

Matt Browne



**Great Danger,
Keep Out**

for String Quartet

2013

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Program Note

This piece was written for my good friends of the Tesla Quartet. And (not coincidentally) it is meant to be a musical portrait of the famed scientist, Nikola Tesla. Tesla was famous for many inventions and discoveries, including alternating current, wireless radio transmission, and even a fabled death ray. The title “Great Danger, Keep Out” is a variation on a sign that was posted outside of his Colorado Springs laboratory, which housed an fifty-seven-foot *tesla coil* (one of Tesla’s more famous inventions) that reportedly generated the largest manmade lightning bolts to this day (and was also the cause of a citywide blackout). The music is greatly inspired by the following account of the phenomenon by Tesla biographers, Hunt and Draper:

"The crackling and snap repeated and then came a tremendous upsurge of sound as the power built up. There was a crescendo of vicious snaps above. The noises became machine-gun staccato, then roared to artillery intensity. Ghostly sparks danced a macabre routine all over the laboratory. There was a smell of sulfur that might be coming from hell itself. A weird blue light spread all over the room. Flames began to jump from the ball at the top of the mast- first a few feet long- then longer and brighter- thicker, bluer. More emanations until they reached rod like proportions thick as an arm and with a length of over 130 feet. The heavens reverberated with a terrific thunder that could be heard 15 miles over the ridge to Cripple Creek."

While the programmatic “electrifying” essence of the work is clearly evident, I also wanted to include a few “easter eggs” about Tesla’s life, in order to more faithfully represent the famous inventor. These include things like his lifelong obsession with the number three (many of the melodies are based off of thirds; the tritone features prominently in harmonic and melodic material) and the opening tempo indication (“With vigor and vitality”), which is a direct quote spoken by Samuel Clemens upon experiencing some of the therapeutic vibrations caused by one of Tesla’s oscillators.

This piece was written for and is dedicated to the Tesla Quartet.

Duration: c. 4 minutes

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Great Danger, Keep Out

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With vigor and vitality ♩ = 152

X noteheads indicate unspecified pitches. Use only one finger for gliss.

Violin I: *sul E*, *pp* → *ff*, *fff*

Violin II: *sul E*, *pp* → *ff*, *fff*

Viola: *sul A*, *pp* → *ff*, *fff*

Violoncello: *sul A*, *pp* → *ff*, *fff*

A

ff

ff

ff

ff

pizz. *f*

B

ff dance-like

arco

ff dance-like

ff dance-like

arco

ff dance-like

19

Violin I: *pizz.* *f* (measures 19-23); *arco.* *p* to *f* (measures 24-28)

Violin II: *pizz.* *f* (measures 19-23); *arco.* *p* to *f* (measures 24-28)

Viola: *pizz.* *f* (measures 19-23); *arco.* *p* to *f* (measures 24-28)

Cello: *pizz.* *f* (measures 19-23); *arco.* *p* to *f* (measures 24-28)

Double Bass: *pizz.* *f* (measures 19-23); *arco.* *p* to *f* (measures 24-28)

Measures 19-23 are in 2/4 time. Measures 24-28 are in 3/4 time.

24

Violin I: *ff* (measures 24-28)

Violin II: *pizz.* *f* (measures 24-28); *arco.* *ff* (measures 24-28)

Viola: *ff* (measures 24-28)

Cello: *ff* (measures 24-28)

Double Bass: *arco.* *ff* (measures 24-28)

Measures 24-28 are in 3/4 time.

29

Violin I: *sul pont.* *sub. p* (measures 29-33); *ord.* *pp* (measures 34-38); *ff* (measures 39-43)

Violin II: *sul pont.* *sub. p* (measures 29-33); *ord.* *pp* (measures 34-38); *ff* (measures 39-43)

Viola: *sul pont.* *sub. p* (measures 29-33); *ord.* *pp* (measures 34-38); *ff* (measures 39-43)

Cello: *sul pont.* *sub. p* (measures 29-33); *ord.* *pp* (measures 34-38); *ff* (measures 39-43)

Double Bass: *sul pont.* *sub. p* (measures 29-33); *ord.* *pp* (measures 34-38); *ff* (measures 39-43)

Measures 29-33 are in 3/4 time. Measures 34-43 are in 4/4 time.

33 **C**

sub. *mf* *ff* *mf* *ff*

37

mf *ff*

41 **D**

fff *ffp* *fff* *mf* *fff* *mf* *fff* *fff*

E

46

sub. *p* sub. *fff* *mf* *fff* *sub. mf* *pizz.* *sub. mf* *mp*

sub. *p* *sub. mf*

mf *mp*

pizz. *arco*
mf *sub. p*

accel.

