Abstract

Every music theory and composition major must complete a senior composition recital in order to graduate. Since the first day of my freshman year, I have been anticipating and preparing for the pieces that I would eventually compose and present at my own recital. From jazz tunes to celtic melodies to classical harmonies, I sought to compose a diverse spectrum of quality material. This project is a presentation of the process required to organize the recital, the material from the recital itself, and my post-recital reflections.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Derek Johnson for advising me through this project. An experienced and skilled composer himself, his guidance was crucial not only for preparing the recital, but also in composing several of the pieces that were presented on the recital itself.

I would also like to thank all of the musicians that played a part in recording “From Us To You,” and especially to Ethan Hardwick, who mixed and mastered the track.

Lastly, I would like to thank my musical “kindred-spirit”, Dr. Nagel, for his support and encouragement to me personally. His dedication as a teacher, passion for music, and laughter as a friend have truly impacted me as a composer and fellow traveler on this lifelong journey of learning.
For my honors thesis, I presented a senior composition recital, which is also in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Music in music theory and composition. This was significant for me as a composer because, while I was not conducting any original research or "solving problems" for this recital, I was building on the information and skills that I’ve acquired over the last three years in private composition lessons with Professors Derek Johnson, Jody Nagel, and Michael Pounds. This project helped broaden my educational experience within my major by requiring me to “see it through to the end.” As a composition major, I’ve spent many hours writing music, but rarely have I needed to see a piece of music all the way from conception to performance.

This culmination of my compositional work here at BSU was also impactful for the audience members who attended, as it exposed many non-musicians to genres of music of which they were likely otherwise unaware (including classical techniques fused with Celtic styles, and musique concrete, which is the experimental style of processing recorded sounds and transforming and combining them into one composition to produce an aural montage).
Senior Composition Recital Reflection

From my "Author’s Statement," my goals for this project were to coordinate and present a composition recital during which my original music would be performed by myself as well as other musicians that would last thirty to sixty minutes in duration. The purpose of this paper is to discuss in brief my rationale for selecting the pieces that I did, highlight a few key facets of the overall process, and summarize the experience.

For my senior composition recital, I chose nine difference pieces that I felt accurately portrayed my compositional time here at Ball State. Furthermore, I sought to use as wide an array of instruments and styles as possible rather than having the recital revolve around the same sonic quality and style of music. The pieces were:

1. *Just a Thought* (soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones)

2. *The Journey Ahead* (fixed media; involving mainly piano and a few sound effects)

3. *The Finish* (violin and piano)

4. *An Ant’s Walk* (fixed media; using manipulated sounds that I recorded in nature)

5. *From Us To You* (prerecorded; soprano and alto saxophones, trumpet, trombone, rhythm guitar, lead guitar, electric bass, piano, and drums)

6. *Raglan Road* (six voices and piano)

7. *The Scrawlings on the Headstone* (solo piano)

8. *Fiddle Caprice No. 1* (solo violin)

9. *Quartet for the Celts* (two violins, viola, and cello)
Other than Raglan Road (which is a well-known traditional Irish song that I arranged), all the music was original. Following this reflection paper, I have included the program notes that I provided for audience members at the recital, a copy of the original recital program, and all available scores.\(^1\) Because I have already discussed each piece in at least some detail in the program notes, I will avoid redundancy and will simply suggest that the reader refer to those supplementary materials for further information on any particular piece.

Overall, I’m very pleased with the pieces that I selected from my portfolio. From the comments that I received after the recital, the audience enjoyed the variety as there were pieces on the program for a range of different levels of musical education. If I had to do everything over, I felt that the largest chink in my musical armor (as it were) was the scarcity of percussion throughout the recital. Other than the drum set in *From Us To You*, I had no un-pitched (or pitched, for that matter) percussion.\(^2\) Several months before the recital, I had contacted a percussionist colleague to see if he would be interested in playing a marimba piece on my recital were I to compose one. Unfortunately, he had a sudden medical emergency that incapacitated him for several weeks, and as a result we were never able to make it happen in time.

Throughout the entire process, my biggest obstacle was obtaining performers. A few individuals had already agreed to play certain pieces months prior to the recital, but for some of the pieces, I was still searching desperately up until just a week before the recital. The most challenging to find were pianists, which surprised me (I would’ve thought that it would have been far easier considering the large number of piano performance majors at the school of

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\(^1\) *The Journey Ahead*, *An Ant’s Walk*, and *Fiddle Caprice No. 1* were never notated.

\(^2\) Pitched and un-pitched percussion refers to whether a percussion instrument has a single discernable “note” attached to it (pitched). Examples of pitched percussion would be the marimba, timpani, xylophone, or chimes. Examples of un-pitched percussion would be a cymbal, bass drum, snare drum, or tam-tam.
music). In total, I asked nearly two dozen pianists before I found someone who agreed to perform *The Scrawlings on the Headstone*.

