



Imperatives

for string quartet

Part for violin II

Nigel Morgan

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About The Piece

Imperatives are ‘doing words’ that carry with them a task, a situation, a request, a dream. Creative practitioners are keen on such words and often use them to initiate a starting point, an emotional state, a characteristic. Their very singularity can lend an elegance, economy and directness to an artist’s thoughts and actions. Visual artists use them frequently as titles, authors too, but musicians perhaps less frequently.

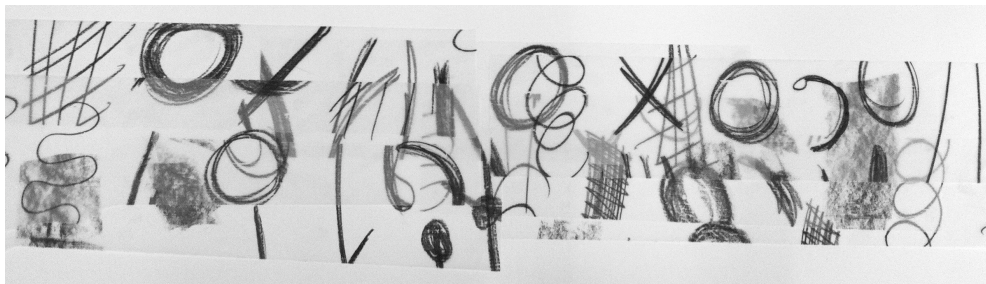
In a similar spirit the composer has gathered a list of imperatives, and choosing *isolate* from the list, reacted to it by deciding to ‘isolate’ one instrument from the quartet as a soloist. The structural device of the isorhythm is employed. Beloved of vocal composers of the 14th Century, Lassus, Dunstable, and Okeghem, the isorhythmic motet became a popular form. This was often based on a plainchant that acted as a thread onto which further threads (parts / voices) were stitched or woven. Thus the first movement of *Imperatives* was created to feature a middle section in which the second violin holds the thread against a background weave of a string trio. The outer movements ‘look’ similar, and indeed in their rhythmic ordering they are. But the pitch content is entirely different.

The idea of a solo set against a backdrop of the remaining instruments in a quartet is the dominant theme of the entire work. Each instrument takes a turn as a solo presence against a variety of different backdrops. The movement titles, imperative words, are mostly spur of the moment inventions devised to hang the musical content, but not necessarily to drive it contextually.

The threads from which the first three movements are devised come from random generations of groups of integers. When converted to pitch, they form an asemic text of music. The word *asemic* is used to mean having no semantic content. The letters that make up the pitch collections are known but their ordering, as words and sonic phrases, is mysterious and seemingly beyond reason. In this I have been much influenced by the speculative ordering of found objects into ‘a language’ by the artist Alice Fox.

*silk sleeve ah no sound
jade courtyard ah dust grow
empty room cold and still
fallen leaf lean on doubled door-bar
peer-after that beautiful woman ah
where find
feel my heart not-yet at-ease*

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
With dust the marble courtyard filled.
No footfalls echo on the floor,
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door
For she, my pride, my lovely one is lost,
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.



The final movement departs from asemic text to that of a celebrated poem from the Chinese. This poem remembers the deceased courtesan Lu-fu-jen beloved of the Han emperor Wu-ti. In his grief he once ordered a sorcerer with an imperative: to *summon* her back to life. His poem is about what is missing, about silence and stillness, emptiness, dust and fallen leaves, and above all an anguished longing. The ‘thread’ is the text itself, first in Chinese (with a character by character translation) then in two translations into English, by H.A.Giles and by Arthur Waley.

The sound of her silk skirt has stopped.
On the marble pavement dust grows.
Her empty room is cold and still.
Fallen leaves are piled against the doors.
Longing for that lovely lady
How can I bring my aching heart to rest?

Whilst solo / background is a constant this duality is amplified by a simplicity of rhythmic utterance. In each movement there are only ever two rhythmic strands present at any one time, and when the quartet do play *tutti*, there is usually just one strand, the music appearing to be choral-like, four voices singing / playing as one.

