

The Compleat Angler: An Album of Songs and Movements in Praise of Fish and Fishing

A thesis

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Abstract

My thesis piece is *The Compleat Angler*, an album of songs and instrumental movements for mezzo-soprano, baritone, marimba, piano, viola, and cello. I wrote all of the texts and the title is borrowed from the seminal fishing book by Izaak Walton published in 1653. The genesis of *The Compleat Angler* did not have a clearly defined intention, or long-range goal. It began as a single song for baritone and piano, “The Octopus” written in 2008, which I then combined with three new, aquatic-creature themed songs and completed in the spring of 2011. This was simply an endeavor to write more art songs, a genre I had not explored yet. However, I had been writing popular music for 10 years and eventually, *The Compleat Angler* became an attempt to synthesize or, at least, reconcile my two different compositional styles.

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	The Prologue and Epilogue	6
III.	The Songs	10
	Impetus and Issues in Text Setting and Writing	10
	New and Differing Functions of Compositional Procedures:	15
	Palindromes and a Drone	
	The Polystylistic Whale in the Room and its Reconciliation	19
	A Final Ode	21
IV.	Out to Sea	22
	Bibliography	25
V.	<i>The Compleat Angler</i> : Texts and Score	26

I. Introduction

My thesis piece is *The Compleat Angler*, an album of songs and instrumental movements for mezzo-soprano, baritone, marimba, piano, viola, and cello. I wrote all of the texts, and the title is borrowed from the seminal fishing treatise by Izaak Walton published in 1653. The genesis of *The Compleat Angler* did not have a clearly defined intention, or long-range goal. It began with the composition of a single song for baritone and piano, "The Octopus," in 2008, which I then combined with three new, aquatic-creature themed songs and completed in the spring of 2011. This was simply an endeavor to write more art songs, a genre I had not yet explored.

I am very experienced with writing for voice and accompaniment, because I have been writing pop songs for ten years. One of my desires since I began studying composition in earnest was to synthesize or, at least, reconcile my two compositional styles. At first, the study of composition and theory mainly influenced my pop songwriting. My compositional palette expanded and I learned how to transcend the narrow conventions of form and harmony I felt constrained to in pop music without entirely leaving that realm. The self-imposed restrictions, or focus, I had developed from my folk-guitar based influences left my songs dependent on plain repetition and a small harmonic vocabulary. Studying and writing music for new instruments in different, longer forms and genres gave me the tools and impetus to

develop my songwriting in new directions. However, my classical composing up to now lacked a significant influence from, or overlap with, my pop songwriting, which I hoped could have a similarly liberating effect. *The Compleat Angler* became a way for my two musical personae to converge in a substantial way, and I will examine the successes and shortcomings of that convergence in this essay.

After the performance of my Four Aquatic-Creature Songs for baritone and piano in February 2011, I was pleased with the results and eager to write more art songs. My professor, John McDonald, suggested expanding the work into an evening-long piece for my thesis, which I flippantly referred to as an “Underwater Cabaret” at the time. It was not until I had written a few more of these songs, retouched for mezzo-soprano and piano, that I began seriously determining how to expand these songs into a unique and substantial work.

The subject of the songs is, perhaps surprisingly, very personal. I was an avid and frequent fisherman in my youth, and the extensive, often peculiar knowledge I gained from this pastime offered vast material for song texts. In the last few years, I have been interested in using idiosyncratic metaphors, ranging from the silly to the macabre, to express serious emotions in all of my songs. I find this technique of expression to be very potent; it avoids a predictability or conventionality in how the text conveys an emotion or thought. A seemingly light or ironic text can effect great poignance at the

moment when the audience realizes that there was a sincere attempt at human expression guiding the words along. This extra dimension in combination with music allows me more territory to meticulously craft even the tersest texts, like “The Crayfish” or “The Humpback.”

I started planning the instrumental movements last summer while I was finishing “The Sunfish” and “The Carp.” I considered using different instruments with the voice, but ended up only doing so in “The Humpback” because I was satisfied with the voice and piano texture of the six songs written so far. More significantly, retaining the simple instrumentation reinforced the self-contained quality of the songs that is shared with songs from a pop or rock album. A song or group of songs, since they are rather short, from *The Angler* could easily be performed again without the instrumental ensemble. This is similar to the portability of songs from most popular music albums; they can be used on their own on the radio, in films, or on tour without the whole band. An able singer could even perform all eight songs.

Eventually, I settled on marimba, piano, viola, and cello as the ensemble for the instrumental movements and began to deliberate their material and construction. Since the songs themselves were not conceived to share motivic connections, I seized the opportunity to relate them musically by combining materials from the songs in the fabric of the purely instrumental movements. So, I wrote two movements, for beginning and

ending the work, whose construction I briefly explained in these program notes:

The instrumental Prologue and Epilogue allow the creatures to swim together in their natural habitat. Themes, harmonies and textures from songs of animals that dwell in lakes are explored in the Prologue. The Epilogue begins with material from the river-dwellers' songs and eventually rushes out to the sea-creatures' music.

