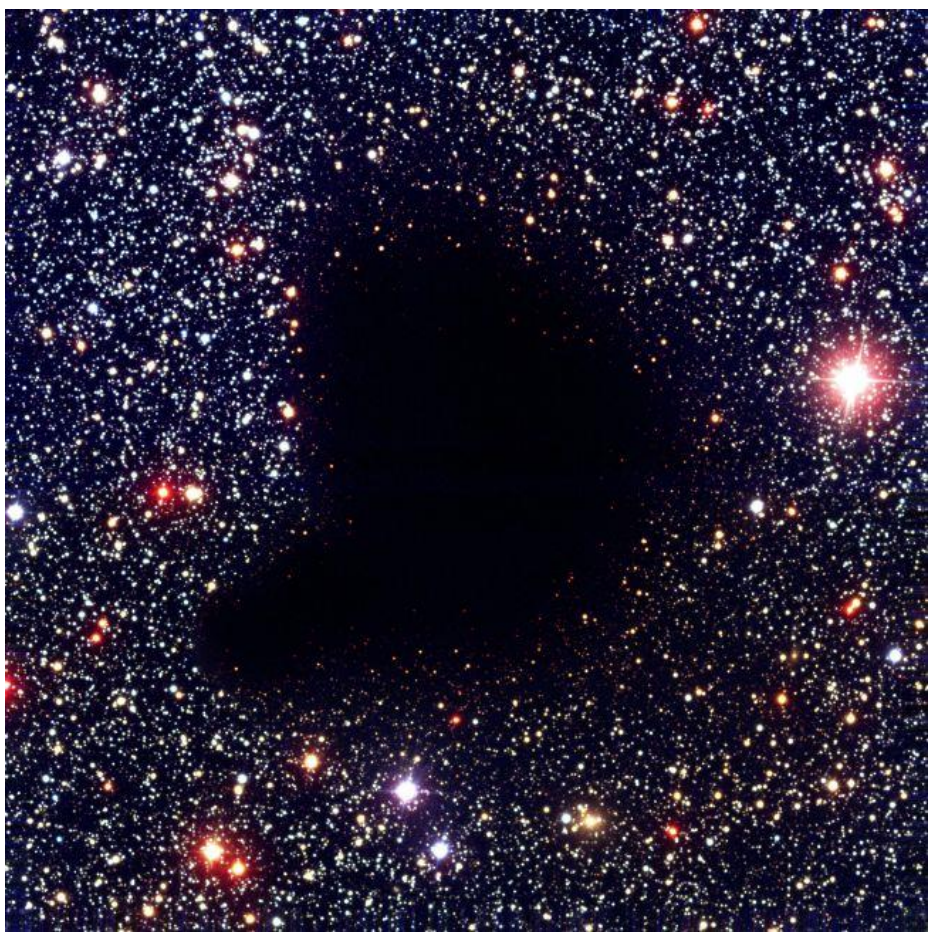
FROM VOID

Flute, alto/bass flute, Eb/bass clarinet, bassoon, f horn, violin I, violin II, viola, cello, piano, percussion



Bekah Simms

Commissioned by Ensemble contemporain de Montréal (ECM+); Véronique Lacroix, Music Director (world premiere performance October, 2020), as part of the ECM+ Génération 2020-1 National Tour

From void, 11'

1 piccolo/flute + Terre Frog Buzzer, provided by composer
1 alto/bass flute
1 Eb/bass clarinet
1 bassoon
1 F horn
2 violins
1 viola + ratchet, provided by composer
1 cello
1 piano, prepared + Terre Frog Buzzer, provided by composer
1 percussion (with two-headed ratchet provided by composer)

Programme note

"From void" dredges up and earths material from a similarly titled work, relying on human and technological fallibility to "fail" in accurately replicating the material. Taking especially compelling moments from the source material, the composer then used imprecise analysis software to glean "false" harmonic fields.

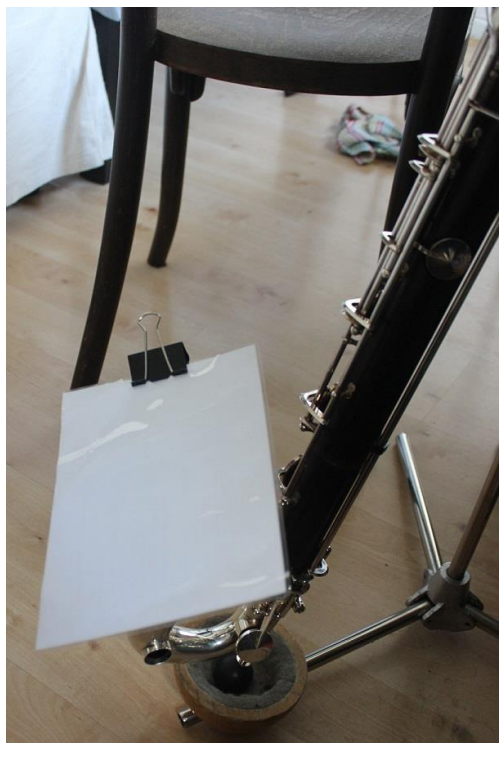
This act of intentional failure acts as a ghost of vulnerability, an acknowledgment of inherent imperfection. These "ghosts" appear throughout the piece – orchestrational projections and spectres of sound, rattles and whispers of things heard before.
This work is dedicated to Clara Iannotta, a transformational teacher and mentor.

