.

⁶ Computer Music Specials, “The Ultimate Guide to Effects: Delay,” *Music Radar* (blog), June 7, 2011, www.musicradar.com.

⁷ *Re(new)al* (2017) was commissioned by the Albany Symphony (David Alan Miller, Music Director) in partnership with General Electric (GE) Renewable Energy. Originally written for percussion quartet and sinfonietta, the work has since been adapted for full orchestra (2018), wind ensemble (2019), and chamber winds (2021).

These compositional techniques have yet to be discussed at length in studies of Cuong's music. This thesis constitutes a conductor's analysis of these two unique techniques in orchestration utilized in the wind band music of Cuong. The focus of the analysis provides detailed examination of *Sound and Smoke*, with selected excerpts from *Vital Sines* serving as a comparison of these techniques present in Cuong's recent body of work. This document supplies a resource regarding Cuong's use of 1) ensemble pedaling and 2) the acoustic recreation of electronic delay processing, for the preparation and performance of Cuong's music for wind band.

Rationale

The rationale for this study consists of three components. First, to date, there are no scholarly publications analyzing the specific use of the aforementioned orchestration techniques in Cuong's *Sound and Smoke* and *Vital Sines*. The scholarly writing currently available focuses on Cuong's *Re(new)al*, and select solo and chamber ensemble repertoire that will be discussed further in the next chapter's Literature Review. Second, Cuong's wind ensemble version of *Re(new)al*, one of his most well-known works to date, has generated a rise in name recognition and popularity, resulting in continued demand for original works for bands, and thus a greater need for conductor and performer scholarship. Finally, Cuong has identified orchestration techniques (ensemble pedaling, and the acoustic recreation of electronic delay processing) as distinctive characteristics of his compositional voice. Conductors and performers need to be aware of these intricacies and elements in Cuong's writing to accurately interpret his music.

Methodology: A Conductor's Analysis

In Frank L. Battisti's book *On Becoming a Conductor: Lessons and Meditations on the Art of Conducting* (2007), the author states, "A conductor, when studying a score, traces backwards the

steps of the composer, who gave life to the music before putting it down on paper.”⁸ It is therefore the responsibility of the conductor to be knowledgeable and authentic in the interpretation of a composer’s voice and intent. This can only be done through the acquisition of information regarding the composer’s life, their upbringing, early musical influences, their teachers and mentors, as well as the personal and historical context of their work within their career. Moreover, as Igor Stravinsky stated:

No matter how scrupulously a piece of music may be notated, no matter how carefully it may be insured against every possible ambiguity through the indications of tempo, shading, phrasing, accentuation, and so on, it always contains hidden elements that defy definition because verbal dialectic is powerless to define musical dialectic in its totality. The realization of these elements is thus a matter of experience and intuition, in a word, of the talent of the person who is called upon to present the music.⁹

Music notation is in no way a comprehensive system, nor can it be a method to fully communicate the composer’s intention. The writing of music resulted, not solely out of a desire to create, but rather, more practically, a necessity to duplicate. In *Sound in Motion: A Performer’s Guide to Greater Musical Expression*, David McGill eloquently addresses this sentiment:

Music was also not originally written down. It sprang forth as *song* that expressed emotion that could not be adequately expressed through words alone. In order for composers to communicate these emotional musical thoughts to performers, symbols were invented to represent music’s individual components. Written music is far removed from that pure and unified form in the composer’s mind.¹⁰

Through research, a conductor must then bridge the gap between the ink on the page and the “purity” of the composer’s idea.

Regarding composers of the past, conductors and musicians are dependent upon the most reliable sources available to base their interpretations and achieve the most authentic performance possible. Musicians have historical accounts upon which they can rely to craft their musical ideas

⁸ Frank Battisti, *On Becoming a Conductor: Lessons and Meditations on the Art of Conducting* (Galesville, MD: Meredith Music, 2007), 49.

⁹ Battisti, 52–53.

¹⁰ David McGill, *Sound in Motion: A Performer’s Guide to Great Musical Expression* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 31.

based on what musicologists have assembled from primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. Unfortunately, many composers throughout history went unrecorded as to the performance practice of their music, due to lack of methodology and communicative restraints of the time. With this in mind, it is paramount that living, contemporary composers are thoroughly documented so that conductors and musicians of the present and future have a scholarly source to reference in their performance preparation. Conductor's analyses are an essential piece of scholarly writing in this regard.¹¹

The conductor's analysis typically consists of three main sections:

1. Background of the Composer
2. Historical Context of the Music
3. Analytical Components of the Score

The Background of the Composer includes biographical information essential in the interpretation of the composer's voice and intent as previously mentioned. The historical context and analytical components offer conductors keen insight into the structure of the composer's work. In a 2022 interview with Classic FM, conductor Marin Alsop said:

I do a lot of analysis on the piece I am conducting. [In doing so] I have done a dynamic analysis, meaning, I know where the loudest points, where the softest points, that kind of gradation, where they occur. When I'm in the concert, I'm constantly shaping the piece to arrive at the loudest moments and to really, really exaggerate the quietest moments.¹²

Describing a conductor as "the messenger" of the composer, Alsop goes on to say, "It is really important to me that every piece I conduct somehow conveys the architecture of the composer's intent. So, I am constantly thinking about the shape, the bigger shape of the piece, while managing all the details."¹³

¹¹ As of September 25, 2022, 715 thesis and dissertation documents that included a conductor's analysis in their abstract resulted from a search of the ProQuest database.

¹² Marin Alsop, "Marin Alsop Reveals 10 Things in a Conductor's Brain During a Symphony Concert," Classic FM, posted on May 26, 2022, YouTube video, 4:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=598yoOf3M>.

¹³ Marin Alsop (b. 1956) is Chief Conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra. She is Music Director Laureate of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, where she served as the orchestra's Music Director for fourteen years. Alsop is the first and only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship.

It is evident that structure of orchestration, and how compositional techniques are utilized and evolve throughout a piece or composer's career, are vital to the conductor's comprehensive understanding of the music. With the optimum goal of delivering an authentic version of the composer's music to the audience, this information directly influences the rehearsal process for a work, as the conductor uses these insights and detail to inform the musical decisions made, both in preparation and performance. In an interview with Jeannine Wagar in the book *Conductors in Conversation*, conductor Catherine Comet addresses the role of the conductor as empowering musicians with necessary information, so they may give an informed performance of the composer's work. She says, "We are serving the music but at the same time we are serving the musicians too. . . . So, you have to make sure that the score is really clarified by the musicians. . . . You try to make sure that the orchestra knows how the music unfolds as a whole."¹⁴ Comet's comments speak to the entire conducting profession as being a role of service, which includes honoring tradition, bringing life to a composer's vision, delivering a genuine performance of the music to the audience, and respecting the musicians that carry out this endeavor.¹⁵ The conductor's analysis of a composer's compositional techniques serves as an indispensable tool to be used in fulfilling these responsibilities.

¹⁴ Jeannine Wagar, ed., *Conductors in Conversation* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991), 30.

¹⁵ Catherine Comet (b. 1944) served as the Music Director of the Grand Rapids Symphony, in Grand Rapids, MI, from 1986 to 1997. She received the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductor's Award in 1988 and also served as the Music Director of the American Symphony Orchestra.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Literature Review

Dissertations and Theses

As of September 2022, there were five thesis or dissertation submissions related to the music of Viet Cuong. Two offer analyses of *Zanelle* (2009) for unaccompanied clarinet, one of which includes an additional analysis of *Wax and Wire* (2014) for chamber ensemble. One is a conductor's analysis of *Bull's-Eye* (2019) for wind ensemble. Two are dissertations about Cuong's concerto for percussion quartet *Re(new)al*. Of these, one is a conductor's analysis of the work's wind ensemble version and the other is Cuong's own dissertation regarding the adaptive processes used in the orchestration of the piece for various mediums. The following descriptions present an overview of each dissertation in the order they were published.

Vanessa A. Davis submitted a DMA dissertation in August 2018 at the University of North Texas titled "A Concept-Based Pedagogy Approach To Selected Unaccompanied Clarinet Repertoire."¹⁶ The document includes an analysis of *Zanelle* by Viet Cuong. The unaccompanied clarinet solo is part of a larger study that discusses the importance of unaccompanied literature within what the author calls "concept-based pedagogy," as a vehicle to "address larger universal musical concepts."¹⁷ Of the five difficulty levels identified by the author, *Zanelle* is placed in the fifth and most advanced category, thus to be considered by students in their third and fourth year of undergraduate study. Along with Cuong's program note, Davis provides brief background information about the composer, including where he was raised, his academic history, and his

¹⁶ *Zanelle* is Viet Cuong's first professional piece and the oldest work in the composer's catalog. The solo is for unaccompanied B-flat clarinet and was commissioned by Miles Jacques, a colleague and classmate of Cuong at the Peabody Conservatory. *Zanelle* premiered December 2, 2009. The title refers to artwork painted by machinery using physical paint and brushwork called a Zanelle.

¹⁷ Vanessa A. Davis, "A Concept-Based Pedagogy Approach To Selected Unaccompanied Clarinet Repertoire" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2018), i.

compositional mentors. Davis details the skills required to perform the solo work and identifies challenges presented to the performer. In addition, Davis provides customized exercises that address the technical prowess demanded by the piece as part of the encompassing scope of the document surrounding concept-based pedagogy.

On October 23, 2019, Nils Landsberg defended his DMA dissertation at the University of Kansas titled “Viet Cuong’s *Bull’s-Eye*: A Conductor’s Analysis.”¹⁸ The commission and premiere of *Bull’s-Eye* is the topic of Landsberg’s document. The author was the consortium organizer (University of Kansas) of ten institutions that supported the composition’s creation.¹⁹ The high percentage of literature in the wind band repertoire that requires double-reed instruments forms a challenge to ensembles who do not possess the necessary personnel. Therefore, the objective of the consortium was to, “create an opportunity for smaller collegiate band programs to perform chamber music of high artistic merit, from an emerging young composer, without having to compromise the timbre of the piece due to instrumentation substitutions.”²⁰ Landsberg’s dissertation includes information about the commissioning project, a biographical sketch of Viet Cuong, a description of Cuong’s compositional style and approach (as of 2019), a discussion regarding the source material for *Bull’s-Eye*, an analysis of the work’s formal structure, and considerations for rehearsal and performance.

In Landsberg’s section regarding the composer’s compositional style and approach, the author cites Cuong’s distinction of two stages in his compositional voice. Cuong specifies that Stage 1 encompasses his works written prior to 2015, including *Sound and Smoke* (2011), *Moth* (2013), and *Diamond Tide* (2015). Landsberg characterizes this stage as incorporating “independent lines,

¹⁸ Nils Landsberg, “Viet Cuong’s *Bull’s-Eye*: A Conductor’s Analysis” (DMA diss., University of Kansas, 2019).

¹⁹ *Bull’s-Eye* (2019) is a work for chamber winds (thirteen musicians) and musically portrays the “process of simplification and abstraction” utilized in Pablo Picasso’s 1945 series of lithographs, titled *Bull* (Cuong, 2019).

²⁰ Landsberg, 1.

layered dynamic contour, non-traditional harmonies, shifting meters, extended techniques, large percussion sections, and an exploitation of the intimate and bombastic nuances unique to the medium.”²¹ Stage 2 includes works composed since 2015. While the pieces from this stage incorporate aspects of the aforementioned characteristics of Cuong’s musical voice, by this time the composer was interested in the “pursuit to create more musical experiences that the audiences can understand even if the material seems a bit strange to them.”²² This comparison of Cuong’s compositional voice over the course of his career thus far provides the inspiration for this study in regard to orchestration techniques, which seeks to expand on the topic that Landsberg’s research brought forth.

Patricia Tran submitted a Master’s Thesis (Music Performance) in December of 2020 at California State University, Northridge titled “Viet Cuong: Virtuosity Unbound.” The document provides an analysis of two pieces written by Cuong: *Zanelle*, for unaccompanied clarinet solo, as previously mentioned in this review, and *Wax and Wire*.²³ Tran includes biographical information about Viet Cuong, as well as a description of his compositional style and approach. Tran’s thesis provides both formal analysis and performance preparation guidelines for the soloist and ensemble.

Viet Cuong’s own dissertation, “Adaptation as Composition: Flexible Approaches in *Renewal*” was published from Princeton University in January of 2022. Cuong focuses on the process of adapting his percussion quartet *Re(new)al* for orchestra, wind ensemble, and chamber winds. Cuong provides detailed background information regarding the piece, including the commission and how the inspiration for the sounds heard in the work transpired. Additionally,

²¹ Landsberg, 6.

²² Landsberg, 6.

²³ *Wax and Wire* is a seven-minute chamber work for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. The piece was premiered in 2014 by the Music from Copland House Ensemble as part of CULTIVATE 2014, the organization’s emerging composers institute.

Cuong's dissertation offers two specific sections on adapting electronic sounds for acoustic ensembles and adapting string-centric music for wind ensembles. The former has become, as the composer states, a "signature of mine over the years."²⁴

An additional dissertation on the topic of *Re(new)al* was submitted by Janet Song Kim in 2022 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Titled "Repurposing Sound: A Conductor's Guide and a Focused Analysis of Viet Cuong's Wind Ensemble Version of *Re(new)al*," Kim's research focuses specifically on the wind ensemble adaptation of Cuong's percussion quartet. The document structure includes background and personal information about the composer, circumstances behind the composition regarding the various versions, commissions and consortiums, premieres and performances, a focused analysis of each movement, as well as interpretive and logistical considerations in regard to phrasing, extended techniques, and the visual aspects of the piece. In a survey of Cuong's musical catalog, Kim identifies characteristics of Cuong's compositional style within the parameters of the past six years (2016–2021). These characteristics include Extended Techniques (ET), Cyclical Harmony (CH), Flourishes (F), Repetitive Motifs (RM), Extreme Dynamic Shifts (EDS), Floating/Ethereal Section (FES), and Sliding/Glissandi (SG).²⁵ Kim also discusses the significance of *Re(new)al* in the context of what the author identifies as the genre of percussion concerto grosso.²⁶

In addition to the documents above on the topic of Cuong's music, a Master's Thesis (Wind Conducting), "Conversations with Composers: Engaging, Programming, and Performing Wind Band Works by Composers from Historically Underrepresented Communities," was submitted in April of 2021 by Cody Edgerton at Western Michigan University. Edgerton presents information

²⁴ Cuong, "Adaptation as Composition," 9.

²⁵ Janet Song Kim, "Repurposing Sound: A Conductor's Guide and a Focused Analysis of Viet Cuong's Wind Ensemble Version of *Re(new)al*" (DMA diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2022), 19.

²⁶ Janet Song Kim defines percussion concerto grosso as a percussion concerto for percussion duos, trios, quartets, or more; which is a considerably smaller subset of the percussion concerto genre.

surrounding diversity in the wind band repertoire, and common misconceptions made in efforts to address current inequities.²⁷ Edgerton provides historical information that places the history of the wind band in the context of “male-normative traditions and military roots.”²⁸ This provides a platform upon which the author discusses current inequities in wind band literature and offers four considerations for conductors regarding the programming of underrepresented composers: intentional programming, authentic and appropriate reasoning, composer and co-conductor engagement, and direct or indirect action.²⁹ Edgerton provides evidence of these considerations through information acquired in interviews with thirteen composers: Jodie Blackshaw, Viet Cuong, Kevin Day, Stacy Garrop, Joni Greene, Jennifer Jolley, Libby Larsen, Gilda Lyons, Nicole Piunno, Kathryn Salfelder, Alex Shapiro, Carlos Simon, and Zhou Tian. While Edgerton does not directly address Cuong’s music, he presents valuable information that offers Cuong’s perspective on this topic. For example, in his interview, Cuong says:

It’s part of my mission statement to show that an American composer can be named Viet Cuong. You don’t have to assume anything about their music, because of what a composer’s name or gender is. . . . If people were to listen to my music, I don’t know if they would think I was a Vietnamese American person. Or if they saw my name first and didn’t know anything about my music, they might assume that I use a lot of pentatonic scales, or that all of my pieces have to be connected to my roots.³⁰

This information provides insight into the mind of the composer and helps support Edgerton’s goal in providing a resource for conductors in how to approach the topic of composer diversity with “sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and authenticity,” in order to “empower composer identities” and to “offer diverse musical experiences for their ensemble.”³¹

²⁷ Cody Edgerton, “Conversations with Composers: Engaging, Programming, and Performing Wind Band Works by Composers from Historically Underrepresented Communities” (MM thesis, Western Michigan University, 2021).

²⁸ Edgerton, 5.

²⁹ Edgerton, 5.

³⁰ Edgerton, 67.

³¹ Edgerton, 5.

Books and Educational Resources

Two books have been published that include chapters about Cuong and his music. First, *The Horizon Leans Forward* (2021), edited and compiled by Erik Kar Jun Leung, includes an interview with Cuong about the influence of cultural expectations surrounding his decision to become a professional composer.³² Second, there are three chapters included in the series *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* that offer an overview of three works by Cuong: *Sound and Smoke* (2011), *Moth* (2013), and *Diamond Tide* (2015).³³ The following descriptions will present an overview of each book's contents.

The Horizon Leans Forward is an expansive resource for conductors and musicians alike who are interested in offering more diverse programming and learning about currently underrepresented composers. The book's title is in reference to a line from Maya Angelou's poem *On the Pulse of the Morning* (1993): "The horizon leans forward, offering you space to place new steps of change."³⁴ The book chapters are contributed by Alfred L. Watkins, Erik Kar Jun Leung, Courtney Snyder, Robert Taylor, Alex Shapiro, and Jodie Blackshaw. Each entry offers firsthand accounts of the author's life and experiences with racism, inequality, and cultural intersections. In Chapter 2: Face, Honor, and Family: The Crossroads of Asian Culture and a Career in Music, Erik Kar Jun Leung offers a personal perspective, while also providing interviews with colleagues in the wind band field who share "their own experiences balancing family expectations and their desire to follow their dreams."³⁵ The interviewees are Jennifer Jolley, Viet Cuong, Travis J. Cross, Danh Pham, and Jason Shiuan. This resource provides a detailed account of Cuong's personal background in the

³² Erik Kar Jun Leung, ed., *The Horizon Leans Forward* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2021).

³³ Richard Miles, ed., *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* 11 (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2018).

³⁴ Maya Angelou, *On the Pulse of Morning* (New York: Random House, 1993).

³⁵ Leung, 60.

context of how his Vietnamese heritage influenced familial dynamics surrounding his decision to become a professional composer.

The *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* book series is a resource guide for music educators published by GIA Publications. Volume 1 of the series was released in 1996 and a new volume has been added every two years, approximately, with the most recent Volume 12 released in March of 2021. The guides offer overview and insight for contemporary repertoire to assist educators with research for ensemble programming. Each book also provides chapters contributed by individuals in the profession, containing interesting topics that involve teaching and conducting. The repertoire presented is organized by difficulty level based on grades, from one to six. Part 2 of Volume 11 in the series provides analyses of Viet Cuong's *Diamond Tide* (Grade 3), *Sound and Smoke* (Grade 5), and *Moth* (Grade 6). The chapters are contributed by Emily A. Moss, Andrew Trachsel, and Shawn D. Vondran, respectively.³⁶ Each analysis offers information about the composer and the composition, historical perspective surrounding the piece, technical and stylistic considerations, musical elements (melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre), and an analysis of form and structure. The information provided offers wonderful insights, and acts as a beneficial introduction to the selected works. This thesis contributes an expansion of Trachsel's *Sound and Smoke* analysis, with attention given to Cuong's specific utilization of orchestration techniques. The following biographical information was obtained through the previously discussed research of Landsberg (2019) and Kim (2022), as well as an interview with the composer conducted by the author.

Viet Cuong: A Biographical Sketch

Located in Marietta, Georgia, the Lassiter High School Band is one of the most renowned high school band programs in the United States, having been recognized for superior musicianship

³⁶ As of September 2022, Emily A. Moss is Professor of Music and Director of Bands at California State University, Los Angeles, Andrew Trachsel is the Professor of Wind Studies and Chair of the Division of Conducting and Ensembles at the University of North Texas, and Shawn D. Vondran is the Associate Director of Bands at Northwestern University.

for over three decades.³⁷ During a weekend recruiting camp, former Associate Director of Bands Catharine Sinon Bushman presented a clinic on the usage of the free notation software from MakeMusic called Finale Notepad. As a rising freshman percussionist, Cuong attended the workshop and this event ignited his career in composition.

Pham Viet Cuong was born September 8, 1990 in the west San Fernando Valley suburb of West Hills, California. He is the older of two children and his family resided in Simi Valley, California, just forty miles from downtown Los Angeles, in southeast Ventura County, before moving to Arizona when Cuong was three. Familiar with the “Mozart Effect,” Cuong’s parents enrolled him in Suzuki piano lessons at the age of five.³⁸ The Suzuki method was founded by Japanese violinist Shinichi Suzuki, and based on the principles of his self-described “mother-tongue approach.” This methodology equates the principles of learning music to learning a native language and incorporates parent involvement, beginning training at an early age, listening, and constant repetition as core tenets of the curriculum.³⁹ Cuong’s participation was brief as he resisted practicing the required material and left the studio in less than a year. Cuong’s disinterest was partially due to his young age, and the fact that he wanted to learn Disney songs instead of repeating the same repertoire ad nauseum. Another key component of the Suzuki method, however,

³⁷ The Lassiter High School Band Program received the Sudler Flag of Honor in 1988, presented by the John Philip Sousa Foundation. The Symphonic Bands have performed at The Midwest Clinic: An International Band and Orchestra Conference (1989, 1996), the Georgia Music Educators’ In-Service Conference (1986, 2000, 2010), and the Bands of America National Concert Band Festival (1993, 1995, 2002). The Marching Band is a two-time Bands of America Grand National Champion (1998, 2002) and has performed numerous times in the Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade (1988, 2001, 2005, 2013) and the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (1999, 2004, 2010).