This is how and why I aimed to create rapidly changing textures and melodies. There was an abundant and diverse cache of material to use in the movements from the songs I had written and was writing. While finishing the Prologue in the fall, I wrote the last two songs, "The Leech and "The Humpback," and determined the final form of the piece. It would begin with the Prologue, followed by the four songs for baritone, the four songs for mezzo-soprano, and the Epilogue. This order was developed to ensure easy transitions that do not disrupt the flow between the four sections. Isolating the singers' songs into separate groups allows them to create a distinct, expressive shape or narrative over the course of four songs, which would undeniably be compromised if their songs were interwoven. After determining this order, I have noticed that certain motivic connections are accentuated by the specific placement of the songs. Material from the three songs in the first group is heard directly before in the Prologue. Beginning the songs with "The Sturgeon" immediately betrays their relationship to the instrumental movements because the Prologue ends with a brief development of the opening melody from the "The Sturgeon." This connection made early on in the album creates an expectation, at least

subliminally, that more familiar material will return in the songs, but the comprehension of an overall organic unity through these references is unlikely and unintended. *The Compleat Angler* was constructed to be comprehensible in part or whole; the unifying elements are not rigorous or pervasive enough to require the listener to hear each reference in the context of the whole album to properly understand it.

The Prologue and Epilogue are subtitled “Lakes” and “Rivers to Ocean,” respectively, in reference to the songs from which they derive their material. I dubbed the songs “Chapters” because that is where one is “taught” about each specific animal. This designation and organization was guided by Walton’s book, *The Compleat Angler*. It consists of many chapters dealing with specific kinds of fish; for example, chapter 4 contains “observations of the nature and breeding of the trout, and how to fish for him.”¹ It was not until I had nearly written the whole piece that its similarity with *The Compleat Angler*’s structure became clear and useful to me. Regarding the songs as chapters, each about their own fish, communicates their self-contained nature and their relationship to the Prologue and Epilogue, which sum up the “song-chapters” in a more general way.

¹ Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Angler* (London: Ballantyne Press, 1896), 107. This is a revised edition, Walton published the first edition in 1653. Cotton added a second part to the book on fly-fishing, first published in 1676.

II. The Prologue and Epilogue

The opening movement, “Prologue: Lakes,” is scored for marimba, viola and cello. The texture in the beginning is rather sparse with subtly shifting meters, like the beginning of “The Sturgeon.” The melodies remain fragmented and the harmonies struggle to escape the realm of static, quartal chords. There are no references to song material until m. 15, when the melodic fragments consolidate into a lyrical, primary line in the viola. A stepwise descending line, often through the interval of a third, is hidden in this melody from the E in m. 15 to the C in m. 17(Example 1); this is one of the most prominent motives of the whole piece.

Example 1



It is essentially a snippet of three or four notes from the octatonic scale that I derived from “The Sturgeon,” where it is employed more transparently. The motive culminates in mm. 22-25 of “The Sturgeon,” which are quoted almost exactly at mm. 56-59 of the Prologue, beginning with the cello’s B. This motive then occurs twice in transposition at the very end of the Prologue, emphasizing its connection to “The Sturgeon,” which comes next in the order. I inserted a reference to “The Muskellunge” in the marimba at m. 20 because it was also made up of three descending notes beginning with E

(Example 2). It is an arrangement of the music from the climactic lines of that song, “Oh, he didn’t even see it” in mm. 27-29. In doing this, the “Muskellunge” motive thus attains a direct connection to the important “Sturgeon” motive, almost as if the latter had generated the former.

Example 2

The musical score for Example 2 consists of three staves: Maracas (Mar.), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vc.). The key signature is B-flat major and the time signature is 5/4. The Maracas part begins at measure 20 with a melody of eighth notes, marked *p*. The Viola part has a sustained chord with a melodic line starting in measure 27, marked *pp*. The Cello part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *mp*.

The next reference to a lake-dweller song, “The Crayfish,” appears in m. 26. The cello plays the melody sung with the line “at the slightest alarm” from mm. 8-9 of “The Crayfish”, which has a similar shape as the melodies heard directly before it (Example 3). They are both rising figures that begin with a step, or steps, and end with a leap, or leaps. This shape first appears in the cello at m. 24 and again in 25, transposed down a whole step. I was not consciously trying to invoke the “Crayfish” motive; it was, rather, the opposite situation. The newly composed cello figure in m. 24 reminded me of the Crayfish motive, so I incorporated it in the texture. This reactive method of constructing the Prologue allowed me to create a more complex, subtly integrated form than that of the traditional “overture,” which is what I initially called this movement when composing it.

