

Suite for a Changing Climate

An Honors Project for the Department of Music

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Suite for a Changing Climate is a four-movement work for classical guitar duo. It is a meditation on the changing nature of the New England seasons and the increasingly uncertain environmental future which we are bound to. At its heart, the piece seeks to explore not only how we mark time through sensory and cultural cues of the natural world, but also how these once reliable signals are becoming unstable in the face of climate change. Each movement of the suite corresponds to a season, beginning with winter and moving cyclically through spring, summer, and autumn. The piece reflects on the dissonance between memory and our present polluted experience of those memories, and further between what was for so long taken for granted as enduring, but is now undergoing rapid loss and transformation.

What drew me to this concept was, in part, a sense of quiet grief. As someone who grew up in New England, I was shaped by the distinctiveness of its seasons, and their range of colors, environments, and discrete worlds. These were not just backdrops, but ways of feeling and of being in time. But the patterns that once seemed so elemental are no longer predictable. Winter is warmer and more erratic, spring is unpredictable in its strides, summer stretches beyond its scope, and the color of our prized autumn foliage fades faster than it used to. These changes are sometimes subtle, but always persistent, and they accumulate into new cultural memories.

Suite for a Changing Climate is not a lament. If there is grief in the piece, it is the kind of grief that also acknowledges beauty. While writing, I imagined moments of joy, warmth, and pure astonishment with natural beauty. The piece functions in part as a memorial to a vanishing experience, but also as a testament to our present moment.

The choice to write for classical guitar duo was both personal and intentional. As a composer, I wanted to focus on an instrument I have a strong connection to and hold in deep regard as both a player and listener. The guitar has tremendous emotional range, and in writing for nylon-string guitar, I was drawn to the wide ranging palette of timbres and effects available. There is a conversational quality to guitar duo writing that felt especially suited to the themes of this piece. One part introduces an idea and the other may endorse, rebuke, or complicate it. This capacity for dialogue was very useful in trying to describe a literal emotional landscape. I also sought to work within the expressive limits of the instrument. With just two guitars, there is an incredible range of timbral and textural possibilities. When writing just one note for example, one has to consider that the same D4 (~299.66 Hz) can be played (technically, though perhaps not practically) on five different strings, each with a varying timbral quality. Depending on where on the string the note is plucked relative to the bridge or fretboard, the timbre can vary dramatically between warm and shrill. Further, if the note is produced as a natural or artificial harmonic, this will create a completely different timbre, and these too can be played on different strings, further enriching timbral possibilities. Between instruments too, different bracing patterns, wood varieties used, and strings radically affect the tone color of the note produced depending on the register and aforementioned factors. When given the choice, one can radically alter the conversational nature of a piece between guitars of different construction. All of these factors present both unique challenges and possibilities when composing for guitar duo. These sounds can evoke natural processes and emotional undercurrents without leaving the realm of traditional musicality.

Suite for a Changing Climate has a clear program. However, I have also endeavored to compose music that stands on its own merits, and my hope is that listeners can also engage with

the suite without awareness of its environmental subtext. In the following text, I will examine each movement individually, tracing how the music seeks to capture a specific facet of each season and the technical elements used to achieve that. Each piece engages with a particular aspect or memory associated with the time of year it represents, while also gesturing toward its present-day instability and the new collective memory forming around it.

Movement No. I: Wintry Mix

Wintry Mix opens the piece with a somber meditation on absence. It is shaped by erosion, both literal and emotional. Winter in New England is now increasingly defined by its irregularity and fragility. This movement attempts to hold that sense of disorientation, capturing both the lingering memory of a season and the unsettling realization that it no longer exists in the same way. The movement may be most aptly described as a modified arch rondo form (ABCBA) where most of the development occurs within the C section (RN 3-4).

The movement begins with an introductory moment formed by a series of gentle harmonics, falling slowly like snowflakes. They are measured and delicate shimmers forming a kind of ethereal melody, suspended over an accompanimental part that shifts uneasily beneath it. The harmonic language becomes increasingly unstable as a first inversion major 7th chord voiced for guitar is transposed up and down the neck, each time beholden to the open high E and D strings, creating increasing dissonance as the voicing moves from C to E to D and eventually Eb in m. 6, creating a kind of quiet unease between the D, Eb, and E all playing against each other.