Clarinet Preparation

In the first section (and briefly after), the bass clarinet is prepared. This particular technique/sound comes from Heather Roche's very helpful blog (https://heatherroche.net/2014/03/24/on-bass-clarinet-preparations/). More information and sounds can be found there.

The bell of the bass clarinet is prepared as described on the website:

"A piece of paper (harder than normal – think a sheet of card or something similar) is fixed to the bass clarinet with a bulldog clip (the bass clarinet can be protected by gluing felt to the metal edges of the clip or by using bluetack)." The image on Heather's website demonstrating a similar preparation with a laminated card looks like this:

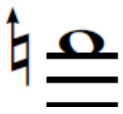


In the same section, the clarinettist is asked to cover and uncover the vent hole to alter the pitch by about a quarter tone. As per Heather's instructions, this can be done with the performer's large toe plugging and unplugging the vent hole (pictured on the left) This cannot be done while wearing shoes, so the performer must play this work wearing only socks (at least on one foot – their choice to wear one shoe instead of none is left to the performer's discretion/sense of playful aesthetics.)

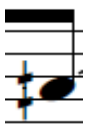
Legend

To silence.

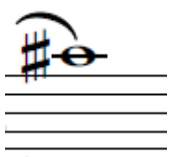
From silence.



Slightly – about 30 cents – sharp; +30 from the notated pitch.



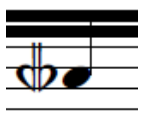
Quarter sharp; +50 from the notated pitch.



Three-quarters sharp; +75 from the notated pitch.

Slightly – about 30 cents – flat; -30 from the notated pitch.

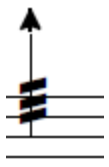
Quarter flat; -50 from the notated pitch.



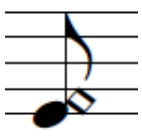
Three-quarters flat; -75 from the notated pitch.

Strings

ST	Sul tasto.
SP	Sul ponticello.
MSP	Molto sul ponticello.
AST	Alto sul tasto (close to the left hand fingers.)
Flaut.	(Molto) Flautando; one or more fingers placed lightly on the string with an extremely light bow pressure. Results in a soft, airy noise with just a hint of pitch.
c.l.b.	Col legno battuto.
c.l.t.	Col legno tratto.
s.p. ⟶ ord.	Gradual change of bow position; short arrows change quickly and long arrows slowly.

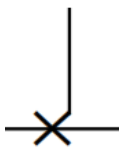


Unspecified pitch but high as “possible;” some very small pitch variations are welcome throughout the piece (i.e., within a whole tone of the actual highest pitch possible.)

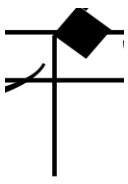


A touch **major second** artificial/stopped harmonic. Played in the same way as other artificial/stopped harmonics, but using the interval of a major second. The sounding result is noisy, grainy, and with only a hint of the resulting pitch (three octaves above the higher written pitch.) The intention with these harmonics is a sound closer to noise than pitch on the noise-pitch continuum, but with phantoms of the high pitch still discernible.

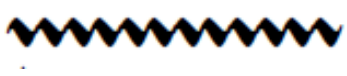
Bow directly on the tailpiece (slowly, without too much pressure.) Creates a quiet, airy sound. There will be an audible pitch; attempt to sound the lowest one possible.



(Cello only; only for single-line staff.) Placing the bow behind the bridge/strings so that the hair of the bow can scrape the wood of the bridge. The boxed pressure notation indicates the pressure of the bow hair on the wood.



Black diamond noteheads indicate half (harmonic) pressure (halfway between normal pressure and harmonic pressure for the left-hand fingers.)

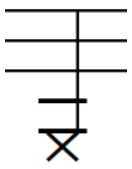


Wild, wide vibrato. Kinetic, with energy.

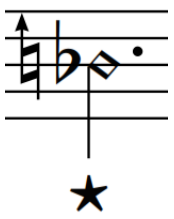
Overpressure; as much pressure as possible is applied to the string from the bow. Most pitch is lost to a creaky, distorted sound - grumbly/granular. There is some residual pitch (10-15%) so that changes in pitch are detectable, but noise should be the overpowering element.