Example 3

The Prologue's references may be remembered by a keen listener when they return in the song, but it is not obligatory for the references to have a palpable foreshadowing effect. I only expect them to function subliminally in the audience's perception of the piece; they need not recognize the primary motives and how they develop throughout the piece. It was not constructed to establish a Classical, pervasive unity of elements.

I have been writing music since 2000, shortly after receiving my first guitar. The core values of all my music, from then until going to college in 2005, came from my experience with the guitar and my own voice. When I began writing for new, versatile instruments for the concert stage, I was immediately impelled to explore more harmonic and formal possibilities than I had in my songs. As an undergraduate, I eventually acquired a chromatic, lyrical style that significantly contrasted with my folk-based songwriting at the time. Though some chromaticism and classical developmental procedures have since bled into my songs, my "non-pop" music diverged from my songwriting style, as I focused on avenues largely unrelated to popular music.

Several songs in *The Compleat Angler* exhibit independence from or indifference toward the forms and conventions of my pop music influences, but the Prologue and Epilogue are more fundamentally different in conception and construction. Alone, these movements have no correlation with the electro-pop tinged folk idiom of my pop music. There is no evidence of the intricate, guitar picking or minimalist synth-lines and beats of my pop aesthetic. It is only when the organization of the complete piece is compared with that of a pop-music album that a similarity becomes perceptible. It is common for an album to begin and/or end with an instrumental track. The album *Bryter Layter* by Nick Drake, a singer-songwriter who strongly influenced me, contains two instrumental tracks flanking eight songs, which is the same general structure as *The Compleat Angler*. I did not consciously intend this correspondence nor notice it until long after finishing the piece. This is evidence for how deeply ingrained pop songwriting and album structuring remains in my compositional outlook.

However, I am not satisfied with the superficial application of pop forms to art music or with some kind of kaleidoscopic polystylism; I want to synthesize and manipulate these divergent styles into a symbiosis. To a certain extent, I believe *The Compleat Angler* achieves this, and primarily because of the first and final movements' construction. Most pop instrumentals I am aware of, including Nick Drake's, do not have an intended thematic relation with the rest of the album, as the Prologue and Epilogue do here. The few that do, like "Overture" and "Underture" from The Who's

Tommy, clearly present themes as in an overture, or reprise large sections of music from earlier songs, as in “A Forest” from Okkervil River’s *Black Sheep Boy Appendix*. The employment of song material in the Prologue and Epilogue is more brief and understated than any of these tracks. I hope the unique interaction between the songs and instrumentals results in a piece that transcends the conventional forms of pop and art music by denying the dominance of either. Lack of stylistic dominance is important for creating the synthesis I desire because it fosters the creation of new, unique forms that prevent interpretations based on a single stylistic perspective.

III. The Songs:

Impetus and Issues in Text Setting and Writing

The text of “The Sturgeon” is extracted from the lyrics of a pop song with the same title I wrote in 2008. The two songs have very different characters and the pop incarnation is almost twice as fast in tempo. My knowledge of peculiar fish facts was exploited in song lyrics for the first time with “The Sturgeon,” so the basic concept of *The Compleat Angler* could be construed as beginning with the composition of that song in 2008. The actual animal is one of the oldest and longest-living fishes in the world. Its most unique trait is the scutes, or bony plates on its back. The frequent viewing of fishing television shows in my adolescence taught me that the scutes of young sturgeon are very sharp and dangerous, but as they grow older, the

plates become worn and smooth. This struck me as a very vivid, nonetheless bizarre, metaphor for the erosion of youthful aloofness or alienating idealism over time. I wanted to reset this text to explore new ways of illustrating this metaphor musically.

The original pop song did little to depict the lyrics in the music itself and the later version does not make any attempt to retain elements of pop-song form. The later song expresses obstinacy or being “petrified in place” in several ways. The opening features mostly static harmony supporting the constant use of the descending Ur-motive. The singer stays within in the interval of a minor seventh, usually concluding phrases on G#, while waiting for “a strong enough wave” to free it from the somewhat restricted territory. Ironically, it is not until m. 16, when the piano rests on a bass pedal and chord (and a melodic sequence is built with the Ur-motive) that the wave begins to swell. The voice and piano finally surpass their earlier peaks in mm. 24-25, but this is far from a triumphant liberation. These measures crystallize into a piano ostinato, which then accompanies the singer’s rhythmic variation of the climactic gesture an octave below. This, coupled with the piano’s Ur-motive ending, creates a very ambiguous conclusion where one is unsure if any progress has occurred at all.

The next song, “The Crayfish,” has an especially curious and humorous text. The musical structure is likely perplexing to the listener at first, but there is a simple, clear logic behind it that is directly controlled by the words.

At m. 9, after the voice sings “at the slightest alarm,” the melody is played in retrograde and in various degrees of diminution or, in other words, it flees backward rapidly like a crayfish.

