

JAMES W. PARKER

B O O M T O W N

FOR VIOLIN AND ELECTRONICS

Program Note

BOOMTOWN is a piece about what happens to communities when industries close up shop and hit the road. It is an echo through the halls of shuttered factories and the cold shafts of vacant mines, a memory of the lost identities of strong willed and stronger hearted people of the world, and a song of hope. As a native Texan, the story of a “boomtown” is a common one. Oil or natural gas is found in an isolated community far from the big city, then industry moves in and brings jobs and prosperity to the community. Eventually the resources dry up, and since there’s no more money to be made, companies pack up and move out. The piece serves as a reflection of a community at the beginning of the difficult process of rebuilding and redefining itself.

Written for Sasha Yakub as part of the 2020 1:2:1 String Intensive

Performance Instructions

In *BOOMTOWN*, I ask performers to take some loose instructions in the score and spin them into a piece of music. The instructions are left intentionally vague in some ways, and intentionally specific in others. You are encouraged to make the piece your own and interpret the instructions however you see fit.

Fiddling

The roots of *BOOMTOWN* are in the old time fiddle tradition, in which almost every note is a double stop. Many double stops are notated, but feel free to experiment with other combinations that might come to mind.

Electronics

The included software is required for performance of *BOOMTOWN*. Details on setup and installation can be found later in this document. The software applies different effects to the performer's sound in each section. The software "listens" for certain pitches to know to move on to the next section. These are indicated by a circled notehead in the score. Be sure not to play this pitch until you are ready to move to the next section. When you are ready to move on, be sure to play the indicated pitch as a single note, not as a double stop.

Scordatura

The first and second strings should be tuned down a whole step from A and E to G and D.

Three Lines

Since scordatura can be very confusing, the piece is notated in three different ways. The top staff is in tab notation, with the bottom line indicating the low G string (4th string), the second line from the bottom indicates the low D string (3rd string), and so on.

The second staff is the piece written as it sounds, indicated by the word (sounding) written underneath "Violin" on the left side of the system.

If you were to ignore that fact that your strings are tuned differently than normal and you played the bottom staff, what is written in the middle staff (the "sounding" staff) would sound.

Fulcrum pulses

This is a technique described by fiddler Bruce Molsky in [this video](#). Essentially, under one bow you play one long note and rhythmically dip the bow so that it plays a shorter note on an adjacent string. I am not a fiddle player, and Bruce explains the video much more eloquently than I can.

BOOMTOWN

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A

Airy, ethereal sounds using only open strings, exploring what's available in this tuning using double stops whenever possible. Consider harmonics, sul tasto, sul pont., flautando, and any other suitable techniques. When you're ready to move on, play an A on the 4th string. The software listens for that frequency to know when to start the next section.

Violin (GDGD)

Violin (sounding)

Violin

B

Play these gestures slowly and plaintively, repeated as many times as you choose and in whatever order you choose. You are encouraged to add in whatever embellishments suit you; mordents, trills, passing tones, suspensions, harmonics or glissandi are all welcome.

Vln. (GDGD)

Vln. (sounding)

Vln.

To transition into the next section, play this lick in your own time. The software is listening for that A# in order to move on to the next section.

11

Vln. (GDGD)

Vln. (sounding)

Vln.

This section is a little bit of a game. The goal is play the repeated bar (sounding B, A, G, F-Sharp) as many times as you can without repeating the same rhythmic pattern. each repeat should still only last four beats. You can exit the repeat any time you want. Any time you play the last two bars of the section, you can decide to move on to letter D.

C

♩ = 80

Vln. (GDGD)

3 4 2 0 4 | 4 2 0 4 | 4 2 0 4 | 4 5 5 0

4 5 5 4 | 4 5 4 | 4 5 4 | 4 5 0

Vln. (sounding)

14

Vln.

D

Similar to letter B, but with a bit more movement and energy in the lines.

Vln. (GDGD)

0 2 4 2 0 | 2 4 4 0 | 0 2 | 0 2 4 2 0 4 | 0 0 0 2 4 2

0 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 | 4 2 | 0 0 0 0 0 0 | 4 5 0 0 0 0

Vln. (sounding)

18

Vln.

23

Vln. (GDGD)

0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 | 0 2 4 2 0 | 2 0 0 0 | 0 2 4 2 0

0 2 4 2 | 0 2 4 2 | 0 0 0 0 | 0 4 4 2 | 0 0 0 0 0

Vln. (sounding)

23

Vln.

28 ♩ = 80 To transition into the next section, play this lick in your own time. The software is listening for the A# in order to move on to the next section.

Vln. (GDGD)

4 5 5 5 4 2 0 0 3 2 0 3 4 0 2 0

Vln. (sounding)

28

Vln.

E Similar to Letter C, but experimenting even more with the rhythms. Even though things might get more syncopated, try to make the lines sound as smooth as possible. Also begin experimenting with alternative double stops.

Vln. (GDGD)

3 4 2 0 0 0 4 2 0 5 4 4 5 5 0

Vln. (sounding)

29

Vln.

Using the "Fulcrum Pulses" technique, play through this chord progression, occasionally adding in harmonic gestures on the G string (similar to the introduction). Since you can only play two notes at a time, move freely between the notes in each chord. Each chord can last for as long or as short as you'd like it to.

Vln. (GDGD)

7 4 4 0 0

6 4 3 0 2

5 5 3 0 2

0 0 0 0 0

2

Vln. (sounding)

33

Vln.

G

Repeat the following progression ad lib. alternating between long held notes, fulcrum pulses, and occasional references to your favorite moments in the piece.

Vln.
(GDGD)

0	0	2	4	4	0	0		0	2	2	3	3	3	5
5	4	4	4	2	2	0	0	4	4	4	3	3	2	0

Vln.
(sounding)

38

Vln.