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Connection and Isolation: A Musical Exploration of Emotion

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CONNECTION AND ISOLATION: A MUSICAL EXPLORATION OF EMOTION

by

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Approved:

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Abstract

Music is emotional and inherently connective, and this paper addresses how research in social work and emotion can be communicated and understood using a musical performance. Using the research of Dr. Brené Brown, I explored the concept of "near" and "far enemies" of emotion with a musical perspective and commissioned composers to write a piece of their interpretation. "Near" and "far enemies" are Buddhist terms typically attributed to the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. The far enemy of an emotion is its opposite, and it typically produces a harsh outcome. Near enemies are not as obvious. Similar to far enemies, they produce a disconnecting effect, but the attack is more subtle. A near enemy can easily be confused for the base emotion. Dr. Brown applied this concept to all emotions that connect us, rather than solely being an exercise for the Four Immeasurables, and she uses the English language to explore and demystify these ideas. It is essential to understand ourselves and our emotions better to be able to communicate our needs with others more effectively. To expand upon her research musically, I hired three student composers to write original works after I assigned them an extensive worksheet that allowed them to explore what these ideas mean to them individually. I then premiered these pieces and explained the concepts to an audience. Participants were asked to fill out a worksheet during the performance, and their responses are the basis for my Honors Capstone.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Sara Bakker for her consistent guidance throughout the entire process of this massive project. From helping me develop my ideas in my very first URCO Proposal, to helping me polish this official Honors Capstone (and everything in between), she has truly stuck with me from beginning to end. Her feedback has been indispensable, and I'm grateful for all the time she has spent on my behalf.

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I am so grateful to the Honors Program and the Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities Grant for all the resources they provided that made this all possible.

I would like to thank Jaume Baixas, Emma Cardon, and Mitchell Jett Spencer for writing beautiful compositions. Thank you as well to musicians Adam Bowen, Hugues Herpin, and Emily Taylor for their dedication and making the process of learning this music so enjoyable.

Finally, I have immense gratitude for my family and friends for constantly supporting my musical journey. Thank you especially to my partner Azure and dear friends Ariel, John, Kirsten, Laurana, Rivkah, and Ryn for the conversations, coffee dates, study sessions, and moral support to make sure I got this project done.

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Introduction

In Fall 2022, I was on my way to Barcelona to study abroad. I was about to leave everything and everyone I knew, and yet I had never felt more connected to myself, and even the friends and family I was leaving. I was curious how this could be possible. I was reflecting on the previous two years, full of struggle with mental health and disconnection. Because of this, I had been engaging in personal exploration of psychology and human emotion; I wanted to understand the reasons and processes behind my own inner workings. The sickness of my mind and the world struggling with a pandemic, climate change, late-stage capitalism, and polarized politics (to name a few) made it difficult for me to see how my participation in the arts had any real value to larger societal problems. While I was on the airplane, I began watching researcher and storyteller Brene Brown's HBO Series, *Atlas of the Heart*. She introduced the idea of near and far enemies of emotion, and I immediately related this concept to my own experience. *Connection and Isolation: A Musical Exploration of Emotion* began to take shape as I wondered how this idea could be communicated musically: Can a musical performance enhance understanding of "near" and "far enemies?" I submitted an Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities (URCO) Grant and received funding, and expanded on the original project to include an audience participation component to count as my Honors Capstone.

On March 24, 2024, the project came to fruition: I performed a lecture recital where I premiered two pieces, presented a lecture while audience members answered questions on a worksheet, and played the two pieces once more. The remainder of this document will summarize the process it took to create and present a lecture recital. I will define connection and its far enemy of disconnection and near enemy of control, explain the compositions with

reference to the composers' stated intentions, and share details about the audience responses in relation to the music scores.

Connection

The first step of the project was to choose which emotion or experience I wanted to explore, and I was particularly interested in exploring the near and far enemies. There were many contenders, such as empathy (with a far enemy of apathy and a near enemy of sympathy) and compassion (with a far enemy of cruelty and a near enemy of pity), but ultimately, I decided to choose connection; connection was what I was hoping to communicate and achieve through this project. The far enemy of connection is disconnection, and the near enemy is control. I thought these concepts would have a lot of possibilities to explore musically as well. Musicians learn from the beginning that they are inextricably bound by connection: connection to the notes, rhythm, pulse, and phrases in order to create a cohesive narrative of a piece or work, connection to the other musicians or performers on stage, and connection to our audience. There is also a level of control musicians must have to execute a piece well. Too controlled, and the performance loses interest for both performer(s) and audience.

Dr. Brené Brown defines connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."[1] Connection is important because we are all neurobiologically wired for it; in other words, it is necessary for our survival to feel and be connected to ourselves and one another.[2]

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[1] Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart* (New York: Random House, 2021), 169.

[2] Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*, 169.

I asked audience members what they thought connection was. Many participants talked about belonging and understanding. Five people wrote about being seen. One participant wrote, "Connection is, in part, the instinctive and ancestral drive to gather for survival. But it has transcended this to become essential for our spiritual, mental, and emotional wellbeing, not just physical." For all of the responses I received, Dr. Brown's overarching definition still holds true.

Disconnection

Dr. Brown defines disconnection as being "often equated with social rejection, social exclusion, and/or social isolation."[3] At all times, roughly 20% of people feel lonely, or in other words, disconnected.[4] They are sufficiently isolated to the point that it creates distress and unhappiness. This impacts physical health, such as high blood pressure, stress hormones, immune function, and cardiovascular function.[5] It also affects behavior, such as lack of exercise or smoking. Feeling disconnected and lonely is serious, and it actually registers in the brain as feeling physical pain.

I asked audience members what disconnection feels like to them, and they all unanimously agreed that it is uncomfortable to experience. Six of the thirty-two used the words isolate or isolated in their response. Eleven of the thirty-two used the words lonely or alone. Seven participants talked about understanding and the lack thereof when disconnection is present. One response said, "Disconnection feels like there is no hope of help or comfort to turn to." Everyone has experienced the feeling of disconnection, and it is uncomfortable.

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[3] Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*, 171.

[4] John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 5.

[5] John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness*, 5.

Control

The Merriam-Webster definition of control is to exercise restraining or directing influence over, or to have power over. There is a level of control we all must have in order to function in society: we need to control our decisions, finances, schedules, impulses, and so forth, but as soon as we try to control our emotions or other people, it can become a major fuel of disconnection. Our emotions are for our survival, and if we try to control how, when, and why we feel them, we become split. One side of us is feeling the emotion, while the other side of us is trying to control or fight against it, often making the situation worse. With others, if we try to control another's story, we're inhibiting them from telling their truth as they see and experience it, and thus sneakily promoting disconnection.

I asked audience members what control is to them and what it feels like. One participant answered that control is "certainty with an absence of trust [and] power over. To be controlled feels small, and to control feels empty." Another noted that control is "a false sense of security." Some responses included the feelings of safety in control: "Control can feel good, because it feels powerful and safe. But it can also feel bad, especially when we wield it over others." There are times and places for control, but controlling our emotions or others will always contribute to disconnection.

Compositions

After choosing and learning about my base emotion with its near and far enemies, my next task was to share this information with the composers. I worked with three composers, and each of them wrote six to eight minute pieces that explored the interplay of connection, disconnection, and control. I compiled information and data and shared videos and written summaries primarily from Dr. Brown's work so they could easily learn about these concepts. I

also created a worksheet for them to complete before beginning the composing process. I wanted each of the compositions to be personalized to their experience, so while I gave them all the same basis to work off of, the questions on the worksheet were mostly about reflecting on their own experience with these concepts.

