

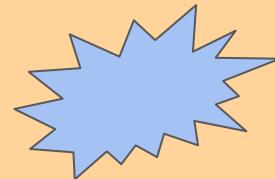


seven sides of fire

inti figgis-vizueta

Youth Orchestra Performance Module
with a [Teacher Resource Guide](#)

WHAT IS A **CONTEMPORARY** **COMPOSER?**



Let's begin by defining our terms:

What comes to mind when you hear the word "contemporary?"

Can our knowledge of music help us to figure out its meaning?

con-tempo-rary we know that **tempo** means "time."

Webster's Dictionary says it can be an **adjective** meaning "happening, existing, living, or coming into being during the same period of time," or a **noun** meaning "a person of the same or nearly the same age as another."

DISCUSSION



What is **YOUR** definition of a contemporary composer?

Use this space to write your ensemble's definition
of a contemporary composer:

WHAT IS A **CONTEMPORARY** **COMPOSER?**

A contemporary composer is someone *living* who is *writing music today*.



Can you name any contemporary composers?

WHAT IS A **CONTEMPORARY** **COMPOSER?**



One great example is **inti
figgis-vizueta**, our featured
composer. We'll be learning a piece
of hers, *seven sides of fire*.

WHAT IS A **CONTEMPORARY COMPOSER?**

Where are some of the places you're likely to encounter the music of a living composer? Let's hear your ideas, then click to see examples!



THE COMPOSER

of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE

is inti figgis-vizueta



inti figgis-vizueta is a composer whose music thrives on **collaboration, interpretation, and transformation**. She imagines her pieces like living organisms—like plants—that grow and change depending on who performs them. Through her work, she **challenges traditional ideas** of fixed musical forms, creating open structures that invite performers to **explore, shape, and reinterpret** sound.

THE COMPOSER

of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE

is inti figgis-vizueta

Inti's native experience:

inti figgis-vizueta's music is deeply shaped by her Indigenous **Quechua** heritage. She honors her **bisabuela** (great-grandmother), who was Quechua and known for her strength—working as the only woman butcher in her town and even fighting men with a machete.

For inti, indigeneity is not just about ancestry—it's about connection to land, memory, and survival. Her music reflects a struggle to reconcile history with the present, blending **Indigenous knowledge** with experimental sound.



DISCUSSION



Are there histories, traditions, or family stories that shape the way you experience the world? How might you express them through music, art, or storytelling?

**What are your ancestral roots?
Do you participate in any activities or traditions that honor them?**

THE QUECHUA PEOPLE

Keepers of Land & Knowledge



The **Quechua people** are one of the largest Indigenous groups in South America, with deep roots in the Andes Mountains. They are known for their **rich traditions, agricultural knowledge, and resistance to colonial oppression**.

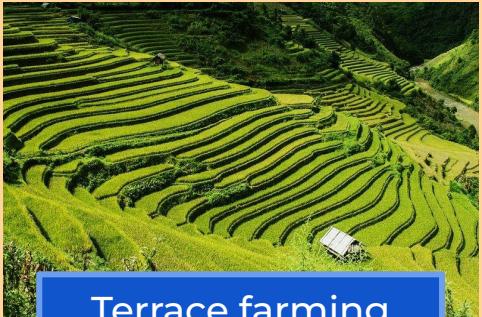
The Andes mountain range is marked here in brown. Which countries do you notice are part of that mountain range?



THE QUECHUA PEOPLE

seven sides of fire is a way for our composer to bring her Quechua family's story to life. For centuries, Quechua communities have practiced sustainable land stewardship, using techniques like **terrace farming and controlled burns** to maintain soil health and prevent wildfires. However, colonial land seizures, forced displacement, and fire suppression policies disrupted these practices, leading to environmental degradation.

Despite this, the Quechua people continue to preserve their language, traditions, and ecological wisdom, passing down knowledge through storytelling, music, and ceremony.



How does writing a piece in which the players recreate a controlled burn help us understand more about the composer's heritage? Can't we just read about it? What is unique about "playing" the controlled burn?

