



Unité
*for soprano and chamber
ensemble*

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To my parents, who have gone to great lengths to support my academic and personal aspirations.

PROGRAM NOTE

Unité, an eleven minute piece for soprano and chamber ensemble, is a setting of selections from *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). Left unfinished at the time of Pascal's death and subsequently published posthumously in a variety of forms and editions, *Pensées* is a complex work of prose, with sections in the manuscripts consisting only of unordered fragments and incomplete thoughts on a variety of philosophical and theological topics. From this source, I have arranged a selection from two fragments into a free verse setting, consisting of five sections.

The first, third, and fifth sections are taken and adapted from one fragment, while the second and fourth sections are taken from another. Arranged in this arch form, the latter fragment is positioned so as to intrude upon the original fragment. The original is a consideration of infinity, while the second describes the finite nature of humankind and the futility of longing for the past or future – temporal horizons we cannot reach. In the fifth and final section, the original fragment considers humankind's position in the infinite, and the paradoxical concept of an infinite soul residing in a finite body. As arranged in the piece, the human, finite perspective of existence interrupts the contemplation of the infinite “universal being,” until both the finite and the infinite are unified in a mysterious harmony in the fifth section, which Pascal can only describe as “incredible.” Reflecting this structure, the piece is divided into five continuous movements.

The “infinite” topic of movements one, three, and five is characterized by smooth melodies in the voice and a recurring static chord, each note fading in and out of the texture, out of phase with the rest: “this is a point moving everywhere at infinite speed; for it is one in all places and is wholly in each place.” Contrastingly, the second and fourth movements consist of more disjunct motion, rapid trills and accelerating notes, as if grasping for what is yet to come: “We scarcely ever think of the present; and if we think of it, it is only to take light from it to arrange the future.” Just as the separate streams of the text join into a unified conclusion in the fifth section, so too does the previous musical material coalesce, bringing together the disparate texts and sounds into a final accord.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Mikel Kuehn for his instruction and guidance throughout the entire process, from the early stages of composition to rehearsals. I am also indebted to Dr. Varghese Mathai of Judson University (Elgin, IL) for introducing me to *Pensées* in 2010, and to Dr. Dominic Descotes of Université Blaise Pascal (Clermont-Ferrand, France) for allowing me to draw from his research and digitization of the French text. Further gratitude is due Hillary LaBonte for not only wonderfully premiering the work but also for giving invaluable input regarding language and text setting, as well as Maria Mercedes Diaz Garcia for her indispensable leadership as a conductor and Erin Cameron for her assistance in researching clarinet timbres, and the rest of the premiering ensemble for generously giving of their time and talents to this collaborative process. Lastly, I would like to thank Matt Ramage and Emily Custer for their compositional feedback and encouragement, and my brother Jonathan Richardson for his involvement in the score preparations.

INSTRUMENTATION

Flute (doubling Alto Flute)

B-flat Clarinet (doubling Bass Clarinet)

E-flat Alto Saxophone

Percussion (1 player)

Viola

Cello

Soprano Voice

Piano

Percussion:

Crotales and Vibraphone
with soft vibraphone mallets and bow

NOTATIONAL CONVENTIONS



Crescendo from silence; if reversed, diminuendo to silence.

bisb.

Bisbigliando or timbral trill between alternate fingerings. This should be as smooth as possible; exact finger choices to this end are left up to the performer.

SPOKEN

Denotes text to be spoken instead of sung. Spoken text should be read in a manner that is dramatic and mysterious, with space before and after each line, and slower rather than fast.

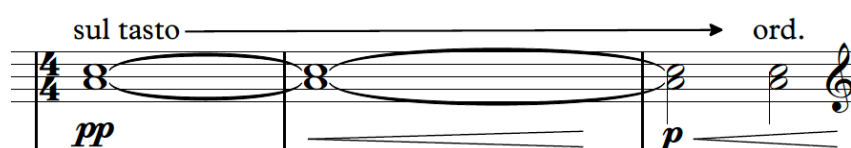


Notes inside boxes should be repeated rapidly in the manner of a harp-like bisbigliando — a blurred and randomly-ordered tremolo. Lines with arrows following boxes show duration (example: piano, m. 2).

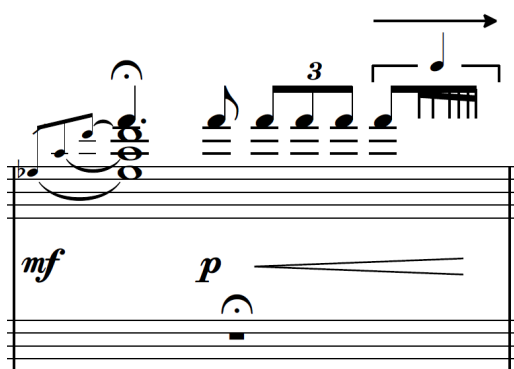


Lines with arrows denote a transformation over time, regarding technique (ex. 1, viola mm. 44-46) or the rapidity of repeated notes (ex. 2, piano m. 34).

ex. 1



ex. 2



Vibrato should be employed throughout at the discretion of the players unless otherwise notated.