Jaume Baixas, a composer from Barcelona, titled his composition for harp, cello, and guitar *Cours d'harmonie de Nadia Boulanger*, opus 14. He said,

> "I wanted to write a piece by which the audience could easily be connected. Therefore harmonically I used the tonal system (which most people in Western cultures are familiar with), something that I usually don't do. As the title suggests, I have extracted all harmonic material from one of the few surviving classroom notes of the teachings of Nadia Boulanger, an important character that connected (or even controlled, we may be tempted to say) many renowned composers.
>
> However the focus of the listener will be on the other parameters of music, I would say. Because the harmony rather feels flat, due to its simplicity, the remaining characteristic, especially timbre, are what maintains the listener connected. Throughout the piece there are points where this tonal clarity is obscured, which may be a good counterbalance of the potential disconnection or boredom the harmonic language may produce.
>
> Finally, I often experiment with different degrees of control when composing. In this piece, some parameters were determined in a more or less random way, especially the tempos and the rhythmic values, as well as the timbrical techniques of some sections."[6]

Unfortunately, Baixas piece was not premiered in the lecture recital due to not being able to find a guitarist and is therefore not included in the following research.

Emma Cardon's work is scored for two cellos. She explains,

> "*not if i see me first*…explores the relationship between connection and control. These two concepts often seem to be one and the same—for instance, going on a strict diet, establishing a rigorous schedule, or being perfectionistic can feel like self-love and connection, but in actuality these actions are often symptoms of disconnection and distrust of the self. I imagine this piece as a self-dialogue wherein the blurring of connection and control are explored by two cello lines, both representing facets of the self. The work begins with two voices that form a single line—although they are not completely in sync, they both come back to a

[6] Jaume Baixas, email message to Kimberly Lewin, September 4, 2023.

> center pitch and seem to be mirror reflections in many ways. As the piece progresses, the two voices break apart, fragmenting into chaos as the damaging effects of negative self-control unfold. At the end, the two celli are completely separated, and even the reprise of the original melody in harmonics sounds less like a return than the start of something new. The piece ends on an uncertain note, representing the anxiety that actual freedom and self-love can bring when someone is used to the certainty and safety of control."[7]

Mitchell Jett Spencer titled his piano trio Fuga Impetuosa. He described that while pondering over the concepts of connection, disconnection, and control,

> "a fugue seemed to me the immediately obvious format for this project. Reflecting on this decision, now with enough discarded sketches to populate a piece three times the length of my final submission, I have since come to understand why the fugue has mostly been abandoned as a musical exercise.
>
> As is normally the case with my efforts, much of this difficulty was self-inflicted. Verily, I wanted more than just to transport this 18th century genre relic into a modern context; I needed to approach it with a new philosophy entirely. What traditionally was written for a handful of distinct and clearly identifiable "voices"—whether explicitly sung or perhaps condensed for a keyboard—is now something much more amorphous. Throughout the piece, pairings of melodic lines will join together as one singular harmonic force, interacting with other forces in a dance of polytonality before splintering into new groupings and new harmonic systems. The subject (first introduced by the piano) is heard countless times in this manner, often covertly, and is treated to the usual fugal manipulations: it is stretched, flipped, rotated, layered, and contorted beyond all recognition. Following a thematic eruption, an introspective recapitulation of the original melody is offered to close the piece.
>
> With every roadblock in this compositional process (and there were many), I found consistent mentorship through the iconic fugues of Bartok, Stravinsky, Beethoven, Gershwin, and of course, Bach. What resulted, however, was a constant tug-of-war—a pushing and pulling of traditional expectations in an attempt to wrestle some sense of individuality from a style of music that can so easily be undermined by subconscious historical influence. In this sense, I had become the subject of my own exploration. What musical intentions did these composers demonstrate that I connected with? And to what extent had I allowed myself to be controlled by convention?"[8]

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[7] Emma Cardon, composer's note of musical manuscript *not if i see me first*, unpublished.

[8] Mitchell Jett Spencer, composer's note of musical manuscript *Fuga Impetuosa*, unpublished.

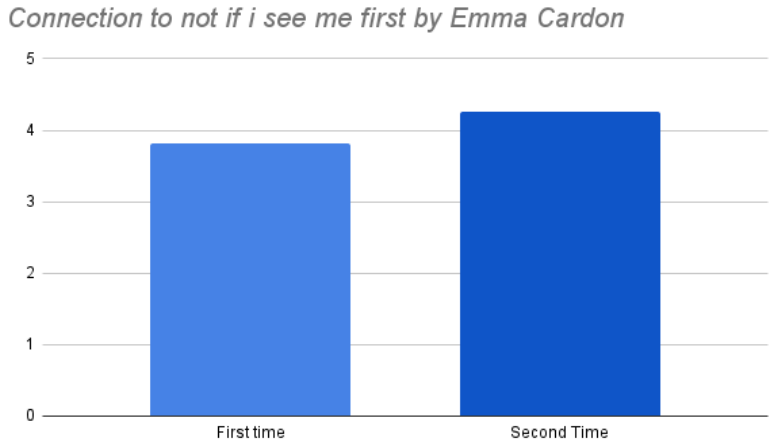
Each composition is distinct to the composers' interpretations. Everyone took different things from the prompts, and they all have unique compositional voices. Baixas' *Cours d'harmonie de Nadia Boulanger* is harmonically simple but contains complex elements of rhythm and includes extended techniques to achieve a large array of timbres. Cardon's *not if i see me first* is the most introspective, as she envisioned the relationship of connection, disconnection, and control as a reflection on the self. Spencer's *Fuga Impetuosa* is the most extraverted with a lot of interplay between the different voices.

Lecture

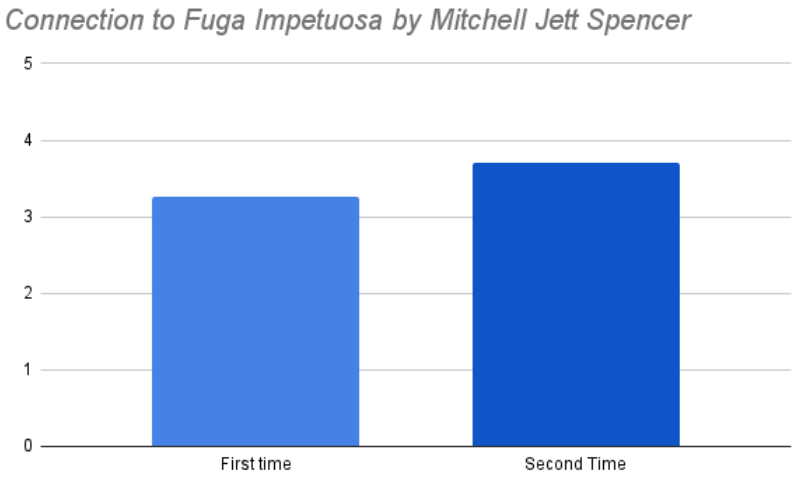
I had two main objectives with the lecture: I wanted to teach the audience about the concepts of near and far enemies, and I wanted to investigate their reactions and responses to the pieces and content to find potential commonalities and trends. Because there is so much information on music and emotion, it was difficult to discern what would be most valuable and interesting to share. The presentation of the lecture was primarily didactic, but there was some interaction because I created a worksheet in which audience members participated by writing down their responses. About half of the worksheet entailed questions to answer on a scale of one to five, and the other half were short answer responses.