THE IDEA behind the composition of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE—Environmental Sovereignty

inti figgis-vizueta's *seven sides of fire* is inspired specifically by Indigenous fire practices—ways of tending the land that use controlled burns to renew and sustain ecosystems. These traditions, passed down through generations, reflect a deep relationship between people, fire, and the land. This is called **environmental sovereignty**.

“Fire isn’t just destruction. It’s renewal. It’s knowledge. It’s history.”

Indigenous communities across the Americas have used fire to protect forests, enrich soil, and create healthier landscapes. But colonization disrupted these practices. European settlers, misunderstanding fire's role in ecosystem balance, banned controlled burns, taking environmental sovereignty away from Indigenous people.

THE IDEA

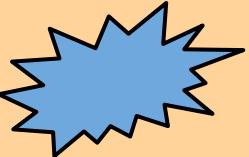
behind the composition of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE

Over time, fire suppression can wreak environmental havoc on the land. For the Andean mountain range, fire suppression led to:

1. Build up of dry brush, leading to larger, more destructive wildfires
2. Depletion the soil of vital nutrients, making it harder for plants to grow
3. Disconnection of people from land stewardship traditions



ACTIVITY



Deep Listening-how does fire sound?

Close your eyes and imagine a fire in your mind. It could be:

- A small campfire flickering in the dark.
- A controlled burn moving through dry grass.
- A raging wildfire, consuming everything in its path.

Really take time to listen to the sounds of the fire **in your imagination:**

- **What do you hear?**
- **How does the fire move?**
- **What emotions does it evoke?**

Read more about Deep Listening in the Teacher Resource Guide!



ACTIVITY

Deep Listening-Creating the sounds of fire

Using your instrument, translate one of these fire-related ideas into a short musical figure. It could be either a sound that **mimics** the actual sound of a fire or a musical idea that **evokes** a fire.

Take a minute to experiment—don't worry about being "correct." This is about capturing the essence of fire.

When everyone has found an idea, share your musical fire with the stand partners around you! **"Listen in"** to your stand partners' sounds, then **"listen out"** into the whole room as different fire sounds are shared!



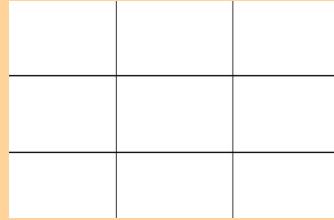
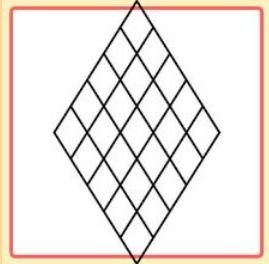
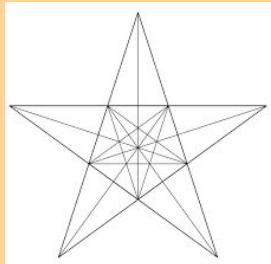
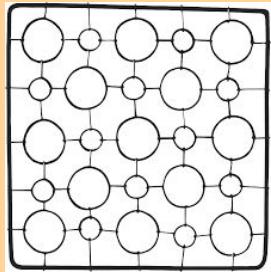
DISCUSSION



What kind of fire did this sound like to you?
How did different students interpret fire differently?
What does this say about how sound can express ideas beyond just notes and rhythms?

ACTIVITY

What is a Cell Score?



Because **creative choice**, **chance**, and **decision making** are values of inti's, she uses a type of musical score called a **cell score** to maximize players' engagement and ownership of the natural evolution of the piece. **A cell score is made up of "cells," or short, repeated musical ideas containing pitch and rhythmic patterns.** Almost like a game board with a few rules in place, players can choose how they go from cell to cell. This means that **your performance of seven sides of fire** will be unique! Cell scores come in all shapes and sizes!

