

Inspiration and Connection: Solomon Valley Inspires Landscape Paintings, a Solo Cello Suite, Haiku Poetry and 24 Kansas Communities

Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello represent one of the greatest collections of works written for a solo instrument and have profoundly inspired and influenced generations of instrumentalists and composers. Considering the cello's wonderfully varied tonal capabilities, different textures can be produced, allowing for harmonic independence and melodic counterpoint to exist autonomously. The cello reached a technical and compositional zenith in Kodály's Op. 8 Solo Sonata, written in 1915, 8 years after his study in Paris where he became acquainted with Debussy and strongly influenced by his music. After this point, composers in the 20th and 21st Centuries had complete license to further explore the rich treasures of the instrument's timbral, harmonic and instrumental possibilities.

Originating from the natural beauty and timelessness of a geographic area, *Solomon Valley Sketches, Le Tombeau de Sandzen* is an artistic synthesis of music, haiku poetry and visual art. Comprised of six movements, each inspired by a canvas landscape of Birger Sandzén (1871–1954 – Swedish painter who settled in Linsborg, Kansas), the work is structured on the six-movement format of the Bach solo suites. As part of the commemoration of the Kansas Sesquicentennial, *Solomon Valley Sketches* was commissioned by Joan Nothern and the Glasco Community Foundation and had its World Premier in Topeka, Kansas on October 9, 2011. Glasco is one of 24 communities in central Kansas that formed the Solomon Valley – Highway 24 – Heritage Alliance to preserve and promote the region's spectacular heritage and its connecting highway. A treasure of this collaborative alliance is the area's landscape of the Smoky Hill River Valley, the very landscape of central Kansas that inspired Birger Sandzén about 100 years ago and provided much of the subject matter for his paintings. The Glasco Community Foundation established a relationship with the Birger Sandzen Gallery in Lindsborg, exploring the relationship between the landscape and the art, resulting in the director of the gallery providing a series of articles about Birger Sandzen and the Solomon Valley connection, published in the Solomon Valley Anthology (the organization's quarterly newsletter) in the Autumn of 2010 through Spring 2011.

The connection of Glasco's position as both part of an alliance and as a community where I gave several performances led to the vision and realization of this project: my composing a cello suite, responding to the art of Birger Sandzén – his Solomon Valley work in particular – as he had responded to the region's natural landscape. To expound on further connections, Birger Sandzén, often regarded as an "American Impressionist", completed his studies in Paris (where Kodály met Debussy), place he was first introduced to the pointillist style of impressionism of Edmond-Francois Aman-Jean, who also taught with Georges Seurat. In 1894, he was hired to teach Art and Voice (another musical and visual art connection) at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas, now referred to as "Little Sweden". After moving to Kansas, Sandzén developed an expressionist style of painting, a bold use of stroke and color that has been likened to Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne. In recent years, paintings by Birger Sandzén have become quite collectable and continue to rise in value. On a 2006 episode of Antiques Roadshow, a Sandzén painting was appraised at a value of \$30 thousand to \$65 thousand dollars.

Solomon Valley Sketches, Le Tombeau de Sandzen

For each movement of the solo cello work, inspiration was drawn from each of Sandzén's landscapes, manifesting into musical expression and haiku poetry, reflecting beauty and power from these paintings, offering tonal "impressions" and an unusual texture and interplay between words, sounds and images. One may ask, why haiku? Stemming from similar roots of Impressionism, Haiku poetry is a traditional Japanese art form, canonically consisting of three lines of 5, 7, and 5 moras each, totaling 17 moras (the Latin term *mora* translates "syllable"). Strict English haiku also consist of 17 syllables divided into three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables each. Written not by definitions or rules, but as "acts of consciousness", haiku are written out experiences of the here and now. Written through awareness, observation, meditation, imagination and contemplation, the poem is deliberately incomplete so that the reader can enter into the haiku moment and experience the feelings and insights of that moment for his or her self.

While meditating on each landscape painting, I was taken into a transcendental experience and the musical sounds and the poetry seemed to flow from the same creatively inspired source. Sometimes the form and

picture descriptions of the poetry dictated musical attributes, and choices of meter, rhythmic and intervallic motives, thematic material, colors and textures are derived from the poetic text, which is ultimately inspired by the painting.



GRAHAM COUNTY, 1911
Stonehenge of Kansas
Proud statues each keeping time
Sacred, eternal

The opening movement, *Graham County, 1911*, the ring of boulders is a majestic, monument-like circular structure, imposing a spacial design, and like Stonehenge, seem timeless. These detailed elements translate into the unity of motives that serve as material unifying all six movements. Keeping within the connection of the haiku syllabic order, musical elements are charged with the open intervals of 5ths 7ths and their inversions (4ths, 2nds and 11ths) constitute the harmonies, motives and contours of the opening phrases. Deliberately impressionistic and referencing Medieval “Organum”, the parallel 5ths and 7ths are tonally ambiguous and lacking the definition of a major or and minor harmony while dissonances of 7ths, 9ths and 11ths are left unresolved. The open intervals invoke a sense of open spaces, noble character and medieval austerity.



