JEREMY GILL

CAPRICCIO

Parker Quartet

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Part I

1. Arsis 1:53
2. Misterium tremendum (sonata da chiesa) 5:45
3. Up, down 1:32
4. La chitarra 1:31
5. Tip, balance, frog; wood 1:07
6. Heterophonic/homophonic interlude 2:57
7. Colors: normal, fingerboard, bridge [solo viola] 2:06
8. Nodes 1:23
9. Two at once (C. Farina) [solo violin 1, tutti] 1:07
10. Eros 5:18
11. Up, up.., down, down... 2:47
12. Pressure 0:29
13. Monophonic interlude 1:26
14. Normal, mute, mute [violins 1 and 2, viola] 1:22
15. Across the strings [violin 2, viola, cello] 1:11

Part II

16. Artificial harmonics 0:56
17. Pluck, snap 1:07
18. Stopped strings 1:05
19. Drumming [violins 1 and 2, cello] 0:57
20. Sonata da camera (J. de Berchem, B. Tromboncino) 5:58
21. The left hand 1:13
22. Open strings 0:32
23. On the string → off the string 1:20
24. Polyphonic interlude (J. S. Bach) 3:33
25. Multiple strings, plucked [solo cello] 2:22
26. Terpsichore [solo violin 2, tutti] 6:38
27. Thesis 1:53

- — 59:30 — -

Capriccio (2012)

Jeremy Gill's music has been lauded as "vividly colored" (The New York Times), "exhilarating" (The Philadelphia Inquirer), "intriguing" (The Washington Post), and "work of considerable intensity" (American Record Guide). He has composed in every genre—symphonies, concerti, chamber music, songs and song cycles, and opera—is an active pianist and conductor, and edited George Rochberg's posthumous *A Dance of Polar Opposites*, published by University of Rochester Press. His music has been commissioned by the Dallas Symphony, Concert Artists Guild, Chamber Music America, and the Lois Lehrman Grass Foundation, among others. He has received awards and honors from Meet the Composer, the League of American Orchestras, BMI, and ASCAP, and he has enjoyed residencies and fellowships with the MacDowell Colony, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and American Opera Projects. *www.jeremytgill.com*

Formed in 2002, the Grammy Award-winning **Parker Quartet** (Daniel Chong, Ying Xue, Jessica Bodner, and Kee-Hyun Kim) has rapidly distinguished itself as one of the preeminent ensembles of its generation. The New York Times has hailed the quartet as "something extraordinary," The Washington Post has described them as having "exceptional virtuosity [and] imaginative interpretation," and The Boston Globe acclaims their "pinpoint precision and spectacular sense of urgency." The quartet began touring on the international circuit after winning the Concert Artists Guild Competition as well as the Grand Prix and Mozart Prize at the Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition in France. Chamber Music America awarded the quartet the prestigious biennial Cleveland Quartet Award for the 2009–2011 seasons. In 2014 the Parker Quartet joined the faculty of Harvard University's Department of Music as Blodgett Artists-in-Residence. *www.parkerquartet.com*

BACKGROUND

When the Parker Quartet and I began planning *Capriccio*, we had the idea to craft a major concert work from which movements could be extracted that would work well in educational settings, displaying various musical textures and techniques and specifically string-related techniques. My challenge was to compose a piece that "worked" in both capacities—excerpted as clear and concise educational examples and as a whole in concert performance.

An essay by the great Italian writer Italo Calvino—"The Structure of Orlando Furioso"—helped me find my way. Like several of its near contemporaries (it was first published in 1516), *Orlando Furioso*, though a poem, is also a proto-novel: essentially, a simple frame exists in which disparate tales are gathered together, and the result is a work of incredible breadth and variety contained within the simplest of conceits (in the case of *Orlando Furioso*, the "frame" is the Crusades). Reading about Ariosto's work led me to Jacquet de Berchem's setting of 94 of Ariosto's verses from *Orlando Furioso* in his *La favola di Orlando: il primo, secondo e terzo libro del capriccio* of 1561, the first work in history to bear the title "capriccio."

The capriccio and its history became the frame for my work because it encapsulates, through its major examples, all that music has been. For Jacquet de Berchem, it was a madrigal cycle on the verge of becoming opera (as the madrigal cycle did for Monteverdi a few decades later). For Bach, in his *Capriccio on the departure of his dearly beloved brother* of 1704, it was a programmatic work that included depictions of horns, laments, but also the learned aspects of fantasy through fugue. And for more recent composers it was both a stormy character piece (of Brahms's seven for solo piano, only one is in a major key) and a virtuoso concert etude (Paganini's *24 Caprices*). Paganini's rendering of the capriccio had its own predecessor in the strange and wonderful *Capriccio stravagante* of Carlo Farina (1627); through his programmatic depictions of mewing cats and barking dogs, Farina found it necessary to extend string technique to include, in this work, the first notated double-stops in Western music.

In my *Capriccio*, I reference a number of these works. In the ninth movement I quote Farina's double-stopping, and in the twentieth, I use some of Jacquet de Berchem's music (viewing the madrigal as early chamber music)—as well as some by his contemporary Bartolomeo Tromboncino (c. 1470–1535)—as bookends to my own music in an older style. I use one whole movement from Bach's 1704 *Capriccio*, but flesh it out considerably—Bach's version is bare, two-part counterpoint that a keyboardist would have filled in in performance, and I have done the same for string quartet, though taking the movement in harmonic directions Bach would not have.

OVERVIEW

Capriccio is divided into two parts that together comprise 27 movements that seek to encapsulate, technically, expressively, and texturally, the physical fundamentals of string playing and experiential fundamentals of music in general. The movements are generally of three types: 1) concerning the "uses" of music, 2) elucidating the "textures" of music, and

3) dealing with the technical "realities" of the instruments (violin, viola, and cello) themselves.

