

**A Pianist's Introduction to Gary Powell Nash**

By

Martha Saywell

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Doctoral Committee:

Martha Fischer, Professor, Music

Julia Faulkner, Associate Professor, Music

John Stevens, Professor, Music

Paul Rowe, Professor, Music

David Crook, Professor, Music

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# A PIANIST'S INTRODUCTION TO GARY POWELL NASH

Martha Saywell

Doctor of Musical Arts: Collaborative Piano

## ABSTRACT

The Doctoral Performance and Research submitted by Martha Saywell under the direction of Martha Fischer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, consists of the following:

### I. Final Project:

#### "A Pianist's Introduction to Gary Powell Nash"

This 50-page final project is an introduction to Dr. Gary Powell Nash as both person and composer. Biographical information is provided about Dr. Nash, and select musical works for and/or with piano are analyzed. Includes musical examples and audio.

### II. Chamber Recital, 9/21/2007, Morphy Hall

A Heartland Portrait – Paulus  
 Night – Wood  
 Four Deadly Serious Songs – Wood  
 Last Letter Home – Hoiby  
 American Folk Songs – Kohn  
 The Moon Is a Mirror – Heggie

Andrew Garland, baritone

### III. Chamber Recital, 04/04/2008, Meriter Retirement Center

Winterreise, D.911 – Schubert

James Kryshak, tenor

### IV. Chamber Recital, 12/3/2008, Capitol Lakes Retirement Center

Sonata in B-flat for Clarinet and Piano - Reger  
 Fantasy...Harbor Lights – Tower  
 Contrasts for violin, clarinet, and piano – Bartók

Ching-Chieh Hsu, clarinet  
 Edith Hines, violin

V. Chamber Recital, 01/25/2009, Morphy Hall

Sonata for Trumpet in B-flat and Piano – Hindemith  
Sonata for Alto Horn in E-flat and Piano – Hindemith  
Sonata for Horn in F and Piano – Hindemith  
Sonata for Bass Tuba and Piano – Hindemith  
Sonata for Trombone and Piano – Hindemith

Matthew Kuhns, trumpet  
Justin Richardson, euphonium  
Andrea Padgett, horn  
John Stevens, tuba  
Mark Hetzler, trombone

VI. Chamber Recital, 04/22/2009, Morphy Hall

Theme and Variations for clarinet and piano – Françaix  
Grand Duo Concertante, Op.48 – Weber  
Sonata for clarinet and piano in E-flat, Op.120, No.2 – Brahms  
  
Ching-Chieh Hsu, clarinet

VII. Lecture Recital: 03/21/2012, Morphy Hall

“An Introduction to Gary Powell Nash”  
  
Why Fades a Dream?  
Deformation II  
“Dedication” from Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies  
Deformation and Tranquility  
  
Melanie Cain, soprano  
Christopher Vanhof, trombone  
Bethany Schultz, clarinet

## A PIANIST'S INTRODUCTION TO GARY POWELL NASH

I have often been asked why I chose Gary Powell Nash and his music as the subject for this document. There are several different reasons that sparked my interest, the most important of which is how I stumbled upon the name of Gary Powell Nash in the first place. While in graduate school as a master's student at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, a colleague from another university presented to me a composition by Nash as part of a lecture recital program featuring works by African-American composers.

My participation in this recital provided me the opportunity to reflect on my own knowledge of African-American composers and their compositions. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, my knowledge was minimal at best. I could name ragtime and jazz musicians, but the only composers that immediately came to mind were William Grant Still and Margaret Bonds.

In the meantime I proceeded to learn *Galaw Ng Sayaw Sa Apat At Tatlo* (movement of dance in four and three) for flute and piano. I was fascinated with the complexities of the writing, especially with regard to rhythm. My colleague and I found that the interplay between the flute and piano parts is quite intricate and requires very slow and detailed practice initiatives. Ultimately I discovered that the overall composition techniques were not necessarily new so much as they were approached in unusual or unconventional ways. I would later learn that *Galaw Ng Sayaw Sa Apat At Tatlo* was originally part of a series appropriately titled *Deformations*. Two of the pieces in that series will be explored here.

While I have since discovered there are many accomplished black composers in America and beyond, they are most certainly grossly underrepresented in traditional classical music study. While great strides have been made to bring black music into the mainstream of music study, current scholarship and implementation is still insufficient. Particularly in America, study of black music tends to focus on contemporary popular styles, especially hip hop and rap music; while these styles are important in their own right, I find this approach to be one-dimensional and ultimately disappointing. There are many other voices!

The following pages contain two large sections, the first of which provides biographical information about Nash, the second of which provides analysis for selected musical works, each for and/or with piano. An ending commentary and recordings of the selected works is also included.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR GARY POWELL NASH**

Gary Powell Nash was born in August of 1964 in Flint, Michigan to parents Millie Francis Powell Nash and Preston Joseph Nash, both of Birmingham, Alabama. He grew up there as the third in line of four children – three brothers and one sister. Although neither of Nash’s parents were musicians, the siblings all took part in musical activities in various forms. His younger brother played percussion while his older brother dabbled in singing. His sister played violin and viola in her high school orchestra and all four siblings took piano lessons. Nash himself played the

clarinet in concert band/wind ensemble throughout school, the tenor saxophone in his high school jazz band, and the tuba in his high school marching band.<sup>1</sup>

Nash attended Scott Elementary School, McKinley Junior High School, Whittier Junior High School, and Southwestern High School, all in Flint, Michigan. He played football in grades six through nine and both tutored math and taught a piano class to elementary school students as a high school senior. He had many interests during his school years before he chose music. “I recall in second grade someone told me that I’d be a scuba diver, mostly because I like to swim.” Other interests included architecture, visual art, and commercial art. Aspirations of composing arose during his sophomore year of high school, although serious consideration for the profession developed between his sophomore and junior years at Michigan State University.<sup>2</sup>

Nash received a Bachelor of Music in Music Education degree from Michigan State University in 1986, a Master of Music in Composition degree from Western Michigan University in 1989, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Music Composition degree from Michigan State University in 1996. His primary teachers were Frank Ell, clarinet professor at Michigan State University, Ramon Zupko, composition professor at Western Michigan University, Charles Ruggiero, professor of composition at Michigan State University, and Mark Sullivan, professor of composition also at Michigan State University.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, January 16, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Favorite composers of Nash include Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, Edgard Varèse, Krzysztof Penderecki, Hale Smith, T. J. Anderson, and Olly Wilson. Favorite performers include Wynton Marsalis, Branford Marsalis, Richard Stoltzman, David Shifrin, Eddie Daniels, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane. He credits Frank Ell, Hale Smith, T.J. Anderson, Olly Wilson, and Czech composer, Karel Husa, as having a large impact on his career. Frank Ell was a source of encouragement and support after Nash's completion of his undergraduate degree, while Hale Smith, T. J. Anderson, and Olly Wilson are described by Nash as "like fathers to me". However, Karel Husa's impact on Nash especially stands out. Nash attended a concert of Husa's compositions performed by the Michigan State University Wind Symphony and Symphony Bands, and it was upon hearing this concert that Nash turned his sights on the goal of becoming a composer of Western Classical music.<sup>4</sup>

Nash now lives in Nashville, Tennessee where he serves as Associate Professor of Music Theory/Technology at Fisk University. He teaches and coordinates courses in music theory, technology, composition, and applied woodwinds, and he also conducts the Fisk University Jazz Ensemble. Previous post-secondary teaching credits include Associate Professor of Music Theory/Composition from 1996-2003 at Mississippi Valley State University (music theory, composition, clarinet ensemble, band) and United States Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Professor/Lecturer of Music Composition from 2000-2001 at the University of the Philippines – Diliman. During his graduate studies at Michigan

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 16, 2012.