SUNSET, 1911
bird kachina trees
dancing timeless ritual
under pale tangerine clouds

Sunset, 1911 depicts a scene with two common trees, most likely the Cottonwood, Kansas’s official state tree. My reference to kachinas, spirits or personifications of things in the real world (a kachina can represent anything in the natural world or cosmos, from a revered ancestor to an element, a location, a quality, a natural phenomenon, or a concept) is an almost comical personification of the trees performing a tribal dance. Sitting a historical reference here, the Solomon River valley was host to many native Indian tribes, including the Pawnee, Delaware, Pottawatomie, Cheyenne, Kansas, Osage, Arapahoe, Kiowa, and Sioux all who camped along the river. Dance rhythms, “special sounds” imitating native flute and modal harmonic changes allude to the Native American association.



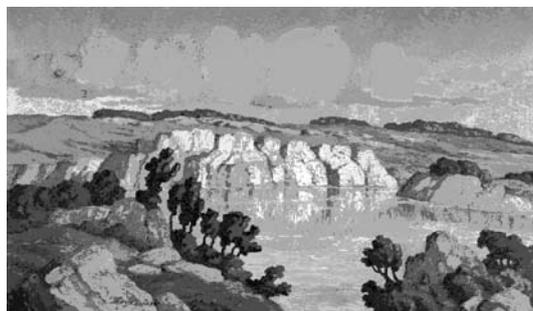
SMOKY RIVER
Indigo night blue
colors streak a mirrored lake
moon canyon echoes

Word painting is very much part of the color and image correlations to sound and texture. In *Smoky River*, the deep colors translate directly into the dark pedal point with moon reflections in the water being expressed as a tone color of harmonics at the end of the movement. Especially with images containing lakes and canyons, the interval structures of 5ths and 7ths are interplayed with their inversions, not excluding their major 7ths–major 2nds versions. Continuing the ABA structure, the 5-7-5 ratios and the three-line structure of haiku serve as a unifying form. Left hand pizzicato offers a connection between movements.



CREEK AT MOONRISE, 1921
Kissed by rising moon
a reflection following
promising morning

Similar to *Smoky River*, *Creek at Moonrise*, the parallel 6ths following the ascending whole-tone scale passages, borrow thematic material from the opening movement, creating continuity and single-mindedness of motivic units.



TWILIGHT, STEVENSON'S LAKE, 1943
Pastel baby clouds
cradle the mirrored beauty
trees gently sleeping

Twilight, Stevenson's Lake, 1943 provokes the imagery of “sleeping trees”, “pastel baby clouds” and “cradle” associations with innocence of lullaby. The plain-chant lullaby theme is displayed in harmonics with the repeated note figure taken from the opening movement’s rhythmic and intervallic motives, again providing unifying elements between the movements. References to first two movements create more unification and display elements of motivic transformation. In the textures of the painting, cloud cover, rock structures and water provide basis for the three-lined poetic form, and consequently, the ABA1 formal design.



RED FARM AND WHEAT SHOCKS, 1950
Golden fields waiting
basking in late summer warm
the lone farmer rests

Of all the six movements, *Red Farm and Wheat Shocks, 1950* is the only one bearing a “human” element. The work of one's hands is evident in the rolled wheat shocks and well-tended farmhouse. The poem creates a character, unseen but yet assumed, resting after his work. The music brings thematic material from earlier movements, alternating in mixed meters, occasionally suggesting a quasi-waltz. The phrasing is declamatory, offering recitative and hymnal statements. Harmonic intervals of the motivic 5ths and 7ths are joined by unexpected minor 3rds, 6ths and 10ths. Nostalgic in character, the movement portrays the love of the land and the warmth of humanity.

As in much of Sandzén's production, the subject matter of rocks, water, and trees is secondary to the artist's expressive color and application of pigment. In *Solomon Valley Sketches*, the musical associations reflecting these properties are demonstrated through the usage of harmonies as a color and their functions, relating to impressionist attitudes, contribute greatly to creating mood and atmosphere.

Santrauka

Inspiracija ir sąsajos: Saliamono slėnis įkvepia peizažus, siuitą violončelei solo, haiku poeziją ir dvidešimt keturias Kanzaso bendruomenes

Kaip profesionalus koncertuojantis violončelininkas, autorius daugiausia dėmesio skiria naujos muzikos, pasižyminčios garso ir vaizdo sinteze, kūrybai ir atlikimui.

Konferencijoje buvo atlikta siuita violončelei solo „Saliamono slėnio eskizai. Sandzeno antkapis“ (kūrinio premjera įvyko 2011 m. spalį, minint Kanzaso pusantrų šimto metų jubiliejų). Kūrinys sukurtas pagal šešis švedų kilmės amerikiečio dailininko impresionisto Birgerio Sandzeno (1871–1954) peizažus. Įkvėpta paveikslų grožio, ši „vaizdų“ siuita yra tarsi minėtų peizažų garsinė versija. Be to, buvo pasitelkta ir originali haiku poezija – taip kūrinyje susiliejo poezija, muzika ir vaizduojamasis menas.

Straipsnyje išryškinamos ir aptariamoms technikos bei komponavimo elementai, panaudoti kuriant sinergetinį ryšį tarp vaizduojamojo meno (B. Sandzeno paveikslų su visomis jų spalvomis, faktūromis, erdviniais santykiais, simbolizmu, formomis ir struktūromis) bei muzikinių ir poetinių asociacijų, panaudotų minėtoje siuitoje violončelei solo.