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Looking Down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

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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

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ABSTRACT

“Looking Down from the Top of a Redwood Tree” was a collaboration with my brother, Fabien 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 Fabien, 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

MAP

"I remember, I still remember" → each member plays this @ the very end before exiting

- tremolos $\frac{4}{6}$
- glissandos $\frac{5}{7}$
- scratch tones $\frac{4}{5}$
- harmonics $\frac{5}{6}$
- behind the bridge $\frac{3}{6}$
- bartok pizz $\frac{4}{2}$

sound
color
image
words

*
"memorialized as stumps no more than 4"
only one left

The diagram shows a musical score for a string quartet with two staves. The top staff is labeled 'violin 1' and the bottom staff is labeled 'violin 2, cello, viola'. The score is divided into six measures, numbered 1 to 6 at the bottom. Measure 1 starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. Measure 2 has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. Measure 3 has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. Measure 4 has a piano (p) dynamic. Measure 5 has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. Measure 6 has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and ends with a piano (p) dynamic. A large black diagonal line runs across the staves from measure 1 to measure 6. The word 'alone' is written in green above the violin 1 staff in measure 3. A blue bracket labeled 'timbre/techniques' spans measures 1 and 2. There are several scribbled-out notes in green and orange in the top left corner. A blue arrow points from the list of techniques to the scribbles.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

(x)

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

△

- 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

Composer
Keri Devillynn
Poet
Fabein Miguel

"we had started hearing sounds"

Thoughtfully ♩ = 72

In your own time,
less than ♩ = 70

1

Soprano

espressivo

Violin I

p arco

Violin II

arco *p*

Viola

arco *p*

Cello

arco *p*

I re - mem - ber I still re - mem -

S

ber It star - ted out slow - - - At the turn

Vln. I

niente *p*

Vln. II

niente

Vla.

niente

Vc.

niente

12

S

of the cen - t'ry One nine zer - o One nine zer - o

Vln. I

niente

Vln. II

niente

Vla.

niente

Vc.

niente

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

16

S

One nine ze - ro One nine ze - ro ze - ro

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p

21

S

rallentando

f 3 *a tempo*

Be - fore these times men rare-ly came a-round

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

pizz.

arco

pizz.

pizz.

26

S

rare - ly came a-round rare - ly came a-round but the last few

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

29

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

Vln. I
pizz.

Vln. II
pizz.

Vla.
arco
mf

Vc.

33

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

Vln. I
arco

Vln. II
arco

Vla.
arco

Vc.
arco

4

p

37

S
me Their pro-gress will not la - st But there was wor -

Vln. I
spicc.

Vln. II
p

Vla.
arco

Vc.
p
arco
tr
mp

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

41

S
 ry in her eyes There was stress laced in her voice I knew we'd

Vln. I

Vln. II
 arco
p

Vla.

Vc.

pp

45

S
 stand to - geth - er as if we had a choice

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

"like a bulging elk"

Remembering ♩ = 80

5

mp

S
 I woke one spring morn - ing — to fath - er scream - ing as he fell to the ground I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.
 arco unmeasured

Vc.
 pizz. *mp*

mp

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

53

S
thought of the rid - dle but I was there I know he made a sound

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

6

56

S
And such a ter - ri - ble noise ah — it was a haunt - ing screech as his

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

59

S
bod - y kicked up the dust A sound like a bulg - ing elk in the cold dead of win - ter
scratchy bow pressure

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

64 *a tempo*

S I'll al-ways re-mem-ber The way those men made him splin-ter

Vln. I *arco* *mp* 3

Vln. II *p* 3 *tr*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *arco* 3 *p*

7

S it was nine-teen fifth-teen and the saws were sharp-er than ev-er their flan-nels moved

Vln. I *scratchy bow pressure*

Vln. II

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pizz.* *mf*

72

S swift-ly be-low me un-de-terred of the slop-py wet wea-ther but the rain rolled

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p* *tr* *p*

Vla. *niente* *p* *pizz.* *arco* *p*

Vc. *pizz.* *p* 3

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

76

S
off me like tears down my face I just kept look-ing arounde in ev-ery emp-ty place in on-ly 12 days

Vln. I
arco

Vln. II

Vla.
niente *p*

Vc.
p

81

S
we'd lost as man - y mem-bers the earth groaned out be - low beg-ing of their

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

8

86

S
sur-rend - der but I nev-er saw a white flag I on - ly saw them cut more

Vln. I

Vln. II
mp

Vla.
mp

Vc.
mp pizz.

