

Patrick Andrew Thompson

MOMENTS SWEEP PAST:

three poems of Tracy K. Smith

for soprano, cello, and piano

Tracy K. Smith, “The Weather in Space,” “It & Co.,” and “Us & Co” from *Life on Mars*. Copyright © 2011 by Tracy K. Smith. Used by permission of The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, www.graywolfpress.org. All rights reserved worldwide.

COMPOSER’S NOTE

What I find most remarkable about Tracy K. Smith’s poetry is its ability to unassumingly blur the line between a profound contemplation of life’s biggest questions and a probing of the simpler experiences in ordinary life. It is at once universal and highly personal, intangible and yet so familiar. Written in 2011, *Life on Mars* confronts the “fundamental unknowables” of this “large and mysterious system we belong to,” while acknowledging that our usual answers - religion, science, art - all invariably fall short.

Moments Sweep Past sets three poems from this collection without pause - “The Weather in Space,” “It & Co.,” and “Us & Co.” Despite their contrasting moods - from sprawling and pensive to whimsical and coy - these poems share the same broad contemplativeness of *Life on Mars* at large, meditating on our search for the answers to these great unknowables.

The music likewise aims to at once capture each poem’s individual character while drawing a single thread throughout, with shared motives, harmonies, and textures constantly evolving into new expressive contexts. The reflective, resonant first poem gives way to a more active and playful second before arriving back at the original mood, now tinged with wistfulness and reverence. While the poetry leaves us with more questions than answers, it still manages to both challenge and nourish. I hope to have captured a little bit of that in this piece.

Duration: ca. 9 minutes

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Cello:

Diamond noteheads indicate where to touch the string to produce natural harmonics. String numbers are sometimes given for clarity, though each harmonic could only be performed on one string, as seen in the figure below

The image shows two staves of musical notation for Cello. The top staff is labeled 'sounding' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Cello (written)'. Both staves are in 4/4 time. The sounding staff shows a sequence of notes with diamond-shaped noteheads indicating natural harmonics. The written staff shows the corresponding fingerings and string numbers (I, II, III, IV) indicated by dashed lines above the notes. The string numbers correspond to the string used to produce the harmonic: I (open string), II (1st string), III (2nd string), and IV (3rd string).

The performer may freely substitute any written touch major 3rd harmonics with touch major 6th harmonics, which produce the same pitch and may speak better

I, II, III, and IV are roman numerals used to indicate string number. **0** indicates an open string

+ indicates left-hand pizzicato

The \sim symbol, as first seen in measure 190, is used to indicate a wide quarter-tone vibrato, always lasting one beat

s.p. indicates sul ponticello; p.s.p indicates poco sul ponticello; s.t. indicates sul tasto;
ord. indicates normal bowing

—————> indicates a gradual change from one bow technique to another

Piano:

In movements 1 and 3, the pedal is always down unless specifically indicated otherwise. All retakes are marked with a new pedal marking.

1. The Weather in Space

Is God being or pure force? The wind
Or what commands it? When our lives slow
And we can hold all that we love, it sprawls
In our laps like a gangly doll. When the storm
Kicks up and nothing is ours, we go chasing
After all we're certain to lose, so alive -
Faces radiant with panic.

2. It & Co.

We are a part of It. Not guests.
Is It us, or what contains us?
How can It be anything but an idea,
Something teetering on the spine
Of the number *i*? It is elegant
But coy. It avoids the blunt ends
Of our fingers as we point. We
Have gone looking for It everywhere:
In Bibles and bandwidth, blooming
Like a wound from the ocean floor.
Still, It resists the matter of false vs. real.
Unconvinced by our zeal, It is un-
Appeasable. It is like some novels:
Vast and unreadable.

3. Us & Co.

We are here for what amounts to a few hours,
a day at most.
We feel around making sense of the terrain,
our own new limbs,
Bumping up against a herd of bodies
until one becomes home.
Moments sweep past. The grass bends
then learns again to stand.