³⁸ The term “Mozart Effect” originated from a 1993 study titled “Music and Spatial Task Performance” conducted by Frances H. Rauscher, Gordon L. Shaw, and Catherine N. Ky. The study consisted of thirty-six college students listening to ten minutes of a Mozart Piano Sonata; after which, the students were given a spatial reasoning test. The study found that after listening to the Mozart Sonata the students scored significantly higher. This began an avalanche of popularity as the general public sought intelligence by listening to Mozart. Rauscher, however, is explicit in her qualification that these found effects are not in reference to general intelligence, but rather a short-lived smaller aspect of intelligence that can be garnered by listening to any music that is found appealing.

³⁹ “About the Suzuki Method,” Suzuki Association of the Americas, accessed September 30, 2022, www.suzukiassociation.org.

is the student learning to play first by ear before incorporating notation. Cuong admits he fooled his mother into thinking he was practicing by improvising simple melodies on the white keys of the piano. Although none of these improvisations were ever notated, this was Cuong's first venture into constructing his own melodies.

When Cuong was seven, he and his family relocated to Georgia. The decision to settle in the school zone of Lassiter High School, in Marietta, was made in large part due to Lassiter students' high test scores. Although the school was third on the list of Cuong's parents, his family valued education and made decisions, such as enrolling in piano lessons, based on the potential for success it would provide in STEM-based activities.⁴⁰

In fact, Cuong's parents originally wanted him to become an orthodontist. This valuation is both a cultural tradition and a result of his parent's background, and their immigration to the United States. Cuong's mother lived in South Vietnam at the end of the Vietnam War, following the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.⁴¹ Her father and some of her brothers were sent to Communist reeducation camps, suffering torture as well as other harsh conditions. She immigrated to the United States in 1978 from a refugee camp in Malaysia via sponsorship from an American church, and worked in a sewing factory to pay her way through college. Cuong's father immigrated to the United States, in 1973, by means of a student visa to study at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Cuong describes his father as a "street kid" who had little in the way of family.⁴² Nevertheless, his father, a physicist, earned a PhD from UCLA and completed a postdoc position at

⁴⁰ STEM is an education curriculum focused on the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. The acronym was first introduced in 2001 by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) as SMET and rearranged by the NSF Assistant Director of Education and Human Resources Judith Ramaley to form STEM. The application of these curricula increased in the United States throughout the early 2000s.

⁴¹ Saigon is the former capital of South Vietnam. On April 30, 1975 the city government surrendered to the North Vietnamese Army which ended the Vietnam War. On July 2, 1976 a military government was established and the country united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

⁴² Kim, 108.

the California Institute of Technology (Pasadena, California).⁴³ Cuong's younger brother Nam chose a career path similar to his father, becoming an engineer and earning a master's degree from Stanford University (Stanford, California).

Cuong continued to express an interest in playing the piano after moving to Marietta. Here he began lessons with a private instructor who displayed more flexibility in the repertoire. While learning Johann Pachelbel's *Canon in D Major* (1680), around the age of eight, Cuong began performing the left hand of the piece while improvising melodies in the right hand. Through this process the young Cuong learned by experience the beginning concepts of consonance/dissonance and harmonic progression. Eventually he began to transcribe what he was playing onto manuscript paper. When Cuong enrolled in middle school band, his keyboard experience provided a natural bridge to the mallet percussion instruments. Cuong acknowledged that as a young percussionist, given the opportunity to count a number of rests, he would use this time to observe the rehearsal process and he began to notice how his teachers grouped certain instruments together in rehearsals. He made connections between flutes and clarinets, or saxophones and French horns, and how these timbres blended and were utilized within the context of the entire ensemble. Thus, when Cuong discovered Finale Notepad he not only found the tool to transcribe his piano pieces, he also already possessed basic knowledge to begin composing music for wind bands.

His early compositions were based on music to which Cuong was exposed in secondary school. For example, after playing Robert W. Smith's *Into the Storm* (1994) he wrote a piece that depicted a storm. Cuong also began to explore ostinato and, through trial and error on Finale, learned concepts such as transposition. His interest in composition continued in high school and was encouraged by the directors of the Lassiter Band, Alfred Watkins and Catharine Sinon Bushman. His teachers loaned him music scores and *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* recordings. Cuong studied the scores as he listened to the music and began to imitate what he heard

⁴³ A postdoc is a temporary position in academia that allows a PhD recipient to continue as a researcher, in preparation for their career, under the guidance of a mentor within a larger research group.

and saw. Bushman won a full version of Finale notation software in a raffle at The Midwest Clinic: An International Band and Orchestra Conference (Chicago, Illinois) and gave it to Cuong who had been limited to the ten staves of the free Finale Notepad. This was a pivotal moment in the composer's life as he came to the realization that he could have a career as a full-time composer. Cuong credits his experience in high school band as having a remarkable influence on him as a musician and human being. He was inspired by his teachers Mike Lynch and Scott Brown, Director and Assistant Director of Percussion Studies at Lassiter, and during this time he fell in love with making music.

The Lassiter High School Marching Band was invited to perform in both the Rose Bowl Parade (Pasadena, California) and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (New York, New York) during Cuong's secondary school years. As a member of the marching band's stationary front ensemble, Cuong had no interest in playing sleigh bells in the parade, which prompted him to learn a wind instrument. His mother purchased a plastic clarinet on eBay and he began to practice and perform on clarinet in the concert bands, while remaining in the marching band's front ensemble. This was another influential moment in the composer's life, as learning clarinet introduced additional instrumental concepts such as articulation, slurring, vibrato, and various timbral colors. The community and sense of belonging provided by the marching band instilled a sense of confidence in Cuong, and its large scale, striking, and dramatic music also influenced his compositional style.

Cuong received no formal compositional training until college. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in composition from the Peabody Conservatory (Baltimore, Maryland) where he studied with 2012 Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts and with Oscar Bettison.⁴⁴ Cuong was on track to complete the degree in three years, leading him to enroll in a five-year Bachelor's/Master's

⁴⁴ Kevin Puts received the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Music for the opera *Silent Night* (premiered November 12, 2011).

program, which he completed in four. He went on to complete a Master of Fine Arts degree in 2014 at Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey), as a Naumburg and Roger Sessions Fellow, where he studied with Steven Mackey, Donnacha Dennehy, Dan Trueman, Dmitri Tymoczko, Paul Lansky, and visiting professor Louis Andriessen. From 2017 to 2019, Cuong earned an Artist's Diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), and studied with 2010 Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon, David Ludwig, and, on occasion, Richard Danielpour.⁴⁵ In January 2022, Cuong completed his PhD in composition at Princeton University. He is currently a member of the Blue Dot Collective with fellow composers Benjamin Dean Taylor, Jess Langston Turner, Roger Zare, David Biedenbender, Jennifer Jolley, and Omar Thomas. Their collective bio states, "Blue Dot Collective is dedicated to composing new works for wind band that are well-crafted, compelling, sincere, exciting, and fresh."⁴⁶ As of 2022, Cuong is Assistant Professor of Composition at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

⁴⁵ Jennifer Higdon received the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her *Violin Concerto* (2008, premiered February 6, 2009).

⁴⁶ "About," Blue Dot Collective, accessed January 14, 2023, www.bluedotcollective.weebly.com.

CHAPTER 2: SOUND AND SMOKE & VITAL SINES

Sound and Smoke: Background

In the spring semester of 2011, when Cuong was a twenty-year-old senior at the Peabody Conservatory, Harlan D. Parker, conductor of the Peabody Wind Ensemble, solicited him to write a piece for the wind ensemble.⁴⁷ Cuong, interested in adding a large ensemble work for band to his catalog, proceeded to compose *Sound and Smoke* in the summer of 2011, and the piece was premiered by the Peabody Wind Ensemble on November 11, 2011, conducted by Parker.⁴⁸ The first movement was subsequently performed at The Midwest Clinic on December 15, 2011, by the Cobb Wind Symphony, conducted by Alfred Watkins. *Sound and Smoke* went on to great acclaim, receiving the 2012 Walter Beeler Memorial Composition Prize, one of the most prestigious awards for original wind band music, which garnered further recognition and performances.⁴⁹ Andrew Trachsel submitted an analysis of *Sound and Smoke* in Volume 11 of the *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* series. He presents the chapter in seven units: Unit 1: Composer, Unit 2: Composition, Unit 3: Historical Perspective, Unit 4: Technical Considerations, Unit 5: Stylistic

⁴⁷ Harlan D. Parker has been the conductor of the Peabody Conservatory Wind Ensemble and coordinator of the Music Education Division at the Peabody Conservatory of Music at Johns Hopkins University since 1990. Parker earned his Bachelor of Music degree from Emporia State University (Emporia, Kansas), and the Master of Music and Doctor of Philosophy in Music Education, with an emphasis in Conducting, from the University of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas). He has also completed post-doctoral work at the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies (Brooklyn, New York).

⁴⁸ Music from the second movement of *Sound and Smoke* began as an orchestra piece that Cuong composed his junior year at Peabody. The material was orchestrated for band upon beginning the project with the Peabody Wind Ensemble. The opening of the piece's first movement originated from piano music that Cuong had been experimenting with since high school, but had not written down until the creation of *Sound and Smoke* (Appendix C, information from interview with Viet Cuong on November 14, 2022).

⁴⁹ The Walter Beeler Memorial Composition Prize, presented by Ithaca College (Ithaca, New York), is the successor to the Walter Beeler Memorial Commission Series, originally established in 1975. The original series is responsible for ten significant contributions to the wind band repertoire. The composition prize, a bi-annual contest funded by the Ithaca College School of Music, continues this tradition in honor of Walter Beeler, conductor of the Ithaca College Concert Band for thirty-five years (1932 through the 1960s). The mission of this project, as stated on the website, is "to further encourage the composition and performance of the highest quality wind band literature in honor and memory of Ithaca College's renowned director of bands," www.ithaca.edu.

Considerations, Unit 6: Musical Elements, and Unit 7: Form and Structure. This thesis seeks to expand upon Trachsel's analysis, which is used in subsequent sections of this chapter and document.

Historical Context and Inspiration

The title *Sound and Smoke* is inspired by a quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust: A Tragedy Part One* (1808). Each of the work's two movements contains parenthetical titles taken from translations of poetry by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973). While the piece does not share a programmatic connection to Goethe's play, the context of the quotation provides insight into the interpretation of Cuong's music. Goethe (1749–1832) first began writing his play in the 1770s; however, he did not complete it until 1806, before being published in 1808. The story of Faust dates back to the first century A.D. with the appearance in classical texts of the literary scholar-magician Simon Magus. *The History of Dr. Johann Faustus* was first published in 1587 and was often reprinted for distribution as a means of entertainment for the provincial population. The existence of the story demonstrates the European period of transition between the medieval to “secular perspectives of an emergent knowledge- and science-oriented modernity.”⁵⁰ The tale of Faust making a deal with the devil, Mephistopheles, to gain “worldly pleasure and higher knowledge” (magic), was passed down throughout the centuries. Goethe became infatuated with the story and wrote his own version as a play.⁵¹ In Eugene Stelzig's 2019 translation, he cites the parallels to Goethe's own life that appear in the play. For example, Margaret, Faust's love, who often goes by the

⁵⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy Part 1*, ed. Eugene Stelzig (Ithaca, NY: Bucknell University Press, 2019), 8.

⁵¹ Stelzig, 8.

name of Gretchen, was also the name of Goethe's first adolescent love, and thus a shared connection in the characters' trajectory can be drawn to Goethe's own life.⁵²

In scene XVI, Martha's Garden, Faust and Margaret (Gretchen) are on a walk when the following conversation ensues:

Margaret: Desiring no possession
'Tis long since thou hast been to mass or to confession.
Believest thou in God?

Faust: My darling, who shall dare
"I believe in God!" to say?
Ask priest or sage the answer to declare,
And it will seem a mocking play,
A sarcasm on the asker.

Margaret: Then thou believest not!

Faust: Hear me not falsely, sweetest countenance!
Who dare express Him?
And who profess Him,
Saying: I believe in Him!
Who, feeling, seeing,
Deny His being,
Saying: I believe Him not!
The All-enfolding,
The All-upholding,
Folds and upholds he not
Thee, me, Himself?
Arches not there the sky above us?
Lies not beneath us firm, the earth?
And rise not, on us shining,
Friendly, the everlasting stars?
Look I not, eye to eye, on thee,
And feel'st not, thronging
To head and heart, the force,
Still weaving its eternal secret,
Invisible, visible, round thy life?
Vast as it is, fill with that force thy heart,
And when thou in the feeling wholly blessed art,
Call it, then, what thou wilt, —
Call it Bliss! Heart! Love! God!
I have no name to give it!
Feeling is all in all:
The Name is sound and smoke,
Obscuring Heaven's clear glow.⁵³

⁵² Stelzig, 7.

Faust equates his feeling for Margaret with the words Love, God, Bliss, and “sound and smoke,” which serves as an interpretive starting point to Cuong’s piece, as Goethe suggests that words will never be able to completely communicate emotion. In the work’s program note, the composer says, “Each of the two movements has been given an abstract, parenthetical title to further incorporate Goethe’s conjecture that words will never be able to fully express what feelings and, in this case, music can.”⁵⁴

Musical Influences

In an interview with Trachsel, Cuong cites four of his musical influences while composing *Sound and Smoke*; these served as inspiration for the atmosphere, texture, and genesis of the piece. The first of these influences is the music of composer Joel Puckett.⁵⁵ Cuong was a student of Puckett’s at the Peabody Conservatory and enrolled in Puckett’s counterpoint course during Cuong’s second year of study. Cuong says, “In terms of a wind band composer who has had a big influence, I’d say he has.”⁵⁶ Cuong specifically admires Puckett’s orchestration and his ability to “pedal the ensemble.” This terminology references Puckett’s ability to create resonance through the use of a pedal point, similar to allowing a chord on the piano to resonate by pressing the sustain pedal. In “A Conductor’s Analysis of Joel Puckett’s *It Perched for Vespers Nine*,” Matthew O. Smith

⁵³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust [Part 1]*, trans. Bayard Taylor (Salt Lake City, UT: Gutenberg, 2005), scene XVI.

⁵⁴ Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* (Downingtown, PA: Murphy Music Press, 2011), ii.

⁵⁵ Joel Puckett is Associate Professor and Chair of Music Theory, Ear-Training, and Keyboard Skills in the Composition/Music Theory department at the Peabody Conservatory. He is an award-winning composer whose music has been commissioned and performed by major contemporary ensembles and soloists.

⁵⁶ Andrew Trachsel, “*Sound and Smoke*,” in *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band 11*, ed. Richard Miles (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2018), 805.

refers to this technique specifically in the section titled Harmony.⁵⁷ “The piece is a static work, meaning that there is little rhythmic and harmonic motion. One of the constants in the piece is the use of pedal tones.”⁵⁸ Cuong became quite familiar with Puckett’s approach to orchestration when he created the individual parts to Puckett’s concerto for flute and wind ensemble, *The Shadow of Sirius* (2009).⁵⁹ It is also of note that, as with *Sound and Smoke*, both *It Perched for Vespers Nine* and *The Shadow of Sirius* took musical direction from literary sources. The former was derived from the nineteenth stanza of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for Vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white moon-shine.⁶⁰

For *The Shadow of Sirius*, Puckett drew inspiration from a 2008 collection of poems by W.S. Merwin of the same title.⁶¹

The second source of inspiration for *Sound and Smoke* was Sergei Prokofiev’s 1925 *Symphony No. 2 in D minor*, Op. 40 (Figure 1). The reference to Prokofiev (1891–1953) is found in the brass fanfare heard in the second movement of *Sound and Smoke* titled “(avalanche of eyes)” (Figure 2). Cuong observed the following about Prokofiev’s symphony:

If you listen to Prokofiev’s Second Symphony—it starts off with this really strident trumpet fanfare that’s just two trumpets trading off the same pitch. It’s much higher in the Prokofiev

⁵⁷ *It Perched for Vespers Nine* (2008) was commissioned by the American Bandmasters Association and the University of Florida, and premiered by the Michigan State University Wind Symphony, in February 2008.

⁵⁸ Matthew O. Smith, “A Conductor’s Analysis of Joel Puckett’s *It Perched for Vespers Nine*,” *Journal of Band Research* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 62.

⁵⁹ *The Shadow of Sirius* premiered in 2010 and was commissioned by a consortium of American wind ensembles lead by Michael Haithcock and the University of Michigan. The work is dedicated to flutist Amy Porter.

⁶⁰ Smith, 58.

⁶¹ The title of Merwin’s collection alludes to the scientific discovery that the star Sirius is in fact a system of stars, and that what appears to be a singular entity is in fact many. This led to the poet posing the question of what is hiding in the shadow on the other side of Sirius.

[than in *Sound and Smoke*], and the beginning of the second movement [of *Sound and Smoke*] starts lower and climbs. I remember just loving that sound: it's so simple, but it works so well. So I started with that—four quarter notes traded off. And that basically became a huge part of the second movement—so much of it is based on two instruments trading off quarter notes like that.⁶²

This trading of pitches creates an echoing effect that is in direct relation to the previously discussed ensemble pedaling. Cuong states, “I wanted to create a piece where, even if it was played in a carpeted ballroom it would sound really resonant and rich.”⁶³ Cuong achieved this through his decisions related to orchestration and texture.

Allegro ben articolato

PICCOLO

FLAUTI I, II

OBOI I, II

OBOE C ALTO

CLARINETTI I II

CLARINETTO BASSO

FAGOTTI I II

CONTRA FAGOTTO

I

TROMBE II

III

I II

CORNI

III IV

I

TROMBONI

II III

Figure 1. Sergei Prokofiev, *Symphony No. 2 in D minor*, Op. 40 (1925), Movement I, mm. 1–2.

⁶² Trachsel, 811–812.

⁶³ Trachsel, 812.



Figure 2. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 1–4.

The third musical influence for *Sound and Smoke* is Maurice Ravel's (1875–1937) *Symphonie chorégraphique, Daphnis et Chloé*, composed in 1912 (Figure 3). Cuong cites “the impressionistic, blurry textures” as having a profound impact on him and asserts that *Sound and Smoke* attempts to duplicate these textures for the wind band (Figure 4).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Trachsel, 811.

The musical score is for Movement I, "feudal castle lights," measures 73-77. It is written for a large orchestra and includes parts for the following instruments:

- Flutes (Fl.)
- Clarinets (Cl.)
- Bassoons (Bsn.)
- Saxophones (Sax.)
- Trumpets (Trp.)
- Trombones (Tbn.)
- Percussion (Perc.)
- Timpani (Timp.)

The score is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score is divided into measures 73, 74, 75, 76, and 77. The percussion section includes a variety of instruments, including snare drum, tom-tom, and cymbal. The woodwind section includes flutes, clarinets, and bassoons. The brass section includes trumpets and trombones. The string section is not explicitly labeled but is implied by the notation.

Figure 4. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, "(feudal castle lights)," mm. 73-77.

The fourth musical influence for *Sound and Smoke* is Cuong's own work for solo alto saxophone and electronics, titled *Naica* (2011).⁶⁵ The piece was premiered by Mason Lubert (saxophone) on May 10, 2011, in the Cohen-Davison Theatre at Peabody Conservatory. Cuong states in the program notes, "The crystal caves of *Naica* provided amazing visual inspiration for my first venture into composing music with live interactive electronics."⁶⁶ The composer describes this piece as a "huge breakthrough," as it was the beginning of his fascination with acoustically recreating delay processing effect in a wind band texture.⁶⁷ Here is Cuong's description of how the electronic effect is created in *Naica*:

The saxophone plays a triplet, and then there's this patch (in MaxMSP) that takes a little snippet and repeats it over for four measures and then fades out. While that was happening, I would have the saxophones play another figure, and then that would layer on top of that, and so I created this kind of "washing" effect. The harmonies in the piece are based on common tones as things shift with each figure repeated again but fades out and then new ones come in. All those textures in the first movement are really just me acoustically recreating that effect.⁶⁸

The acoustical recreation of electronic delay processing has undoubtedly been a compositional throughline in Cuong's career that will be further analyzed in Chapter 4.

The aforementioned musical influences in *Sound and Smoke* can be distilled into two categories: ensemble pedaling, and the acoustical recreation of electronic delay processing. Both orchestration techniques are present in many of Cuong's works and, throughout their development, have become quintessential elements of the composer's compositional voice.

⁶⁵ *Naica* has a duration of eight minutes and is written for solo alto saxophone and live delay processing (with Max MSP). Both the alto saxophone and a bass clarinet version are available on www.vietcuongmusic.com.

⁶⁶ "Naica," Viet Cuong Music, accessed September 30, 2022, www.vietcuongmusic.com.

