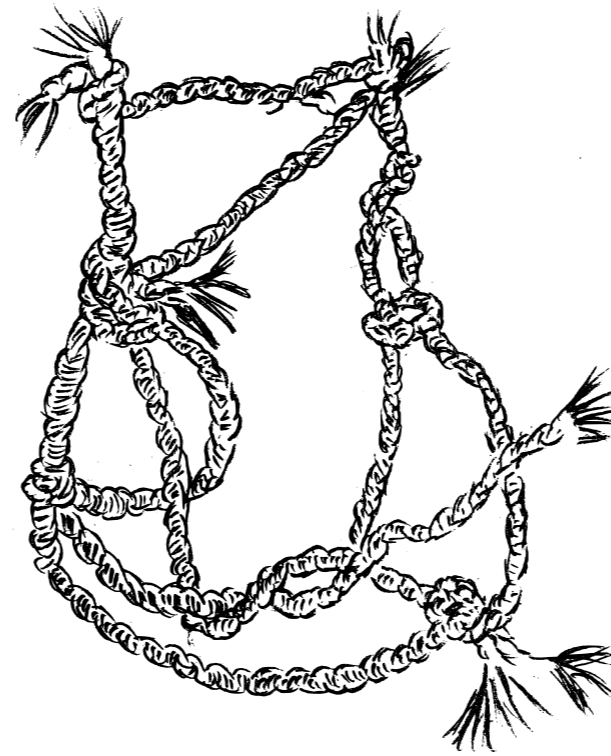


Njabulo Phungula

like knotted strings

for string quartet

(2022, rev. 2023)



Commissioned by the JACK Quartet through JACK Studio

The first performance was given on 28 January 2023 by the JACK Quartet at the JACK Studio Festival, in Ernst C. Stiefel Hall at the Mannes School of Music in New York City, USA.

Programme note

In *like knotted strings*, I looked to the work of Jorge Luis Borges, whose literature often tackles themes relating to infinity, labyrinths, and intertextuality. Having established a basic ‘library’ of sound gestures and microtonal chords, I wrote a piece in which I flesh out these materials and explore a handful of their possibilities, with quasi-quotations which provide a glimpse of a musical composition which may or may not exist in a different timeline. In keeping with the Borgesian themes that inspired the work, the piece presents multiple versions of certain passages. Each version leads to a different outcome, which may or may not lead (back) to another version of that same idea. Gestures and harmonies are re-contextualised and presented as half-remembered recollections. As far as a reading of the form of the work is concerned, one may approach the work from different angles, all of which are equally legitimate. In the grand scheme of the structure, each of the four members (or narratives) of the quartet follows their own paths as the music progresses. Sometimes these parts converge in a rhythmically, harmonically, or gesturally homogenous fashion, only to diverge later on. This aspect of the work presented the greatest challenge for me, as I sought to establish the meta-narrative of the music whilst ensuring the work stands as a cohesive whole.

— Njabulo Phungula

“Some genres describe time as the ramification of alternatives, others as the inevitable enactment of a timeless pattern. In some, alternatives are only possible at a few critical moments; time is like a knotted string with deterministic interstices leading to rare and dense moments of choice.”

— Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*

“Almost immediately, I understood: “the garden of forking paths” was the chaotic novel; the phrase “the various futures (not to all) suggested to me the forking in time, not in space.”

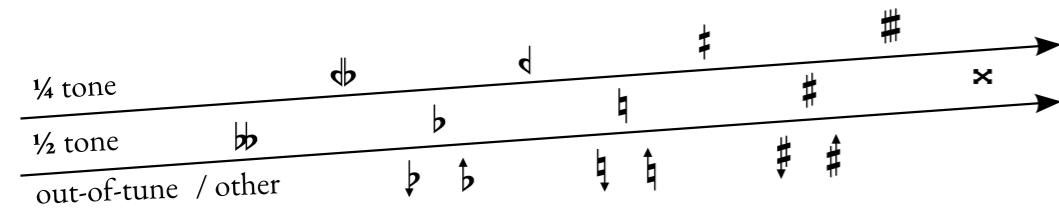
— from Jorge Luis Borges’ *The Garden of Forking Paths*

Performance notes

Duration: *c.* 11'30"

Accidentals only apply to the octave where written, and they apply through to the end of the measure. Sometimes, courtesy accidentals are used.

The following accidentals are used:



* Generally, these arrowed accidentals are used to denote an 'out-of-tune' effect with a pitch deviation not exceeding a $\frac{1}{8}$ tone.

** When these accidentals are used for natural harmonics, they represent the slightly flat or sharp tuning of the 7th, 11th and 13th partials.

General:

- = Crescendo dal niente
- = Diminuendo al niente
- = Exponential crescendo

s.t. = sul tasto

m.s.t. = molto sul tasto

s.p. = sul ponticello

m.s.p. = molto sul ponticello

ord. = ordinario. Cancels the above directions.

c.l.b. = col legno battuto

= Play with strings dampened with the left hand (dampened with harmonic pressure).

= Play the strings either in the pegbox, or behind the bridge. Every instance of this technique is accompanied by the relevant instruction.

= Ricochet / jeté

= Tap the highest (open) string with the bow screw; comfortably fast. Begin tapping near the bridge, gradually moving towards the fingerboard, with the end of the gesture being at, approximately, the halfway point of the fingerboard.

arco; III.;
multiphonic *8^{va}*

Cello: In measure 66.

Multiphonic on the G string, producing the 7th, 8th, and 15th partials.
For reference, you may explore this and other multiphonics on the "Cello Map App".

Video: <https://vimeo.com/388175210/9979426e46>



29 Airy; ♩ = ca.60

Vln. I arco s.p. ord. s.p. ord. s.p. ord. IV 3

Vln. II ord.

Vla. arco norm.

Vc. ord.

mp *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

p *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf* *p*

pp *p* *pp* *mf* *p*

pp *p* *mf* *p*

43 Moving; ♩ = ca.144

Vln. I c.l.b. pizz. mf

Vln. II mf > pp mf

Vla. s.t.; flautando p mf

Vc. c.l.b; dampen strings (harmonic pressure) mf

57

Vln. I *p* *f* *mf* *p*

Vln. II *mp* *mf* *p*

Vla. *(mf)* *p*

Vc. *mf* *pp* *mf* *(mf)* *p*

s.p.

c.l.b.

s.p.; I *8va-1*

III [7] *8va-1*

m.s.p.

65 Cautious; ♩ = ca.54

Moving; ♩ = ca.144

63

Vln. I *pp* *mp* *mf* *p*

Vln. II *pp* *mp* *mf* *p*

Vla. *pp* *mp* *mf* *p*

Vc. *pizz.* *p* *mf* *arco; III multiphonic* *mf* *p*

ord.

(ord.)

ord.

c.l.b.

s.p.; I *8va-1*

arco; III multiphonic *8va-*