Audience Responses

The first questions on the audience worksheet were how connected they felt (on a scale of one to five, one being not connected at all and five being very connected) to the pieces we had just premiered. The average for *not if i see me first* was 3.82, and the average for *Fuga Impetuosa* was 3.27. After they had heard the second performance, they were asked the same question, and this time both increased: *not if i see me first* had an average of 4.25 and Fuga Impetuosa had an average of 3.7. This data can be visualized in the graphs below:



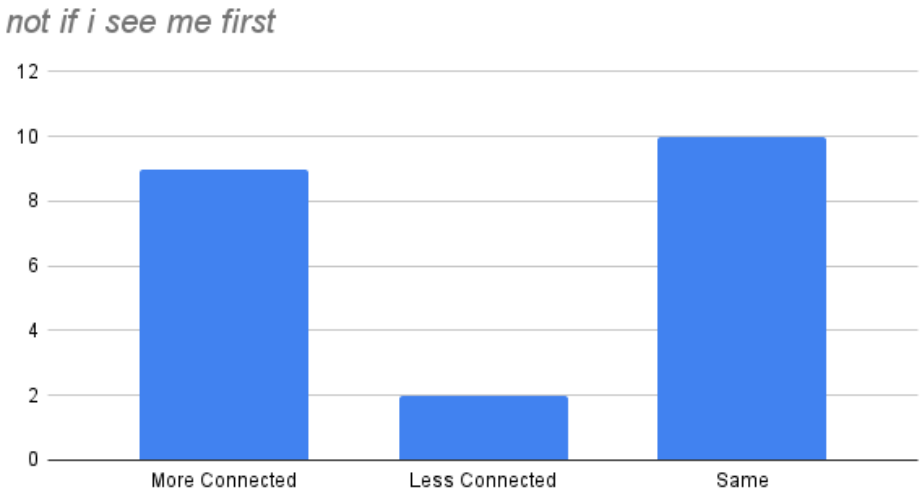
Bar graph of average connection to *not if i see me first, figure 1*



Bar graph of average connection to *Fuga Impetuosa, figure 2*

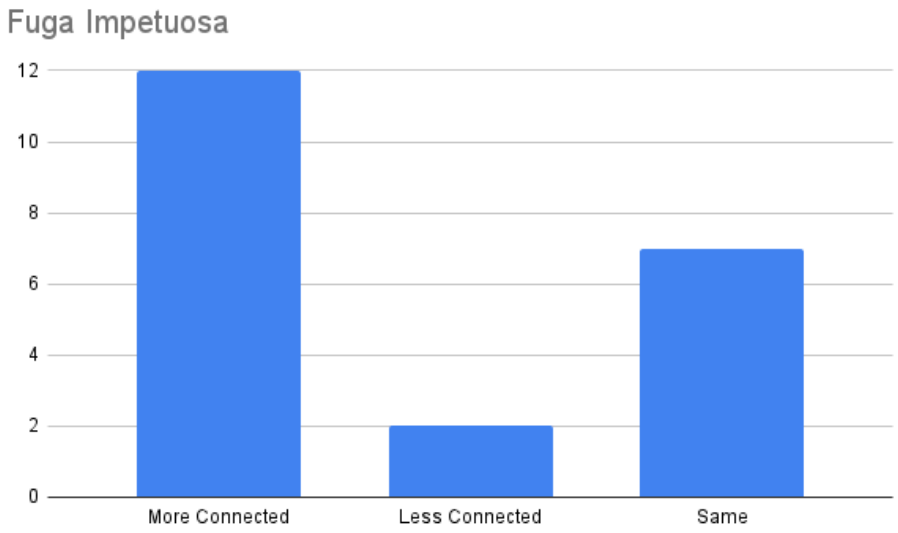
Without a highly controlled experiment setting, it's impossible to conclude why audience members on average felt more connected to each piece on the second listening. It could have been that they were more familiar with it and knew what to expect. It could have been that my explanation of near and far enemies made sense to them musically. It could have been the composer videos talking about their pieces right before we performed. There are many uncontrollable factors that would be worth studying in a more controlled setting.

Additionally, many individuals changed their responses from the first to second listening. For *not if i see me first*, about half of the participants felt the same amount of connection to the piece, but closely followed by people feeling more connected:



Bar graph of connection differences from first to second listening in *not if i see me first*, *figure 3*

In *Fuga Impetuosa*, most participants felt more connected:

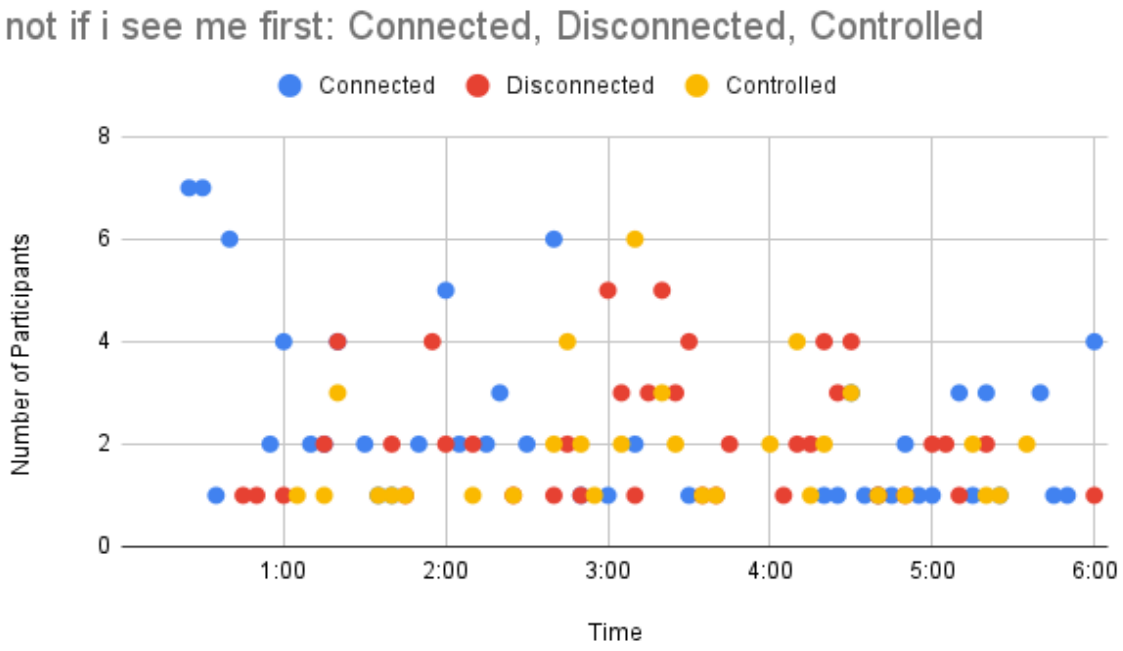


Bar graph of connection differences from first to second listening in *not if i see me first*, *figure 4*

Again, without a controlled research experiment and a small sample size, it is difficult to draw conclusions on why participants changed their answers. It's interesting to note that it did happen though.

Connected, Disconnected, Controlled: *not if i see me first*

During the second time that audience members were listening to the pieces, I had a timer going as we played. They were asked to mark down specific times that they felt either connected, disconnected, or controlled by or because of the music.



