

GRADUATION RECITAL PROGRAM

Sunday, March 24, 2024, 1pm
From the studio of Dr. Arlan N. Schultz
University of Lethbridge Recital Hall (W570)
Jonathan Alexander, Composition

String Trio (2024)
“Valse Rêverie”

Alayna Mcneil (Violin)
Brenna LeMay (Cello)
Jonathan Alexander (Piano)

Wind Quintet (2023)
I. “Prelude”
II. “The Valley”

Brynn Norton (Flute & Piccolo)
Ryan Miller (Clarinet Bb)
Sydney Stene (Clarinet Bb)
Ashlee Dowdle (Horn F)
Ellie Shifflet (Bassoon)

Scoring for Games
I. Interactive Game Music (2021)
II. Example Composer Pitch (2024)

Jonathan Alexander (Composition & Mixing)

Intermission

Brass Quintet
I. “Source” (2023)
II. “The Dip” (2022)
III. “Exit Strategy” (2023)

Rex Mulder (Trumpet I Bb)
Katie Tsujimoto (Trumpet II Bb)
Ty Bahl (Horn F)
Madelyn Appleton (Trombone)
Keely Evanoff (Tuba Eb)

Scoring for Animation (2021)
“Liv”

Paige McMorrow (Directing & Animation)
Jonathan Alexander (Composition)

Jazz Quartet (2024)
I. “Consolation”
II. “Pseudonym”

Cool Cats Combo:
Rayden Wong (Alto Saxophone)
Luke Povhe (Drum Set)
Jonathan Alexander (Piano)
Ian Saunders (Double Bass)



FACULTY OF
FINE ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

PROGRAM NOTES

String Trio (2024)

In my String Trio, I embarked on a dual mission: to delve into the world of guitar writing, a realm completely distinct from composing for other instruments, and to further hone my skills in writing for violin and cello.

The Waltz, titled “**Valse Rêverie**,” was envisioned as the first movement of a larger suite, and employed both quartal harmony and pentatonic melodies to create its musical world. The imagery that guided this composition was a winter scene in a central city park - a frozen lake, perhaps including the graceful reflections of dancing figure skaters.

Several musical influences informed this work. Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor provided a foundation, while Yasunori Nishiki's score for the video game Octopath Traveller offered a touch of contemporary inspiration. Additionally, the guitar works of Heitor Villa-Lobos, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and William Walton served as guiding lights for exploring the guitar's unique potential within the trio's texture.

Wind Quintet (2023)

My Wind Quintet (2023) arose from material I explored in a previous brass quintet. It became a vehicle for me to further explore my fascination with contrapuntal textures. Here, I prioritized the interplay of independent melodies within a modal framework, while opting to forego traditional key signatures. This piece, a stark contrast to its atonal and dissonant predecessor, took a more tuneful and playful approach, perhaps a response to the intensity of the earlier work. The influence of the English composer Malcolm Arnold, particularly his penchant for evoking imagery of seascapes, permeated the overall composition, as did imagery from “The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker,” as both movements were composed while watching Let's Play videos of this game in my periphery.

Delving deeper into the individual movements, the opening “**Prelude**” drew influence from the works of Gustav Holst, especially his “Song of the Blacksmith.” Movement II, “**The Valley**,” drew its bounding arpeggios from Justin Hurwitz's score for “La La Land,” while the opening solo and trio sprouted from my childhood recollections of watching the film “Kiki's Delivery Service” of which the scenes overlooking the town by the shore and the scenes featuring a laggardly dog were most inspiring.

Scores for Games (2021, 2024)

The First segment, “**Interactive Game Music (2021)**,” provides a few examples of my 2021 explorations into non-linear music for a 2D action side-scroller's forest level. Inspired by the likes of Gareth Coker and Christopher YOUNG, the scores I created aimed to evoke a sense of adventure with Lovecraftian undertones, with the music dynamically shifting according to the player's actions, adding layers for tension or fading out for boss encounters. This project proved to be a stepping stone in my development, as it introduced me to technical concepts like adaptive music, as well as new compositional concepts including melodic crossfading and pitch matching.

The boss battle segment marked my first attempt at formal structure. In crafting the boss battle, I particularly looked to Charlie Rosen, of the 8-Bit Big Band, for guidance. His arranging method, which utilizes plain english terms to map out musical form (e.g. “Introduction → Frenzy → Building Percussion → Main melody → Contrapuntal Section → Refrain...”), proved invaluable in structuring this piece. Apart from Rosen, Other influences included the likes of Stravinsky and

Prokofiev, especially in my experimentation with orchestrating divisi strings and the rhythmic concept of *perpetuum mobile*.

Finally, the second segment, "**Example Composer Pitch (2024)**," I took my first shot at an epic hybrid orchestral demo for a game company, aiming to capture the vibe of "Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart." This project became a cornerstone in my exploration of hybrid orchestral techniques, and helped to develop my first template in combining the traditional western orchestra with synthesizers.