ACTIVITY

Reading a Cell Score

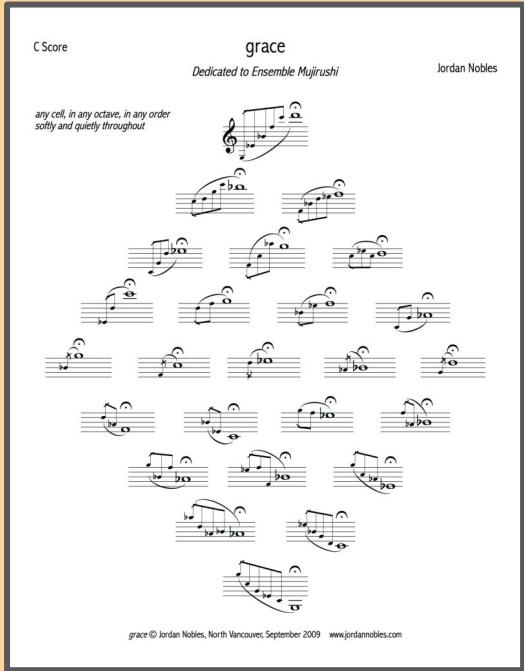
C Score

grace

Dedicated to Ensemble Mujirushi

Jordan Nobles

any cell, in any octave, in any order
softly and quietly throughout



grace © Jordan Nobles, North Vancouver, September 2009 www.jordannobles.com

Cell scores can look like a diamond, like *Grace*, by Jordan Nobles.

In either case, with some composer guidelines in place, and some direction by a conductor, **players will make choices** about which cell to start with, and how to proceed through the piece!

In C.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

7. 8. 9. 10.

11. 12. 13. 14. 15.

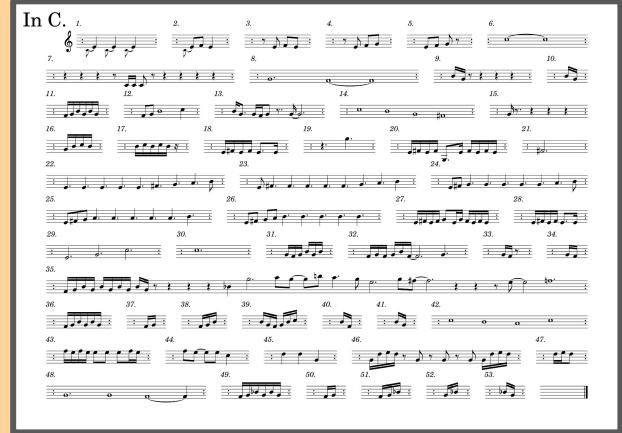
16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21.

22. 23. 24.

25. 26. 27. 28.

29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34.

35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53.



They can also look like a measure map, like *In C.*, by Terry Riley

ACTIVITY

Reading a Cell Score

On the next slide, you will see a **simple cell score** made up of melodic fragments from inti's piece. Keep in mind that *your ideas of how to play the cell* are just as important as the composer's in a piece like this, which invites you into the co-creative process!

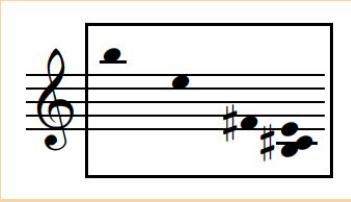
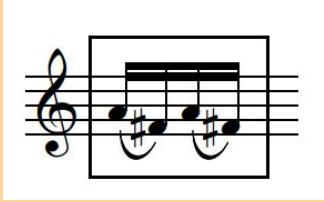
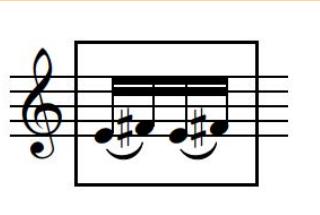
1. Find your triangle of cells based on your clef. Establish your tempo.
2. Start in any cell and play it more than twice. Continue until you feel it's time to change cells.
3. The piece ends when everyone has finished playing all 3 cells in their triangle. It's ok to finish at different times!

