

Two Etudes

solo viola

Michael Scott Cuthbert

1999

These etudes were written in the summer of 1999 while I was researching *Ars Nova* music in Florence, Italy. They exist in separate versions for viola and violin. The dense polyphony and rapid changes in average note duration in these pieces are influences of the music of Italy's fourteenth century. The sort of extreme virtuoso playing at the expense of nuance to be heard at the many student recitals in the Florentine summer inspired some of the wilder technical considerations of the etudes. These are study pieces for the techniques of our era.

The first etude builds in intensity through continually increasing density of texture. The second etude contrasts sharply defined rhythmic placement, at the 64th note level, with often undefined pitch placement via glissandi. The trade-off between distinctly separated repeated notes and wild speed is largely left to the performer. In performance, the works may be preceded by three to five minutes of slow, sustained open strings (including double stops) played pianissimo to tune the ears back to hearing these fundamental resonances of the instrument. If played, this section should be labeled "aperitif" on the program.

Notes indicated in parentheses during glissandi indicate only approximate pitches the violinist might play at that point in the measure. In the case of the double glissandi of the second movement (m. 46 ff.), the parenthetical notes represent the physical limit of the glissandi and are not expected to be sounded.

The entire work could be amplified by means of either a contact microphone placed near the bridge or two microphones, one near the bridge and the other near the nut, attached to spatially separated speakers to draw out the difference between the left-hand pizzicato notes and the arco and normal pizzicato notes.

The pieces should be played without break, though a slight pause to remove rosin from the fingerboard or oil from the bow may be necessary after the first etude.

I am grateful to Rolf Schulte for assistance with an earlier version of this work.

for Sarah Darling

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September 1999

Molto rubato (♩ = c. 40)

I

4 *pp* pizz. gliss lower D-flat to G *mp* arco II *pp* *mp* *pp*

8 *mf* III IV III *mp* (echo) arco all notes

12 *f* pizz. arco *mp* *pp* *p* *pp* *mf*

16 III *f* *ff* sul tasto

20 *f* pizz. arco poco piu mosso *mp* *ff* on fingerboard, moving higher throughout

23 *mf* *ff* sul tasto al fine *f* *ff*

26 *pp* *fff* faint, ethereal; dead tone bow other side of fingering! near nut

I II barely separated; wild III II III IV

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II

As fast as it looks (♩ = 84-112)

f

4

7

10

13

16

19

23

mf (sub.)

fff

mp ff (sub.) *mp*

pp

sfz sfz sfz mp

II III IIII arco II III I: + I: +

27 non-accented

sfz *sfz* *sfz* (sim.)

30

f *p*

33

36

bowed gliss.

40

43 half sul pont. m.o.

ff

46

49

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articulate and accent only stemmed notes

52

56

60

64

68

72

75

subito *p* (echo)

fff

gliss. all four strings, bow only strings indicated