⁶⁷ Trachsel, 810–811.

⁶⁸ Trachsel, 810.

Sound and Smoke: Structural Elements

Sound and Smoke is scored for wind band. It is of note that the piece contains three independent flute parts, along with five extensive percussion parts, in addition to timpani, each of which may be covered by one percussionist. Table 1 includes a list of the individual parts, along with the number of each part provided in the rental set, as designated in the score.

Table 1. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Instrumentation.

Woodwind	Brass	Percussion
(2) Flute 1 (2) Flute 2 (2) Flute 3 (1) Oboe 1 (1) Oboe 2 (1) Bassoon 1 (1) Bassoon 2 (1) Contrabassoon (3) Bb Clarinet 1 (3) Bb Clarinet 2 (3) Bb Clarinet 3 (1) Bb Bass Clarinet (1) Eb Alto Saxophone 1 (1) Eb Alto Saxophone 2 (1) Bb Tenor Saxophone (1) Eb Baritone Saxophone	(2) Bb Trumpet 1 (2) Bb Trumpet 2 (2) Bb Trumpet 3 (1) F Horn 1 (1) F Horn 2 (1) F Horn 3 (1) F Horn 4 (2) Trombone 1 (2) Trombone 2 (2) Bass Trombone (2) Euphonium (2) Tuba	(1) Timpani (1) Percussion 1 (Bass drum, crash cymbals, sizzle cymbal, wind chimes, slap stick, large tom-toms) (1) Percussion 2 (suspended cymbal, marimba, snare drum, bell tree, high-hat) (1) Percussion 3 (vibraphone, chimes, sleigh bells, high-hat, large taiko drum) (1) Percussion 4 (vibraphone (separate), glockenspiel, china cymbal, crash cymbals) (1) Percussion 5 (tam-tam, triangle, crotales, splash cymbal, xylophone)

The score is transposed and individual parts are written without key signatures. *Sound and Smoke*, which is sold on vietcuongmusic.com ©2011, has a duration of approximately fourteen minutes. *Sound and Smoke* includes two movements: Movement I. “(feudal castle lights)” and Movement II. “(avalanche of eyes).” The first movement is approximately six minutes and thirty seconds, and the second movement approximately seven minutes. By means of information gathered in consultation with Cuong, Trachsel describes the form of the piece as episodic. For the

purposes of this document, Trachsel's designated episodes are used as points of reference in the analysis. The composer says the following about the form:

One thing happens after the next. In a way, the “sound and smoke” idea—how things often dissipate and move on quickly to other things. I didn't want things to be really predictable—so I didn't set out a form when I first started. I wouldn't say it's an ABA or something. My hope is that it has an organic feeling but also has a surprising feeling that's still satisfying. I think that whenever material comes back, it should be transformed by the journey it went on.⁶⁹

The reason for partitioning the piece into two movements is to create a slow and fast section, and textural references to the first movement are found in the second movement; beyond this, however, the material in both movements is unrelated. As reference for the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, Tables 2 and 3 provide designation of the episodes, as identified by Trachsel.

Table 2. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” Form Analysis.

Episode	1		2	3	4	5	6	Coda
Measures	mm. 1–9	mm. 10–35	mm. 36–51	mm. 52–85	mm. 86–97	mm. 98–113	mm. 114–126	mm. 127–137
Tempo	<i>Adagio</i> (♩ = 54)	<i>A tempo</i>	<i>Maestoso</i> (♩ = 60)	<i>Piu mosso</i> (♩ = 66)	<i>Adagio</i> (♩ = 54)	<i>Moderato</i> (♩ = 84)	<i>Maestoso</i> (♩ = 60)	<i>Piu mosso</i> (♩ = 66)
Meter	3/2		3/2, 4/2	2/2, 3/2	3/2, 2/2	3/2, 2/2	4/2, 3/2, 2/2	3/2

⁶⁹ Trachsel, 812.

Table 3. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” Form Analysis.

Episode	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Development
Measures	mm. 1–39	mm. 40–58	mm. 59–73	mm. 74–90	mm. 91–107	mm. 108–122	mm. 123–156	mm. 157–171	mm. 172–204
Tempo	<i>Presto</i> (♩=c.152)								
Meter	4/4, 3/4, 2/4	3/4, 4/4	4/4, 3/4	3/4, 2/4	3/4, 4/4	3/4	3/4	3/4	3/4, 4/4

9	10	11	12	Transition	13	14	15	16
mm. 205–227	mm. 228–238	mm. 239–248	mm. 249–260	mm. 261–266	mm. 267–281	mm. 282–301	mm. 302–309	mm. 310–334
						<i>Prestissimo</i> (♩=c. 172)		
3/4, 4/4	3/4, 2/4	4/4, 3/4, 2/4	3/4, 2/4, 4/4	3/4, 2/4, 4/4	4/4, 3/4, 2/4	2/4, 3/4	4/4	2/4, 3/4, 4/4

***Vital Sines*: Background**

A second composition exemplifying Cuong’s compositional process is the Concerto for Sextet and Wind Band titled *Vital Sines*, “commissioned for Eighth Blackbird through the generous support of The U.S. Navy Band.”⁷⁰ The piece is scored as a concerto grosso, which situates the soloist sextet between the accompanying wind band sections (Figure 5). The score is in C and the individual parts are written without key signatures. *Vital Sines* is sold on vietcuongmusic.com ©2022, and the piece has a duration of sixteen minutes. Viet Cuong’s website currently states, “This piece is available for any wind ensemble to perform exclusively with Eighth Blackbird through April 2026.”⁷¹

The work was premiered with Eighth Blackbird and the United States Navy Band on Saturday, April 9, 2022 in the Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center (Alexandria, Virginia). There have since been subsequent performances of the piece given by university wind

⁷⁰ Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* (Downingtown, PA: Murphy Music Press, 2021), cover.

⁷¹ “*Vital Sines*,” Viet Cuong Music, accessed March 9, 2023, www.vietcuongmusic.com.

ensembles, and two performances of the work at The Midwest Clinic, once again with Eighth Blackbird and the U.S. Navy Band.⁷² *Vital Sines* was a finalist for the Sousa-ABA-Ostwald Award, presented by the American Bandmasters Association, and the winner of the 2023 ASCAP/CBDNA Frederick Fennell Prize, awarded by the College Band Directors National Association. Table 4 provides the instrumentation for *Vital Sines* of both the soloist sextet and accompanying wind band. Figure 5 shows the full score layout with the included soloist sextet.

Table 4. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, Soloist Sextet and Wind Band Instrumentation.

Soloist Sextet	Woodwind	Brass	Percussion
Flute	Piccolo	Bb Trumpet 1	Percussion 1: Timpani, Crotales [C4, Bb4]
Bb Clarinet	Flute 1	Bb Trumpet 2	
Violin	Flute 2	Bb Trumpet 3	Percussion 2: Glockenspiel
Violoncello	Flute 3	F Horn 1	
Piano	Oboe 1	F Horn 2	
Percussion:	Oboe 2	F Horn 3	
Marimba, Drum Kit, Crotales [C#4, E4, F4, C5, G5]	English Horn	F Horn 4	Percussion 3: Vibraphone, Suspended Cymbal
	Bassoon 1	Trombone 1	
	Bassoon 2	Trombone 2	
	Bb Clarinet 1	Trombone 3 (Bass Trombone)	Percussion 4: Chimes, Triangle, Crotales [Eb4, Ab4, A4]
	Bb Clarinet 2	Euphonium	
	Bb Clarinet 3	Tuba	
	Bass Clarinet		Percussion 5: Bass Drum, Crotales [D4, G4, C5–C6 upper octave]
	Contrabass Clarinet		
	Soprano Saxophone		
	Alto Saxophone		
	Tenor Saxophone		
	Baritone Saxophone		
			*Lower octave crotales are to be played in conjunction with several snare drums. See Performance notes (in score) for instructions.

⁷² Friday, December 19, 2022 (6pm and 8pm), both performances were held at the McCormick Place Convention Center (Ballroom 375AB) in Chicago, Illinois.

VITAL SINES

Viet Cuong

3/4 Lush $\text{♩} = 80$

Flute 1

Flute 2

Flute 3

Oboe 1

English Horn

Bassoon 1

Clarinet in B $\flat$ 1

Clarinet in B $\flat$ 2

Bass Clarinet

Contrabass Clarinet

Soprano Saxophone

Alto Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone

Baritone Saxophone

Flute

Clarinet in B $\flat$

Viola

Violoncello

Piano

Mandolin

Trumpet in B $\flat$ 1, 2, 3

Horn in F 1

Horn in F 2

Truba

Euphonium

Tuba

Trumpet

Chickadee

Suspended Cymbal

Chimes

Bass Drum

3/4 Lush $\text{♩} = 80$

straight note

4/4

3/4

2/4

6/16

4/4

3/4

Figure 5. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, Page 1 of Score.

On December 20, 2022, Cuong gave a presentation at the 76th Midwest Clinic titled *Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission*, along with members of Eighth Blackbird, and the United States Navy Band (Kenneth Collins, conductor). The clinic provided context regarding the genesis of the project, from the perspectives of both the United States Navy Band and Eighth Blackbird, as well as information from Cuong about his approach to orchestration and musical development in this particular work. The following sections synthesize the material from this presentation to provide historical context and inspiration for *Vital Sines*.

Genesis of the Project

Eighth Blackbird, founded in 1996, is a sextet based in Chicago, Illinois. The winner of four Grammy Awards for Best Small Ensemble/Chamber Music Performance, the ensemble has worked with both established and emerging composers in the commissioning and premiere of their works.⁷³ Kenneth Collins cites three factors that led to the U.S. Navy Band's unprecedented collaboration with Eighth Blackbird. The first was the Midwest Clinic performance, originally scheduled for December 2020. The second was the result of Collins simply taking a chance in contacting Eighth Blackbird about the possibility of working together on a project. The third was the value of persistence throughout the endeavor as the project took a turn due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the postponement of the original performance date.

During an August 2018 meeting in Collins's office, discussions took place regarding the upcoming 2020 Midwest Clinic performance. Knowing that the commission of new works would play a role in the selected repertoire, the goal was to create something new and different for wind band. While brainstorming ideas for musical inspiration, Collins played the Eighth Blackbird Grammy award-winning album *Filament* (2015). Other than the members of the sextet being "musical heroes" of its conductor, the U.S. Navy Band had no prior association with the Eighth

⁷³ "Bio," Eighth Blackbird, accessed September 18, 2022, www.eighthblackbird.org.

Blackbird organization.⁷⁴ In what he called a “twenty-first-century cold call” Collins located contact information via their website and asked if Eighth Blackbird would be interested in pursuing a project together, to which they quickly responded, “Yes.”⁷⁵

A few months later in December 2018 during The Midwest Clinic, Collins met over coffee with a former member of Eighth Blackbird, Yvonne Lam (violinist), Deidre Harrison (former chief operating officer), and Cuong. The group spoke for two and a half hours about the direction of the project and everyone left knowing, “This is going to be special.”⁷⁶ A year later, in December 2019, the U.S. Air Force Band (Washington, D.C.) performed at The Midwest Clinic and Collins brought percussionist Matthew Duvall (a founding member of Eighth Blackbird) to the concert in order to see the venue and gather logistical information for the following year’s performance. Then, in March 2020, as the world shutdown and uncertainty loomed, the project ultimately took a new direction.

Viet Cuong and Eighth Blackbird

The partnership between Cuong, Eighth Blackbird, and the U.S. Navy Band has been described by both the composer and the chamber ensemble as, “a dream collaboration.”⁷⁷ Eighth Blackbird personnel includes two original founding members, Lisa Kaplan (piano) and Matthew Duvall (percussion). The other featured Eighth Blackbird members that were part of the Midwest Clinic performances were Lina Andonovska (flute), Zachary Good (clarinet), Ashley Bathgate (cello), and Maiani de Silva (violin).

⁷⁴ Cuong, “*Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission.*”

⁷⁵ Cuong, “*Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission.*”

⁷⁶ Cuong, “*Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission.*”

⁷⁷ Cuong, “*Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission.*”

Cuong's relationship with Eighth Blackbird began in 2017 when the composer participated in the first Blackbird Creative Lab. This mentorship program is an initiative that invites emerging artists, selected by application, to engage in an immersive two-week experience, which culminates in a performance of music the composers write for the program. Cuong's piece *Electric Aroma* (2017) was the result of this project.⁷⁸ Kaplan says that even at that time (in 2017), Cuong demonstrated an incredibly creative, beautiful, and unique voice, and they knew "it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship."⁷⁹

Duvall admitted that the original email from Collins "blindsided" him and the organization, as the combination of their ensemble with wind band is not a usual pairing.⁸⁰ He was, however, enthusiastic about the idea, having been interested in a collaboration with band for some time. Eighth Blackbird proactively seeks to invest in and forge personal collaborations with composers of the works they perform, to ensure the music is something enjoyed by the ensemble and is idiomatic for the instrumentalists. Based on their previous connection, when plans for the new work began, Eighth Blackbird knew immediately that they wanted to contact Cuong about joining the project.

Cuong described the experience as "surreal" when he received the text message from Duvall asking if he would be interested in writing a piece for Eighth Blackbird and the U.S. Navy Band.⁸¹ Having experienced prolific success in composing music for wind band, in addition to contemporary orchestral chamber music, the composer said the opportunity to join these two communities in a single work is a great honor, and incredibly "validating."⁸²

⁷⁸ *Electric Aroma* (2017) is written for soprano saxophone, clarinet, percussion, and piano and is seven minutes in length. Eighth Blackbird liked the piece so much, they requested that Cuong modify the instrumentation in a new arrangement for the ensemble to perform. This resulted in a 2018 version for flute, clarinet, percussion, and piano. Both versions are available on www.vietcuongmusic.com.

⁷⁹ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

⁸⁰ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

⁸¹ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

⁸² Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

Admittedly, there were inherent considerations in planning a piece for Eighth Blackbird's instrumentation and the wind band. The make-up of the sextet is meant to sound like a "mini-orchestra," and the instrument families collectively possess a range from the lowest note of the piano and cello to the highest piccolo and violin harmonics, and the metallic percussion. Cuong's goal was to create a piece that was a "marriage between the two ensembles," that simultaneously featured the soloist sextet, and showcased the wind band sonorities.⁸³ Additionally, being "informed by [his] past as a band kid," Cuong wanted the work to come across as a wind band piece, while also sounding fresh at the same time.⁸⁴ With a wide range of timbral tools at his disposal, the composer said that orchestration was his primary concern in achieving the desired result, while also ensuring all the elements work together in "a practical way for a large ensemble."⁸⁵

The title of the work, *Vital Sines*, speaks to how vitally significant band and music (sine waves) have been in the composer's life. Cuong's vision for the piece and the composer's use of ensemble pedaling and acoustic recreation of delay processing was immensely successful. The orchestration of *Vital Sines* is so masterfully constructed that, in fact, audience members at The Midwest Clinic performances approached the composer under the assumption that Eighth Blackbird was being processed electronically; to which, Cuong delightedly replied, "It's all acoustic."⁸⁶

⁸³ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

⁸⁴ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

⁸⁵ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

⁸⁶ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

CHAPTER 3: ENSEMBLE PEDALING

Definition of Ensemble Pedaling

As previously mentioned, Cuong makes great use of ensemble pedaling in his music. This is the idea of generating sustain and resonance through tactical decisions of orchestration, producing an effect similar to pressing the sustain pedal on a piano. More specifically, Cuong achieves this technique through three distinct methods in *Sound and Smoke* (Table 5).

Table 5. Methods of Ensemble Pedaling in *Sound and Smoke*.

Method 1	Method 2	Method 3
Timbral Continuation	Division of Melodic Content Through Rhythmic Offset	Sustain Via Harmonic Divisi

The first method, timbral continuation, initiates sound in a specific instrument part, and then continues, or pedals, each pitch elsewhere in the ensemble, thus creating the desired sustain. This has a remarkable timbral effect as possibilities of various instrument combinations present the opportunity to employ multiple colors to support the musical material, which generates unique sonic results. Regarding timbral continuation, to achieve the desired effect it is important to identify the color that is initiating the melodic sequence, and the assigned voices being utilized as pedal point. Then, attention can be directed towards bringing the initiating sound forward in the texture, followed by instructing the pedaled instruments to simply add their sound to the tail of the leading voice. The intended sound cannot be generated by one instrument, nor should it sound like two instruments working together. The effect is maximized when the joined colors manifest in a new sonority with one voice acting as the front, and the others serving as the sustain.

The second method, division of melodic content through rhythmic offset, entails dividing melodic content between two or more sections by offsetting the rhythmic treatment in a *klangfarbenmelodie* of sorts.⁸⁷ The application of the offset rhythm allows Cuong to employ longer note durations and generate the desired sustain, while maintaining the velocity of the melodic line. Oftentimes, the composer will accent the individual notes, making it clear that emphatic diction is required in the articulation. In moments such as this, a good amount of decay should be added to the sustain of each note, without breaking the sound between pitches. The reason for this is the composite melody becomes unclear if all notes are sustained at full volume for the entire duration. Thus, the melodic content comes forward if a considerable decay is performed following each accent, simultaneously maintaining the pedaled intent.

The third method, sustain via harmonic divisi, incorporates the use of division, within harmonic motion, that separates from the progression taking place. The divided line sustains the sonority from the previous measure, therefore pedaling one chord as the progression continues to a different chord. The following section includes detailed description regarding Cuong's application of one, or a combination of, these orchestration methods in *Sound and Smoke*.

⁸⁷ *Klangfarbenmelodie* (German) translates to sound color melody, and is a term first used by composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) in reference to a technique that essentially divides a singular line of melodic material among multiple instruments. *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Klangfarbenmelodie."

Detailed Application of Technique in *Sound and Smoke*

Movement I. “(feudal castle lights)”

Episode 1—Method 1, mm. 1–9

Sound and Smoke opens with the clarinets presenting a *pianissimo* B-flat minor triad. The depth of sound begins to shift as the flutes and alto saxophones join on Beats 2 and 3, respectively. This leads to the clarinets moving to an A-flat major triad on Beat 1 of measure 2, as the flutes and alto saxophones remain in B-flat minor. Within these opening two measures, Cuong establishes the two pedals he proceeds to develop in orchestration during the first nine measures of the piece. The texture continues to grow as horns and oboes enter (m. 3), followed by bassoon, trombone 2, and euphonium (m. 4). The trumpets are the last to join the pedaling effect (m. 7), before the full ensemble plays the E-flat chord in measure nine (Eb^{m7}sus4). Cuong diligently layered the voices as they enter in a manner that ensures the sonority of one triad sustaining as the subsequent chord enters; thus, “pedaling” a chord in one section as the next sonority enters elsewhere in the ensemble. The rhythmic pattern of this opening section suggests two-measure micro-phrases within a larger structure. The use of two dotted-half notes every other measure obscures the meter (3/2) and generates a kaleidoscopic effect as the color of the ensemble develops and the volume increases (Figure 6).

The musical score for Figure 6 consists of four staves. The top staff is for Fl. 1-3, the second for Bb Cl. 1-3, the third for Eb Alto Sax. 1-2 and Bb Ten. Sax., and the bottom for Bb Tpt. 1-3. The music is in 3/4 time. The woodwind staves (Fl. 1-3, Bb Cl. 1-3, and Eb Alto Sax. 1-2 / Bb Ten. Sax.) feature sustained chords and melodic lines, while the brass staves (Bb Tpt. 1-3) play sustained chords. The score is divided into two systems, each containing four measures. The first system shows the initial chords and melodic lines, while the second system shows the continuation of these elements, with some instruments playing sustained notes or chords.

Figure 6. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),”
Reproduction of Ensemble Pedaling in Concert Pitch, mm. 1–9.

Episode 1—Method 1, mm. 11–35

The following section is characterized by a composite musical line created by two bowed vibraphones (percussion 3 and 4, Figure 7). The resulting melodic content (mm. 11–20), beginning on concert F, is sustained by the flutes, clarinets, and alto saxophones. Each pitch in the vibraphones is found in the utilized wind colors (Figure 8). The bowed, metallic sound distinguishes the initiation of each melody note, and the pitch is then pedaled (sustained) by the participating woodwind instruments. This creates a unique texture as the winds act in a supporting role to the characteristic percussion sounds. The phrasing is divided into two three-measure phrases (mm. 11–16), marked by a *crescendo* leading to Beat 1 of the following phrase.

Measures 17–20 act as an extended phrase of four measures, prior to the foreshadowing of thematic material performed in the solo clarinet (m. 21).

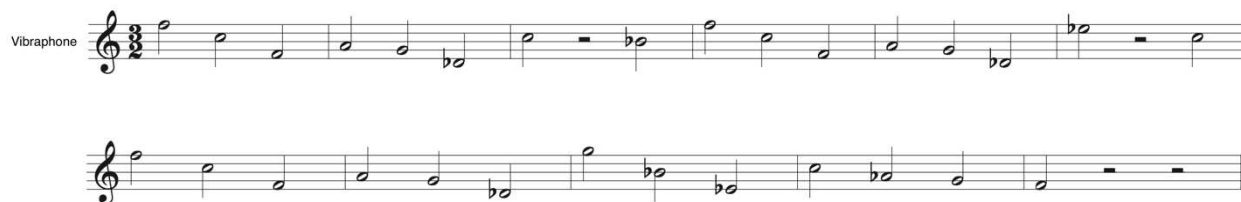


Figure 7. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),”
Reproduction of Bowed Vibraphones in Percussion 3 and 4, mm. 11–21.