State University, he also held a position as Graduate Teaching Assistant for Undergraduate Music Theory Classes.<sup>5</sup>

Nash's other professional experience includes: Musical Arranger and Musical Consultant for So Cal Dream Drum and Bugle Corps of Fountain Valley, California (2009-2010); Musical Arranger, Brass Technician, Musical Consultant and Co-fundraising Coordinator for Music City Legend Drum and Bugle Corps of Nashville, Tennessee as well as Musical Director for Legend Brass (2003-2007); adjudicator for musical competition contests by Georgia Parent Teacher's Association, Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University, and Kentucky Music Teachers National Association (2003-2004); Flint Community Schools and Flint International Institute Assistant to Chinese Language Arts Specialist for International Immersion Youth Summer Camp (2002); Chief Musical Arranger for Clarksdale High School Marching Band in Clarksdale, Mississippi and Brunswick Senior High School in Lawrenceville, Virginia (2001-present); substitute teacher at Flint Central High School (2001); Music Theory Instructor for Community Music School's Summer Youth Choir Camp at Michigan State University School of Music (1996-1999); Choir Director at Central Christian Church in Flint, Michigan (1991-1994); and Chief Musical Arranger for Flint (MI) Northern High School Marching Band (1989-present).<sup>6</sup>

Nash has been a recipient of many awards including the Tennessee Music Teachers Association Composer of the Year in 2005, and the 2001-2002 Mississippi Humanities Council Teachers Award Recipient as Mississippi Valley State

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 16, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

University's Teacher of the Year. Commission grants have been awarded by: Ellen Taaffe Zwilich Young Composers Workshop in Carnegie Hall to compose *Brass Magnolia Suite* (1999) for trumpet, horn, bass trombone and percussion/jazz drum set; Millersville University of Pennsylvania Wind Ensemble to compose *Tradition and Innovation* (2004); Middle Tennessee State University to compose *Hymn* (2005) for tenor H. Stephen Smith and piano; Ohio Northern University to compose *Bee Bin Bop* (2006) and *Woosah* (2006) both for steel drum ensemble; American Composers Forum Continental Harmony New Music to compose *Big Medisonial Ceremonial* (2003) for the Louisville orchestra; and Metro Nashville Arts Commission "Arts Building Communities" Grants for Conundrum Ensemble (2012) and also for Victoria Theodore, guest jazz piano/composition artist for the 2010 Fisk Jazz Ensemble Spring Concert.<sup>7</sup>

Fellowships and other grants include the Artist in Residence Fellowship for Virginia Center for the Creative Arts Artists' Colony in both 1995 and 1997, the Mississippi Arts Commission Artist Fellowship in 2003, and the United Negro College Fund/Mellon Foundation Grant to attend the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Faculty Seminar for the Atlantic Slave Trade held in Accra, Ghana, West Africa in 2007, and a 1994 American Society of Composers' Authors and Publishers Foundation Grant to Young Composers Award. Nash was also awarded a Proclamation from the Mississippi Valley State Faculty Senate in 1999 and is named in the 1998 Who's Who Among America's Teachers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 16, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Nash has also been a recipient of various other professional honors by way of various guest residencies and guest presentations. These include: Composer in Residence with Opera Memphis for “Singing in Memphis” in 2004; Visiting Lecturer in Music at Philander Smith College in 2005, Visiting Guest Composer at State University of New York Onondaga Community College/Syracuse University Collaborative Music Project in 2005, Guest Presenter of “Music of the Philippines, Academia and Beyond” at the Southeastern Composers League Annual Conference at the University of Georgia in 2003, Visiting Guest Composer at Ohio Northern University in 2006, Composer in Residence with Banda Sinfonica Union Musical Utielana in Valencia, Spain in 2006, Visiting Guest Composer for “Dimensions in Music” at Austin Peay State University in 2006, Visiting Guest Composer for Ho Chi Minh City Music Conservatory Contemporary Music Festival in Vietnam in 2007, and Visiting Lecturer in Music Residency at the University of Alaska – Anchorage in 2008. Memberships in professional organizations include the American Composers Forum, Southeastern Composers League, International Consortium of African Music and its Diaspora, International Society of African to American Music, the Nashville Composers Association, the National Music Teachers Association, the College Music Society, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Professional Music Fraternity, Kappa Kappa Psi National Honorary Band Fraternity, and Broadcast Music, Incorporated.<sup>9</sup>

Nash’s print publications include: *The Mission* (1985, rev. 2005) for wind ensemble, published by Devmusic Company in Biloxi, Mississippi in November of

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 16, 2012.

2010; *Bluebird Animato* (2005) and *Soulful Quartet, No. 1* (2008) both for English horn, violin, viola, and cello, published by Prairie Dawg Press in Manhattan, Kansas in October of 2010; *Brass Magnolia Suite* (1999) for trumpet, horn, bass trombone, and percussion/jazz drum set, *Enigmatic Fanfare* (1993) for four trumpets, *Improvisation* (1987) for solo trumpet, *Progressive Jazz Suite* (2005) for solo bass trombone, and *Six Interlocutions* (2003) for trumpet and percussion, all published by Gold Branch Music, Inc. in Richfield, North Carolina in January of 2005; and *Deformation IV* (1992) for tuba and piano, published by Tuba-Euphonium Press in November of 1994. Also, “Nash, Gary Powell” by Mark Katz and Timothy Rommen appears in the *International Dictionary of Black Composers*, published by Dearborn Publishers in April of 1999, and “Nash, Gary Powell” appears in *Musical Landscapes in Color: Conversations with Black American Composers* by William C. Banfield, published by Scarecrow Press in November of 1994.<sup>10</sup>

Nash’s commercial recordings include: *Deformation V* (1993) for bassoon and piano on the compact disc *Legacy* produced by Albany Records (August, 2008); *Six Interlocutions* (2003) for trumpet and percussion on the compact disc *Atmospheres* by LP Productions (November, 2007) and also on the compact disc *Nuove musiche per Tromba 5* (January, 2005); *Progressive Jazz Suite* (2005) for solo bass trombone on the compact disc *The Smell of Wet Dogs After a Summertime Rain* (November, 2006); *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies* (2003) for solo piano on the compact disc *Towards an African Pianism: An Anthology of Keyboard Music from Africa and the Diaspora* (September, 2005); *Tradition and Innovation* (2004) for

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<sup>10</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 16, 2012.

band/wind ensemble on the compact disc *Tradition and Innovation: 150 Years* by the Millersville University Wind Ensemble and Symphonic Band (December, 2004); *A Fraternal Prelude* (1997) for band/wind ensemble on the compact disc *Out of the Depths* produced by Citadel Records (January, 2004); *Blues Impromptu* (1995) for solo cello on the compact disc *Music from Mount San Angelo* produced by the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (September, 1995); and *In Memoriam: Sojourner Truth* (1992) for orchestra on the compact disc *Symphonic Brotherhood: The Music of African-American Composers* with Julius P. Williams conducting the Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic Orchestra of Zlin, Czech Republic produced by Albany Records (June, 1993).<sup>11</sup>

Nash's favorite compositions from his own output are *In Memoriam: Sojourner Truth* (1992) for orchestra, *Fanfare Froaangriblmn* (2006) for brass choir and percussion ensemble, *Deformation III* (1992) for jazz drum set and mallet percussion ensemble, *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies* (2003) for solo piano, *Psalms of Ascents* (2004) for choir, piano, and clarinet solo, and finally *Soulful Quartet, No. 1* (2008) for English horn, violin, viola, and cello. He considers his greatest musical accomplishments as having received notable performances of his music and being able to meet so many outstanding musicians along with his many years of being a college professor.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 16, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

## ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF SELECTED WORKS

Nash describes his compositional style as both Neo-romantic and avant-garde.<sup>13</sup> Two especially interesting and unique characteristics of Nash's compositional style are his use of tonality and his omission of key signatures. It is not uncommon for Nash's compositions to evolve through several key areas, whether major, minor or modal, and he opts to use accidentals throughout his works to establish key areas as they emerge rather than using them to indicate a departure from the blanket tonic indicated by a key signature. In fact, he even provides unique instructions concerning the accidentals themselves. In much of his music, including three of the seven works analyzed below, he states that accidentals "hold through only for continuously repeated notes and two-note ostinato passages."<sup>14</sup> This serves as a challenge to performers as a traditional music training regiment specifies that accidentals remain unequivocally throughout a measure of music. Another recurring compositional element is the interval of a fourth; specifically, stacked fourths are found consistently throughout his compositions, some of which are highlighted below. Nash's jazz influences are also apparent in his frequent use of various types of seventh and ninth chords and also his frequent use of syncopated rhythms. These rhythms are quite intricate and demanding on the performer as they challenge the usual sense of division, grouping, and ultimately symmetry of a given meter.