罗袂兮无声
玉墀兮尘生。
虚房冷而寂寞
落叶依于重扃。
望彼美之女兮安得
感余心之未宁。

The music is dedicated to the Spektral Quartet of Chicago, USA, one of the brightest stars in the firmament of quartet playing.

Notes for performance

The pitch range or compass for each instrument sits by and large within that found in Baroque music for stringed instruments. The music is either homogeneous in four parts or features a solo instrument with accompaniment. Dynamics and expressive markings have been kept to a minimum to encourage performers to view such instructions as a guide, no more. In the first and third movements the solos for 2nd violin and viola respectively might be played with a Baroque simplicity of bowing action, short precise bow strokes and articulation, little or no vibrato. The second and fourth movements suggest a more expressive and full-bodied tone and delivery.

I – Isolate

1763, from French *isolé* "isolated" (17c.) + English *-ate*. The French word is from Italian *isolato*, from Latin *insulatus* "made into an island," from *insula* "island." The French word was used at first in English (*isole*, also *isole'd*, c. 1750), then after *isolate* became an English word, *isolated* became its past participle.

II – Dispel

c. 1400, *dispelen*, from Latin *dispellere* "drive apart," from *dis-* "away" + *pellere* "to drive, push". Since the meaning is "to drive away in different directions" it should not have as an object a single, indivisible thing (you can dispel suspicion, but not an accusation).

III – Imbibe

late 14c., from Old French *imbiber*, *embiber* "to soak into," from Latin *imbibere* "absorb, drink in, inhale," from assimilated form of *in-* "into, in, on, upon" + *bibere* "to drink," related to *potare* "to drink," from PIE **po(i)-* "to drink". Figurative sense of "mentally drink in" (knowledge, ideas, etc.) was the main one in classical Latin, first attested in English 1550s.

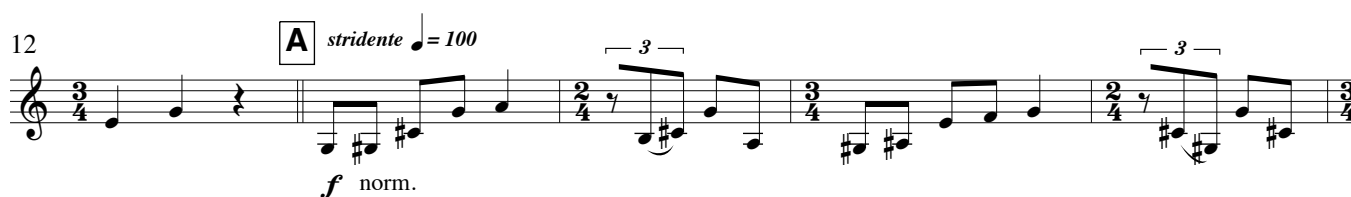
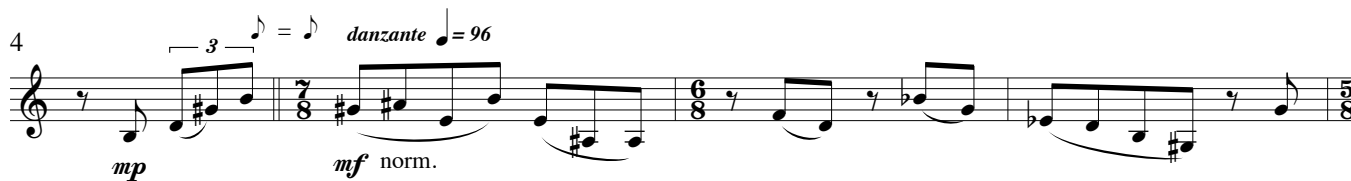
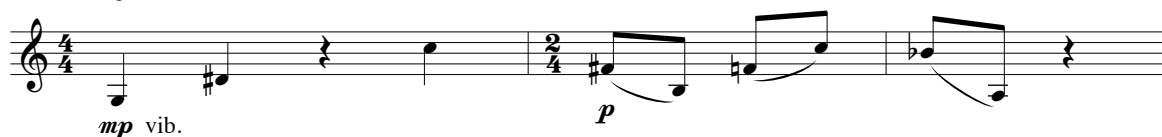
IV – Summon

