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BARS, CHAINS, AND BROKEN THINGS
for orchestra

Andrew J. Filson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Music in Composition in the School of Music Jordan College of the Arts, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN USA

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Date (final approval): 14 Nov 2017 Advisor
Bars, Chains, and Broken Things

Bars, Chains, and Broken Things reflects common themes for those in the current prison system and their return to civilian life. I believe that by creating a greater awareness and understanding of these problems we as a society can better serve those in need. Art has historically played a role in cultural development, so my hope is that this piece may find a home in the hearts of those who wish to make a change in this field. It is my opinion that those who have been incarcerated deserve a second chance, and by affording them that opportunity we can reinforce the idea of rehabilitation over punishment.

In the spring of 2013, I was completing the fourth year of my undergraduate degree, and it was at this time that I was most emotionally torn on how to adequately “give back” to my community. Many of the readily available volunteer opportunities were through forms of faith-based ministry programs, but as an individual uncertain of his own spiritual beliefs I instead sought a different path. This resulted in my participation with a group that volunteered at the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility. This particular facility is the designated maximum-security prison for the Indiana Department of Corrections regarding juvenile males.\(^1\) Indiana does not have an age minimum requirement for a child to be prosecuted,\(^2\) but I was informed by workers at the facility that there tends to be leniency granted to those below the age of 13. If tried as a minor, a student can remain in the facility through the age of 21.\(^3\) Due to these

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3 IN.gov, “Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility.”
circumstances, the group of students I worked with ranged from age 14 to 21. After many hours of in-house training, background checks, and finger-printing, I spent several months meeting and working with the “well-behaved” group presented to me. Some of the inmates I worked with were in prison for theft, attempted murder, and various forms of assault charges. Although I only worked there for eight months, the impact of this experience has been of great personal significance. It is a future goal of mine to resume this type of position when I have completed my own education, and it is for this reason I decided to create a programmatic work with this theme.

At the Pendleton facility, I learned that inmates are called ‘students’ to assert the importance of continued education. One student in particular had a story that truly resonated with me. Abandoned by his father at a young age, he was eventually recruited by his stepfather to participate in illicit activities. While engaging in a drug deal, the authorities arrested the student but not his stepfather. The young man refused to cooperate with the authorities and implicate his stepfather, so he was convicted. This was a non-violent offense committed at age fourteen, but he still received a multi-year sentence. It is this specific story for which Bars, Chains, and Broken Things is inspired by and named.

The piece begins with the Introduction and is then divided into four short, connected movements:

i. Abandonment

ii. Imprisonment

iii. Solace

iv. False Freedom
Each movement is connected by the overarching concept of the piece, but there are stark contrasts in the compositional approaches used to create them. In addition to the piece’s concept acting as a means of connection, there are two primary musical ideas that begin in the Introduction and are developed in later movements. The first of these ideas is the use of metric ambiguity. This is achieved with the string section during the Introduction, and it is most clearly demonstrated in mm. 10–15 (Figure 1). The second of these ideas is the motif found in the solo clarinet part at mm. 26–28 (Figure 2). These are essential components of the entire piece, and the Introduction serves primarily as a means to demonstrate them before the individual movements take turns developing them.

![Figure 1. Measures 10–15. Strings creating metric ambiguity.](image)

![Figure 2. Measures 26–28. Solo clarinet in Bb establishment of “Loss” motif.](image)
Programmatic Elements

As a programmatic piece, specific compositional devices were used to convey different ideas throughout the work. There was an agreement among the students with whom I worked that their time in prison was confusing. They viewed their teenage years as the transition from childhood into adulthood, and by spending this time away from the rest of society they feared what it would be like to try and reenter civilian life. In order to represent this confusion, I chose to utilize metric ambiguity throughout the piece. A combination of three different approaches is found among the different movements. The first of these is the utilization of prescriptive disruption in traditional meter. Figure 1, above, demonstrates a rhythmic weaving among string parts that helps mask beat 1 of most measures during the Introduction. When the first movement is reached, there is a shift in the string parts toward supplying a more aggressive, driving accompaniment for the rest of the orchestra. Instead of being sustained, they now push forward with shorter repeated notes interrupted by accents (Figure 3). The accented notes occur on nonconsecutive beats, and this helps continue the metric ambiguity established in the introduction.