The image shows three staves of music for Bb Clarinets, labeled Bb Cl. 1, Bb Cl. 2, and Bb Cl. 3. The first two staves contain measures 11 through 16, and the third staff contains measures 17 through 21. The music features a variety of note values, including eighth, quarter, and half notes, with some slurs and ties. The third staff includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 21.

Figure 8. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),”
Reproduction of Ensemble Pedaling in Clarinets, mm. 11–21.

The effect continues in m. 22, beginning on concert B-flat. In this section (mm. 22–31), the clarinets, alto/tenor saxophones, French horns, and euphonium generate the pedaling effect, led once again by the bowed vibraphones. The timpani signals the beginning and last note of each four-measure phrase (mm. 21–27). The extended phrase in measures 28–31 mirrors the phrasing of the

preceding section. Trombones 1 and 2 join the effect in measures 30 and 31, as the euphonium shifts to a more harmonically driven role on Beat 3 of measure 31. The final four measures of this section (mm. 32–35) maintain the ensemble pedaling in the flutes and trumpet parts as a descending line made of the notes from the C natural-minor scale (G-F-Eb-D-C-Bb-Ab-G-F-Eb-D-C), leading to the arrival of measure 36.

Episode 2—Method 3, mm. 36–44

The pedaling of the ensemble during the segment beginning at measure 36 is found in the trumpet harmonic progression. Bassoons, contrabassoon, trumpets, and low brass provide a harmonic foundation upon which the first full statement of the main thematic material is presented. The progression of chords is as follows: Cm, F, Eb/G, Ab, Bb, C, Bb, G, Fm, Db^{M7}. As the low voices move in unison rhythm, the divisi trumpet parts maintain the presence of the previous chord while the other voices move to another. The sustain of the preceding sonority creates the pedaled effect within the harmonic foundation of this segment (Figure 9). The effect culminates with a simultaneous E-flat major triad in the trumpets over a D-flat major-seven chord. The chord tones of both triadic harmonies are separated by a whole step, thus creating tension leading to the arrival of measure 45.

Maestoso $\text{♩} = 60$

Bb Tpt. 1–3

Bsn.
C. Bsn.
B. Cl.
Low Brass

Figure 9. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),”
Reproduction of Pedaled Harmonies, mm. 36–44.

Episode 2—Method 2, mm. 45–46

In the final measures of Episode 2, Cuong employs the flutes, oboes, clarinets, alto saxophones, trumpets, and French horns in a closing statement that imitates the melodic line first

heard in the bowed vibraphones (m. 11). The composite melody outlines the following pitches: C, G, C, Eb, D, Ab, G (Figure 10). The final note (G) functions as a tritone within the D-flat major chord on Beat 1 of measure 47. The climax of the episode is the F dominant-seventh chord on the upbeat of Beat 2 (m. 47), with the concert G functioning as an unresolved, suspended-ninth. Similar to the opening of the movement, Cuong once again utilizes the dotted-half-note rhythm (m. 47) to obscure the meter and create an unexpected moment of impact. The chord begins to decrescendo in measure 48, and instrumental groups begin to exit the texture in measure 49.



Figure 10. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),”
Reproduction of Composite Melody, mm. 45–46.

Episode 3—Method 2, mm. 59–83

The alternating sixteenth-note motif that begins in measure 59 between the flutes and oboes is a pedaled idea in that the final quarter note of each alternating gesture is sustained as the accompanying voice begins on the same pitch and alternates in the same sixteenth-note manner. The sustain against the oscillation creates the illusion of one continuous descending melodic line with each downbeat being simultaneously sustained, or pedaled, for an entire beat (Figure 11a). This idea continues through measure 79 with interspersed sixteenth-note delay processing (mm. 58, 65, 72, 79). Beginning in measure 80 a similar pedaled motif begins, again between flute 1 and 2, and oboes. Flute 1 and oboe 1 are paired against flute 2 and oboe 2. The tied eighth-note to half-note rhythmic idea in the oboes pedals the accompanying flute pitch and the sustain of each pairing continues through the next grouping’s entrance (Figure 11b).



Figure 11a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” m. 59.

Figure 11b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” m. 80.

Episode 3—Method 1, mm. 80–85

The final six measures of Episode 3 are divided into three two-measure phrases, which contain a composite melody comprised of quarter notes. The melodic content of the first four measures of this section (mm. 80–83) is found in the crotales (percussion 5). Each note of the

melody is pedaled in the trumpet parts, as well as trombone 2 and bass trombone. In the final two measures (mm. 84–85) the crotale part is doubled in trumpet 1, and flutes 1 and 2. Meanwhile, the pedaled melodic content is shared by trumpets 2 and 3, and trombones 1 and 2, presenting the following progression: D, A, D, (F#), E, Bb, G, C, F, E. The crotale part fills in the F-sharp (in parentheses), rather than the collaboration of trumpets 2 and 3 and trombones 1 and 2. The offset rhythm of the ascending half notes in the French horns against the dotted-half notes of the bassoons, baritone saxophone, bass trombone, and euphonium, generates an additional pedaling effect in this segment, which leads to the beginning of Episode 4.

Episode 4—Method 1, mm. 86–97

The series of chords in the French horns and low brass progress in a similar fashion as the opening of the piece with the pedaled juxtaposition of triads. In the first statement by bassoon 2, French horns, and low brass, an overlapping progression occurs: G^{M7}, Bm, A⁷, Bm, B, E, E^{sus4}, G^{M7}. This blurred, harmonic texture is passed to the woodwinds as the colors overlap in measures 90 and 91. The woodwinds proceed in a similar fashion through a new progression of harmonies (mm. 90–97): G^{M7}, Bm, F#, Bm, Db, D, Eb, D, Ab. In both instances, the chords overlap in order to create a similar kaleidoscopic effect first heard in the opening of the movement.

Episode 5—Method 2, mm. 98–109

Throughout Episode 5, the re-articulation of the clarinet and alto saxophone parts generates the pedaled effect that provides harmonic interest in this segment. This begins first in the clarinets (mm. 99–100) with the outlining of a G major triad (concert G-D-B, Figure 12). The alto saxophones follow with an outlined A-flat major triad (concert Eb-C-Ab, Figure 12). French horns join in harmonic support beginning in measure 104. The same pedaling effect continues in measures 107 through 109, with the addition of bassoon 1, contrabassoon, bass clarinet, baritone saxophone, trombones, and tuba.

Figure 12. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” mm. 98–101.

Episode 5—Method 3, mm. 110–113

The trumpets once again act as the pedal for the ensemble during this section. The low reeds and low brass progress through the following chords (mm. 110–113): F major, E-flat minor, C-flat major, and F major. The tonality changes on Beat 1 of each measure; however, the offset trumpet rhythm sustains the chord from the previous measure and generates the pedaling effect. This leads to measure 112 when, on Beat 3, the trumpets move to a concert D-flat major triad, played over the C-flat major triad in the low voices, and then the voices shift together to F major on Beat 1 of measure 113, which harmonically leads to Episode 6.

Coda—Method 2, mm. 127–128

In a similar manner first heard in measure 59 (Figure 11a), the alternating sixteenth-note motif (mm. 127–128) is a two-part pedaled idea now shared between all three flute parts, both oboe 1 and 2, and all three clarinet parts. The final quarter note of each alternating gesture is sustained as the accompanying voice begins on the same pitch and alternates in the same sixteenth-

note fashion. The sustain against the oscillation creates the illusion of one continuous descending melodic line with each downbeat being simultaneously sustained, or pedaled, for an entire beat.

Movement II. “(avalanche of eyes)”

Episode 1—Method 2, mm. 1–35

The ensemble pedaling at the beginning of the second movement is performed by trumpets. In the opening four measures all three trumpet parts work as one to generate a composite melody, which begins on a unison concert F (Figure 13), while the sustain of each note generates a pedaled echo effect. In the opening statement, the French horns act in a harmonically supportive role, as does the euphonium.



Figure 13. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 1–4.

The same effect is extended in measures 12 through 19. Once again, the trumpets generate the melodic material as the French horns and euphonium provide impact and harmonic support (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 12–19.

Measures 28 through 35 show another expansion of the same idea, where now Cuong imitates the opening two statements by beginning the line a half step higher (F-sharp). The French horns, trombones 1 and 2, and euphonium carry the line beginning in measure 28, and the orchestration of the second phrase expands in measure 32 beginning once again with the trumpets (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 32–35.

Following the opening statement, the woodwinds present two simultaneous ideas in mm. 5–9. One idea is a delay-processed duet performed in the flutes and clarinets, discussed in the next chapter. The second idea is a pedaled line in the oboes and alto saxophones that mimics the opening

trumpet fanfare (Figure 16a). The trading of an accented concert F drives the section forward, and as notes change a composite melody is produced. A similar idea is presented after the second fanfare in mm. 20–27 (Figures 16b and 16c). Once again, the oboes and alto saxophones generate an alternating, pedaled line, now with the addition of grace notes supporting the delay processing that occurs in the flutes and clarinets.



Figure 16a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 5–9.



Figure 16b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 20–22.



Figure 16c. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 24–27.

Episode 1—Method 2, mm. 36–39

In the last four measures of Episode 1 (mm. 36–39), the oboes and clarinet 3 contribute a pedaled line comprised of a repeated concert G. Between the two oboe parts and the divisi clarinet

the composite line generates an accented quarter-note rhythm, sustained via the *fortepiano* *crescendo* dynamic, thus having a pedaled quality that provides continuity within the rhythmic verticality of this section.

Episode 2—Method 1, mm. 40–56

The alto saxophones present a duet in this section that acts as the composite melodic material, which is then delay-processed by the tenor saxophone (details of this will be discussed in the next chapter). Interestingly, clarinets 1, 2, and 3 pedal the individual saxophone parts (alto saxophones 1 and 2, and tenor saxophone, respectively). As the rhythmic treatment of the saxophones calls for angular, staccato articulation, the complimentary clarinet lines pedal the first note of each saxophone entrance and then accentuate the final sixteenth note of each gesture (Figure 17).

The image displays a musical score for six instruments: Clarinet 1 (1), Clarinet 2 (2), Clarinet 3 (3), Alto Saxophone 1 (1), Alto Saxophone 2 (2), and Tenor Saxophone (B♭ Ten. Sax.). The score is written in 3/4 time and spans three measures. The instruments are arranged in two systems. The first system contains Clarinets 1, 2, and 3, and the second system contains Alto Saxophones 1 and 2, and the Tenor Saxophone. The music features a variety of dynamic markings, including *ff* (fortissimo), *fp* (fortepiano), and *f* (forte), along with crescendo and decrescendo hairpins. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and slurs, indicating a complex rhythmic and melodic structure.

Figure 17. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 40–41.

Episode 3—Method 1, mm. 59–67

Measure 59 through measure 69 consists of two three measure phrases followed by an extended five measure phrase. This culminates in a four-measure tag beginning at measure 70 that drives to the start of Episode 4. In each phrase, the vibraphone presents the melodic material in full (Figure 18a) as the clarinets and oboes pedal select notes via the indicated *fortepiano crescendo* (Figure 18b). The flutes and xylophone add a sharp contrasting color to this motive beginning in the extended five measure phrase (m. 65), and the trumpets join in the crescendo beginning on the upbeat of Beat 3 in measure 67. The delay processing that occurs in conjunction with this pedaled phrase will be discussed in the next chapter.



Figure 18a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” m. 59.

The image shows a musical score for a woodwind section. It includes staves for Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Contrabassoon (C. Bn.), and B♭ Clarinet (B♭ Cl.). The Oboe and B♭ Clarinet parts have dynamics of *mp*, *fp*, and *f*. The Bassoon and Contrabassoon parts have dynamics of *mf*. The B♭ Clarinet part also has dynamics of *fp* and *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and articulation marks.

Figure 18b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” m. 59.

Episode 6—Method 2, mm. 108–119

At the beginning of Episode 6, the trumpets begin a pedaled exchange that harks back to the opening fanfare; however, the rhythm is augmented to dotted quarter notes. The ascending line travels through concert A-B-C-D-Eb-F-G before landing on what is essentially an inverted augmented G chord (G-Cb-Eb) in measure 120. The exchange occurs primarily between the trumpet 1 and 2 lines; however, the trumpet 3 part actually begins the alternation (mm. 108–110), before the first trumpet joins in measure 111. Flutes 1 and 2 add additional support (mm. 114–117) before deferring to a running triplet figure that *decrescendos* prior to the *subito forte*, in measure 120.

Episode 8—Method 1, mm. 157–171

There are two simultaneous instances of ensemble pedaling that begin in Episode 8. The main melodic material is carried by the three flutes. Flute 3 in fact presents an imitative version of the opening fanfare. The rhythmic treatment generates a dotted-quarter feel in the foreground of this segment, thus augmenting the opening trumpet quarter notes. There are three statements of the thematic material, each an extended version of the previous. The first phrase is three measures in length, punctuated by a unison concert D-flat in the full woodwind and brass sections. The next phrase is five measures, once again accentuated by a concert D-flat. The final phrase is seven measures, this time capped off with a resolution to a unison concert D-natural. In each statement, flutes 1 and 2 serve as the pedal for the melodic motion in flute 3 (Figures 19a and 19b). The pulsing C-sharp quarter notes in the glockenspiel also resolve to D-natural in measure 172 and provide an underlying rhythmic dissonance throughout all three phrases.

The image shows a musical score for three flutes, labeled Fl. 1, Fl. 2, and Fl. 3. The score is written on three staves. Flute 1 and 2 play a steady eighth-note pattern, while Flute 3 plays a melodic line with dotted-quarter notes. The score is marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 4/4. The score spans 8 measures. Flute 1 and 2 play a steady eighth-note pattern, while Flute 3 plays a melodic line with dotted-quarter notes. The score is marked with a piano (p) dynamic.

Figure 19a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 157–164.



Figure 19b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 165–171.

Episode 8—Method 2, mm. 157–171

As the melodic activity occurs in the flutes, as detailed above, the swirling harmonies in the clarinets and alto saxophones provide harmonic interest in this section (Figures 20a and 20b). The phrasing of the progression mirrors that of the flutes. The composer uses pedals for select notes of the harmonies produced, which give the excerpt a sense of wandering before the desired sonority is reached. The first phrase leads to an F-sharp minor-seventh chord over A, in measure 159. The second phrase passes through G major and an E minor-seventh chord over D before arriving at the C major seventh chord in measure 163. The final phrase of the section searches through various progressions before arriving at the C-sharp half-diminished seventh chord over G in measure 169. This resolves to D minor in measure 171 in anticipation of the D-natural impact of measure 172.



Figure 20a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 157–164.

This musical score excerpt shows four staves. The instruments are Bb Clarinet 2, B Clarinet, and two parts of Eb Alto Saxophone (1 and 2). The music continues with eighth-note triplets, marked with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The notation includes various accidentals and slurs.

Figure 20b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 165–171.

Episode 10—Method 3, mm. 228–238

In addition to the delayed processing of the eighth-note triplets, Episode 10 is characterized by the pedaled harmonic progression carried by the bassoons, contrabassoon, bass clarinet, French horns, and low brass. The progression begins in D minor. In the first 2/4 measure (m. 230), G major is introduced on Beat 2 and continues into the following two measures, as D minor pedaling

continues simultaneously. The next 2/4 measure (m. 233) introduces A-flat major, which carries into the following two measures as the pedaled G major continues from the previous bar. B-flat major is then suggested on Beat 3 of measure 235, which sustains the following two measures as A-flat major is pedaled. B-flat major ultimately prevails in measure 238, in preparation for the statement of thematic material in measure 239. The rhythmic movement of the trumpets (mm. 228–238), who are joined by flutes 1 and 2 in measure 234, is similar to the quality of Episode 6 in its ascendancy and dotted-quarter alternation. The notes presented are chord tones of the underlying harmonic progression and the line adds both harmonic and rhythmic support.

Episode 14—Method 1, mm. 290–293

There is a pedaled melodic line in the interlude during Episode 14 (mm. 290–293), performed in the oboes, and the divisi clarinet 3 part (Figures 21b and 21c). The resulting melodic line is performed in its entirety in the glockenspiel (percussion 4, Figure 21a), thus the oboe and clarinet act as the pedal for this content.

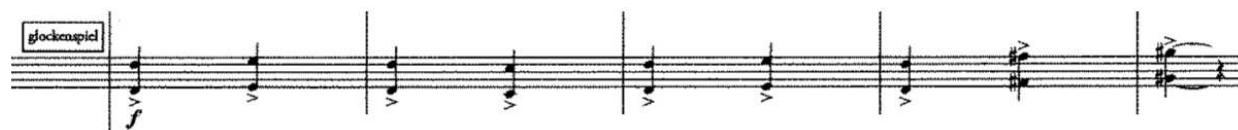


Figure 21a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 290–293.



Figure 21b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 290–293.



Figure 21c. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 290–293.

Episode 15—Method 2, mm. 302–309

The final example of ensemble pedaling in the piece (mm. 302–309) occurs in a recapitulation of the opening fanfare, this time beginning on concert E-flat. As before, the trumpets carry the composite melodic material within their interaction (mm. 302–305), as the French horns provide harmonic support, and the euphonium, tuba, and bass drum provide a foundational pedal (Figure 22). The orchestration proceeds to grow as the entire brass section is utilized in the second fanfare statement of this segment, which begins one half step higher on concert E-natural. This half step relationship mirrors the development of the opening fanfare, from concert F-natural to concert F-sharp. The interaction of the trumpets presents the melodic material of the second fanfare as the rest of the brass section provides depth to the sound, and the flourishing woodwind sixteenth-note runs propel the music forward into the final episode.



Figure 22. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 302–309.

Selected Examples of Ensemble Pedaling in *Vital Sines*

During the Midwest Clinic presentation discussed in the previous chapter, Cuong distilled the opening of *Vital Sines* (mm. 1–13) into a skeletal line of music in eighth notes (Figures 23a and 23b). There are three distinct phrasal gestures, each extending the previous by one measure. As the solo sextet is featured, the accompanying woodwind instruments, as well as the trumpets and French horns on occasion, are assigned a note from the eighth-note melody, which the assigned instruments pedal through the end of that particular phrase, culminating in the *crescendos* leading into Beat 1 of measures 4, 7, and 13. Figure 23a demonstrates the rhythmic complexity of the opening material, while Figure 23b illustrates the skeletal line extracted from the first thirteen measures of the work, as identified by Cuong. This was Cuong's initial material for the piece.⁸⁸ Figure 24 illustrate the accompanying wind band parts, which act as pedals for the melodic content, thus creating the sustained, lush atmosphere of the opening segment.

⁸⁸ Cuong, "Vital Sines: The Making of a Commission."

Figure 23a shows the first two measures of a musical piece for Piano and Marimba. The Piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It features a complex, rhythmic melody with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The Marimba part is also in a grand staff and plays a similar, though slightly simpler, rhythmic pattern. Both parts are marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a crescendo hairpin. The Piano part includes a *sfz* (sforzando) marking at the end of the first measure and a *Red.* (ritardando) marking at the end of the second measure. The Marimba part also has a *sfz* marking at the end of the first measure.

Figure 23a. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, mm. 1-2.

Figure 23b is a skeletal reproduction of the opening material, measures 1-13, for a piece titled "Lush". The tempo is marked as 80 beats per minute. The score is written in a single staff with a treble clef. It features a complex, rhythmic melody with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 in measure 4, then to 3/4 in measure 8, and finally to 4/4 in measure 12. The piece ends with a double bar line in measure 13.

Figure 23b. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, Skeletal Reproduction of Opening Material, mm. 1-13.

3/4 Lush ♩ = 80 **2** **4/4**

Piccolo

Flute 1 2

Flute 3

Oboe 1 2

English Horn

Bassoon 1 2

Clarinet in Bb 1 2

Clarinet in Bb 3

Bass Clarinet

Contrabass Clarinet

Soprano Saxophone

Alto Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone

Baritone Saxophone

pp *p* *mf* *fp*

Figure 24. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, mm. 1-2.

CHAPTER 4: ACOUSTIC RECREATION OF ELECTRONIC DELAY PROCESSING

Definition of Electronic Delay Processing

In order to thoroughly examine electronic delay processing as a compositional technique, which Cuong uses in a number of pieces, it is first necessary to establish an understanding of its electronic origins. These origins start with Max, a software program owned and maintained by the company Cycling '74, founded in 1997 by David Zicarelli in San Francisco. Max creator Miller Puckette originally developed the software in 1988 at IRCAM, the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music in Paris, founded by Pierre Boulez. Puckette designed an earlier program for IRCAM, however, up until this time, there had never been software built with the intention of being reused in future pieces of music. In July of 1988, Philippe Manoury, in his *Pluton*, was the first to utilize Puckette's new program. Puckette says, "And so I came up with the programming environment Max, to try to basically just make it possible for composers to customize what it did for whatever piece of music [it] was they were working on."⁸⁹ Puckette patented and licensed the interface in 1990 with Opcode Systems for commercial distribution. Cycling '74 took over program development in 1999 and introduced a new extension program to Max, called MSP, which makes possible Max's unique feature of allowing "real-time audio synthesis."⁹⁰

Delay processing is achieved through this real-time audio synthesis as a signal that can be interpreted by the program in a number of ways. From the Max v.8.5.1

Documentation MSP Delay Tutorial 1: Delay Lines:

One of the most basic yet versatile techniques of audio processing is to delay a signal and mix the delayed version with the original signal. The delay time can range from a few milliseconds to several seconds, limited only by the amount of RAM you have available to

⁸⁹ Mike Sheffield, "Max/MSP For Average Music Junkies," *Hopes and Fears* (blog), accessed September 30, 2022, www.hopesandfears.com.