“The Crayfish” is simply intended to be a musical joke or quip, a little relief from the mostly dark tone and eccentric pensiveness of the other songs. However, a metaphorical view could be drawn from this song, as with “The Sturgeon” and others. I am completely open to deeper interpretations; in the context of the whole piece, the song could have many different effects on the listener beyond the musical witticism I intended to construct during the few hours it took me to compose it.

As mentioned, the only song in *The Compleat Angler* that was not composed in 2011 is “The Octopus,” written shortly after the first version of “The Sturgeon” in 2008. This was my first attempt at non-pop songwriting and, not surprisingly, it is very similar in construction to the forms I used in my earlier songs, as well as songs by artists I revered. I had written several solo instrumental and chamber pieces by that time and was enjoying the new freedom of writing longer musical forms for versatile instruments. So, when I returned to songwriting and the constraints of the voice, my own voice in particular, I naturally used a simpler, more repetitive form.

“The Octopus” is in varied strophic form with a coda, though I would not have known to call it that at the time; I used this plan in many of my earlier pop songs. However, my comfort with this smaller form, which

requires less material, allowed me to experiment with new scales and extended, chromatically-related harmonies. The melody is mostly constructed from the octatonic scale, so similarities with the “Sturgeon” Ur-motive coincidentally occur.

I am not bothered by using a pop-song form here because I include a whole array of forms in *The Compleat Angler*. If all the songs were in strophic or verse-chorus form I would be concerned, because that seems to me the superficial synthesis of pop and art song with which I am not satisfied.

The role of the animal in the text is also different from those in the rest of the cycle, in that it is mostly for imagery purposes. The octopus is introduced to create a quirky and perhaps somewhat disturbing image of an ink-smearing face to intensify a subject completely unrelated to octopi. I do not use attributes of the animal to metaphorically characterize a person or state of mind, as in “The Sturgeon.” The person addressed in “The Octopus” is not accused of pedantry via comparison with a somehow pedantic octopus. The role of the octopus is to reveal the person’s pedantry symbolically by spraying them with ink, thus displaying their “inkhorn” temperament.

As I continue to discuss the songs, it will become more evident that none of them complete a musical process or textual narrative. I sought open-ended forms for *The Compleat Angler* that pose questions and create curiosities more than unequivocal, pre-composed structures. This way of composing is in accord with my process of writing and setting texts

simultaneously. I never write an entire text before setting it to music, so I cannot predetermine the form based on its prosody or strophes. This also prevents me from developing an interpretation of the complete text that informs my musical setting.

Arnold Schoenberg's intuitive approach to text setting he described in "The Relationship to the Text"² is similar to my own even though he discusses setting poems not written by himself. The correspondence between our approaches is betrayed in his belief that he "had never done greater justice to the poet than when guided by [his] first direct contact with the sound of the [poem's] beginning."³ He composed after his first reaction to the text, without consciously perceiving a deeper meaning of the whole poem, which is akin to my process because it would be impossible for me to construe a deeper meaning in a text that has not yet been completed. However, my situation is complicated by the fact that the music I write also guides the words I have not yet written in the text. So, there is no single, dominant element dictating my text-setting process; the text and music interact symbiotically as opposed to hierarchically. This adds another layer to the compositional crux of *The Compleat Angler*, or the impartial synthesis of elements to prevent banality in the musical structures. Not only do I avoid an obvious authority determining the musical style of the piece based on my

² Arnold Schoenberg. "The Relationship to the Text," in *Style and Idea*, trans. Leo Black, ed. Leonard Stein. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

³ *Ibid*, 144.

pop songwriting or instrumental art music experience, but also my process of text writing and setting subverts a clear acquiescence of the music to the text, or vice versa.

New and Differing Functions of Compositional Procedures:

Palindromes and a Drone

“The Muskellunge” is perhaps the simplest and most impressionistic of all the songs. The text and music are meant to depict someone fishing for a muskellunge and its striking of the lure. The fish is a very large and rare predator that only lives in the upper Midwest and Canada, thus it is referred to as “the fish of ten thousand casts.” I try to capture the monotony of this kind of fishing with the long, circuitous opening, while also retaining an ominous tension akin to the chance that a ferocious strike might occur at any moment. Similar to “The Crayfish,” there is a tentative, chromatic figure in mm. 22-23, which represents the fish swimming towards the lure and then finally attacking in m. 26. The fisherman misses the strike because he was caught off guard amidst the monotony of the piano’s right hand ostinato at mm. 20-26. This ostinato quivers in response to the fish’s strike in m. 27, but it is too late, and the earlier chromatic figure descends in retrograde as the “musky” swims away.