Figure 3. Measures 34–36. New accompaniment in string rhythm.
Aleatoric sections were conceived as a development on what is found in the strings during the introduction and first movement. Previously, the strings were given prescriptive means of disrupting the sense of meter; now, the entire orchestra has been assigned similar sections to create a lack of unified rhythm (Figure 4, below). This approach is revisited and expanded at multiple points in the latter three movements, but it is always a form of a partially controlled aleatory construction. The conductor retains the room and flexibility with the orchestra to immediately reestablish a traditional metric approach in the subsequent sections.

Silence measured in seconds is the third method of metric ambiguity found in this piece. The previous approaches result in a near constant source of sound with little room for rest, so the decision to apply silence seemed a natural option to clearly differentiate a section. The first instance of this can be found at the end of the second movement with the orchestra’s spoken section (Figure 5). This approach allows for the steady control of traditional meter, but by abruptly ending the music it prevents the establishment of an easily identifiable beat.
An element of programmatic significance found in the first movement is the chasing effect demonstrated in the woodwinds. In order to convey the idea of abandonment, choppy and acrobatic lines in the woodwinds were used to complement the disruption given by the string section. The different parts in the woodwinds are often mimicking each other, but they rarely have any extended sections with simultaneous rhythms (Figure 6). This creates an effect of a voice attempting to leave the others behind.

Frequently recurring ideas throughout the piece are misleading harmonic moments which prevent a sense of resolution. In order to adequately reflect the mentality of confusion
experienced by the students, the piece is predominantly dissonant. There are moments, however, where the music appears to build toward a cadence and allow resolution. Instead, sections such as mm. 55–58 have an unexpected chord change that disrupts the previous material (Figure 7, below).

The initial conception of the second movement is rooted in an idea of harmonic “walls.” Solitary confinement is a feared element of the prison system, and it exists both in adult systems and juvenile facilities. My idea for this movement was to reach walls, barricades, or some sort of confinement musically and then deconstruct it. An example of a wall being reached is at m. 144 (Figure 8), where the orchestra enters with a powerful harmonic moment before being interrupted by the following aleatoric section.

![Figure 7. Measures 55–58. Misleading harmonic moment.](image)
The use of soloists and whispering in the second movement is meant to represent an incarcerated individual (Figure 9). After having conversations with the students, I learned of their struggles with loneliness and how it affected them. I was informed that some had even been placed in solitary confinement as a result of behavioral issues. They told me that some students
resorted to talking to themselves in an effort to stave off the feeling of isolation. I decided to reflect this by creating solos with whispered accompaniments that gradually grew in prominence.

The text details four aspects leading in and out of solitary confinement:

1. The verbal reaction to getting arrested.


3. Statements from those while in solitary confinement.

4. Reflections of those who suffered mental trauma as a result of solitary confinement.

The text gathered for this is assigned as one group of texts representing the thoughts and words of testimonies or reflections on an aforementioned category. During my time working with the students, I kept a journal in order to maintain a consistent method of reflection after each visit. The text used in this piece came directly from the students as I recorded it in my journal.

The fourth movement addresses a personal concern regarding the release of inmates, both juvenile and adult, at the end of their sentences. I fear that there is not enough done within the prison system to adequately prepare inmates for a return to civilian life; this lack of preparation seems to be a strong factor in the likelihood of future crime. If a person is released into an environment where they initially resorted to crime, then it seems to me that their past problems may make themselves present once again. To make this a musical idea, I structured the fourth movement so that the new material would be interrupted by material from prior movements.
Figure 10. Measure 205. Aleatoric beginning.

