

James Weeks

Ground-level (Drawing)

for a string player

2025

In a garden, yard, park, on a doorstep, or anywhere a wild plant such as a weed is growing, prepare by immersing yourself in the sound environment; with eyes closed, focusing on each sound in turn and gradually immersing yourself within their polyphony (see Polyphonic Listening). Continue until you feel calm, focused and attentive, then open your eyes.

‘Draw’ the plants, as many as you want, on your instrument, one after the other. Sketch carefully and methodically, attending closely to the detailed shape of each part of the plant, adding texture and shading as desired. Sit close to the plant you are drawing.

For writing implement, use a bow, or fingertips, or a natural material such as a feather (the quills rather than the point) or the stem of a wild plant.

Sketch mostly on the strings, but sometimes if desired moving across adjacent parts of the body of the instrument. Move in all directions across this writing surface, according to what you are sketching. Space does not need to be mapped directly onto the instrument – it is the gesture of the sketching movement that is captured, not the shape of the plant itself – though this often happens naturally with individual strokes and lines.

Strings can be tuned in any way. They can be lightly muted with the LH, or left unmuted; or move between these two options intuitively as you work. Do not pluck strings deliberately.

The piece should be mainly very soft, only a little louder than a pencil moving across a sketch-pad. The sounds that emerge are incidental to the movement that made them; enjoy these as they emerge, and the way they sit within the overall sound environment. Pause whenever you want and listen to the sound environment.

You may wish to record your sketch, or not.

Finish the piece when you want.

Any string instrument can be used for this, bowed or plucked. Multiple performers can perform the piece at once, as long as they are sufficiently far apart to be able to concentrate solely on their own work. Any audience members should be situated among the performers and should not move during the (very quiet) performance.

*This piece can be performed alongside **Ground-level (Looking)** and/or **Ground-level (Touching)**, or their recordings superimposed later, as desired.*

*after Dürer
July 2025*