

Teachers Resource Kit

LENTZ Violin Concerto



Learning & Engagement
Stages 5 & 6

***“...to beam in distant heavens...”* – Violin Concerto**
by Georges Lentz
Stage 5 & 6 Teaching Resource

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Acknowledgements

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Simone Young Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Craig Whitehead Chief Executive Officer, Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Resource Development

Writer: Jim Coyle

Editor: Sonia de Freitas

Production: Daniella Pasquill, Jann Hing

Design: Amy Zhou

Contact

For information concerning the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Learning & Engagement program, contact:

Email: education@sydneyssymphony.com

Online: www.sydneyssymphony.com

“Your life can be changed and enriched through all sorts of music; music from now, music from the past, music from the very distant past and music from as recently as yesterday.

Through intensive listening students become involved in one of the highest orders of thinking.

As a teacher, by bringing students to a concert and studying music in the classroom, you are providing your students with a special pathway to musical knowledge through direct experience of and contact with live music.”

Richard Gill AO
(1941 – 2018)

Conductor, notable educator and advocate. Richard was the founding Artistic Director of Education at Sydney Symphony. He has inspired generations of musicians through his work and continues to inspire new generations through his legacy.

Syllabus link

NSW Curriculum

“... *to beam in distant heavens...*” – violin concerto by Georges Lentz covers a range of topics from the NSW syllabuses:

Years 7 - 10 Elective:

An Instrument and Its Repertoire

Art Music of the 20th and 21st Centuries

Music for Large Ensembles

Music 1 Preliminary and HSC:

Music for large ensembles

An Instrument and Its Repertoire

Music of the 20th and 21st centuries

Music 2 Preliminary:

Australian music

Music 2 HSC:

Mandatory Topic: Music of the Past 25 years (Australian focus)

Work: “... to beam in distant heavens...” – violin concerto by Georges Lentz

Composer background

Through high profile international performances and CD releases, Georges Lentz has established himself in recent years as one of Australia's leading composers - this despite the fact that he is far from being a prolific writer. Being given to self-doubt, he rarely publishes new compositions, rarely accepts commissions, and tends to work on each of his pieces over a number of years, often working on several at the same time.

Born in Luxembourg in 1965, Georges Lentz studied music at the Luxembourg Conservatoire, the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique (1982-1986) and the Hannover Musikhochschule (1986-1990). Since 1989, he has been working on a cycle of works called "Caeli enarrant..." ('The Heavens are telling...' - Psalm XIX). His music is concerned with astronomy, a love of the Australian landscape and Aboriginal art, and reflects the composer's spiritual beliefs, questions and doubts. He has been living in Australia since 1990.

Georges Lentz' compositions have been widely played in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China. Many renowned ensembles have performed his works, among them: Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Gürzenich-Orchester Köln (Cologne Philharmonic), Düsseldorfer Symphoniker, Bochumer Symphoniker, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra London, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Hallé Orchestra Manchester, ORF Symphony Orchestra Vienna, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Orchestra of the Sibelius Academy Helsinki, St Louis Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, New Japan Philharmonic, Nieuw Sinfonietta Amsterdam, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Continuum New York, Ensemble Oriol Berlin, Ensemble 24 Sydney, Australian String Quartet, Vilnius String Quartet, Indiana University New Music Ensemble, Cleveland New Music Ensemble... His music has been played at important international festivals and in many of the world's great concert halls, including the Philharmonie Berlin, Konzerthaus Vienna, Musikverein Vienna, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall London, Rudolfinum Prague, Carnegie Hall New York, Kennedy Center Washington, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Sydney Opera House...

In 1997 Georges Lentz won the Paul Lowin Prize for orchestral composition, the most prestigious composition prize in Australia. His orchestral work '*Guyuhmagan*' was the top recommended work at the 2002 UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers in Paris. His latest compositions include '*Monh*' (2001-2005) for solo viola and orchestra, (written for German soloist Tabea Zimmermann, and co-commissioned by the BBC, the Echternach Music Festival and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra), as well as '*Ingwe*' (2003-2009), a 60 minute work for solo electric guitar (written for young Australian guitarist Zane Banks). In 2009, *Monh* won the APRA award for best composition by an Australian composer. In recent years, Georges Lentz has been more and more interested in and influenced by musical improvisation, sound art and sound sculpture, as well as digital music. In April 2022, the [Cobar Sound Chapel](#), a long-cherished dream, was opened in Cobar in Outback NSW. It is a purpose-built venue, designed by architect Glenn Murcutt, to permanently house the surround-sound four-channel projection of Lentz' vast digital composition "*String Quartet(s)*" (2000-2022). He is currently working on a new violin concerto for Arabella Steinbacher, to be premiered in 2023.