⁹⁰ Sheffield, "Max/MSP For Average Music Junkies."

store the delayed signal. When the delay time is just a few milliseconds, the original and delayed signals interfere and create a subtle filtering effect but not a discrete echo. When the delay time is about 100 ms we hear a “slapback” echo effect in which the delayed copy follows closely behind the original. With longer delay times, we hear the two signals as discrete events, as if the delayed version were reflecting off a distant mountain. This tutorial patch delays each channel of a stereo signal independently, and allows you to adjust the delay times and the balance between direct signal and delayed signal.⁹¹

Through various objects that can be added to the blank canvas of Max, “gate-in” (tapin~) and “gate-out” (tapout~) commands give total control of the sound processing to the user, allowing for delay to not only happen in real time, but also to either be processed in left/right stereo or directly to the computer’s output source (speaker).

Cuong acoustically achieves the recreation of this electronic effect through rhythmic, melodic, and timbral considerations. There are five distinct methods that the composer uses which yield intriguing results in *Sound and Smoke* (Table 6).

Table 6. Methods of Acoustic Delay Processing in *Sound and Smoke*.

Method 1	Method 2	Method 3	Method 4	Method 5
Fragmented Processing	Rhythmic Delay	Melodic Alteration	Hocket Assignments	Melodic Extension

The first method, fragmented processing, entails having select instruments perform a primary melodic motive, and then meticulously assigning fragments of the motive to be repeated, or acoustically “processed,” by other instruments. This is normally followed by a *decrescendo* leading to a statement of another primary motive, which is then processed in a similar fashion. This method in particular yields a number of timbral possibilities as multiple families of instruments may be utilized to process the primary motivic figure. Cuong utilizes the fragmented processing method several times throughout the course of *Sound and Smoke*. It is most present in the first

⁹¹ “MSP Delay Tutorial 1: Delay Lines,” Max Online Documentation, accessed September 30, 2022, <https://docs.cycling74.com>.

movement and the composer harks to this same texture in the second movement. At first glance, the overlapping triplets appear to be accompaniment figures, many of them being scalar or arpeggiated in nature. After further analysis, it is found that each individual line is meticulously assigned to the acoustical processing of a primary motive fragment. In rehearsal of these segments, the primary motive should be performed mechanically with each note sounding at the same volume, as if produced electronically. This will ensure that all nine notes of the motive are audible to the listener. The instruments assigned to the processing of the primary motive should announce their entrance by performing the first three notes at the maximum marked volume, and then proceed to taper as indicated. This will ensure that both the primary motive and its delay are perceived from an audience perspective. Timbral considerations are also present in these segments as Cuong intentionally pairs certain instrument families and implies a direction, regarding tessitura, most often from low to high. This should be considered in terms of balance as the lower instruments will need to play slightly louder in order to match the volume of higher instruments. If this is not addressed, the delay processing will sound lopsided and not evenly distributed amongst all voices.

The second method, rhythmic delay, involves having a section play a melodic line and then having other instruments, usually of the same section, begin the same melodic line at a later point in time. This rhythmic offset generates the delay processing.

As an extension of method two, the third method, melodic alteration, offers another layer of detail to the delay processing. In some cases, as the rhythmic treatment is offset, Cuong will have the delayed instrument begin on a note lower in pitch than the original voice. This creates an effect of the delayed instrument sounding as if it is coming from farther away, despite the echo only being offset by no more than one full beat. When this is the case, the lower pitched voice will need to perform slightly louder in order to balance and be heard in equal part to the originating instrument.

The fourth method, hocket assignments, includes constructing a hocket rhythm that creates a composite melodic figure between two voices, normally within the same section. Then, a third part, or another instrument, is employed to act as the echo or delayed output of the two interacting voices.

The fifth method, melodic extension, appears once in *Sound and Smoke* during the first movement. This method is characterized by strategically selecting moments of thematic material to delay process and rhythmically offsetting those figures. Cuong then fills in the negative space with added scalar passages that lead to these desired moments, therefore, extending the melodic content. This allows the composer to achieve an illusive desired output signal while also employing more than two voices, thus generating a blurred effect of the music being performed within an echo chamber. The following section includes detailed description regarding Cuong's application of one, or a combination of, these orchestration methods in *Sound and Smoke*.

Detailed Application of Technique in *Sound and Smoke*

Movement I. "[feudal castle lights]"

Episode 1—Method 2, mm. 23–31

Episode 1 (mm. 23–31) comprises the first example of the delay processing effect utilized in *Sound and Smoke*. As the pedaling effect of the bowed vibraphone is occurring underneath the solo clarinet line, beginning in measure 21, the three flute parts are added as a layer of color (Figure 25). The motive is made of a descending triplet figure followed by a line of rising sixteenth notes, which then descend. The dynamics follow the contour of the line. The triplets begin at *mezzo forte* and *decrescendo* to *piano* and the sixteenth notes begin at *mezzo piano*, *crescendo* to the highest note, and then *decrescendo* as the line descends. Each flute part is offset by a quarter note, which in the context of the 3/2 meter is one half beat. Flute 1 enters on the upbeat of Beat 1, followed by flute 2 on the downbeat of Beat 2, and flute 3 on the upbeat of Beat 2. This delayed relationship maintains

throughout this section (mm. 23–31), and although the motive expands and develops, the dynamic contour remains the same.

The image shows a musical score for three flutes, labeled Fl. 1, Fl. 2, and Fl. 3. Each staff is marked with 'one player' above the first measure. The music consists of eighth-note triplets, indicated by a '3' over the notes. Dynamic markings are placed below the staves: *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano) for Fl. 1, *p* and *mf* for Fl. 2, and *p* and *mf* for Fl. 3. The score spans several measures, showing the development of a rhythmic motive through these instruments.

Figure 25. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” mm. 23–24.

Episode 2—Method 1, mm. 36–44

The line of eighth-note triplets found in the clarinet 1, alto saxophone 1, and vibraphone (percussion 3) make up a nine-note primary motive (Figure 26a), which is processed via acoustic delay effect by the clarinets 2 and 3, alto saxophone 2, tenor and baritone saxophones, and vibraphone (percussion 4). Essentially, the first three notes of the primary motive (clarinet 1 and alto saxophone 1) are repeated by clarinet 3 and baritone saxophone. Notes 4, 5, and 6 of the primary motive are repeated by clarinet 2 and tenor saxophone. Notes 7, 8, and 9 are repeated by alto saxophone 2 and percussion 4. Each repeat of the assigned notes occurs a total of five times, within a *diminuendo*, and this generates the recreation of the delay processing effect (Figure 26b).

Figure 26a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, "(feudal castle lights)," mm. 36–37.

Figure 26b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, "(feudal castle lights),"
Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, m. 36.

Episode 2—Method 3, mm. 49–51

In the final three measures in Episode 2, the trumpets present an imitation of the main theme. This imitation begins in trumpet 3 on Beat 2 of measure 49, offset by a full beat (one half note), as trumpet 2 enters on Beat 3, and trumpet 1 on Beat 1 of measure 50. Interestingly, all three trumpets play the same notes in this excerpt, with the exception of the first two notes of each statement (Figure 27). Trumpet 3 begins with concert C and D, followed by trumpet 2 entering on concert B-flat and C, and trumpet 1 on concert A-flat and B-flat. The resulting sound simulates spatial relationships with a sound source and the perceived frequency, similar to the Doppler effect.⁹² This is the first time the delay processing effect is used in this manner, thus adding an additional layer to the orchestration.

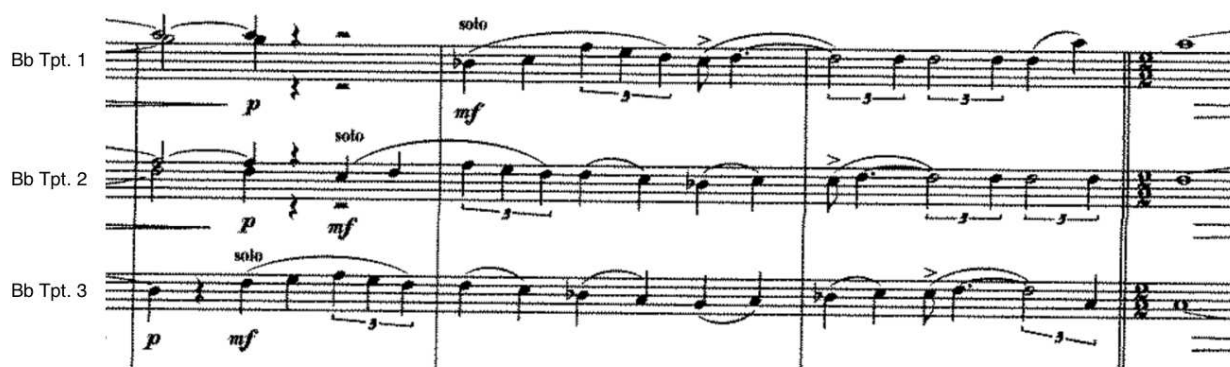


Figure 27. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” mm. 49–51.

Episode 3—Method 1, mm. 52–85

Similar to the technique used in the previously discussed eighth-note triplets (m. 36), Cuong processes the triplets in measure 52 in the same fashion (Figure 28a). The nine-note primary motive is found in clarinet 1, alto saxophone 1, and percussion 3. The first three notes are repeated in clarinet 3 and marimba (percussion 2). Notes 4, 5, and 6 are repeated by alto saxophone 2. Notes

⁹² According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the Doppler effect is the apparent difference between the frequency at which sound or light waves leave a source and that at which they reach an observer, caused by relative motion of the observer and the wave source. For example, as a wave source moves away from the observer, the pitch descends, and as it moves closer, the pitch ascends. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Doppler Effect.”

7, 8, and 9 are repeated in clarinet 2 and percussion 4 (Figure 28b). The difference in this section is that the duration of each delay effect is shortened by the length of a quarter note (one half beat). The first delay is repeated seven times, the second repeated six times, the third repeated five times, the fourth repeated four times, and the final repeat occurs three times. This leads to measure 59 where the contour of the primary motive changes from ascending to descending, before being reverted back to ascending in measure 60.

The orchestration of this effect adds both bassoon parts, as well as the tenor and baritone saxophones in measure 66. The primary motive remains in the clarinet 1 and alto saxophone 1, as bassoon 2 and baritone saxophone process the first three notes of the motives, and bassoon 1 and the tenor saxophone process Notes 4, 5, and 6. The bassoons and baritone saxophone exit the texture in measure 80, and the oboes along with flute 3 are added in measure 84. In these final two measure of Episode 3, oboe 2 repeats Notes 4, 5, and 6 of the primary motive, and flute 3 and oboe 1 repeat Notes 7, 8, and 9.

The image displays a musical score for measures 52-53. It consists of six staves, each labeled on the left: Bb Cl. 1, Bb Cl. 2, Bb Cl. 3, B. Cl., Eb Alto Sax. 1, and Eb Alto Sax. 2. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (mp, pp, p). Triplet markings (3) are present above several groups of notes. The B. Cl. staff features a long, sustained note with a 'p' dynamic. The Eb Alto Sax. 2 staff also has a long, sustained note with a 'pp' dynamic. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line.

Figure 28a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” mm. 52–53.



Figure 28b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),”
Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, m. 52.

Episode 3—Method 2, mm. 58, 65, 72, 79

The previous chapter details the ensemble pedaling that occurs beginning in measure 59. In addition to this, a delay processing effect in the flutes leads into the opening of each phrase within this section, starting with the entrance in measure 58. Each of these measures contains a series of sixteenth notes that *crescendo* to the highest written note and *decrescendo* as the line descends. Flute 1 enters first in each statement, with flute 2 following a quarter note later, and flute 3 a quarter note after that, similar to the triplet excerpt beginning in measure 23. These measures mark the end of the phrase and lead to the start of the next. After measure 58, each delay processing measure occurs after every six measures (Figures 29a, 29b, 29c, and 29d).



Figure 29a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” m. 58.



Figure 29b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” m. 65.



Figure 29c. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” m. 72.



Figure 29d. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” m. 79.

Episode 3—Method 3, mm. 66–72

The French horns quote the main theme in this section beginning with horns 1 and 2. The starting pitch is concert A, beginning on Beat 2 of measure 66, thus a major sixth higher than the first full statement of the theme (m. 36). Horns 3 and 4 begin their quotation on concert D on Beat 1 of the following measure (m. 67), a perfect fifth lower than horns 1 and 2 (Figure 30). This half note offset creates the delay processing effect as the two moving lines remain a beat apart through measure 72. By utilizing a lower starting pitch for the second voice, Cuong creates a sense that the processed echo is coming from further away, similar to the effect first heard in the trumpets (m. 49).



Figure 30. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” mm. 66–68.

Episode 6—Method 5, mm. 114–123

At the beginning of the final episode, an imitation of the main theme is produced in three-part counterpoint, which results in an effect as though the melodic material is being performed within an echo chamber. The counterpoint is located in the flutes, oboes, and trumpets. It begins with flute 1 and trumpet 1 on Beat 1 of measure 114; flute 2, oboes, and trumpet 2 on Beat 2; and finally, flute 3 and trumpet 3 on Beat 3. Due to the rhythmic complexity of this section, and to maintain the illusion of the theme being processed three times (instead of twice), the composer adds notes in stepwise motion when needed in order to manage the perceived delay (Figure 31a).

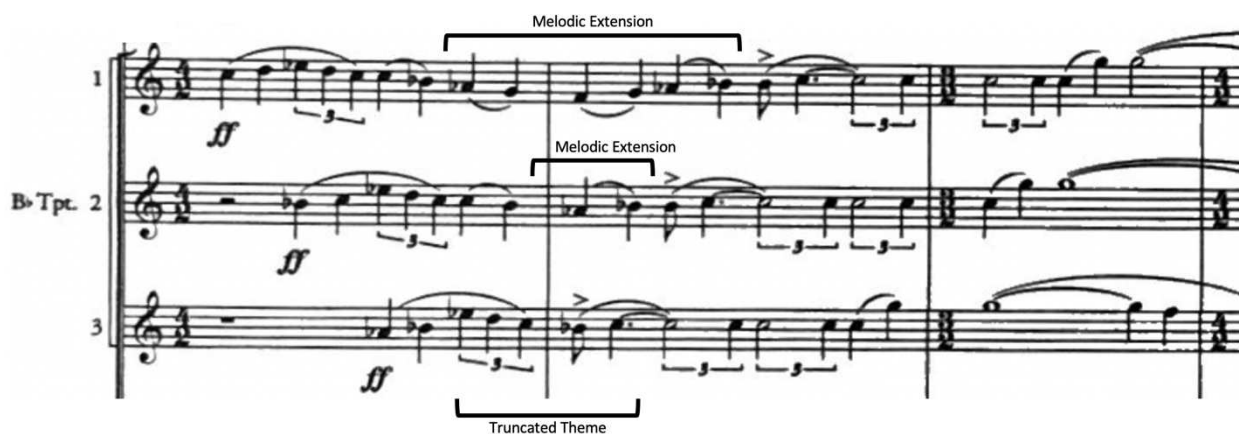


Figure 31a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, “(feudal castle lights),” mm. 114–116.

Episode 6—Method 2, mm. 114–121

An accompanying line is presented in the alto saxophone and French horn, which serves as counter melodic material and provides momentum throughout the episode (Figure 31b). Alto saxophone 1 performs in unison with horns 1 and 2, and alto saxophone 2 performs in unison with horns 3 and 4. Both lines are essentially separated by a half note in the same fashion as the thematic material in this section (Figure 31a). Cuong intentionally alters certain notes of the scalar passage in order to fit consonantly within the harmonic progression taking place. For example, alto saxophone 2 and horns 3 and 4 begin on a concert G-flat in measure 116 because of the C-flat major tonality in that measure.



Figure 31b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, "(feudal castle lights)," mm. 114–116.

Coda—Method 1, mm. 127–137

The triplets that begin in measure 129 are processed similarly to the sections beginning in measures 36 and 52 (Figure 32a). The nine-note primary motive is performed by clarinet 1, alto saxophone 1, and vibraphone (percussion 3). The first three notes are repeated by bassoon 2, baritone saxophone, and marimba; Notes 4, 5, and 6 are processed by bassoon 1, clarinet 3, and tenor saxophone; and Notes 7, 8, and 9 are repeated by clarinet 2, alto saxophone 2, and vibraphone (percussion 4). These processing assignments hold true from measures 129 through 132 (Figure 32b). Beginning in measure 133 the bassoons revert to a concert B-flat pedal, and the baritone saxophone exits the texture completely. In the final three measures, the processing of the final three notes of the primary motive by flute 3 and clarinet 2 is altered by one note. Instead of playing concert G, A-flat, and B-flat, as stated in the primary motive, the processing repeats the notes of concert G, A-flat, and F. This is most likely because clarinet 1 sustains the final note of the primary motive (concert B-flat) and, rather than disturb that octave of the pedal, Cuong drops the last note of the delay processing down a perfect fourth (concert F); this way the effect can also be heard in its entirety, instead of being lost in the clarinet 1 sustain.



Figure 32a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, "(feudal castle lights)," mm. 129–132.



Figure 32b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement I, "(feudal castle lights)," Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, mm. 129–131.

Movement II. "(avalanche of eyes)"

Episode 1—Method 4, mm. 5–27

Following the opening fanfare, the woodwinds present two simultaneous ideas, from measure 5 through measure 10. One is a pedaled line in the oboes and alto saxophones that mimics the opening trumpet fanfare, as discussed in the previous chapter. The other idea is a delay processed composite motive performed in the flutes and clarinets (Figure 33a).



Figure 33a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 5-9.

Written in three voices, the flute 1 and clarinet 1 act as a duet with flute 2 and clarinet 2, respectively. The flute 3 and clarinet 3 voices serve as the processed delay effect of the flute 1 and clarinet 1 lines. The first delay is offset by two beats (mm. 5-6) while the second delay is processed three beats later (m. 8). A similar idea occurs in measures 20 through 22, and measures 24 through 27 (Figures 33b and 33c). In the final two measures (mm. 26-27) the delay does not occur and the rhythm is replaced by accented eighth note on Beats 1 and 3 of the measures (flute 3 and clarinet 3). This is due to the added sixteenth notes on Beat 2, performed by flute 2 and clarinet 2, which act as a connection to the sixteenth-dotted eighth sustain in the flute 1, oboe 1, and clarinet 1, which fills the 2/4 measure (m. 27) and *crescendos* to the impact in measure 28.



Figure 33b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 20-22.



Figure 33c. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 24–27.

Episode 2—Method 4, mm. 40–56

The alto saxophones present a duet in this section, serving as the composite melodic material that is then delay processed by the tenor saxophone (Figure 34). Essentially, the tenor saxophone’s entrance on Beat 3 of measure 40 begins the delay of Beats 1 and 2 of the measure of alto saxophones 1. This is followed by Beats 3 and 4 of measure 41 in the tenor saxophone serving as the delay to the alto saxophone 2 entrance on Beat 2 of measure 40. The process then repeats in measures 42 and 43. It is clear in measures 44 and 45 how the offset saxophones serve as a quarter-note delay processing of the staccato eighth notes on Beats 1 and 2 of measure 44. The same structure from measures 40 and 41 occurs in measures 46 and 47, before the phrase is extended (m. 48) and begins anew in measure 49.

Figure 34. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 40–41.

Episode 3—Method 1, mm. 57–64

The delay processing in Episode 3 actually begins in measure 57 and overlaps episodes into measure 59. The eighth-note triplets hark back to the texture heard in the first movement. A similar method of processing the figure occurs in this section (Figure 35a). The nine-note primary motive is presented in bassoon 1, tenor saxophone, and euphonium. The first three notes of the motive are repeated by bassoon 2 and baritone saxophones. Notes 4, 5, and 6 are carried forward by alto saxophone 2; the last three notes of the motive are processed by alto saxophone 1. The initial motive is processed (repeated) a total of six times (Figure 35b), while the second and third motives are processed eight times.

The image displays a musical score for four saxophone parts: Eb Alto Sax. 1, Eb Alto Sax. 2, Bb Ten. Sax., and Eb Bari. Sax. The score is written in 4/4 time and features eighth-note triplets. The Eb Alto Sax. 1 part begins with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a series of eighth-note triplets. The Eb Alto Sax. 2 part also begins with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a similar pattern. The Bb Ten. Sax. part enters with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a series of eighth-note triplets. The Eb Bari. Sax. part enters with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a series of eighth-note triplets. The score includes various musical notations such as beams, slurs, and dynamic markings (f, p).

Figure 35a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 57–58.



Figure 35b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),”
Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, mm. 57–59.

Episode 3—Method 2, mm. 60–64

The flutes add a layer to the blurred texture in this section by providing a cross rhythmic rising and falling set of sixteenth notes (Figure 36). The hurried nature of this figure is accentuated; while the notes presented in all three flutes are the same, flutes 1 and 2 are offset by one and a half beats, and flutes 2 and 3 are offset by only a half beat (eighth note). This provides a more frenzied atmosphere to this section that propels the music forward.