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<sup>13</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, January 26, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> The three pieces in question, all available from the composer, are: *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies for Piano Solo* (2003); *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano* (1987); and *Deformation II, a short piece for trombone and piano* (1988).

The selected pieces for analysis are not published but may be obtained directly from Nash; they include not only solo piano works but also intentionally cover a broader spectrum of the piano coupled with the other main instrument groups of woodwinds, brass, strings, and voice. In order to give the pianist a point of departure for further study, each analysis provides a general overview with additional detailed analysis in more complex passages. Supplemental background information for each piece is provided also.

***Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano***

*Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano* was completed in January of 1987.<sup>15</sup> It is the first piece in a series of eight for various instruments that use the term “deformation”. Nash’s principal teacher, Ramon Zupko, has a series of pieces called *Fluxus*, and Zupko studied with Vincent Persechetti, who had a series of pieces titled *Parables*; Nash felt it only fitting to have a series called *Deformations*. However, some of Nash’s mentors did suggest that some audiences might provoke a negative connotation of his music since the term “deformation” is usually considered unfavorable.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the last three of the “Deformations” now have different titles.

The intention of using the word “deformation” is to highlight the untraditional use of motives and themes. In these works, forms are not necessarily

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano*, score, 1987, available from the composer.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail to author, March 17, 2012.

symmetrical or the expected development section of a typical sonata form is often replaced by a completely contrasting section in an altogether different tempo.

Themes are often reintroduced only partially or in variation, with those variations being sometimes slight and other times more obvious.<sup>17</sup>

One of the initial examples of “deformation” in Nash’s piece for clarinet and piano is the treatment of the opening theme when it returns in measure twelve.

While the theme could easily be reproduced note for note, Nash chooses to momentarily replace the opening two sixteenth notes at B-flat and A-flat with an eighth note at the higher pitch of C, thereby delaying the recognition of the same theme as it appears in the first measure. In the second and third beats of measure thirteen, he then uses enharmonic equivalents to the pitches used in the second measure with one tiny alteration in rhythm.<sup>18</sup> (Compare Examples 1a and 1b below.) For the listener, these changes in the appearance of the pitches are not perceivable; however, for the performer, they are a challenge in translating the music from the written page to the performer’s instrument.

**Example 1a:** *Deformation and Tranquility*, measures 1 and 2 of clarinet



<sup>17</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano, score, 1987, available from the composer.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



**Example 1b:** *Deformation and Tranquility*, measures 13 and 14 of clarinet



For performance study purposes, *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano can be divided into seven sections, the first of which spans the first sixteen measures. The initial treatment of the opening theme and its return are already discussed above. Additionally, as is characteristic of much of Nash's output, the most challenging aspect of these sixteen measures is the use of syncopation. Performers must "lock in" the rhythms, especially at the conclusion of phrases that do not end on a strong beat and at the commencement of phrases that do not begin on a strong beat. This becomes more difficult in areas where the clarinet and piano parts have matching rhythms as in measure nine. The rhythm at measure nine is also a recurring characteristic of Nash's writing. At beats two, three, and four, the final note within each beat is not only syncopated, but also is displaced by one sixteenth-note value.<sup>19</sup> The retreat of each of these notes to an earlier placement within the sixteenth note subdivision generates the illusion of the performers suppressing the tempo although it never actually changes. (See Example 2 below.)

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<sup>19</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano, score, 1987, available from the composer.

**Example 2:** *Deformation and Tranquility*, measure 9

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Although the opening theme returns as discussed above, it is not completed in the same way as in the beginning. Whereas the clarinet and piano parts descend in the opening, they now continue upward into a bridge to the next section of the work.<sup>20</sup>

The second section of *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano spans measures sixteen through thirty-three. This section shows the influence of jazz and is especially apparent via a syncopated ostinato in the piano part complete with walking bass line. As in a jazz tune, this allows the pianist to “lay down a groove” over which the clarinetist can solo. There is one brief departure from the ostinato/solo tonality in measures twenty-nine through thirty-one.

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano, score, 1987, available from the composer.

Although the original tonality returns in measure thirty-two, the section abruptly ends at the end of measure thirty-three.<sup>21</sup>

The interval of a fourth, whether perfect, augmented, or diminished, is prominent throughout *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano*. However, it is in this second section that the use of the fourth is most obvious. All of the chords in the treble of the piano ostinato are stacked fourths, and even the short melodic fragments that occasionally emerge from the texture are based on the interval of a fourth separated with various types of non-chord tones.<sup>22</sup>

The process of “deformation” can once again be seen in this second section by examining a couple of the aforementioned melodic fragments within the ostinato pattern of the piano part. The first example is from measure twenty-three.<sup>23</sup> The leap from G-flat to C would qualify as a fourth had Dr. Nash chosen to either lower the G-flat by one octave or raise the C by an octave. As written, the interval appears as a fifth, but by association of inversion, the pattern of fourths is still intact. The second example is from the following measure.<sup>24</sup> The fourth is retained aurally as the interval between the B and G-flat is actually a third as written. Once again, it is a challenge to the performer that is not ascertainable by the listener. (See Example 3 below.)

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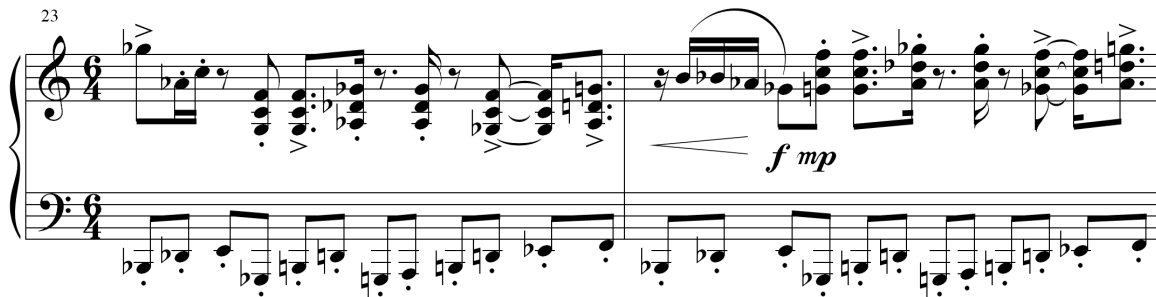
<sup>21</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano*, score, 1987, available from the composer.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

**EXAMPLE 3:** *Deformation and Tranquility*, measures 23 and 24 of piano



Section 3 of *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano covers measures thirty-four through forty-one.<sup>25</sup> This section serves as more of a bridge between the previous and following sections. The interval of a fourth is still dominant within the piano part, but the piano part is significantly diminished allowing the clarinet to control the transition to the next section.