Georges Lentz' works are published by Universal Edition in Vienna.

From <https://www.georgeslentz.com/shortcv.htm>

Work Background

“... to beam in distant heavens...” – violin concerto by Georges Lentz

This concerto for violin and orchestra was composed between 2019 and 2022. It forms part of a continuing series of works by Georges Lentz (collective known as *caelli enarrant*, which are written for a wide variety of performing media, but nevertheless all address the composer's central concerns. These concerns are to do with the spiritual and the astronomical as well as Lentz' fascination with the poetry and art of William Blake (1757-1827) and his deep concern about the environmental damage that human activity is inflicting on the planet. This was composed for violinist [Arabella Steinbacher](#) from Germany who will perform the premiere performance in Sydney Opera House.

Instrumentation of work

Woodwind	Brass	Percussion	Strings
3 Flutes (2 nd Doubling Alto Flute, 3 rd Doubling Piccolo)	4 Horns in F 3 Trumpets 2 Trombones	Large hammer Thundersheet Glockenspiel Steel drum Tubular bells Hi-Hat Cow Bells 1 Crotales (with Double Bass Bow) Wine bottle Bass drum Cow bells 2 Thai gongs Tom-tom Triangle Marimba Piano doubling MIDI keyboard	Solo violin 12 First violins 12 Second violins 6 Off stage violins 8 Violas 6 Cellos 6 Double basses Electric guitar

Listening guide

As this is the world premiere performance by highly complex orchestral work, offering a chronological guide to the piece would be of very limited value. Therefore, the following offers a description of some of the musical characteristics of this work.

In terms of pitch organisation, Lentz uses a variety of highly complex techniques, as well as some more straightforward ones. These include a dissonant sheen of very quiet sustained clusters. These are achieved by dividing each string section into individual parts and having each player contribute a note to a cluster cord. Some of these cover a very wide range of pitch. There are more lyrical passages which are centred around the tonality of F sharp major. Lentz also uses dissonant and disjunct melodies on occasions, both in the solo instrument and in the orchestra.

The organisation of duration in this concerto is heavily influenced by the mathematical idea of fractals. Fractals are mathematical patterns which retain the same shape irrespective of the scale. In other words, the small and the big are the same except for the size. The most famous use of fractals is in the Mandelbrot Set, which can be seen in animated form [here](#).

The use of fractals may also be seen to be a structural device. The ratio of four to one is particularly significant in this work. The tempo alternates between a slow one and a quicker one which is exactly four times as fast. Sometimes these alternations are spaced far apart, on other occasions they are very rapid. There are passages of very precise rhythms, sometimes involving complex time signatures and syncopations. There are also less measured and unmeasured passages, including some very long pauses and moments of silence or near-silence.

Dynamics run the full gamut from very loud to very soft, as one would expect, and a wide variety of the expressive techniques are used. Notably, and this is typical of Lentz' music, expressive techniques are employed at a very detailed level indeed. This extremely thoughtful and precise writing is the result of Lentz' very slow and meticulous compositional process.

There is a great deal of innovation in the use of tone colour in this concerto. This occurs not so much in the deployment of original performance techniques, but in the carefully weighted combinations of tone colours, some of which involve extended techniques. Again, this is a result of the composer's highly detailed and deeply imaginative scoring. There are some unusual additions to the orchestra, including a MIDI keyboard and electric guitar. The entire work starts with a shattering blow from a large hammer. Hammers are not unknown in orchestral and operatic music, but to open a concerto with one is a particularly bold stroke. The solo part requires the sort of virtuosity that one would expect in a concerto, but it's also noticeable for its playability by an extremely good player. In other words, solo part is always idiomatically written for the violin.

The placing of instruments in space is also a noticeable feature of this work. There are six violins placed off stage at the rear of the concert hall, in addition to the regular section in the orchestra. Furthermore, the soloist starts by playing off stage and makes her entrance after the concerto has started.

