

## Sketchbook Written Materials

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EMORY | arts

2021-2022

# MUSIC EMORY@

This recital is presented by the  
Department of Music at Emory University.  
**music.emory.edu**

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Cover and Program Design: Lisa Baron | Cover Photo: Mark Teague

2021-2022

# MUSIC@ EMORY

## *Sketchbook*

**Sawyer Gray, composer**  
Senior Honors Recital

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Sunday, April 3, 2022, 3:30 p.m.  
Performing Arts Studio | 1804 N. Decatur Road



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# Welcome

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Welcome! Thank you for your interest in my music. When I look back over my work as a composition student, I find that most of my pieces investigate or explore a personally significant issue or topic—like a musical “sketch.” Collected together, they render my experiences coming of age in a new digital world.

In my *Sketchbook*, each work illustrates some aspect of the world as I experience it, expanded by the restraints of the medium and my developing compositional voice. While the subject of each piece varies, two main themes emerge throughout the program. The first theme is the self. As you will see throughout this program, the self is multi-faceted. Through these works, I study its many faces—the self informed by kinship and ritual, the self decoded by online echo chambers, the self enraptured by constant content, the self as a political badge, the self in intimacy, and the self as enmeshed in a network of other selves.

The other theme is vulnerability, specifically the complex relationship between vulnerable selves and social media. The internet has split my generation’s social landscape between physical and digital worlds, and my identity has become, in part, a commodity for advertisers and followers. Online content repositories have also commodified my attention. Attention and identity are both rooted in the self—now troubled in the new millennium. Personally, identity and attention have been sites of turmoil for my sense of self, turmoil that manifests in my music. Here in the social media age, we are implicitly asked to make ourselves into a brand. Especially as a “content creator,” my success in the internet’s content-feeding machine depends on marketing—social media judges success in quantities of likes, shares, and followers. Not only is my attention now dependent on a drip-feed of content, my self-worth is chained to its production on the other end.

Between selves, vulnerability, and the internet, I’ve found the necessity and sacredness of *community*. Throughout this program, relationships serve as a catalyst for introspection and reflection. Identities form with the delineation of groups, and these identities are used to define selves. This identification is a powerful process fundamental to the human condition. Throughout my sketches, I am constantly searching for community, comradery, and self-identification—you can find these in the form of a muse, or embedded in a compositional process, or as an overarching philosophy of survival.

—Sawyer Gray

# Program

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All pieces composed by Sawyer Gray (b. 1999)

This project is sponsored in part by a grant from Emory Arts.

Please enjoy the live pre-show ambient music as you enter and are seated.

The official curtain time will be marked by the house lights going dark.

*Memory Creek* for violin and acoustic guitar (2021)

Sophie Barthel and Sawyer Gray, performers

*The Cave* fixed media (audio and video) (2021)

1. *Hide and Seek*
2. *The Offering*
3. *Bathroom Manifesto*
4. *Trampoline*
5. *Oblivion*

**Music:** Neil Bathina, drums (tracks 1 and 4)

Ethan Feldman, trombone (tracks 1, 3, and 4)

Josh Peacock, trumpet (tracks 1, 3, and 4) and trombone (track 3)

Alex Petralia, double bass (track 2)

Beverley Sylvester, bongos (tracks 1 and 4)

Andrew Wei, alto saxophone (tracks 1, 3, and 4)

Sawyer Gray, guitars, electric bass, synths,  
drum programming, production, and vocals

**Video:** Rebecca Shenfeld, animation and production design (*Oblivion*),

Sophia Beraud, co-director (*Hide and Seek*),

Emilio Ontiveros, dancer (*Bathroom Manifesto*),

Sawyer Gray, camera (*The Offering*, *Trampoline*), production design  
(*Hide and Seek*, *The Offering*, *Bathroom Manifesto*, *Trampoline*), editing

PAS Staff, camera, lighting, set (*Bathroom Manifesto*)

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*Throw it Back* for violin, viola, and drum kit (2020)

Eric Zhang, violin; Sprite Crawford, viola; Tommy Parker, drum kit

*Introducing Mike Espy* for fixed media (audio and video) (2020)

## **—Intermission—**

**Intermission will include a shift in the audience seating arrangement.  
We kindly ask that all patrons vacate their seats at this time while the  
stage crew rearranges the performance space.**