Pitch bends in the flute should be executed by rolling the head-joint.

SELECTIONS FROM *PENSÉES*

I

Infini rien.

C'est un point se mouvant partout d'une vitesse infinie.
Car il est un en tous lieux et est tout entier en chaque endroit.

Il est mouvement perpétuel.

II

Nous ne pensons presque point au présent,
et si nous y pensons,
ce n'est que pour en prendre la lumière pour disposer de l'avenir.

III

Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point: on le sait en mille choses.

Le cœur aime l'être universel naturellement et soi-même,
et il se durcit contre l'un ou l'autre à son choix.

Vous avez rejeté l'un et conservé l'autre.

Est-ce par raison que vous vous aimez?

IV

Le présent n'est jamais notre fin.
Le passé et le présent sont nos moyens, le seul avenir est notre fin.

Ainsi nous ne vivons jamais, mais nous espérons de vivre,
et nous disposant toujours à être heureux,
il est inévitable que nous ne le soyons jamais.

V

Notre âme est jetée dans le corps
où elle trouve nombre, temps, dimensions.

Le fini s'anéantit en présence de l'infini et devient un pur néant.

Ainsi notre esprit devant Dieu;
Un espace infini égal au fini.
Incroyable que Dieu s'unisse à nous.

I

Infinite nothing.

This is a point moving everywhere with infinite speed.
For it is one in all places and is wholly in each place.

It is perpetual motion.

II

We scarcely ever think of the present;
And if we think of it,
It is only to take light from it to arrange the future.

III

The heart has its reasons which reason does not know: we know a thousand things.

The heart loves the universal being and oneself naturally. . .
And it hardens against one or the other at its choice.

You rejected one and kept the other.

Is it because you like it?

IV

The present is never our end.
The past and the present are our means;
The future alone is our end.

So we never live, but we hope to live;
And, as we are always preparing to be happy,
It is inevitable we should never be so.

V

Our soul is cast into a body,
Where it finds number, time, dimension.

The finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite,
And becomes a pure nothing.

So our spirit before God;
an infinite space equal to a finite.
Incredible that God should unite himself to us.

The text is derived from fragments from *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), adapted by the composer. The modern French translation of Pascal's manuscripts were prepared by Dr. Dominique Descotes of Université Blaise Pascal (France), as found on the research database www.penseesdepascal.fr; they are used with kind permission. Sections marked with the Roman numerals I, III, and V are taken from Sellier 680, and sections II and IV are taken from Sellier 80. "Sellier" refers to the *Pensées* fragment numbering system of Philippe Sellier, used by Dr. Descotes. The English translation above is by W. F. Trotter (1958) and is in the public domain (and can be found freely on iBooks and Project Gutenberg, among other sources).

UNITÉ

Score in C

for soprano and chamber ensemble

Text from *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal
Adapted by the composer

Benjamin J. Richardson (1992) (ASCAP)

I Mysteriously

♩ = 60

Flute and Alto Flute

Bass Clar.

B-flat Clarinet and Bass Clarinet

Alto Saxophone

Vibraphone and Crotales

Viola

Violoncello

Soprano Voice

Piano

A

pp

pp < mp

pp < mp

bowed

mp

pp

pp < p > pp sim.

bisbigiando in random order, as rapidly and smoothly as possible

ppp

Red. sempre

Fl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Vib.

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

B

pp

pp

pp < mp > pp

pp < mp > pp

pp < mp > pp

pp

mp

mp

mp

mp

Ah... In - fi -

C

17

Fl.

B. Cl. *pp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Sax. *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Vib.

Vla. *pp* change bow as needed, senza vib.

Vc. *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Sop. *mf* *mp* *mp*
ni rien c'est un point se mouv - vant;

Pn. l.v. release ped. when sound has died away



D

23

Fl. *mp* *mf* *mp*

B. Cl. *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Sax. *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Vib.

Vla. *mp* vib. *b.e.* *(h)e.* *b.e.*

Vc. *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Sop. *mf*
Par - tout d'ú-ne vi - tess - e in - fin - ie

Pn. *p* *ped. sempre*

28 senza vib.