A short but exuberant triplet passage emerges from this like a sigh of relief (RN 1) before descending into a grim reinterpretation of the opening of the piece at RN 2. The melodic signposts introduced in the opening accompaniment persist, but they are now reframed in a shifting compound meter to create a disorienting sense, as if the foundation beneath is less secure. While the melodic material remains recognizable, it is now surrounded by increased movement, rhythmic irregularity, and more firmly minor harmony. The two guitars, rather than moving in strict coordination, often diverge slightly in phrasing and emphasis, heightening the sense of misalignment and flux. This continues to develop with intensity through RN 3 as we reach an arrival point where the melody is reinterpreted after RN 4 with a syncopated feel that provides a moment of relief but also discombobulation. In the next section, we see a return of the material from RN 1 now reinterpreted, developed, and mixed freely with motives from throughout the piece, ending with a slow and somber release.

In the final section (RN 6), the piece circles back to its opening material, but in a transformed state. The harmonic texture thins, the pace slows, and the original falling gesture returns, but it is no longer soft and luminous. Instead, it has become more urgent. The harmonics have given way to more muted tones where the intervals are tighter and the expression is less dreamlike. This is not a simple return but a kind of reckoning where the memory of snowfall is still there, but it has been altered and weathered by uncertainty. The movement ends not in strong resolution, but in stillness as the music comes slowly to a full stop.

Movement No. 2: Springtime

Springtime is the most overtly energetic movement of the suite, embodying a sense of motion and renewal. Where *Wintry Mix* ends with a quiet stillness, *Springtime* begins in motion, both bright and alive with possibility. Yet even in its bursts of energy, the piece reflects the unease of a season that no longer unfolds with predictability. Late frosts, sudden cold snaps, and erratic weather have rendered spring less a linear emergence and more a back and forth negotiation. The music captures this instability beginning with subtle disruptions, and then increasingly through dramatic contrast of harmonic and melodic content.

This movement is rooted in sonata form, giving it a sense of clear classical structure and coherence. It opens with two clear, lyrical themes. The first is introduced in canon in the two guitars. The imitative texture allows for a conversational interplay between the instruments, with one voice echoing or slightly reframing the other. Both themes are light and optimistic, with playful rhythmic contours and clean, diatonic harmony, though the second introduces a motif of high alternating dyads in m. 19 which will serve as interrupting interjections in the development. In this opening section, the mood is hopeful, and writing it I was reminded of warm air and longer days.

As the movement progresses into the development, the music begins to lose its tonal footing. The melodies, once bright and grounded, are reinterpreted through darker harmonic colors. Immediately the dyads from the second subject are reinterpreted in a minor harmony (RN 2), and cadences are complicated with diminished fifths and other more complex colors (m. 51). Later, octatonic scales begin to emerge (m. 53), obscuring a clear tonal center. This section is more fragmented, with phrases pulled apart or interrupted unexpectedly. Rhythms become less regular, syncopated, or staggered, and what was once lighthearted begins to feel unsettling. The

transformation of the themes is the emotional core of the movement. It reflects the way that warmth can be interrupted by sudden cold, or how early blooms can be lost to frost. The development is full of friction with fragments of the original theme appearing only to be quickly derailed. The music moves through uncertainty before it can return.

When the recapitulation finally arrives (RN 3), it brings a sense of familiarity, but not full resolution. The opening themes are restored and there is a quiet acknowledgement that spring has arrived, but the process is not unchanged. The tonal center is reestablished, but the listener is left with the memory of its earlier collapse. This tension between emergence and disruption is central to the movement's message. *Springtime* goes beyond being a celebration of seasonal rebirth to a portrait of instability. But there is hope in its final gestures: a return, even if tainted, is still a return. The movement tries to show how the joy of spring and disarray of changing seasonal rhythms coexist. In this way, it also keeps the energy of the piece moving forward.

Movement No. 3: Summer's Lullaby

Summer's Lullaby begins as a piece of comfort with a gentle tribute to the warmth, stillness, and suspended time of summer. Beneath its calm surface though lies a quiet unease. In many ways, this movement explores an emerging emotional conflict of the season. There is a temptation to be lulled by serenity, even as the signs of destructive change accumulate around us. The result is a piece that begins tranquil but gradually tilts toward a grim disorientation. The form can best be described as a modified theme and variations, with brief interjections of a second theme coming at poignant moments throughout.