Scatterplot of audience members feeling connected, disconnected, or controlled by *not if i see me first, figure 5*

Timestamps 0:25 (7 out of 30), 0:30 (7 out of 30), 0:40 (6 out of 30), 2:00 (5 out of 30), and 2:40 (6 out of 30) were the most agreed upon for when participants felt connected to the music. The highest percentage of people that agreed on a timestamp was where the piece started (it started at 0:26), and this is what the score looks like at that moment:

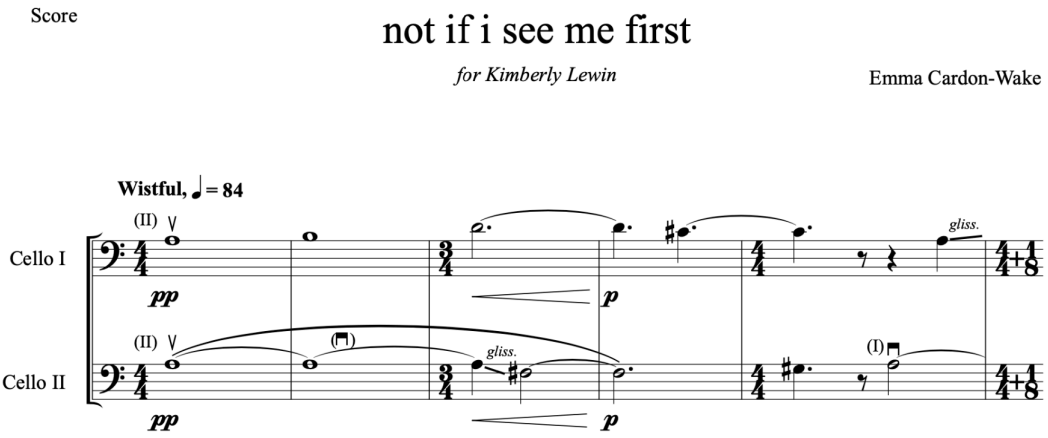


figure 6

The two cellos both start on A but quickly separate to a dissonant major second in the second measure. By the third measure, consonant intervals are heard, and they return to the center pitch (A) on the fifth measure. Perhaps this dissonance in the second measure actually helped reinforce the audience's general feeling of connection: because the voices diverge a small step for only a brief moment, the return to consonance feels relieving but not far-fetched. Six people marked feeling connected at 0:40, and that is the fifth measure where the cellos are in unison again.

The next spot where five participants felt connected at the same place was at 2:00, which was measure 30. This is the score at that moment:

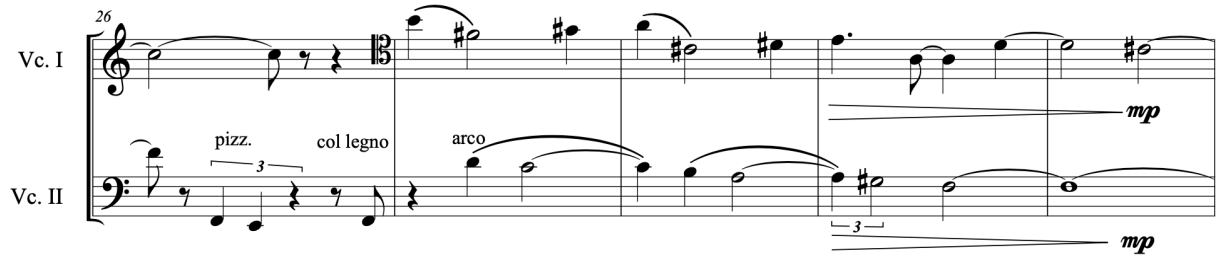


figure 7

Measures 30 and 31 are a resting and transitionary period in the piece. Motion has built up throughout the piece, but at this moment, the voices suspend for a moment before the piece begins delving into chaos.

The final highest point of connection is at 2:40, which is the start of Cardon's "*undercurrents of volatility*:"

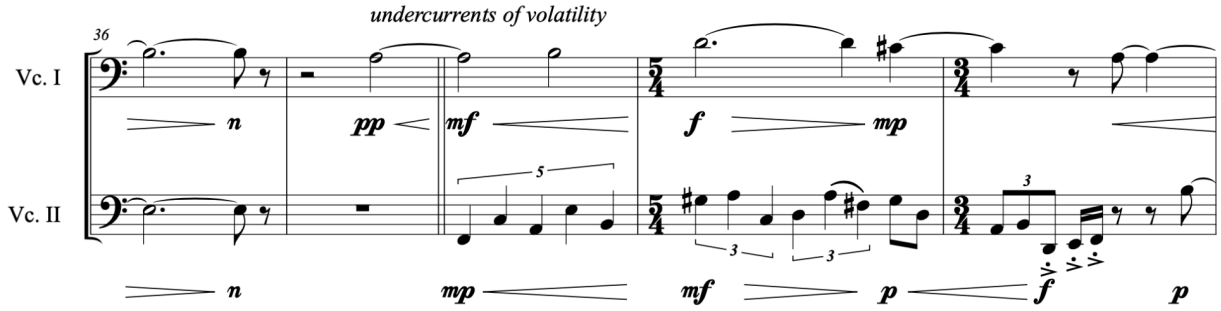


figure 8

It's interesting to me that participants marked feeling connected to this section, because it starts to become unstable right from the beginning. The second cello has interesting rhythms that make it hard to feel a natural pulse. Perhaps the audience members were responding to the first cello line, where the opening material is echoed here.

The first common time for disconnection is at timestamp 3:00. The piece is much more unsettled here and the two voices are almost fighting for power over one another, as pictured in the score below:

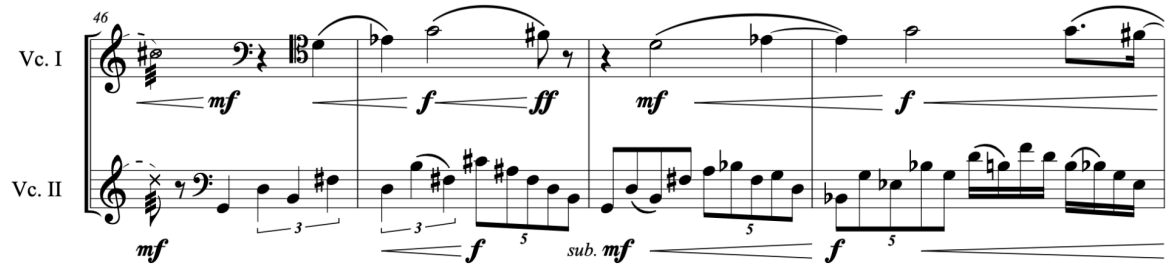


figure 9

The next agreed-upon spot for disconnection was at timestamp 3:20, where there is almost an explosion of built energy, and then *col legno* begins in both cello parts at "Scampering:"

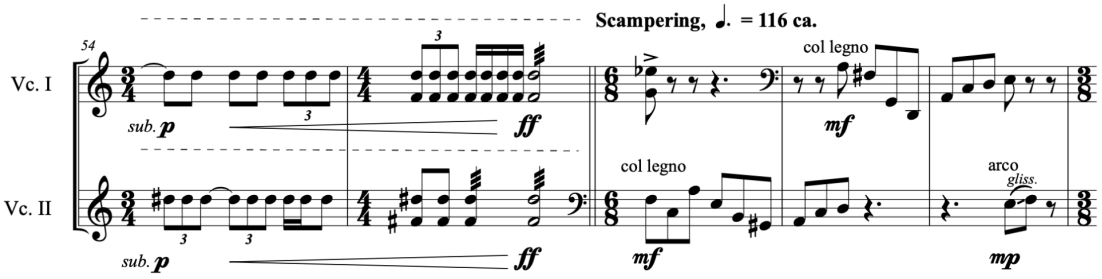


figure 10

In a way, both voices come together here to create the "explosion," but it is not necessarily a happy reunion. There is a building of tension in the measures before, and rather than the tension being released and the voices coming together once again, they diverge into an interesting back-and-forth that reinforces feelings of insecurity.