c. 1200, "call, send for, ask the presence of," especially "call, cite, or notify by authority to be at a certain place at a certain time" (late 13c.), from Anglo-French *sumunre* and directly from Old French *somonre*, variant of *sumundre*, *somondre* "summon," from Vulgar Latin *summundre* "to call, cite," from Latin *summonere* "hint to, remind privately," from *sub* "under" + *monere* "warn, advise". In part also from Medieval Latin use of *summonere*. Meaning "arouse, excite to action".

I : isolate

intimo ♩ = 60

Violin II



42 **E** *riservato* ♩ = 55
solo
♩ = 55
mp non legato

45
mf

47
mp *mf*

50
p

54
mf con convinzione

57
p lontano subito pp

62 **F** *intimo* ♩ = 60
mp vib. *p* *mp norm* *danzante* ♩ = 96

67
mf

71
mp *p vib.*

74 **G** *stridente* ♩ = 110
f norm

78

mf *mp* *p* *molto ritard*

83 **H**intimo ♩ = 60

mp vib. p

The musical score for measures 83-86 of 'Hintimo' is written on a single staff. Measure 83 is in 4/4 time, marked *mp vib.*, and contains a half note G, a half note A, and a whole rest. Measure 84 is in 4/4 time, marked *p*, and contains a half note B, a half note C# with a sharp sign, and a whole rest. Measure 85 is in 6/8 time, marked *p*, and contains a half note D, a quarter note E, and a quarter note F. Measure 86 is in 9/16 time, marked *p*, and contains a half note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B.

86

86

9/16

3/4

10/16

4/4

mp

The musical score for measures 86-90 is written on a single staff. Measure 86 is in 9/16 time and contains a half note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by a half note A4, and a half note B4. Measure 87 is in 3/4 time and contains a half note G4 with a flat sign, followed by a half note F4 with a flat sign, and a half note E4. Measure 88 is in 10/16 time and contains a half note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by a half note F4 with a flat sign, and a half note E4. Measure 89 is in 4/4 time and contains a half note G4 with a flat sign, followed by a half note F4 with a flat sign, and a half note E4. Measure 90 is in 4/4 time and contains a half note G4 with a sharp sign, followed by a half note F4 with a flat sign, and a half note E4. The dynamic marking *mp* is placed below measure 87.

89

ritard. *stridente* ♩ = 110

f *mp* *f* *sub.* *mp*

93

mf *f* *ff* *f* *ritardando*

97 *contenuto* = 80 *ritard. e pesante* *quasi fanfara* = 60
mp *mf* *p* *mp*

101

ff *p calmo*

II : dispel

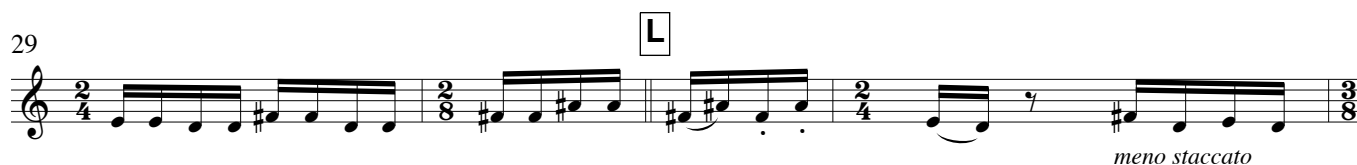
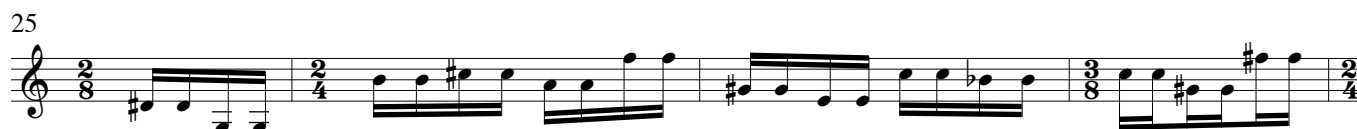
potentoso e magico ♩ = 60