The opening starts simple and tender, composed as a lullaby with a sparse melody and barely making use of the instrumentation's textural possibilities, instead creating a near monophonic line traded between both guitars. The rhythm is simple and unhurried with sweet harmonies. This is the kind of summer I imagine where time stretches and the air is heavy and slow. It suggests that motion should feel optional. But as the piece unfolds, that stillness begins to shift. The lullaby tune, once firmly grounded, is reinterpreted through new rhythmic frameworks beginning at RN 1. The melody and accompaniment, though drawn from the same source, begin to drift in and out of phase with a 3:2 polyrhythmic feel. Their coordination becomes less certain and out of sync in a way that suggests a kind of vertigo. The lullaby begins to feel more like a memory which is still familiar, but no longer comforting. This variation is followed by a bright gesture of planing major triadic harmonies which interrupts the lullaby's distortions (RN 2), attempting to reassert control and return the music to its original calm, but never quite succeeding. This is followed by a return to the theme in a minor tonality, and then a repeat of the planing harmonic figure at RN 4 which is derailed before it is stated in full and overtaken by a forceful and unstable variation of the opening material. This descends into a violent argument between the two instruments after RN 6, both battling for attention and primacy through dynamics. This continues into RN 7 with fragmented aspects of the original lullaby alternating with dense textures derived from the accompaniment in both RN 3 and RN 6 at unpredictable intervals of time.

These disruptions reflect the emotional core of *Summer's Lullaby*. It is the tension between a desire to stay suspended in comfort and the knowledge that climate change is constant. The music becomes a metaphor for inaction and how the allure of calm can sometimes prevent us from responding to danger. To finish, the bright interrupting gesture returns one final time, but

hollowed out and rendered haunting through the use of harmonics and slight shifts in harmonic material (RN 8). What began as a gesture of reassurance takes on an ethereal quality, suggesting that its original intention is no longer effective.

Movement No. 4: Leaf Peeping

Leaf Peeping brings the suite to a close with a reflection on autumn's once gleaming color palette and the increasingly fleeting beauty of the season. Traditionally, autumn in New England has been synonymous with natural vibrancy: beautiful reds, golds, and purples drawing people to come and witness the spectacle. But as climate change accelerates, this spectacle is set to become shorter, duller, and more erratic. Rising temperatures and unseasonal warm spells disrupt the chemical processes that produce vivid fall colors, compressing this aspect of autumn and dulling its intensity. *Leaf Peeping* attempts to capture both the memory of that brilliant dance and the sorrow of its fading, using a modified ternary form (ABABA) to showcase the pattern of diminishing beauty.

The primary theme, which recurs throughout the piece, is fast and syncopated, colored by a melancholy beauty which I think rings true to autumn. Each time the theme returns, however, it appears in a more compressed form (RN 2, 4). The phrase length shortens, the harmonic colors are fewer, and the rhythmic complexity is reduced in both the melody and accompaniment. This gradual erosion mimics both the ecological reality and the emotional impact that the brilliant colors of autumn are fading. The final appearance of this theme in m. 73-74 is stripped down to two short runs of straight eighth and sixteenth notes in each instrument, almost a ghost of its former self.

The second theme (RN 2), which interrupts the first, is excessively bright, making use of the lydian mode of D major to reflect this fact. It is martial and surprising, as well as metrically more stable than the primary theme. This idea was born out of the idea of warm-weather disruptions, jarring bursts of heat that interrupt autumn, affecting both the foliage and the rhythm of the season. In contrast to the sorrowful dance of the main theme, this section feels intrusive and artificial, a reminder that what we're witnessing is not only loss, but interference. Later in the piece, the second theme returns in a minor variation with its once exaggerated brightness now twisted into something more clearly grim. It adopts an imitative form at m. 61 and descends into a cacophony of a modified version of the original motive, displaying the sense of decline that defines the movement. Finally, after one last barren and truncated entry of the original theme (RN 4), the coda offers a moment of retrospection (RN 5). Transforming the initial 5/4 meter of the movement by dividing it evenly into two groups of five eighth notes in the accompaniment, this section briefly recalls each of the four movements' initial thematic ideas in a bare fashion with simple textures and dynamics that create a memorializing sensibility. The piece ends with a quiet holding of space for what has been lost and altered.