Six out of the thirty participants who followed this prompt felt most controlled at 3:10. This was in between the moments of disconnection listed, when the music is very intense yet to a certain degree, controlled:

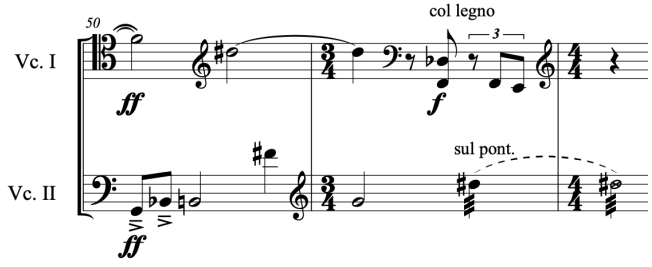


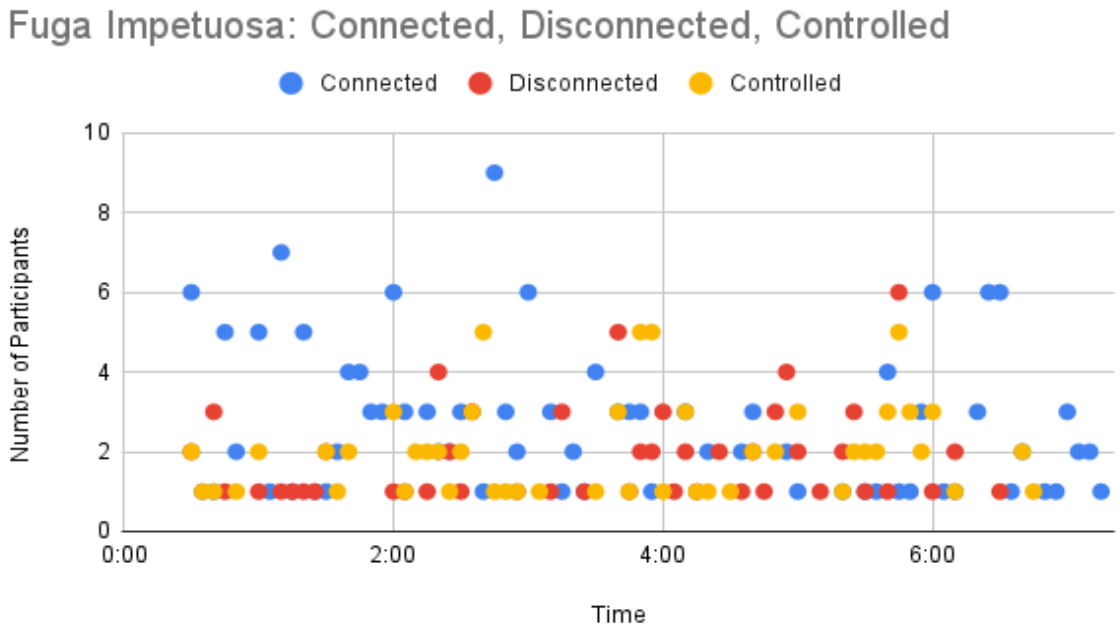
figure 11

The voices are not unified here, but Cardon is very specific with the rhythm and type of sound that is to be produced.

Overall, out of the thirty participants, most times given were when they felt connected to the piece: there were 95 times marked. There were 79 marks for when participants felt disconnected, and 54 for feeling controlled. There is a lot of variation in what they felt and when, but there were a few agreed upon sections.

Connected, Disconnected, Controlled: *Fuga Impetuosa*

This was the result of audience members' second time listening to Spencer's piece:



Scatterplot of audience members feeling connected, disconnected, or controlled by *Fuga Impetuosa, figure 12*

The most notable areas for connection are at timestamps 0:30 (6 out of 30), 1:10 (7 out of 30), 2:00 (6 out of 30), 2:45 (9 out of 30), 3:00 (6 out of 30), 6:00 (6 out of 30), 6:25 (6 out of 30), and 6:30 (6 out of 30).

The piece began at 0:28, and 20% of people noted a connection. The piece begins with piano alone that introduces the fugal material that will make up the entire work:

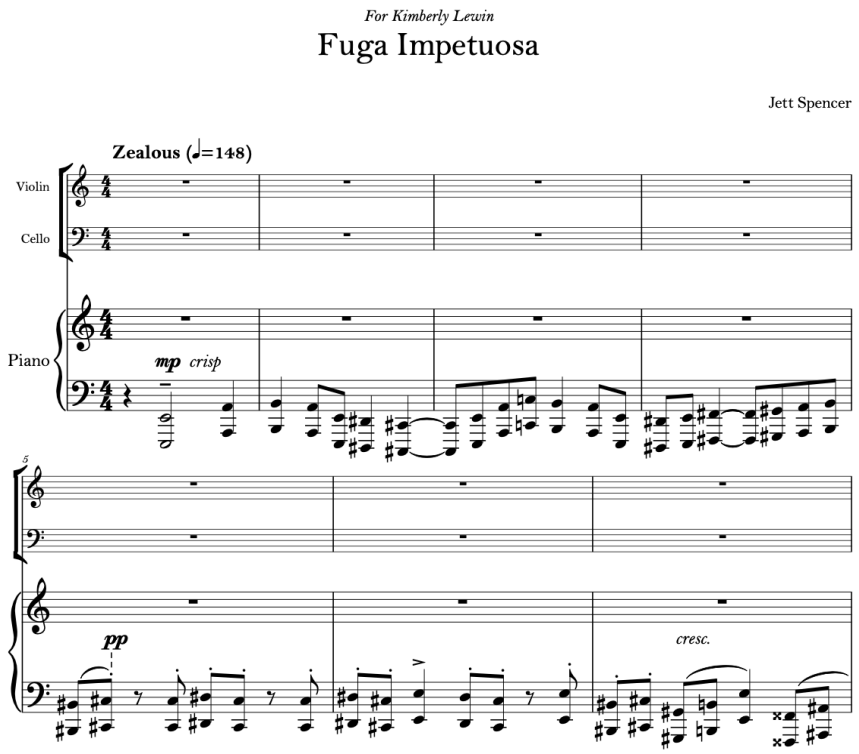


figure 13

Participants had already heard this piece performed at the beginning of the lecture recital, so perhaps their connection to it was that it was familiar.

The next timestamp was 1:10, which is measure 25 in the score:

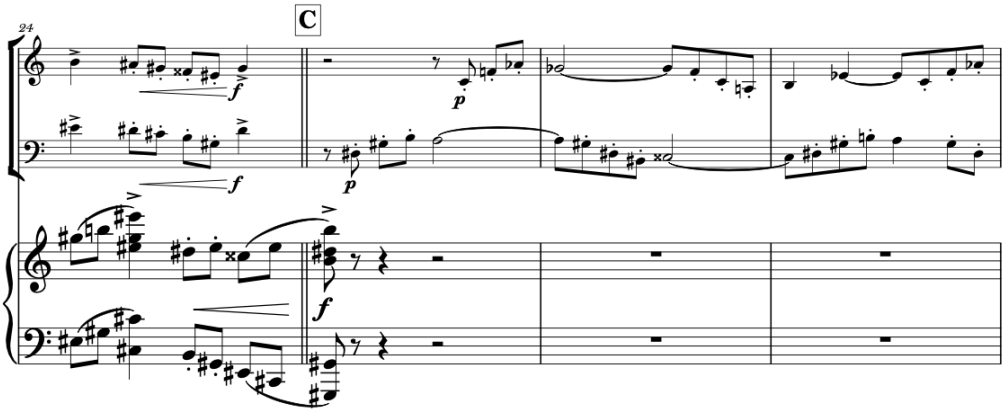


figure 14

This is a duet between the strings, and it is very conversational. The rhythm started by the cello is repeated by the violin two beats later. It is not the most harmonically tonal section, but still colorful and nice to listen to.