Lentz uses a wide variety of texture in the composition of this work. There are a number of orchestral instruments omitted, noticeably the double reed woodwinds. However, the frequent division of the tutti strings, sometimes into many parts, can create textural thickness. There are long passages of solo music for the violin, often with little or no accompaniment. On other occasions the texture changes constantly and subtly. This, combined with a highly idiosyncratic use of tone colour, creates a constantly shifting and shimmering effect.

Georges Lentz' music can be complex and is far removed from the music of video games and film scores. However, it is music that has the capacity to be very engaging for the young listener because the issues it tackles issues of profound importance (particularly to the young) and, stylistically, stands apart from general

trends in contemporary art music. This makes it all the more fascinating. Immersion in Georges Lentz' music pays great dividends, because there is so much there that is of importance, of truth and of beauty.

Learning Activities

Activity 1: Score Reading/Musicology



Learning Objectives:

- To enhance knowledge and understanding of score conventions.
- To develop composing and performing techniques on the violin.

Score excerpt 1 is taken from the opening cadenza of “...to beam in distant heavens...” A cadenza is a passage in a concerto, usually unaccompanied or sparsely accompanied, in which the soloist plays music of a particularly virtuosic nature. A cadenza at the start of a concerto is often called an *eingang*. This is the German word for ‘entrance’. In this instance, Georges Lentz takes this idea literally: the soloist starts her *eingang* off the start, then walks on ‘with poise’ (as the score directs) then plays the rest of the *eingang*. Score excerpt 1 is taken from a passage after she has come on stage.

Task 1

Explain the following notations that feature in **Score Excerpt 1**:

<i>vivace</i>	
<i>rubato</i>	
<i>flautando</i>	
<i>sul tasto</i>	
<i>Non vib.</i>	
	
	

Task 2

A cadenza is virtuosic and often presents great technical difficulties. However, Georges Lentz is not only a composer of exceptional skill and techniques, he is also a professional violinist himself. There are, therefore, no *unnecessary* difficulties. Look at **Score Excerpt 1** again and identify the ways in which the writing suits the techniques of the violin.

Score Excerpt 1

Vivace
IV ♩ = 110

Violin

f *p* *mp* *pp*
rubato, flautano

ff *espres. vib.*

Lento

♩ = 110

sul tasto
spettrale
non vib.

ppp *pp* *ppp*

Activity 2: Composition

Learning Objectives:

- To encourage reflection about the student's own practice as a composer.
 - To stimulate compositional ideas.
-

Not only is “...to beam in distant heavens...” a concerto *for* violin, it is also a concerto *about* the violin. Lentz explores the violin and ideas about the violin in a variety of ways. These include important passages for the orchestral violins, each of whom has a unique part. It also includes having a section of six violins off stage and by having the keyboard player use the MIDI sound which is called violin. This only bears a passing resemblance to the sound of an actual violin, but is an interesting exploration of tone colour and of perception of tone colour.

Consider your own instrument. Consider not only writing original music *for* it, but also writing original music *about* it. For example, you may start by considering the cultural connotations of your instrument. How is it portrayed in art? How does it appear in poetry? What sort of associations do most people have with your instrument and with those who play it? Reflect carefully on how this could influence you composing a new work. Include all these reflections in your composition process diary and your portfolio.

Activity 3: Performance

Learning Objectives:

- To perform an arrangement of a short passage from “...to beam in distant heavens...”
- To encourage critical reflection as part of the creative process.

Perform this class arrangement of an excerpt from “...to beam in distant heavens...”

[It is strongly recommended that the keyboard part be included to gain the full effect of the harmonies]

Very Slowly
espres. ma semplice

The musical score consists of six staves. The top staff is for the Solo Instrument, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second staff is for Accompaniment, marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The third staff is for Accompaniment in B \flat , also marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The fourth staff is for Bass, marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The fifth staff is for Keyboard, marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The sixth staff is for Gong (or bell or cymbal with soft mallet), marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The score is in 4/4 time and features a melodic line in the solo instrument and a rich harmonic accompaniment in the other parts.

Write a critical reflection of the musical qualities and any technical difficulties you experienced playing this arrangement. Do these reflections cause you to consider your own practice as a performer or as a composer?

Take it in turns to improvise an additional part while the rest of your class performs this arrangement. Record your improvisations then discuss each one as a group.

Activity 4: Composition

Learning Objectives:

- To encourage reflection about the student's own practice as a composer.
 - To stimulate compositional ideas.
 - To improve the student's compositional process.
-

Score Excerpt 2 is taken from a passage towards the end of “...to beam in distant heavens...”