The fourth section of *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano is the most contrasting component of the work. While the element of syncopation remains, note values in this section are much longer. Combined with the marked slower tempo, this section promotes a sense of expansiveness and reprieve from the opening sections. The intervals within the chords have now been reduced to thirds, which promotes a tighter harmonic movement.<sup>26</sup>

The fifth section constitutes a cadenza for the clarinetist and simultaneously serves as a bridge for the driving rhythms of the beginning to reappear. The

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<sup>25</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano, score, 1987, available from the composer.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

incremental movement of strong pulses across sixteenth-note subdivisions is developed further. It is in this cadenza that Nash is most detailed about articulation and dynamics. In measure seventy-one alone, the dynamic level changes six times! A gradual *accelerando* leads into the faster sixth section although the main theme does not appear yet.<sup>27</sup>

The sixth section of *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano* encompasses measures eighty-three through one hundred five and is considerably thicker in texture than any other portion of the composition. Whereas the piano plays a lesser role in the opening, it is in this section that the piano and clarinet parts become more entwined. Melodic sixteenth-note passages are sometimes split and combined between the two parts. (See Example 4 below.) At measure one hundred, there is a brief reminder of the earlier ostinato pattern, which leads directly into a return of the opening theme.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano*, score, 1987, available from the composer.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

**EXAMPLE 4:** *Deformation and Tranquility*, measure 97

The seventh and final section of *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for *clarinet and piano* is a four-measure coda that showcases both the upper register and extended techniques for the clarinet. The penultimate measure highlights the interval of the fourth through the sixteenth-note pattern of the piano and both parts join together in the last measure for a final boisterous (*fff*) statement of syncopation.<sup>29</sup> (See Example 5 below.)

**Example 5:** *Deformation and Tranquility*, last measure

<sup>29</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation and Tranquility*, a short piece for clarinet and piano, score, 1987, available from the composer.

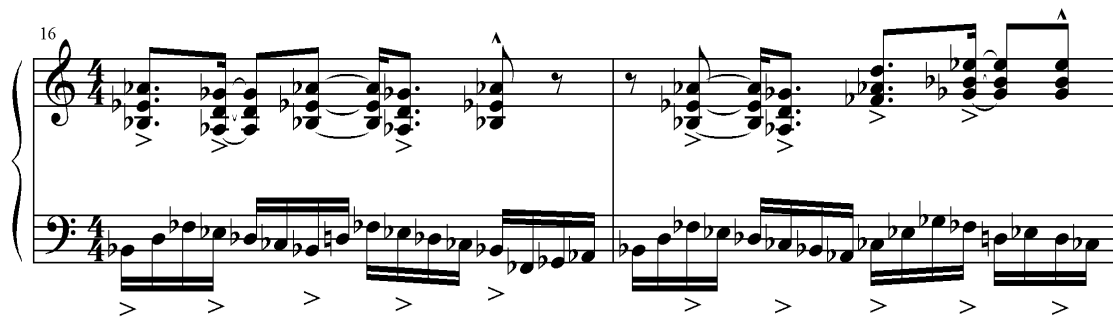
***Deformation II, a short piece for trombone and piano***

*Deformation II, a short piece for trombone and piano*, is a prime example of Nash's rhythmic prowess. The piece is presented in an ABA form with the B section presenting lyrical melodic ideas at half the tempo of the rhythmically driven outer sections. The underlying rhythmic pattern of these outer A sections is based on shifting the pulse to every third sixteenth note within the overall duple meter, specifically across three beats at a time with the fourth beat retaining the usual pulse, reminiscent of a standard clave rhythm. (See Example 6 below.) In the initial A section, the trombone and piano trade these syncopated rhythms back and forth but never present them simultaneously. It is in the return of the A section that these syncopated rhythms are sometimes shared by the two instruments, rendering a challenge to both performers to stay exactly in lockstep with one another. The other underlying feature of the A sections is a recurring four-note motive consisting of two repeated notes, a small skip of a second or third down, then a skip back up to a step above the original repeated note with an occasional return to the original note instead. This four-note motive is highlighted in the piano solo in the return of the A section. (See Example 7a below.) Throughout the piece he may hook these motives together by making the fourth note of the motive double as the first note of the next motive, thereby producing a motivic chain.<sup>30</sup> (See Example 7b below.)

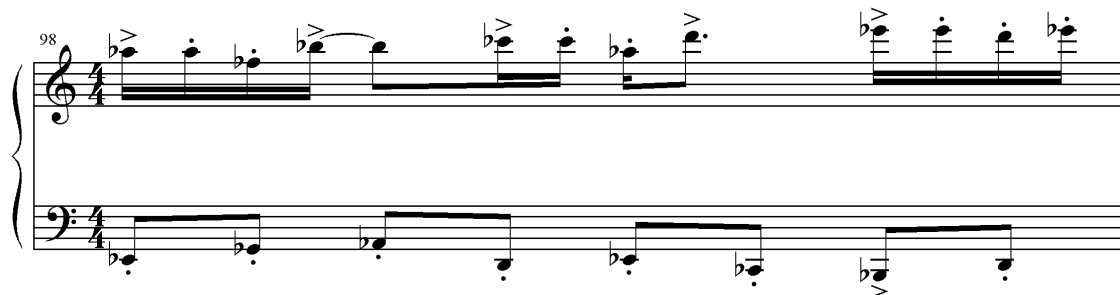
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<sup>30</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation II, a short piece for trombone and piano*, score, 1988, available from the composer.

**Example 6:** *Deformation II*, measures 16 and 17



**Example 7a:** *Deformation II*, measure 98



**Example 7b:** *Deformation II*, measures 2 and 3



The contrasting B section of the piece provides a beautiful reprieve from the outer sections with an arrival in the key area of E-flat. As mentioned briefly before, the tempo is now cut in half, but additionally the driving sixteenth-note rhythms have been replaced by longer note values of quarters, dotted quarters, half notes, etc., to aid the atmosphere of a reprieve from the rigorous rhythms of the outer



sections.<sup>31</sup> Jazz influences are distinguished through the trombone's use of a plunger mute and glisandi. Due to the nature of the contrasts between the middle and outer sections, it is fitting that the title on the first page of music substitutes "rhapsody" in place of "piece" even though "piece" is intended to be used as part of the official title.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Why Fades a Dream?***

*Why Fades a Dream?* is a setting for soprano and piano of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem by the same name. Paul Laurence Dunbar was a late nineteenth-century African-American writer who received critical acclaim across the United States and Great Britain for his literary compositions. He is actually best known for his writing on the difficulties of African-Americans in the United States and their desire for equality.<sup>33</sup>

*Why Fades a Dream?* was written for a senior recital at Mississippi Valley State University and is one of three poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar that Nash has set to music. Dunbar is the first African-American poet that Nash studied as a professional, and he attributes his interest in setting Dunbar's poetry to its often-strophic nature.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Deformation II, a short piece for trombone and piano*, score, 1988, available from the composer.

<sup>32</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, March 15, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Lida Keck Wiggins, *The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Naperville, Illinois: J L Nichols & Company, 1907.)

<sup>34</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2012.

Nash sets the stage for *Why Fades a Dream?* with a series of descending thirds whose metrical values are often elongated with the use of ties to portray a sense of suspension in mid-air. Throughout the song, he uses melodic contour and syncopation to paint Dunbar's text. For example, the recurring text "why fades a dream" or its variation "so fades a dream" always commences on a descending melodic line to highlight the concept of fading. The second and third syllables of the text "flecked in between" are placed on the second and fourth sixteenth-note division of the beat, literally situating the text *in between* stronger beats.<sup>35</sup> (See Examples 8a – 8c below.) The ties and suspensions from the opening return in the piano postlude, but now with melodic thirds that ascend rather than descend.

**Example 8a:** *Why Fades a Dream?*, measures 1-4

The image displays a musical score for measures 1-4 of the piece "Why Fades a Dream?". It is written for piano in 4/4 time, featuring a treble and bass staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 1 and 2, and the second system covers measures 3 and 4. In measure 1, the treble staff has a whole note chord (F#4, A4) with a tie to measure 2, and the bass staff has a half note chord (F#3, A3) with a tie to measure 2. In measure 2, the treble staff has a whole note chord (F#4, A4) with a tie to measure 3, and the bass staff has a half note chord (F#3, A3) with a tie to measure 3. In measure 3, the treble staff has a whole note chord (F#4, A4) with a tie to measure 4, and the bass staff has a half note chord (F#3, A3) with a tie to measure 4. In measure 4, the treble staff has a whole note chord (F#4, A4) with a tie to measure 5, and the bass staff has a half note chord (F#3, A3) with a tie to measure 5. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *ppp*, and articulation markings like accents and slurs. A rehearsal mark "8va" is present at the beginning of the first system, and a "3" is written above the treble staff in measure 3.

