



# Listening Guide

*Quintet* by John Beckwith

*This guide will provide the listener with a framework for understanding and listening to this untraditional work. Insights will be provided into form, instrumental colour, and important motivic features.*

## Description

John Beckwith's *Quintet* for an unusual ensemble of instruments – flute, trumpet, bassoon, viola, and double bass – opens with a brash cacophony of contemporary sounds that are quickly juxtaposed by a quiet ethereal mood. Floating chant-like melodies are intertwined with an array of ensemble colour. The opening atmosphere returns at the end to conclude this introspective quintet, however without ferociousness, as if making peace with the aggressiveness of the opening.

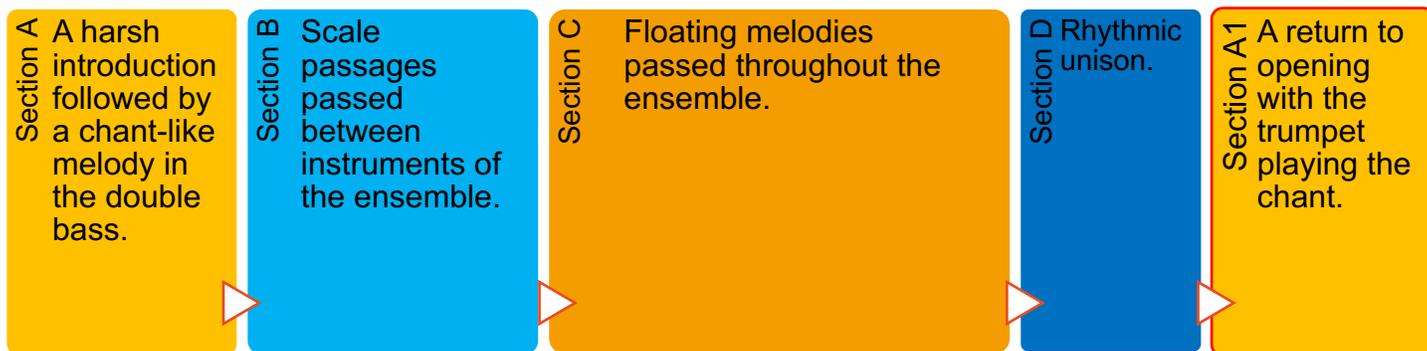
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Composition Date: 2015

Orchestration: flute, trumpet, bassoon, viola, double bass

Duration: 12 min

Form: This piece consists of five sections. Sections A, C, and A<sup>1</sup> (yellow sections) are similar in atmosphere being quiet, using a free meter, and frequent use of minor thirds. Section B and D (blue sections) are louder with rhythmic drive.





## Section A

Description	Time
<p>John Beckwith's <i>Quintet</i> opens with a cacophony of unconventional sounds including key clicks, the bassoon reed played on its own, the trumpet mouthpiece buzzed, and fast fluttering trills.</p> <p>A long glissando (slide) in the bass introduces the primary motive: two notes played strong and loud by the bassoon. These two notes are the distance of a minor third. This interval creates a melodic framework for the rest of the work (<a href="#">Click here to listen to an example of a minor third</a>)</p>	32:35-32:50
<p>The double bass plays a slow floating chant-like melody comprised of minor third intervals. Brief interruptions of colour by the other instruments of the ensemble distract from the chant played by the double bass.</p>	32:50-33:25
<p>Loud forceful interruptions performed by the flute and trumpet are reminiscent of the opening cacophony. The melody, however, continues quietly in the double bass.</p>	33:26-34:17



## Section B

Description	Time
This section is denser with less use of silence.	34:20
Like the previous section, a melody is introduced in one instrument while the others interject with splashes of colour. This melody is more active comprised of ascending and descending scale passages.	
The fast-moving melody is passed throughout the instruments of the ensemble	
Viola	34:20-34:28
Flute	34:28-34:36
Trumpet	34:36-34:44
Bassoon and Double Bass	34:44-34:55
Trumpet	34:55-35:03
A transition to the proceeding section concludes section B. Held notes in the viola and short quiet notes in the double bass and bassoon gesture to a quieter mood, similar to the beginning of the Quintet.	35:10-35:19



## Section C

Description	Time
The flute performs a floating melody with frequent use of minor thirds, like the opening chant. The bassoon accompanies the flute with sustained notes.	35:21-35:50
The viola accompanies the trumpet melody with sustained notes.	35:50-36:20
The melody continues to pass throughout the ensemble. Additional instruments are introduced gradually creating a strong dynamic.	36:20-38:24

## Section D

Description	Time
The free-floating quality of the previous section is contrasted by short, accented attacks. The flute, trumpet, and bassoon perform in rhythmic unison while the double bass performs a low rhythmically driven melody.	38:26-38:52
The bass melody is then passed to the viola.	38:52-39:18



## Section A<sup>1</sup>

Description	Time
A return to the chant-like atmosphere of the first and third sections. The trumpet performs the melody with colourful interruptions by the ensemble.	39:20-39:47
The trumpet performs with a mute changing the colour of the melody.	39:48-40:47
The mute is removed from the trumpet creating a brighter fuller sound.	40:50-42:16
<i>Quintet</i> ends using two musical ideas from the opening:	42:17-42:46
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A glissando (or slide) in the double bass</li> <li>2. A strong accented low minor third in the viola (instead of the bassoon, like at the beginning).</li> <li>3. Long held notes in all instruments creating a calm chant-like feel moving in minor thirds, similar to the double bass melody at the beginning.</li> </ol>	

## Further Listening

Title	Features
<i>Five Lyrics of the Tang Dynasty</i> (1947)	One of Beckwith's most performed works.
<i>String Quartet</i> (1977)	Beckwith notes that these are his most popular and favourite compositions.
<i>Sharon Fragments</i> (1966)	

A full catalogue of Beckwith's compositions and recordings are available on the [Canadian Music Centre website](#).

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