Playscapes for Piano Trio

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Abstract

*Playscapes* is a piano trio of an approximate duration of 43 minutes. It is in three movements: Playscape I, II, and III. The top range of the piano (G7-C8) is prepared in such a way that these notes become essentially a percussive effect. *Playscapes* explores a concept of “Musical Activity” – areas of music where simple rules are established and create a context wherein anomalies can occur. Playscape I is a series of these musical activities. In Playscape II, one musical activity goes on for a long time. In Playscape III, two musical activities alternate. In addition, a general trend towards noise occurs throughout *Playscapes*.
Acknowledgments:

Thank you to Dr. Omar Daniel for being an excellent supervisor throughout this process and Dr. Catherine Nolan for her insightful comments as a second reader.

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Thanks to Annie Castillo for providing guidance with piano writing and generally providing emotional and editorial support.

Thanks to all my friends who show up to my contemporary music concerts, go with the flow, and remind me how fun and crazy all this contemporary music stuff really is.

Thank you to Dr. Andrew Staniland, Martin Arnold and Linda Catlin Smith who have all provided me with guidance that allowed me to write this piece.
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PLAYSCAPES

For Piano Trio

James Lowrie
Playscapes for piano trio

Ca. 43 Minutes

Each movement has an alternate title if played alone

Playscape I – Ca. 21 minutes
Alternate title: Playscape

Playscape II – Ca. 14 minutes
Alternate title: Possessing a weapon has made me bashful in this economy of self-awareness

Playscape III – Ca. 8 minutes
Alternate title: Small Museum

Program note:

I remember in my teens, growing up in Belleville, I hung out on playscapes because there was nothing better to do.

When I moved to Toronto for university I figured there would be no more playscapes. But, I was wrong. There were playscapes all around the downtown if you knew where to look. On summer nights, I would head out very late, with an audiobook to lay around in a playscape. Sometimes I ran into other adult playscrapers (that’s what you call them), who were usually couples. That annoyed me because I liked to think I was the only person who did this, also I didn’t like that they were turning playscaping into some sort of couple’s retreat. We had to keep the playscape sacred. On the other hand, when I did see someone by themselves, it was worrying, like, what’s that guy’s problem? Sometimes, the comedians and I would go hang out on playscapes and that was okay, they understood the spirit of the activity.

At some point in my thirties, it just got weird. I figured I would have to wait until I had my own children, who I would use as an excuse to build a playscape in the backyard, assuming I ever made enough money to have a backyard.

When I turned 50, I had to face the reality that I probably wouldn’t have kids. Even still, I built a playscape in my backyard.

Even now, in my retirement, I still head out on summer nights with an audiobook (which I can barely hear over the damn tinnitus) and stare up into the night sky and think about what’s left to be done.

Notes for performers:

*b* dynamic

The *b* dynamic is for when an instrument is to balance, in terms of psychoacoustics, with another instrument. This is used to account for the vagaries of dynamics when it comes to mixed modes of playing with extended techniques or pizzicato. For example, the cello is playing pizzicato starting at bar 188 to the end of Playscape I. The piano and violin are given the “*b* Vc.” instruction. This means, “the piano and violin are to play at a dynamic level so that the listener perceives them equally to the cello”. As the cello is playing forte pizzicato, this will likely be around mezzo-piano.
**Accidentals:** Accidentals sustain through bar on selected pitch. Courtesy accidentals are sometimes included. These are presented without parentheticals.

**Piano**

**Required Preparation:** The G7 - C8 range of the piano is to be blocked out with masking tape in order to create a sound that is about 25% pitch and 75% noise. Whenever these notes are played the sustain pedal should be down, unless otherwise specified. The making must be done accurately so that the F#7 should sound normally. This will NOT be notated in the score in any way.

**Strings**

**Bow bridge:** This should be a quiet noise effect without any pitch. This can also be moved in and out of imperceptibly from regular bowing, as if the pitched material is being subsumed into the noise. The main example of this being the noise in the violin in bars 70-71.

**Noise on the strings:** This should be a quiet noise effect without any pitch. Cover all 4 strings high up with your palm, and then bow III and IV with a fast speed and light bow pressure (flautando). This effect can be combined with tremolo.

**Ghost flautando:** A technique that sounds 80% noise and 20% pitch. Closely related to the "noise on string" technique. Finger the written pitch at half pressure (like a harmonic), while also placing the other fingers behind that pitch to block any harmonic from being produced. Light bow pressure and fast speed should create the sound of a “ghost” note. Likely this will involve playing even lighter than you would think. It is an extremely quiet effect.

**Bow Positions**

MSP: Multo Sul Ponticello, almost on the bridge.
SP: Sul Ponticello
norm. or N: Normal bowing position
ST: Sul Tasto
MST: Multo Sul Tasto
Playscape I

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\[ \text{Getting ready for a long walk} \]

**Violin**

\[ \text{loud but not dramatic} \]

**Cello**

\[ \text{mp} \]

**Piano**

\[ \text{mp} \]
Maybe this is building to something, maybe it's just a place of rest.
Playscape I

79

Vln.

Vc.

83

Vln.

Vc.

pizz.  arco

87

Vln.

Vc.

91

Vln.

Vc.
Intricate but relaxed, like someone building a watch as a hobby
It's light and fun but it becomes hard work over time.

b. Vc. (mp)
Playscape I

Vln.

Vc.

Minimalista!

lots of pedal to end of section

Vln.

Vc.

Vln.

Vc.

Vln.

Vc.

17 Playscape I
 Playscape I

Vln.

Vc.

360

365

369

374
\[ \frac{56}{4} \text{ Flexible, rubato, cantabile, patient} \]

Some melodic fragments suggested throughout with slurs, these are just a starting point for shaping ideas. Dynamics are to be employed subtly. Feel free to add in more dynamic shaping and articulations throughout. Subtle pedaling is also encouraged.
37

becoming a bit more urgent, push forward

53

pedal all As until bar 64

64

Vln.

Vc.
q = ~72 subito

\[ \text{playscape II} \]
Playscape III

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Violin

Cello

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137
Vln.
Vc.

137

141
Vln.
Vc.

141

pizz. arco

145
Vln.
Vc.

145

pizz. arco
Curriculum Vitae

Name: James Lowrie

Post Secondary Education:
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2009-2013 BMus

University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2017-2019 MMus

Related Experience:
Soundstreams Emerging Composer Workshop
Soundstreams, Toronto, 2019

Array Music Young Composers Workshop
Array Music, Toronto, 2018

Tuckamore Young Composers Workshop
Memorial University, Toronto, 2018

Montreal Creative Music Lab
Montreal, 2018

Conferences:
2019 North American Saxophone Alliance
University of Western Ontario, 2019, Presentation of New Work

The 21st Century Guitar
University of Ottawa, 2019, Presentation of New Work

Related Experience:
Graduate Teaching Assistantship
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