After securing performers, the next most challenging aspect of the process was learning to coordinate rehearsals for seventeen very different schedules. Thankfully, the performers were flexible and agreeable, and in the end everything worked out well. Despite the successful outcome, there were several days when I had rehearsal after rehearsal scheduled back to back. I found it challenging to learn to shift mentally and “get in the zone” for each piece, not only as the composer, but also as a performer (as in the example of the string quartet).

One facet that I believe few non-musicians realize is just how much work is already completed prior to the semester of a student’s senior composition recital. Were I to try to compose all new material in time for a forty-five minute recital, find musicians, rehearse, and coordinate all the logistics in just a single semester, I would go crazy and it wouldn’t be much of a success. Rather, I had already done perhaps seventy-five or even eighty percent of the work prior to this semester. Each piece has taken dozens (if not hundreds) of hours to compose. It takes several more dozen hours to properly score the piece. I think that the average student perceives music as something that one just “whips up” (as evidenced by my telecommunications roommate who had the brilliant idea that he would compose the soundtrack for his movie using Apple’s “garage band” the night before it was due). Few people understand that music composition is a rigorous process of sitting at the piano for hours upon hours, sometimes spending half a day on five seconds of music. As an example, I spent nearly four days straight working through the middle piano section of *From Us To You*. The moment only lasts fifteen seconds, but they are the most crucial fifteen seconds of the entire piece, and I wanted it to be perfect. When the audience came to my recital, few audience members realized that I spent
weeks in front of a computer editing every single part note by note and dot by dot. To a lot of people, I think that the music more or less just “happens” when creative people simply “feel” the music.

I say all of this to highlight the fact that writing a reflection paper and assembling scores together is only the cherry on top, the last hundred yard stretch of a marathon that has been in progress for nearly four years. For any non-musicians reading this, I felt that it was important to communicate the magnitude of the amount of work that lies within just a few measures of a piece of well-written, well-performed music. Many hundreds of hours of man-power lie within this black binder, and though the majority of those are mine, no small portion belongs to dozens of musicians who have helped me with these pieces over the years.

While it was a long and demanding process, the end result of standing in front of an appreciative audience, having just had forty-five minutes of the best of my original work performed skillfully by a dozen and a half musicians was truly rewarding and marks a new chapter in my life as a composer.
Supplemental Material in the following order:

~ DVR

Tracks:
1. Senior Composition Recital video recording
2. The Journey Ahead
3. An Ant’s Walk (stereo mastered edition)
4. From Us To You

~ Senior Composition Recital Program

~ Program Notes

~ Scores
2. The Finish (2013)
3. From Us To You (2015)
4. Raglan Road (2016)
5. The Scrawlings on the Headstone (2015)
6. Quartet for the Celts (2014)
Nathan Davis, composition

Nathan Davis (b. 1994)

Just a Thought (2015)

Dylan Keiser, soprano sax  Sam Lock, alto sax
Kendell Fowler, tenor sax  Kaleigh Wilder, baritone sax

The Journey Ahead (2015)

fixed media
Bobby Bennett, animation

The Finish (2013)

Nathan Davis, violin  Stephen Weigel, piano

An Ant’s Walk (2014)

fixed media

From Us To You (2015)
Patrick Kavanagh  
*Raglan Road*  
(1904-1967)  
arr. Nathan Davis

Kristin Caviani, Will Haerberle, Rosie Hua, Matt Kimball,  
Michael Pluckebaum, Valerie Weingart, voice  
*Joey McNamara, piano*

Nathan Davis  
*Richard Anatone, piano*

Fiddle Caprice No. 1 (2015)  
*Nathan Davis, violin*

*Quartet for the Celts* (2014)  
*Nathan Davis and Alex Holzman, violins*  
*Amanda Smith, viola*  
*Naomi Rockenbaugh, cello*

Nathan Davis is a student of Derek Johnson, Keith Kothman,  
Jody Nagel, and Michael Pounds.  
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Bachelor of Music in music theory and composition.