The musical score for Figure 36 shows three staves labeled Fl. 1, Fl. 2, and Fl. 3. The time signature is 3/4. Each staff contains a series of sixteenth notes that rise and then fall, creating a cross-rhythmic texture. The notes are beamed together in groups. A dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) is present at the beginning of each staff. The notation includes various accidentals (flats and naturals) and rests.

Figure 36. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 60–62.

Episode 6—Method 1, mm. 108–119

The delay processing of the triplets in this section once again references back to the texture heard in the first movement. In this particular instance, the nine-note primary motive is carried by the clarinet 1, alto saxophone 1, and vibraphone (percussion 4). The first three notes are repeated by clarinet 3 and baritone saxophone. The next three notes are processed by clarinet 2 and tenor saxophone. Notes 7, 8, and 9 are repeated by oboes 1 and 2 and alto saxophone 2. There is a total of four sequences of triplets in this section and each is processed a total of eight times, which provides a symmetry to this episode as it can be divided evenly into five, three-measure phrases (Figures 37a and 37b).

The image displays a musical score for four saxophone parts: Eb Alto Sax. 1, Eb Alto Sax. 2, Bb Ten. Sax., and Eb Bari. Sax. The score is written for two measures. The Eb Alto Sax. 1 part begins with a triplet of eighth notes (F4, G4, A4) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Eb Alto Sax. 2 part enters in the second measure with a triplet of eighth notes (B3, C4, D4). The Bb Ten. Sax. and Eb Bari. Sax. parts both play continuous triplet patterns of eighth notes throughout the two measures. The Eb Bari. Sax. part starts with a triplet of eighth notes (F3, G3, A3) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Bb Ten. Sax. part starts with a triplet of eighth notes (B2, C3, D3) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Eb Alto Sax. 2 part starts with a triplet of eighth notes (B3, C4, D4) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Eb Alto Sax. 1 part has a triplet of eighth notes (F4, G4, A4) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Eb Alto Sax. 2 part has a triplet of eighth notes (B3, C4, D4) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Bb Ten. Sax. part has a triplet of eighth notes (B2, C3, D3) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The Eb Bari. Sax. part has a triplet of eighth notes (F3, G3, A3) marked with a forte 'f' dynamic.

Figure 37a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 108–109.



Figure 37b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),”
Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, mm. 108–111.

Development—Method 1, mm. 187–189

At the end of the first half of the Development section (mm. 172–204), a large portion of the wind section (flutes, bassoons, contrabassoon, clarinets, alto and tenor saxophones, trumpets, and trombones) play a short fragment of two sixteenth notes and an eighth note. This fragment is then delay processed by all three flute parts and the glockenspiel (percussion 4). The processing is repeated a total of nine times, within a *decrescendo*, following the initial statement. Flute 3 performs all nine repetitions and the flute 1 and 2, and glockenspiel parts exit the texture (m. 188) to contribute to the *diminuendo* (Figure 38).



Figure 38. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 187–189.

Episode 10—Method 1, mm. 228–239

The beginning of Episode 10 marks another statement of the delay-processed triplet texture (Figure 39a). The nine-note motive is presented in clarinet 1, alto saxophone 1, and vibraphone (percussion 4). The first three notes of each motive are repeated by clarinet 3 and tenor saxophone. The next three notes are carried solely by clarinet 2. The last three notes are repeated by oboe 1 and alto saxophone 2. There is a total of four motives in this section and the beginning of each aligns with a harmonic change heard in the chordal accompaniment. Each motive is repeated a total of six times (Figure 39b), with the exception of the last, which is processed a seventh time due to the stagnation of the harmonic progression leading into the next episode.

The image displays a musical score for seven instruments: Bb Cl. 1, Bb Cl. 2, Bb Cl. 3, B. Cl., Eb Alto Sax. 1, Eb Alto Sax. 2, and Bb Ten. Sax. The score is organized into three measures. The first measure contains a nine-note triplet motive for each instrument, marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The second measure shows the continuation of this texture, with some instruments playing sustained notes or rests, and dynamics shifting to piano (p) or mezzo-forte (mf). The third measure concludes the sequence, with some instruments returning to forte (f) dynamics. The notation includes various musical symbols such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Figure 39a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 228–230.



Figure 39b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),”
Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, mm. 228–230.

Episode 12—Method 2, mm. 249–260

The melodic content in Episode 12 is carried out by the flutes, oboe 1, and clarinets (Figure 40), with support from trumpets 1 and 2. The main thematic material can be found in flute 1, oboe 1, and clarinet 1. This melodic idea is delay processed twice by one beat beginning with flute 2 and clarinet 2 on Beat 2 of measure 249, and flute 3 and clarinet 3 on Beat 3 of the same measure. The three lines are rhythmic duplicates of each other and remain offset through the sixteenth-note pattern found in measure 254. Trumpets 1 and 2 add support to the flutes and clarinets 1 and 2, respectively, from measure 252 through 254.

The same melodic and rhythmic idea begins to repeat, beginning in measure 255; however, at measure 258 the eighth notes are altered from their original pitches and measures 259 and 260 are scored down a perfect fourth from their initial statement. Also, the sixteenth-note motive is played a total of four times in measure 260, as opposed to the original three statements in measure 254. Once again, trumpets 1 and 2 offer support in the final three measures of the phrase (mm. 258–260).



Figure 40. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 249–251.

Transition—Method 1, mm. 261–266

The eighth-note triplets during this transitional segment are processed in a similar manner as before; however, the four nine-note motives are presented in a more rapid succession, causing the processing time to become shorter (Figure 41a). The primary motive is performed in the clarinet 1, alto saxophone 1, and vibraphone (percussion 3). The first three notes of each motive are repeated by clarinet 3 and tenor saxophone. Notes 4, 5, and 6 are processed solely by alto saxophone 2. The last three notes of each motive are repeated by clarinet 2 (Figure 41b). The first two motives are echoed a total of four times, and the last two motives are repeated three times. oboes 1 and 2 add to the effect beginning in measure 265, repeating Notes 7 through 9, and Notes 4 through 6, respectively. The processing of the last three notes of the final motive is truncated by a half beat, as it is only repeated twice, while the preceding notes are repeated three times.



Figure 41a. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes)," mm. 261–262.



Figure 41b. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, "(avalanche of eyes),"
Reproduction of Initial Fragmented Processing Segment, mm. 261–263.

Episode 13—Method 2, mm. 274–281

Both of the previous two delay-processing effects are presented simultaneously in this final section of Episode 13. The flutes, oboes, and clarinets delay process the melodic material based on what was first heard in measure 249. All three trumpets add to this effort in measure 276. The main melodic idea is carried by the flute 1, oboes 1 and 2, and clarinet 1 lines (Figure 42). The delay processing is offset by one quarter note, as before, beginning on Beat 2 of measure 274 with the flute 2 and clarinet 2, and Beat 3 of the same measure with flute 3 and clarinet 3. When trumpets 1, 2, and 3 joins (mm. 276–277), they align with flutes 1, 2, and 3, and clarinets 1, 2, and 3, respectively.



Figure 42. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 274–278.

Episode 13—Method 1, mm. 274–281

In addition to the delay process of the melodic material in the upper woodwinds and trumpets, the processed eighth-note triplet texture provides a lushness to this closing section of Episode 13 (Figure 43). The primary nine-note motive is presented now in the tenor saxophone and euphonium. The first three notes are repeated by bassoon 2 and baritone saxophone. Notes 4, 5, and 6 are repeated by bassoon 1 and alto saxophone 2. The last three notes of each motive are processed solely by alto saxophone 1. There is a total of four motives in this section. The first two are processed five times. Due to metric constraints, the third is shortened, and only repeated four times. The final motive is processed seven times.



Figure 43. Viet Cuong, *Sound and Smoke* ©2011, Movement II, “(avalanche of eyes),” mm. 274–275.

Selected Examples of Acoustic Delay Processing in *Vital Sines*

The following two examples of the delayed-processing effect are provided to illustrate the use of this orchestration technique within the solo sextet, as well as between the soloists and accompanying wind band. Both examples were utilized in Cuong’s Midwest Clinic presentation discussed in Chapter 2.

In the opening material, as the melody notes are found in the eighth-note subdivision, the delay effect is set to the dotted-sixteenth note. Much of the rhythmic interplay can be seen in the solo piano and marimba (Figures 44), while the other solo instruments act in supporting roles to this material. Figures 45 illustrates the four levels of rhythmic activity employed to generate this effect. Line 1 represents the macro, skeletal material. Lines 2 and 3 represent the rhythmic interplay between the solo piano and marimba, as well as the other members of the solo sextet. Line 4 illustrates the composite rhythm produced by the melodic material and resulting delay.

Figure 44 shows a musical score for Piano and Marimba. The Piano part is written in treble and bass clefs, featuring a complex melodic line with many accidentals and dynamic markings (f, sfz). The Marimba part is also in treble and bass clefs, providing a rhythmic accompaniment with similar melodic motifs. Both parts are marked with 'f' and 'sfz' dynamics.

Figure 44. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, mm. 1-2.

Figure 45 shows a rhythmic analysis score. It consists of four staves: Macro Rhythm, Piano, Marimba, and Composite Rhythm. The Macro Rhythm staff shows a simple 3/4 meter. The Piano and Marimba staves show complex rhythmic patterns with many sixteenth notes. The Composite Rhythm staff shows the combined rhythmic pattern of the Piano and Marimba.

Figure 45. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, Analysis of Rhythmic Levels, mm. 1-2.

The following excerpt from the section beginning at measure 126 serves as an example of the delay-processing effect utilized between the solo sextet and the wind band. In this particular illustration, the accompanying English horn, and alto saxophone echo the melodic content played by the solo cello (Figure 46). The delay effect is once again set to the dotted-sixteenth note, creating cross-rhythmic interplay that transcends the 2/4 metric structure. More specifically, the concert C played by both the cello and English horn on the upbeat of Beat 1, in measure 126, is delay-processed and echoed on the second sixteenth note of Beat 2 by the English horn. The concert A-flat played by all three instruments on the downbeat of 2 (m. 126) is delay-processed and echoed by the

alto saxophone on the last sixteenth note of the measure. Finally, the concert B-flat played by the cello and alto saxophone on the upbeat of 2 in measure 126 is delay-processed and echoes across the bar line on the alto saxophone's second sixteenth note of Beat 1 in measure 127.

The musical score for measures 126 and 127 of 'Vital Sines' by Viet Cuong is presented in three staves. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 12/8. The staves are labeled Eng. Hn (English Horn), A. Sax. (Alto Saxophone), and Vc. (Cello). The Vc. staff is marked 'arco' and 'f' (forte). The score shows the following notes:

- Measure 126:** Eng. Hn and Vc. play a half note B-flat. A. Sax. is silent.
- Measure 127:** Eng. Hn and Vc. play a half note B-flat. A. Sax. plays a half note B-flat.

Figure 46. Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines* ©2022, mm. 126–127.

CONCLUSION

The music of Viet Cuong represents an established voice in both the wind band and contemporary music media. In his creativity of expression and detailed thought in orchestration he has amassed an impressive body of work, which continues to push the limits of instrumental ensembles across multiple genres. Cuong has earned recognition and praise from musicians around the world who have had the opportunity to interact with his music. Jerry Junkin, Director of Bands at the University of Texas at Austin, and conductor of the Dallas Winds, said the following about the composer:

I think he has a very interesting yet identifiable personal style in his composition, so that you hear—and this is only a compliment and this is not in any way anything other than a compliment—because you hear his music and it is always so colorfully orchestrated regardless of the medium. So it doesn't matter if it's for a small group or for a symphony orchestra, or whether if it's for wind ensemble, I think he's really a master orchestrator. . . . He has this wonderful mixture of sonic capabilities, his music is beautifully tonal but yet incorporates contemporary techniques. He's a very eclectic composer.⁹³

Evidence of Cuong's mastery lies in his "identifiable" compositional voice, as Junkin observes. Furthermore, in viewing *Sound and Smoke* and *Vital Sines* as representative works of Cuong's oeuvre, spanning more than a decade (2011–2022), it is clear that while the composer's distinctive musical sound has developed, it originated from an authentic place, firmly established at the start of the composer's professional career. Therefore, it is paramount that performers and conductors of Cuong's music are educated in the trajectory of the composer's compositional process to ensure authenticity of the repertoire in performance.

As a result of the research process for this project, opportunities for further study regarding Cuong's music have presented themselves. First, further analysis of *Vital Sines* is needed to comprehensively present the details of this work, both structurally and its implications in the infusion of contemporary music genres with the wind band; of which, the piece is among the first of

⁹³ Kim, 118.

its kind. Second, a similar method of analysis utilized in this study may be applied to other pieces by Cuong, in which the composer employs similar orchestration tactics, particularly in *Moth* (2013). Finally, further analysis is necessary to examine other compositional methods the composer utilizes to acoustically recreate electronic sounds. For example, Cuong employs a Shepard Tone during segments of *Vital Sines*. This is an auditory illusion that sounds deceptively as though a particular pitch is constantly ascending or descending.⁹⁴ How does the composer achieve this through orchestration, and is it something found or developed elsewhere in his music? Another interesting acoustic sound is the effect of lowering a struck crotale onto an upside-down snare drum, which creates a “sympathetic vibration” resulting in an electronic-sounding crescendo, similar to what would happen if a pitch were electronically reversed via a Digital Audio Workstation.⁹⁵ These instructions are included in *Vital Sines*, and Cuong first experimented with the effect in *Electric Aroma*. It will be fascinating to observe how the composer employs or develops this technique, and continues to discover similar methods of replicating electronic sounds through acoustic means. Of this aspect in Cuong’s ingenious writing, the composer states, “If I’m to be known for anything. I would love for it to be that.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Matteo Malinverno, “The Shepard Tone: What It Is and How It Works,” *Splice* (blog), June 6, 2022, www.splice.com.

⁹⁵ Cuong, “*Vital Sines*: The Making of a Commission.”

⁹⁶ Cuong, “*Vital Sines*: The Making of a Commission.”

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APPENDIX A

PERMISSION FOR USE OF COPYRIGHTED MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Dear Mr. Pouncey,

In accordance with your request, I hereby grant permission for the physical or digital reproduction of excerpts of the score to my works *Sound and Smoke* and *Vital Sines* as part of your graduate thesis entitled *A Conductor's Guide to Ensemble Pedaling and Acoustic Recreation of Electronic Delay Processing in the Wind Band Music of Viet Cuong*.

Copyright credits should be ascribed to Viet Cuong and the years of copyright are 2011 and 2022, respectively.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Viet Cuong".

Viet Cuong

APPENDIX B

VIET CUONG: LIST OF PUBLISHED COMPOSITIONS

ORCHESTRA

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
<i>Next Week's Trees</i>	2021	8'	String Orchestra
<i>Extra(ordinarily) Fancy</i>	2019	11'	Concerto for Two Oboes and Chamber Orchestra: 1-2(soloists)-1-1, 2-1-1, 2 perc, harpsichord, strings
<i>Re(new)al</i>	2017-2018	16'	Percussion Quartet Concerto *sinfonietta version: soloists, 1-1-1-1, sop sax, bari sax, 1-1-1, piano, 1- 1-1-1-1 *full orchestra version: soloists, 2-2-2-2, 4-2-3-1, timp+3, piano, strings
<i>Bullish</i>	2019	7'	Chamber Orchestra: 2(picc)-2(EH)-2- 2(contra), 2-2, timp+2, strings
<i>Electric Aroma (a most disagreeable noise)</i>	2018	8'	Sinfonietta: 1-1-2-1, 1-1-1, 2 perc, piano, 1-1-1-1-1
<i>Moxie</i>	2018	8'	Orchestra: 4-3-3-2(contra), 4-3-3-1, timp+4, piano, harp, strings
<i>Neon</i>	2016	11'	Orchestra: 3-3-3-2(contra), 4-2-3-1, timp+3, piano, strings
<i>Scribbles and Riddles</i>	2016	6'	Orchestra: 2-2-2-2(contra), 2-2-2-1, timp+4, strings

<i>The Wild Woods: Prelude to Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf</i>	2016	13'	Chamber Orchestra and Narrator: 1-1-1-1, 3-1-1-0, timp+2, strings
<i>Nothing If Not</i>	2015	14'	Double Woodwinds, Piano, Bass, and Percussion

WIND ENSEMBLE

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
<i>Deciduous</i>	2023	8'	Wind Ensemble
<i>Vital Sines</i>	2022	16'	Solo Sextet and Wind Band
<i>Re(new)al</i>	2021	16'	Percussion Quartet Concerto (chamber winds version)
<i>Full Circle</i>	2020	4'	Wind Ensemble
<i>Re(new)al</i>	2019	16'	Percussion Quartet Concerto (full wind ensemble version)
<i>Bull's-Eye</i>	2019	11'	Chamber Winds (picc, fl, cl, bass cl, sax quartet, tpt, hn, pno, 2 perc)
<i>Tuba Concerto</i>	2019	16'	Concerto for Tuba and Wind Ensemble
<i>Lasting Light</i>	2018	8.5'	Wind Band
<i>Electric Aroma</i>	2018		Saxophone Ensemble
<i>Howls and Hymns</i>	2017	8'	Professional Trombonist and Young Band
<i>Diamond Tide</i>	2015	8'	Wind Band
<i>Moth</i>	2013	8'	Wind Ensemble
<i>Sound and Smoke</i>	2011	14'	Wind Band

CHAMBER

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
<i>Circling Back</i>	2021	4'	Oboe, Cello
<i>Room to Move</i>	2021	4'	Cello Octet
<i>Sanctuary</i>	2020	7'	Soprano Saxophone, Piano
<i>Sandbox</i>	2020	8'	Percussion Quartet
<i>Explain Yourself</i>	2019	11'	Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Piano
<i>Fine Lines</i>	2019	15'	Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano
<i>Cymbalisms</i>	2018	8'	Percussion Quartet (4 suspended cymbals)
<i>Electric Aroma</i>	2018	7'	Flute, Clarinet, Percussion, Piano
<i>Electric Aroma</i>	2017	7'	Soprano Saxophone, Clarinet, Percussion, Piano
<i>Extra Fancy</i>	2017	7'	Two Oboes, English Horn, Two Bassoons
<i>Commitment Bed</i>	2016	10'	String Quartet
<i>Water, Wine, Brandy, Brine</i>	2015	13'	Percussion Quartet (15 crystal glasses)
<i>Prized Possessions</i>	2014–2015	12'	Saxophone Quartet
<i>Wax and Wire</i>	2014	7'	Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano
<i>Windmill</i>	2013	7'	Flute, Violin, Cello, Percussion
<i>Lacquer and Grit</i>	2013	10'	Flute, Piano
<i>Trains of Thought</i>	2012	11'	Oboe, Bassoon, Piano

<i>Pulse Train</i>	2010	7'	Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Viola, Cello, Percussion, Piano
<i>Suite</i>	2010	12'	Two Oboes, English Horn

SOLO

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
<i>Again and Again</i>	2021	2'	Solo Prepared (or unprepared) Piano
<i>Looking Up</i>	2021	1.5'	Solo Clarinet
<i>America the Beautiful: "Echo Chamber"</i>	2020	2'	Solo Piano
<i>Mist Fantasy</i>	2020	4'	Solo Oboe
<i>Well-Groomed</i>	2019	7.5'	Solo Snare Drum
<i>Apparition</i>	2017	6'	Solo Clarinet
<i>OBSESSION</i>	2013	10'	Solo Guitar
<i>Veil</i>	2011	8'	Solo Piano
<i>Zanelle</i>	2009	8'	Solo B-flat Clarinet
<i>Six Canadian Scenes</i>	2009	10'	Solo Oboe

VOCAL

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
<i>Noise Suppression</i>	2020	4'	Countertenor, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon
<i>O Do Not Love Too Long</i>	2018	4'	Tenor (or Baritone), Piano
<i>Thu Điều</i>	2017	6'	Soprano, Winds (flute, clarinet, bassoon), Harp, String Quartet
<i>There</i>	2017	8'	Chamber Choir, Winds
<i>A Needle's Eye</i>	2015	6'	Countertenor, Two Tenors, Baritone, Bass

ELECTRONIC

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
<i>Naica</i>	2011	8'	Alto Saxophone and Live Delay Processing (with Max MSP) Bass Clarinet version also available

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH COMPOSER

Monday, November 14, 2022

Benjamin Pouncey (BP): I gathered a lot of biographical information from the interviews you did with Doctor [Nils] Landsberg and Doctor [Janet Song] Kim over the past few years. I did want to ask a couple of follow up questions, if that's okay, about some things from those interviews from primarily the time between when you were a student at Lassiter High School and going to Peabody. I am interested to hear a little bit more about what you were writing while you were at Lassiter, and what kind of pieces those were. Were they full band pieces? Were they things that the band played through or were you writing more for friends?

