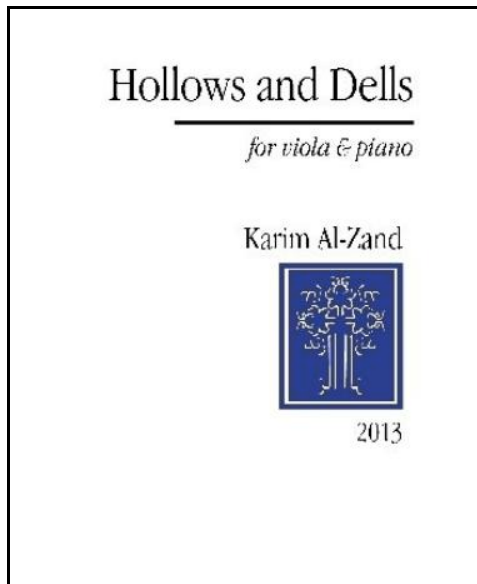


# New Music Reviews

by Andrew Braddock



*Hollows and Dells*, for viola and piano (2013)

By Karim Al-Zand

Duration: 12'

Available at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

\$15.00

Karim Al-Zand's evocative new work *Hollows and Dells*, for viola and piano, artfully explores the concept of memory. Al-Zand wrote this three-movement work for his colleague at Rice University, violist Ivo-Jan van der Werff, who premiered the piece in December 2013 with pianist Simon Marlow. Both the title and conceptual inspiration for this work come from a line in the opening pages of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*: "Within the hollows and dells of memory, over which . . . the sun of my infancy has set." The composer writes that the piece is inspired by "formative musical memories" of a Canadian boarding school, with

British folksong and hymn quotations and Irish and Appalachian fiddle idioms.

Of the three movements, the first exhibits the most innovative and fascinating form. Titled *I'll sing you one, oh!*, this movement uses the "stacking song" form found in the English folksong *Green Grow the Rushes, Oh!* Al-Zand provides the useful example of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* to illustrate the structure of a stacking song, in which each new verse is followed by a repetition of the previous verses. Variation in the musical ideas provides freshness and excitement in this movement, and they appear at a fairly rapid rate, creating unexpected and pleasant shifts in color. The movement begins with four successive open string quarter notes, slurred from C to A, reminiscent of the opening of Shostakovich's viola sonata. After a jaunty measure of off-beat eighth notes, the open strings return, completing the three-measure incipit. The verses then employ a variety of meters (7/8, 3/8, 5/8, and 6/8), creating stylistic contrasts, including a haunting and almost timeless *subito pp* in the 5/8 verse and a lyrical expansion and re-imagining of the incipit's second measure in a later verse.

Al-Zand provides a new take on the form of the stacking song, going beyond simple verbatim restatements of earlier verses. The composer mines this repetitive structure for expressive gain by both subtly varying the restatement of each verse and, in certain instances, "cross-pollinating" his themes. In the earlier stages of this movement, the repetitions of verses are

made only slightly different from the originals, if at all, through the use of octave displacement or the exchange of material between viola and piano. As the movement progresses, Al-Zand alters each verse more liberally, with the introduction of new harmonies, effects such as pizzicato and glissando, expansion or contraction of register, and even a piano solo section. Additionally, some verses borrow distinctive motives from neighboring verses.

These compositional strategies create coherence and originality within the movement, as well as serving the greater goal of portraying the flawed, yet uniquely beautiful process of memory. Memory is not a fixed and concrete document; rather, it is influenced by a multitude of factors, including one's current state of mind or the presence of other, similar memories. In choosing a formal structure from a song lodged deep in his own memory, Al-Zand creates a fascinating musical depiction of the jostling, vibrant, and ever-changing process of memory.

The following two movements similarly engage in the concept of memory, but in unique ways. He crafts the second movement around Hubert Parry's setting of "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind," and the third draws upon Irish and Appalachian fiddle traditions, combining the energy and excitement found in fiddle music with the harmonically and rhythmically progressive features that one expects from art music.