Moments Sweep Past

three poems of Tracy K. Smith

Patrick Andrew Thompson

2020

1. "The Weather in Space"

Reflective, slightly subdued $\text{♩} = 80$

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) features a Soprano line with rests, a Cello line with a *pizz.* (pizzicato) attack in 4/4 time, switching to *arco* (arco) in 3/4 time, and a Piano line with *p bell-like* (piano bell-like) sounds. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the Cello and Piano parts with dynamic markings *ppp*, *mp*, and *p*, and includes performance instructions like *8va* (octave) and *red.* (ritardando). The third system (measures 9-12) features a more complex Piano part with *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamics, *ord.* (ordine) markings, and various time signatures (2/4, 4/4, 5/4, 4/4). A large watermark 'BIBLIOTHECA' is visible across the score.

14 *p* *ppp* *f* *mf*

Is God be - ing_ or pure force?_ The

p *ppp* *mf*

8va

p *mf*

Red.

IV III II I

19 *mp*

wind Or what co - mmands it?

s.t. *p* *ppp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*

II ord. III

8va

ppp *mp* *ppp* *ppp* *mp* *ppp*

Red.

23 *pp*

gliss to as high as possible

I II

8va

p *pp* *mp* *pp* *p* *pp*

6 3 3

28 *p* *pp* *p* 3 3

When our lives slow And we can hold all

mp *pizz.* *arco* *pizz. arco III*

p *delicately* *Red.* *p* *Red.*

33 *mp* 3 3 *pp*

that we love

mp *pp* *mp* *mf*

mp *pp* *mp* *p*

Red. *Red.*

37 *mp* *mf* *mp* 3 3

it sprawls In our laps like a gan - gly doll.

mp *p* *mp* *p*

mp *pp* *p* *p*

mp *pp* *p* *p*

Red. *Red.*

p *sempre*

42 *pp* *p*

When the

ppp *p* *ppp* *p*

pp *mp* *pp* *p*

Red. *Red.*

pizz. *arco*

8va

46 *f* *mp* *f*

storm Kicks up and no thing is ours,

IV III II I I II

f *pp* *mf* *pp* *p* *f* *pp*

f *pp* *f*

Red. *Red.*

49 *mp* *p*

we go cha - - - sing

mf *mp* *pp sub.*

keep interval throughout gliss

repeat, gradually getting faster to m. 54

ppp cresc. poco a poco to m. 54

54 *f* *mp* *mf dim.* *mp*

Af - ter all we're cer - tain to lose,

f dim. *mp*

gliss to as high as possible

repeat at constant speed, as fast as possible

f dim. *mp* *p*

59 *p* *rall.*

so a - live

mp *p* *pp* *ppp*

8va *8va*

64 *a tempo* *p* *pp whispered*

Fa - ces ra - di - ant with pa - nic.

pp sempre *pp sempre*

8va *8ba* *8ba* *8ba* *8ba*

repeat at approx. 32nd note speed artificial harmonic gliss on C string

2. "It & Co."

70 Playful, coy ♩ = 156

Musical score for measures 70-75. The score is in 2/4 time. It features a vocal line (top staff), a bass line (middle staff), and a piano accompaniment (bottom two staves). The bass line starts with a *p* dynamic and includes a *pizz.* instruction. The piano accompaniment includes a sequence of chords marked with a circled 8 and a circled 8 with a red line underneath. A large watermark 'PREVIEW' is visible across the page.

Musical score for measures 76-81. The score is in 2/4 time. It features a vocal line (top staff), a bass line (middle staff), and a piano accompaniment (bottom two staves). The bass line includes dynamics *mp* and *p*. The piano accompaniment includes a *secco* instruction. A large watermark 'PREVIEW' is visible across the page.

Musical score for measures 82-87. The score is in 2/4 time. It features a vocal line (top staff), a bass line (middle staff), and a piano accompaniment (bottom two staves). The bass line includes a *mp* dynamic. The piano accompaniment includes a *mp* dynamic. A large watermark 'PREVIEW' is visible across the page.