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School of Music  
COMING EVENTS

**DA Lecture Recital: Dustin Palmer, conducting**  
Thursday, April 7 | 12:00 p.m. | MIB-152

**Junior Recital: Johnnie Taylor, baritone**  
Thursday, April 7 | 5:30 p.m. | Choral Hall

**Junior Recital: Branden Downing, piano**  
Thursday, April 7 | 5:30 p.m. | Sursa Hall

Series LXX – Number 187

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PROGRAM NOTES

Nathan Davis – Senior Composition Recital – April 6th, 2016

JUST A THOUGHT (Fall 2015)
Performed by Dylan Keiser, Sam Lock, Kendell Fowler, and Kaleigh Wilder (saxophones)

The title “Just A Thought” reflects the short period of time that I spent composing the tune for this piece. Within twenty minutes of deciding that I wanted to write a jazz tune, I had the melody and chord structures complete. I then spent the next few months working out how I wanted to score it for four saxophones. The middle section focuses on a rhythmic ostinato with a slowly undulating harmony.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD (FALL 2015)
Animation by Bobby Bennett

This project was part of an Honors science class that explored storytelling through landscapes. For “The Journey Ahead,” the viewer is taken on a journey through a woodland realm, over a mountain range, and across a vast dessert. The piano music reflects the emotions of the various landscapes, from the serene forest, to the harsh sand dunes.

THE FINISH (FALL 2013)
Performed also by Stephen Weigel (piano)

This was the first piece I composed at Ball State. My goal, in addition to creating successful counterpoint, was to write convincing and smooth modulations. Listen for the two main themes in the piece, as they come back at the end.

AN ANT’S WALK (SPRING 2014)

I wanted to compose a musique concrète piece that truly went somewhere, that told a story. The result is “An Ant’s Walk,” where the listener experiences ordinary objects on an extraordinary level. I recorded all sound samples with a Zoom field recorder. The sounds include various manipulations of bark, sticks, grass, ice, water, pebbles, and large boulders. Throughout the piece, most sounds are introduced at a normal level (i.e. on a size we would typically encounter). Each sound is then transformed and expanded to the size that I perceive and ant might experience (i.e. a pebble dropping in water might feel like being shelled by a WW2 Tiger tank). For those who are unfamiliar with musique concrete, it is “the experimental technique of musical composition using recorded sounds as raw material. The principle uses the assemblage of various natural sounds to produce an aural montage” (Encyclopedia Britannica).
FROM US, TO YOU (SPRING 2015)

Special thanks to Ethan Hardwick for recording and mixing

By far my most ambitions project to date, I orchestrated and spearheaded the Letterman Project '15 to be a university-wide expression of students' gratitude to David Letterman in honor of his retirement from "Late Show" in May of 2015. The project involved over 300 Ball State students (as well as former president Paul Ferguson). Because I wanted the music to reflect multiple aspects of Letterman's career, the middle section (the piano solo) features both the Ball State University Alma mater, and David Letterman's Late Show theme. As a further tribute to the occasion, the orchestration is the exact same as Paul Shaffer's famous CBS orchestra.

RAGLAN ROAD (SPRING 2016)

Performed by Kristin Caviani, Will Haeberle, Rosie Hua, Matt Kimball, Michael Pluckebaum, and Valerie Weingart (voices) and also Joey McNamara (piano)

This is my arrangement of the poem by Patrick Kavanagh set to the traditional Irish tune titled "The Dawning of the Day."

On Raglan Road on an Autumn Day, I saw her first and knew That her dark hair would weave a snare That I might someday rue. I saw the danger, yet I passed Along the enchanted way And I said let grief be a falling leaf At the dawning of the day.

I gave her the gifts of the mind. I gave her the secret signs That's known to artists who have known (That's known to those) True gods of sound and stone. (Gods of stone) And word and tint without a stint (And words, words, words to say) I gave her poems to say (With her own name) With her own name there and her own dark hair (Dark hair) Like clouds o'r fields of May. (Clouds o'r fields of May)
THE SCRAWLINGS ON THE HEADSTONE (SPRING 2015)

Performed by Richard Anatone (piano)

I composed this short piece for solo piano during the same semester as my course in 18th century counterpoint. The opening section features invertible counterpoint (melody and harmony lines that function both above and below each other), while the middle section focuses on a sequenced harmonic phrase. At the end of the piece, the opening motive is heard again, but staggered and interrupted, as if the one reading the scrawlings on the headstone simply can’t move past some grievous text inscribed at its base.

FIDDLE CAPRICE NO. 1 (SPRING 2013)

Sometimes a composer slaves for weeks and months to fully envision a piece, and sometimes it just comes into view suddenly. Fiddle Caprice No. 1 fits into the latter category – a lively tune that spontaneously jumped into my fingers when I was in the mood of “play first and analyze later.”

QUARTET FOR THE CELTS (FALL 2014)

Performed also by Alex Holzman (violin), Amanda Smith (viola), and Naomi Rockenbaugh (cello)

I believe that the string quartet is among the most effective of chamber ensembles when orchestrated correctly. As a traditional celtic musician, I sought to find a truly celtic work written specifically for a string quartet. When I found none, I resolved to compose a work that would authentically combine Irish melodies with classical techniques. The result is a piece that holds a unique place in my heart as a composer, violinist, and musician.

