

MUTH 5370: Paper #4

Nokuthula Ngwenyama: *Sonoran Storm* for Solo Viola

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MUTH 5370: Analytical Techniques III

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Dear Professor,

Today I would like to discuss Nokuthula Endo Ngwenyama's piece entitled *Sonoran Storm* for Solo Viola (2016). It has been a pleasure to study this piece for many reasons — namely that the piece is fairly new, written by an American composer of Ndebele and Japanese descent, and a viola solo — making this already quite unique! I am pleased that we are supporting diversity in the classical field by bringing this piece and composer to light in our studies.

To begin, I would like to share the composer's program note on the piece to allow us to imagine the programmatic view that she intends. I have pulled this quote and subsequent screen-shots of the sheet-music from a purchased score:

Humidity rises in the desert. That scorch blaster hitting the face feels fuller and expectant upon exit. Haboob dust causes a metal gate to clang. It's bulging brown outside. Feet scamper across parched earth as clouds approach. Expanding into the atmosphere, they amass to quench aridity's obsession.

Anti-trades carry ocean moisture across Baja California to the Sierra Madres during the monsoons. It drifts north across el Camino del Diablo and swirls above the Mogollon Rim. Cumulus giants, made stronger by el Niño, dwarf the eastern landscape. The sun sets, the ground cools, and the desert braces for thermal dynamism. Tree branches partner with updrafts, while downdrafts pelt the land. Angular veins shoot through darkness.

Thunder rumbles with an abusive baritone's vigor while the saguaro leads succulents in thirsty supplication, arms toward the sky.

Static tendrils demand audience: jagged voltage communicates melody in joyful obeisance. The virga stop teasing as ten miles of heaven drop to the floor (section A). Big

weather enjoys a snail-paced game of bumper cars, reforming whilst arboreal cards stand empty. It's calm. Is it over? Abated leaves bathe in temporary starlight (section B). But summer westerlies do not relent, and another thunderhead descends. The romp resumes, culminating in a celebration of renewal and life (section A).

This title and inspiration for this piece is from the Sonoran Desert, a region in the southwestern United States of Arizona and California, as well as the northwestern region of Mexico in the states of Sonora, Baja California, and Baja California Sur. Below in Figures 1 and 2, I have provided some images to help us contextualize the region. You can read more about the importance of the area [linked here at www.desertmuseum.org](http://www.desertmuseum.org).

Figure 1: Map of Sonoran Desert Region, highlighted in yellow.

