

ALEX TEMPLE

VI  LA J  KE

for two vaudevillian violists
& electronic studio audience

composed in 2013–2014
for Doyle Armbrust
& Chris Fisher-Lochhead

NOTES

VIOLA JOKE is a comedy routine that takes place in a nightmare world. The exact nature of this world is revealed gradually over the course of the piece: there's an enormous hole in the center of town, a vast wasteland between two formerly adjacent parts of the city, and a gigantic mountain that blocks out the sun. At the same time, people are disappearing, and losing their identities in a mysterious Fog.

The two performers attempt to find some humor in this dire situation, and their audience — played by a series of samples triggered by a foot pedal — responds well at first. But when the comedians start pretending that they've succumbed to the madness of the Fog, the audience turns against them, responding with stony silence (represented by a sample of crickets chirping).

In order to sell this bizarre scenario to the piece's real-life audience, its real-life performers should be sure to put aside all concerns of good taste.

NOTATION

VIOLA PART



VOICE PART



♩ = 80

c.l. tratto

arco
sul pont.

pizz.

arco
ord.

♩ = 100

suddenly wild and burlesque-y

D

Musical notation for the first system, double bass part (D). It features a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The music begins with a *ff* dynamic and includes fingerings (5, 5, 6) and articulation marks like *c.l. tratto*, *arco sul pont.*, *pizz.*, and *arco ord.*.

ff with a serious attitude, as if you were beginning an arcane, cerebral piece

C

Musical notation for the first system, cello part (C). It features a 3/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The music begins with a *ff* dynamic and includes articulation marks like *c.l. batt.*, *pizz.*, *arco sul tasto*, *c.l. batt. ord.*, and *arco*.

ff with a serious attitude, as if you were beginning an arcane, cerebral piece

suddenly wild and burlesque-y

(foot stomps)

Musical notation for the second system, double bass part (D). It continues the melodic line from the first system, featuring various articulation marks and dynamics.

Musical notation for the second system, cello part (C). It features a rhythmic accompaniment with *ff* dynamics and articulation marks like *c.l. batt.* and *arco*.

Musical notation for the third system, double bass part (D). It begins with a *p* dynamic and includes a crescendo leading to a *ff* dynamic. It features various articulation marks and dynamics.

Musical notation for the third system, cello part (C). It begins with a *p* dynamic and includes a crescendo leading to a *ff* dynamic. It features various articulation marks and dynamics.

(foot stomps)

A

♩ = 80

exaggerated, hammy delivery
(speak with the approximate pitches and rhythms of the viola part)

25

D

sul pont. *f*

ord.

sul pont. *f*

ord. 3

Yeah, Chris?

Have I heard a- bout

C

sul pont. *f*

ord. 3

sul pont. *f*

ord. 3

Hey, Doyle?

Have you heard a - bout it?

29

D

what?

sul pont. *f*

ord.

3

3

3

3

3

3

3

3

Who has-n't?

(wait for sample to end)

(laughter)

C

ord. 3

5

3

3

3

3

3

3

3

3

Have you heard a - bout the ter - ri - fy - ing - ly huge hole?

(wait for sample to end)

35

D

But aren't you wor-ried?

sul pont.

35

C

Wor-ried? That pitch black, bot-tom-less pit is - n't real - ly the size of

pizz.

arco

39

D

ord.

(laughter)

39

C

ten ci - ty blocks! It's just in the fore-ground!

43

D

And what a- bout the gro - tesque-ly o - ver-sized chair?

43

5

3

3

6/16

7/16

2/4

sul pont.

ord.

5

3

3

C

43

pizz.

Well at least it is - n't as big as the hor - ri - fy - ing - ly wide gap!

43

5

3

3

6/16

7/16

2/4

5

3

3

49

D

49

(laughter)

49

stage whisper

It's big-ger!