The songs for mezzo-soprano begin without the eerie tone prevalent in the first song set. I also used palindromic devices in “The Sunfish,” but in a more straightforward way and on a smaller scale for a different effect. The piano’s notes from the first measure are repeated backwards in the singer’s first phrase. (Example 4) Beneath the voice in mm. 2-4, the piano plays another slightly altered palindrome. Whereas retrograde melodies were used to depict backward motion in “The Crayfish” and “The Muskellunge,” here it is meant to evoke a simple, pastoral scene—like a child fishing for sunfish in a small, country pond—with the balanced, habitual nature of symmetrical melodies.

Example 4

The musical score for Example 4 is set in 3/4 time. The voice part begins with a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half rest in the second measure. In the third measure, the voice enters with a triplet of eighth notes: G4, F4, and E4, with the lyrics "ev - er - y" under the notes. The piano part consists of two staves. The right hand plays a melody starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes F4 and E4, then a quarter note D4, and a half note C4. The left hand plays a bass line with a whole note G3 in the first measure, followed by a half note F3 and a quarter note E3 in the second measure, and a whole note D3 in the third measure. The dynamic marking *mp* is placed below the piano part.

The extensive use of modes and harmonies from D-flat major also reference an archaic sound world distinct from most of the cycle (not to mention that I originally wrote the song for harp and voice). If I had not abandoned the harp, its inclusion in the instrumental ensemble would surely have affected the Prologue and Epilogue. The marimba may have been

swapped for a less pitch-specific percussion instrument, thus changing the ensemble's abilities to represent the animal themes in their respective aquatic environments.

The second half of "The Sunfish" assumes a harder-edged, unsentimental tone after the speaker, the fish, asks "where have you been?" in mm. 11-12. Two measures later, the music becomes much louder and repetitive, employing a few tonally unstable and distant harmonies from mm. 5-7, and here there is no return to D-flat major. The text's (and music's) idyllic reminiscing halts and shifts to the present tense and to a provocative, accusatory tone. This is meant to effect the sudden and persistent scolding of the sunfish that begins in m. 15 and to shatter any nostalgia elicited from the first 14 measures.

The prevalence of the D-flat scale in "The Sunfish" might suggest a connection with the diatonicism of pop-music harmony, but I find that correlation weak in this instance. The uneven, obscured harmonic rhythm and asymmetrical phrase lengths reflect a very different grammar than pop music's, though the individual materials are similar at times. This is another way that I manipulate aspects of my compositional styles into new forms whose constructions are not governed by a single stylistic element. I try to freely utilize my musical palette without preconceived notions.

The poem “Am Ufer” by Richard Dehmel was the prosodic model for the text of “The Leech.”⁴ I rewrote the poem from the point of view of a leech, retaining many words in direct translation. The leech describes its intense sensory experience of smelling blood as the music follows the extreme dynamics of the text itself. This way of handling the Dehmel text could easily be construed as parody, but satire was not my original intent; the poem simply appeared to be a useful apparatus for my task.

Several composers, including Richard Strauss, Anton Webern and myself, had previously set “Am Ufer” to music, but these settings had no effect on my creation of “The Leech.” My version of “Am Ufer” is a pastiche of harmonically adventurous late romanticism for tenor and piano. I had not heard the Strauss or the Webern songs when I wrote it and, though I have now, I did not intentionally take them into consideration while writing “The Leech.” The only influence beyond the tone and some words from “Am Ufer” was the structure of the original text, which became somewhat obscured by how I broke up the stanzas in my setting.

The music of “The Leech” is essentially through-composed, following the capricious, evocative character of the text, but it relies heavily on developing variation, which may seem to suggest sectional repetition. The piano’s soft but active introduction wriggles between different subdivisions,

⁴ Richard Dehmel (1863-1920). “Am Ufer,” from *Weib und Welt*. Originally published 1896.

eventually settling into 9/8 at m. 5. The harmony also stiffens into a clear, two-bar progression with a drone on F-natural that is repeated almost three times while a long, single melodic phrase is sung. This section's construction is very similar to the verses of pop songs, but unlike them, its melody is not repeated with new lyrics, nor is it transposed or sequenced, as I had often developed phrases in my earlier classical music. It has a fleeting structural significance, like the other sections of the song, without a definite function or designation in regard to the piece's form.

The Polystylistic Whale in the Room and its Reconciliation

I was impressed by the wide range of timbres and pitch in the recording of a humpback whale I heard last summer. The special effects and extended techniques of the cello seemed the most suitable for imitating these whale sounds. I only attempted to capture the shapes and gestures in notation for "The Humpback," but there were a few similar "phrases" in the whale song that contained nearly discrete pitches. Measure 7 is my transcription of one of these phrases, which returns transformed with shrunken intervals in m. 11, then expanded intervals in m. 19, which is similar to how the whale varied the phrases. I do not assert that traditional developmental techniques are truly manifested in whale song; my correlation is completely biased, because my ear is trained to hear certain

relationships between sounds as more “musical,” or simply familiar, and to add unrelated, external connotations to that sound.