87

87

mf

pp cresc.

arco

93

94

mf

93

94

mf

We are a part of It. Not guests.

f

mp

mp

pizz.

mp supporting voice

8va

Red.

secco

100

mp

100

mp

Is It us, or what contains us?

8va

106 108 *mf*

How can It be a - ny - thing — but an i - dea, —

mf mp

mf mp

gva

112 *p* — *mf*

Something tee - - - - - tering on the spine —

p — *mf* — *mp* — *mf*

p — *mf* — *mp* — *mf* — *mp* — *mf*

arco jeté *pizz.* *jeté arco* *pizz.*

gva

117 *mp* — *mf* *pp sub.* — *mf* — *pp*

— Of the num - ber i? —

mp — *mf* — *ppp* — *mp* — *pp*

mp — *mf* — *pp sub.* — *mp* — *pp*

arco *gva*

Red.

123

mp

It is el - e - gant But coy. — It a - voids the blunt ends

pizz. *p* *arco* *mf* *pizz.* *p* *p*

8va *mp* *p* *mp*

129

mf

p

134

Of our fin - gers as we point.

arco *tr* *mf dim.* *mp dim.* *p*

mf dim. *mp dim.* *p*

Red. *Red.*

135

tr *pizz.* *p* *arco*

140 *mp*

We Have gone loo - king for It _____ ev - ery - where

mf *pizz.* *p*

8va

145 *pp* *mp*

In Bi - bles and band - width, _____

arco *pizz.*

8va

150 *mf* *mp*

bloo - - - - - ming _____ Like a wound _____

arco *pizz.* *mf* *mp*

8va

160

mp

155

— from the o - cean — floor. — Still,

p *mp* *pp* *mp*

(*Red.*) *secco*

161

mf

It re - sists the ma - tter — of false ver - sus real. —

delicately *delicately*

166

p

mp

Un - con - vinced by our zeal, It is — un - a - pea - sa - ble. —

arco *pizz.* *p dim.* *mp* *p* *p dim.* *mp*

8va

172 *p*

It is like some

pp dim. *arco* *pizz.*

pp dim. *8va*

178 *ppp* **181** *p* *mf* *p* *mp* *3*

no - vels. Vast and un - read - a - ble.

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

ppp *mp* *mp*

8va

Red. *Red.*

Tempo I ♩ = 80

185 *p* **188** 3. "Us & Co." Suspended, freely ♩ = 60

p *ppp* *mp* *pp* *p* *mf* *ppp* *p*

III *II* *wide vib. ord*

p *mp* *pp*

209 *mf* *p* 212 ♩ = 88 *mp*

sense of the ter - rain, _____ our own

mf *mp* *p* wide vib. ord. p.s.p.

mp *pp* *mp*

(Red.) Red.

215 *mf*

new limbs, Bum - ping up _____ a - gainst a herd of bo - dies _____

ord. *mp* *ppp* *mp* *p* *mp* *8va* *mp*

p *mp* *mp* *p* *mp*

Red.

220 *p* *mp* *pp*

un - til one be - comes home.

mp *ppp* *mp* *p* *ppp* *0*

p *pp* *pp* *p*

Red. Red.

225

mf *mp*

Mo - ments

pizz. *arco*

mf *p*

mf *Red.*

227

mf

sweep past.

pizz. *arco*

mf *p*

mf *Red.*

229

p *mp* *p*

The grass bends

mf *mp*

mf *p*

mf *Red.*

poco rall.

232

mp *pp*

then learns a - gain

mp *p* *ppp*

mp *pp*

Red.

a tempo (♩ = 88)

238 *mp* *ppp*

to stand.

natural harmonic gliss on D string

pp sempre

mp *pp* *mp* *p*

8va *pp sempre*

Red.

244

p *mp*

pizz. arco

pp *mp* *p*

pp *p* *mp*

Red.