James W. Parker

BOOMTOWN

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 alone, 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, respectively.

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. Up request you can have a score with any combination of these staves.

<u>**Fulcrum pulses**</u>
This is a technique described by fiddler Bruce Molsky in <u>this video</u>. Essentially, under one bow you play one long note and rhythmically dip the bow so that is plays a shorter note on an adjacent string. I am not a fiddle player, and in the video Bruce explains much more eloquently than I can.

<u>A Rundown Of Each Section</u>

Letter A:

<u>Violin:</u>
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.

<u>Electronics:</u>
-Drones on G and D

Letter B:

<u>Violin:</u>
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. To transition to the next section, play the lick in the last two bars without worrying about the rhythm, singing slowly. The software is listening for that A# in order to move on to the next section.

<u>Electronics:</u>
-Drones on a G pentatonic scale
-Delay with Reverb

Letter C:

<u>Violin:</u>
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 4 beat rhythmic pattern. Once you repeat a rhythmic pattern, you have to move on. You can play the last two bars of the section whenever you want, and anytime

you play those two bars, you can decide to play the G on the open 4th string to move on to the next section.

Electronics:
-Drones on a few octaves of Gs
-Slow chorus effect: several iterations of the performer played at different speeds.

Letter D:

Violin:
Similar to letter B, but with a bit more movement and energy in the lines. In order to transition to Letter E, play the last two bars in time.

Electronics:
Low G and D drones
Slow chorus effect

Letter E:

Violin:
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. Let yourself go wild!

Electronics:
Drones on a ton of notes
Delay w/ Reverb

Letter F:

Violin:
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.

Electronics:
Low G drone
Slow chours

Letter G:

<u>Violin:</u>
Repeat the progression ad lib. alternating between long held notes, fulcrum pulses, and occasional references to your favorite moments in the piece.

<u>Electronics:</u>
Several Reverb-y Delays

Score

B O O M T O W N

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F Fulcrum Pulses

Vln.
(sounding)

Vln.

G Coda

Vln.
(sounding)

Vln.