The narrator of the tiny text describes how the whale song is so powerful that it shakes her in the sea. This tactile element brings the listener deeper into the scene of a whale song. There are many moments of silence in the song; it even begins with a measure of rest, to avoid all sense of linear progression. Whale song is not like a piece of music with an important order of events, at least not to our knowledge, and accordingly I did not want to force this setting into conventional musical parameters. This process is concurrent with my main concern in all of the musical composites in *The Compleat Angler*, as expressed earlier—the avoidance of superficially employing musical material within the parameters of a different musical idiom.

“The Humpback” becomes problematic in light of my intention to avoid polystylism in *The Compleat Angler*. Its instrumentation, microtonality, and substantial use of extended technique create a sound world distinct from the rest of the piece. However, justification may be found in a comparison with certain popular music albums. Two albums I mentioned before, The Who’s *Tommy* and Okkervil River’s *Black Sheep Boy Appendix*, introduce new instruments and textures in transitions or interludes. These specific instances also use melodies extant elsewhere in the album, causing them to seem less polystylistic than explorations of new textures in which to employ

thematic material. “The Humpback” can be viewed as an allusion to this practice in pop albums because it fulfills a similar, interlude function and its material is used in the Epilogue.

A Final Ode

“The Carp” was the only song I had determined to set long before its composition commenced. I wanted to contradict the common perception of the fish as an ugly, deplorable bottom-feeder that does not even deserve to be in the water with other more desirable game fish. I very much appreciated the carp in my youth and wanted to capture its beauty and substance; it always put up long, exciting fights and often shimmered when its golden scales neared the water’s surface. When I read Walton’s entry on the carp in his treatise, I found the perfect starting point for this goal. I used his opening description of the fish for the song’s first line, “Queen of the rivers: a stately, a good, and a very subtle fish.”⁵ To further expound on the elegance of the carp, I originally conceived the song with harp accompaniment. The tingling glissandos were written to depict the carp’s beautiful shimmering in the water and are approximated in the resulting piano part.

The repetitive harmonic progression in the opening of “The Carp” is similar to the repetition in “The Leech,” except that here it returns later in the

⁵ Walton and Cotton, *Angler*, 192.

piece, taking on a structural significance. This return in m. 12, combined with the hint of a melodic reprise in m. 15, suggests a varied strophic form, but the music instead trails off into floating glissandos without a real second stanza. The sentiment and the colors I wanted to give the carp had been expressed; I felt there was no metaphorical aspect in the text that needed further elaboration—it speaks purely to the glory of the carp. Though it may seem ironic and deliberately humorous (especially to fisherman who scorn the carp), I wrote the song to show my sincere appreciation of the carp. Saving its song for last places the carp even more upon a pedestal as the ultimate animal song of the album.

IV. Out to Sea

The Epilogue of the piece, as explained earlier, follows a stream of melodies derived from the river-animal songs, until spilling out into music from the oceanic-creature songs. This movement was not conceived as a finale, or a culmination of the activity of the complete work; it only references select songs. It arose as the imagining of these animals' musical emblems swimming together, picking up where the Prologue ended. The thematic saturation in this movement is complex and extensive, but several moments may be easily recognized. The cello's entrance in m. 13 is a clear use of the melody from "at the slightest alarm" in "The Crayfish," and the very ending has the Ur-motive from "The Sturgeon," which may be very familiar at

this point. The ubiquity of this motive in the instrumental movements reflects the versatility of the sturgeon itself; it is the only animal that lives in lakes, rivers, and the sea.

The Epilogue is not intended to represent the completion of a large-scale process or form; it simply conveys a trajectory within itself alone. The trickling of the marimba's opening gradually accumulates into a steady stream of "river" music that rushes out to the sea environment. If my fabrication of this action has a strong, conclusive quality, it results from the evocative nature of the action itself and my own disposition while writing it. I had written the rest of the piece by this time and knew that this would be the very end. This is similar to how I have assembled my pop-music albums. I would collect and order some loosely related, or unrelated, songs and choose an intriguing, but conclusive, song for the end and an equally intriguing, but welcoming, song to begin with.

The free, inconsistent employment of musical and textual themes throughout the piece has led me to reject the description of *The Compleat Angler* as a song cycle in the tradition began by Beethoven and Schubert. I am apprehensive about labeling the piece as such because listeners' might perceive it as developing and grappling with this tradition, which was not my intention. *The Compleat Angler* confronts a broader issue: the reconciliation of my pop songwriting style with my art composition idiom. Designating the piece as an album alludes to this issue, which I encourage listeners to

consider. The overall construction more closely reflects the pop concept albums I referenced than the 19th century song cycles I have studied. Like pop songs, each song or movement can be isolated and exist as an autonomous piece, adding a dimension of immediate accessibility. Contextualization within the entire album is not imperative for comprehending the individual songs. Listeners are not required to perceive any of the deeper governing structures throughout the piece to appreciate the “real” significance of the individual songs. I do not expect this because *The Compleat Angler* was composed without a commanding scheme, but rather with the intuitive coalescence of materials that appeared to me, like the chance encounter of a muskellunge and crayfish in some Minnesotan lake.

