

**The Black Path**  
for string quartet

**Cameron McArthur**  
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## **Programme Note**

The 'Black Path' is a track that follows the southern bank of the river Tees. It is ancient: in the late 5th century it formed the boundary between the Anglian Kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia. Later, when York was under Viking rule, the path marked the north-eastern corner of Eric Bloodaxe's kingdom. For the last few decades, it has been a barren route through the abolished heart of industrial Teesside. Once used by sailors and steelworkers on their daily commute, it carves a scar between blast furnaces, cranes, and heavy pipelines, working steadily out from the town to the mouth of the Tees and Coatham marshes. Grimy steel slag, a by-product of the (now abandoned) steel works along the route was used for the foundations for the path. This slag, combined with the accumulation of industrial cinders underfoot, helped give the path its modern name. It's an arresting and unique landscape, and I am regularly struck by its semi-wildness, as I drive above it on one of my own weekly commutes. An evocative image, it was the inspiration for this, my second string quartet.

The work is split into two movements. The first establishes a traditional score-as-absolute approach, where the performers adhere to a precisely notated, traditionally designed score. The sense of momentum is largely controlled by pitch relationships, texture, and by shapes, gestures, and phrases. The performers' role is simply to convey what they encounter; they are expressive, but always serving the music (and thereby, my intentions). In the second movement, the performers are given increasing amounts of control over the sense of musical energy, making decisions about tempo, metre, pitch, and the general flow of the music. Sometimes one performer takes charge; sometimes all four musicians carve their own path. Eventually, all four players return to follow the precise notation in the score - but the musical momentum is different. The energy has changed, and it cannot be reset.



# The Black Path

for string quartet

Cameron McArthur

Glistening  $\text{♩} = 96$

I

Violin I:  $x.s.p. \rightarrow m.s.p. \rightarrow x.s.p.$   
*ppp* *delicato* *p* *ppp*

Violin II:  $x.s.p. \rightarrow s.p. \rightarrow x.s.p.$   
*ppp* *delicato* *mp* *ppp*

Viola:  $\frac{12}{16} \frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{2}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$

Violoncello:  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{2}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$

8

Vln. I: *ppp* *espress.* *f* *p* *s.t.*

Vln. II: *pp* *espress.* *ppp* *f* *p* *s.t.*

Vla.:  $\frac{12}{16} \frac{5}{4}$  *ppp* *p* *pp* *espress.* *ppp* *f* *p* *s.t.*

Vc.: *ppp* *espress.* *f* *s.t.*

13

Vln. I: *f* *p* *ppp* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Vln. II: *f* *ppp* *p* *f* *p*

Vla.: *f* *ppp* *f* *p* *f*

Vc.: *p* *ppp* *p* *f*

2

17 poco a poco ord. (ord.) poco a poco s.p.

Vln. I *p* *f* *ppp* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Vln. II poco a poco ord. (ord.) poco a poco s.p. *f* *p* *f* *ppp* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

Vla. poco a poco ord. (ord.) poco a poco s.p. *p* *f* *ppp* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Vc. poco a poco ord. (ord.) poco a poco s.p. *p* *f* *ppp* *f* *p* *f* *p*

23 (s.p.) rall. ord.

Vln. I *p* *f* *p* *ppp* *p* *pp*

Vln. II (s.p.) ord. *f* *p* *f* *p* *ppp* *p* *mf* *pp*

Vla. (s.p.) ord. *p* *f* *p* *ppp* *mf* *pp*

Vc. (s.p.) ord. *f* *p* *ppp* *p* *pp*

**A** Hurriedly, spidering ♩=72

28 *mp* *f* *mf* *mf*

Vln. I *mp* *f* *mf* *mf*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

30

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *mf*

*p* *p* *p*

31

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff* *p* *f*

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

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

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

33

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*pp* *f* *ppp* *f* *f* *ppp*

36

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.