Figure 11. Measures 233–235. False cadence.

Aleatoric passages (Figure 10, above), misleading harmonic moments (Figure 11, above), and a reference to the chime effect at the end of movement three (Figure 12, below) all serve this function.
The instrumentation of *Bars, Chains, and Broken Things* is as follows: 2, 2, 2, 2 — 4, 3, 2, 1, 1 — timpani, 2 perc, harp, piano — strings. The instruments found in the percussion parts are a suspended cymbal, snare drum, bass drum, tubular bells, and vibraphone. The decision to utilize a standard orchestra came as a result of this being my first orchestral work, and the percussion choices were determined by the effects and timbres they offered to specific sections in the music. Non-pitched percussion are effective at providing support for moods established in the other sections. An example of this occurs in the second movement with the drone effect provided by the suspended cymbal. Its ever-present sound helps to act as a foundation for the soloists without interfering harmonically. The vibraphone seemed a natural choice for its ability to sing through an orchestral layer in its high register, and its option for bowing provides a unique sound effect when paired with a smaller group of instruments.
Movement Overview

Movement one, “Abandonment,” is meant to represent the reaction of an emotionally underdeveloped youth attempting to process loss. The student who played the largest role in inspiring this piece confided in me the knowledge that he had spent his entire life feeling as if everyone was going to leave him. Upon hearing this, I could not help but surmise that this fear influenced his desire to become attached to his stepfather and get involved in less reputable activities. This movement is meant to feel unsettling. It is designed to create a sense of longing in the listener for resolution, but the music does not supply it.

The second movement, “Imprisonment,” is a musical manifestation of the psychological experience of incarceration as understood through the words of those I encountered at the facility. It took months for the students to feel comfortable enough to discuss how they had been affected by their imprisonment. The most prominent feeling discussed with me was loneliness, and this increased dramatically if they served time in solitary confinement. I believe complete isolation to be detrimental to recovery, so the echoes of that belief rang true from the words of these students.

“Solace,” the third movement, symbolizes the acceptance of the students’ situations. The general consensus of students with whom I spoke was that a point is reached in prison whereupon a person accepts the position they are in; this acceptance then becomes peace of mind. I am of the opinion that this does not last. On too many occasions did I witness students begin antagonizing one another for a reason as little as attempting to assert dominance. This does not seem to me the behavior of content individuals.
The fourth and final movement, “False Freedom,” is a commentary on the result of the current approach to America’s prison system. Presently, my concern is that there is a focus on punishment over rehabilitation in American culture. I find this to be damaging not only for the individuals within the system, but for those affected by people who commit crimes following a sentence served. The national recidivism rate, which is the conviction of a crime post-release of a previous conviction, is averaging 31.7%. Nearly one-third of all who enter, even non-violent offenders, will return to prison. My personal experience is limited to the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility, and they seemed genuinely concerned with rehabilitating the students who come through their system. However, I remain unconvinced that the current process of release is as effective as one would hope. One of the core issues facing these students is that many of them return to their original environment, and the environment itself often contributes to the initial problems. “False Freedom” represents my belief that no matter how hard they may try, many people convicted of a crime will not experience real freedom without proper assistance.

**Main Idea Development**

The Introduction serves primarily as a means to establish the two primary elements of the composition:

1. The use of metric ambiguity (Figure 1).
2. The introduction of the “Loss” motif (Figure 2).

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Following the Introduction, the first movement continues the use of metric ambiguity with the string sections. The approach to this, however, is much different. Replacing the sustained notes is a stream of eighth notes with shifting accents, and this new section creates a sense of pulse without establishing a clear metric downbeat (Figure 3). The other important element, the “Loss” motif, can be found in multiple locations, but one of the most clearly identifiable moments occurs in mm. 93–97 with the bass trombone and tuba (Figure 13).

