

AN ANALYSIS OF STRING QUARTETS BY CAROLINE SHAW

by

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Preface

My dissertation research aims to document the life and music of a 36-year old living American female composer, Caroline Shaw, who in 2013 became the youngest winner in history of the Pulitzer Prize for music with her a cappella piece, *Partita for 8 Voices*, written for the vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth.

In December of 2016, I attended a string quartet concert at the National Sawdust in Brooklyn, New York, given by colleagues in the Attacca Quartet who featured and performed three of Caroline Shaw's string quartets. Following this initial encounter, I immediately took interest in her music and looked up Shaw's other works. I hope to shed light on the great compositions and talent of Caroline Shaw whose music is gaining enthusiasm both within and outside of the Classical music world. My goal, applied more broadly, is to contribute to increasing publications and documentations of living female composers and their works. The following presents some recent statistics on the representations of composers in classical music culture:

According to data collected by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra for the year 2014-2015, music written by living composers only accounted for 11% of music programmed to be performed by the top twenty-one American orchestras; of the 11%, only 1.8% accounted for female composers (O'Bannon). This information has inspired me to research more on current female composers and their works. I will start with this dissertation on Caroline Shaw and hope to address other female composers in my future research.

This paper is divided into two main categories: a) the life, education, and career of Caroline Shaw and b) an analysis of her string quartets. Materials from various interviews including those from radio broadcasts, recent articles, and my own interviews with Caroline Shaw and musicians who collaborated with her are integrated throughout all the chapters along with other supplementary materials such as score excerpts, which Ms. Shaw generously provided. Interviews have been processed via phone conference, emails, as well as in person.

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Part One: Life and Works

Chapter I: Early Life

Born in 1982 in Greenville, North Carolina, Caroline Shaw started learning the violin at the age of two through the Suzuki method. She grew up in a musical family with her mother and two older brothers also playing the violin, and her mother taught Shaw until the age of five. Then, Shaw took violin lessons with Joanne Bath until the end of high school. Shaw remembers growing up listening to Classical music and particularly enjoying opera. Her mother frequently sang to her, and Shaw recalls that at the age of ten, she listened to *La Traviata* every night and became fascinated with opera music. This was when she really began connecting music to the voice (Sirota). She remembers often listening to a recording of a particular singer whose voice resembled her mother's, and she tried to emulate the singer's vibrato on the violin in such a way that a long sustained tone was followed by an added vibrato towards the end (Sirota). By joining an Episcopal church choir as well as a local youth choir, Shaw also gained experience as a vocalist and was exposed to traditional choral music.

An active participant of various musical ensembles from an early age, Shaw played in her first string quartet playing at age of nine. At fourteen, Shaw attended the Kinhaven Music School over the summer. She had just played Brahms's Violin Sonata when the camp staff encouraged students to write for a composers' concert (Sirota). Shaw made her first attempt at composing by writing a piece for viola and piano which became her very first composition to be completed and performed (Shaw, Interview 1). Performing Clara Schumann's Piano Trio that same summer

became a pivotal experience for Shaw. As she recalls, that was when she decided that she wanted to pursue music.

Chapter II: Education

After graduating high school, Shaw was accepted to the Rice University Shepherd School of Music to study with Kathleen Winkler. There she was able to pursue music as well as to take advantage of the widely varying education the school offered. Besides her violin studies, Shaw continued pursuing her interest in singing. In addition to being a member of an accapella group, Shaw also participated in a wide range of vocal projects during her undergraduate studies that included covers of songs by pop artists such as Madonna and Bend Folds Five (Sirota).

Toward the end of her degree, Shaw remained uncertain how to direct her career path. After graduation, she spent three months in Paris while taking an audition for the violin section position in the Paris Opera, but she realized she did not want to play in an orchestra (Sirota). However, Shaw was certain of her desire to stay involved in string quartets. During her senior year in college, Shaw had auditioned for graduate school as well as for the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship which was designed to give the fellow one year to study abroad and pursue an independent project (Shaw, Interview 1). After winning the fellowship, she traveled abroad to write music and study landscape architecture and gardens. Her project aimed to produce a series of string quartets based on the aesthetic principles of historical formal garden designs including prominent French formal gardens, English landscape gardens, and Italian Renaissance gardens. Though she did not complete this project, Shaw gained a great deal of inspiration and perspective from her studies which eventually helped shape and develop her compositional voice (Sirota).

The symmetry of French gardens, the idyllic pastoral nature of English gardens, the different layout and lighting, and the questions of design, proportion, and taste that were the aesthetics of the 17th to 18th century landscape architecture influenced how Shaw thought about these concepts in her compositional writing (Shaw, Interview 2).

She returned to the US and started her master's degree in violin performance at the Yale School of Music under the tutelage of Syoko Aki (Hatmaker). Returning to a structured routine of school and practicing took some adjustment, and Shaw was still unsure of what she wanted to do as a violinist. Shaw found that returning to the familiar path of a violin career after being abroad felt somewhat limiting, and she continued to be drawn to musical activities outside the violin. Shaw remained active outside of her school curriculum by joining the Yale Baroque ensemble as well as another local church choir (Sirota), and her experiences as a baroque musician and as a vocalist would later leave imprints on her compositions, as could be heard in the titling of movements in *Partita for 8 Voices* or in the simple vocal lines in her string quartets.

Chapter III: Early Professional Life

After finishing her master's degree, Shaw chose to pursue composition but was weary of and cautious about having a formal composition teacher. She knew from an early age that she wanted to write but also knew her natural tendency was to follow others' directions, which she felt was not ideal for her creativity. In an attempt to learn on her own, Shaw began by playing new music in various freelance settings and paying attention to the new music landscape at the time (Sirota).

Equally interested in singing, Shaw took a job in the church choir of New Haven's Christ Church where she sang hymns, plainchants, and early motets by Byrd, Tallis, and Josquain (Sirota). Singing in this gothic and resonant church had a significant influence on the way Shaw conceptualized sound, resonance, and space. Shaw recalls being terribly moved by the plainchant the choir sang during a Tenebrae service her first year (Sirota). Though not religious, having grown up witnessing many ceremonies and church services around her, Shaw feels a deep connection between music and spirituality, and this is certainly a quality one can hear in her music (Sirota).

Shaw started earning income by playing for dance classes. In a beginning modern dance class, she would play the violin, piano, or percussion, and learned different ways to compose and improvise quickly (Sirota). Sometimes she was given a certain rhythm, meter, or tempo and would provide the dancers with something to use within a certain structure. Other times, she was free to improvise which she coincidentally found to be the best way to learn how to compose (Sirota). Ballet class was regimented and structured with a lot of rules, yet Shaw was able to create her own composing practices and experiments through the context of this class.

In 2010, in an effort to take on composition more seriously, Shaw applied to Princeton's doctoral program in composition. Here, Shaw was not required to meet with a teacher on a weekly basis. She was free to work with various teachers, such as Steve Mackey, Paul Lansky, and Dan Truman, on a case by case basis. Prof. Truman, a composition teacher and a violinist, also had an interest in folk music and breaking barriers between different genres (Sirota). This educational experience provided the space Shaw needed to develop her own voice.

During this time, Shaw continued to make a living as a violinist. She moved to New York City, freelanced as a modern and Baroque violinist, joined a new music group called “Red Light New Music”, and also became a member of the Trinity Wall Street Choir (Shaw, Interview 1).

Chapter IV: *Partita for 8 Voices*

In the summer of 2009, the vocal ensemble, Roomful of Teeth, was started by an octet of singers. Brad Wells, who had a “dream of exploring human voice in a way that hasn't been done before,” auditioned singers who were interested in his artistic vision with the ensemble, and the group first met for three weeks in Massachusetts (Sirota). The ensemble, whose mission is to explore possibilities of human voice and to commission new works, experimented with ways to depart from the traditional classical training of *bel canto* technique (which is used in operatic singing by opening the throat and producing the vibrato); and by bringing in yodeling masters and throat singers to teach different methods of breaking and using the voice, such as Tuvan throat singing (Sirota). At Wells’ encouragement for any members to compose for a concert, Shaw wrote one movement of what was to become *Partita for 8 Voices*. During the performance the audience reacted positively to the piece, and Shaw recalls that this was “a moment that captured in an instant what [she] hoped this project would be— more than a standard vocal ensemble, primarily about engaging audience directly” (Sirota). Subsequently in October 2012, New Amsterdam Records released a recording of her work performed by Roomful of Teeth (Roomful of Teeth). In April of 2013, three years after she had started her PhD program at Princeton, the thirty-year-old Shaw submitted *Partita for 8 Voices* to the Pulitzer Prize

committee with hopes that it would help the vocal ensemble get more gig opportunities, and to her surprise, Shaw became the youngest ever to win the Pulitzer Prize for music (Hambrick). According to Steven Mackey, then the chair of the Department of Music at Princeton, this was the first Pulitzer Prize awarded to a member of the department. He commented on Shaw:

It is both a testament to her prodigious talent — and I dare say our good judgment — that the strength of her musical vision was apparent in the pieces she submitted with her application three years ago [...] we were then and continue to be struck by the freshness of her musical voice. It is an original blending of vernacular music, ancient music and avant garde techniques at once fascinating and moving. [...] She really knows from the inside what makes a piece work. As a result, her music lives — no, jumps off — the stage rather than sitting passively on her teacher's desk awaiting intellectual critique. (Saxon)

Barbara White, professor of music at Princeton also commented on the significance of Shaw's performance background to her compositions:

Her daily hands-on experience with music-making infuses her creation of new work. For example, in her compositions for Roomful of Teeth, she explores the physicality of the voice, the cohesion and power of the group, and the remnants of earlier forms of music. (Saxon)

Shaw commented that the *Partita* contains “very surprising sounds of the human voice and also some very familiar and rich harmonies.” (Saxon). The work comprises four movements inspired by Baroque dance forms: 1. Allemande, 2. Sarabande, 3. Courante, and 4. Passacaglia, evident of her experiences in, references to, and affinity for music of the past which “channels a lot of music that she has played and sung” (Saxon). Shaw said, “I’ve spent a lot of time playing Bach’s Partita’s (for solo violin). One of my first jobs was to play for ballet and modern classes, so the music in ‘Partita’ is kind of like choreography for me” (Saxon). Each movement has the meter of a related Baroque movement, but Shaw’s work goes beyond this loosely based framework. It is filled with unique sounds, some that came as a result of experiments with Roomful of Teeth, and Pulitzer Prize jury members described the composition as, “a highly polished and inventive a

cappella work uniquely embracing speech, whispers, sighs, murmurs, wordless melodies and novel vocal effects” (Pulitzer jury). In the score, Shaw writes:

Partita is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another.

The work evolves from lines and rounds of sung and spoken texts that give the listener a sense of motion in space, to bright and belted melodies and chord progressions sung with rhythmic vitality and groove.

Chapter V: Career (to date)

Besides composition, Shaw continues to perform as a violinist with the American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) and as a vocalist with Roomful of Teeth. Collaborations with numerous ensembles and artists include: the Trinity Wall Street Choir, Alarm Will Sound, the Wordless Music Orchestra, AXIOM, the Opera Cabal, the Mark Morris Dance Group Ensemble, Red Light New Music, Robert Mealy's Yale Baroque Ensemble, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Seattle Symphony, the Philharmonia Baroque, and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; Renée Fleming, Jonathan Biss, Kathleen Winkler, Dawn Upshaw, Sō Percussion, Gil Kalish, Roomful of Teeth, and Far Cry (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). In the quartet world alone, she has worked with and written for numerous groups, many of whom are her friends: the Aizuri Quartet, the Attacca Quartet, the Brentano Quartet, the Calidore Quartet, the Dover Quartet, the Brooklyn Rider, and the JACK Quartet. Beside string quartet, her set of compositions for other string instruments are: *Broad & Free* for violin and piano, *Thousandth Orange* for piano quartet, and *Lo* for violin and orchestra

(Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). Shaw also keeps a variety in her projects and has composed the music for Josephine Decker's 2018 film, *Madeline's Madeline*, and holds residencies at the Banff Center, the Vail Dance Festival, and Dumbarton Oaks. Outside of the Classical music realm, Shaw has collaborated and co-produced with rap artists such as Kanye West in a number of tracks in his recent albums such as *808's & Heartbreak* (Gordon), *The Life of Pablo* (Young), produced for Nas in *NASIR*, and contributed to records by The National and by Arcade Fire's Richard Reed Parry (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). Shaw holds a teaching position at NYU and is also a Creative Associate at the Juilliard School (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com).

Chapter VI: Compositional Process/Musical Outlook

As a musician who is active as a violinist, a vocalist, and a composer, Shaw shies away from being defined by any one role or label and rather hopes her various professional personas point toward the balanced, well-rounded, and rich experiences of her musical life (Shaw, Interview 2). Her music is a culminating result and reflection of her rich musical experiences. For instance, her years of singing as a vocalist in diverse settings have had a tremendous defining impact on her writing. Her vocally-driven sonic world has a sense of breadth and depth that requires understanding of the human voice. Her experiences singing at churches also inspired Shaw to focus on the atmosphere and the sonic absorbency in different acoustical spaces and venues. The music of the past, Renaissance to Baroque to Classical, have all left their imprints on her writing and thus to play or listen to her music requires openness to and understanding of other music.

Shaw who had also freelanced as a Baroque violinist enjoys working with pieces from a time period that contained minimal information (Shaw, Interview 2). She compares composing to cooking, as opposed to baking, due to the fact that instead of following an exact recipe and chemistry, one can tinker with varying factors and ingredients to taste. Shaw always considers carefully the necessity of every element put into the score and believes composers should not “preserve themselves strictly in this text form when writing a score” but should rather include the performers as active participants in creating the work as well (Oterl). She contemplates,

If I didn’t put this here, would it give a sense of freedom to the performer to do something informed by the rest of the music? And is there enough other information there to give them a context to make a decision that they feel excited about? (Oterl).

Shaw, as a composer, had also worked with performers who demanded more information on the score. Shaw says of the experience:

I said, ‘You should think of the way that you approach Mozart versus Haydn versus Beethoven. It’s not all the same. It’s slightly different, but there is a general sensibility that you come to that with. It’s how you play four eighth notes in a row; you wouldn’t play them robotically. [...] If you can create some kind of sensibility among each other that encourages people to come up with ideas and feel empowered to articulate them, that’s what I would like to create. (Oterl)

Having the opportunities to work closely with the people who perform her work, Shaw values this relationship and wants her musical scores to be a living piece of work read interpretatively and figuratively rather than one that is finished and untouchable. Her hope with her music being disseminated to the public isn’t that the music is performed and heard exactly in the way she imagines or desires, but rather that the music, apart from the composer, is created in the hands of the performers and exists on its own (Shaw, Interview 1). This is the kind of visceral experience Andrew Yee from the Attacca Quartet has had working with Shaw on her quartets. He shares how Shaw would defend strongly the things she felt passionate about but at other times would be

very open to musicians' ideas and changes (Yee). Shaw believes ultimately that the composer and performer should work to trust each other. Shaw's experiences as a seasoned violinist and a singer have also greatly informed her writing, as she is always mindful about how the music would feel for the players, both instrumentalists and vocalists. Shaw tries to be aware of the physicality of playing and singing as well as the tuning, rhythmic groove, or resonance of the particular instrument or voice. In quartet playing, Shaw takes into consideration what a quartet player would be thinking or feeling as he or she considers what to do to make an idea or gesture come to life (Weiser).

On the classical musical landscape, Shaw believes that while the term 'Classical music' is well defined when it comes to established music repertoire of the past, contemporary classical music varies so widely in style that it is harder to define. She expresses some concern at the separation of composition and performance students in conservatories and hopes that this taboo will see changes in which their instrument, or rather the intent to perfect their craftsmanship on the instrument, does not become their entirety or sole purpose as artists (Sirota). As a performer-composer, Shaw embodies the belief that the natural human urge and desire to create and the desire to refine the quality of one's creation or recreation must coexist. In a masterclass at the Music Academy of the West in July 2017, while working with a cello student playing her composition for solo cello, *In maus tuas*, Shaw made a comment that seems to sum up her vision for performances of her works-- "There is more of you I can see in there" (Music Academy of the West). While I believe that informed musical decisions are important, I also think that the substantial focus on mastery of playing an instrument and a strong emphasis on unquestioningly following the notations or intentions of composers (which in itself seems to be a cultural

reflection of the 21st century obsession with accuracy, precision, and provable facts) leave little room for musicians to ultimately find musical spaces during training to practice artistic freedom.

During her developmental phase as a composer, Shaw exposed herself to as much new music as possible. Over time, she found herself being drawn to various musical traits in other composers' works: the string technique and writing of Salvatore Sciarrino, the simplicity and harmonies of minimalist *Arvo Pärt*, the aleatoric technique of Witold Lutoslawski, and post-minimalist music such as that of David Lang (Shaw, Interview 3). While those certain aspects of their music resonated with her, Shaw notes that she had always found some other musical element in their writing, such as harmonic pacing, only partially aligning with her own ideas. While minimalist music *inspired her*, *Shaw found that dwelling on one musical idea without allowing the music to go through a journey and evolve were not part of her compositional voice at this point*. Shaw points out that the music of Haydn and Beethoven and their use of form had great influence on her compositional style, particularly her string quartets. As she sifted through constant exposure to a great output of modern compositions, Shaw came to ultimately discover her own musical voice that combined her own rhythmic and harmonic drive with qualities inspired through listening to the music of others.