*f* *p* *f* *ppp*

5

4/4 5/4

Detailed description: This system contains measures 36, 37, and 38. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature changes from 4/4 in measure 36 to 5/4 in measure 37 and remains 5/4 in measure 38. Dynamics range from *f* to *ppp*. A fingering of 5 is indicated for the first five notes of the strings in measures 37 and 38.

39

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.

*f* *pp* *f* *6*

*f* *pp* *pp* *mp* *p*

*f* *pp*

*f* *p* *mp*

quasi gliss.  
3 3

5/4 3/4

Detailed description: This system contains measures 39 and 40. The key signature has one flat. The time signature changes from 5/4 in measure 39 to 3/4 in measure 40. Dynamics range from *f* to *pp*. Measure 39 includes a *quasi gliss.* instruction. Measure 40 features triplets (3) in the Violin II and Viola parts. A fingering of 6 is indicated for the Violin I part in measure 40.

41

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.

*fp* *mf*

*pp* *f* *mf*

*mf* *p* *mf*

*pp* *sfzp* *f* *sfzp* *f* *sfzp* *f* *sfzp*

5

5/4 3/4

Detailed description: This system contains measures 41, 42, and 43. The key signature has one flat. The time signature changes from 5/4 in measure 41 to 3/4 in measure 42 and remains 3/4 in measure 43. Dynamics range from *pp* to *sfzp*. A fingering of 5 is indicated for the Violin I part in measure 41.

44

Vln. I *f* 6 6 *ff* 3 5

Vln. II *f* *ff* 3

Vla. *f* 6 *ff* 3

Vc. 3 5 *ff* 3

**B**

m.s.p. 'nasty'  
heavy and slow bow  
rapid light touch left hand tremolo

46

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla. m.s.p. 'nasty' heavy and slow bow rapid light touch left hand tremolo *f* m.s.t. flautando III 3

Vc. m.s.p. 'nasty' heavy and slow bow rapid light touch left hand tremolo m.s.t. flautando *f*

47

Vln. I

Vln. II *f* m.s.t. flautando IV

Vla. 3

Vc.

6

48

m.s.t.  
flautando  
IV 3

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *pp*

3

2/4 5/4

51

**C** Shimmering ♩=96

senza vib s.p. poco a poco ord. I II

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

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

senza vib s.p. poco a poco ord.

senza vib s.p. poco a poco ord.

ord. *p* *f*

3 3

55

ord. m.s.p. ord.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ppp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

ord. m.s.p. ord.

ord. m.s.p. ord.

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

ord. m.s.p. ord.

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

5 6 5

59

Vln. I: *p* *mf* *ppp* *p*

Vln. II: *mf* *mf* *ppp*

Vla.: *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vc.: *mp* 3 3 6 *f* *ppp* *mp*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 59, 60, and 61. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The Violin I part starts with a *p* dynamic, moves to *mf*, then *ppp*, and ends with *p*. The Violin II part starts with *mf*, remains *mf*, and ends with *ppp*. The Viola part starts with *p*, moves to *mf*, then *p*, *mf*, and ends with *p*. The Violoncello part has a melodic line with triplets (3) and a sextuplet (6), with dynamics *mp*, *f*, *ppp*, and *mp*.

62

Vln. I: *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *rall.*

Vln. II: *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vla.: *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vc.: *pp* *p* *mp* *ppp*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 62, 63, 64, and 65. The time signature changes to 3/4. The Violin I part has dynamics *mf*, *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and ends with *rall.*. The Violin II part has dynamics *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*. The Viola part has dynamics *mf*, *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*. The Violoncello part has dynamics *pp*, *p*, *mp*, and *ppp*.

67

Vln. I: *p* s.p. → m.s.p. → x.s.p. → tonlos *ppp*

Vln. II: *pp* s.p. → m.s.p. → x.s.p. → tonlos *ppp*

Vla.: *ppp*

Vc.:

Detailed description: This system contains measures 67, 68, 69, and 70. The time signature changes to 3/4, then 5/4, and back to 3/4. The Violin I part starts with *p*, then has a crescendo from *s.p.* to *m.s.p.* to *x.s.p.* to *tonlos*, and ends with *ppp*. The Violin II part starts with *pp*, then has a crescendo from *s.p.* to *m.s.p.* to *x.s.p.* to *tonlos*, and ends with *ppp*. The Viola part has *ppp*. The Violoncello part is silent.