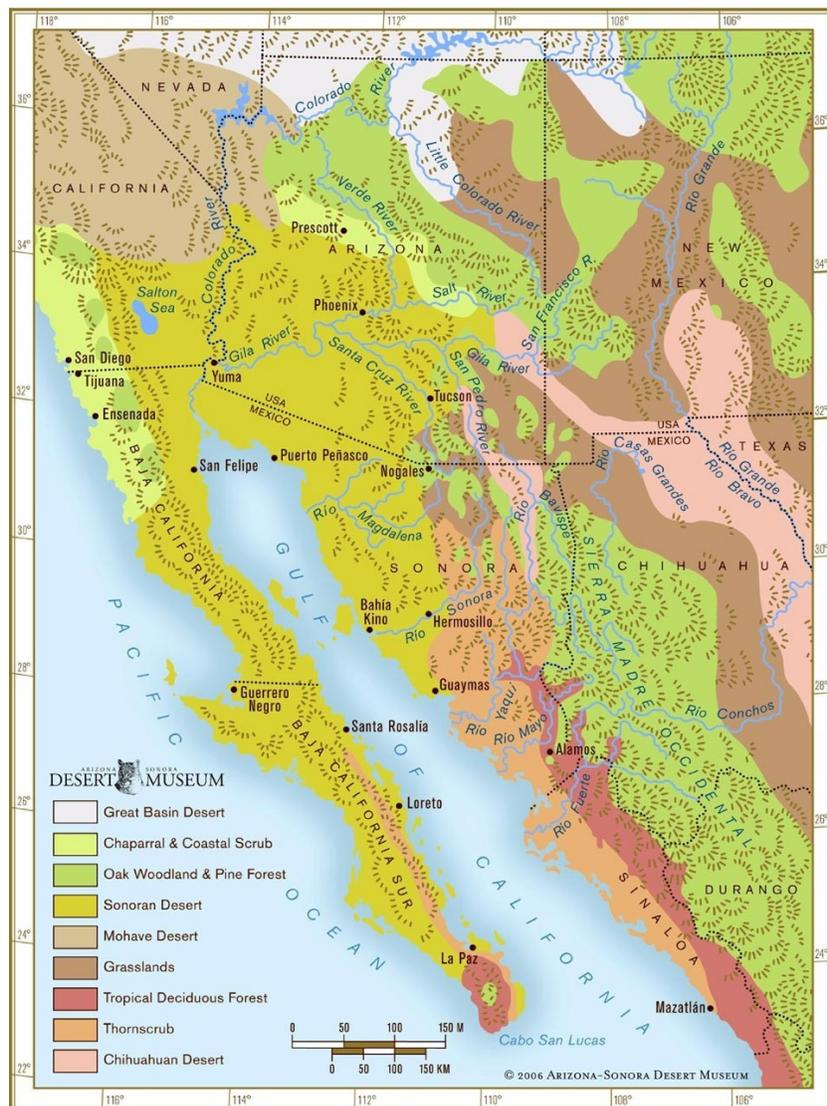


Figure 2: *Image of Sonoran Desert from Saguaro National Park, Arizona.*



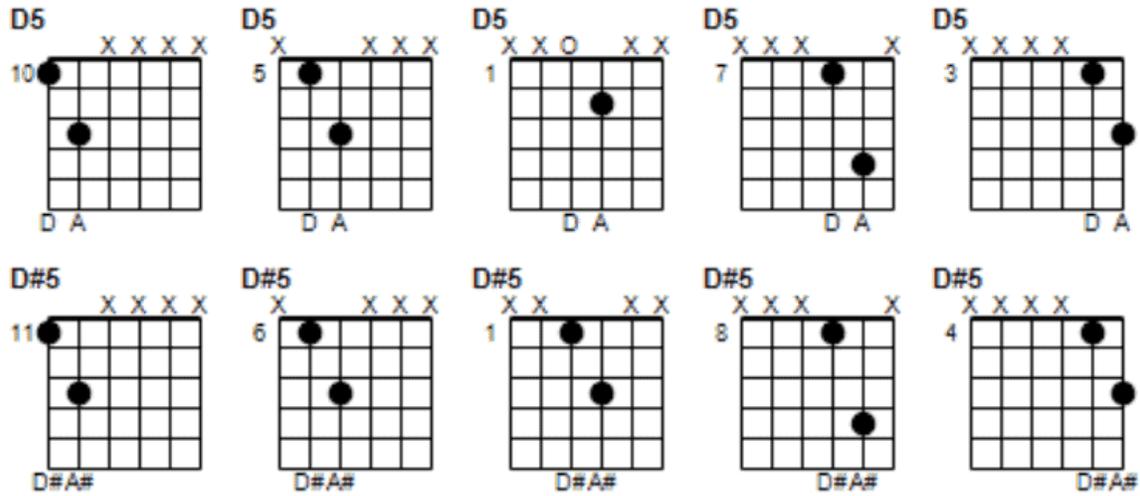
The piece is in E-flat sonata form, although it takes many liberties in striving away from standard sonata form conventions. Before I discuss the entirety of the form of this work, I want to draw your attention to a few key areas that I find imperative to the discussion of Ngwenyama’s piece. Below in Figure 3 I have labeled the opening four measures, which introduces the character of the piece Ngwenyama was attempting to embody — that being a “*celebration of renewal and life*”.

Figure 3, Score: *Sonora Storm* for Solo Viola, Introductory material (mm. 1–6)

Introductory Material Nokuthula Ngwenyama (2016)

Allegro (♩ = 98)

Figure 4: Open power-chord tablature fingering chart for guitar, D5 and D#5.



Ngwenyama implements chords similar to the guitar’s use of “power-chords” for a large portion of the piece. In fact, the entire introduction, first subject, and transition of the exposition (mm. 1–55) overwhelmingly uses this technique. The first full measure the listener experiences *without* the use of power-chords is in measure 56, at the beginning of the Second Subject (which instead uses a broken chord style).

Figure 5, Score: *Sonora Storm* for Solo Viola, First Subject (mm. 11–14)

Above, in Figure 5, I have highlighted a string of notes in green in this opening phrase. Amongst the power-chord foundation, Ngwenyama adds in a layer that provides a melody. This occurs after a full 10 bars of repetitive introduction that cycles between E-flat (I), A-flat (IV), and B-flat (V). Although the power-chord feature could be argued to be borrowed from rock music, I

believe that the melodic layering we witness in Figure 5 is more closely aligned with today's pop/electronic music — specifically that of a loop track. A loop track functions by layering multiple takes over one another. The most common way to use a loop track in performance is to start with a chordal background (or rhythmic track), followed by layers of melody and harmony. Measure 11 reminds me of this kind of performance practice, where the foundation was presented “bare” in mm. 1–10 before “layering” the melody overtop of the still-ongoing background. I have linked an [example of a loop track performance here](#). The “acoustic layering” that Ngwenyama uses in *Sonara Storm* is a compositional centerpiece of the work. ♥