<sup>35</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Why Fades a Dream?*, score, 1998, available from the composer.

**Example 8b:** *Why Fades a Dream?*, measures 21-22 of soprano line



**Example 8c:** *Why Fades a Dream?*, measure 17 of soprano line



***Two Songs (of Paul Laurence Dunbar)***

*Two Songs (of Paul Laurence Dunbar)* was completed in 1995, and both poems were extracted from *Lyrics of Lowly Life: The Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. The premiere was given by Shudong Luo, now Shudong Luo Braamse, a colleague at Michigan State University and the singer for whom the composition was written.<sup>36</sup> The title of Nash's setting of these poems is not merely reflective of the fact that he composed two different songs, but rather "Two Songs" is the name of the duo of poems; they do not possess individual titles.

Much like in *Why Fades a Dream?*, Nash uses text painting to enhance the musical experience, particularly in the first of the two songs. In the eleventh measure, the soprano is given a descending glissando on the word "buzzed" in imitation of the bee that is the subject of the first stanza. (See Example 9a.) The

<sup>36</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, October 16, 2012.

second stanza, describing robins in a tree, is set at a higher pitch range and the chirps of the birds are demonstrated in the piano interlude following the stanza. (See Example 9b.) In the final stanza, glissandi are once again used, painting the sunshine falling on a lover's hair and the lover's lingering.<sup>37</sup> (See Examples 9c and 9d.) The glissandi are also further evidence of jazz influence on Nash's style, in addition to the syncopated rhythms that are prominent within the song. Of course, the tempo marking of "Jazz-Blues Like" is also a dead giveaway!

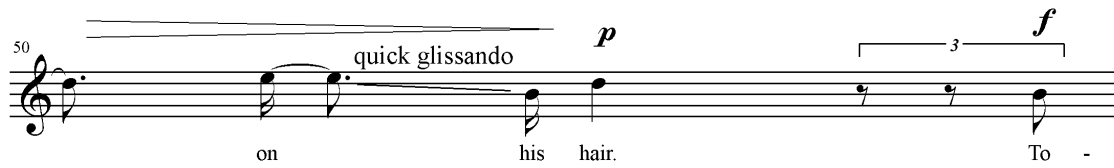
**Example 9a:** *Two Songs*, measure 11 of 1<sup>st</sup> song, soprano



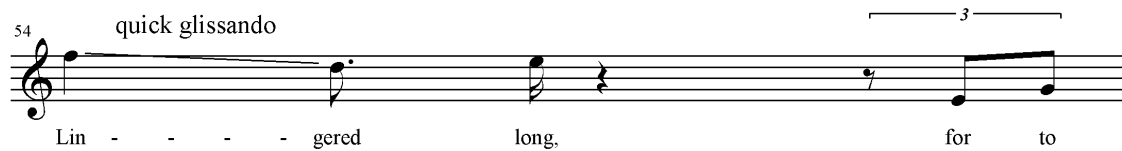
**Example 9b:** *Two Songs*, measures 37-40 of 1<sup>st</sup> song

<sup>37</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Two Songs (of Paul Laurence Dunbar)*. score, 1995, available from the composer.

**Example 9c:** *Two Songs*, measure 50 of 1<sup>st</sup> song, soprano



**Example 9d:** *Two Songs*, measure 54 of 1<sup>st</sup> song, soprano



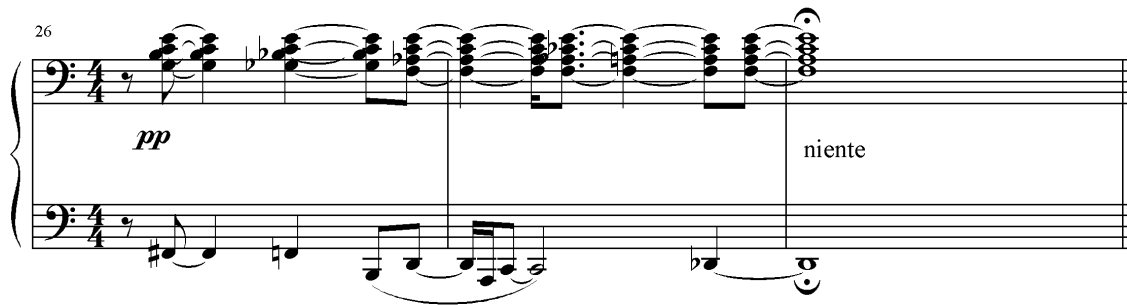
The second song is much slower and more carefree which complements the wistfulness of the singer's lover; it is also a mere twenty-eight measures in length. The jazz influence indicated in the first song carries over here via walking bass lines with a generous use of seventh and ninth chords throughout; the postlude ends with a chain of these chords.<sup>38</sup> (See Examples 10a and 10b.)

**Example 10a:** *Two Songs*, measures 12-13 of 2<sup>nd</sup> song, piano



<sup>38</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Two Songs (of Paul Laurence Dunbar)*, score, 1995, available from the composer.

**Example 10b:** *Two Songs*, measures 26-28 of 2<sup>nd</sup> song



***Three Argemarillo Fantasies***

*Three Argemarillo Fantasies* (2007) is a three-movement work for solo piano.<sup>39</sup> The name "Argemarillo" is an original word conceptualized by Nash by combining "Argentina" and "Amarillo". The movements were inspired by pianist Gustavo Tolosa, who originally hails from Argentina and currently lives in the state of Texas, hence source and combination of the two words.<sup>40</sup> Like the *Two Songs* (of Paul Laurence Dunbar), the movements do not bear their own titles, but rather are designated by roman numerals.

The first movement begins with a slow, sultry sixteen-measure introduction that gives no warning of the fast, multi-meter section that follows. At measure seventeen, a walking bass line that alternates between 4/4 and 3/8 sets the foundation to which the eventual harmonic progression will be anchored. Both the introduction and the onset of the fast section are in the key of E-flat minor as

<sup>39</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, October 13, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2012.



especially considering the fast tempo. This section also arrives on a climactic chord via similar methods of crescendo and contrary motion to the previous section.<sup>42</sup>

(See Example 12 below.)

**Example 12:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, measures 105-107 of 1<sup>st</sup> movement



Measure one hundred eight marks the return of a slow tempo that appears with no warning just as the fast section also began. However, there are no obvious similarities here to the slow introduction. Nash utilizes a new time signature of 3/16 interspersed among the 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures. While the tonality of E-flat minor remains in the treble, the bass line briefly suggests E Major before moving to the dominant of B-flat. Unlike the immediate tempo changes in the previous sections, this section accelerates in the last two measures to introduce the fast and final section.<sup>43</sup>

The final fast section shares similarities with the previous section in that Nash uses the time signatures of 3/8 and 2/4. While the changes in meter are not as

<sup>42</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, score, 2007, available from the composer.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



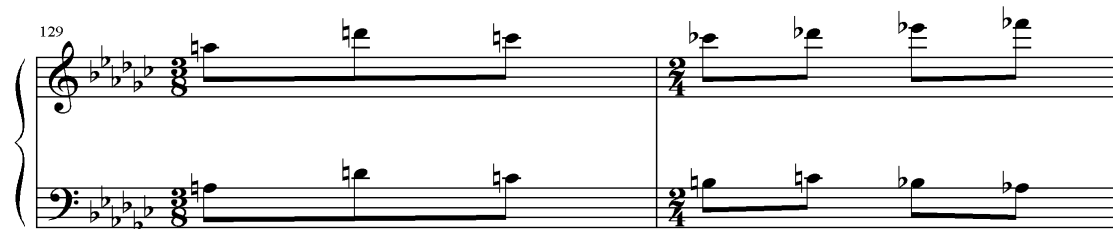
frequent as in the first fast section, this final fast section poses the biggest challenge for the performer via the constantly changing tonality and a healthy use of accidentals. In fact, accidentals that apply to the treble often do not apply to the bass.<sup>44</sup> (See Example 13.)