Timestamp 2:00 is the pickup to measure 54:

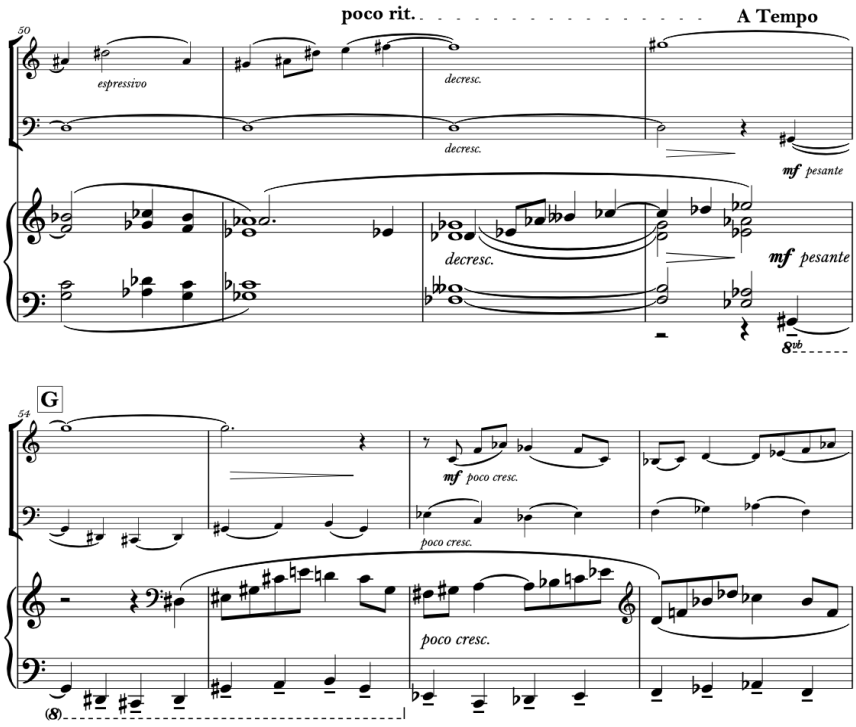


figure 15

This moment is a restful transition, and the cello and piano lines connect into a unified voice in the low registers while the violin holds a high G# drone. Participants likely responded to the inherent connection when two voices come together.

Almost a third of the sample size (nine of the thirty people who followed the prompt) wrote that they felt connected to the piece at 2:45. This is a copy of the score at that moment:

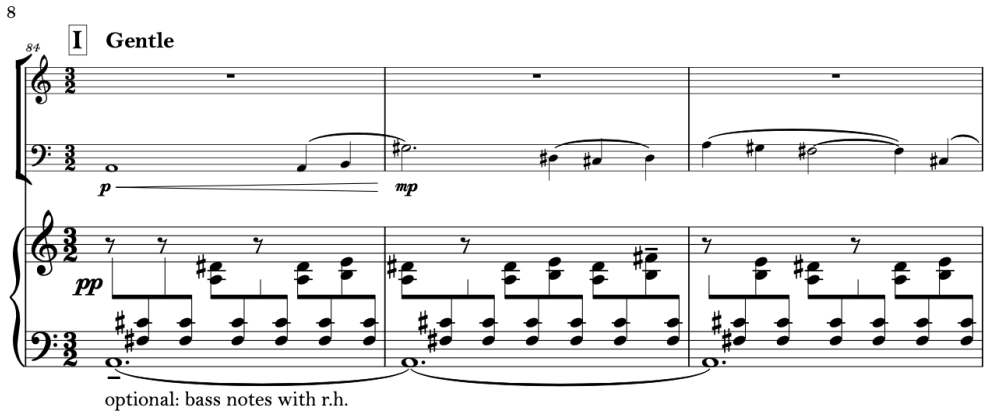


figure 16

As Spencer indicates, this moment is gentle and melodic. The cello solo soars above a rhythmic pulse provided by the piano, which on its own is familiar because it hints at the fugue subject that is constantly recurring throughout the piece. Perhaps so many people felt connected here because it's the first time that the music slows down and becomes more introspective.

When the violin enters, participants marked down 3:00 as another spot for connection:

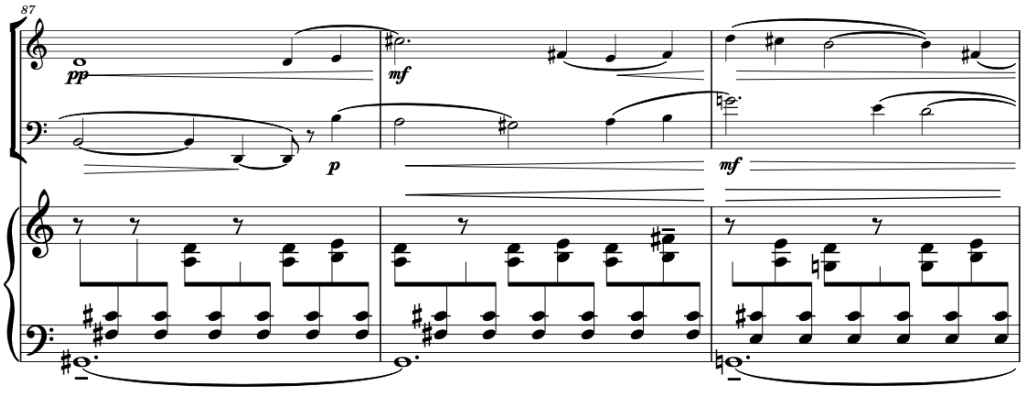


figure 17

The harmonic language is still interesting at this moment, but there are a lot more consonant intervals, especially between the strings.

6:00 was another common spot for connection. Like 1:10, this moment is a duet between strings:

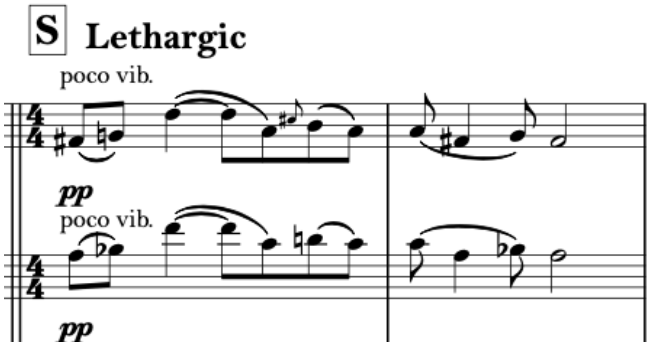


figure 18

It sounds almost folksy, and this "Lethargic" section is a stark contrast to the intense material that precedes it. For the full six measures of the duet, violin and cello have the same rhythm.

The last high moments for connection were 6:25 and 6:30. This is the moment right after the cello and violin duo, when the piano enters with a pleasant C Major chord. The piano part is reminiscent of the opening, fugal material, but this time it is gentler; Spencer marks "Andante" here.

