Looking Down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

Keri Pertuit

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LOOKING DOWN FROM THE TOP OF A REDWOOD TREE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Music

in

The School of Music

By
Keri Pertuit
B.M., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2020
December 2021
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to sincerely thank the School of Music faculty at Louisiana State University, with specific thanks to my composition professor Dr. Mara Gibson for her constant support, expertise and guidance throughout this process. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Jesse Allison and Dr. Inessa Bazayev for sharing both wisdom and insight with me. Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my husband for always supporting me and pushing me to believe in myself and my music.
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ABSTRACT

“Looking Down from the Top of a Redwood Tree” was a collaboration with my brother, Fabein Miguel Disedare. From the onset of this project, I reached out to him about the possibility of him creating the poetry, functioning as the lyrics of this piece. When working with Fabein, he suggested the topic of global warming, and we agreed to incorporate this theme through the telling of a story from the perspective of Redwood Tree located on the California coast. This song cycle follows the story of a family of trees inhabiting the coastline, their struggles with deforestation, their lack of protection, and takes us from 1915 to present day. With the text, I was able to create a visual map that aided me in incorporating timbre, extended techniques, and dynamics. Each of these musical elements guided me in shaping the four most important elements of this piece, sound, color, image and words. Throughout this piece we experience loss so great, that it is heard, seen and spoken. My musical goal was to achieve a sonic fusion between text, images and sound.
PERFORMANCE TEXT

I: “we had started hearing sounds”
I remember, I still remember, he started out, slow
The turn of the century, one nine zero zero
Before these times men rarely came ‘round
But the last few years we had started hearing sounds
The creaking & the snapping, then a thundering crash
Don’t worry mother told me, their progress will not last
But there was worry in her eyes, & stress laced in her voice
But I knew we’d stand together, as if we had a choice

II: “like a bulging elk”
I woke one spring morning to father screaming, as he fell to the ground
I thought of the riddle but I was there, I know he made a sound
And such a terrible noise it was, a haunting screech as his body kicked up the dust
A sound like a bulging elk, in the cold dead of winter
I’ll always remember, the way those men made him splinter
It was 1915, & the saws were sharper than ever
Their flannels moved swiftly below me, undeterred of the sloppy wet weather
But the rain rolled off me, like tears down my face
I just kept looking around me, at every empty place
In only 12 days, we’d lost as many members, the earth groaned out below, begging of their surrender
But I never saw a white flag, I only saw them cut more
Giants that once stood here, memorialized as stumps no more than four
In the chaos & smoke & destruction of it all I kept turning for mother,
Only to find her turning brown below, being segmented like the others
III: “for a moment”
It took them many days & many trips, to remove my fallen family from the forest floor & every time they hauled off pieces, it shook me to my core
But even in the darkness, I failed to fall asleep
I’d flail my limbs from side to side but empty handed weep
But then one night I felt the air of a presence growing near
I snapped awake to find a throne as Lear’s
The weight I felt no more than ice, growing long on needle
I’m so alone, I’m so alone, I’d even take bark beetle
& for a moment, I thought I felt one crawl beneath my skin
& for a moment, I wished it true, to see my family again

IV: “the local attraction”
Men say the brook is babbling, but I know that she sings
For she serenades me daily, but men don’t understand such things
But some 50 years later, they thought enough of this place
To designate protection, but I never did feel safe
I once knew a fellow, 2,000 years old, but now he lies not far from me, with a car sized hole
& just across the way, I heard one received a plaque
So highly esteemed, a general in fact & people came in droves, with cameras in hand
But the silver shines like saws, & still they kill this land
300 feet & growing, when they last made their measure
They patted on me gently, but dare it be my pleasure
To think that now I’m treasured because I am so rare
To think of competing with Ferris wheels, upstate at county fairs
To think of America’s crown jewel, all scattered on the floor
& wonder why I’m red inside, I’m bleeding at my core
V: “a seat at the water table”
His eyes swept low his breathe a sigh, as he finished up his tale
He licked his lips & cleared his throat, as my face turned ghostly pale
It’s harder now than it’s ever been, he said in whispering tones
But I missed the next thing he said because of an airplane’s drone
If my roots stretched from here to Hollywood, I fear I still wouldn’t be able
To speak up above the rest of the noise, to declare my seat at the water table
But no resentment I hold to man, for trying to make a dollar
But he’d have much more if he had let us stand together down in the holler
& with that he turned to face the sun, as it sank down into the sea
& on his side a scar revealed, that before I did not see
A logging crew, a sharp-toothed saw, an ancient memory
I placed my hand upon the mark, the sayings true it seems
I guess that time does heal wounds, perhaps, perhaps indeed