*Hollows and Dells* is best suited for the advanced violist. Although the last movement lies almost entirely in first position, it nonetheless presents frequent challenges in both left and right hand technique. Because of its frequent meter and mood changes, the first movement requires both performers to be alert

and nimble. Several upper-register passages necessitate accurate and fast shifting. *Hollows and Dells* will easily satisfy violists seeking a fresh, evocative, and fascinating work to add to their recital programs.

The image shows a page of musical notation for a piece titled "Muse" by Don Freund. It is an "Arioso for Bethany" in 3/4 time, with a tempo of approximately 80 beats per minute and a "freely expressive" character. The score is for Viola and Piano. The Viola part is marked "mf singing, searching" and features a melodic line with some grace notes. The Piano part is marked "Piano: flowing, pushing forward as if gently swept by the wind, but oftentimes held back, almost stopping before resuming the push." and includes a "colla parte" section. The score also includes a "with dabs of Pedal" instruction at the bottom.

*Songs without Words*, for viola and piano (2011)  
By Don Freund

Duration: 9'

Score freely available at [www.donfreund.com](http://www.donfreund.com)

Don Freund has written numerous works for the viola, expressing a wide range of moods and characters and showcasing Freund's ability to elicit an impressive variety of sounds from the instrument. His earliest work for viola and piano, *Three Bagatelles* (1968), is an exhilarating and high-octane set of three short pieces that exude vitality, and his *Seven Etudes a due* (1973) for viola and cello explores extended techniques. The *Viola Concerto* (1995) is his most substantial work for the instrument, and the work's single movement has colors ranging from introspective and mournful to humorous and even confrontational.

*Songs without Words*, for viola and piano, is Freund's most recent work for the viola, written in 2011. Of the three selections, two are adaptations of Freund's pieces originally written for other instruments, with one specifically composed for the set. In a sense, this work functions as a compendium of the composer's lyrical music in its many forms, and it displays

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his intimate knowledge of the viola's soulful qualities.

The first selection, *Muse*, is an arioso dedicated to Bethany Harper Bernstein. She premiered Freund's *Three Bagatelles* and taught the viola to him in an undergraduate string methods class. In this work, the viola has a plaintive melodic line interspersed with frequent interruptions. The melody is characterized by expressive leaps of perfect fourths and fifths. Underneath this melody, the piano plays right-hand eighth notes that meander throughout the entire movement, creating a feeling of searching. In the score, the composer poetically instructs the pianist to be "flowing, pushing forward as if gently swept by the wind, but oftentimes held back, almost stopping before resuming the push." Accented chromatic neighbor notes among these right-hand eighths form tritone dissonances against the simple chordal bass, infusing the music with nostalgic yearning and a twinge of pain. The movement cycles through various transpositions of the original melody, exploring all but the uppermost registers of the viola's range, before reaching a sparse conclusion with open string pizzicato chords.

*Morning Sunsong*, second in this collection, originally appeared in Freund's concerto for alto saxophone, *Sunscapes* (2006). Much like *Muse*, this song has a lyrical feel, along with more harmonic and rhythmic complexity. The general ABA' form of this song begins with a viola melody to be played with the indication of a

"pop-tune rubato" that includes some chromatic excursions around a loosely defined tonal center of F. The composition features, among other musical designs, quasi-improvisatory chromatic triplets in the viola, along with dissonant interjections from the piano.

*Come, Gentle Night* is the shortest of the three and concludes this set of pieces in a lively, yet understated way. Its original form includes text; thus it is only in its present form that it has evolved into a song without words. It first appeared in the third act of Freund's music-drama for voices and piano, *Romeo and Juliet*. The speech-like rhythms in the viola part are easily perceptible, and the viola part winds its way through a variety of rhythms that create a spot-on *parlando* style, despite how complex it may at first seem on paper. *Come, Gentle Night* ends with a brief burst of treble piano color, like a small starburst in the sky, bringing this lyrical and soulful collection of songs to a light-hearted and delightful conclusion.

The songs present few technical challenges to the violist and will be accessible to most intermediate players. At around a total of nine minutes in total, and with its simple but beautiful lyricism, this work could serve to counterbalance heftier pieces in a recital program. The score is available for free download on Freund's website, and you can also hear a complete performance featuring violist Atar Arad.