*Tell Me When, Just a Little Longer* for electric guitar and drum kit  
with choreography for two dancers by Hayden Hubner (2021)

Emilio Ontiveros, Xavier Bell,  
Tommy Parker, and Sawyer Gray, performers

*Sketchbook* for improvisers (2022)

Tommy Parker, drums  
Eric Zhang, violin  
Sawyer Gray, guitar  
Andrew Wei, alto saxophone  
Kathy Li, double bass

# Acknowledgements

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Eli Guajardo and Jeff Millsaps for the show; Sophia Beraud for all your help with the videos and my writing; Adam Mirza for encouraging me early on and helping me believe in myself; my parents; Katy Young for . . . everything; and Julien Nathan for your unwavering support for everything I do, and your compassion, patience, and guidance on my journey to understand myself.



# Music at Emory

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## **Memory Creek**

for violin and acoustic guitar

(2021)

*The memory creek meekly flows to infinity  
and springs from the infant's bond to their mother, the sacrifices made for  
love, the great flow of energy that sustains life on Earth...  
The trickle of the creek invites you to listen to your past self and imagine  
your future self.*

I grew up in Mississippi in a musical family from North Carolina. Throughout my childhood, my parents took me to blues festivals as far as the Delta and as near as our own town. Today, I revere music as a medium for traditions and community. The music of the places I'm from--the delta blues, along with my small home town's indie music scene, and the mountain music my parents kept on around the house are core elements of my identity today. I am not just from these places, I am also from these musics.

To prepare for this piece, I studied the folk music I was raised on, with a special interest in the music of Appalachia. I had fun researching techniques, history, and transcriptions of Appalachian folk, and studied scores of even older Scots-Irish music introduced to me by my violinist and collaborator Sophie Barthel as well. The final score emerged from jam sessions with Sophie and transcribing Bluegrass fiddle solos I remember hearing as a child. In these ways my compositional process resembles the bluegrass tradition, since jigs and reels involve improvisation, oral tradition, and--importantly--having fun!

Traditions, community, and identity closely enmesh. Music serves as a primary medium for all three of these in every human culture. However, in today's technology-ruled world, large societal shifts are leading to the decline of many old, sacred traditions. While fiddle music is not under any

threat of disappearance, by re-transmitting it here I seek to assert the older kind of identity--kinship.

## **The Cave**

fixed media (audio and video)

(2021)

1. Hide and Seek
2. The Offering
3. Bathroom Manifesto
4. Trampoline
5. Oblivion



Scan for lyrics

*The Cave* is a set of music videos and songs that tells the story of a boy who loses himself as he becomes addicted to and enmeshed with the alt-right internet culture machine. *The Cave* is my first venture into narrative songwriting. I originally intended to make a rock album about emotional vulnerability and gender expression, but as I worked on it I realized that the internet and corporeal isolation were important themes to this project as well. I wrote this music after a year of online school, when I felt isolated from any community outside of my small quarantine bubble. Experiencing community only through the screen (in the form of online theater, zoom classes, Reddit music forums, and political Twitch and Instagram feeds) was deeply unfulfilling for me.

As the internet has grown more ubiquitous, the collapse of space and time has had major ramifications on how people relate to one another. For those who grew up with the internet, the line between online and offline relationships all but completely blurs. In a way, we have become cyborgs, gifted/burdened with the ability to instantly give and receive social approval. As emotional cyborgs, our identities form through the socialization and content we receive online. This content is curated by algorithms engineered

to maximize advertisers' profits, incentivizing the addictive nature of online affirmation over the wellbeing of the individual. This process funnels people into discrete internet communities, some rampant with toxic conspiracism or extremist mythologies.

There are few internet communities that rival 'incels' in their toxicity, depravity, and terminal online-ness. Incel is a portmanteau of "involuntary celibate," a community of boys and men whose misogyny derives from a combination of sexual frustration, self-loathing, and social conservatism. Their example exhibits the harms of patriarchy on self-hating men. Paradoxically, even though the pressures of patriarchal gender roles form the root of their torment, incel boards are completely enraptured by the mythology of patriarchy. In this space, everything is filtered through the worldview that imagines an ongoing patriarchal power struggle which the 'incels' have been naturally selected to lose. On these forums, they come together to commiserate their ultimate, inevitable, eternal celibacy.