8 **D** Dark, heavy, and rich  $\text{♩} = 120$

70 ord.

Vln. I *ppp* *p* *mf* *pp* *f* *pp*

Vln. II (ord.) *pp* *mf* *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *p*

Vla. (ord.) *pp* *f* *pp* *pp* *f* *p* *f*

Vc. ord. *ppp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *f*

78

Vln. I *mf* *ff* *p* *fff* *p*

Vln. II *f* *mp* *f* *ff* *p* *fff* *ppp*

Vla. *pp* *f* *ff* *p* *fff* *f* *pp*

Vc. *pp* *f* *ff* *p* *fff* *f* *p* *f*

poco accel.

83

Vln. I *f* *p* *f* *p* *ff*

Vln. II *f* *p* *f* *p* *ff*

Vla. *p* *f* *p* *ff*

Vc. *p* *f* *p* *ff*

Aggressive ♩=140

Vln. I  
*p* — *fff* *ff* *p* — *fff* *ff* *p*

Vln. II  
*p* — *fff* *ff* *p* — *fff* *ff* *p*

Vla.  
*p* — *fff* *ff* *p* — *fff* *ff* *p*

Vc.  
*p* — *fff* *ff* *p* — *fff* *ff* *p*

← ♩ = ♩ → Scurrying (♩=70)

Vln. I  
*fffz**p*  
cresc.

Vln. II  
*fff* *p* — *f* *mp* < *f* *mp* — *f*

Vla.  
*fff* *p* — *mp* *p* < *mf* *mp*

Vc.  
*fff* *p* — *f* *p* — *f* *p*

tr~~~~~

Vln. I  
*f* *ff* 3

Vln. II  
*f* 5 7 7 *ff* 3

Vla.  
*f* 5 5 7 *ff* 3

Vc.  
*f* 5 *ff* 3

gliss. up with harmonic pressure  
trill to open strings

10

96

lightly dampen all strings  
bow randomly as fast as possible, staying close to the frog

poco rall. . . .

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff*

*pp* > *ppp*

*pp*

*f* 3

*pp*

99

Meno mosso ♩=64

pizz. 5

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*pp* *mp* *pp*

leggiere

pizz. 3

*pp* *mp* *pp*

leggiere

*ppp*

*ppp*

101

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*mp* *pp*

*mp* *p* *pp*

(ord.)

m.s.p.

*f*

attacca

Free Time - open and spacious

N.B. durations are at performers' discretion, unless otherwise indicated  
move to the next bar only when all performers have played their material

104 pizz.

Musical score for measures 104-108. The score is for four staves: Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. Measure 104 features a pizzicato (pizz.) instruction and a *mp* dynamic marking for the Vln. I part. The Vln. I part plays a series of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The other staves (Vln. II, Vla., Vc.) are silent, indicated by rests.

109

Musical score for measures 109-111. The score is for four staves: Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. Measure 109 features a pizzicato (pizz.) instruction and a *mp* dynamic marking for the Vln. I part. The Vln. I part plays a series of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The other staves (Vln. II, Vla., Vc.) are silent, indicated by rests.

112

Musical score for measures 112-114. The score is for four staves: Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. Measure 112 features a pizzicato (pizz.) instruction and a *mp* dynamic marking for the Vln. I part. The Vln. I part plays a series of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The other staves (Vln. II, Vla., Vc.) are silent, indicated by rests.

115

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*mf* *f* *mp*

continue ad lib.

**Each bar ca. 4"**

118

continue sim. using these pitches in any order

*mp*

continue sim. using these pitches in any order

*mp*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

begin to introduce random accents  
(examples notated this bar only)

*mp*

play in any order  
repeat ad lib  
(pizz.)