VI: “fading thoughts of man who listened to the tree”
The ax had always been sharpened, & there at the roots
A gun that’s been loaded, & sits ready to shoot
We look to the past, & see innocent faces
We think in the future, & picture imaginary places
But here on this soil, with my feet shuffled still
A solitary tree, had given me fill
I had scrolled social media, all day & all night & been hypnotized by it’s artificial light
But in the depths of this forest, I’d woken from my slumber
& stood gazing softly, at this monolithic lumber
There’s something out here, that man cannot take
But it falls with the trees as we take & we take
One last picture for me, as I walk away looking back
& for once in my life, I’ve no feeling of lack
I remember, I still remember. Each member plays thus before exiting.

- tremolos
- glissandos
- scratch tones
- harmonics behind the bridge
- bartok pizz

Sound color image words

"Memorialized as stumps no more than 4"

Only one left.
PERFORMANCE NOTES

(x)
- This symbol indicates that the note should be played behind the bridge, with a heavy bow pressure.

Δ
- This symbol indicates that the note should be played as a scratch tone, with very heavy pressure, creating a blend of note and sound.
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

years they star- ted mak- ing sounds star- ted mak- ing sounds And the creak- ing and the snap- ping and the

thun- der- ing crash cra - - - ash Don't wor- ry Mot- her told

me Their pro- gress will not la - st But there was wor -
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

There was stress in her voice. I knew we'd

stand together as if we had a choice.

I woke one spring morning to father screaming as he fell to the ground. I
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

thought of the riddle but I was there I know he made a sound

And such a terrible noise it was a haunting screech as his

body kicked up the dust A sound like a bulging elk in the cold dead of winter

scratchy bow pressure
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

S

off me like tears down my face I just kept looking around in every empty place in only 12 days

Vln. I

we'd lost as many members the earth groaned out below begging of their

Vln. II

surrender but I never saw a white flag I only saw them cut more

Vla.


Vc.
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

Gi-ants that once stood here mem-or-ial-ized as stumps no more than four And in the chaos and smoke and de-

struc-tion of it all I kept turn-ing for Mot-her On-ly to find her turn-ing brown be-low

be-ing seg-men-ted like the oth-ers

"for a moment"

Heart Broken $d = 56$

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure

be-hind the bridge, heavy bow pres-sure
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

Heart Broken \( \frac{d}{=56} \)

It took them many days and many trips

ah

To remove my fallen

famil-ly from the forest floor

ah And every-time they hauled off pieces

14
It shook me to my core

But even in the darkness I failed to fall asleep
I'd flail my arms from side to side but empty-handed weep But

But then one night I felt the air of a presence growing near
I snapped awake to find
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

139

S

a throne as Lear’s

The weight I felt no more than ice growing long on

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

143

S

need-le

I’m I’m so a-lone I’m so a-lone I’d even take bark beetle And for a mo-ment I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

146

S

thought I felt one crawl beneath my skin

And for a mo-ment I wished it true to see my fami-

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.
Moving on \( \mathbf{p} \) _the local attraction_

ly again Men say the brook is babbling But I know that

she sings For she serenades me daily But men don’t understand such things But some fifty

years later they thought enough of this place To designate protection But I never did feel safe I
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

once knew a fellow Two thousand years old But now he lies not far from me with a car sized hole And just across the way I heard one received a plaque So highly esteemed general in fact People came in droves with cameras in their hands The silver shines like
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