Incels are closely linked to other online enclaves of right-wing extremism. Because of their misplaced anger, they are ripe for radicalization. Alt-right "pipelines" are an observable consequence of social media algorithms' programming and the propensity of online spaces to become echo chambers. The Cave takes this background and focuses on the individual. How is he feeling in this process, and where does it leave him once he's sacrificed corporeal reality for this online, constructed world?

Track 1, "Hide and Seek," establishes this character's inability to connect on an emotional level to his crush, the seeds of his frustration. "The Offering" elevates this initial conflict as he begins to take this rejection as a critical hit to his ego and self-worth. However, in "Bathroom Manifesto," instead of working through these feelings healthily, he turns to the misogynist landscape of the darker internet to cope, provided with quick dopamine rushes from the affirmation these toxic communities grant him. In

“Trampoline,” he sourly reflects on his past as a “normie,” and seals his fate in the final track, “Oblivion,” by leaving his corporeal form to fully integrate with the singularity of internet hive mind.

I recorded the music for *The Cave* over the summer of 2021 with a grant from the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience program at Emory. I used this project to hone my production skills and to familiarize myself with Ableton Live. I created the videos over my last year at Emory.

### **Throw it Back**

for violin, viola, and drum kit

(2020)

*The algorithm is like a slot machine. It takes advantage of brain chemistry,  
dopamine.*

*Refresh is addictive. The infinite scroll is a bottomless chasm.*

*It's also where culture is created in the internet age.*

*This culture is as real as any other, with legends, songs, language, souls...*

In the summer of 2020, I spent a lot of time watching videos of people “throwing it back” on TikTok. “Throwing it back” is a dance-move akin to a single, slower twerk. To throw it back, a dancer holds their knee with one hand and rolls their back, usually on an angle prominently positioning their butt for the camera. This move became a meme online in social media. One friend would challenge another by asking “Hey \_\_, do you know how to throw it back?” The dance would be recorded and posted on TikTok--a social media platform based on short, digestible videos. TikTok’s robust algorithm infamously captures users’ attention, dooming them to scroll endlessly. The platform lends itself to discursive reposting and video mimicry, and trends come and leave TikTok constantly, adding to its addictive nature.

I composed *Throw it Back* during a period of avid TikTok consumption, when catchy earworms from the app would echo in my head 24/7. Inspired by TikTok's process of repost and reinterpretation, I used melodies fleetingly popular on the platform. This piece reflects that cacophony of hooks. At the same time, I had the opportunity to work with members of the Vega Quartet, who are in residency at Emory University. Never having composed for professional or classical players, I challenged myself to adapt the electronic, beat-driven hooks of TikTok for a classical chamber duet. I overlaid the rhythms and melodies of Lizzo, Internet Money, Yeen, and Cardi B on classical textures of Bartok and Beethoven. Returning to the piece a year later, I added a part for drum kit.

### **Introducing Mike Espy**

for fixed media (audio and video)

(2020)

Identity in America has always been political. This country's founders framed their government around principles of liberalism, a European Enlightenment philosophy which lauded its white male subject's ability to properly commodify and exploit land, using terms like "natural rights," "humanism," and "freedoms." This dynamic reverberates through our country's history. Today, identity politics seem to be the prevailing political discourse in mainstream conversations. Much of it feels like noise--every corporation wants to demonstrate how much they value inclusion in their marketing. It is especially hard to filter the noise in politics. Political campaigns advertise needs and hopes: equality with others, empowerment, freedom from oppression, but today's politicians struggle to fulfill these slogans since they remain bound to the old gods: property and capital.

In his campaign for U.S. Senate Mike Espy used all the typical language, which spread through my advertiser-curated news feeds across

platforms. I shared, liked, subscribed, watched, commented, and fought for his campaign. Following the Espy campaign, excitedly voting for him, posting about it, and talking to my friends in Mississippi about state politics became my modes of connection to home while away at school, much in the same way that following MSU football has kept me close to home, but even more viscerally because this is politics--justice, activism, the betterment of the state and the people there. Did Espy himself believe in his cause?