The four movements that are concerned with the uses of music are the second, tenth, twentieth, and twenty-sixth, which take as their subjects religion ("Sonata da chiesa"), love ("Eros"), community ("Sonata da camera"), and dance ("Terpsichore"), because these seemed to me to be the primary uses of music throughout recorded history. They constitute the most extended movements in *Capriccio*, and feature traditional (quasi-romantic) narrative structures.

The movements that elucidate the textures of music are the three "interludes": monophonic, polyphonic, and heterophonic/homophonic. The first two use exclusively these types of textures (all parts in unison or octaves in the case of the first, all parts independent in the case of the second), while the last is a mix of heterophony (essentially a single line that is heard in multiple voices and embellished by some but not all) and homophony (parts moving in parallel motion).

The 18 movements that deal with the technical realities of string players and their instruments are divided into three types, focusing on 1) the bow, 2) the strings, and 3) the fingers. Each of these categories are explored from the most simple concepts or techniques (the "up, down" of the third movement, for example) to the most complex (bowing "across the strings" in the fifteenth).

Finally, the first and last movements, "Arsis" and "Thesis," literally meaning "up" and "down" in a rhythmic, or gravitational, sense, serve as a large upbeat to the work and as a final resting point, respectively.

A CLOSER LOOK

The 18 technical movements and three interludes are ordered, within each part, intuitively; that is, neither in the order of their composition nor in order of increasing complexity. Essentially, once I had determined the large-scale structure of the piece—that it would begin and end with "Arsis" and "Thesis" and that the order of the "uses" movements would be religion, love, community, and dance—I placed the technical movements and interludes such that they would organically move from one to another of these nodal points. What follows is a brief description of each of the technical movements in the order in which they appear in *Capriccio*:

"Up, down" deals with the simplest method of sound production (using the bow) on stringed instruments: drawing the bow up and down on the string. "La chitarra" imitates the guitar in technique and tuning, but also in use—the cello is a singer, accompanied by the rest. "Tip, balance, frog; wood" uses these various areas of the bow in characteristic ways. "Colors: normal, fingerboard, bridge" is for solo viola (each member of the quartet will have an extended solo or solo movement) and deals with where on the string the bow is placed, whether normally (between the fingerboard and bridge), over the fingerboard (sul tasto), or on the bridge (sul ponticello). "Nodes" uses only natural harmonics (by touching the string lightly at various nodal points, intervals in the harmonic series above the fundamental string pitch are produced)."Two at once (C. Farina)" is for solo violin 1 and uses double-stopping throughout.

"Up, up..., down, down..." is the first of the technical movements to allude to a previous movement (in

this case, the tenth, "Eros"). As *Capriccio* progresses, this happens more often. "Up, up..., down, down..." also remembers, technically, the up and down of the third movement, but here the up and down bows are successive ups and downs. "Pressure" uses excessive pressure by the bow on the string, resulting in "hammer strokes"—harsh, staccato attacks—and the breaking up of sound that occurs when the pressure of the bow interrupts the free vibration of the string. "Normal, mute, mute" is the first of three movements for string trio (here two violins and viola) and juxtaposes the sounds of unadorned strings, muted strings, and hyper-muted strings (via a "practice mute"). Practice mutes are also used, by the full quartet, in the preceding "Monophonic interlude." "Across the strings," the second trio (for violin 2, viola, and cello), ends Part I with another reminiscence of "Eros," and has the players bowing across two, three, and four strings.

Part II opens with "Artificial harmonics." Contrasting with "Nodes," this movement uses only "touchfourth" artificial harmonics, which broaden the pitch palette to include all chromatic pitches and also allow for harmonic glissandi. It is followed by "Pluck, snap," a mechanical-sounding pizzicato movement that includes "Bartók pizzes": plucking the string so hard that it snaps against the fingerboard. "Stopped strings" contrasts with the forthcoming "Open strings." To "stop" a string is simply to shorten it by placing the finger on the fingerboard, resulting in a higher pitch: a simple gesture, but in this movement I highlight it by using glissandi (dragging the finger up or down the string) and asking the players to play higher than normal on any given string (as in the opening of the movement). "Drumming" is effected by lightly drumming on the strings with the fingers

of the right hand, creating a ghostly, scarcely audible, and beautiful sound. This movement is the last of the three string trios, here for two violins and cello.

"The left hand" highlights the uses of this hand: beyond merely stopping notes, it provides or withholds vibrato, and can be used to pluck the strings, both while bowing with the right hand and in alternation with bowing. "Open strings" continues the technique of bowing while plucking, but only using the open, that is, not stopped, strings. "On the string→off the string" deals with the action of bow speed on the relationship of the bow to the string. Essentially, as the speed of the bow increases it begins to bounce off the string. This movement begins legato, with the bow on the string, moves to non legato, then to spiccato (a controlled bounce), then to sautillé (a free bounce), paralleled by the increasing speed of the music. Finally, "Multiple strings, plucked," for solo cello, uses pizzicato on multiple strings simultaneously—sometimes strummed, sometimes plucked together—and also alternates plucking with the left and right hands.

Beyond all these influences, references, and technical considerations, I feel that *Capriccio* manages to fit the definition of "capriccio" as given in the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* as "a humorous, fanciful, or bizarre composition." Composing *Capriccio* was itself a bizarre experience (string quartets are famously difficult for composers), and I can only hope that, despite its ambitions, it conveys humor and fancy. I hope, too, that it possesses some of the warmth and tenderness I feel for those for whom I composed it—the Parker Quartet—whose perfect sound, unmatched musicianship, and fullest humanity were my greatest inspiration.

CREDITS