Viet Cuong (VC): It was a combination of things. I think you probably read, I got my start from trying to write music that was similar to what we were playing in middle school. So, when I got to high school, it was mostly a continuation of that. I remember my freshman year of high school, the associate director at Lassiter named Catherine Bushman (it was Catherine Sinon at the time, so Ms. Sinon), had given me one of her downloads of Finale that she had won at a raffle at Midwest. And that was a big moment because what I was using at the time, when I first started, was Finale Notepad, which you could only, I think at the time, have up to seven instruments. And then towards the end of middle school, I got what was called Finale Printmusic, which had maybe up to twenty instruments. Then the full version of Finale, I've never reached the max of that. So, I could basically have a whole band score. I would say that's when I started to actually write full band pieces, my freshman year of high school.

They were mostly in the style of whatever I was doing in band, so in the fall I would write these pieces that were sort of marching band-esque. An example of that was, oftentimes in Lassiter's marching band shows, the closer of the show would have a woodwind fugue. And that's where I learned what a fugue was. I never learned what a fugue was from Bach or anything (laughs). So, I would write these woodwind fugues and they often had this marching band sound to them. And in the spring, I would write pieces inspired by what we were playing in concert band. I was also in percussion ensemble in high school. The percussion ensemble was really good. We went to Midwest my sophomore year. I remember we played David Gillingham's *Stained Glass*. It's a big percussion ensemble piece and I remember writing a piece for a mallet percussion ensemble that was similar to *Stained Glass*. In addition to that, I wrote for the concert band, not just pieces based on what we were playing. I was also inspired by the original versions of the marching band arrangements we performed. My freshman year we did a show consisting of David Holsinger's music. For a while, Lassiter was playing a lot of David Holsinger shows. So, I would write these pieces that were similar to David Holsinger.

I also wrote some chamber pieces for my friends. I wrote a woodwind quintet, and a string quintet, because I didn't know that string quintet was unusual. (laughs) I figured, of course it would include string bass! (laughs) I also wrote arrangements of piano music for my friends to play on mallet instruments in our percussion ensemble. I remember I wrote some Chopin arrangements, and Rachmaninoff. And, I made a vibraphone trio arrangement of the Morten Lauridsen *O Magnum Mysterium* because we were playing that my junior year in concert band. Everything I did was very directly tied to what the Lassiter band program was doing.

BP: Right. Yeah, that's really interesting. And then, you took some of those things that you had written and applied to undergraduate programs. What really drew you to Peabody?

VC: I didn't know what Peabody was until the summer before my senior year. There is something called the Georgia Governor's Honors Program (GHP), and it is basically a summer program for high school students throughout Georgia. You could audition or interview for whatever program you choose. It's kind of a little preview of college, if you will. I was a percussion major there. And we had different classes each week. So, one day there was a twenty-first century music class. And I remember, our percussion teacher's name was Ryan Smith and he would play music [in the twenty-first century music class]. It was my first time hearing, the music of George Crumb. He also played this orchestra piece called *Rainbow Body* by a composer named Chris Theofanidis. And I loved it, I still love that piece. And I remember getting chills listening to it and just being so inspired to Google this guy, Christopher Theofanidis. And I read that he taught at a place called Peabody, which is a music school in Baltimore. And so, I looked into it and it ended up on my list of schools for that reason.

There were other schools on that list too. I remember applying to USC (University of Southern California) and Michigan, because I knew that they had good band programs. I was very inspired by Frank Ticheli's music. And we sight read Michael Daugherty's *Niagara Falls* and I thought that was cool. And so, there were other schools I applied to that were tied to the things that we did in band but Peabody was different because it was this thing outside of Lassiter; the way I discovered Peabody. Ultimately, I decided to go to Peabody because I thought everything in my life, in my musical life, had been so band focused. I probably should try to do something outside of that. And so, by going to a place like Peabody, where it's a music conservatory, where they have a wind ensemble, but it's not the focus. At a conservatory [the focus] is usually the orchestra and opera program. So, it was good for me to branch out.

BP: Yeah, I read that you said your ears were kind of opened up to other music while you were there [Peabody]. Do you remember some of those experiences in particular that were turning points or that really expanded your musical knowledge?

VC: Yeah. My roommate my freshman year was a violinist, and I remember learning about the violin the first week of school. I didn't even know what the open strings of a violin were. (laughs) Like I mentioned, I wrote a string quintet in high school. It was not good. It showed no understanding of string instruments, or bowing, or anything like that. So just talking to him about violin and string writing and things like harmonics was so mind blowing. And then one of my best friends was also a violinist, and he lived right next door to us. And just being around people who come from a different musical background and who played different repertoire was so amazing. When I think back, my best friends in college, a lot of them were string players, and guitarists, and percussionists; some wind players, some brass players, and so it was a good mix. And mostly just because, you're in music school, everyone's conversations are about the music they're working on, the repertoire, what they're working on in orchestra. I remember going to orchestra concerts to support my friends and hearing music I'd never heard before. And that was really great and just opened up my world to so many other things that I could try to write.

BP: Right. That's fantastic. I was curious about your teachers, because I believe you studied with Kevin Puts and Oscar Bettison there [at Peabody], and I read some things about how Joel Puckett had influenced some of your wind band writing. Are there other things that you look back now and say, "I think this is something I do because of this experience with this person?" Not just at Peabody, but at Princeton and Curtis, and other places you've been.

VC: Yeah, I think I always have been inspired by my teacher's musical voices. The pieces they write. The risks they take, and the risks they don't take. The things they've learned through all of their experiences. I think that's what, as a composer-teacher, that's what you teach, your learned experience and helping the student navigate those things themselves. So, with Kevin [Puts] in particular, I always found him to be this guiding light for me because his music, I think, is in a similar world to mine. But nowadays, as a composer, you can really write whatever you want and it's really exciting for that reason. But maybe fifteen years ago, in some ways, I felt pressure to maybe write music that wasn't necessarily true to myself, [in order] to be taken seriously. But, no matter what, I always remembered, Kevin [Puts] can write whatever music that's really honest to him. And sincere. And he's massively successful. So, I was inspired that I could do the same. I can stay honest to who I am and maybe I'll have a career one day. (chuckles) And I'd say that's true of every teacher that I studied with. They're all really confident musical voices, and so even though, [for example] Oscar's [Bettison] music is very different from Kevin's, he has the same confidence in his music. And Oscar [Bettison] really helped me just try to also think outside of the box too. That was great to [study for] a year with him at Peabody. So, everyone, every teacher I've had, has influenced me in a different way. And, I owe a lot to them too.

BP: That's great. And now you are teaching at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Is that correct? How has that experience been?

VC: Yeah, it's been really rejuvenating to have my teaching be part of my musical life and to feel like I am useful in ways other than just as a composer (chuckles), in terms of what I have to offer to the world, musically. I think when you're a composer and you're freelancing, like I was doing for years before getting this job, a lot of your self-worth is tied up with your composition career. And what kind of commissions you're getting. And how many performances you're getting. And it can be kind of overwhelming at times, so I feel much more [as though] I have a balanced outlook on life now to where I still want to have all these things happening in my career outside of teaching, but teaching is also a kind of grounding force in my life now, which I have really enjoyed ever since [starting] this job.

BP: That's great. I was curious, because I know you have done a lot of residencies and things like that and taught in those situations, and now at UNLV. I was wondering if you have found, over the years, anything in your teaching experience that's reinforced how you think about composition, or changed it, or that has helped shape your approach, and how you think about music.

VC: Yeah, it's interesting seeing different generations, even separated by ten or fifteen years, what they enjoy about music. I remember in my orchestration class last year playing, I feel like it's something everyone has to do if you teach orchestration, [Maurice] Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. Which is a piece I love. My mind was blown the first time listening to that in college. And I remember playing it for my class and some of the students just not being into it. (chuckles) And it seems like maybe, and I'm generalizing here, but it seems like people in my generation really love these really textural pieces. Music that's really focused on color and timbre and shifts in texture, things like that. And then sometimes I feel like more recently I've seen younger students, who are in college now, really into counterpoint and really structured ways to make music. It's just been interesting seeing that. So, teaching kind of keeps you on your toes and connected to what's going on, which is nice.

BP: Yeah. Do you have any ideas where that comes from [younger student's musical interests]?

VC: I don't know. I think it's just maybe the pendulum swinging. If a lot of composers are interested in one thing then things kind of shift eventually. Because we're trying to find fresh ways to do

things. So, once a lot of composers have exhausted one avenue you kind of explore a different one. Which is cool. It's what keeps music interesting and why music has evolved over hundreds of years. This semester I'm teaching a Baroque seminar, this graduate seminar, and we cover many notable composers of the Baroque era. And it's so interesting, seeing everyone in the Baroque era write within these styles and forms. Everyone's using the same instruments for the most part. Everyone's using similar chords. But then, seeing how everyone has their own distinct musical style, and how Scarlatti is so vastly different than Bach. It's also interesting that the pendulum completely swung in a different direction for the Classical era. It's so different. What people valued, what people wanted to hear. It's so crazy to compare Bach to Mozart. Two composers that are really iconic and popular, but they're so different. So, I think music just does that every so often. And I think changes and shifts now happen more quickly because of how accessible music is.

BP: Right. Yeah, that is really interesting. And going back to what you were saying about your generation being interested in textures and colors; a large inspiration for this thesis is the evolution of your compositional voice. And the impetus for that was the interview with Dr. [Nils] Landsberg and the dissertation on *Bull's-eye*. I think you mentioned something about having noticed stages that you've traversed so far and what you were interested in when *Sound and Smoke* was written versus now. So, I'm curious if you still feel like you have those stages, and if you feel you're still in a second stage; or is there perhaps a new stage that's emerged. What are your thoughts are on that now?

VC: Yeah. It was so funny when I was sitting in Nils's defense because it was very meta and kind of strange to listen to someone discuss the stages of your life. (laughs) But I think it's true. I would say I'm in a completely different place now than I was in 2019. COVID happened and it was a pretty stark, kind of change [regarding] the music I wanted to write during that time. Because I think Nils called it [the second stage] a more whimsical era, including *Bull's-Eye* and my double oboe concerto, and these pieces that are really sort of humorous and funny; or always feels like I'm winking or something during the piece. I got to a place during COVID where a lot of the music I was writing was actually all very reflective and kind of, I guess, just more melancholy. I would say in that time, and I think maybe still now, I was writing music as a way to find comfort as opposed to a way to entertain myself, if that makes sense. I think *Vital Sines* is definitely one of those pieces, from during that time. I also was just really interested in writing music that was unapologetically beautiful. And almost using that as a [means of] defiance by doing that. For example, writing a concerto for Eighth Blackbird, which is a very prominent new music ensemble, and almost every chord is a triad or major seventh chord. So, I guess that's how I would sum up the last couple years.

BP: Right. Yeah, I thought it was really interesting, I discovered the arrangement of *America the Beautiful* that you wrote [*America the Beautiful: "Echo Chamber"* (2020), for solo piano] and found a recording online. It's gorgeous.

VC: Oh, thanks. Yeah, that was one of those pieces and I think that year, 2020 to 21, I wrote a lot of music, but it was a lot of short little pieces. That's what people wanted at the time. It was easy to present online, the recordings or live stream. Yeah, I remember writing an *America the Beautiful* arrangement. It was due around the time of the election in 2020. What a time to write a piece that's a variation of *America, the Beautiful*. I think it was, in that project, there were seventy or so composers [participating]. So, it was really fascinating to see what everyone was expressing at that time.

BP: Absolutely. Something I would like to know more about are comparisons between the different aspects of your writing. Focusing on *Sound and Smoke* as being one end of the spectrum and *Vital*

Sines being on the other. So, I was hoping to ask some questions about some different compositional components, but in the context of how you thought about them ten years ago versus now; and if it's the same, or different, and how might they have developed over time? One of the components being form, and how you think about form. I read about some of your earlier pieces that you wrote beginning to end, and did not really set out with a form in mind. Is that the case now, or do you think differently about that?

VC: Yes and no, I think it still depends on the piece. But I do think more about form now. There's almost this youthful indiscretion in *Sound and Smoke* where I was doing whatever I thought should happen next and I wasn't thinking about form as much. But now I kind of like to combine that with being more deliberate about the structure of a piece. And to take a step back every so often and think about that structure. And I think in terms of structure and form, I've learned also in the last ten years how to make the most out of one musical idea. With *Sound and Smoke*, you almost see a peek at that, in the second movement, how it goes [sings motive]. I'm doing stuff with that, but it's more all over the place, where as now, I really try to squeeze as much as I can out of one idea and be really economical with it because I think it results in a piece that's really tight and focused. And I think maybe if you want to use a word to describe the change, a big change over the last ten years, it's just been focus. I think my music is much more focused now.

BP: I would like to also ask about texture, however, next to that point; do you think about thematic material early on, or motives? Or do you go with a color/timbre first? Is there a melody in mind from the beginning or do you begin experimenting with fragments/intervals?

VC: It's hard to say truly what comes first, melody or texture, because it's different for every piece. Usually I start with one of those two. I think for *Vital Sines*, the very first thing I wrote that ended up in the piece. . . . [actually] there was a lot of stuff I wrote that didn't end up in the piece because it was the piece that originally was supposed to be premiered in December of 2020 at Midwest, so if that had happened, the piece would have been completely different than what it is now. And I think it's much better now than what it would have been in 2020. . . . [however] the first thing I wrote that ended up in the piece was the very opening measures [plays opening measures]. That "melody," I guess you could call it, I thought let me orchestrate that. And I knew from right then what the texture would be. It was almost as if the texture and melody came together. I wanted to make it sound really resonant and reverberant and that it's like all these things being echoed. It was this way of writing for piano that I have been working on in pieces like *America the Beautiful*, that was a prototype for it, as well as another piece called *Again and Again* I wrote around the same time for prepared piano.

I feel like they [melody and texture] are almost inseparable to me. With melody, I immediately think, well how am I going to orchestrate it; or with texture, I think, well what melody am I going to use with it? So, I don't ever write a piece as a piano short score and then decide when it's time to orchestrate it. It's totally inseparable to me. Some composers will write something that looks sort of like a piano piece, or they'll have a couple piano staves, grand staves, and then they'll write the piece and then orchestrate it. What I actually do is I have the band score and then in the middle of the score I have a couple piano staves. That's where the information is because it can get really unwieldy if there is a whole band plus a sextet. (chuckles) And so, there's piano staves running through the piece. They aren't actually music that anyone is playing, there are not three pianists in the piece, but it's almost like a short score that's happening at the same time as everything else.

BP: Yeah, that's really fascinating. I'm really interested in the delay processing effects that I know you've used and I read, in your own dissertation, about how you used those effects in *Re(new)al*, but

how it started with the saxophone solo that you composed for saxophone and electronics [*Naica*] and led to *Sound and Smoke*? Could you talk a little bit about how that has been almost a throughline, maybe, in your compositional voice, and how that's developed and become complex?

VC: Yeah, I will say if there's one thing I want to be my signature, I want it to be that. I've used this delay sound world for, like you said, from 2011 when I wrote that saxophone piece [*Naica*] until now. It's been over ten years and it's been this aspect of my orchestration that feels really personal to me and it's also just been really fun to explore. In a piece like *Sound and Smoke*, that delay is just a quarter note. You play "dah," and it echoes quarter notes, "dah dah dah dah dah." And that's something I still do, but I have played around with using delays that are different durations depending on what meter you're in, which is something I first did in *Re(new)al*. Because what's interesting to me about that is that's something a computer, like a Max patch or a pedal, cannot do; unless you write some really complicated Max patch that is probably going to have bugs and not ever work. But changing the duration and speed of delay note to note, that's something I've been more interested in too. I do this in *Vital Sines* too, have the delay set to the dotted sixteenth note sometimes, but it's set to eighths at other times. The actual delay becomes a counterpoint to the music that is being processed. It's been really fun to do that and I'm still trying to explore more ways to use these sounds.

BP: Yeah, it's really interesting and creates such a cool soundscape, it's really fascinating, especially when you're following everything on the score.

VC: Oh yeah thanks. And I would say that is something that has been a throughline throughout a lot of my music. There was a time in grad school that I wasn't doing it as much. But, I'm trying to think, I use it in *Smoke and Smoke*; I use it in *Moth*; I don't use it in *Diamond Tide*. And then there was a while where I wasn't really interested in that. It was somewhat recently, the last couple years. Because this feeling of delay and echoing also almost symbolizes for me, especially during the COVID year, all of us being alone and our thoughts bouncing around in our head. Our communities became these online echo chambers. And I guess we've been in online echo chambers for a long time, but it was a time where that was almost the only ways we interacted with people. And also, there's this idea of notes echoing like our influences echoing around us. Our mentors, we're like echoes of their pedagogy. There's different ways to look at it, but I think thematically it's a tool, as well as just like being a cool sound.

BP: Yeah. Wow, I love that. That's great. And I thought it was really interesting to see in your writing how you thought about not only the initial sound but also what instrument ended up echoing that sound, the type of articulation that it has, and just those types of connections that are there. When you're creating different palettes, are there certain colors and combinations that you are drawn to or do you try to create something different each time?

VC: Yeah, I really like the sound of using delay with percussive instruments, so piano, marimba, playing staccato notes, with woodwinds. I found it doesn't work as well with brass when it's a dotted note value delay. When it's a quarter note, it's fine. With brass, I have these tricks to make them playable because say you're playing dotted eighth notes at a quick tempo [sings rhythms]. It creates this cross rhythm of four against three. What I oftentimes do is give them downbeats so that it is easier to play [sings rhythm]. And that rhythm with brass instruments can be less effortless sounding. But if I were to write repeated dotted eighths, it's hard to count, so it doesn't all lock up together. I just finished this piece called *Deciduous* for band, for the Florida All-State Band. The entire thing is delay effect. It's mostly in the woodwinds, mallet percussion, and piano. I would say in terms of colors I'm drawn to, I just really like woodwinds and percussion because those are

instruments I play. Brass is great too. But, for the delay effect, those [woodwinds and percussion] are the instruments I gravitate towards most because they're just more nimble I suppose.

BP: Right. Speaking of percussion, how have you approached percussion instruments [in general] over the years? Especially being a percussionist, how do you like to use that section of the band?

VC: You know, I would say, as in the way that my compositional voice has become more focused over the years, the way I write for percussion has become more focused. I always try to get as much as I can out of a select group of instruments that I choose to use in a piece, in terms of writing for percussion instruments. In a piece like *Sound and Smoke* I think there's a moment where I used sleigh bells shaken for six measure, or something like that, I don't use them again. (laughs) It's sort of this youthful discretion in thinking, "there's so many great percussion instruments. I love this sound of triangle rolled with sleigh bells, it's really jangly and really cool." And it is a cool sound. But now if I were to do that, I would think, "well, I need to use these sleigh bells again, what can I do with them? What other sounds can I make? What else can I combine them with?" And so now if I say I'm going to use these crotales, I'm going to divide them up between six people and use these effects with them. So that's one way that is changed.

In some other ways, it's sort of stayed the same. I don't know if you've noticed, there are certain instruments I don't use a lot for the percussion section. And I think this has to do with just being a percussionist growing up, there are just instruments I didn't like to play. Either that, or I just feel like the sound of them is tired to me. Maybe they've been used so much to where they're not as interesting to me to use. One of them being snare drum. Unless I'm using snare drum in a way like in *Re(new)al* where it's part of a drum set, or in *Vital Sines* where it's literally part of a drum set or in *Sound and Smoke*, there's a place where I wanted to be [sings boom-chick-boom-chick], I otherwise don't use it. I think part of that is just because, how many middle school, high school band pieces do we have where there's some sort of snare drum motor with the bass drum? It's so tired, that sound, it automatically makes the piece sound like it's like written for a specific purpose, and I don't like that about it. And so that's an instrument I don't like to use.

I also don't like xylophone a lot of the time. I don't know if you've noticed that too, but I don't use xylophone very much at all. I used it recently in my double oboe concerto, but that's because it sounds great with harpsichord, using xylophone like continuo, which is cool. But otherwise I don't really like it because it sticks out too much. Maybe because in marching band in the pit I was always the xylophone player. (laughs) What I love about marimba and vibraphone is that, on some level, they're neutral instruments, almost like piano, where they can blend so well, with other things. When you hear a marimba and vibraphone, you don't think, "that's a marimba and vibraphone." They create beautiful timbres that come out of the instrument. And also, I'm really into reverb, delay, really wet, acoustic in my music. And xylophone is the antithesis of that. It's meant to be really brittle sounding. It just doesn't fit in my music. I would say usually when I use it [xylophone] a bunch, I regret it. There are moments where I use xylophone because I want it to articulate and accent what the marimba and piano are doing.

BP: I feel as though, even without snare drum, there's a lot of velocity in what's going on. I was curious what your thoughts are on your approach to meter and making decisions on time signatures to use. I know a lot of the beginning of *Sound and Smoke* the half note is getting the beat versus the meters in *Bull's-Eye* and *Vital Sines*. How has meter become something that you've used to create velocity?