**Example 13:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, measures 127-128 of 1<sup>st</sup> movement



The section begins with a sequence of three nine-measure phrases, each at a different pitch level. There are slight variations in pitch direction within these three phrases, but the rhythm of each phrase remains the same with the final measure always in 2/4 and the penultimate measure always in unison between the treble and bass.<sup>45</sup> (See Examples 14a, 14b, and 14c.)

**Example 14a:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, measures 129-130 of 1<sup>st</sup> movement



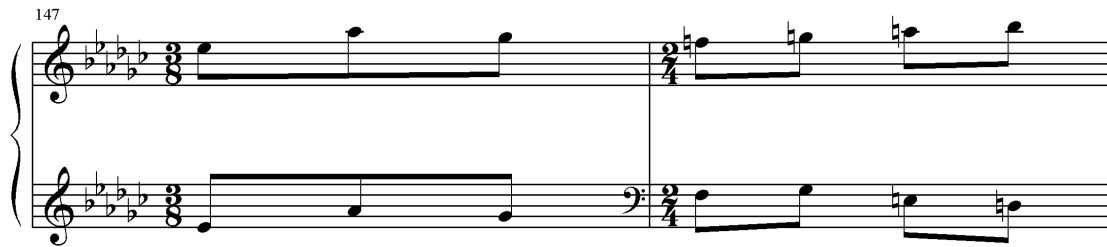
<sup>44</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, score, 2007, available from the composer.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

**Example 14b:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, measures 137-138 of 1<sup>st</sup> movement



**Example 14c:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, measures 147-148 of 1<sup>st</sup> movement



A new sequence follows, this time three phrases of seven measures. This sequence shares similarities with the previous sequence – specifically the use of stacked fourths and a meter of 3/8 with the exception of the final measure in 2/4. The coda begins at the mid-point of measure one hundred seventy and remains in 2/4. The treble and bass are initially and briefly in unison until the treble begins to reference the aforementioned chords of stacked fourths. The final chord in the treble uses the interval of a third between the top-most voices.<sup>46</sup> However, if the top pitch of A-natural were to be displaced to the bass, it then fits the usual pattern of stacked fourths as well. (See Examples 15a and 15b.)

<sup>46</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, score, 2007, available from the composer.

**Example 15a = last chord of 1<sup>st</sup> movement**



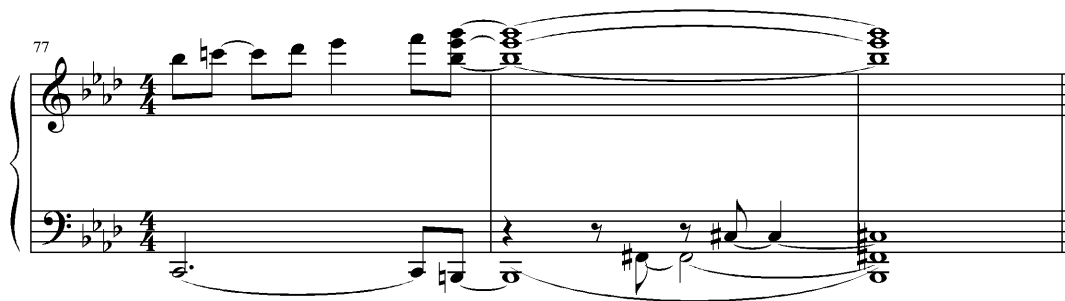
**Example 15b = last chord of 1<sup>st</sup> movement with treble A moved to bass**



The second movement of *Three Argemarillo Fantasies* is a “medium-fast tango-like tempo”. Although not a slow tempo, a comparison to the driving rhythms of the first movement suggests that the middle movement could fit a traditional form of a slow second movement. The movement is in ABA form with the outer A sections in F minor and demonstrates a lighter character. The transition to the final A section is reminiscent in the frequent use of accidentals and seemingly shifting tonality. Nash also adds a brief coda that surprisingly moves away from F minor

and instead culminates on an E-flat major triad in the treble over stacked fifths in the bass with B as the anchor note.<sup>47</sup> This departure from the overall tonality is an interesting segue to the third movement, as it does not leave the listener with a sense of closure. (See Example 16 below.)

**Example 16:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, last 3 measures of 2<sup>nd</sup> movement



The third movement of *Three Argemarillo Fantasies* has a brighter feel, but in actuality has a much slower metronome marking than the second movement (84 beats per minute versus 104). It is the more frequent use of sixteenth notes that contributes to the forward motion of this movement. Also in ABA form with a short coda, it is the B section and the coda that pose the biggest challenge to the performer. Once again the tonality is shifting away from the stated key of B-flat Major, and every measure is filled with accidentals. As in the first movement, accidentals in the treble do not apply to the bass or vice versa. (See Example 17 below.) As in the previous two movements, the final chord is somewhat unusual in

<sup>47</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, score, 2007, available from the composer.

that non-chord tones are prevalent. The presence of B-flat major is unmistakable by the B-flat and F in the bass. However, B-natural, A-flat, C-natural, and E-natural are also used. (See Example 18 below.)

**Example 17:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, measure 36 of 3<sup>rd</sup> movement



**Example 18:** *Three Argemarillo Fantasies*, last chord of 3<sup>rd</sup> movement



### **“Dedication” from *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies***

*Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies* is a three-movement piano solo of which *Dedication* is the second movement. Nash was living in the Mississippi Delta when he composed this piece, but found that both “Mississippi Delta” and even “delta” had been overused in titles of other works; he instead chose “magnolia”, the state flower of Mississippi.<sup>48</sup> The first movement, “Buddy’s Path,” was inspired by Buddy Guy’s blues and the first movement of Beethoven’s *Pathétique* sonata, Op. 13. The third movement, “Fast Blues on the Wall”, was inspired by a blues tune titled *On the Wall* that Nash discovered in a blues anthology.<sup>49</sup> Both the first and third movements can be found on the compact disc *Towards an African Pianism: An Anthology of Keyboard Music from Africa and the Diaspora* featuring Darryl Hollister, the pianist for whom the composition is written; however, the second movement is not included in that recording.<sup>50</sup>

Nash follows the standard pattern of having the second movement in a slower tempo while being flanked on both sides with faster movements. When asked about the title “Dedication”, Nash jokingly said it was for lack of a better idea, but the title was in actuality a result of a friend’s reaction to a saxophone piece. In 1995, Nash had begun composing a three-movement alto saxophone concerto, also with a fast-slow-fast organization for the movements, and he shared it with his best

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<sup>48</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, March 17, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Akin Euba, *Towards An African Pianism: An Anthology of Keyboard Music from Africa and the Diaspora*, ABA 0002 CD, 2005, compact disc.

friend who also happens to be a composer. This friend began playing through the piano part to see what it was like, and when he got to the second movement he said, “Okay, what’s her name?” Although the friend clearly thought the piece might have been inspired by a little romance, in fact it was not. When Nash began composing the second movement of *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies* in 2003, his musical ideas were similar to the ones used in the alto saxophone concerto. Nash did mention that he could have named the movement, “Okay, what’s her name?”, but he decided that perhaps *Dedication* would be more appropriate.<sup>51</sup>

*Dedication* actually begins with a nine-measure introduction that is somewhat aggressive, especially in comparison to what is generally expected in a slow second movement. There are two main reasons for this; the first is the fortissimo dynamic marking; the second is the faster note values that create a sense of momentum. At measure ten, the main body of the piece commences, and the volume relaxes and seemingly the tempo does as well. However, this section is actually marked at a faster tempo, but due to the use of longer note values, it would be easy for one to perceive the tempo as slower. There is eventually a brief return to a slower tempo, but it initially retains the longer note values of the previous section. There is a series of crescendos between piano and forte that hint at the ensuing climax that consists of the faster note values of the first slow section. This return of faster note values comes in the form of a 32<sup>nd</sup>-note ostinato in the right hand of the piano part. Although the presence of 32<sup>nd</sup> notes would normally indicate a subdivision of eight parts, Nash phrases them together in groups of seven.