Same listening tips:

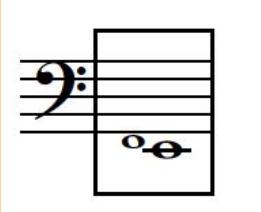
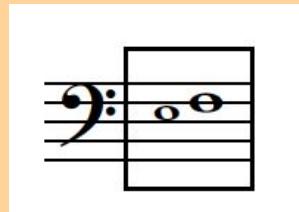
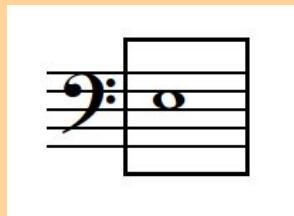
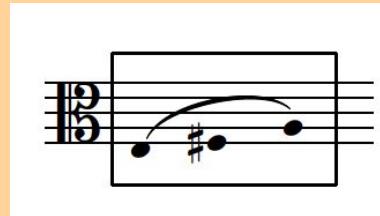
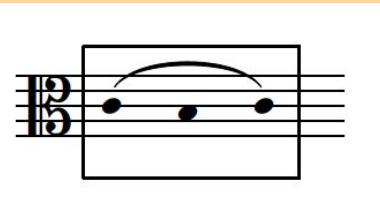
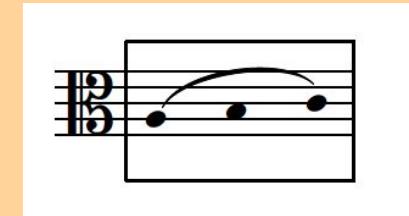
- Listen out into the room to blend and create with other players.
- Can you hear one person's cell?
- Can you hear the composite piece, made up of all the individual cells?

ACTIVITY

Reading a Cell Score



Remember to **listen** to the other people playing, and **create** as a response to the others.



ACTIVITY

Taking our cell score learning a step further, let's play this one, which uses the **actual format** of melodic fragments from *seven sides of fire*—like you normally read music, left to right, but following the rules of the cell score.

Using the same listening tips from above, play each cell in the order they enter on the score, creatively *layering* and *dovetailing* to evoke a sense of fire. What side of fire might this become?

The musical score consists of seven staves of music for a string instrument, likely a cello. The staves are arranged vertically, with the top staff in treble clef and the bottom staff in bass clef. The music is divided into melodic fragments by vertical lines and connected by horizontal arrows pointing from left to right, indicating the sequence of performance. The fragments are as follows:

- Fragment 1: Treble clef staff, four notes: B, A, G, A.
- Fragment 2: Bass clef staff, one note: C.
- Fragment 3: Treble clef staff, six notes: B, A, G, A, G, F#.
- Fragment 4: Bass clef staff, one note: C.
- Fragment 5: Treble clef staff, six notes: B, A, G, A, G, F#.
- Fragment 6: Bass clef staff, one note: C.
- Fragment 7: Treble clef staff, six notes: B, A, G, A, G, F#.

Performance instructions and markings include:

- independent, slow** (tempo marking) over Fragment 3.
- 3** (dynamic marking) over Fragment 3.
- tap fingers quickly on open strings** (instruction) over Fragment 7.

THE COMPOSER

of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE

is inti figgis-vizueta

In the words of our composer:

“For the most part my pieces are workshops in some ways. It’s almost like a loose suit, and then we fit it over the rehearsal.”



Knowing this, what do you think you'll need to bring to a performance of this piece? Why do you think it's important for inti to have the pieces be open to interpretation.

THE COMPOSER

of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE

is inti figgis-vizueta

Here is what inti thinks:

“We’re able to continue to revisit [my pieces] and see how they’ve changed. I’ll hear people come back and play something that I haven’t heard in years... And suddenly someone just blows me away with a completely different place that they go with it.”



Turning the **IDEA** into **SOUND**

Let's take a look at side ii: *burning*

The ensemble's technical focuses are playing fast string crossings, harmonics, drones, and bent notes. But inti has given the ensemble another vital focus: **choice!**

Each musician has **choices in how they shape the story** of the burning fire.