Having experiences writing for and apart from commission-based projects, she also believes that inevitably composers are influenced by the musical community they are writing for. While with all compositions, Shaw is committing to her own artistic voice and writing for herself in a way, the attention to the commissioned organization, artist, or audiences impact the shaping of the works as well. To consider who the performers and listeners are, what the size and history of the institutions behind the musical organizations are, where the funds come from, and the venues of the performances are all important factors that impact the work being written (Oterl).

Her musical experiences and her music ultimately encourage others to listen to, to step into, and to participate in and explore the musical world outside of one's comfort zone.

Part Two: String Quartets

Besides the imprint of vocal music from some of her earliest musical memories, Shaw recalls that after her first time playing in a string quartet at the age of nine, she truly fell in love with music. After this encounter with the string quartet genre, the young Shaw wanted to try to write her own quartets, like Mozart. With no compositional training of any kind up to that point, she attempted her first slow movement for a string quartet in the style of Mozart in a key of G major (Sirota), written out of sheer enjoyment and amusement. Later, while contemplating her career path, Shaw knew she always wanted to remain in the world of string quartets, and to date she has composed at least 13. As one of her favorite genres, Shaw makes an effort to write at least one string quartet every year or two (Shaw, Interview 3). Central to her string quartet writing is the aim to make the composition as comfortable, idiomatic, engaging, and memorable as possible for the players. While the musicians also have the task of delivering the composer's ideas and considering their audience, the notion that they play for the sake of enjoying the experience, the way Wolfgang Mozart had envisioned when writing string quartets for the entertainment of his friends and social circles, becomes a significant component in Shaw's music.

String quartets by Ludwig van Beethoven, their overall format or form, and the way sonata form allowed Beethoven to transform and develop a musical idea had strong an especially strong influence on Shaw. Although Shaw does not explicitly adhere to Classical sonata forms, she embraces the structure of an 'ABA' or binary form because it allows her to let a musical idea appear and constantly evolve or transform. Shaw compares music to film in that there is a narrative; the kind of high points or climaxes and arch in a story or a film resonate with how

Shaw would like to write her music. Shaw found ways to weave in her own musical language, new sonorities, and different harmonies into the kind of musical format Beethoven laid out in his music. The list below is comprised of her completed works for string quartets:

Table 1

List of Caroline Shaw's String Quartet Compositions

Name of Composition	Year	Instrumentation	Commission/Performers
Punctum	2009, 2013	String quartet	
Entr'acte	2011	String quartet	Brentano Quartet
Valencia	2012	String quartet	Shaw and friends in Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA
By and by	2013	String quartet and voice	
Ritornello.2.sq.2.j	2013, 2014	String quartet originally paired with film	JACK Quartet and American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME)
1655	2014	String quartet with dance	FLUX Quartet and Pam Tanowitz Dance
Cant voi 'aube	2015	String quartet and mezzo-soprano	Brooklyn Rider and Anne Sophie von Otter, commissioned by Carnegie Hall
Plan & Elevation	2015	String quartet	Dover Quartet
Blueprint	2016	String quartet	Aizuri Quartet

To the Hands	2016	String quartet and choir	The Crossing and Donald Bally
First Essay: Nimrod	2016	String quartet	Calidore Quartet
Schisma	2018	String quartet	Brooklyn Rider
Second Essay: Echo & Third Essay: Ruby	2018	String quartet	Calidore Quartet

Source: Shaw, Caroline. Compilation of her string quartet scores.

The following three chapters will analyze three of Shaw's completed string quartets: 1. *Punctum*, 2. *Entr'acte*, and 3. *Blueprint*. In the fourth and the last chapter, I will briefly discuss other quartets: *Ritornello.2.sq.2.j*, *Plan & Elevation*, and *To the Hands*. These quartets were selected for their common stylistic elements and themes.

Chapter VII: *Punctum* (2009, revised 2013)

Background

Originally composed in 2009 and revised in 2013, *Punctum* is a piece Shaw wrote shortly before entering Princeton University for her compositional studies. Shaw describes the work as:

An exercise in nostalgia, inspired by Roland Barthes' description of the "unexpected" in photographs and in particular by his extended description of the elusive "Winter Garden" photo in his 1980 book *Camera Lucida*. Through modular sequences strung together out of context, the piece explores a way of saturating the palette with classicism while denying it form, and of disturbing the legibility of a harmonic progression in order to reinforce it later. One could also say the piece is about the sensation of a particular secondary dominant in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

Shaw draws inspiration from various sources for the piece— memoirs, stories, and photography that Barthes shares through his book as well as chorales from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (Shaw, *Punctum*). Shaw's distinctive timbre and color blend with clear and often simple rhythm, texture, and harmony, reflective of her affinity for choral and vocal writing of the 16th to 17th century.

Firstly, the title of the work, *Punctum*, encourages examination of text from Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. In his observations of collected photographs, Barthes notes a duality that exists in these images: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* means that there's an object or image in the photograph that is self-contained and obvious in meaning to all who observe it, "whole whose meaning can be taken in at a glance (without effort, or 'thinking')" (Houlihan). It is a "kind of general enthusiastic commitment" in which the observer seeks to understand the meaning in a photograph (Barthes 26). On the contrary, *Punctum*, a Latin word derived from a Greek word that means 'trauma', punctuates or disturbs the *studium*; Barthes illustrates *punctum*:

The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out [...] it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me [...] for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricked me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). (Barthes 26-27)

Punctum is the unexpected 'detail' that suddenly catches the observer's attention and consequently remains in the observer's memory (Barthes 42). This idea of *punctum* becomes evident in Shaw's composition as will be discussed later in this chapter. Shaw also quotes Barthes following the title of her composition: "The Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is'." Part One Chapter Two of Barthes' *Lucida* also tells a story of Barthes' effort to find the photograph that captures the essence and truth of the entire being of his deceased mother, rather than simply an image or partial reflection of her. He finds this in a photograph of her with her brother, when they were five and seven years old, standing side by side in a garden; the picture capturing that unchanged kindness and gentleness Barthes remembers of his mother and to awakening a certain nostalgic remembrance (Barthes 69-70). Shaw recalls being moved by this story and description of his search for his mother's photograph.

Analysis

Punctum opens with a fortissimo C#M chord held over the entire measure with a fermata (Ex. 1.1). This grand gesture is followed by a softly lingering C# in the viola over two measures before the entrances of the two violins. The sustained C# evolves over the next few measures; violins softly alternate the C# in slow syncopation and punctuated articulation. Underneath, the viola and cello join in on the 'murmuring' gesture on C#, but they are free to improvise the alternating rhythm between the two with varying timbre.

The image displays a musical score for Caroline Shaw's *Punctum*, measures 18-22. The score is written for four staves in 4/4 time. Measures 18-20 show a complex texture with various dynamics (mp, cresc., f) and articulations. Measure 21 features a fortissimo (ff) section with sustained notes. Measure 22 concludes the section with a final chord.

Ex. 1.2: Caroline Shaw, *Punctum*. m.18-22.

(Parallel fourths echo practices of Palestrina and others of his time; rules of counterpoint can be found in Johann Joseph Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* from 1725.)

Section B (Ex. 1.3) contains pointillistic quarter notes in the upper three voices in “modular sequences strung together out of context” where one again finds fragmented sequences of perfect fourths and fifths (Shaw, *Punctum*).

♩ = 116
B sul tasto, at tip, steadfast —
 like an extremely quiet machine that weaves microscopic silk tapestries

23

31

cantabile
 mp

Ex. 1.3: Caroline Shaw, *Punctum*. m.23-28.

Shaw marks *ppp* and “sul tasto, at tip, steadfast— like an extremely quiet machine that weaves microscopic silk tapestries” to help the players visualize a certain sound and atmosphere. The second violin part melts into a brief off-beat descending scale figure at m. 28, as if it happens unnoticeably and in passing; the significance of this material becomes more evident as the cello takes this material seven measures later at m. 36 in a cantabile manner (Ex. 1.3). This quotes the antecedent phrase of the opening in the chorale *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* from Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244 (Ex. 1.4):

63 CHORAL. Coro I. II.

Soprano.
Flauto traverso I. II.
Oboe I. II. Violino I.
col Soprano

Alto.
Violino II coll' Alto

Tenore.
Viola col Tenore

Basso.

Organo e Continuo.

1. O Haupt voll Blut und Wun-den, voll Schmerz und vol - ler Hohn!
O Haupt, zu Spott ge-bun-den mit ei - ner Dor-nen-kron'!

2. Du ed - les An - ge - sich - te, vor dem sonst schrickt und scheut
das gro - ße Welt - ge - wich - te, wie bist du so be - speit!

6 7 6 6 6 9 6 4 #

Ex. 1.4: J.S. Bach, *St. Mathew Passion*. Chorale *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*.

In m. 55-57, the cello mimics the consequent phrase of Bach's chorale (Ex. 1.5):

Ex. 1.5: Caroline Shaw, *Punctum*. m.55-58. Quotation of Bach's chorale.