Although a progressive by Mississippi standards, Espy's faced allegations of corruption with poultry giant Tyson Foods, a corporation with a reputation of OSHA violations and animal abuse. Even still, Espy's loss to Cindy Hyde-Smith left me disappointed and disillusioned. I felt like my team had lost our chance to make Mississippi a bit better. This experience led me to reflect on how political people perform political identity online today. The throws of disillusionment with Mississippi's debaucherous electoral politics birthed this piece.

I mostly created *Introducing Mike Espy* in one night. Inspired in part by early explorations into electronic music (such as Pierre Schaeffer's work with magnetic tape), I conceptualized this piece with two constraints: (1) using samples from one source (Mike Espy's campaign material); (2) manipulating these samples only through chopping, slowing down, and speeding up the audio. Later on, I added drum samples and sounds pulled from online birdcall libraries. These additions frame the speech between contrasting moods, giving the piece tonal evolutions that correspond with feelings of hope, despondency, peace, and doom.

-Intermission-

## **Tell Me When, Just a Little Longer**

for electric guitar and drum kit

with choreography for two dancers by Hayden Hubner

(2021)

Freud used the German word 'phantasie' to mean an imaginative fulfillment of frustrated wishes, conscious or unconscious, including deep desires that drive urges beyond logic and reason - love, sexuality, survival. In this piece, four beings exist in one place, and they each have a deep hole, which begs to be filled. *Head, Shoulders, Knees, Toes*, repeated throughout the dance, stands for each figure's inner child, and the site behind consciousness that drives them. According to Freud, our early childhood experiences form the basis of self, but as consciousness emerges these experiences are repressed and forgotten. However, they echo throughout our conscious lives in the form of phantasies.

I co-created this piece with Hayden Hubner, a choreographer in Emory's dance program. It debuted at the 2021 Spring Emory Dance Company concert, *Nothing Has to Be the Way It Was Before*. Before this collaboration, my experience with dance was limited to dancing in ensemble numbers in high school musicals. Witnessing the process of conceptualizing and choreographing a piece from the ground up gave me an expanded perspective and a deeper appreciation for performed music's position between embodied and extended consciousness.

Composition occurred alongside the choreographing; both evolved very organically. I began in the studio with Calvin Bruno, the drummer for the project, recording long sessions of improvised music. Hayden used this music as well as music from her own playlist for the initial choreography. After a few sessions, the dancers and musicians merged, which began an iterative process--music influenced movement, which in turn inspired new choreography to inspire new music.



Themes also solidified in rehearsals--relationships and vulnerability, how much of oneself is shared. See if you can discern what is shared between the four performers and how this process affects the people involved. Pay attention to how space is held, and who occupies it. What seems real? What seems imagined?

## **Sketchbook**

for improvisers

(2022)

Improvisation has been my oldest and best friend in the universe of playing music. I grew up practicing by improvising on the piano and later the guitar. Jamming with friends is still my preferred mode of social interaction. Improvisation has also been a meditative solo practice. I have only recently begun to study structured improvisation in depth. In different ways, I utilized improvisation to compose every piece on this program. Some guitar parts for *The Cave* were derived from late night voice memos of hummed melodies over ambling chords, recorded and filed for later use in composition. I also often leave room for subtle improvisation even in my fully notated pieces, such as in the middle section of *Memory Creek* or the guitar solo in *Tell Me When, Just a Little Longer*.

In this piece for improvisers, I created a structured improvisation for any number of performers. This means that each time that a group of musicians plays the piece, it will sound different; when different musicians play the piece, it will sound wildly different. The score for *Sketchbook* was formatted after scores in Christian Wolff's Prose Collection and The Fluxus Performance Workbook. I wrote a poem to guide the improvisation. It has three stanzas, each asking the reader to analyze themselves in a slightly different way.

1. Plant a garden / memory

2. Grow your garden / contacts

3. Harvest your garden / footprint

As the concluding performance on my recital, this piece synthesizes the overarching questions posed by the other works. It harkens back to that deep sense of belonging in the community you most identify with--your family, biological or found. Here, the ensemble signifies a community. Each musician begins on their own, but through the course of the improvisation, they borrow and share ideas, creating a complex and rich network of interconnected selves with fleeting moments of potential shared consciousness. This piece illustrates the enmeshment of the self and identity with other selves, and the importance of community to the stability of the individual.