52

arco *mp* *cresc. poco a poco* *ord.* *mp* *cresc. poco a poco*

cresc. poco a poco

ord. *mp*

F Wild ♩ = 168

58

ff *fff* *fff* *fff*

ff *fff* *fff* *fff*

ff *fff* *fff* *fff*

ff *fff* *fff* *fff*

molto rit. **accel.**

63

pizz. heavy

8va short

8va short

ff

pizz. heavy

ff

pizz. heavy

short

ff

pizz. heavy

short

ff

G Brisk and playful ♩ = 156

69

arco

p light

arco

ffp light

arco

sf

p light

73

p light

sf

sf

sul pont.

p light

f

ord. p

ord. sf

pizz. arco

p

pizz. sf

arco

p

77

Violin I: *f*, *ord.*, *mp*, *ord.*

Violin II: *pizz.*, *arco, sul pont.*, *p*, *f*, *mf*

Viola: *f*, *p*, *mf*

Cello/Double Bass: *f*, *mf*

81

Violin I: *f*, *ff*, *sul pont.*

Violin II: *f*, *ff*, *sul pont.*

Viola: *f*, *ff*, *sul pont.*

Cello/Double Bass: *f*, *ff*, *sul pont.*

84 **H**

Violin I: *ord.*, *mf*, *f*

Violin II: *ord.*, *sf*, *sub. mf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*

Viola: *pizz.*, *sub. mp*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*

Cello/Double Bass: *pizz.*, *ff*, *sub. mp*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*

88 *spicc.*

fp

mf

sf

sf

sf

91 *f*

f

spicc.

sf

sf

sf

95 **I** *ord.*

ff *p* *ff* *f* *ff* *p* *ff* *f*

p *ff* *f* *ff* *p* *ff* *f*

arco *col leg.* *ord.* *col leg.* *ord.*

p *ff* *f* *ff* *p* *ff* *f*

arco *col leg.* *ord.* *col leg.* *ord.*

99 *col leg.* *ord.*
ff mf

ff mf

col leg. *ord.*

ff *mf* *ff*

col leg. *ord.*

ff *mf* *ff*

103 **J**

fff *As before.* *sub. p* *sf*

fff *As before.* *sub. p* *sf*

fff *As before.* *sub. p* *sf*

fff *As before.*

fff *As before.*

107

sf *sf* *sf*

f *ff* *f* *ff*

110

Musical score for measures 110-112. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves. The first two staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music consists of rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando) and *ff* (fortissimo). There are accents (^) and breath marks (v) above several notes.

113

Musical score for measures 113-115. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves. The first two staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music continues with rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando) and *ff* (fortissimo). There are accents (^) and breath marks (v) above several notes.

116

Musical score for measures 116-118. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves. The first two staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music continues with rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *ff sub. p* (fortissimo, subito piano). There are accents (^) and breath marks (v) above several notes.

K Gliss. with "shaky" vibrato sul. E

119 *fff* violent

Gliss. with "shaky" vibrato sul. A

fff violent

(C#)

fff violent

fff violent

122 *sub. p* *ff* *fff*

sub. p *ff* *fff*

p *sub. ff* *fff*

p *sub. ff* *fff*

L Long, slow gliss.

125 *p*

sub. p

p

128

f sub.p *f* *ff*

133

M

>mp *short* *sub. ff* *f dance-like pizz.* *mf dance-like*

138

sub. ff *f* *mf*

143

Musical score for measures 143-146. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature changes from 6/8 to 4/4. Dynamics include *ff* and *mf*. Performance instructions include *arco* and *v* (accents).

147

Musical score for measures 147-151. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one flat. The time signature changes from 6/8 to 2/4. Dynamics include *p* and *p* *sweetly*. Performance instructions include *pizz.* and *v*.

152

Musical score for measures 152-155. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one flat. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 2/4. Dynamics include *f* and *cresc. poco a poco*. Performance instructions include *arco* and *v*.

157

Musical score for measures 157-160. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 3/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, including triplets and slurs. There are dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f* throughout the passage.

161

accel.

Musical score for measures 161-164. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The key signature is one flat. The time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *ff* (fortissimo) and includes an *accel.* (accelerando) instruction. The notation is dense with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, including triplets and slurs. There are dynamic markings such as *ff* and *f* throughout the passage.

165

Musical score for measures 165-168. The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The key signature is one flat. The time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *ff* (fortissimo) and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, including triplets and slurs. There are dynamic markings such as *ff* and *f* throughout the passage.

168

171

O $\text{♩} = 84$ ($\text{♩} = 168$) Driving

175

$\text{♩} = 168 (\text{♩} = \text{♩})$ $\text{♩} = 84 (\text{♩} = \text{♩})$ $\text{♩} = 168 (\text{♩} = \text{♩})$

pizz. *arco* *pizz.*

pizz. *arco* *pizz.*

pizz. *arco* *pizz.*

179

P

P

arco *garish*

arco *arco*

Musical score for measures 182-185. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. Measure 182 features a triplet of eighth notes in the Violin I part. Measures 183-185 show a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the Violin I and II parts, and a pattern of eighth notes with accents in the Viola and Cello/Double Bass parts.

Musical score for measures 186-189. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. Measures 186-188 are marked "sul pont." and feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. Measure 189 features a sixteenth-note tremolo in the Violin I and II parts, marked "ord." and "fff".