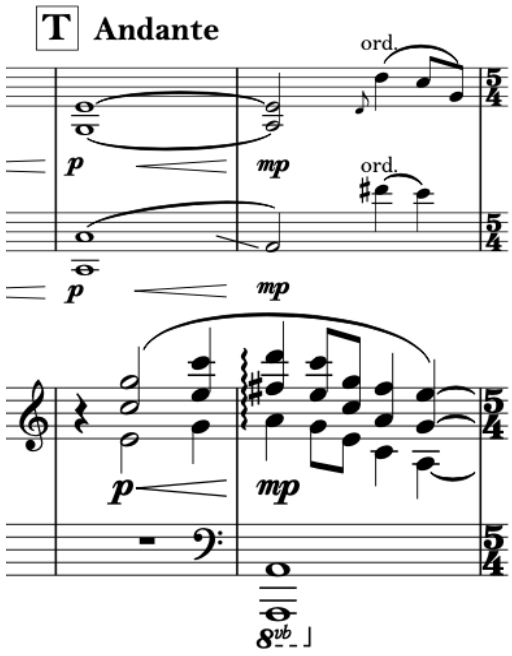


figure 19

There were many shared moments of connection among the group, and there were also a few shared for disconnection and control. The highest levels of disconnection are found at 3:40 (5 out of 30) and 5:45 (6 out of 30).

This is the score at 3:40:

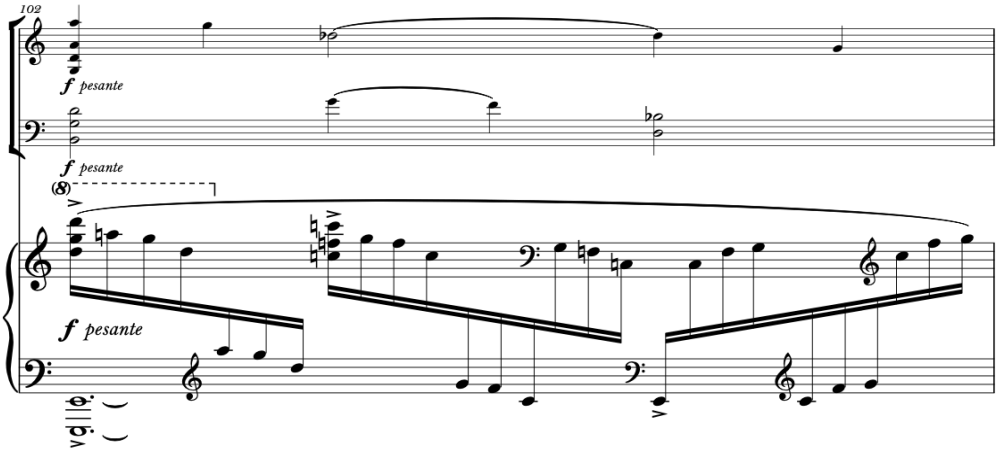


figure 20

This part was difficult to put together as an ensemble because each voice needs to be heard distinctly by the audience in order for it to make sense. The cello and violin have a back and forth, but it feels more like a fight than a conversation due to the harmonic tension, and the piano has large sweeping gestures that ultimately descend into chaos.

20% of people felt disconnected from 5:45, and 16.66% felt controlled:

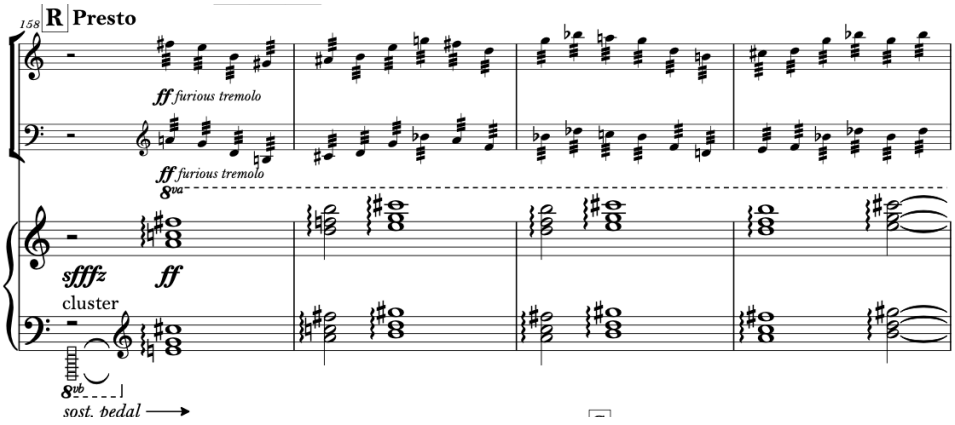


figure 21

This is the climax of the piece, and harmonically a very strange section. The piano sets the stage with a cluster chord, and the violin and cello erupt in a "furious tremolo." The composer likely intended for his audience to experience disconnection at this moment.

In addition to the example above, five out of thirty people also also reported feeling controlled at 2:40, 3:50, and 3:55. This is the score at 2:40:

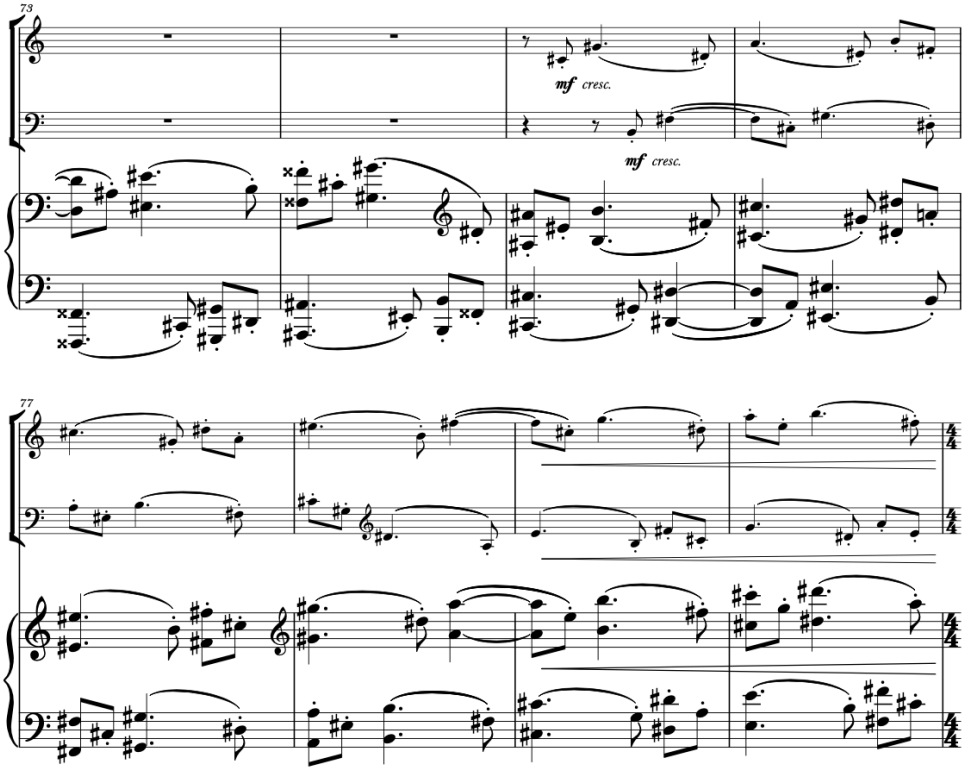


figure 22

The music at this moment is very controlled, so it makes sense the audience responded this way. The violin and cello are offset by a beat, almost mimicking one another while the piano, who started the figure, doubles each voice.