S

saws and still they kill this land
three hundred feet and growing
when they last made

their measure and they patted on me gently
but dare it be my pleasure

to think that now I'm treasured

Be-cause I
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

am so rare to think of competing with Ferris wheels up-state at country fairs to think of Amer-
ica's crown jewel scattered on the floor and wonder why I'm red inside I'm bleeding at my core

his eyes swept low his breath a sigh As he finished up his tale he licked his lips and cleared his
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

throat as my face turned ghost-ly pale
It's hard-er now than it's ev-er been he said

in a whip-er- ing tone but I missed the next thing he said be-cause of an air-plane's drone

If my roots stretched from here to Hol-ly wood I fear I still would n't be ab-le to
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

S

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

but he'd have much more if he had us stand together down in the hollow

L

L

L

L

L

L

L

L
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

and with that he turned to face the sun as it sank down into the sea

and on his side a scar revealed that before I did not see a logging crew a sharp toothed saw an ancient

memory I placed my hand upon the mark the sayings true it seems
Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

perhaps time does heal wounds

perhaps indeed
Mvt. VI

**Violin I**

The ax had always been sharpened, & there at the roots
A gun that’s been loaded, & sits ready to shoot
We look to the past, & see innocent faces
We think in the future, & picture imaginary places
But here on this soil, with my feet shuffled still
A solitary tree, had given me fill
I had scrolled social media, all day & all night & been hypnotized by it’s artificial light
But in the depths of this forest, I’d woken from my slumber
& stood gazing softly, at this monolithic lumber
There’s something out here, that man cannot take
But it falls with the trees as we take & we take
One last picture for me, as I walk away looking back
& for once in my life, I’ve no feeling of lack

**Violin II**

The ax had always been sharpened, & there at the roots
A gun that’s been loaded, & sits ready to shoot
We look to the past, & see innocent faces
We think in the future, & picture imaginary places
But here on this soil, with my feet shuffled still
A solitary tree, had given me fill
I had scrolled social media, all day & all night & been hypnotized by it’s artificial light
But in the depths of this forest, I’d woken from my slumber
& stood gazing softly, at this monolithic lumber
There’s something out here, that man cannot take
But it falls with the trees as we take & we take
One last picture for me, as I walk away looking back
& for once in my life, I’ve no feeling of lack
Viola
The ax had always been sharpened, & there at the roots
A gun that’s been loaded, & sits ready to shoot
We look to the past, & see innocent faces
We think in the future, & picture imaginary places
But here on this soil, with my feet shuffled still
A solitary tree, had given me fill
I had scrolled social media, all day & all night & been hypnotized by it’s artificial light
But in the depths of this forest, I’d woken from my slumber
& stood gazing softly, at this monolithic lumber
There’s something out here, that man cannot take
But it falls with the trees as we take & we take
One last picture for me, as I walk away looking back
& for once in my life, I’ve no feeling of lack

Cello
The ax had always been sharpened, & there at the roots
A gun that’s been loaded, & sits ready to shoot
We look to the past, & see innocent faces
We think in the future, & picture imaginary places
But here on this soil, with my feet shuffled still
A solitary tree, had given me fill
I had scrolled social media, all day & all night & been hypnotized by it’s artificial light
But in the depths of this forest, I’d woken from my slumber
& stood gazing softly, at this monolithic lumber
There’s something out here, that man cannot take
But it falls with the trees as we take & we take
One last picture for me, as I walk away looking back
& for once in my life, I’ve no feeling of lack
VITA
Keri Devilynn Pertuit received a Bachelor of Music Education from Southeastern Louisiana University in 2020. She is currently studying Music Composition under the supervision of Dr. Mara Gibson at Louisiana State University. Keri is a composer based out of Walker, Louisiana. She has had pieces performed by notable ensembles like Hypercube. Her music has also been accepted to festivals and conferences such as the Hypercube Composition Lab (2020), Splice Summer Institute (2021), and Impulse New Music Festival (2021). Keri is planning on receiving her masters degree in December 2021.