Lastly, I would like to share my interpretation on the form of this piece. As mentioned before, the piece is in E-flat major sonata form, although it strays away from typical conventions from time to time. Some of these moments include restating the First Subject and Transition before the Second Subject is introduced and a Secondary Development that occurs in the recapitulation. My interpretation is as follows. Additionally, I have provided a full score at the end of this paper with these sections marked in red brackets (Figure 6):

Exposition, mm. 1–68

- Introductory material, mm. 1–10
- First Subject (or Prime), mm. 11–25
- Transition, mm. 25–34
- First Subject returns, mm. 35–50
- Transition returns, mm. 50–55
- Second Subject, mm. 56–59
- Transitional material, mm. 60–67

Development, mm. 68–144

- Second Subject material, mm. 68–75

- First Subject material, mm. 76–82
- Rapid modulations, mm. 82–83
- First Subject material, mm. 84–89
- Transitional material, mm. 90–93
- Development Theme 1, mm. 94–105
- Transitional material, mm. 106–117
- Development Theme 2, mm. 118–133
- Transitional material, mm. 134–139
- Retransition, mm. 140–144

Recapitulation, mm. 144–209

- Recapitulation begins; introductory material mm. 144–151
- First Subject (or Prime), mm. 152–158
- Transition with altered key, 158–167
- Second Subject with altered key, 168–174
- Secondary Development, mm. 175–188
 - First Subject with altered keys & transitional material, mm. 176–182
 - Development Theme 1 & transitional material, mm. 182–188
- Return of First Subject, mm. 188–201
- Coda, mm. 202–209

I hope you can take my writings into consideration as you continue to study this piece!

Best wishes,



Slade Presley Denman

Begin Figure 6, Score: *Sonora Storm* for Solo Viola, full score with form labels (mm. 1–209)

Sonoran Storm

for Solo Viola

Introductory Material

Nokuthula Ngwenyama (2016)

Allegro (♩ = 98)

1

f

3

p *simile poco cresc.*

5

mf *p* *poco cresc.*

7

f *mp*

9

11

First Subject

mf *p*

13

15

18

pp

20

22

24

Transition

26

And the rain fell

mf

28

30

mf

32

34

First Subject returns

p poco a poco cresc.

37

40

f

42

p

45

47

49

Transition returns

51

And the rain fell

53

mf

55

Second Subject

57

mf cantabile

59

Transitional material

fp

61

fp

63

mf

65

cresc.

6 6 6 6

67

f broad

Development begins,
Second Subject material

69

1 2 4 1 1 1 3 2

71

poco a poco decresc.

73

rall.

0

75

rit.

mf *f*

First Subject material

77

79

81

83

mf

85

87

89

Transitional material

f *mf*

91

93

Development Theme 1

f rit. *mf* *mp*

Meno mosso (♩ = 76)

96

100

Transitional material

104

107

109

111

113

115

117

119

123

127

Musical notation for measures 127-130. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. It features a complex melodic line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 3). A 'rall.' marking is present above the staff.

131

Musical notation for measures 131-133. The music continues with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4). A 'rall.' marking is present above the staff.

Transitional material

134 *piu meno mosso*

Musical notation for measures 134-135. The music consists of sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (1, 2). The dynamic marking is *pp*.

136

Musical notation for measures 136-137. The music features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (6).

138

Musical notation for measures 138-139. The music features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (1).

139

Musical notation for measures 139-140. The music features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (3). The dynamic marking is *mf*.

Retransition

poco accel.

140

Musical notation for measures 140-141. The music features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs. The dynamic marking is *p* *poco a poco cresc.* and *simile*.

142

Musical notation for measures 142-143. The music features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (0). The dynamic marking is *f* and *rubato*.

Recapitulation begins

144 *Tempo Primo*

Musical notation for measures 144-145. The music features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (>). The dynamic marking is *f* *pp* *poco a poco cresc.* and *simile*.

146

mp p

148

mf mp

150

First Subject

152

p

154

156

Transition with altered key

158

160

fp

162

fp

164

mf *cresc.*

rall.

166

Second Subject with altered key

168

f broad

170

172

poco a poco *decresc.*

174

Secondary Development

176

p

178

poco a poco *cresc.*

180

mf *cantabile*

182

mp

f

185

mp

f

rit.

Return of First Subject

188 **Tempo I**

190

192

194

196 *mf*

198

200

Coda

202

205 *f mf f mf f mf*

fmp cresc. al fine

207 **molto rit.**

ff