3:50 and 3:55 is the start of the main fugal section:

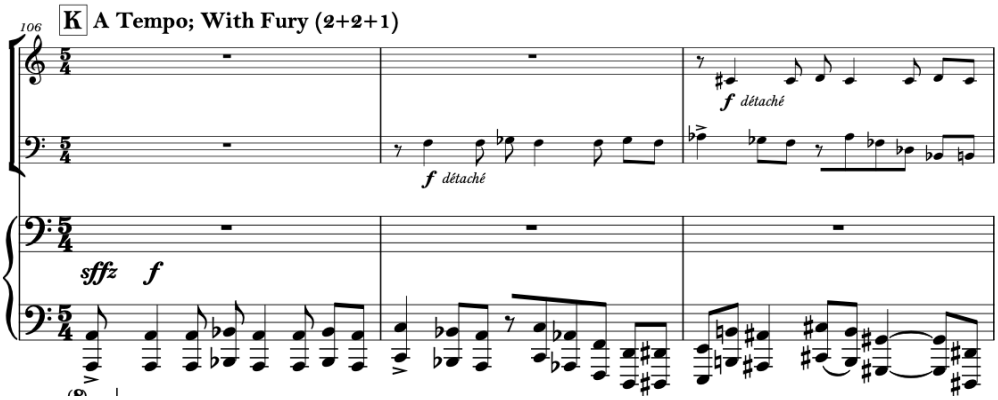


figure 23

This is one of the most dramatic parts of the piece, and a moment where each voice is playing the fugue subject in a true round. The piano starts, the cello enters with the same rhythm a bar later, and the violin is last.

Like *not if i see me first,* most of the responses given were when participants felt connected to the piece. There were many more responses this time: 174 times were marked for connection, 82 marks for disconnection, and 93 for feeling controlled.

Conclusion

Music is emotional. The emotions that we associate with a piece or how we individually relate to it can be subjective, but according to my participants, everyone indicated that they felt some sort of emotional response and connection to the pieces we performed. At certain points in the pieces, there were commonalities up to 30% of participants indicating that they felt connected, disconnected, or controlled at the same part of the piece.

The final question on the audience worksheet asked, “How can music help us feel more connected and/or promote connection?” One response said, “It gives space and encourages us to feel emotions—ALL emotions, which therefore helps us to think a thought all the way through, which then makes our wants and needs more clear. That way, we can communicate and relate

them better to others, making it possible to connect with and understand others." Music has the capacity to simultaneously elicit emotion and forge bonds, two essential components in finding connection. As exemplified during the lecture, this unique ability to cultivate shared emotional experiences can create a shared sense of connection and promote collaboration even amongst a diverse group of individuals. Using music as a bridge for connection can help us come together to address problems in our modern world.

Reflective Writing

When the idea first sparked that I should somehow study the connection between music and the research of emotion, I never could have imagined how intense the undertaking would be. Even though I found myself struggling with how to move forward at various stages of the project, this endeavor will be highlighted in my memory as one of the most meaningful aspects of my undergraduate career. From learning how to write an effective grant proposal to encountering my first solo commissioning project and building deep connections with mentors, composers, and colleagues through the process, my Honors Capstone has built many bridges and taught me life-long skills that will be invaluable as I move forward into the professional world.

During my undergraduate years, I have participated in a number of commissioning projects, but this was the first time I had been the one to write the grant proposal, find composers, and share my ideas with them. As a professional musician, grant writing, networking and collaborating with composers, not to mention learning and premiering new pieces is essential to staying relevant in the shifting landscape of the contemporary classical world. I aspire to be culturally connected and to comment on contemporary issues and solutions through my art form, using it as a catalyst for necessary change. Having the opportunity to undertake this project in my degree has given me a major advantage, as I was able to begin refining the skill sets needed, with the support of many amazing mentors and colleagues, to make my future goals a reality.

The connections I made with my colleagues and mentors through this process will be unforgettable. I had never done anything like this before, and their guidance was imperative to the success of my project. At the very start of the process, I barely knew how to articulate my ideas in words, let alone write them clearly. After FaceTime sessions and coffee meet-ups with numerous friends and professors about my rough ideas, things began to take shape. Even as I'm

finishing this project a year and a half after the rough idea first emerged, the same community is still helping me with draft edits. A project of this scale would not have been possible alone; I have relied heavily on my community, and I'm so grateful for the relationships that have fostered because of the process.

Aside from all the logistical skills I learned, I also developed many musical skills. Learning new repertoire is always an exciting exercise, as each piece requires one to think critically about character and mood, and what to say musically through personal interpretation. From this starting point, it is then essential to use instrumental technique to most closely achieve the desired message. From the smallest details of fingerings and bowings, bow distribution, vibrato, and tonal palette, to larger goals like making long lines and having clear phrases, these musical ideas are rooted in rock solid technique that serves musical intention as closely as possible. Every piece has unique technical demands to overcome, and oftentimes, commissioned pieces even more so. Emma Cardon's *not if i see me first* and Jaume Baixas' *Cours d'harmonie de Nadia Boulanger*, opus 14 both had extended techniques, i.e. musical or sonic demands that are unusual and not standard ways to play the instrument. This is always exciting to come across in a new score, but it can be daunting to learn how to do something I've never had to do on the instrument before. When learning brand new works, it's impossible to listen to others' recordings, as they obviously do not exist. Growing up, I learned with the Suzuki method (a method of teaching where students start ages three to five and learn by ear for the first few years), so I'm always listening to others' recordings when I embark upon new repertoire. The best you can get with a commissioned work is a midi file, which simply tells you how the music

should be aligned. *Fuga Impetuosa* and *not if i see me first* were luckily not my first experience with this. It's special to be able to be the one to determine how a piece is first interpreted.

This capstone also broadened my experience across disciplines. I engaged with social work research, something musicians are not typically tasked to do. Even though these fields don't overlap in my program, I bridged the gaps in order to create a cohesive narrative that brings to light how they connect in real time. Music is good at communicating ideas, emotions, and stories, and other various subjects, especially when it is intentionally intertwined across disciplines.

Presenting *Connection and Isolation: A Musical Exploration of Emotion* connected me with the local community. My lecture recital was open to the public, and I engaged with audience members through the performance itself by asking questions and having them fill out worksheets. It will soon be shared virtually as well, connecting it to an even larger audience. My hope is that participants were emotionally moved by the pieces, and that they learned something about themselves and others through my demonstration of social work and neuroscience. One of the best (and most terrifying) parts about being a musician is getting to share my art with others. Moving forward, I want to be as intentional as I was with this project with all future endeavors. Art has the power to connect us to ourselves and each other, and it also communicates messages that can otherwise be hard to digest.

Although there were many moments of grief, overwhelm, and frustration throughout the life of this project, I am so grateful to the Honors Program for encouraging students to undertake projects that they are passionate about. Without the requirement of a capstone to graduate with Honors, I likely would not have engaged in a project of this scope. This experience has been a profound learning opportunity, and the product is the culmination of my time at USU.

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Author Bio

Kimberly Lewin will graduate from Utah State University with a Bachelor of Music Performance in Spring 2024. During her time at USU, she has been involved in a number of projects that concern pressing issues of our time. Her Freshman Year, she participated in a student-led Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities (URCO) project titled *Plastic Ocean.* Premiered in 2019, this is a multimedia project concerning climate change. *A Storm We Call Progress*, another student-led URCO project, was premiered in 2020, and is a chamber opera that addresses personal transformation and global sustainability. *Uncovered*, premiered in 2021, is another chamber opera about a woman's journey leaving Hasidic life and coming out as gay. These projects and ensembles have been the highlight of Kimberly's degree, and her own URCO project, *Connection and Isolation: A Musical Exploration of Emotion*, was inspired by her participation in other creative projects. Kimberly intends to become a professional musician while navigating the evolving landscape of the classical art form. She would enjoy establishing a chamber group that focuses on the local community and the promotion of culturally relevant and important stories. In the near future, she plans to audition for graduate programs across the country to further her education.