The phrase is a fragment of Bach's chorale in its entirety, and it is scattered within varying textures and layers, as if it were accidental or inserted without fully seeking the listener's attention. Undoubtedly one can recall here the notion of *punctum*. The rising perfect fourths heard before are not unintentional after all; Shaw takes the ascending perfect fourth (also the first two notes of the opening of Bach's chorale) and develops it over an extensive middle section from m. 62 to 146 (see Appendix A). A series of perfect fourths become long melodic fragments juxtaposed against the punctuated alternating motive (Ex. 1.6 and Ex. 1.7):



Ex. 1.6: Caroline Shaw, *Punctum*. m.72-76.



Ex. 1.7: Caroline Shaw, *Punctum*. m.82-87.

Following this, the upper three voices intensify in rhythm and dynamics while ascending and descending in scale-like passages (see Appendix A, m. 147-167). Suddenly at J (m. 168), all four voices finally arrive in four-part harmony that fully states the hymn (see Appendix A). As if only a nostalgic memory in passing, or a *punctum*, the hymn quickly dissolves into the texture with which the work began— with the return of a quiet but marked murmuring motive on C# (see Appendix A).

Chapter VIII: *Entr'acte* [a minuet & trio] (2011)

Background

Inspired by the Brentano Quartet's performance of Haydn's Op. 77 No. 2, Shaw wrote *Entr'acte* for the group in 2011 (Shaw, *Entr'acte*). The work was first performed by the Brentano Quartet at Princeton University in April 2011, then revised into a string orchestra version in July of 2014 and commissioned by A Far Cry, a conductorless string orchestra based in Boston (Shaw, *Entr'acte*). The piece takes Haydn's "spare and soulful shift to the D-fat major trio in the minuet," as a springboard to establish a similar structure; this surprising and sudden shift becomes the basis upon which Shaw builds her various musical ideas (Shaw, *Entr'acte*). Shaw describes *Ent'racte* to be "riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further [...] to the other side of Alice's looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition." Characteristic of her writing, Shaw welcomingly looks to the music of the past for germination of ideas or inspirations. Shaw comments that the way in which *Ent'racte* makes reference to the music of another time period also reflect the perspectives she gained from her studies of European landscape gardens. For instance, the 18th-19th century English landscape gardens feature follies, or fragments of castles that were constructed and intentionally placed in the garden, as a nostalgic reminder and longing for the past, and such a concept can be heard in her music (Sirota).

While Shaw's work loosely takes on the structure of minuet and trio, she switches around the two in terms of their characteristics. Rather than having a playful minuet and a more serene or pastoral trio as in Haydn's work, Shaw's minuet starts with somber and almost resigned melodies in a minor key later contrasted with the more lighthearted and lively trio. Structurally,

however, it maintains the overall ternary form of ABA of a standard minuet and trio. Within the minuet is a smaller scale binary structure of AB with repeats for each section followed by a transition into the trio. The trio, more extensive in length and more varied, also starts with a loose binary structure with repeats. However, the subsequent middle section following the trio's theme departs from a standard minuet-trio form in its presence, length, and variety. Lasting from m. 68-174, this middle portion is longer than the minuet and the trio's AB sections combined (see Appendix B). This is also where Shaw introduces at least four new compositional ideas. About half way through this section, Shaw takes the pizzicato theme from the beginning of the trio section and develops it. Given the variety of new material, sheer length, and development of ideas from the beginning of the minuet, this section carries some significance and gravity. Functionally and structurally, it hints at the kind of development one may hear in a sonata form. However, Shaw did not intend to write music that fit accurately into such structural labels. Rather, as mentioned earlier, the piece is intended on "riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further" (Shaw, *Entr'acte*). The table shows a basic structural organization of the work:

Table 2

General Structure of Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte*

Minuet (m. 1-41)	Trio (m. 42-173)	Minuet (modified) (m. 174-206)
A (m. 1-8)	C (m. 42-50)	A' (m. 174-182)
B (m. 10-15)	D (m. 51-67)	B' (m. 183-190)
Transitional materials (m. 16-41)	E/new section and materials (m. 68-174)	Transitional materials (m. 191-196)
		Closing (m. 197-206)

While the structure of the piece loosely mirrors that of a minuet and trio, Shaw pushes the boundaries of the traditional form and infuses it with a variety of rhythm, harmony, and texture; therefore, blurring the notion that this music is a traditional classical minuet and trio.

Analysis

The minuet begins with a quiet four-part harmony in sighing melodic gestures; all four voices are rhythmically in unison playing primarily triplets with periodic duplet hemiolas. These triplets in a 9/8 meter give the melodic fragments a rhythmic groove that balances the somber and almost resigned atmosphere of the opening (Ex. 2.1).

sweeping $\text{♩} = 92$

The musical score for the opening measures of Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte* is presented for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The time signature is 9/8, and the tempo is marked as 92. The score begins with a 'sweeping' instruction. The first measure shows a quiet four-part harmony with dynamics ranging from *p* (piano) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The subsequent measures feature complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and duplet hemiolas, with dynamics ranging from *p* to *mf*. The score is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and includes various articulations and phrasing marks.

Ex. 2.1: Caroline Shaw, *Entr'acte*. Opening measures.

The harmony that initially echoes the musical language of Classical and Baroque music starts to dissolve into dissonances (transition at m. 16) until the voices pair up to play minor second apart from each other. Pitchless gestures echoing the opening of the minuet interrupt the flow of sound with silence that is only filled with the brushing sound of the bow hair against the

strings. Here Shaw uses an extended technique in which the players position the fingers of the left hand over the strings with just enough pressure to stop the strings from vibrating, but light enough not to elicit an actual pitch; producing a sweeping noise with the bow. Here, to indicate the lack of pitch, Shaw marks pitchless notations with ‘x’ (Ex. 2.2):

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, specifically measures 16 through 20. The score is written for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Measures 16-19 show melodic lines for all instruments with dynamics *mp*, *p*, and *ppp*. Measure 20 introduces an extended technique where the Violin I and Violin II parts use 'x' marks to indicate pitchless notations. A text box above the Violin I staff explains: "light finger pressure, to produce pitchless bow noise - staff placement of x notehead was arbitrary". The Viola and Cello parts continue with melodic lines throughout the measures.

Ex. 2.2: Caroline Shaw, *Entr'acte*. Extended technique.

Quickly the triplets dissolve into a three measures of sparse and short harmonics that are tossed around, and this ends the minuet section. While the meter has stayed mostly consistently in 9/8, the minuet's melodic material is grouped in ways that can make the listener unsure of the meter,

which is also reminiscent of a similar trait in the opening of Haydn's minuet in Op. 77 No. 2 (Ex. 2.3). The shift into the trio is rather abrupt and brief (see Appendix B, m. 41-42).


II

Menuetto. Presto, ma non troppo

Ex. 2.3: Joseph Haydn, String Quartet No. 67 in F Major, Op. 77 No. 2, 2nd mvt. Minuetto.

The Trio begins in E flat major with pizzicato, again in four-part harmony (see Appendix B, m.42). The continually changing pulse and meter give the pizzicato melody an improvisatory quality. The phrases are clear; the antecedent phrase is spread over 7-9 measures, while the consequent phrase lasts 16 measures. Meehan from the Calidore Quartet recalls spending much time strategizing cues to best execute the unison pizzicatos and to keep the ensemble together.

Following this brief melody is the beginning of a lengthy middle section (m. 68) that constantly shifts from one new musical idea to the next, echoing the idea of “absurd, subtle, technicolor” transitions (Shaw, *Entr’acte*). The inner voices play steady and quiet triplets with a left hand pizzicato while controlling the pitch by closing in on the string with the bow hair. Like a clock ticking, Shaw describes this to result in “something soft but open, like the lute stop of a harpsichord” (Ex. 2.4):



76

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

* stop string (control pitch) with the bow hair, and pizz with left hand. if there is a buzz in the sound, use more weight on the bow hair (staying right at the frog helps with this). the result is something soft but open, like the lute stop of a harpsichord.

Ex. 2.4: Caroline Shaw, *Entr’acte*. Pizzicatos in middle voices.

Over and underneath this ticking sound, the outer voices play thin and eerie but broad strokes of melodic lines in *pp*; one voice overlaps or echoes the other. At m. 98, Shaw starts incorporating the pizzicato motive from the beginning of the trio and develops it over varying texture. Cross rhythms and off-beats create a sense of playfulness, while deviation away from traditional harmony also creates a slightly dissonant clash and contrast to the simplicity that started the trio. At J (m. 124), the use of bariolage in the viola reflects a common Baroque technique and idiom (Ex. 2.5):

The image displays a musical score for Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte*, specifically measures 121 through 125. The score is written for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. Measures 121-124 are characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, including triplets and slurs, with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 125 is marked with a 'J' and features a piano (*p*) dynamic and an *arco* instruction. The Viola and Violoncello parts show a *cresc.* marking. The Violin I and II parts are mostly silent in the second system.

Ex. 2.5: Caroline Shaw, *Entr'acte*. Bariolages.