![Figure 13. Measures 93–97. “Loss” motif in bass trombone and tuba.](image)

In the second movement, the use of metric ambiguity is achieved primarily through whispering (Figure 9) and a return of sustained chords in the string sections. The whispering initially serves as a form of white noise effect, but it eventually transitions to spoken text with
rhythmic values. However, silence measured in seconds accompany the text at the end of the movement, so the metric ambiguity remains intact (Figure 5). The “Loss” motif is less discernible in this movement, but it is still present. Fragments of it can be found in multiple locations. One such spot is in the trumpet parts at mm. 142–143 (Figure 14, above).

**Figure 15.** Measures 162–163. String swells followed by silence measured in seconds.
The third movement is marked by a substantial difference in its approach to rhythm. In order to create a new method of metric ambiguity, the concept of measured silence introduced in the second movement took control of the new movement’s direction. This is most notable in the string parts (Figure 15, above). Similar to the second movement, the “Loss” motif is never stated in its original form. In this movement, however, the general shape of the motif is slightly altered and hidden by various parts (Figure 16, above).

In the fourth movement, metric ambiguity is achieved largely through the use of aleatoric writing (Figure 10). The interruption of new material by preexisting parts makes the continuation of this difficult, but the combination of it all creates a tone that ultimately serves its initial purpose. In mm. 216–219, the “Loss” motif makes a return with a full statement in the trumpet parts (Figure 17).

**General Overview of Musical Progression**
The beginning of the first movement is marked by the string sections’ eighth-note pulse, which has replaced the earlier sustained notes as a source of metric ambiguity. The woodwinds begin a series of choppy and acrobatic lines to complement the disruption given by the string section. Low brass instruments serve as an occasional interruption, both rhythmically and harmonically, to prevent the music’s rhythm normalizing. These ideas combine to create a sense of chaos and a longing for resolution. Moments such as mm. 55–57 (Figure 7) briefly provide the illusion of such a resolution, but the immediate interruption of notes prevents any sense of true completion. The end of the first movement is signaled with an interruption by the piano with a fast ostinato in the upper register of the instrument. This occurs during the last iteration of the misleading harmonic section (Figure 18) in mm. 101–102. It then leads into the final section with a flurry of notes in the string and wind sections, and this sense of urgency is compounded by harmonically unstable brass punctuating to assert a lack of cadence. The end of the movement is marked by a series of accented chords in the orchestra to give full weight to the sound before falling apart in the following movements.

![Figure 18. Measures 101–102. Piano with ostinato.](image-url)
Movement two, “Imprisonment,” is a musical manifestation of the psychological experience of incarceration as understood through the words of those I encountered. There are moments of spoken text which detail four aspects of the process that I observed:

2. The verbal reaction to getting arrested.


4. Statements from those while in solitary confinement.

5. Reflections from a few who suffered mental trauma as a result of solitary confinement.

In order to reflect this musically, I decided to include three solos and utilize a smaller number of forces. As seen in the beginning of the movement (Figure 19), descending flurries of notes were used to create a “falling” effect. The instruments were gradually phased out in this manner until reaching rehearsal mark K.

![Figure 19. Measure 120. “Falling” effect.](image)

At m. 125 (Figure 9), the first solo of the movement begins while a large portion of the orchestra begins whispering. The strings, piano, harp, and vibraphone provide most of the
harmonic support at this point with a suspended cymbal drone in an effort to keep from overpowering the soloist, and the whispering should be largely heard as white noise.

The nature of the whispering section acts as a precursor to the aleatoric music found at rehearsal mark M (Figure 4). At M, most of the orchestra has repeated figures meant to be measured only in relative terms to the previously understood beat; the overall duration of the section is measured in seconds instead of beats, and therefore the parts will inevitably break away from each other to create a more cacophonous sound. This effect represents the internal struggle likely felt by an individual as they attempt to maintain their sanity while in solitary confinement.

