This piece, composed for piano, two violins, viola, and cello, has been a musical academic exercise in the development of a multi-movement structure over the duration of 12 minutes. Although exempt from the rigidities of established musical forms, the piece is nonetheless an exploration of a narrative form insofar as its structural elements give rise to different points of intensity within it. By narrative form I am referring to a structure that tells a musical story; the piece is based on the development of themes that lead to moments of tension and resolution. The narrative concept is explored both within and throughout its three movements. The creation of the piece remains a purely musical endeavor, as I drew no conscious inspiration from extra-musical sources or influences. Exposure and study of various piano quintets that range from the classical period to the contemporary tradition was a helpful guide through the creation of the piece.

Several technical aspects of the quintet emerge in the writing process of a narrative structure. One must pay careful attention to the role of the piano or strings as either accompanimental or melodic voices and must consider the balance between these in the music. Strings and, to a lesser extent, piano provide a large toolbox of techniques that can be used to color the piece, establishing differences within sections that enhance the musical narrative. Also, as a composer writing for skilled musicians it was necessary to keep in mind the technical abilities of the performers, as well as the technical limitations of their instruments. The project was hence a learning experience in effective writing for the piano quintet ensemble.

A greater understanding of my creative process was perhaps the most important result of this creative exercise. Composing music gives rise to various barriers that the composer must overcome, beyond simple “writer’s block.” In my experience, music both manifests itself abstractly in the mind and comes to being through experimentation on the piano. In either case, translating musical thoughts and ideas from the mind or piano onto paper is a language barrier that is often difficult to overcome. While music itself exists outside of the page, its notation is a necessary blueprint that brings the abstract idea of a piece into reality. The blueprint must be carefully crafted so that the nuances of the music, in the composer’s mind, come to life in its performance. Another challenge was combining the intuitive creative process with a critical analysis of the function of the music. For me it is easy to write a musical idea without considering where it lies functionally in the narrative structure of a movement. The challenge lies within expansion of ideas into a smooth structure, so that each section leads appropriately to the next. The resulting musical painting is hopefully captivating to the listener’s ears.

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Funded by the Edward E. Langbein Summer Fellowship