49

3

3/4

3/4

3/4

♩ = 72

52 tentative

O-K. I've got one. That's— that's not a night - mar-ish - ly huge Gap. It's just an out - let store.

gaining confidence smug

D

52

pizz. arco

mp p mp p mp mf (laughter)

C

52 sul tasto c.l. batt. ord. pizz. arco

mp p mf

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff (D) is a vocal line with lyrics: "O-K. I've got one. That's— that's not a night - mar-ish - ly huge Gap. It's just an out - let store." The middle staff (D) is a piano accompaniment with performance instructions: "pizz." (pizzicato), "arco" (arco), and dynamic markings: "mp", "p", "mp", "p", "mp", "mf". The bottom staff (C) is a cello/bass accompaniment with performance instructions: "sul tasto", "c.l. batt. ord." (crescendo), "pizz." (pizzicato), and "arco" (arco), and dynamic markings: "mp", "p", "mf". The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, quintuplets, and slurs. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 72. The piece ends with a measure of laughter.

58

D

58

f

mp *sfz*

pizz.

Ev' - ry-one's tel - ling it in the o - ther half of the ci - ty!

58

C

58

f

pizz.

arco

sul pont.

ord.

Where'd you hear that? You walked through that

62

D

62

arco

pizz.

arco

with a raised eyebrow

What can I say? I'm a size queen. (don't wait for sample to end this time!)

(applause)

62

C

62

pizz.

arco

blank, fea - ture - less waste - land? But it's ter - ri - fy - ing - ly huge!

(don't wait for sample to end this time!)

B ♩ = 100

68

D

C

p *f* *ff*

77

D

C

like a smarmy radio advertiser

And we're talking about the unfathomably vast, empty plain that separates the two halves of our fair city!

like a smarmy radio advertiser

Yes, that's right, we're talking about the impossibly deep, pitch-black hole that recently appeared at the center of town!

And we're talking about the incomprehensibly large chair at the end of that long, long hallway!

p *f* *p* *mf* *p* *mp* *pp*



robotic monotone; give each syllable equal emphasis

Space, time and lo - gic make less and less sense now that so ma - ny si - ni - ster e - vents have un - furled.

D

81

f *mf*

bold and brassy

We know that space, time and lo - gic make less and less sense now that so ma - ny si - ni - ster e - vents have un - furled.

C

81

f

pizz.

More and more things are gro - tesque and im - mense now, as we draw clo - ser to the end of the world.

D

86

p

lyrical and mysterious

More and more things are gro - tesque and im - mense now, as we draw clo - ser to the end of the world. and it's cer - tain - ly not our in - ten - tion to pro - voke!

C

86

p *p*

arco

♩ = 92

Rit.

93 *pizz.* *arco* *mp* *puckish and Mozartean*

93 *lyrical* *mp*

93 *pizz.*

C But here in this ca - ba - ret we call Con - stel - la - tion, we can en - ter - tain the dwind - ling pop - u - la - tion.

♩ = 112

like an old-timey circus barker

98 *arco* *ff* *bold and brassy*

98 *arco* *ff* *saucy*

D It's not a se-date show. We pro-mise it's great, though. It's the mi-cro-the-a-tri-cal late show called Vi o - la Joke!

C It's not a se-date show. We pro-mise it's great, though. It's the mi-cro-the-a-tri-cal late show called Vi o - la Joke!

10

♩ = 112

103

D

improvise à la Stéphane Grappelli

C

103

D9 G9 D9 F9 eø7 dm11

ff

D

♩ = 82

(speech rhythm is approximate)

111

D

How many people who have peered through the door at the end of the shocking-long hall-way does it take to change a light-bulb?

111

C

111

mf

mf

mf

I don't know. How many?

D

116

They'd rather sit in the dark.

116

c.l. tratto

pp

imitate laughter

(laughter)

116

C

116

c.l. tratto

pp

imitate laughter

♩ = 78

120

D

arco poco sul tasto

mf

120

5

5

3

I don't know. What?

C

(speech rhythm is approximate)

120

3

3

5

What's the difference between the appalling large chair and the nauseatingly deep hole?

120

pizz.

mf

3

126

D

c.l. tratto ord.

pp

imitate applause

(applause)

126

3

You can remember the chair.

C

126

c.l. tratto

pp

imitate applause

♩ = 74

taking on a darker tone

130

D

arco sul tasto

mp

What do you get when you cross the un-set-tling-ly vast, dark, fea-ture-less ex-panse that se-par-ates the two halves of the ci-ty?