quasi sul pont

Violin II

pp

staccato sempre



meno staccato



38 M

43

47

52 N

58 O

63

68

72 P

77

81

86 Q

90

mp

p

pp flautando


mf

p


mp


p

III : imbibe

spensierato ed energico  = 190

Violin II

spensierato ed energico  = 190



mp *p*

6

The first system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' consists of six measures. The first measure is in 3/8 time, marked *f* (forte), and contains a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure is in 3/8 time, marked *mp* (mezzo-piano), and contains a quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The third measure is in 3/8 time and contains a whole rest. The fourth measure is in 4/4 time, marked *f*, and contains a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, and a quarter note B4. The fifth measure is in 4/4 time and contains a whole rest. The sixth measure is in 3/4 time and contains a quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4.

11

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef. It begins with a 2/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some beamed eighth notes. There are two key signatures: one with one sharp (F#) and one with two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The dynamics are marked 'ppp' (pianissimo) and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The score ends with a 5/8 time signature.

15

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single five-line staff. It begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of the following notes: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. The notes are grouped into four pairs, each connected by a slur. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The system ends with a double bar line.

20

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The melody starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, followed by a mezzo-piano (*mp*) section. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, along with rests and phrasing slurs. The piece concludes with a final cadence.

25

The first system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' consists of seven measures. It begins with a treble clef, a 7/8 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure contains a half note G4 and a quarter note A4, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The second measure contains a half note B4 and a quarter note C5. The third measure contains a half note D5 and a quarter note E5. The fourth measure contains a half note F#5 and a quarter note G5. The fifth measure contains a half note A5 and a quarter note B5, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The sixth measure contains a half note C6 and a quarter note D6. The seventh measure contains a half note E6 and a quarter note F#6, marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The system concludes with a 4/4 time signature.

30

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The piece is divided into five measures, each with a different time signature: 4/4, 2/4, 7/8, 4/4, and 3/4. The melody begins with a whole rest in the first measure. The second measure starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The third measure, marked mezzo-forte (*mf*), continues the melodic line. The fourth measure, marked pianissimo (*ppp*), features a half note and a quarter note. The final measure concludes the piece. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the tempo is indicated as 'Moderato'.

34

[illegible]

40

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The score begins with a piano introduction marked 'p'. The first line of the melody is marked 'mp' and includes a 'Vivace' section. The second line is marked 'p' and includes a 'Tutti' section. The third line is marked 'mf' and includes a 'Forte' section. The fourth line is marked 'f' and includes a 'Piano' section. The score ends with a double bar line.

47

mp *mf* *mf*

53

ppp *mp* *mf* *f*

58

ff *p* *mp* *intimo*

65

p

70

pp *mp* *mp vib.* *p* *pp* *mp*

76

f *mp* *f* *mp*

82

Vc.
p *come prima* *p* *come prima* *pp*

86

pp *ppp*

91

f *ff*

95 Va. Vc.

pp *f*

99

p *f* *p* V

104

pp

108

ppp *f*

113

f

117

pp *f* *ff*

122

p *mp* W

126

dolce *pp* *p lontano* *pp*

131

p *mp* *mf* *f*

135

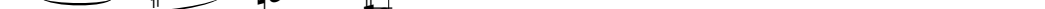
f *mf*

140

mp *p legato e sostenuto*

145

149



154

7/8 G A B \flat C

5/8

3/4 G A B

4/4

mp

158

Example 158 shows measures 158-162. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 2/4, then to 7/8, and back to 2/4. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some measures containing rests. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). A crescendo hairpin is present in measure 159, and a decrescendo hairpin is in measure 161.

IV : summon

Violin II

malincolia ♩ = 40

p

pp

5

9

pp

ppp

14

19

pp

23

26

p

pp

29

ppp

pp

35

poco ritard.

39

AA ♩ = 40

pp *intimo*

p