121

play in any order  
repeat ad lib.  
(pizz.)

*mf*

play in any order  
repeat ad lib.  
(pizz.)

*mf*

continue sim. using these pitches in any order

*mf*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

accel.

125

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

very slow bow  
gritty sound with no pitch

arco

*p*

pizz.

11/16

**E** Driving, rhythmic ♩=164

129

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff* (4+3+4) III arco IV

*mf* 5 stuttering

pizz.

*ff* (4+3+4) pizz. + II arco III

*mp*

*ff* arco (4+3+4)

*mp*

*ff p*

accents sim.

132

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* 5

3

4:3

5

135 pizz. *pp subito* *f mp*

Vln. I

Vln. II (pizz.) *pp subito* *f mp*

Vla. *f mp* arco

Vc. pizz. *ff* *f*

138 *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp*

Vln. I *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp*

Vln. II *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp*

Vla. *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp*

Vc. arco *mp* pizz. *f* *mp* *pizz.* *f* *pp*

141 *mf* *ff* *mf* *f* *mp* *mp* *f* *mp* *p*

Vln. I *mf* *ff* *mf* *f* *mp* *mp* *f* *mp* *p*

Vln. II *ff* *mf* *f* *mp* *mp* *f* *mp* *p*

Vla. *f* *mp* *mp* *f* *mp* *p*

Vc. *f* *mp* *p* *f* *mp* *p*

144

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff*

*ff*

*mf*

*ff*

*ff*

3 4:3 5 3

146

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

5 5 6 5 5 3

**F**

148

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*f* *mp*

*f* *mp*

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

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

pizz. arco ord.

pizz. arco ord.

153

Vln. I arco *ff pp* *p* 4:3

Vln. II arco *ff pp* *p*

Vla. *f* s.p. quasi gliss. *ff* ord. *pp*

Vc. *f* s.p. 6 *ff* ord. *pp*

156

Vln. I 5 4:3 5 *ff* *p* 5 3

Vln. II *ff* *p* 3

Vla. 3 5 *ff*

Vc. 3 *ff*

158

Vln. I pizz. *pp* *mp*

Vln. II pizz. *pp* *mp*

Vla. pizz. *mp* *mf*

Vc. pizz. *mp*

166

Vln. I *mf* *mp* arco

Vln. II *mf* *mp* *pp* arco

Vla. *f* *pp* arco

Vc. *f* *pp* arco

172 arco

Vln. I *pp* 5 6 6

Vln. II 3 5 5

Vla. *pp* 5 3

Vc. 3 5

174 *poco rall.* pizz. pizz. s.p.

Vln. I *f* 5 3 *p*

Vln. II *f* 5 3 *p*

Vla. 3 *f* 3 *p*

Vc. *f* 3 *p*

18

176 - Lightly ♩=148

Vln. I *pp*

Vln. II *pp*

Vla. *pp* pizz. *ppp*

Vc. *pp* pizz. *ppp*

**G**

179 accel.

Vln. I

Vln. II arco *pp*

Vla. arco ord. *pp* 3

Vc. arco ord. *pp* *pp*

Driving, rhythmic ♩=164

Vln. I *pp* arco 5 6 6

Vln. II 3 5 5

Vla. 5 3

Vc. 3 5

183

Vln. I *f* 5 6

Vln. II *f* 6 7

Vla. *f* 5

Vc. *f* 6 7

184

Vln. I *ff* 7 7

Vln. II *ff* 9

Vla. *ff* 6 6

Vc. *ff* 9

185

Vln. I 7

Vln. II 9

Vla. 7

Vc. 7 7

lightly dampen all strings  
bow randomly as fast as possible, staying close to the frog

186

Vln. I *fff*

Vln. II *fff*

Vla. *fff*  
ms.p. - finger lightly  
vigorous bow pressure  
bright, loud, dirty  
harmonic glissandi