# Memory Creek

Sawyer Gray

♩ = 96  
Lively

Fiddle

Guitar

4

Fiddle

Guit.

A

8

Fiddle

Guit.

D

A

12

Romantic, lyrical

Fiddle

Guit.

A C#m B7 B7b9 E

16

Fiddle

Guit.

A C#m B7 B7b9 E

20

Slowly ritard to about 3/4 speed (72 BPM), repeat until you hear me playing the unison part

Fiddle

Guit.

pp

mf

Unison here

Rit.

Return of the groove (A tempo)

21

Fiddle

Guit.

f

mf

Gliss

28

Fiddle

Guit.

32

Fiddle

Guit.

Rit.

36

Fiddle

Guit.

♩ = 106

E7

Reel

E7

39

Fiddle

Guit.

42

Fiddle

Guit.

A

G

A

G

46

Fiddle

Guit.

A

G

D

D

Repeat and improv!

50

Fiddle

Guit.

Am7

D7#5

C

B7

G#dim7

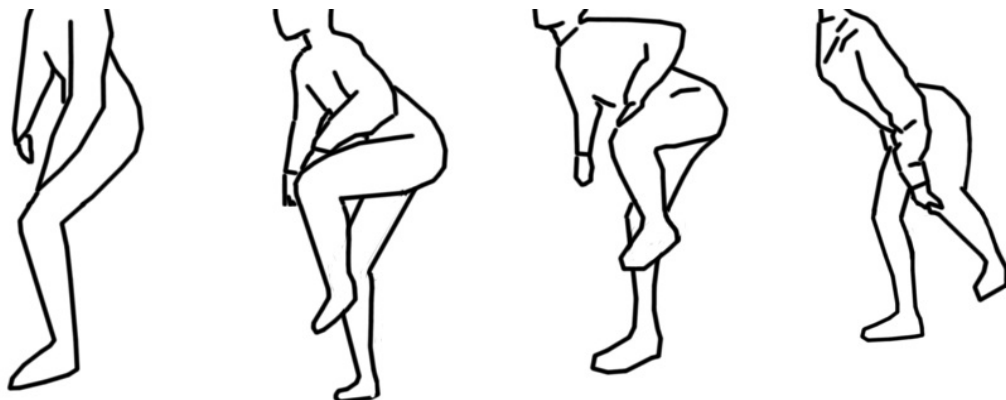
Rit.

gliss.

Sawyer Gray

# Throw It Back

This piece is inspired by the catchy, hook-based melodies of Tiktok, and is created as an examination of the state of youth culture on the internet. *Throwing It Back* is a dance move that was popular on the platform in the summer of 2020.





15

Vln.

Vla.

Dr.

19

Vln.

Vla.

Dr.

Pizz. C Arco

*f* *p*

23

Vln.

Vla.

Dr.

*mf* *p* *mf*

Throw it Back

30 D

Vln. *f* Take a second

Vla. *f*

Dr. sticks *mp* Choke quickly

35

Vln.

Vla.

Dr. 2 2

39

Vln. *p* *f*

Vla. *p* *f*

Dr.



Throw it Back

43

Vln. *p* *f* *p* *f* *mp*

Vla. *mf*

Dr.

49

**E** Gently *pp*

Vln. *pp*

Vla. Legato

Dr. Atmospheric *p*

54

Vln. *mp* *p* *mf*

Vla. *mp*

Dr. *pp* poco cresc.

F

A tempo

58

Vln. *mf* *p* *pp* *p*

Vla. *pp* *pp* *mp*

Dr. *mp*

*rit.* *Pizz.*

62

Vln. *mp*

Vla. *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp*

Dr. *Click sticks* *Rim*

67

Vln. *mf*

Vla. *pp* *mp* *Pizz.* *mf*

Dr. *3*

G

"Link" by Yeen  
Continue pizz.

71

Vln. *p* *mf* *Arco*

Vla. *p* *pp*

Dr.

Detailed description: This system covers measures 71 to 74. The Violin part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing eighth notes. In measure 73, it changes to mezzo-forte (*mf*) and features a triplet of eighth notes. In measure 74, it is marked *Arco* and continues with a triplet. The Viola part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing eighth notes, and then drops to pianissimo (*pp*) in measure 73. The Drum part is silent throughout.