Over 31 measures of bariolage, the two violins take turns in trumpet-like calls over long sustained vertical chords that start out on a bright E major chord. A brief transition with running pizzicatos and short jumping harmonics leads to the final new material before the return of the minuet. At m. 163 or M, Shaw uses a unique timbre with pitches sliding and falling in short eighth and quarter notes, creating sigh-like gestures (Ex. 2.6):

a world that someone can live in and can make their own so that they feel like they are actually writing the music as [they] go [...] like a script for an actor rather than something that is so clearly dictated” (Music Academy of the West). This closing is also reminiscent of Shaw’s *In manus tuas*, a work for solo cello written in 2009, which is based on a 16th century motet by Thomas Tallis. In a masterclass at the Music Academy of the West in July 2017, Shaw worked with a student cellist who performed this piece, and she suggested that the performer tries to get the pizzicato chords to sound more like a gamba or a harpsichord and to get as much variation as possible in the contact point of the pizzicato as well as in the pacing and volume of the rolling of chords. Similarly, the solo cello in *Entr’acte* can also be performed taking into consideration these suggestions as the player experiments with timing, pacing, and resonance of the series of chords. Andrew Yee from the Attacca Quartet describes Shaw’s music:

Breath is such a huge part of her music [...] that as long as you are breathing, the notes will take care of themselves. I played cello and sang with her on a show [...] she feels space in music in such a calm and natural way. It changed the way I felt about a cello solo at the end of *Entr’acte*. I felt a calmness and clarity [...] it was the best I played it.

Chapter IX: *Blueprint* (2016)

Background

Blueprint for string quartet was commissioned by the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing arts for the Aizuri Quartet in 2016. Members of the Aizuri Quartet met Shaw in different settings at different times; some attended school with her, while others had collaborated on various projects (Kozasa). The Aizuri Quartet was invited in the summer of 2016 to perform at a concert series held by Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia, and the festival offered to sponsor a newly commissioned piece for the group. When the quartet first approached Shaw, Kozasa recalls that Shaw accepted the proposal and asked the group to give her their concert programming for the season in order to get inspiration from the pieces they were playing throughout the season. One of the pieces they planned on performing at Wolf Trap was Beethoven's Op. 18 No. 6 for String Quartet in F major. Shaw, who also loved the piece, had the idea to use the piece as a blueprint, and these two pieces ended up being the final program for the concert (Kozasa).

Blueprint is also a nod to the ensemble's name; *aizuri* is a Japanese art form that uses indigo shade for woodblock printing. After composing the piece, Shaw came to the Curtis Institute of Music, where the Aizuri was resident graduate quartet at the time, to hear the rehearsal where they spent two hours going over some passages for adding dynamic schemes (Kozasa). Kozasa describes her experience of working with Shaw on the piece:

Having a performer-composer can be easy or very specific. Caroline was really open to our ideas where there weren't specific instructions in the score. For example, in the "stormy" section; we were free to put accents where we felt necessary. In passages that had no dynamic scheme, Shaw would suggest that we try a couple things, and that's how we came to a place we were comfortable with.

Blueprint is filled with passages that seem to leave out detailed instructions or dynamics.

Perhaps, Shaw had the intent of leaving a space for the musicians to create their own.

Analysis

Blueprint begins with a distant and almost cold introductory fragments of eighth notes played softly and in rhythmic unity by all four voices (Ex. 3.1):

like a marble bust
stoic & grand & still
but with a little wink or some side-eye

$\text{♩} = 90$

color begins to emerge

Ex. 3.1: Caroline Shaw, *Blueprint*. Opening measures.

These fragmented melodies are very vocal in quality, and the rests seem to emulate a singer taking breaths. As Shaw's vocal background comes into play in her writing, musicians are advised to sing such phrases during rehearsals. Shaw marks in her instructions: "like a marble bust, stoic & grand & still, but with a little wink or some side-eye." Imaginative yet abstract, the

instruction calls for the players to decipher through these indications and to create colors that will make these words become palpable. Kozasa comments about how the quartet rehearsed such passages:

The “like a marble bust with a bit of a side-eye” marking... we were still playing around with the timing of fermata, such as how still we were going to be between the notes. Her music has a lot of room for change and creativity. Other times, because it was modeled after Beethoven, the stacking of chords had to be precise because it is so naked like in the introduction. We spent a lot of time figuring out harmonies and making them sound and solid as much as possible.

Kozasa emphasizes the challenges posed by the often bare and simple nature of the work and how her quartet focused on using color and time to explore the possibilities with this piece.

In the following transition at m. 12, all four voices flail into something more concrete, extroverted, and strong in character (with markings such as “extravagantly Schumannesque” at m. 14). These swirling ascending notes arrive at section A (m. 15) with the same opening eight note motive in a grand and strong fortissimo (see Appendix C). Shaw keeps the passage flowing by interjecting the fragmented eighth note opening motives with more changing figurations in triplets, sixteenth notes, and sextuplets. The eighth note motives start to wind down and melt into triplets in section B or m. 33; here, Shaw changes the sonority and texture with alternation of ordinary and *sul ponticello* in the bow while also calling for fluctuation in pitch in the left hand (see Appendix C, m. 33-45). Her marking, “Tim Burtonesque warped technicolor Western” hints at Shaw’s humor and attitude towards giving subtle suggestions that encourage the players’ creativity. All four voices must rehearse this to ensure a unified pacing of the pitch bending. This ‘technicolor’ section winds down to a big *rallentando* and arrives at the first instatement iteration or ‘blueprint’ of Beethoven’s Op. 18 No. 6 (Ex. 3.2):

In Beethoven's *Maliconia*, these two measures end in a minor cadential chord before leading into the 3/8 *Allegretto quasi Allegro*. Shaw uses this motive as the pivotal point in her piece to move from 'stoic' and 'marble' introduction into the light and groovy 'opus 18 partay'. This passage is instantly bright and lively in Bb major, the same key as that of Op. 18 No. 6. It also reflects the *con brio* feel of Op. 18 No. 6's first movement, *Allegro con brio* (see Appendix D). Throughout, Shaw uses the accompaniment motive from Beethoven's first movement as an accompanying texture in the violins while setting a flowing rhythm against these eighth notes with syncopations, triplets, and off-beat Bartók pizzicatos. The violins continue to use materials from both first and last movements of Beethoven's Op. 18 No. 6 as their first thematic motif (see Appendix C, m. 75 and Appendix D). The constant exchanges of thematic fragments between the violins pose a challenge to keeping a flowing and uninterrupted line while ensuring that the texture does not get too thick and heavy. The rehearsals and related discussion amongst players should include whether to keep the long line or to bring out accents and entrances of the two players.

The second thematic material is introduced at section F, marked '*cantabile*', where the music develops into a broad triplet melody in the outer voices while the inner voices continue the eighth note *con brio* accompaniments (see Appendix C, m. 83). Shaw's ability to integrate the various 'blueprinted' motivic ideas is witty and brilliant. The accompaniment material builds up into a more intertwined texture with the two violins in dialogue, helping the music transition away from the second thematic material and taking it once again through a 'technicolor' texture of the broader triplets heard in the introduction. Then comes an entirely new 'thorny' passage in which polyphonic texture of crawling chromatic eighth notes is interrupted by vertical half note pizzicatos in homophonic texture. The resulting fully diminished pizzicato chords keep musical

tension and stalls the flow of the eighth notes. This third new thematic section is also harmonically much more dissonant and unresolved unlike the first two motives. Kozasa comments on the rehearsal process of these contrasting sections:

She has an amazing sense of different kinds of grooves. It can be “opus 18 partay”; bubbly, effervescent, and always levitated but then other parts like the ‘stormy’ section, it becomes groovy in a very different way. In between each stormy section, half the pizzicatos are in unison, make chords, so we have to be dead on exactly together to keep the groove. We worked on a lot on being on the same train. The writing is so pure... it is naked so we have to be precise but effervescent and carefree at the same time.

The performer is challenged to continually adapt to the different rhythmic grooves posed in each section. As the third section winds down, Shaw quotes m. 29-32 of Maliconia from Op. 18 No. 6 (Ex. 3.4) to bring the section to a close before reaching a recapitulation (Ex. 3.5).



Ex. 3.4: Ludwig v. Beethoven, String Quartet Op. 18 No. 6, finale. m.29-32.



Ex. 3.5: Caroline Shaw, *Blueprint*. m.206-212.

The opening material returns in the recapitulation in a ‘quiet but strong’ manner (see Appendix C, m. 215-328). With quick acceleration through flurries of fast sixteenth notes, where Shaw marks ‘Quaker meeting vibe with the occasional 16th run interruption, gradually becoming more and more ecstatic,’ the music gains momentum into the final outburst of a quotation of the Prestissimo coda from Op. 18 No. 6’s finale (see Appendix C, m. 234-end), and the movement ends with two lighthearted pizzicato chords. Much of Beethoven’s humor also makes an imprint on this movement. Shaw, through various musical ideas and instructions, additionally conveys the message of approaching the work playfully.