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

91

S
 — Gi-ants that once stood here me-mor-ial-ized as stumps no more than four And in the chaos and smoke and de-

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

95

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

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

9

poco rit.

100

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

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

10

"for a moment"

Heart Broken $\text{♩} = 56$

scratch tone arco

scratch tone

behind the bridge, heavy bow pressure

behind the bridge, heavy bow pressure

behind the bridge, heavy bow pressure

arco

arco

arco

arco

rubato

p

p

p

p

p

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

Heart Broken $\text{♩} = 56$

105 *p* almost spoken

105 scratch tone It took them man-y days and man-y trips ah

Vln. I

Vln. II *mf* *p*

Vla. *mf* *p*

Vc. *mf* *p*

111 ah to re - move my fall - en

Vln. I

Vln. II *mf* *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

117 fami - ly from the for - rest floor ah And every-time they hauled off pie - ces

Vln. I

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

Moving on ♩ = 90

122

S
It shook me to my core But ev-en in the

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf *pp* *pp* *pp*

129

S
dark - ness I failed to fall a - sleep I'd flail my arms from side to side but emp - ty hand-ed weep But

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p *p* *p*

135

S
But then one night I felt the air of a pre-scence grow - ing near I snapped a-wake to find

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

pizz. arco

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

139

S a throne as Lear's _____ The weight I felt no more than ice grow-ing long on

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf

mf

mf

mf

143

S need - le _____ I'm I'm so a-lone I'm so a-lone I'd ev - en take bark bee-tle And for a mo-ment I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p

p

p

p

146

S thought I felt one _ crawl be - neath my skin _ And for a mo-ment I wished it true to see my fami -

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

pp

pp

pp

pp

pp

rubato

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

Moving on ♩ = 90 *p* 12 "the local attraction"

151

S
ly a - gain — Men say the brook — is babb - ling — But I know that

Vln. I
f *p*

Vln. II
mf *p*

Vla.
mp

Vc.
p

158

S
she sings For she ser - e - nades me dai - ly — But men don't un - der stand such things But some fif - ty

Vln. I
f *p*

Vln. II
mf *p*

Vla.
mp

Vc.
p

164

S
years la - ter they thought e - nough of this place To des - ig - nate pro - tec - tion But I nev - er did feel safe I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

170 *rubato*

S — once knew a fel - low Two — thou - sand years old But now he lies not far from me with a car - sized

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. *p*

177

S hole And just a - cross the way I heard one re - cieved a plaque So high - ly es - teemed gen - er - al in

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf Moving Past ♩ = 110

184

S fact Peo - ple came in droves with cam - eras in their hands The sil - ver shines like

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla.

Vc. *p*

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

189

S
saws and still they kill this land three hun-dred feet and grow-ing when they last made

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.
mp

Vc.

193

S
their mea - sure — and they pat - ted on me gent - ly but dare it be my plea - sure

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.
mp

197

S
to think that now — I'm trea - sured Be - cause I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mp

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

202

S
am so rare to think of com-pet-ting with fer-ris wheels up-state at coun-ty fairs to think of A-mer-

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

208

S
i - ca's crown jewel scat-tered on the floor and won-der why I'm red in - side I'm bleed-ing at my core

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Moving on ♩ = 90
in an almost spoken manner

214

S
his eyes swept low his breath a sigh — As he fin-ished up his tale he licked his lips and cleared his

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

220

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

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

pp

p

mp

224

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

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

rallentando

p

p

228

S
If my roots stretched from here to Hol-ly wood I fear I still would n't be ab-le to

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

a tempo

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

232

S
 speak up _____ a-bove the rest of the noise to de-clare my seat at the wa-ter ta-ble the wa-ter ta-

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

236

S
 ble but no re-sent-ment I hold to man for try-ing to earn a dol-lar

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

239

S
 but he'd have much more if he ___ had let us stand to-gether down in the hol-lar

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

242

S

and with that he turned to face the sun — as it sank down in - to the sea —

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

245

S

and on his side a scar re - vealed that be - fore I did not see a log - ing crew a sharp toothed saw an anc - ient

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

249

S

mem - or - y I placed my hand up - on the mark the say - ings true it seems

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

p

Looking down from the Top of a Redwood Tree

253

S

per - haps time does heal wounds — per - haps per - haps in - deed

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

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.