I’d like to thank my family and friends for supporting me in my musical endeavors. A few people in particular warrant mentioning by name:

~ Sarah Davis (my mom), for faithfully taking me to music lessons even when I wanted to quit,
~ William Davis (my dad), for his constant friendship and encouragement,
~ Jody Nagel, whose teaching has inspired me in ways few ever have and I suspect few ever will,
~ Bobby Bennett and Ethan Hardwick, for being two of the greatest friends and fellow musicians anyone could ask for.

Thank you for coming! I hope hearing my music blesses you even half as much as it blesses me to be able to share it.
Just A Thought

Nathan Davis

©2015
Just A Thought
Just A Thought
The Finish

Vln.

Pno.

Vln.

Pno.

Vln.

Pno.
The Finish

Vln.

Pno.

rit.

a tempo

dolce

Vln.

Pno.

f

Pno.
The Finish

Vln. 46

Pno. ~

Vln. 49

Pno. ~

Vln. 49

Pno. ~

Vln. 52

Pno. ~

Vln. 52

Pno. ~

The Finish
The Finish

Vln.

Pno.

Vln.

Pno.

Vln.

Pno.

Vln.

Pno.

Vln.

Pno.
To You, From Us

Nathan Davis

Piano

Soprano Sax

Alto Sax

Trumpet in B♭

Trombone

Electric Guitar 1

Electric Guitar 2

Electric Bass

Drum Set

Nathan Davis ©2015
To You, From Us

Pno.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

S. Sx.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

A. Sx.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

B\# Tpt.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

Tbn.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

E.Gtr. 1  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

E.Gtr. 2  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

E.B.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

D. S.  
```
\{ | \#\# | \#\# | \#\# |
\( G (a d d 2) \)  \( D (a d d 2) \)  \( A \)  \( B m 7 \)  \( F#m 7 \)  \( C#m \)
```

D. S.
To You, From Us

Pno.

S. Sx.

A. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

E.Gtr. 1

E.Gtr. 2

E.B.

D. S.
To You, From Us

Pno.

S. Sx.

A. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

E.Gtr. 1

E.Gtr. 2

E.B.

D. S.

Em7  Fmaj7  D#  C  F♭  F  Am  B♭
cresc. poco a poco

Pno.

S. Sx.

A. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

E.Gtr. 1

E.Gtr. 2

E.B.

D. S.

Em7  Fmaj7  D#  C  F♭  F  Am  B♭
cresc. poco a poco
To You, From Us

Pno.

S. Sx.

A. Sx.

Bb Tpt.

Tbn.

E.Gtr. 1

E.Gtr. 2

E.B.

D. S.
To You, From Us

Pno.

S. Sx.

A. Sx.

Bb Tpt.

Tbn.

E.Gtr. 1

E.Gtr. 2

E.B.

D. S.
To You, From Us

Pno.

S. Sx.

A. Sx.

Bb Tpt.

Tbn.

E.Gtr. 1

E.Gtr. 2

E.B.

D. S.

\[28\]

\[\text{rit.}\]

Abm  Ebsus  Ebmaj7

f  \[\text{mp}\]

f  \[\text{mp}\]

f  \[\text{mp}\]

Abm  Ebsus  Ebmaj7

Abm  Ebsus  Ebmaj7

\[\text{mp}\]
On Raglan Road on an Autumn day I saw her first and knew,
That her dark hair would weave a snare That I might some-day rue.

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Patrick Kavanagh
arr. Nathan Davis
I saw the danger yet I passed along the enchanted way. And I

I saw the danger yet I passed along the enchanted way. And I

said, "Let grief be a fallen leaf At the dawning of the day."

said, "Let grief be a fallen leaf At the dawning of the day."
That's fl
lol
~

I gave her gifts of the mind, I gave her the secret signs,
That's

known to those Gods of stone

known to artists who have known true gods of sound and stone.
And

And words words words to say With her own name

word and tint without a stint I gave her poems to say With her
Dark hair clouds o’r fields of May

own name there and her own dark hair Like clouds o’r fields of May.
Quiet street where old ghosts meet. I see her walking now.

Walk away so hurriedly. Because he did not love me.

Way from me so hurriedly. My reason must allow. That.

I'm only clay. He's only clay. We'll lose our wings.

I have loved, not as I should. A creature made of clay. When the

mf
Raglan Road

I'll lose our wings, lose our wings at the dawning of the day. We'll

angel woos the clay, he'll lose His wings at the dawning of the day. When the

I'll lose our wings, lose our wings at the dawning of the day.

angel woos the clay, he'll lose His wings at the dawning of the day.
The Scrawlings on the Headstone
Moderato ($J = c. 90$)
Quartet for the Celts
Quartet for the Celts
Quartet for the Celts