Writing *Suite for a Changing Climate* was a formative experience for me as a composer, and as an interpreter of the world around me. As my first significant original work, it forced me to ask difficult questions about what I wanted my music to say. Writing for classical guitar duo was both a comfort and challenge, as on one hand, I had the familiarity of an instrument I play, while also the complex task of shaping a musical conversation that feels alive and cohesive. It wasn't always a straightforward process, but it was one that asked for dedication and further exploration at every step. What emerged is a piece that I hope reflects both the vulnerability of this moment in time and the power of musical expression. I hope you enjoy it.

Acknowledgements

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Suite For a Changing Climate

For Guitar Duo

I. Wintry Mix

Hayden Byrne

$\text{♩} = 50$
play accents ord.
Light P.M.

Classical Guitar 1

Classical Guitar 2

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

10

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

VII

mp

p

12

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

III

mf

mp

p

mf

14

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

dim.

16

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

II

III

mf

mp

6

6

6

18

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

III

mp

mf

p

20

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

22

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp

mf

24

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f

mf

26

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

pp

4

29

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp

mf

m

mf

f

a tempo

42 (rit.) **6**

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

pp

44

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

p

Vib.

46

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

mf

p

rall.

48

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

pp

p

rall.

II. Springtime

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Classical Guitar 1

Classical Guitar 2

$\text{♩} = 110$

mf

mp

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

5

IV

V

mf

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

8

mf

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

12

mf

mf

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

16

mp

mp

39

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

VII₁

41

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf *f* *mp*

V

44

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp

II

47

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

II

49

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp *mf*

sul pont.

52

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp *mf*

55

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf *mf*

m i a m

58

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

60

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f

VII

62

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf *mp*

X

III

65

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp

VII

III. Summer's Lullaby

Hayden Byrne

Classical Guitar 1

Classical Guitar 2

$\text{♩} = 60$

mp

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

p

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

p

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

1

mf

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f

13

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

15

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

17

2

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

18

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f

19

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

rit.

VII

VI

20 $\text{♩} = 45$ $\text{♩} = 60$ 3

Guit. 1 *mp* *mf*

Guit. 2 *mp*

22

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

24 *f* *mp* VIII IX

Guit. 1

Guit. 2 *mf*

26 IX *mf* *mf*

Guit. 1

Guit. 2 *mf*

28 sul pont. *mf*

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

30

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

IV

VII

ff

mf

ff

mf ord.

4

32

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

VII

f

f

34

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

VIII

ff

35

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

5

38

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

41

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

44

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f *p* *mf*

47

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf *f*

6

50

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f *p*

52

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

pp *mf* *f*

15

Guit. 1 *mf*

Guit. 2 *mp*

17

Guit. 1 **1** ♩ = 116

Guit. 2 *mf*

20

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

23

Guit. 1 *mf*

Guit. 2 *mp*

26

Guit. 1

Guit. 2 *mp*

29

Guit. 1 *mp*

Guit. 2 *mf*

51 IX *tr*

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

52 **3** ♩ = 116

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

56

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

59 V *mf*

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

62

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

64

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

66 *rit.* 4 ♩ = 100

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f III

mp

70

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

mf

③

73

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mi m

mf

76

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

f

tr

79 5

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp let ring

mf sul pont.

②

81

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

P.M. -----

p

R.H.

84

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

P.M. -----

let ring

mp

mf

R.H.

87

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

P.M. -----

p

R.H.

mp

mf

3 *m* *i* *a* VII 3 4

90

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mp

92

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

mf

mf

mf

rall.
♩ = 60

96

Guit. 1

Guit. 2

The musical score consists of two staves, Guit. 1 and Guit. 2, both in treble clef with a capo on the 8th fret. The tempo is marked 'rall.' and '♩ = 60'. A dashed line is drawn above the Guit. 1 staff. Guit. 1 features a melodic line with slurs, a trill, and a tremolo. Guit. 2 provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and a tremolo at the end. The piece concludes with a double bar line.