

Das Nichtige

for clarinet in B \flat and violin
(2017)

Maya Miro Johnson

Program Notes

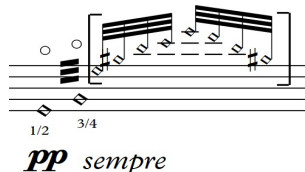
Das Nichtige was written in contemplation of the theories of Karl Barth, a 20th century Swiss-Protestant theologian, on the nature of evil in a post-Holocaust schema. His ideas seek to preserve traditional beliefs on evil, which are not necessarily easily reconciled with the horrors of total warfare that the 20th century brought to the world. I found that his notions were extremely dissonant with my own; however, of his reasoning, one idea in particular stood out to me as a potent image: the supposition of evil as "das Nichtige", or "the nothing/the void", which surrounds the world as an intangible yet readily present potentiality of evil, a passive yet adversarial threat to the divine and to the mortal. What was most interesting to me about this was the precise language Barth uses to describe it. The word "nichtige" itself can be translated a few different ways, and I prefer the more loose and esoteric "nothing", over "nothingness", or "void" (more accurate translations), for it allows for more possibilities of interpretation, just as the main violin motif in the piece consists of ambiguous, chance-based harmonics. Thinking about what "nothing" (or the absence of sound) might sound like was an interesting challenge, and I eventually settled on the motifs of breath, unspecified harmonics, and a kind of primordial call and response for the First Supposition and Third Supposition segments (the Second Supposition being more interested in pitch). To create a nebulous atmosphere, I employed a number of extended techniques and vocalizations. These eerie echoes serve to destabilize the ear's expectations yet unify the self-contained sonic world of the piece, much like Barth's theory itself.

-Maya Miro Johnson

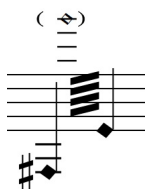
November 2017

Duration: ca. 10-12'

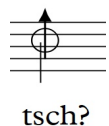
First performed by Kattiusca Marín, clarinet, and Jesse Massey, violin
February 23rd, 2018, the Urban Arts Gallery, Salt Lake City, Utah.



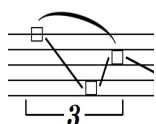
Harmonic trills, violin: created by quickly alternating between the two pitches indicated, with the lower finger at half pressure, and the higher finger even less. Pressure and therefore partials are ultimately ambiguous, and any number of overtones may be allowed to sound.



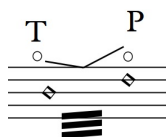
Multiphonic trills, clarinet: corresponding to the gesture for violin above, finger the lower notes in rapid succession while aiming to produce the higher sounding partial.



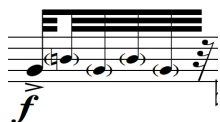
Breath tone #1, clarinet and violin: articulated breaths and soft vocalizations. The specific syllables or phonetic sounds of the whispers are written out in "libretto" below the staff. For the clarinet, this will be executed both outside and inside of the mouthpiece throughout the score.



Breath tone #2, clarinet: pure air tones through the instrument, indicated in high, medium, and low registers and largely controlled through embouchure.



Contact point indications, violin: a bent line indicates an audible transition in contact point. The abbreviations T, O, and P stand for sul tasto, ordinario, and sul ponticello.



Partial left hand pizzicato ornaments, violin: only the first note should be plucked with the right hand. The notes in parentheses follow as left hand fingerings only, catching the string while it still resonates.

N.B.

Simple and recognizable extended techniques, such as bowing behind the bridge, blowing into the f-holes, bowing the tailpiece, playing beyond the fingerboard, singing into the clarinet, slap tongue, flutter tongue, key clicks, and glissandi are notated in the score with written instruction.

Multiphonics are at the discretion of the clarinetist.

Excerpted Sample Score

Das Nichtige

Ist Supposition

Maya Miro Johnson

2017

A breath (unit of time = +/- 50)

in mouthpiece

Bb Clarinet

2

shh tsch? *mp* shh whho?

Violin

any number of these partials might be allowed to sound

pp sempre

sim.

T P T

IV

Cl.

7 3 4 2

pp

n

Vln.