Bibliography

Walton, Izaak, and Cotton, Charles. *The Compleat Angler*. London: Ballantyne Press, 1896.

Schoenberg, Arnold. *Style and Idea*. Translated by Leo Black, Edited by Leonard Stein. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

The Compleat Angler

an album of songs and instrumental movements for
mezzo-soprano, baritone, marimba, piano, viola, and cello

to be programmed in the following manner,

Epilogue: Lakes

Chapters:

The Sturgeon

The Crayfish

The Octopus

The Muskellunge

The Sunfish

The Leech

The Humpback

The Carp

Prologue: Rivers to Ocean

Single songs, movements, or groups of them may be performed separately,
but this order should be followed when the piece is performed in its entirety.

Texts

The Sturgeon

With the stones I'll lay petrified in place
Waiting for a strong enough wave
To lift and erode these fresh prickly bones.
Like age on a sturgeon's sharp, armored plates.

The Crayfish

I can only crawl forward slowly.
At the slightest alarm
I flee backward rapidly.

The Octopus

You follow a trail all inkhorn and frail
And it's smeared on your face and teeth
From the octopus that you scared by the reef.

I find it so odd only cephalopods
Are so clearly aware of
How you plume in your pedantry,
Now that's your only care.

The ink runs down your face.

The Muskellunge

On the ten thousandth cast the fool relaxed.
Oh, he didn't even see it.

The Sunfish

We swam everyday that the sun was out
And I ate your worms when there were clouds.
Where have you been?
'Cause I've been nibbling on tires, dying,
And now you steal your own bait
and now you steal mine.

The Leech

The world becomes odorless except the smell of your blood.
Its florid spirit floods all my senses.

Without a sniff, it's radiation burns the darkest pools
As I emerge from their distant night.

The Humpback

You vibrate my whole body
with the strongest voice
in the sea, shaking me.

The Carp

Queen of the rivers:
A stately, a good and a very subtle fish
But when shimmering in the water
She's golden.
Queen of the rivers.

Prologue: Lakes

$\text{♩} = 80$

Marimba

Viola

Violoncello

f *mf* *p*

pp *p*

f *pizz.* *sfz* *arco* *mp*

6

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

gliss.

10

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

mf *mp* *mp*

16

Mar. *mf* *pp*

Vla.

Vc.

20

Mar. *p* *mf*

Vla. *pp* *mf*

Vc. *mp*

22

Mar. *p*

Vla.

Vc. *mp*

24

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

mf

mf

26

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

28

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

mp

31

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

mp

p

32 34

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

40

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

mf

rit.

f

pizz.

p

pp

f

mp

47 *a tempo*

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

p

a tempo

arco

mf

mp

sul ponticello

mf

mp

51

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

53

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

57

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

63

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

mf

68

Mar.

Vla.

Vc.

pp

pizz.

mp

pizz.

mp

The Sturgeon

Andante Solemne ♩ = 90

Baritone

Piano

6

with the stones I'll lay petrified in

Pno.

11

place waiting for a strong enough

Pno.

16

8 wave a strong en-ough wave to lift and er-

Pno.

p

poco allargando

23

mf *mp*

ode these fresh prick - ly bones like age on a

Pno.

poco allargando *tranquillamente*

29

8 stur-geon's sharp arm - ored plates

Pno.

rit.

The Crayfish

Allegro Scherzando ♩ = 130

Baritone

Piano

Allegro Scherzando ♩ = 130
accel. *rit.*

mp

38

a tempo ♩ = 130

p

I can on-ly crawl for ward slow

a tempo ♩ = 130

41

meno mosso ♩ = 115

mp

ly at the slight - est a-larm

meno mosso ♩ = 115

p

mf

45

I flee back - ward rap - id - ly

The Octopus

Grave ♩ = 41

Baritone

mp

you

Piano

p

Grave ♩ = 41

51

fol - low a trail all ink - horn and frail and it's smeared on your face and

54

teeth from the oct - op - us that you scared by the reef

57

I find it so odd on - ly

60

mf *mp*

ceph - o - lo - pods are so clear - ly a - ware of how

63

rit.

you plume in your ped - ant - ry now that's your on - ly care.

8va

66 *mf*

the ink runs down your

mf

69

face

72

rit.