Gradually, the movement’s whispering develops a stronger and more defined presence. This was accomplished by assigning specific rhythms to the text and reducing the harmonic content of the non-soloists (Figure 20). At the end of the movement, the text follows one of the harmonic “walls” and becomes the primary focus (Figure 5). The movement ends with the orchestra speaking as one, and the measured silence between statements begins the introduction of ideas of the upcoming movement.

Figure 20. Measures 147–148. Rhythm assigned text.

Movement three, “Solace,” utilizes the effectiveness of silence within a large ensemble.
By having the movement begin with a solo piano, the music presents itself as an immediate contrast to the previous movements (Figure 21). The first two movements have a fairly constant source of sound, so the sparse orchestration and use of silence in this movement furthers the contrast.

The opening is followed by a light, high string section with a small swell (Figure 15). This swell, which utilizes pitches forming whole tone clusters, is meant to be calming and far less dissonant than the earlier movements where free atonality, the octatonic scale, and other modes of limited transposition are used to create the harmony. In order to maintain an easily controlled beginning and end, the played notes in the pattern remain in an established meter and the rests are measured in seconds. This combination removes any sense of beat for the listener. The addition of the other sections of the orchestra (Figure 22) is a representation of my concern that as much as an inmate might believe there is solace to be found in their situation, there will never be any true peace of mind while they remain in this environment. This leads to the longing for freedom, or the idea of freedom, represented in the final movement.
The beginning of the fourth movement, “False Freedom,” retains the piano “chime” effect from the previous movement and provides another moment of aleatoric writing for several players (Figure 10). This serves as a bridge between stylistic differences of the two final movements, and this leads to a flurry of notes found in multiple instrument sections which reference the acrobatic nature of the winds in the first movement. The intent behind this approach is to mirror the idea of returning to a person’s original state of being or environment. As a result, even though there are new musical ideas in the fourth movement there is an ever-present feeling of returning to the beginning. New material emerges at rehearsal mark EE, but the piano and harp both resume a similar chime effect found at the end of movement three. In the string section found at rehearsal mark GG, the players temporarily resume a pattern found in the introduction. The strings move away from this pattern, but immediately following this change the woodwinds resume similar note flurries from the first movement. Gradually, the music finally reaches its climax at rehearsal mark II. This moment marks a firm establishment of the
individuality of the movement, and could almost be thought to be the end of the piece due to a loud, sustained chord. However, much like sections of the first movement it is interrupted with a false cadence (Figure 11). A moment from the first movement is revisited as yet another attempt to mirror the idea of returning to an original state of being. At rehearsal mark KK, there is one final moment of large scale aleatoric writing. It is a loud, truly chaotic moment to represent the overwhelming nature of imprisonment and the attempt to rejoin the free world. This leads to the second and successful attempt of an ending to the work, and this is achieved by revisiting the material from rehearsal mark II. Instead of interrupting the section with another false cadence, however, the ending is prolonged with repeated emphasis on the chord demonstrated in the piano part. After several accented moments with the chord, the bulk of the orchestra stops playing and leaves the basses and cellos with a low drone. This effect creates a weaker sense of resolution, which represents my understanding of what it is like to leave the prison system.

Conclusion

My time spent at the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility was of great personal significance. Before my tenure at the facility I had not volunteered to serve my community, and as a result I have developed a desire to pursue social understanding and equality. The students I met with made mistakes in their lives, but I am of the belief that it is the responsibility of society to properly address the needs of these students in order to successfully reintegrate them back into the world. Their stories have played a notable role in my desire to teach, volunteer, and become more socially and politically aware. By creating *Bars, Chains, and Broken Things*, I hope to
assist in the awareness and activism related to concerns with the current prison system in the United States of America.
Bibliography


BARS, CHAINS, AND BROKEN THINGS

Introduction
i. Abandonment
ii. Imprisonment
iii. Solace
iv. False Freedom

for orchestra

ANDREW J. FILSON
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Program Notes:

*Bars, Chains, and Broken Things* is a four-movement work for orchestra with a distinct social narrative: the American prison system. During my time working as a volunteer with the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility, I came to know several young men and their stories. This piece serves as a loosely programmatic work chronicling the four most significant concepts which resonated with me. The individual movements are named and seek to musically represent these ideas: “Abandonment” - a common feeling among the incarcerated, “Imprisonment” - the effects and words of those feeling isolated, “Solace” - a state of calm acceptance, and “False Freedom” - a refutation of the belief that release from the prison system signifies the end of society's punishment. It is my hope that this work serves as a musical contribution to awareness of the current issues faced in the American prison system.

Performance Notes:

All movements are attacca, therefore players should be ready to immediately begin the following movement. This is particularly important for the pianist in the transition between movements i. and ii.

In mm. 120–123, the woodwinds and strings should not be terribly concerned with the precision of rhythm. The motion is what is important, so focus mostly on conveying the effect and the successful arrival on the sustained notes.

**Whispering**

At rehearsal mark K in movement ii., players in certain sections will notice text boxes. Text should be whispered (strongly, or you will be lost in the sound of the other instruments) in no particular rhythm unless specifically marked, otherwise the players shall repeat the text for the duration of the marked arrow.

**Aleatory**

In sections such as rehearsal mark M in movement ii., players need to repeat the given phrase without remaining in time with each other (watch closely for conductor) and should stagger their playing if marked with a rest at the end. This is particularly important for the string glissandi found in multiple sections.

There are instances in which the aleatoric sections do not begin with all participating members starting simultaneously. The conductor will dictate both instruments entries and the completion of the section.

**Temporal Measurement**

The third movement incorporates temporal qualities in lieu of metric options frequently; it is imperative that the orchestra members watch the conductor. Moments of rests marked with fermatas containing time stamps will be counted by the conductor, and sections containing small subsets of instruments playing by measuring in seconds will require good communication between players and the conductor.

**Isolated Tempo**

There are moments in which the pianist and vibraphone player will have a "chime" effect with a tempo marked differently from the rest of the orchestra. This should be treated literally, and with careful attention to a steady beat.

**Piano Harmonics**

At rehearsal mark Y, the pianist has harmonic markings. While holding the damper pedal, the pianist will need to lightly place fingers on the strings of the pitches with the diamond note heads and produce the indicated harmonic.

**Dynamics**

All dynamic markings are global, so adjustments may be necessary and encouraged in order to properly balance the orchestra.

Text:

I didn't do it
It was an accident
You're hurting me
I want my parents

The hotbox
The hole
The SHU (pronounced "shoe")
The block
The bling
Lockdown
AdSeg (pronounced "ad-saygg")

I want to leave
Let me out
I need to go
Please

It's quiet
Except for the voices
I hear them at night
At night

Duration:

C. 16
Transposed Score

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in Bb
2 Bassoons

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
2 Trombones
1 Bass Trombone
1 Tuba

4 Timpani
Percussion 1: Suspended Cymbal
Percussion 2: Vibraphone
Snare Drum
Bass Drum
Tubular Bells

1 Harp
1 Piano

Violins I
Violins II
Violas
Cellos
Double Basses
Legend:

crescendo from nothing

diminuendo into nothing

exact multiphonic

multiphonic based on the provided fundamental

spoken text, unmeasured, repeated duration corresponds to arrow length

harmonic glissando

gradual accelerando with beamed pitches

note values should correspond to provided tempo, but can be inexact with its repetition - repeat for duration indicated by arrow

play random notes in the given register - repeat for duration indicated by arrow

piano harmonics, lower pitches with diamond note heads are the played notes (fundamentals), bracketed notes are the sounding pitches

snare drum - rim shot

n.v. non vibrato
Freely, \( \frac{1}{4} \) = ca. 60

A little slower, \( \frac{1}{4} \) = 58
iv. False Freedom