T P P T

p

Cl.

11 4

ppp

n thickening

Vln.

mp

mf

trm

3
14 2 // 6 () () ()
Cl. *f* *ppp*

beyond the fingerboard
Vln. (tr) // *ppp* *p* sempre 7 *tr*

19 2
Cl. *n*

Vln. 5 7

22 5 () 2
Cl. *p* subtone *whho...* *tsch...*

Vln. // *T* *P* 5 6

25 3 MULTIPHONIC 4
Cl. *pp*

Vln. *8va* *tr* *morendo*

28 **6** sung into clarinet ad libitum **2** accel.

Cl. *pp* *f*

Vln. *pp* *f* *mf* (sung) sul III and II *tr*

**Nuovo tempo giusto, non veloce ma lento non più
not completely in tandem, but reuniting at m. 37**

33 key clicks

Cl. shh! *mf* *ppp* *f* *f* *p* *f*

Vln. sul tasto *pp* rapid, bumpy

35

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

accel.

Vln. *f*

6 3

5

MULTIPHONICS, ca. 20"

37 **8 rit.**

Cl. *pp f pp*

Vln. *mp* **IV** beyond fingerboard *pp*

now with slight pulse ♩ = 52 +/-

40 **2**

Cl. (embouchure) *p* subtone sempre

Vln. shh - tsch? *mf* tss-tss *f* *p < f pp < mp*

48 **4 2**

Cl. *pp* normal tone *pp* dolcissimo

Vln. *ppp* *p* shh... col legno *pp* chp - tss... **6**

55

Cl. *mp* *p* al tallone

Vln. *mp* darting *mf* dolce *sf*

61 4 8 3 poco accel. . . .

Cl. *mp*

Vln. *whh... mp* *p molto flautando* *mp* *sul III*

65 6 5 4

Cl. *f* *ff* *f*

Vln. *ff* *mp* *f* *sf* *f* *shh...* *pizz.*

69

Cl. *pp* *subtone*

Vln. *arco* *P* *T* *sul tasto* *3* *attacca*

Excerpted Sample Score

88 **8** (with embouchure)

Cl. *mp* echoing *ppp* *pp* slap tongue → ord.

Vln. arco *8va* gliss. molto lento *p* *5* *3* beyond the fingerboard *imprecisely rhythmic*

89 **4**

Cl. *p* *f dolce* *n*

Vln. *mf dolce* *3* *3*

92 → ord. slap tongue **5**

Cl. *pp* *f* *mp*

Vln. *f* *5* *6* pizz. *mf* *5* *3*

Più vivo ♩ = 50

94 key clicks- choose the noisiest fingerings

low

Cl. *f* *ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch*

Vln. *f* tapping fingerboard side

95 key clicks

Cl. *f*

Vln. arco (follow clarinet) *ppp* *mf*

Un poco più mosso ♩ = 112

97 3 slap tongue

4

Cl. *f*

Vln. non vibrato *f* *pp* *f* pizz. *mp*

Excerpted Sample Score

3rd Supposition

Without tempo again

110 **8** WEAK MULTIPHONIC **4** **5** **2** faster

Cl. *p* *p* tsch? whh tsch?

Vln. arco *ppp* sempre

114 repeat several times **G.P.**

Cl. *p* *pp* mostly air *ppp*

Vln. blow into f-holes *f* shh... *sf* tsch? *pp* *ppp* ord.

122 **3** **4** **3**

Cl. *mp* *p* <> dolce

Vln. *mp* haahh... *mp* > *pp* *p* <> dolce

wwho - hha - shh

127 **2** **G.P.** slap tongue **G.P.** **G.P.**

Cl. *ppp* subtone *mp* whh... *p* whh... *p̄* (behind the bridge)

Vln. *mp*

133 **3** **2**

Cl. *mf* ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch *mf* *ppp*

Vln. *pp*

137 **G.P.** **4** // **G.P.** **G.P.**

Cl. *n* *f* *ppp*

Vln. *n* *f* faster *p* shh - tsch?

143 **G.P.** **G.P.**

Cl. *ppp* *p*

Vln. *ppp* 8va bow the tailpiece one full bow ca. 7"