75

Vln. *mf* *Arco*

Vla. *f* *pp*

Dr.

Detailed description: This system covers measures 75 to 77. The Violin part continues with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a triplet in measure 75. In measure 77, it is marked *Arco* and features a triplet. The Viola part is marked *f* (forte) in measure 75 and *pp* (pianissimo) in measure 77. The Drum part is silent throughout.

78

Vln. *mf* *Arco*

Vla. *mp* *mf*

Dr.

Detailed description: This system covers measures 78 to 81. The Violin part starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a triplet in measure 78. In measure 80, it is marked *Arco* and continues with a triplet. The Viola part is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano) in measure 78 and *mf* (mezzo-forte) in measure 80. It includes a "chopping" effect in measure 78 and a *Pizz.* (pizzicato) marking in measure 80. The Drum part is silent throughout.

81 Sharply

Vln.

Vla.

Dr.

Click sticks Rim Click sticks

cresc.

84

Vln.

Vla.

Dr.

**H**

*f*

*mf*

This is the groove, add your own subtle variations to taste

88

Vln.

Vla.

Dr.

4

Add a fill to get into half time for a sec here

92

Vln. *mp* *f* *mp* *f*

Vla. *fp* *f* *ff*

Dr. Bell *3*

95

Vln. *mf* *ff* *mf* Pizz. *3* Arco

Vla. Pizz. *mf* Arco

Dr. *3* *pp* *3* *3*

98

Vln. Pizz. Arco *mf* *f* *p* out to infinity at the last second

Vla. Pizz. Arco *mf* *f* *pp* *mp* cont.

Dr. *f* *3* *3* Solo *ff*

102

Vln. *ff* *mp*

Vla. *tr*

Dr. *Bring it down*

Detailed description: This system covers measures 102 to 108. The Violin part starts with a rest, then has a long note with a fermata in measure 105, marked *mp*. The Viola part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with trills, marked *tr*. The Drum part has a steady pattern of diagonal slashes, with the instruction "Bring it down" written above the staff.

109

Vln. *pp* *p*

Vla. *tr* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp*

Dr. *Brushes* *p* *mp* *ppp*

Fade in the snare wash/white noise with cymbal tinks, follow hairpins for energy

Detailed description: This system covers measures 109 to 113. The Violin part has a rest in measure 109, then plays a melodic line starting in measure 110, marked *p*. The Viola part has trills in measures 109 and 111-113, and rests in measures 110 and 112. The Drum part uses brushes in measures 109 and 110, then switches to a snare wash pattern in measures 111-113, marked *ppp*. The instruction "Fade in the snare wash/white noise with cymbal tinks, follow hairpins for energy" is written above the drum staff.

114

Vln. *pp*

Vla. *tr* *pp* *mp* *pp*

Dr. *fade to nothing*

Detailed description: This system covers measures 114 to 118. The Violin part has a rest in measure 114, then plays a melodic line starting in measure 115, marked *pp*. The Viola part has trills in measures 114 and 116, and rests in measures 115 and 117. The Drum part has a snare wash pattern in measures 114 and 115, then rests in measures 116-118. The instruction "fade to nothing" is written below the drum staff.

Sketchbook

*can be played with any instrumentation, but requires at least 2 players.*

1. Plant a garden  
memory  
kept in your body  
as sound...  
dreams  
as fantasies  
fantasies  
as you

is it love  
is it God  
is it time  
is it death  
that you carry?

does it trickle through?  
or does it destroy you  
as if you were a splintering dam?

does it invade your fantasies?  
or does it control them?

2. Grow your garden  
contacts  
how many numbers do you have?  
do you collect them?

3. Harvest your garden  
footprint

how are you traced?  
as a shape  
read  
as a book  
or a message?  
or do you disappear when you leave?

To play this piece:

Play through each stanza;

Stanza 1- With yourself

*Focus on yourself. Try to develop a single idea reflective of what the stanza means for you.*

Stanza 2- With each other

*Begin to listen to others' sounds. Focus on a couple and integrate them into what you're playing. Repeat this step, integrating other voices into your own, until you're ready to move on to the next stanza.*

Stanza 3- Exit, however you please

*End your playing in your own way. The piece ends when everyone has stopped playing.*