The Muskellunge

Andante Minaccioso ♩ = 85

Baritone

Piano

mf

8vb

80

(8)

87

mp

On the ten thou-sandth cast the fool re -

mp

(8)

8vb

93

laxed

p sempre

mf

p subito

8^{vb}

99

f

mp

Oh he did n't ev en see it

f

mp

103 rit. ♩ = 75

rit. ♩ = 75

pp

The Sunfish

poco a poco rit. throughout each phrase

Andante Sospeso *mf*

Mezzo-Soprano

we swam ev - er - y day that the

Andante Sospeso

Piano

mp

110

sun_____ was out and I ate your worms when there were clouds_____

115

p where have you been? *f* 'cause
(ben)

120

I've been nib - bl - ing on tires, dy - ing, and now you steal your

f

125

own — bait and now you steal mine

The Leech

Mezzo-soprano

$\text{♩} = 55$

Piano

$\text{♩} = 55$

p

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The Mezzo-soprano part has rests. The Piano part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. It features a sequence of chords and moving lines in both hands, with a four-measure rest in the bass line at the end of the system.

3 *molto rit.* $\text{♩} = 45$

molto rit. $\text{♩} = 45$

mp

This system contains measures 5 through 8. The tempo is significantly reduced to a quarter note = 45, marked as 'molto rit.'. The Mezzo-soprano part has rests. The Piano part continues with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic, featuring a two-measure rest in the bass line at the end of the system.

6 *mp*

The world be - comes od - or - less__ ex - cept the smell of your blood

This system contains measures 9 through 12. The Mezzo-soprano part begins with the lyrics: "The world be - comes od - or - less__ ex - cept the smell of your blood". The piano part continues with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic, featuring a two-measure rest in the bass line at the end of the system.

9

p

its flo rid spir - it floods all

p

13

— my sens - es

With-out a

p

p

16

mf

sniff

it's rad - i - a - tion burns

the dark-est pools

mf

mp

19 *p* *p*

as I emerge from their distant night

p 2 2

The Humpback

48

$\text{♩} = 60$

Mezzo-soprano

gradually start to tremolo

$\text{♩} = 60$

Violoncello

p *f* *mp* *ord.* *3*

all glissandos should slide evenly for the duration of the note they are above

29 *p*

scratch tone ord. *sul G* *pizz.* *arco* *mf* *p* *slide off of fingerboard*

37 whole bo-dy with the strong-est voice in the sea

scratch tone ord. *pizz.* *ord.* *3* *f* *mf*

43 sha - king me

sul pont. *f* *mf*

49 *p* *pizz.* *(pizz.)* *pp*

The Carp

Mezzo-Soprano

Maestoso ♩ = 70

p

Queen of the riv - ers

Piano

57

a state - ly, a good and _____ a ve - ry subt - le

60

fish _____ but

mf

61

when shimmer - ing shimmer - ing in the wa -

mf

Leg.

*

62

ter she's_____

mp

Leg.

*

63

— gol - den

mp 3 *allarg.*

65 **a tempo ma hesitante**

a tempo ma hesitante
subito p

68 **p dolce**

rit.

queen of the riv - - ers
rit.

71

ped. * *ped.* *

Epilogue: Rivers to Ocean

$\text{♩} = 80$
trickling

Marimba *pp*

5
Mar. *p*

9
Mar.

12
Mar. *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *mp*

The musical score is written for Marimba, Viola, and Violoncello. The Marimba part is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It begins with a tempo of quarter note = 80 and the instruction 'trickling'. The first staff (Marimba) starts at measure 1 with a *pp* dynamic. It features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 3 and a fermata over the final note. The second staff (Marimba) starts at measure 5 with a *p* dynamic, containing a triplet of eighth notes in measure 6. The third staff (Marimba) starts at measure 9 and features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 10. The fourth staff (Marimba) starts at measure 12 with a *p* dynamic, consisting of a series of chords. The Viola part (Vla.) is in bass clef and begins at measure 12 with a *p* dynamic, playing a melodic line with a fermata. The Violoncello part (Vc.) is in bass clef and begins at measure 12 with a *mp* dynamic, playing a melodic line with a fermata.

17

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

p

f

sul ponticello

p

20

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

pp

ord.

p

24

Mar.

f

p

Pno.

mf

Vla.

Vc.

mf

26

Mar.

Pno.

p

f

Vla.

p

f

Vc.

p

f

30

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

f

sul C

ff

36

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

p

p

p

39

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

mf

f

mf sul C

42

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

mp

leggiere

mf

45

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

mp

subito f

48

Mar.

Pno.

Vla.

Vc.

f

mp

p

mf

mp

mf

52

Mar. *mf* *f* *ppp*

Pno. *ff*

Vla. *p*

Vc.

55

Mar. *f* *ff*

Pno. *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f* *p*

8vb *ff*

59

rit.

Mar. *ppp*

Pno. (8) rit.

Vla. *ppp*

Vc. *pp*