Fl. *p*

B. Cl. *p* *mp* *p* *p* *mp* *p* *p* *mp* *p*

Sax. *mp* *p* *p* *mp* *p* *p* *mp* *p*

Vib. *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p* *mp* *p* *p* *mp* *p* *p*

Sop. *mp dolce*
 car il est un en tous lieux et est tout entier en chaque endroit; il est

Pn.

II

Ad Libitum **A Tempo** (♩ = 60)

32

Fl. To Cl.

B. Cl. *pp*

Sax. *pp*

Vib. ord. *f*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Sop. *legato, slow rubato*
 mouvement perpétuel. Nous

Pn. *mf* *p* *f*

Ped.

37 **Ad Libitum** **A Tempo** ord. 4

Fl. *pp* *mp* *ppp* *pp*

Cl. B♭ Clarinet (ord.) *pp* *p* *ppp* *pp*

Sax. ord. *pp* *p* *ppp* *p*

Vib. *p*

Vla. sul pont. *pp* *p* *ppp* ord. *mp* *mf* *mp*

Vc. sul pont. *pp* *p* *ppp* ord. *mp* *p*

Sop. *mp*
ne pen-sons presque point au pré-sent

Pn. *pp* *mf* *p*

42 **E**

Fl. *ppp* *mp*

Cl. *p* *mp*

Sax. *pp* *p* *mp*

Vib. *mp*

Vla. sul tasto *pp* ord. *p* *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Sop. *p legato* *mp* *f*
Et si nous y pen-sens, ce n'est que pour en pren - dre la lu - mière,

Pn.

48

Fl. *mf*

Cl. *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *p*

Sax. *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

Vib. \wedge ped. sim.

Vla. *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *p*

Vc. *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

Sop.

Pn.



F

53

Fl. *pp* *mp* *mf* *mp*

Cl. To B. Cl. Bass Clarinet *f* *mf*

Sax. *pp* *mp* *mf* *mp*

Vib. *f*

Vla. *pp* *mf* *mp* *f*

Vc. *pp* *mf* *mp* *f*

Sop. *mp* *mf*

Pn. *mp* *f* *mf*

Red.

1.v. 8va

ord. senza vib. → ord. senza vib. → vib.

non en dehors sul tasto senza vib. → ord. senza vib. → vib.

Pour dis-po-ser de l'a-ve-nir.

58 III ♩ = 69

Fl. *mf* *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

B. Cl. *f* *f* *ff* To Cl.

Sax. *mp* *mf* *mp* *f* *ff*

Vib. *pp* *f*

Vla. *mp* *f* *p* *p* *mp* *p*

Vc. *mp* *f* *ff*

Pn. *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *ppp*

with vib. mallets
Crotales l.v. throughout



63

Cl. *pp* *mp* *pp*

Crot. *pp* *ped. sim.*

Vibes *pp* *ped. sim.*

Vla. *p* *mp* *p* *p*

Vc. *pp*

Pn. *ppp*

G

69

Fl. *p p mp p mf mp*

Crot. *mf* dampen

Vibes *mf*

Vla.

Vc. *mf mf*

Sop. *mp mf mp mf*
 La_ cœur a ses rai sons que la_ rai-son ne conn - - aît point;

Pn.

75

Fl. *mp p*

Cl. To Bass Clarinet

Sax. *mf*

Crot.

Vibes

Vla. *mf mp*

Vc.

Sop. *mf mp*
 on le sait en mi - - lle

Pn.

H

78

Fl. *p*

Crot. *p*

Vibes

Vla. *p*

Sop. choses.

Pn. *p*

Ped. sempre

79

Fl.

Crot. *p* l.v.

Vibes

Vla.

Sop.

Pn.

I

80

Vla. *mp*

Sop. *mp*
Le cœur aime l'être l'un

Pn.

81

Vla.

Sop.

Pn.

Λ ped. sim.



82

Vla.

Sop.

Pn.



83

Sax.

Vla.

Sop.

Pn.

84

B. Cl.

Crot.

Vibes

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

85

B. Cl.

Crot.

Vibes

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

86 **J**

Fl. *pp*

B. Cl.

Sax. *pp*

Crot.

Vibes *mf* l.v.

Vla. *mp*

Vc.

Sop. *mf*
Et il se dur - cit

Pn. 6

87

Fl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Crot. *arco* l.v.

Vibes *mf*

Vla.

Vc. *mf*

Sop. con - tre l'un ou l'au -

Pn. 6

88

Fl. *mf*

B. Cl.

Sax. *mf*

Crot.

Vibes *mf* l.v.

Vla. *f*

Vc.

Sop. tre à son choix

Pn. 6

K

89

Fl. *f*

B. Cl. *f*

Sax. *f*

Crot.

Vibes *mf* l.v.

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

Sop.