LET'S PLAY

Co-creating the musical story

How does “foliage burning” **sound in your mind?**
Take a minute to make the sounds of burning foliage on your instrument. You might even include your **fire sound ideas** from slide 15.

Now let's look at **cell C** in *inti's burning*. Take a few moments with your stand partner/s to become familiar with your parts.

Following *inti's* notation, blend your ideas together with *inti's* directions to co-create your collective **burning soundscape!** Take time to listen to one another as you create this cell together. Keep in mind what came **before** and what comes **after** this cell. This will help you shape your choices!



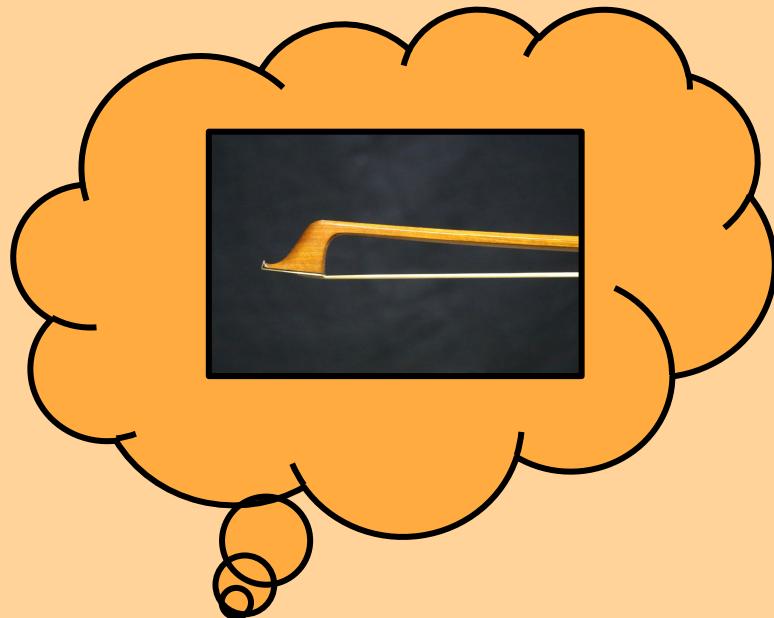
Now this part of the story, *the cell*, has been created by both our composer and...YOU!

QUESTION



So, what incredibly, amazing tool does a string player have to explore the variety of textures and intricacies of fire sounds?

Click to affirm what you already all knew!



THE IDEA behind the composition of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE: The World of the Bow!

inti's piece gives us the opportunity to get to know the potential of our **bows** to help create a story soundscape; in this case, the different sound qualities the *seven sides of fire*. Bows contain a world of sound, executed through **pressure (weight), placement (contact or sounding point), and speed**. inti encourages the ensemble, with imaginations firing, to make individual and collaborative choices, using the bow in a variety of ways to create the evolution of the fire. You might even consider **intention** to be the most important part of your bow work!



THE IDEA

behind the composition of SEVEN SIDES OF FIRE

Pressure: The amount of weight placed upon the bow as it makes contact with the string.

Placement, or Contact/Sounding Point: Where a player places the bow in between the bridge and fingerboard. Sometimes these are called bow highways, measured by the width of the bow hair. Using the middle of your bow, place the hair flat on the string, right next to bridge. That is Highway 1. Then you measure from that endpoint to the next to find your subsequent highways, each getting closer to the bridge. There are about 5 in between the bridge and fingerboard, each containing their own expressive possibilities!

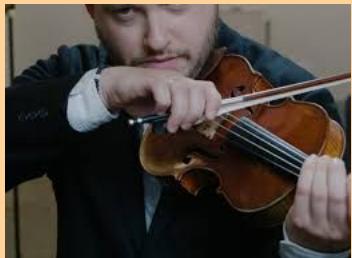
Speed: How fast a player pushes, or pulls the bow. Pretty obvious, right? But, when combined with pressure and placement, speed has a whole new set of possibilities!



