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3 December 2021

### **Analysis Paper #4: (My) Colors of *Sonoran Storm***

In music circles we frequently talk about “color.” It is part of the word “chromatic,” after all. When musicians talk about colors in music, they are often referencing various aspects of the music, such as timbre, pitch, or mood. There are other colors associated with music, though. As a musician with grapheme–color synesthesia, I associate pieces with certain adjectives or descriptive words, and these words make colors in my mind’s eye. For instance, when I recall Nokutula Ngwenyama’s *Sonoran Storm*, I see maroon.<sup>1</sup> This is because the word I would use to describe the piece is “resonant,” and that word is a rich, deep shade of red. But each section that makes up the piece has its own personality and “word,” and therefore the piece is comprised of more than one color. In this paper I will analyze the development of *Sonoran Storm* with words and their colors, only loosely using formal music theory terms. Because this piece has distinct sections with individual personalities, I will label each section with a word and use the colors for those words to help map out the piece visually. This will show how, even though the same motives are used over and over again, with each iteration they are shaped by their context and transformed into something deeper and more complex by the end of the piece.

#### **Declamatory**

00:10 to 00:15

The piece opens with a very brief introduction. The introduction, though simple, grabs the listener’s attention. The piece immediately transitions into the first section.

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<sup>1</sup> It’s hard to describe or show exactly what I see because word-colors are a combination of the colors for each letter in a word. The word “resonant” is a much more complex hue than maroon, but it’s close enough.

**Hovering**00:15-00:35

The first part of the piece seems like it could be looped endlessly. The motive is a stream of repetitive notes that surround and separate a set of three ascending notes. Ngwenyama repeats this motive several times before moving into the next section.

**Jubilant**00:35-01:09

This section features the most singable melody from the piece, still surrounded by secondary, repetitive notes. The combination of staccato filler notes and motion of the melody make this section feel very carefree and joyful. It is also a good example of controlled viola technique, maintaining a consistent, subordinate sound for the secondary notes while shaping the overarching melodic line.

**Hovering/Reminiscent**01:09-01:34

The “Hovering” motive is back but altered. The piece is starting to develop, with more variation in the direction of the melodic notes. This section reminds me of pieces that Bach wrote for solo violin and cello and the way that he would arpeggiate chordal progressions (particularly the “Prelude” from Cello Suite No. 1). This connection may be partly why this section makes me think of the word “reminiscent,” but the music does seem to have a rather musing quality to it in comparison with the “Jubilant” theme.

**Jubilant/Joyful**01:34-02:11

The exultant melody returns, but it has changed. We remember and hear it differently because it is now a familiar melody that we could hum along to. Not only that, but we also hear it a bit differently after the wistfulness of the “Reminiscent” section. This, and the addition of several embellishments, makes this “Jubilant” section more plainly “Joyful,” and therefore a tad bit darker in hue.

### **Reminiscent/Hovering**

02:11 to 03:22

This section starts out like the previous “Reminiscent” section, but it maintains some of the bounce of “Hovering” amidst the more Bach-like arpeggiated passages. It is an expansive section with a larger pitch space range than previously heard in “Hovering” or “Reminiscent.”

### **Jubilant/Forceful**

03:22 to 04:17

The main melody once again returns, but it is becoming more and more brash and forceful. There are significantly more melodic leaps and double-stops than heard in previous iterations. And at the very end of this section there is a shift in energy—the tempo slows and the harmony becomes more ominous.

### **Dolorous**

04:17 to 06:42

This section is certainly a development of the “Reminiscent” section, but expanded upon and so altered in character that it is now a completely different color. This is the softest, slowest, longest section of the piece. Double stops and arpeggios abound, as do harmonics. The melody ascends from the lower range of the viola to the higher, preparing for a new hearing of the “Reminiscent” section, but now transformed into—

### **Contemplative**

06:42 to 07:10

Suddenly the piece seems to come out of a dark place and into the sunlight. Although the material is not significantly different, it is freer and unrestrained after the mournfulness of the previous section. It is a moment of clarity for the listener between the “Dolorous” and “Hovering” sections.

### **Hovering**

07:10 to 07:41

This section is a cadenza-like variation of the “Hovering” motive. It speeds up in tempo, slows down, and rises and falls in dynamic range. This iteration is more virtuosic and varied than the first time that “Hovering” was introduced. At the end of this section Ngwenyama sets the stage, once more, for “Jubilant.”

### **Jubilant/Hesitant**

07:41 to 8:21

The joyful melody is back, but now interrupted with short asides. This means that the melody is not as carefree or simple as it was in the first half of the piece. It seems to me that the music is hesitant to resume its buoyancy after the heartbreaking “Dolorous” section. This is further indicated by how quickly Ngwenyama reverts to the “Hovering” motive.

### **Reminiscent/Recollecting**

08:21 to 08:47

To me, this final iteration of the “Reminiscent” motive is less wistful in character. It is far more pragmatic. The chords make the melody more emphasized than we’ve heard in previous

“Reminiscent” sections. It is no longer a gentle reminder of the melodic material but a powerful statement.

### Jubilant/Exultant

08:47-10:31

The main, “Jubilant,” theme returns. There are new rhythms, new secondary notes, new phrasings, and a completely altered understanding of the melody. After going through the middle “Dolorous” and “Contemplative” sections, the melody has utterly transformed and is now “Exultant.” The piece reigns to a halt with repeated notes and then two final chords that hearken to the overarching melodic line and the declamatory introduction.

Nokutula Ngwenyama’s *Sonoran Storm* is an excellent example of how motives and themes can be transformed over the course of a piece. It requires a rather large vocabulary to describe because, with each repetition of a motive, the description must change. When I start listening to the piece, it is joyful and buoyant. The words that describe the first half are bright and warm colors. Halfway through, the piece is heartbreaking and the piece takes on darker, cooler shades. Even when the melody, the primary expression of joy from the beginning, returns, its meaning and presentation is different. I hear it on the other side of sorrow and reflection; it is now expansive, complex, and confident. In a word, exultant.

### Colors in *Sonoran Storm* based on descriptive words