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<sup>51</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, February 28, 2012.

This causes the initial note of the pattern to consistently shift back one 32<sup>nd</sup> note allowing for the pulse to be somewhat camouflaged. Simultaneously the left hand plays a staccato line on various parts of the 16<sup>th</sup>-note subdivision. These left hand notes occur on a main beat only once per measure and coincide with the first note of the right hand grouping only twice. This further camouflages the pulse and provides the illusion of notes and rhythm by chance despite the very intricate and specific rhythms in both parts. (See Example 19 below.) Following this section is a brief transition back to an abbreviated version of the faster section that ends the piece.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies for Piano Solo*, score, 2003, available from the composer.



**Example 19:** “Dedication” from *Three Magnolia Fantasies*, measures 71 – 75

The image displays a musical score for five systems, each consisting of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The notation is characterized by dense, rapid sixteenth-note passages in the treble clef, often grouped by slurs. The bass clef provides a more sparse accompaniment, primarily using eighth and sixteenth notes, with occasional rests. The first system begins with a measure number '71' in the upper left. The overall texture is intricate and technically demanding, typical of a 'fantasy' piece.

## ***For Two***

Of the pieces discussed within this document, *For Two* (originally *Deformation VI*) for violin and piano is by far the most avant-garde and consequently the biggest performance challenge. It was written for Seunghee Lee, Professor of Violin at Central Michigan University, although, to Nash's knowledge, she has never performed the piece.<sup>53</sup> The only recording prior to the compact disc that accompanies this document is by violinist Rachel Vetter Huang and pianist Hao Huang on a recital at Scripps College in Claremont, California in 1999.<sup>54</sup> (The recording may be obtained directly from Dr. Nash.) The opening performance directive of "Aggressively" is initially misleading as the metronome marking indicates a more moderate tempo of 112; additionally the piano part, albeit with loud dynamic markings, seems relatively thin in texture and movement. It is the complex rhythms and frequent dissonance that establish the aggressive nature. *For Two* is considerably larger in scale than the other works presented in this document. It can easily be divided into six large sections. However, those six larger sections will be divided into smaller segments for further analysis here.

The first large section of *For Two* covers measures one through sixty and consists of three smaller subsections. The first segment (measures one through twenty) is a dialogue between the violin and piano beginning with the violin's opening exclamatory and dissonant chord being answered immediately by an equally exclamatory and dissonant chord in the piano. Similar exchanges take place

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<sup>53</sup> Gary Powell Nash, e-mail message to author, April 28, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

in measures seven and twelve, although here there are three exclamations, two in the piano separated by one in the violin. Between these exclamations, the piano part attempts to interrupt the melodic line of the violin part, sometimes overlapping the end of the violinist's phrase with the onset on small melodic fragments in the piano.<sup>55</sup>

At measure twenty-one, the second segment of Section One begins. Marked as "A little less aggressive", the piano part takes on the role of accompaniment with a six-note bass figure that is repeated but in different rhythmic combinations. (See Example 20 below.) At measure thirty, the bass line continues on its rhythmic trajectory, but the pitches are altered and often change registers. Meanwhile the dominant feature of the treble is a series of chords that span either a major or minor seventh, but sometimes the major seventh is notated enharmonically by a diminished octave. Occasionally the piano part will have small melodic fragments, but primarily the melodic content belongs to the violin. The one exception is at measures forty-five through forty-seven where the piano momentarily performs both roles.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

**Example 20:** *For Two*, measures 21-25, piano bass line



The third segment of Section One begins at measure fifty-four and serves as a transition into Section Two. Marked “Aggressively”, the piano part includes quarter-note triplets and quarter-note quintuplets that, although not changing the tempo, suggest a forward movement. It is a particularly interesting use of momentum through rhythm given that the following section is actually at a much slower tempo.<sup>57</sup>

Section Two of *For Two* begins at measure sixty-one and now has a metronome marking of 70 beats per minute. It is marked “Still with aggressive feeling” which is not hindered by the slower tempo because the violin is now playing 32<sup>nd</sup> notes as opposed to 16<sup>th</sup> notes in the previous section. Dialogue between the two instruments has now returned, but at measure seventy-three the exchange between the two parts is no longer in rapid succession, hence the marking of “Calmly”. The combination of long notes and/or tied notes along with syncopated rhythms gives the illusion that there is no meter in measures seventy-three through eighty. At measure eighty-one, a more obvious pulse returns, but it is short-lived.

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<sup>57</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.

Measure eighty-seven begins a transition into the next section by means of a semi-melodic line in the bass of the piano. Semi-melodic in this instance refers to what is visually a melodic line, but due to rests among the line in combination with a rallentando, sounds somewhat fragmented and incidental. The rallentando leads to the final two measures of the section at a tempo marking of 54 beats per minute and a variation of the previous bass line.<sup>58</sup>

Section Three of *For Two* begins at measure ninety-three and has a metronome marking of one hundred sixty-two beats per minute but is marked “Still with calm feeling”. While the metronome marking in and of itself may evoke a less-than-calm perception, Nash uses sustained tied notes in both the violin and treble of the piano with a minimalistic bass line of quarter notes separated by generous amounts of rests. In a purely aural context, this section could easily be perceived as having no tempo change from the previous section. The aforementioned generous amounts of rests also obscure the meter of 3/4. However, Nash eventually begins building toward a more apparent representation of the meter and truly fast tempo. First there is a tiny hint of movement via a small melodic fragment of eighth notes in the violin at measure one hundred ten. A slightly longer eighth-note melodic fragment appears again in the violin at measures one hundred sixteen and one hundred seventeen. At measure one hundred twenty-one, the length of the 8<sup>th</sup>-note melodic line covers almost five measures. At measure one hundred thirty, the melodic lines in the violin are now 16<sup>th</sup> notes and the minimalism of the piano’s bass line is fading, allowing the 3/4 meter to become more apparent. The section also

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<sup>58</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.

grows gradually in volume to its climax at measure one hundred fifty-eight where the next section begins.<sup>59</sup>

The second segment in Section Three of *For Two* begins at the violin pickup notes to measure one hundred fifty-nine. Although a cadenza of only fifteen measures, the violin moves from soft to fortissimo twice and covers a range of A-flat just below the treble staff to B natural one octave above the treble staff. Sixteenth notes are phrased together in groups of four, five, or six separated with wide leaps, both up and down, some as large as an eleventh. Again, these groupings combined with the wide leaps leave the impression of a composition without meter. The violin then trills and tremolos away to nothing (“niente” in the score) and is followed by seven beats of silence. The piano then introduces its own short cadenza via an unexpected *fff* cluster chord in the bass. However, the chord lasts for twelve beats bringing it back to the quietude of the previous violin cadenza ending. Three short 16th-note runs, each a little louder and higher than before, segue into the third and last segment of Section Three.<sup>60</sup>

Although Section Three has been in triple meter from its onset, it is at the third segment of Section Three beginning at measure one hundred eighty-four that the meter becomes once again identifiable. However, at measure one hundred ninety-seven, the meter changes to 4/4 to simulate slowing down. Though the tempo does not change, the extra beat in each measure coupled with the longer note

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<sup>59</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

values of the piano may mislead the listener into believing he/she is hearing a ritardando or rallentando. It is a clever segue to the slower tempo of Section 4.