C

arco sul tasto

mp

135

D

pizz.

c.l. tratto ord.

imitate "aww"

A-bout twenty years ol-der.

pp

("aww")

C

taking on a darker tone

135

I don't know. What?

c.l. tratto ord.

imitate "aww"

pp

♩ = 70

quieter, as if you're beginning to scare yourself

140

D

arco
molto sul tasto
slide between harmonics when possible

140

C

quieter, as if you're beginning to scare yourself

140

arco
molto sul tasto

Why did the man who had looked up at the dis-qui-et-ing-ly tall moun-tain try to kill him-self?

I don't know. Why?

147

D

c.l. tratto
ord.

pp

imitate thunder

(thunder)

147

C

c.l. tratto
ord.

pp

Because he couldn't shake the feeling that his face had been replaced by a blank, featureless expanse of skin.

imitate thunder

E ♩ = 66

as if confused and preoccupied

155

Knock knock.

E - ri - ka.

Erika disappeared a week ago and I'm really starting to worry.

arco ord. IV

as if confused and preoccupied

155

Who's there?

E - ri - ka who?

move bow perpendicularly on C string to create an unpitched "whoosh"

159

imitate birds

(birds)

pp

159

imitate birds

pp

molto sul pont.

ord. III IV (b.o.)

169 *slow, ghostly whisper*

D

Oh yeah? Well, your mom's so dumb that she thinks the deliriously tall mountain that casts its shadow over the city and permits us only a few scant minutes of daylight has always been there.

If you have something to say, say it to my face.

c.l. tratto

pp p pp pp p pp p pp

169 *slow, ghostly whisper*

C

Hey. Your mom's so dumb, she doesn't understand why she can't recognize her own reflection.

to audience
Can you believe this guy?

c.l. tratto

pp p pp pp p pp p pp

179 *like an echo*

D

What face? What face? What face?

p pp ppp

179 *like an echo*

C

What face? What face? What face?

p pp ppp p

F ♩ = 112

mocking and abrasive

186

Ha! I bet you thought we had lost our - selves in the fog! Right? Well, don't wor-ry. We're fine. But

arco sul tasto

ff *pizz.* *mf* *ff* *arco sul pont.*

3 *3* *3* *3*

ff *mf* *ff* *arco sul pont.*

3 *c.l. batt. ord.* *c.l. tratto* *pizz.* *arco sul pont.*

♩ = 90

191

you should-'ve seen the looks on your fa-ces!

imitate crickets

(crickets)

imitate crickets

ord. *sul pont.* *mf*

3 *3* *3* *3*

Accel

203 *robotic monotone*

D
We see the fros - ty re-cep-tion— well, more like ant-arc - tic— that you, our dear au - di - ence has gi - ven our schtick.

p *mf*

C
O-K. *resigned* We see the *ingratiating* fros - ty re-cep-tion— well, more like ant-arc - tic— that you, our dear au - di - ence has gi - ven - our schtick.

ord. *pizz.*
mp *mf*

♩ = 104

208

D
Some - times black co - me - dy can be ca - thar - tic and that's why we played such a hair - rai - sing trick.

pizz. *f*

C
Some - times black co - me - dy can be ca - thar - tic, and that's why we played such a hair - rai - sing trick. And we

arco *schmatzy*

somber and stately

arco
imitate a viol: sul tasto & non vib.

212 *p* *mp*

212 *tr*

212 *pizz.* *mp* *arco* *pp* *mp*

lyrical

rea-lize our me-thods may seem a bit ba - ro - - que- But when the laws of phys - ics are col - lap-sing like a flat tire,

218 **Rit.** $\text{♩} = 112$ *shouty*

218 *pizz.* *arco* *ff*

218 *pizz.* *arco* *ff*

bold and brassy

how can you res-pond, ex - cept with ghas-t-ly sa-tire? So no more in-vec - tive! At least we're se-elec - tive 'bout the

So no more in-vec - tive! At least we're se - lec - tive 'bout the

223

D

a - li - en - a - tion ef - fect of this Vi - o - la Joke!

Rit.

A tempo

223

223

223

C

a - li - en - a - tion ef - fect of this Vi - o - la Joke!

223

mp

mp

ff

mp

ff

pizz.