The work itself is clear in structure, a trait present in many of her quartets. The composition can be broken down into the following:

Table 3

General Structure of *Blueprint*

Introduction	m. 1
Transition	m. 33
T1: first blueprint of Beethoven's thematic materials	m. 61
T2: second material	m. 90
Transition	m. 147
T3: third material	m. 157
Transition	m. 200
Recapitulation (introduction material truncated)	m. 215
Transition	m. 224
Coda/closing material	m. 234

While the piece was not intended to be described with any traditional musical terms or defined in its structure, the overall scheme of the work as laid out above points to the notion that this work is a blueprint not only of Beethoven's motivic materials in Op. 18 No. 6, but also of the Classical forms.

Part Three: Other Quartets

Shaw's other quartets such as *Ritornello*, *To the Hands*, and *Plan & Elevation* also contain flavors of Classicism and ancient music layered into Shaw's own idiom. These quartets are unique in that the inspirations or collaborations behind the compositions extend beyond the purely string quartet realm. *Ritornello* was originally a project paired with a film also created by Shaw with parallel scores for the same music in mind—one for the voice and one for the strings. *Plan & Elevation* is a set of five movements inspired by her residency in the gardens and space in Dumbarton Oaks, an estate that had also inspired Stravinsky to write a piece called Concerto in E-flat “Dumbarton Oaks” for their thirtieth anniversary. *To the Hands* is a work for string quartet and voices created as a part of the Seven Responses Project by Donald Nally and The Crossings (Shaw, *To the Hands*).

Chapter X: *Ritornello.2.sq.2.j* (2012)

Ritornello is Shaw's personal project that originally began in 2008 with her "minor obsession with the Prologue of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and the baroque ritornello aria form" (Shaw, *Ritornello.2.sq.2.j*). The title refers to a musical form which traces back to music of the 16th century (such as that of composer Giovanni Gabrieli); ritornello, which derives from words such as *ritorno* in Italian meaning "return," was predominantly explored in music during the Baroque period (Taruskin 352). Ritornellos were present in early forms of operas and concertos, such as those by Torelli (Taruskin 784), and were essentially returning statements that alternated with episodes by soloist(s) (Burkholder 425). In *Ritornello*, Shaw explores the concept of refrain by incorporating certain formal and harmonic elements of the past into her music.

Shaw's original intention for the work was to write one composition with parallel scores for voices and for strings (Shaw, Interview 2). The first version was created during her two-week residency with Opera Cabal in Chicago in 2012, having Shaw as the soloist paired with a film presentation. This approximately 20-minute work was later extended to 30 minutes along with the film, and Shaw eventually wrote a parallel score for the string quartet in American Contemporary Music Ensemble and for eight voices in *Roomful of Teeth* (Shaw, *Ritornello.2.sq.2.j*). Other revised versions are available in which Shaw truncates the length of the work and revises the film. Worked and reworked again and again over an extended period of time, this project also reflects the title, as such, with the process of constant return to the composition being an act of 'ritornello' itself (Shaw, *Ritornello.2.sq.2.j*). *Ritornello* was first premiered in the quartet version by the American Contemporary Music Ensemble on October 16, 2013 in WNYC New Sounds Live which followed the vocal rendition of the work performed for

the same series the day before (Shaw, *Ritornello.2.sq.2.j*). Recently, different versions have been performed by Roomful of Teeth, the JACK Quartet, the Calder Quartet, and other ensembles. The second string quartet version was completed in April of 2014 in Princeton, and this is the version that will be discussed. The video version available on Shaw's website (www.carolineshaw.com) is from January 2012 which presents her film and her performance using a loop pedal, her own voice and viola-playing.

Amongst the many inspirations for this composition, Shaw says, are Rip Van Winkle, Nietzsche, and Terrence Malick. Shaw writes about this work:

Sometimes it is the smallest things that return. Again and again, and again. Sometimes repetition enhances meaning. Reinforces meaning. Depletes it, warps it. Envelopes it. The simplest words, when repeated aloud, develop a strangeness that is delightful and chilling at the same time. Repetition folds and unfolds a signifier until the relationship between the signifier and the signified breaks down, articulated best in fragments and distilled to something non-verbal. Elusive semiotic theory aside, this, I think, is where some of our music comes from. And maybe this is why some music keeps coming back.

Ritornello does not exist in a single, finished form. It's designed intentionally as a general project that could expand and contract like an accordion. It is, to be quite honest, the most important thing I am working on right now, and it is the longest thing I have been working on in my life so far. It will be something that I return to, again and again.

There are many different colors and crevices in the music itself, but the main material that returns (the "ritornello") is grounded in just two chords. Recently someone said to me, "It's all V-I, or is it I-IV?" I'm not sure it matters. And I love the ambiguity. It mirrors that other wild binary that I love — the sometimes elusive distinction between joy and sadness.

From Shaw's writing one can sense that the act of repeatedly returning to the composition is not to construct, reconstruct, and polish it to the point of perfection and completion but rather to create a musical space in which Shaw and her music are allowed to evolve, to transform into many colors, forms, and emotions.

The piece is essentially a series of chorus and verses that are paired with a film created by Shaw who takes footages of Brooklyn and Queensboro bridges alternating with animated scenes of a piece of blank paper folding and unfolding, which visually represent the musical verses and choruses, respectively (Schaefer). The work begins with the ritornello passage which is to repeat itself either in its entirety or in variation four more times throughout this 20-minute long movement. It is a simple cycle of chords C major-F major, first presented in short fragmented phrases. All four voices move in parallel motions, swinging up and down the interval of perfect fourths, traits that echo harmonic idioms of 16th and 17th century music (Ex. 4.1).

Ex. 4.1: Caroline Shaw, *Ritornello*. Opening measures.

Though the meter is marked 4/4, there is nothing square about the phrasing, and if anything, Shaw writes phrases over the bar lines, causing the listener to lose the sense of what meter this may be in. The violins improvise over pedal E in free rhythm at Verse 1, while the viola and the cello play long pizzicatos together. In such sparse and bare texture, the violins must ensure that

they do not overlap each other or be in sync rhythmically too often, as the alternation between the two instruments is what creates the texture. They should rehearse and plan in a way that allows each voice to be alternatingly heard yet without sounding rigid. The lower voices must also work to make sure the pizzicatos are executed with good synchronization. Fast moving pizzicatos and vamp replete this passage before Ritornello II. Yee, who worked on this piece with the Attacca Quartet, says they “changed the work a lot and felt this work was very much a trial ground for new expressions and techniques” (Yee). The passage below exemplifies ways in which the players are given the freedom to explore the sonic world and experiment (Ex. 4.2).

2-4x 150 >3x, then gradually transition to epic drone situation [about a minute?]

"epic drone moment"

violins:
 - to pont
 - become less "together" on changes
 - add jitters & arpegg's
 - expand range with other notes (in A-maj chord)

cello:
 - to pont
 - generally hold A or A/D drone beneath to fill out sound

viola:
 - hold down the fort and don't change

155 [Verse 2]

violins:
 - only harmonics and/or ponty partials remain...
 - fade out

p

p

p

p

Ex. 4.2: Caroline Shaw, *Ritornello*. m.149-156.

Ritornello III reverses the direction of the perfect fourths. A frenzied acceleration brings the piece to the final Ritornello V played in rhythmic unison in pizzicato.

Chapter XI: *Plan & Elevation*- the Grounds of Dumbarton Oaks (2016)

From 2014 to 2015, Shaw was the inaugural Early-Career Musician in Residence at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, a research institute, library, and museum and an estate with long tradition of music. Commissioned by the Dumbarton Oaks for its 75th anniversary in 2016, *Plan & Elevation* is a five-movement work written for the Dover Quartet. The work is inspired by various gardens and drawings of structures by architects of Dumbarton Oaks as well as by Shaw’s experiences as a resident composer at the estate (Strawser). The five movements are named after five gardens in the institution: The Ellipse, The Cutting Garden, The Herbaceous Border, The Orangery, and The Beech Tree, and each of the five movements is based on a simple ground bass line. Shaw describes the title to refer to two ways of seeing and experiencing the grounds (Shaw, *Plan & Elevation*):

The title, *Plan & Elevation*, refers to two standard ways of representing architecture—essentially an orthographic, or “bird’s eye,” perspective (plan), and a side view which features more ornamental detail (elevation). This binary is also a gentle metaphor for one’s path in any endeavor—often the actual journey and results are quite different (and perhaps more elevated) than the original plan.

The Ellipse starts with the descending three note figures that echo the opening of the song “Three Blind Mice”, itself a repetitive tune, played alone by the violin and persistent throughout the movement within varied texture (Ex. 5.1).



Ex. 5.1: Caroline Shaw, *Plan & Elevation*. Opening measures.