LET'S PLAY

Pressure, placement, and speed are important choices in creating the sound you want, but so are the bow **tilt** and **angle**!

Tilt: Place the middle of your bow with the hair **flat** on your D string. If your bow hair is flat you should see the shadow of the stick on the hair. Now, using your fingers, and maybe a tiny bit of wrist, tilt the stick away from you. To tilt or not to tilt- why is this important?



Angle: Thinking of the bow like a teeter-totter, your fingers, wrist, arm, and shoulder consistently calibrate to keep an optimal bow angle relationship to the string. The most basic way to think about it is if you are angled far to the right or left, you will play 2 strings at once. Sometimes you want that, but when you don't, use your bow arm as a lever to correct the angle.

LET'S PLAY

Two creative invitations!

A string player is constantly making decisions about *pressure, placement, speed, angle, and tilt* of the bow, to create the sounds they want to make. But sometimes composers include special bow techniques to evoke unique sounds. Below are two beautiful invitations by inti to use our bows creatively and with intention:

1. Take a look at Cell B in *side ii: burning*. Here, inti includes **sul pont** (on the bridge), and **sul tasto** (over the fingerboard), with this direction: “play fast 16th note figures between D and A strings, with notes in A [A B C# D E F# G#], create little melodies, settle into melodic patterns, move between sul pont and sul tasto.”
2. Check out *side iii: smoking*. inti gives this direction: “play given melodies; start almost pitchless (**brushstroke sound**) then slowly add tone & dynamic until haunting & cantabile.”

How might you use creatively use your bow techniques to achieve the sounds inti invites us to bring to life in these two examples?

Turning the **IDEA** into **SOUND**



Now, using more **refined bow technique**, let's take a look at side V: *sprouting*

The ensemble's technical focus is arpeggiated chords, played *pizzicato*, or *arco*. The soloists' technical focuses are playing the written pitches and musical gestures. Here again, inti has given both the soloists and the ensemble another vital focus: **choice!**

As with *burning*, both ensemble and soloists have **choices** in how they shape the story of the sprouts emerging from the ashes into dense, new growth.

LET'S PLAY

Co-creating the musical story

How does “sprouting foliage” **sound in your mind?**

Take a minute to make the sounds of sprouting foliage on your instrument.

Now let's look at **cell A** in inti's *sprouting*. Take a few moments with your stand partner/s to become familiar with your parts.

Following inti's notation, blend your ideas together with inti's directions to co-create your collective **sprouting soundscape!** Take time to listen to one another as you create this cell together, and enjoy playing with dynamics and presence! Think critically about what came **before** and what comes **after** this cell. Make choices boldly!



Now *this* part of the story, the cell, has been created by both our composer and...YOU!

DISCUSSION



This module on *seven sides of fire* has taken us on a contextual journey about Indigenous environmental sovereignty; specifically controlled burns. Why do you think it's important to become familiar with this cultural practice while co-creating inti figgis-vizueta's piece?

Going further, how does improvisatory cell score practice, and expanding the possibilities of your bow technique help you bring *seven sides of fire* to life?

RESOURCES

National Park Service, [“Indigenous Fire Practices Shape Our Land.”](#)

U.S.A. Today, [How controlled fires have helped prevent mega-fires for centuries](#)

CREDITS

President and CEO: Melissa Ngan

Artistic Director: Curtis Stewart

Education Director: Kevin James

Curriculum Design: Leila Ramagopal Pertl and JL Marlor, Education Coordinator

Thank you to inti figgis-vizueta for composing *seven sides of fire* and for creating a work that draws on a rich history to inspire and connect both students and educators alike.

seven sides of fire was commissioned by American Composers Orchestra via EarShot: Advancing Equity through Publishing & Repertoire Development, made possible through support from the Sphinx Venture Fund. Administered by EarShot Publishing, exclusive publisher, in partnership with Boosey & Hawkes, sole licensing agent.

Thank you to all participants, educators, and students who have engaged with this module. Your curiosity and creativity continue to make music meaningful and impactful.