Here, I experimented with layering orchestral and synthesized sounds to create new timbres and textures. This involved techniques like pairing snare drums with pulsing synth snares, harps enriching the low-end of an 808 kick, and layering flute and violin runs with a retro synth. Also, while not of a hybrid approach, a particularly satisfying orchestrational discovery in listening to the "Ratchet & Clank" soundtrack included fast dovetailing between the violas and violins, creating a rapid exchange of melodies inspired by the limitations of string players shifting positions, highlighting the importance of idiomatic writing.

Ultimately, While my pitch wasn't successful, this project solidified my approach to crafting hybrid orchestral templates and underscored the importance of experimentation within the creative process.

Brass Quintet (2023)

In my "Brass Quintet" (2023), I channeled the grindset energy of Silicon Valley's startup culture. The music reflects this, building from consonance to dissonance, with melodies shifting from simple modes to more complex structures. This piece was a breakthrough for me - my first multi-movement and notated concert work. It also established the compositional style I use to this day, drawing contrapuntal lines directly into a piano roll and interplaying the intervals between voices while paying little to no attention to chord symbols.

All three movements were composed in a generative manner, with each new idea growing from the last, written in a fugato style. Melodies weave together freely, guided by general voice-leading principles but not while completely ignoring intuition. I also considered other contrapuntal aspects and parameters via what may be called parametric counterpoint. Examples include how rhythmic motifs interact with one another, and ensuring that subsequent counterpoints to rhythmic motifs follow a smooth flow of kinetic energy.

Inspiration came from various composers, including Malcolm Arnold, Eugène Bozza, David Sampson, and György Ligeti. The structure is classic fast-slow-fast. Building on the aforementioned influence of Silicon Valley's startup culture, programmatically, Movement I, "**Source**," bursts with optimism, reflecting a startup founder's initial zeal. Movement II, "**The Dip**," is a slow, textural contrast that ventures into more unsettling harmonies. Finally, Movement III, "**Exit Strategy**," is a wild, percussive race to the finish, or a frantic escape from the founder's unruly creation.

"Liv" (2021)

Scoring "Liv," was my second opportunity to collaborate with an animation student from Sheridan College after a wildly exciting first foray into animation music for their group project the year prior. "Liv," is Paige McMorrow's thesis film about a friendly ghost girl in what many would describe as a style similar to Disney. This project honed my skills in composing quickly, a crucial ability in the fast-paced animation industry.

Inspired by the music in works like Disney's "Gravity Falls," and "Pixar's "Onward," I first developed a workflow to streamline the scoring process. This involved first establishing a tempo, harmonies, and melodies using a MIDI piano before immediately jumping into orchestration, while also spending a few extra moments adding chords upfront to save time and confusion in the long run. Harmonically, I explored modal changes to create emotional shifts within scenes. For example, the Lydian mode conveyed cheerfulness, while the Lydian augmented mode took on a darker, more

unsettling tone. Mixolydian offered a neutral feeling, and the Ionian mode signaled a return to normalcy. Modal mixture, like blending Aeolian and Ionian modes, helped evoke a sense of success and acceptance. By relying on modal changes within the key of D, I avoided frequent key changes, further expediting the composition process.

Jazz Quartet (2024)

In my Jazz Quartet pieces, "**Consolation**" and "**Pseudonym**," I explored the art of guided improvisation through lead sheets. Both pieces share a fascination with the diminished four-note chord as a source of harmonic movement. However, unlike in my Brass Quintet, while diminished harmony is indeed used as inspiration, I deliberately avoided the diminished scale here. Instead, the diminished chord served as a foundation for harmonic progressions and leaping melodies, and I was deliberate not to fall into the habit of octatonic voice leading. Lastly, on a compositional note, these are the only two pieces in my graduation recital not composed entirely within a Digital Audio Workstation.

"**Consolation**" (ballad) drew inspiration from diverse sources, including John Coltrane's "Naima," the film scores of Jerry Goldsmith ("Chinatown") and Daniel Pemberton ("Motherless Brooklyn"), the Pokemon Diamond and Pearl title theme, and even the simple word imagery of the word "bogus." Here, I aimed to create a textural soundscape, encouraging the double bass to utilize bowed passages and the saxophone player to explore extended techniques and pitch bending. The piano is instructed to play simple four-note chords over an alternating Ab A pedal, gradually straying from overtones typically found in the harmonic series of these two pedals.

"**Pseudonym**" (uptempo) was a playful homage to some of my favorite musical influences. The opening lick was inspired by the anime "Great Pretender," while the free jazz spirit echoed the sounds of "Gundam Thunderbolt." Traces of Ornette Coleman, Hiromi Uehara, and even the "JoJo's Bizarre Adventure" theme can also be found woven into the fabric of the piece. Admittedly, this piece may have simply been an indulgence in my favorite licks and progressions, particularly a sequence of four dominant seventh chords arpeggiating the notes of a diminished seventh chord.