The Cutting Garden begins with a rising bassline which becomes the figured bass underneath the rest of the movement; there are oscillating harmonics in the violins and viola from another string quartet work by Shaw, *Valencia*, as well as texture in Ravel's String Quartet in F Major (Ex. 5.2). This is immediately apparent when a melodic fragment from the first movement of Ravel's String Quartet appears. A variety of timbre and technique also remind the listener of the kind of impressionistic textural varieties and sonorities one would hear in Ravel's work such as *sul ponticello*, use of harmonics, and pizzicato. The music also takes snippets of a theme in the first movement of Mozart's String Quartet No. 14 in G major K. 387 (Ex. 5.3) as well as Shaw's own *Entr'acte* (Ex. 5.4). Shaw's music encourages players to explore the knowledge of other composers and works in order that this knowledge would inform them as to how to approach the varying textures, sounds, and idioms embedded within her music.

77

81

pont. norm.

pont. norm.

pont. norm.

pont. norm.

p

f

Ex. 5.2: Caroline Shaw, *Plan & Elevation*. Quotation of Ravel's String Quartet in F Major.

92

norm.

norm.

norm.

norm.

pp

cresc...

dim...

dim...

dim...

f

Ex. 5.3: Caroline Shaw, *Plan & Elevation*. Quotation of Mozart's K. 387.



Ex. 5.4: Caroline Shaw, *Plan & Elevation*. Quotation of *Entr'acte*.

The meditative third movement, *The Herbaceous Border*, begins and ends with chords by the viola alone contrasted by a texturally thicker, more chaotic middle section. The end of the movement continues straight into the fourth, *The Orangery*, in which a solo violin begins with fast bariolages which bring to mind Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* or Bach's bariolage passage in the Chaconne from D Minor Partita for Violin Solo. These fast arpeggiations are contrasted with long sustained notes.

The Beech Tree starts with chordal pizzicatos in all four voices before separating into *ad libitum* pizzicatos (Ex. 5.5). The chords in the cello are strong and rooted in character, and the long tone in the upper voices are expansive and meditative. The players should experiment with the character, timing, and duration of the pizzicato chords as well as the articulations of various fast passages.

attacca

274 $\text{♩} = 60$

279

*play these somewhat randomly, no regular rhythm.
try to play approximately all the notes in the bar.
(so your rhythms will naturally get faster with more notes.)*

pizz

*play these somewhat randomly, no regular rhythm.
try to play approximately all the notes in the bar.
(so your rhythms will naturally get faster with more notes.)*

p

pizz

*play these somewhat randomly, no regular rhythm.
try to play approximately all the notes in the bar.
(so your rhythms will naturally get faster with more notes.)*

p

Ex. 5.5: Caroline Shaw, *Plan & Elevation*. The Beech Tree, fifth movement.

A sudden shift to slow chordal progressions reaches a climax, and the movement ends the way it started. Underneath the sudden textural shifts, the cello plays constant long pedal notes that flow from chords to single notes to chords as if to keep the entire movement within a certain consistent harmonic framework. Cellist of the Dover Quartet, Camden Shaw, comments how “very cognizant of atmosphere” Shaw is; they spent a great deal of time in discussion about getting into a meditative state and “sinking deeper into meditation with each repetition of the

ground bass patterns” (Shaw, Camden). Rather than phrasing, creating an atmosphere that feels tangible and real is what Shaw wanted to hear in this work (Shaw, Camden)

Chapter XII: *To the Hands* (2016)

The Crossing, a professional chamber choir dedicated to new music, commissioned *To the Hands* as a part of the Seven Responses Project in which seven composers were chosen to write pieces in response to Dieterich Buxtehude’s *Membra Jesu Nostri* from 1680 (The Crossings). Buxtehude’s work is a seven-part cycle of cantatas focusing on seven limbs and body parts represented in the suffering of Jesus Christ (Huizenga). The performance by various ensembles for the project such as the International Contemporary Ensemble and Quicksilver included works by these seven composers as well as the complete work by Buxtehude (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). Shaw chose *Ad Manus* from Buxtehude’s work meaning “To the Hands,” which is a suite comprised of six short chorales with texts and string quartet accompaniment: No. 1, Prelude: Wordless; No. 2, *in medio* (In the Midst); No. 3, Her Beacon-Hands Beckon; No. 4, Ever Ever Ever; No. 5, Litany of the Displaced; and No. 6, I Will Hold You. The instrumentation of string accompaniment to voice is also reflective of the practice that was common during the Renaissance era, and the work is infused with the familiar harmonic languages of the past. The work aims to shed light on the modern political issues involving “the suffering of those around the world seeking refuge, and [...] our role and responsibility in these global and local crises” (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com).

meditative, but still flowing forward

CAS

$\text{♩} = 100$

pp

Soprano

nn

The musical score for the Soprano part consists of eight measures. The first three measures are whole rests. In measure 4, there is a half note G4 followed by a half note F#4. Measure 5 contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter rest. Measure 6 has a quarter note C4, a quarter note B3, and a quarter note A3. Measure 7 features a quarter note G3, a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note E3. Measure 8 begins with a triplet of eighth notes (D3, C3, B2) followed by a dotted half note A2.

11

S

oo

oh

B

PAPA

Ex. 6.3: Caroline Shaw, *To the Hands*. m.30-31.

The Prelude bleeds into the next movement, *in medio* (In the Midst), in which Shaw adapts text from Buxtehude's *Ad manus* with a word change to the phrase in the last line. The text is first presented in Latin and then in English translation:

quid sunt plagae istae
quid sunt plagae istae in medio manuum tuarum
in medio
quid sunt plagae istae in medio manuum nostrarum

what are those wounds
 what are those wounds in the midst of your hands
 in the midst
 what are those wounds
 what are those wounds in the midst of our hands

By replacing 'your' with 'our' in the last line, it poses the question of how 'we' are responsible for the inflicted wounds (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). The strings start in jarring sequences of harmonies and dissonant pizzicatos over which, in contrast to the first movement, the voices enter in *stretto* (Ex. 6.4). The movement maintains a sense of struggle as all voices tug against one another in a thick polyphonic texture. While the meter is $\frac{3}{4}$, voices and strings play cross

rhythms of four against three, three against two, sextuplets, and arpeggios that embody the sense of conflict and pain embedded in the text. The music then culminates in a homophonic harmony on the text, “*in medio*,” with chorus and the strings all becoming gradually more harmonized and rhythmically in unison. Though the chorus seems to land in the world of tonal harmony in the last phrase with a pull towards G minor, the very last measure does not provide the resolution to the tonic G minor chord but remains unresolved (Ex. 6.5).

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and string ensemble. The top section features a vocal line with lyrics: "Quid sunt pla - - gae is - tae". The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Below the vocal line, there are two staves of string music. The first staff of strings has dynamics of *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. The second staff of strings has dynamics of *p* and *pp*. The bottom section shows a string quartet with dynamics of *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. The final measure of the string quartet is marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic.

Ex. 6.4: Caroline Shaw, *To the Hands*. Stretto texture.

122

S *ff* in me - di - o ma - nu - um no - - - strum *pp*

A *ff* in me - di - o ma - nu - um no - - - strum *pp*

T *ff* in me - di - o ma - nu - um no - - - strum *pp*

B *ff* in me - di - o ma - nu - um no - - - strum *pp*

Violin I *p* *ppp*

Violin II *p* *ppp*

Viola *f* *ppp*

Violoncello *f* *ppp*

Contrabass *f* *ppp*

Ex. 6.5: Caroline Shaw, *To the Hands*. Opening measures. End of *in medio*, second movement.

The third movement, *Her Beacon-Hand Beckons*, uses text by Shaw that responds to a 1883 sonnet called “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus, that was written on the Statue of Liberty in 1903 (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). The primarily homophonic first half of the movement exudes a much more unified and bright mood compared to the *in medio*, and Shaw attempts to portray a more comforting image of a hand—more “open, beckoning, and strong”. This movement does not include a string quartet.

The fourth movement, *Ever Ever Ever*, takes another text from Buxtehude based on *Song of Songs*, from the Bible and portrays a picture of an aged woman alone in an empty house. The melodies sung by the chorus in low registers feel heavy and slow, giving weight to the texts. Contrasting this are ethereal harmonic quarter notes passed around in the strings, giving balance to the weightiness of the chorus.