Task 1

An unusual instrument included in “...to beam in distant heavens...” is a MIDI keyboard playing the violin sound. Most people find this sound rather strange (possibly even psychedelic), because of its thin and very artificial sound. This is, however, nothing more than a matter of opinion.

Consider other instruments or sound sources that you or your friends find very odd, weird, even disturbing or alien. How could you exploit this tone colour in a composition? Remember, music doesn't always have to be pleasant. The purpose of all art is to reflect our experiences as human beings and not everything that happens to us is nice.

Task 2

Among the more original sound sources in “...to beam in distant heavens...” are a large hammer and a wine bottle. Furthermore, Lentz sometimes instructs his percussionists to play their instruments in unusual ways, including the bass drum being played with a broom.

These may be considered to be found sounds (to a certain extent). Compose a piece of music using only found objects as sound sources. For example, you could use the contents of your pencil case in various ways to create a variety of timbres, which could be incorporated into an original composition.

Task 3

“...to beam in distant heavens...” has a score which is entirely handwritten. Lentz took three years to compose this concerto, which considering the level of detail in the score is unsurprising. There is a growing body of opinion the composer should never begin a piece by using notation software. Start your next composition with paper and a pencil. Sketch your ideas, draw a map or a plan. You do not have to start by notating on the staff; you could use words, diagrams or pictures. The critical thing is to move away from the computer and to think, then to sketch your ideas.

Activity 5: Score Reading/Musicology




Learning Objectives:

- To enhance knowledge and understanding of score conventions, including extended techniques and their notation.
- To analyse musical texture and colour in detail from a score.

Score Excerpt 2 is taken from a passage towards the end of “...to beam in distant heavens...”

Task 1

Explain the following notations that feature in **Score Excerpt 2**:

<p><i>Staccatissimo sempre</i></p>	
<p><i>Arco IV</i></p>	
<p><i>Col legno battuto</i></p>	
	
	
	

Task 2

This passage contains 3 elements of musical texture:

- A solo passage in the foreground
- A rhythmic accompaniment
- Sustained notes

Describe in detail the musical characteristics of each of these elements and any innovative ideas in them.

Score Excerpt 2

Flutes
a3
mp espr.

Clarinets in Bb
a3
pp (like a shadow)

Trombone 1
p

Trombone 2
mp

Steel Drums
ff \rightarrow f

Hi-Hat
f

Bass Drum
with broom
scraped
ff \rightarrow <

MIDI
f

Electric Guitar
dist. secco (staccatissimo sempre)
f

Solo Violin
ff
IV pizz. arco IV pizz. arco

Viola
col legno (battuto)
ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp





Cello
col legno (battuto)
ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp

Contrabass
col legno (battuto)
ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp \rightarrow ff \rightarrow pp

Suggested Answers

Activity 1

Task 1

<i>vivace</i>	Lively
<i>rubato</i>	With some flexibility in tempo
<i>flautando</i>	Flute-like tone colour
<i>sul tasto</i>	Play with the bow nearer the fingerboard than usual
<i>Non vib.</i>	Play without vibrato
	Left hand pizzicato. The bow continues to play the F, whilst the fourth finger on the left hand plucks the open E string.
	Fingered tremolo – rapid alternation of two notes in the same bow stroke.
	Quarter tones – F quarter sharp and B quarter flat.
	Natural harmonic on the fourth string. The finger touches the G string lightly at a certain point and the resulting pitch is two octaves higher than the open string. The tone colour is somewhat pale and glassy. If you have no bowed instruments available, you can experiment with natural harmonic on classroom guitars – touch the string lightly on the 5 th or 7 th or 12 th fret.

Task 2

Answers may include:

- The semiquaver passages are across all four strings. Therefore, the violinist needs to place her left hand in the correct position (as if holding down a guitar chord) then move the bow up then down.




Although the left hand positions are not easy (and intonation in these very high pitches is always problematic) the notes 'fall under the fingers'.

- The left hand pizz is played while the left hand is holding a low F on the D string. Therefore, the fifth finger is positioned to play the *pizzicato* easily.
- The '*espres. vib.*' Passage is on the fourth string, which has a natural richness of tone colour and is very well suited to writing such as this.
- The quarter tones are between adjacent semitone and in fifths, this means this passage can be played easily by a small movement of the left hand.
- The point at which the G string is touched (node) for the natural harmonic is close to the grace notes that are played immediately prior to it.