Vc. *fff*  
ms.p. - finger lightly  
vigorous bow pressure  
bright, loud, dirty  
harmonic glissandi

187

Vln. I  
m.s.p.  
light finger pressure  
bounce up and down the strings wildly  
scratchy and almost pitchless  
III  
IV  
5

Vln. II  
m.s.p.  
light finger pressure  
bounce up and down the strings wildly  
scratchy and almost pitchless  
III  
IV  
5

Vla.  
m.s.p. 'nasty'  
heavy and slow bow  
rapid light touch left hand tremolo

Vc.  
m.s.p. 'nasty'  
heavy and slow bow  
rapid light touch left hand tremolo

lightly dampen all strings  
bow randomly as fast as possible,  
staying close to the frog

**molto rall.**

189

Vln. I

pizz. *p* *pp*

6 5

Vln. II

*p* *pp*

morendo pizz. 5 3 3

Vla.

*p* *pp*

morendo pizz. 3

Vc.

*p* *pp*

morendo pizz. 3

192

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

**H** With delicate pride ♩=66

195

Vln. I

arco

Vln. II

arco *pp*

arco N.B. all trills sim. (to touch 4th harm.)

Vla.

*pp* *p*

(pizz.)

Vc.

*pp*

22

Musical score for measures 197-200. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one sharp (F#).  
- **Vln. I:** *mp*, melodic line with slurs and accents.  
- **Vln. II:** *mp*, melodic line with slurs and accents.  
- **Vla.:** *mp*, melodic line with trills (tr) and slurs.  
- **Vc.:** *pp*, arco II, melodic line with trills (tr) and slurs.  
- **Annotations:** "N.B. all trills sim. (to touch 4th harm.)" is written above the Viola and Violoncello staves.

Musical score for measures 199-200. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one sharp (F#).  
- **Vln. I:** Melodic line with slurs and accents.  
- **Vln. II:** Melodic line with slurs and accents, including a triplet of eighth notes.  
- **Vla.:** *p* to *pp*, L.H. pizz. (left hand pizzicato), melodic line with slurs and accents, including a triplet of eighth notes.  
- **Vc.:** Melodic line with trills (tr) and slurs.

Musical score for measures 201-204. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one sharp (F#).  
- **Vln. I:** *mp*, melodic line with slurs and accents.  
- **Vln. II:** *mp*, melodic line with slurs and accents.  
- **Vla.:** *pp* to *p*, (arco) trills (tr) and slurs, including triplet markings.  
- **Vc.:** *pp* to *p*, melodic line with trills (tr) and slurs.

203

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

play in any order  
repeat ad. lib

205

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*pp*  
play in any order  
repeat ad. lib

*mp*  
with cello  
*molto rubato*

*mp*  
with viola  
*molto rubato*

**Freely**

208

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

210 **rall.**

Musical score for measures 210-211. The score is for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). Measures 210 and 211 are marked with a **rall.** (rallentando) instruction. The time signature is 4/4. The Violin parts are mostly silent, indicated by thick black bars. The Viola and Violoncello parts feature sustained chords and melodic lines. A vertical dashed line separates measures 210 and 211.

**Fragile; dying away** ♩=66

212

Musical score for measures 212-213. The score is for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as ♩=66. The dynamics are *pp* (pianissimo) for Vln. I, *pp* for Vla., and *ppp* (pianississimo) for Vc. The Vln. I part has a long note with a fermata. The Vln. II part is silent. The Vla. part has a melodic line with a fermata. The Vc. part has a tremolo and a single note.

213

Musical score for measures 213-215. The score is for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are *mp* (mezzo-piano) for Vln. I and Vln. II, *p* (piano) for Vla., and *p* for Vc. The Vln. I part has a melodic line with a fermata. The Vln. II part has a melodic line with a fermata. The Vla. part has a tremolo and a melodic line with a fermata. The Vc. part has a melodic line with a fermata. A Roman numeral **IV** is written above the Vln. I part in measure 215.