VC: Yeah, that's a good question. In *Sound and Smoke*, I wanted to have the half note be the beat because I wanted it to feel like the music of Palestrina; like Renaissance vocal music where usually the half note gets the beat. And I think there's something psychologically that when we see half

notes, when we see a lot of these empty note heads, we will sing or play things longer. Even if you know you could write the same music and have the eighth note be the beat, I think we would approach it differently. Because we see more stems and beams, it just looks faster, even if it isn't fast. And I've seen Bach do this in kind of on an opposite way where he has this solo violin music that's really slow, but it's all these thirty-second notes. But it doesn't actually sound like that, if you were just to transcribe it without looking at it. But I think he psychologically wanted something that had a sense of urgency, even though it wasn't fast, necessarily. And so, with *Bull's-Eye*, I want that sense of urgency a lot of the time. I remember thinking that I could notate it in eighth notes [sings theme], and it might be easier to read, but it wouldn't have that lightness about it. And I've done this in other pieces too, I have a chamber piece, it's a piece I've kind of withdrawn, called *Nothing If Not*. These sixteenth notes run throughout most of the piece [sings rhythm]. I made a full orchestra prototype of that piece and I made it eighth notes instead [sings rhythm] and they never played it as fast as *Nothing If Not*. Even though I marked that tempo. No one ever plays it that fast because they see eighth notes and don't play it as quickly. So that's one aspect of it, choosing the mensuration of the meter

But meter changes are this interesting thing I've been exploring, like in *Vital Sines*, you know there's that section where there's all those major changes. But those are what the music is, going between dotted eighths to eighths. And so, I notate it that way. Then there's a point where the drums come in and I take all that music, but just make it in 4/4. And it creates these cross rhythms and groove. Which is a fun thing to do. I know people would look at that music with all those meter changes and think, "why don't you just put it in 4/4?" And turn a couple pages, that's what it is. And so, trying to do it both ways is kind of fun. And then underneath that, the drum set, which is just a very straightforward 4/4 beat. So, that was a big moment when I realized that I'll just erase all the meter changes and put a steady groove on top. That was a cool discovery with that piece. But generally, I like for meters to be very straightforward. I only do meter changes when they're necessary. Or when I feel like it adds something to the music that would be missing if it wasn't there.

BP: Right. Very intentional.

VC: Yeah, I don't do meter changes just to make the music hard. If someone commissions a grade six piece, it might be all 4/4. I don't think of grade six as this formulaic thing where it must have this sort of meter change and this metric modulation or whatever. All that notation just serves to express exactly and most clearly what I'm trying to do.

BP: I thought it was really interesting in *Bull's-Eye*, I'm pretty sure it was in Dr. Landsberg's dissertation, you mentioned changing the feel, not necessarily changing the meter, but changing the feel of the music to draw attention to the orchestration getting thinner. Is that something you feel as though you do a lot or are there other things like that you use to draw the listener's attention in certain aspects of the music?

VC: I would say, in *Bull's-Eye*, that was something specific to that piece in terms of using meter changes to draw attention. But all the time I will thin things out and orchestrationally draw your attention to other things. Kind of like if you ever work in a digital audio workstation, like Logic or Pro Tools, you can mute and unmute things. And sometimes I'll do that. I'll write a whole entire, fully orchestrated thing, and then decide, "Oh, it's too thick and dense for too long. Let me 'poke holes' and thin things out." Which is a fun thing to do as well because it's almost like you're a DJ, remixing your own music.

BP: In terms of your process, do you feel like your process has evolved over time, as your voice has evolved, in terms of what you start with when you're first starting out with a piece?

VC: I think so, yeah. I'm much more now, for whatever reason, drawn to using the piano more in the process, than I was before. Keeping the piano in the process longer. I don't know why that is. I think maybe it might be something as simple as the music notation software I use now, called Dorico, I use the piano to import music, and before in Finale, it didn't do that. I would say I just think more deeply about every single note and the voice leading of notes and things I have, from years of teaching things like music theory, I think more deeply about. I don't like to compromise on things like voice leading. I just think more about it than I did when I was younger. So, when I listen to a piece like *Sound and Smoke*, when I rehearse it with a group now, I appreciate the sort of youthful quality to it. It always brings me back to that time. Twenty years old, starting my senior year of college, and writing this piece called *Sound and Smoke*. It was an exciting time too, and I think all of us composers, we look at these younger pieces that we wrote before we knew as much as we do now, and there's something very endearing about it.

BP: What was that process like with *Sound and Smoke*? Are there early sketches of that piece? What did you start with?

VC: Yeah, *Sound and Smoke* began as an orchestra piece actually, a piece I was working on my junior year of college. I guess at some point in that year, I abandoned that piece and then at the end of that year, Harlan [Parker, conductor of the Wind Ensemble], he asked if I wanted to write a band piece for them for the Peabody Wind Ensemble because I'd written a piece, which I have since withdrawn, my freshman year of college, that they premiered my sophomore year and it went well. So, I thought, "there's all this music I abandoned that I wrote this last year. It would be a shame for it to go to waste." I remember pulling out that file and deciding to make this orchestra piece into a band piece. And that was the second movement of *Sound and Smoke*. I hadn't written any of the first movement until I got that ask from Harlan. Though I'll say, the opening of *Sound and Smoke*, the first page of it, is music that I had played on the piano, from a time, probably sometime in high school. It was something I had come up with and had never used it for anything and I had never written it down. But I just had it in my hands and my ears and I eventually decided to write it down. I remember writing it down and thinking, "Wow, this is cool."

BP: How did you make the decision to have two movements in that piece?

VC: I really just wanted to write a slow and fast movement. This is another throughline in my music, and that is I don't change tempos in my music very often. Usually the tempo is just set and it goes. (chuckles) And when I change tempo, it's when I change movements for whatever reason. I don't do a lot of *accelerando* or *ritardando*. I have ideas to do that more, it just hasn't been something I've done very much. Whenever I change tempo, I may go into halftime. It's not a change of tempo. I don't remember exactly why I wanted to do two movements in *Sound and Smoke*, other than just, I wanted to write a slow and fast movement. It was also I wanted to break away from the form I had heard my whole life in band music which is fast, slow, fast. It was almost like giving myself a challenge of, "You're going to write something that's going to be seven minutes, and it's going to be slow. And then it's going to be fast." I remember the piece I wrote my freshman year for band, it's called *Ziggurat*, like the Mesopotamian structures called ziggurats. And that was a fast, slow, fast piece.

BP: You mentioned tempos not changing, and we talked about delay processing, are there other throughlines that you've noticed in your music?

VC: I would say triadic harmony. It's something I've always loved. If I ever use seventh chords I'm really judicious about that for whatever reason. Something about triads I find beautiful and pure in a certain way. And I think maybe in a couple years I'll graduate to using seventh chords. Maybe by the time I'm old I'll be up to eleventh chords and just stop there. (laughs) Even the opening of *Sound and Smoke* is overlapping triads. With *Vital Sines*, it's triads but changing one note in them at a time to create suspensions and moving things down by step one note at a time. That's one of them. And I think I would say, it's not that I don't change tempo ever. For example, in *Vital Sines* there are changes of tempo, but they're very small. They're like "slightly faster." (chuckles) When I say I typically don't change tempo, I'm saying it's not drastic, suddenly slow or suddenly fast. And I've always loved the use of metallic percussion. There are probably other things as well, but I would say triadic harmony is probably one of the biggest things.

BP: When you're thinking about harmonic motion, does that come first and then you fit an orchestration effect with it, or is the effect driving the harmonic motion?

VC: I would say purely, for example the harmonic motion of just a G minor chord, that is not connected to the effect. But to make the delay effect the most effective, the notes have to be a certain distance apart, otherwise it just sounds like a scale [plays example]. But if I voice a G minor chord with notes a sixth apart, it makes the delay effect work a little better. And so that's why all the intervals between these notes [in *Vital Sines*] are sixths or fifths, they're voiced that way, far apart [plays opening of *Vital Sines* using different voicings]. I could have closed the voicing and it wouldn't have sounded as interesting. The voicing is tied to the effect.

BP: Wow, that's fascinating. That's really interesting. With *Vital Sines*, could you give us some background information with that commission and your history working with Eighth Blackbird?

VC: Yeah. Eighth Blackbird is a group that I have admired for so long. I think I first heard of them when I was a sophomore in college. I checked out this CD called *Strange Imaginary Animals* from the Peabody library. And it had pieces by Jennifer Higdon and Steve Mackey, two people I would later go on to study with in grad school. And I just loved their [Eighth Blackbird's] albums that they put out and the energy and vitality they have as a group. And so, when I saw they had this Eighth Blackbird lab, I thought, "well of course I'm going to apply to that." I remember applying and thinking I had such a long shot to get into something like that, but then I did. I went there that summer and I wrote *Electric Aroma* for the lab. It went really well and I was really proud of the piece and that was kind of that. I kept in touch with the members, because later on, Matthew, the percussionist from Eighth Blackbird, asked me to write a piece for a program to be used at Interlochen and I eventually made a version of *Electric Aroma* that Eighth Blackbird could play, which swapped out the soprano sax for a flute, because Eighth Blackbird doesn't have saxophone. So, they became friends and mentors to me. But then one day, I was in Philly, and I remember getting a text from Matthew, and he said, "Hey, can I ask you a question?" And I thought, sure, I thought it was a question about the piece I wrote for his program at Interlochen or something similar. Instead he said, "Would you be interested in writing a concerto for us with band? It would be with the Navy Band. And it would be premiered at Midwest in 2020." And I couldn't believe it. It was a dream project. I never thought I'd write a piece like that. And I responded, "Yeah, of course!" (chuckles) Eventually I got in touch with the Navy Band about it and the rest is history. And the thing was that commission was delayed and delayed because of COVID. But it's finally being performed at Midwest next month, which is so exciting! And I'm doing a clinic on it at Midwest with the Navy Band as well. Are you going to be at Midwest this year?

BP: I'll be there, yes!

VC: Great! They're performing the piece at both their 6:00 and 8:00 PM concerts, I think. And then we're doing a clinic the next morning.

BP: That's great. I can't wait!

VC: Yeah, and I think the process of them [Eighth Blackbird], working with the Navy Band, which is Ken Collins, the conductor, who is a big fan of Eighth Blackbird as well, I think he just reached out to them and he asked, "Do you want to collaborate on something?" And they said, "Sure, who will write the piece." And I think that maybe Eighth Blackbird had a list of composers that they thought would be good and they included me on the list. Then they eventually agreed on me. It was one of those commissions, too, where it was very validating, not just because it was an Eighth Blackbird, or Navy Band commission, but because it was both. For years, I always felt like my band career was very separate from my new music world career. I don't know why, but it just always felt like that because there was never much cross pollination between the two. New music ensembles exist and then bands are a whole world unto itself. And so, I always felt like I was kind of juggling two careers and to have a commission like this felt like I finally got to embrace those different parts of myself and put them in the same piece, and also have the honor of bridging those two worlds together, which is really amazing.

BP: And it's such a beautiful marriage of those two sounds as well. It's such an incredible piece.

VC: Oh, thanks. Yeah, I worked hard on it I'll say. (chuckles) When I finally finished it and wrote that horn line at the end, it was the last thing I wrote, I just cried. I couldn't believe it was done. I also knew it was done when I cried, "Like, okay, this is it." Because I think about, what if I was a composer who only wrote for new music ensembles, and maybe some orchestras? If the Navy Band got the list and my name was on it, they might not have thought to commission me. [They may have thought], "Does he know how to write for band? I don't know. I guess we could commission him, but they might not be comfortable with that." At the same time if I only wrote band music, I don't think Eighth Blackbird would have known who I was, or they might not have thought I was a good fit for the lab because they wanted people who could write chamber music, because that's what we were writing at the lab. So, it was nice, like I said, really validating to get that commission.

BP: Absolutely. That's awesome. What was the process like writing that piece? I know you mentioned the opening piano. Did you write the sextet and the band parts all at the same time? Or did you write one then go back and add?

VC: Mostly in this piece, I wrote the sextet music first, then thought of what the band could do as well. The way the piece is structured though, I wrote this first section and then I develop it three times. After the big opening two minutes, it goes down to just focus on Eighth Blackbird for the most part. And then taking that and putting it in 2/4, and then having more band stuff. And then finally having a third time and a new key, with a melody on top. And it's this big [moment] where everyone's playing together. And also, using orchestration as a way to develop material.

But there are other things I wrote for the band first. The last push to the end, I had this vision of this chaconne. But this chord progression I wrote the band music first. And then I added the sextet music. So, it went both ways. Or actually, you know, another part that came first was the part where there are all the string arpeggios. And the band is fading in and out. I wrote all that band music first because I wanted to create a Shepard Tone, where it felt like it was constantly descending. And it took me days to figure out how to make that orchestration be exactly what I

wanted. And in that case, I had the music [plays on piano]. I had that first, but I knew I had to write the band stuff first to make it work exactly how I wanted it to.

BP: When I listen, I definitely hear the sections you talked about. In terms of form, do you see it [*Vital Sines*] as being divided into those three developmental sections?

VC: Yeah, because I like the idea of things coming back. It's like the sine wave. It goes up and it comes back to where it was and comes back to where it was. And I like the idea of it getting more intense as it goes.

BP: And with this being a combination of the new music that you've done as well as writing for band, how do you approach writing for band versus an ensemble like Eighth Blackbird? What are the considerations that you have to account for with something like that?

VC: I guess with band, oftentimes we're writing and it's, on some level, pedagogical music because most bands are educational ensembles, being part of a school. And so, with that comes this whole grade level system. How hard is the piece going to be? Compared to the new music world, where you're usually writing for professional level ensembles. That was something different, whereas with this piece, I felt like I could kind of go all out in a band piece for the first time. Which was nice. And it was the first time I'd worked with an original piece for a military ensemble too. You know, with a professional ensemble, you can do whatever you want. And I guess otherwise it's just the differences between writing chamber music and large ensemble music. Those are just different considerations in terms of practicality and whatnot that I had to balance in this piece. But I didn't feel like I had to really make any compromises though with this piece, which was nice.

BP: Yeah, congratulations. It's a really remarkable piece. I can't wait to hear it live next month.

VC: Thanks. Yeah, I'm excited for that. It's a piece too that, this recording turned out really well, every moment sounds so vibrant. It's just an impeccable recording. But there is something about this piece live that's just very exciting and emotional and I can't wait for everyone to hear it. I think also a lot of people in the band world don't know who Eighth Blackbird is. And, I think there's a lot of Eighth Blackbird fans who don't really know the band world, so I think it's going to be a nice experience for everyone to have and I can't wait.

BP: Yeah. It's going to be amazing. I just have a few questions left if that's okay.

VC: Yeah.

BP: Part of the introduction to this paper so far contains a section on the responsibilities of the conductor and the conductor-composer relationship. I wanted to ask, how do you view the significance of conductor-composer relationships in projects that you've done and current projects that you're working on?

VC: It's really important to me. Because it's so much mutual trust involved. Where you trust them to bring the music to life, and the conductor has to trust that you [the composer] know what you're doing and that you have a vision. And though it might be hard to get it to where it sounds like what you want it to sound like, they [the conductor] have to trust that you [the composer] know what you want the music to sound like and that what you've written can achieve that. And so, with every conductor I work with I really value that sense of trust and I think it's good to be involved with one

another in the process. Very rarely do I ever just send off a piece. There's some level of back and forth, which is great. And I always welcome that.

BP: Absolutely. How do you view the role of the wind band right now in the art music realm? Do you see it on a trajectory, both in general and also specifically for you, in terms of its place in the music world?

VC: I think it's a really vitally important medium for composers to write for because, first of all, we as composers can take so many risks with wind ensemble music, because a lot of you conductors are willing to go there with us. And so that's one thing. That there's this renaissance of band music, and people are really excited and conductors are really excited to commission composers and support them and develop lasting relationships too. In a couple of months, I'm going to the University of Oregon to do *Vital Sines* with Dennis [Llinás]. He was one of the very first people who did *Sound and Smoke*, when I was a complete nobody. And, it's been amazing to work with conductors who really support your music over the years. It doesn't always feel like that outside of the band world. And so that's great. I also think the importance of bands in the musical world is just that there's such a strong sense of community. And for me, that was really important as a kid to have that community. And of course, I was so lucky to go to a program like Lassiter. But even then, I talk to people who didn't go to programs like Lassiter, they still have that same experience where they felt lost as kids, and then they found band. And it was that thing they always looked forward to doing, regardless of whether or not they became musicians professionally. So that's, I think, perhaps one of the most important things that the wind band does. For my own personal trajectory, I think it's something I'll always write for, because I feel very at home in it. And even though I started off as a band kid and took all these different turns and everything, and I still hope to write for all sorts of ensembles, but band is something I think, every couple of years at least, I'll come back to. As long as you all will have me.

BP: What other composers and ensembles are you interested in and listening to right now?

VC: Yeah. I've been listening to a lot of orchestral music recently because I'm writing this big piece for orchestra. I listened to Steven Stuckey's *Concerto for Orchestra* recently, or *Second Concerto for Orchestra* I should say, he's written a couple. And, I've been listening to ambient music, Nils Frahm, because I'm kind of wanting to do something like that for this orchestra piece. I think there's hints of this ambient music in what I've been doing recently and it's something I want to explore more. I listened to this piece by Andrew Norman recently called *Sustain* that's really incredible. And then some saxophone quartet music as well. I did listen to some of Eighth Blackbird's albums recently. I also like listening to music that's by people sort of my age, maybe a little older, or a little younger, and see what other people are doing. These days everything is so easily accessible through the internet, so it's easy to stay in tune with what everyone's doing.

BP: What is your hope for ensembles and audiences that experience your music?

VC: I just want them to connect with it in some way. I think it's a hard thing to be able to predict how your audience will react to your music. Because audiences are different every time. And the audience at Midwest is going to be extremely different than audience at a new music concert in Chicago. Ideally, I just want them to connect with it in some way, so that maybe they leave humming a melody, or maybe they leave having a favorite moment, or just remembering something that really stuck with them. I think in *Vital Sines*, I hope that there's different things that different people might connect with. I think there's some moments in the piece that I think of as really special or things that if I was an audience member, I would probably walk away remembering. I think the one

moment in the piece for me is when it all focuses into that clarinet solo in the middle of the piece. I kind of think of it like after all this big stuff and static energy, maybe some turmoil, and anguish, it comes down to this moment where it's almost like a ray of light coming through one or a bunch of clouds. But also, I am really proud of the last four minutes of the piece, with that chaconne at the end and the big build to the end. I just hope everyone connects with my music in some way. Ideally, maybe it even inspires them in some way.

APPENDIX D

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Benjamin Pouncey, a native of Columbia, South Carolina, received a Masters of Music in wind conducting from Colorado State University. During his tenure at CSU, Mr. Pouncey assisted in the administration of a comprehensive university band program, including teaching, recruiting, and operational activities. He was guest conductor of the CSU Wind Symphony, Symphonic Band, and Concert Band, and assisted with the Colorado State Marching Band, Presidential Pep Band, and the Rampage Basketball Band.

In 2022, Mr. Pouncey was selected from a national pool of applicants as a National Band Association Young Conductor, part of the Young Composer/Conductor Mentor Project with the United States Air Force Band (Washington, D.C.). In June 2022, he rehearsed and conducted the United States Air Force Band in a world premiere of composer Trevor Smith's *Palette and Spectrum*. Mr. Pouncey is a recipient of the National Band Association *Citation of Excellence* and received the 2018 Phi Beta Mu Theta Chapter *Young Band Director's Award*.

Mr. Pouncey graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2012 from the University of South Carolina where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Music (music education-trumpet). While attending the University of South Carolina he performed on a compilation of music by Leonard Bernstein with the Wind Ensemble, under the direction of Dr. Scott Weiss, for the internationally acclaimed classical records label NAXOS. In addition, he toured with the Wind Ensemble in their 2012 National Concert Tour of China, including performances in Beijing, Shaoxing, Hangzhou, Chuji, and Shang-Hai. He also performed for nationally televised audiences at various New Year's Day bowl games.

Mr. Pouncey served as Director of Bands at Ashley Ridge High School (Summerville, SC) from 2018-2021, where he directed all aspects of a comprehensive high school band program. Under his direction the program at Ashley Ridge grew and the concert bands and marching band

consistently earned superior ratings at state festivals. Of note, the program seated nine to twelve students in the South Carolina All-State Bands annually. Prior to Ashley Ridge, Mr. Pouncey was co-Director of Bands at DuBose Middle School (Summerville, SC) from 2013-2018 where he was the 2013 *Rookie Teacher of the Year*. He taught all levels of brass and percussion pedagogy and co-directed all ensembles. During his tenure, the DuBose Middle School Bands earned superior ratings at South Carolina Concert Performance Assessments and students were consistently seated in the South Carolina All-State Band. The DuBose Symphonic Band was a featured ensemble at the 2018 South Carolina Music Educators' Association Conference.

An alumnus of The Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps, Mr. Pouncey served as the corps' drum major from 2009 to 2011 and was a member of the trumpet section in 2007 and 2008. The Cadets are 10-time Drum Corps International (DCI) World Champions, having won their most recent title in 2011. Mr. Pouncey received *The Cadets Distinguished Service Award* every year from 2008 to 2011 and he was the recipient of the 2011 *DCI Jim Jones Leadership Award*, given each year to one drum major from both the World and Open Class. Mr. Pouncey served as a member of The Cadets' instructional staff and has been a clinician for the DCI Drum Major Leadership Seminar. Mr. Pouncey is an instructor for the Music for All Drum Major Institute, the University of South Carolina Drum Major Clinic, and the Western Carolina University Summer Symposium (drum majors). Student leaders from band programs across the country attend these events to receive instruction, guidance, and training for their leadership roles within their band program.

Mr. Pouncey has been published in the National Band Association Journal and holds professional affiliations with the College Band Directors National Association, Kappa Kappa Psi National Honorary Band Fraternity, and the National Band Association.