Activity 5

Task 1

Explain the following notations.

Staccatissimo sempre	Always very short and detached
Arco IV	Bow on the 4 th string (ordinarily a passage in this register would be played on the 1 st string)
Col legno battuto	Play with the wood of the bow in a percussive style
	Hi hat open the closed (pedal action)
	Left hand plucks the two open strings
	Tuplet – two semiquavers in the time that would normally be occupied by three. Like a triplet in reverse.

Task 2

This passage contains 3 elements of musical texture:

- A solo passage in the foreground
- A rhythmic accompaniment
- Sustained notes

Describe in detail the musical characteristics of each of these elements and any innovative ideas in them.

A solo passage in the foreground:

Solo violin plays more sustained notes in a moderately high register. These are played very high on the 4th string, creating an unusual tone colour. The MIDI synthesiser contributes to this element in a dissonant way. Not only is its tone colour thin and plasticky, but it is also playing in microtones giving the impression of out of tune playing.

A rhythmic accompaniment:

The hi-hat and bass drum play most of the time and conform quite closely to the shape of the irregular bar lengths. The low strings play series of longer and shorter repeated tuplets. These passages start very loudly and immediately become quieter. These are played by striking the strings with the wood of the bow and, in

the case of the violas and cellos, are a double stop involving an open string.

Sustained notes:

The flutes, clarinets and 1st trombone play the same notes in different octaves. The second trombone is a fifth lower and its dynamic is marked a little louder to balance the seven other instruments. The flutes are in their very lowest register, which is a rather veiled and mysterious sound. The idea of having all three clarinets played two octaves higher than the flute is an extremely unusual one. Clarinets are capable of extreme quiet playing, known as echo tone, and in this case this supports the upper harmonics of the flute tone. The carefully weighed and differing dynamics support this highly innovative use of timbral combinations.

Glossary

Musical term	Definition
a2	Two instruments play the given pitch.
Accompaniment	The part of the music that is not the main theme or tune, but the musical support.
Da capo	From the beginning.
Dissonant	The term describing the sound when notes played simultaneously do not blend together but clash.
Duration	Referring to the rhythmic aspects of music, length of sounds or silence.
Dynamics and expression	Volume and choice of how the sound is made.
Expressive techniques	Ways of playing or articulating a sound often related to the interpretation of a style.
Extended Techniques	When a player is required to play their instrument in an untraditional manner, such as blowing into a trumpet without the mouthpiece or tapping the belly of a stringed instrument.
Forte (f)	Loud
Fortepiano (fp)	To commence a note loudly and becoming very soft immediately after.
Graphic Notation	A method of indicating pitch, rhythm and dynamics using symbols instead of traditional musical notation.
Legato	Smoothly
Melody	Tune
Metre	The way that the beats are grouped in a piece of music, i.e. the number of beats in a bar
Orchestra	A group of mixed instruments comprising woodwind, brass, percussion and stringed instruments and usually directed by a conductor.
Ostinato	A repeating pattern – may be rhythm only or rhythm and pitch.
Pentatonic Scale	A scale consisting of five notes only – the most common being the 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 5 th , and 6 th notes of the scale.
Piano (p)	A dynamic marking meaning soft.
Pitch	The relative highness or lowness of sounds. Discussion of pitch includes the melody and direction of pitch movement and the harmony (different parts).
Pizzicato	A technique used by string players where the sound is made by plucking the string rather than bowing it.

Program music	Music that is inspired by a story, character, place or atmosphere i.e.it is inspired by a non musical program.
Sequence	A pattern that repeats at a higher or lower pitch.
Sforzando piano (<i>sfp</i>)	To accent the start of the note loudly, then become suddenly soft.
Soundscape	Compositions of organised sounds that describe a scene of a place.
Staccato	Playing a note so that it sounds short and detached.
Structure (form)	The plan underlying the construction or the design of a piece of music. Structure relates to the ways in which sections of music sound similar or different.
Texture	The layers of sound in a piece of music.
Timbre/Tone Colour	The particular features of a sound, which distinguish one sound (instrument or singer) from another.
Tuned and Untuned percussion	Tuned percussion refers to percussion instruments, which play specific pitches such as xylophones. Untuned percussion instruments include shakers, triangles and other instruments with no definable pitch.