First violin introduces the fifth movement, *Litany of the Displaced*, with solo bariolages that glide up from one chord to another that are harmonically unrelated and unsettling. These alternate and gradually blend with unsung spoken numbers in the chorus which represent statistical data on the number of various displaced people around the world that was gathered from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (Shaw, www.carolineshaw.com). When every singer in the chorus recites different numbers in a loud articulate voice over one another, the resulting effect is one of overwhelming chaos. Shaw makes a statement about how she views herself and her works in light of addressing political issues:

I'm not sure I can say that I should or that I can present work that's meaningful and deeply engages with issues. But I want to try, and I have to keep trying. And I think there's something about engaging with political issues specifically in choral music because it's a very community-oriented art. [...] You can write something that people sing together and talk about with each other, and that's where the conversations have to start. [...] But there are artists where it is extremely important to be clear exactly what they think and they want you to think that way, like a lot of political hip-hop music. It's just not how I operate. (Barone)

In the last movement, *I Will Hold You*, texts by Shaw and a line from the Bible's Zechariah portray a "comforting promise" to embrace, protect, and love. The polyphonic flourishes of ascending scales and bariolages by the quartet before the final declaration of '*in medio*' resemble the sounds of organs in its magnitude of sound and texture. The string quartet in this composition is not merely accompanimental in the way it would have been done in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. As a matter of fact, the quartet plays materials that are often independent of the

chorus or in direct contrast to them in articulation, rhythm, or harmony. Rather than playing a supporting role, the string quartet is Shaw's way of expanding on Buxtehude and coloring the otherwise traditional choral work with something entirely new. However, this is not done for the sake of being new or different, but rather the quartet's parts play a crucial role in this composition. The quartet creates and sets the atmospheres appropriate for each set of texts and movement, and it helps reiterate the essence of the work by vividly portraying its message. It is in the hands of the quartet players to understand the text and context of the piece. They should explore the atmospheric possibilities through various timbre and articulations (Shaw marks indications such as "dry, brittle" and "warm, resonant" in the string parts).

Closing Thoughts

Rather than creating something entirely new, as is often an assumed notion in modern music, Shaw creates music that recognizes, embraces, and synthesizes music of the past with her own idiom. I am reminded of what Burkholder once said of Johannes Brahms - he mastered "the integration of a progressive musical language with an allegiance to the tradition of Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven" (Burkholder 82). I think Shaw may be able to do so as well. Shaw's hope is to continue cultivating and celebrating a sense of community created by the intimacy of four people working together, having fun together, and consequentially creating beautiful music together.

Her music is a culmination of her multi-faceted musicianship and the unique manner of her writing. Her vocally driven sonic world amplifies atmosphere that provokes a sense of

mysticism, joy, and humanity. More than anything, the essence at work in these music that have moved audiences of all types is Shaw's undeniably unique imagination.

Appendix A

Punctum

" The Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is' "
— Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* part 1.2

Caroline Shaw
2009 / rev. 2013

$\text{♩} = 60$
immutable

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello

ff
pp
pp
pp

sul tasto, non vib
sul tasto, non vib
[murmuring] sul tasto
[murmuring] sul tasto

pp

7

pp
sul pont
norm
sul pont
sul pont
norm
sul pont

add vib . . .
add vib . . .

3

47

p *pp* *cresc...* *5* *mf*

55

mf *pp* *molto cresc* *3*

62

mf *cresc* *ff* *3* *slightly more articulated, for definition (both violins)*

67 **D** (more legato)

p slightly more articulated, for definition (both violins)

p

dolce *mf*

dolce *mf*

72

77

mf *p*

f

mf

mf

82 **E**

mp

mp

88

mf

mf

mf

mf

94

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

ff

ff

ff

ff

99 **F** longer stroke, still sep. *pp* *mf* longer stroke, still sep. *mf* longer stroke, still sep. *mf* *accel.*

105 *pp* *pp* *pp* (Violin I) *pp*

111 *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp* *legato* *legato* *legato* *legato* $\text{♩} = 160$

117 *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *molto accel.* *pesante-ub* *f* *f* *f* *f* **G** $\text{♩} = 200$

123 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = 133$
full and warm

full and warm

full and warm

full and warm

128 *dolce, cantabile*
mf

mf

mf

mf

134 *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

f *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

f *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

f *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

141 *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

147 **I**

151

156

sempre forte

161

molto rall.

(Violin I)

166 J ♩ = ♩ = 100

ff

169

174 *mp*

180 *pp* *al tasto* **K** *al tasto*

Appendix B

entr'acte

{ minuet & trio }

CAS

sweeping $\text{♩} = 92$

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

6

1.

2.

A

11

pp

f

pp

f

pp

f

pp

f

32

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

ppp

mf

(ppp)

1. 4

2.

37

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p

39

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p

p

f

pizz

2

2

2

2

{ like granits - maybe slightly slower than before }

42 $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ **D**

Vln. I *pizz.*
p

Vln. II *pizz.*
p

Vla. *pizz.*
p

Vc. *pizz.*
p

49

Vln. I *mf* *mp*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. *mf* *mp*

57

Vln. I *f* *mf* *ff*

Vln. II *f* *mf* *ff*

Vla. *f* *mf* *ff*

Vc. *f* *mf* *ff*

193

start accelerando independently, going out of phase

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

197

like sandpaper arpegg

light finger pressure, sliding up

indeterminate number of these whispered arpeggios -- just keep going until you've reached the top

tacet to end

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

201

like recalling fragments of an old tune or story

feel free to roll chords extra luxuriously when necessary for technical, or aesthetic, reasons

Vc.

204

Vc.

206

Vc.

Appendix C

*commissioned by the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts
for the Aizuri Quartet*

Blueprint

Caroline Shaw / 2016

like a marble bust
stoic & grand & still
but with a little wink or some side-eye

$\angle = 90^\circ$

color begins to emerge

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in a four-staff format. The first three staves are for vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor/Bass), and the fourth staff is for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 13/8. The score is divided into six measures. The first five measures show the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The sixth measure is a final chord for the piano. The piano part features a variety of dynamics, including *p* (piano), *f* (forte), *pp* (pianissimo), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piano part also includes a triplet of eighth notes in the sixth measure. The vocal parts are written in a simple, melodic style, with the lyrics 'The Rose Tree' written below the Tenor/Bass staff.

[illegible]

13 *extravagantly Schumannesque*

f *ff* *mp*

3 *5* *3* *pizz*

A

[illegible]

22

mf *ff* *accel.* *pizz* *dim.*

mf *ff* *pizz* *dim.*

mp *ff* *pizz* *dim.*

mp *ff* *pizz* *dim.*

27 arco pont., but going to ord.... $\text{♩} = 160$

mp pp

ppont., but going to ord.... mp pp

ppont., but going to ord.... mp pp

ppont., but going to ord.... mp pp

B Tim Burtonesque warped technicolor Western

33 ord. flat-ish

ord. sharp-ish

ord. flat-ish

ord. sharp-ish

39 norm. flat-ish norm. (fl.) norm. (fl.)

mp

mp

mp

mp

45 *norm.*

f *pp* *f* *mf*

50 *dim.* *pizz* *f* *dim.* *pizz* *f*

ff *ff* *ff*

♩ = 80

55 *goopy rallentando*
to a lugubrious half-speed,
like wearing heavy wool
molto rall.

♩ = 80

pp *arco* *pp* *f* *pizz* *arco* *pizz*

pp *pp* *f* *pizz* *f* *pizz* *f*

pp *pp* *ff* *f*

62

arco pizz arco

67

pizz

71

[D] pizz arco pizz arco

76

arco

3

3

3

3

3

3

81

pizz

arco

pizz

86

brunchy gossip, lots of unexpected accents

brunchy gossip, lots of unexpected accents

cantabile

cantabile

arco

arco

mf

mf

3

3

213 *quiet but strong.*
♩ = 90

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

pizz

221 *Quaker meeting vibe with the occasional 16th-run interruption, gradually becoming more and more ecstatic*

dim. *dim.* *dim.* *dim...* *p* *p* *p* *p*

6 5 5

226

6 6 6 3 5 6 6 5

229 $\text{♩} = 130$ *gangbusters* 

237

246

256

ff

261 *fabulously flailing*

perfectly poised

pizz
p

pizz
p

pizz
p

pizz
p

Appendix D

SECHS QUARTETTE
VON
L. VAN BEETHOVEN.

Beethovens Werke.

Serie 6. № 42.

Dem Fürsten von Lobkowitz gewidmet.

Quartett N° 6.

Op. 18. № 6.

Allegro con brio.

[illegible]

First system of musical notation, measures 1-8. The system consists of four staves (treble, alto, tenor, and bass). Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, *f*, and *ppp*. The key signature has two flats.

Second system of musical notation, measures 9-16. The system consists of four staves. Dynamics include *pp*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *p*. The key signature has two flats.

Third system of musical notation, measures 17-24. The system consists of four staves. Dynamics include *p*, *decresc.*, *pp*, and *cresc.*. The key signature has two flats.

Fourth system of musical notation, measures 25-32. The system consists of four staves. Dynamics include *p*, *f*, and *pp*. The key signature has two flats.

Fifth system of musical notation, measures 33-40. The system consists of four staves. Dynamics include *f*, *p*, and *pp*. The key signature has two flats.

Adagio. Allegretto.

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems of three staves each. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Adagio.' and changes to 'Allegretto.' at measure 122. The score includes various dynamic markings: *sf* (sforzando), *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *decresc.* (decrescendo), and *pp* (pianissimo). The piece concludes with a repeat sign at the end of measure 127.

R. 42

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