Pn. 6

90

Fl. *f*

B. Cl. *f*

Sax. *f*

Crot. arco *mf* l.v.

Vibes *mf*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

Sop. Vous a - vez

Pn. 6

91

Fl. *f*

B. Cl. *mf*

Sax. *f*

Crot. l.v.

Vibes *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Sop. *mf* re - je - té *f* l'un et

Pn. 6

92

Fl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Crot.

Vibes

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

arco *l.v.* *mf*

93

Fl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Crot.

Vibes

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

To Cl. *pp* *l.v.* *mf* *mp*

94 15

Fl. To B \flat Cl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Crot. i.v.

Vibes *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Sop. *p*

l'au - - - - - tre.

Pn. *ppp* 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

L **A Tempo** (♩ = 60)
(sneak breath as needed)

95

Fl. *pp* *mf* — *f* *ppp*

B. Cl. Clarinet in B \flat *ppp*

Sax. *pp* *mf* — *f* *ppp*

Vib.

Vla. (change bow as needed) *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Sop. Et -

Pn. i.v. 6 *mf*

M

ord.

97

Fl. *mf* *mp* *mf*

Cl. *mf* *mp* *mf* *mf* *mp*

Sax. *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

Vib.

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Sop. *p*
ce par rai-son que vous vous ai- mez?

Pn. *mf* 1.v.



103 To A. Fl. Alto Flute

Fl. *mp*

Cl. *mf* *f* *p* *f*

Sax. *mp* *mf* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Vib. *mf*

Vla. *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Vc. *mf* *f* *mp*

Sop.

Pn. *f* 1.v.

N IV Cadenza - Tempo Ad Libitum

106 *Rubato throughout*

A. Fl. *mf* *pp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Cl. To B. Cl.

Vib.

Sop. SPOKEN: with a steady and mysterious tone
(*mp*) "Le présent n'est jamais notre fin;"

Pn.

110 *accel.* *rit.* *accel.* *rit.*

A. Fl. *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*

Sop. SPOKEN
"Le passé et le présent sont nos moyens, . . ."

113 *accel.* *rit.*

A. Fl. *p* *ff* *mp*

Sop. SPOKEN
"... le seul avenir est notre fin."

117

A. Fl. *p* *pp*

Sop. SPOKEN
"Ainsi nous ne vivons jamais,
mais nous espérons de vivre, . . ."

121

A. Fl. *ppp* To Fl.

Sop. SPOKEN
"et nous disposant toujours à être heureux, "
SPOKEN
"... il est inévitable que nous ne le soyons jamais."

V Evanescent

O A Tempo

125

Fl. Flute

B. Cl. Bass Clarinet

Sax.

Vib. l.v. bowed l.v. l.v.

Vla. II mute

Vc. I mute

Sop. SPOKEN: almost whispered SPOKEN

"Notre âme. . ." "est jetée dans le corps," où elle trou - ve

Pn. una corda

ppp *mp* *ppp* *pp* *ppp* *ppp*

132

Fl.

B. Cl. *pp* < *p* > *pp* < *p* > *pp* < *p* > *pp*

Sax. *pp* < *p* > *pp* < *p* > *pp* < *p* > *pp*

Vib. l.v. l.v. w/ mallets *mp* *mp* *ppp*

Vla. *ppp* *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Sop. *ppp* *mp*

nom - bre, temps di - men - sions. le fin - i s'a - ne - a - tit en

Pn. bisb. *ppp* *pp* *8va* bisb. accent notes at random, circa every 1.5-2.5 seconds

Q

137

Fl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Vib.

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

pp < *p* > *pp*

pp

p

p

p

ppp

p

p

p

bisb. sim.

bisb.

pré - sence l'in - fin - i et de - vient un pur né - ant



R

144

Fl.

B. Cl.

Sax.

Vib.

Vla.

Vc.

Sop.

Pn.

ord.

p

p

mp

p

p

p

p

p

p

mp

mf

pp

p

no mute

Ain - si no - tre e - sprit de - vant Dieu

149

Fl. *mp* *pp* *mp* *mp* *f*

B. Cl. To Cl.

Sax. *mp* *mf* ord. *f*

Vib.

Vla. *mf* *f*

Vc. *mf* *mf* *f*

Sop. *f*
un e-space in -fin - i E - gal au fin - i.

Pn. *f*

S Ad Libitum $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 46$

154

Fl.

B. Cl. Clarinet in B \flat (ord.) *ppp*

Sax. *ppp*

Vib. dampen *ppp*

Vla.

Vc. *ppp*

Sop. *pp* *Freely* *ppp*
In-croy-able que Dieu s'un - isse à nous

Pn. *ppp*