

Symbionts

Jon Jeffrey Grier

For Violin and Viola (2010)

Structural Elements

A symbiont is any organism involved in a symbiotic relationship. In mutualistic symbioses—such as the combination of fungus and algae in lichens, the honeybee and the clover it pollinates, or the clownfish and the anemone—the two organisms have evolved to the point that one can scarcely survive without the special services of the other. In effect, all organisms exist in a balanced, symbiotic relationship with their environments. The environment offers the organism what it needs to survive, and the organism contributes to the finely-tuned workings of that ecological system in the course of making its living. Perhaps a greater appreciation of this relationship would prompt our own species to arrest our accelerating tendency to take more and return less to our environment. We are, ironically, the only ones with any choice about it.

Here, the violin and viola sound closely related parts, often imitative and in the same general range, neither complete without the other. The degree of importance of the parts is equal and balanced throughout. There is a symmetry to the whole: movements I. and V. are different takes on the same material, as are movements II. and IV. Movement III. is unique—the one in which the two instruments combine to sound a single voice.

Interpretive Suggestions

I. Play this very motorically, precisely and delicately for a sort of busy beehive effect. Make all *sul ponticelli* as thin and edgy as possible. Highlight imitative entrances.

II. Very slow, quivering, *rubato*. Extra time is OK where needed or suitable. Play strums and *pizzicati* loudly enough to balance *arco* parts. The two lines can be thought of as vines winding slowly around a tree, with no two tendrils exactly the same.

III. Play with a very steady pulse, but smoothly, gracefully, and lightly lyrically, like a trout holding its place in a stream. Work for a sense of ensemble in which the two lines merge into one, whether playing at the same time or not.

IV. This movement varies much in the degree of independence of the two parts. Play expressively, with a hint of mystery, but in fairly strict time. The transitions from harmonics to ordinary playing should be executed with as little dynamic difference as possible (in those places where no change is indicated). Play the strums in a moderately slow, even, guitar-like manner.

V. In very strict motoric time, tense, changeable, rather like a chase. Bars 77-84 are a reminiscence of the previous movement; play these with a warm, lyrical tone.

About the Composer

Jon Jeffrey Grier holds a B.A. from Kalamazoo College, where he studied composition with Lawrence Rackley, an M.M. in Composition from Western Michigan University, studying with Ramon Zupko, and an M.M. in Theory and a D.M.A. in Composition from the University of South Carolina, where he studied with Jerry Curry, Dick Goodwin and Sam Douglas. Jon has taught Advanced Placement Music Theory and Music History at the Greenville Fine Arts Center, a magnet school of the arts in Greenville, SC, since 1988. He composes frequently for student and faculty ensembles at the FAC, usually when he really should be grading papers. Jon has also been a writer/keyboardist with various jazz-fusion ensembles since 1984. He lives in Greenville with wife Marion and manic mongrels Roxanne and Gracie Jean.