Under the Radar

Steven Snowden

Viola Quartet

2009
While the history of manned flight provides countless tales of tenacious inventors and spectacular failures, one in particular caught my attention while I was writing this piece. Jean Marie Le Bris, a retired French sea captain, designed and built a manned gliding machine based on the physiological proportions of the albatross. He dubbed his glider *L’Albatros artificial* (the Artificial Albatross) and it was to become his life’s obsession.

In December of 1856, Le Bris mounted his glider on a horse-drawn cart and ordered his driver to speed down a country road into the wind. Seated atop the Artificial Albatross, Le Bris unhooked the restraining rope and broke free of the cart. However, the unfortunate driver became entangled in the rope and dangled perilously below the glider as it soared 300 feet above the ground. After sailing about 600 feet, Le Bris’s machine crash-landed in a nearby field. Both Le Bris and the driver escaped without injury and the glider suffered only minor damage. His next attempt however, resulted in severe damage to the Artificial Albatross and a broken leg for Le Bris. Despite this failure and the many that followed, Le Bris never gave up and is now recognized as an important (though eccentric) figure in the development of modern manned flight.

From one perspective, *Under the Radar* is a programmatic portrayal of Le Bris’s relentless tenacity. Musical textures and ideas build to a feverish intensity over and over, but each one, destined for failure, falls short of reaching a culminating climax. From another perspective though, this piece is about giving violas a chance to play in a style far removed from much of their traditional literature. With *Under the Radar* I wanted to write something that was the direct opposite of typical viola music. Rather than a slow and somber dirge, I chose cast the violas into the role of athletic and melodramatic rockstars.

Approximate duration – 6 min.

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very intense \( \downarrow 54 \) but with no discernible pulse

\[ \text{under the radar} \]

\[ \text{for Viola Quartet} \]

\[ \text{Steven Snowden} \]

\[ \text{very intense} \]

\[ \text{sul C} \]

\[ \text{no vibrato} \]

\[ \text{pppp} \]

\[ \text{ff} \]

\[ \text{let ring} \]

\[ \text{ppp} \]

\[ \text{f} \]

\[ \text{ss} \]

\[ \text{no vibrato} \]

\[ \text{sul C} \]

\[ \text{end} \]

\[ \text{attacca} \]

\[ \text{no vibrato} \]

\[ \text{sul C} \]

\[ \text{ord.} \]

\[ \text{end} \]

\[ \text{attacca} \]

\[ \text{no vibrato} \]

\[ \text{sul C} \]

\[ \text{ord.} \]

\[ \text{end} \]

\[ \text{attacca} \]
Slowly Building Steam
accel. from ~ \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = 40 \) in meas. 1 to ~ \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = 90 \) by meas. 7

Viola 1

Viola 2

Viola 3

Viola 4

* continue accel. in measure 7.
repeating until tempo reaches \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = 120 \)
Viola 1 cues measure 8 with a Bartok pizz.

Incessant \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = 120 \)

Under the Radar
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Under the Radar
Under the Radar

Vla. 1

Arco repeat gesture, gradually sliding down the fingerboard.

Vla. 2

Like a passing siren

Vla. 3

Pizz. sul pont.

Vla. 4

Like a passing siren
Under the Radar

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla. 3

Vla. 4

sul C

arco

sinister and

a little off kilter

pp

pp
becoming volatile
aggressive and maniacal
Under the Radar
Freely, like swarms of melodramatic weeping

Extremely intense vib.
with deranged anticipation

accel, poco a poco

ricochet

behind the bridge

ord,
frenzied \( \cdot = 120 \)

Under the Radar

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla. 3

Vla. 4

use bow pressure to produce harsh scratching sound

wild vib.

(Pitch is secondary to dynamic and effect)

use bow pressure to produce harsh scratching sound

wild vib.

(Pitch is secondary to dynamic and effect)