Section Four of *For Two* begins at measure two hundred seven and is marked at “Half tempo” and also “Sweetly”. The long note values in the piano at measure one hundred ninety-seven are further extended and are also found in the violin. At the end of measure two hundred twenty, the piano and violin play a moving line in unison, a hint at the forward movement soon to come. Although the violin returns to long tied notes separated by small melodic fragments, the piano part begins to be more active with syncopated 16<sup>th</sup> notes and frequent meter changes. At measure two hundred thirty-one a dialogue returns between the violin and piano based on consecutive stacked fourths in the piano and arpeggiated fifths in the violin. The section ends with a sustained high F in the violin over another set of stacked fourths with a pedal tone G in the piano. The violin again fades away (“niente”) while the piano chord sustains for an additional eight beats.

Section Five of *For Two* consists of a cadenza divided between the violin and piano parts, the first section for piano, the second for the violin, and the third again for the piano with an overlapping between the first two sections. Out of the faded chord from the previous section emerges a piano bass line that by way of smaller and smaller note values builds to a climactic 32<sup>nd</sup>-note ostinato coupled with a high violin tremolo. This piano ostinato follows the same pattern as in the 32<sup>nd</sup>-note passage of “Dedication” from *Three Ivory Magnolia Fantasies* – the groups of seven moving the pulse back one 32<sup>nd</sup> note at a time.<sup>61</sup> (See Example 19 above.)

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<sup>61</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.

Just as Nash moved the piano cadenza line forward with ever decreasing note values, he brings the piano cadenza to a close by increasing the note values to simulate a *ritardando* despite never actually changing the tempo. The violin continues its tremolo after the piano ceases with a glissando to a lower pitch level. It is here (measure two hundred fifty-eight) that the violin commands the cadenza with two melodic runs, the first followed by a tremolo, and the second followed by a tremolo chain with ever slightly changing pitches underneath a pedal G. The piano reestablishes itself with the final, climactic section of the cadenza. Nash uses a series of stacked fourths moving upward in the right hand of the piano against a downward moving series of 4ths in the left hand. This chain grows in intensity through a rapid crescendo and acceleration. Nash restates this same idea at new pitch levels with an even wider dynamic range (*pp-ff* versus *ppp-fff*). It is a precursor to the final section to follow.<sup>62</sup>

The sixth and last section of *For Two* bursts forth with loud, accented chords of stacked fourths in the piano in dialogue with quiet 16<sup>th</sup>-note runs in the violin and a mixture of meters (4/4 and 3/4). The violin joins the aggressive, syncopated rhythm of the piano at measure two hundred seventy before a reintroduction of the melodic ideas found in the second segment of Section One. While the piano continues these melodic lines, whether in whole or in part, the violin moves high within its range between rhythms of double stop quarter-note triplets and double stop sixteenth notes. As the violin settles into a repeated pattern of double stop

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<sup>62</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.



quarter note triplets, the piano begins its own repeat of static chords at an ever increasing rate. The persistence of these repeated notes in a high range create a sense of urgency toward the ending. The violin introduces the coda with a double stop glissando to even higher pitches. The polyrhythm of the coda (measures three hundred sixteen through three hundred twenty-two) is highly complex and a testament to Nash's rhythmic prowess. The violin part, while still in quarter note triplets, now plays specific divisions of the triplet rather than all three, with the pattern always changing. Meanwhile the piano part is grouped into eighth-note quintuplets, also with specific divisions in changing patterns. Again the meter seems to disappear as every note is accented, and the two parts rarely play together.<sup>63</sup> (See Example 21 below.)

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<sup>63</sup> Gary Powell Nash, *For Two*, score, 1994, available from the composer.

**Example 21:** *For Two*, coda

**AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY**

Due to the rhythmic and harmonic complexities of the music, Gary Powell Nash's works are often difficult to learn. This creates the potential that performers may not want to devote time to learning the music, and it is already difficult enough for contemporary composers to receive public performances of their works. I believe that performers have a natural tendency to shy away from contemporary

works in general, difficulty notwithstanding. I attribute this to three factors. The first is a lack of recordings; performers often rely on recordings to answer questions about the music and/or to inspire new and different ideas. The second is a lack of scholarship and analysis; new music often has not yet been thoroughly researched, resulting in a lack of sufficient publications to consult. The third factor is the intimidation that is associated with working directly with a composer. I personally have had no negative experiences working with any composer including Gary Powell Nash. He has been both incredibly gracious and helpful. However, by choosing to be a performer, one consequently subjects himself/herself to the criticism of any listener. While it is easy enough to defend one's performance choices to the average listener, it is not the same with the composer; hypothesizing one's conclusions about a composer's intentions takes on a whole new meaning when one is talking to the very person who formulated those intentions in the first place.

What does all of this mean to Gary Powell Nash? He is certainly not apathetic about the dissemination of his compositions to the broader public, having been forthcoming about his constant pursuit to get his music onto as many recitals as possible. His choice to be a composer would seem rather self-defeating otherwise. When I performed *Galaw Ng Sayaw Sa Apat At Tatlo* (see introduction) Nash was in attendance. I was not satisfied with the performance, and I proceeded to apologize to Nash after the concert. He was quick to indicate that the opportunity to hear a live performance of his compositions was much more important to him. "After all," he

said, “no two performances could be the same, and I doubt any would be perfect, whatever that even means.”

I have decided that Nash, despite his desire to have his works performed, does not necessarily intend for just anyone and everyone to play his music. With the possible exception of virtuoso show pieces, I have never believed that the primary focus of music is just to showcase the performer. Unfortunately many performers make, or at least *try* to make, it about themselves. However, I don’t think this is possible with Nash’s music. The differences between how he composes and what a performer with musical training in a traditional Western classical music style generally expects to find in a composition hardly allow time for the performer to be concerned just with oneself. As a result, I have found practicing and performing his music to be quite liberating.

Finding collaborators, however, was not always so rewarding. I showed some of Nash’s scores to various colleagues, some of whom were receptive and some of whom were not. Often the same question arose: “Why didn’t he just write it like...?” The end of the question has most often been about enharmonic equivalents, but it’s the use of the word “just” in that question that particularly strikes me. Do all compositions have to be presented in the same format? Can one not choose to write an F-flat instead of an E? Is it solely the composer’s responsibility to compose in a manner most convenient to the performer? I think Nash’s music is best approached by performers who are not threatened by having their longstanding conceptions about composition pushed to new and potentially uncomfortable limits. All of my recording collaborators were somewhat skeptical at first, but every one of them

came away from the experience with positive comments about the music. I do not think that any of my collaborators felt that they ever really mastered the music, and I don't feel that I did either. I don't believe that is necessarily the sole purpose anyway. In the future I plan to discuss this with Dr. Nash, but for now I am enjoying my own discoveries while studying his music. Sometimes a work of art is best defined by the questions that remain unanswered.

As for the listener, the compositions for voice and piano are quite accessible due to the text. However, the most positive audience reactions have been to *Deformation and Tranquility, a short piece for clarinet and piano* and *Deformation II, a short piece for trombone and piano*. The most common description I've been given by listeners of these two pieces is "fun". That is most certainly fitting, as they are also fun to play!

My personal favorite, however, is *For Two* (violin and piano), which I believe is the least accessible to the listener. I enjoy the complexity of the rhythms and the harmonies, and it definitely requires the most practice, not only due to its rhythmic and harmonic complexity, but also its length and scope. I appreciate the challenge, and I was fortunate enough to be able to work with a violinist who appreciated that challenge as well. I do think it would be much more difficult to hear *For Two* with no score or knowledge about the score; it would certainly be difficult for a listener who has little to no musical training or knowledge.

I believe these differences in accessibility are the best features of Nash's dossier of works. While there are common threads throughout his compositions, his

music is generally quite varied. This diversity will likely contribute to Nash's name and music standing the test of time.

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