Half over-pressure; there is some stoppage to the bow and some harshness, but lower dynamic levels can still be achieved.

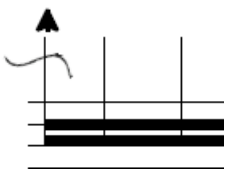
Normal pressure from the bow.



X-noteheads indicate a very harsh sound produced by bowing the wrapping of the string beneath the bridge. Very crunchy.

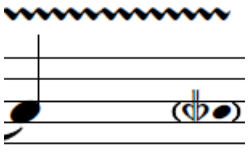


An asterisk with a harmonic denotes a **multiphonic**; these are attained usually by using harmonic pressure microtonally (i.e., 10-50 cents) away from existing natural harmonics. The result should be **multiple partials of the fundamental** (ie, the pitch of the open string) **sounding at once**. The desired effect is distorted and heavy. Changing bow speeds should further alter the type/amount of distortion.



Unspecified pitch (other than very high)//rhythmic gesture but fast as possible; no need to be regular, just extremely quick.

The same as above, but with slight (microtonal) pitch variation/inflection rather than on a repeated/static high pitch.



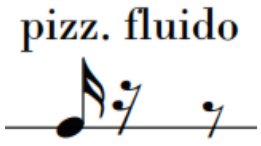
Trill to the bracketed note (microtonal trill.)

Ricochet – very bouncy, with a clear diminuendo sound profile

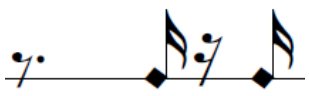
Slow bow, ord. bow

Different bow speeds and changing between different bow speeds occur throughout the piece. The intended effect is a constantly moving

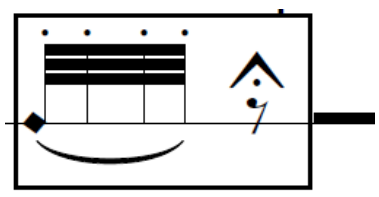
sound, transforming between various iterations of granular; gravelly; and distorted, with little “stoppages” occurring at its slowest.



Pizzicato fluido; holding the metal part of the end of the bow (the same part for the thimble-like sound) against the string, pluck the string and then immediately glissando the bow down the string. Video example available.

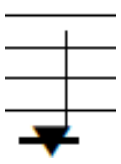


Staff indicating with the metal part of the end of the bow, to imitate a thimble sound. Diamond note heads indicate the left hand pressure - should be muted as if playing a harmonic. The right hand should tap gently with the end of the bow. Should be slightly mechnical, clinking softly. Bow position indication represents where the end of the bow should approximately be played on the string.

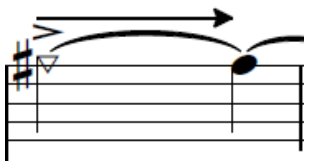


Boxed gestures are performed rhythmically free and repeated for the length of the dark line that follows them. Boxed gestures are meant to be elastic and free of tempo, with **inexact repetitions and pushing and pulling** of the length of notes/silences between notes/silences between repetitions/etc. *Do not repeat the exact gesture over and over.*

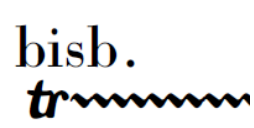
WINDS/BRASS:



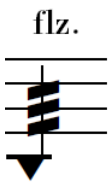
Triangle noteheads indicate an “Aeolian,” or air, sound achieved through blowing air through the instrument without conventional pitch activation. Residual pitch is appropriate; if possible, the notated pitches/positions should be the residual pitch. Crescendos indicate an allusion to a gust or burst of wind/air sound.



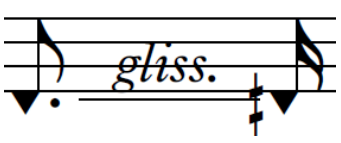
An air noise sound (with fingering/residual pitch indicated written) moving back to a more conventionally pitched/sounding note. Can occur in either direction.



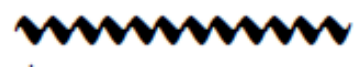
Bisbigliando: timbral trills where the colour/timbre is changed through trilling keys that do not alter the pitch substantially (more than a quarter tone.)



Fluttertongue (here combined with an air sound.)

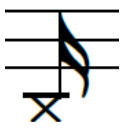


Glissandi are achieved through pitch bends OR fingerings, but will be specified. For non-fingered glissandi, use the embouchure or playing position to slowly and microtonally perform these glissandi.

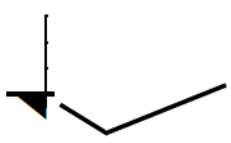


Wild, wide vibrato. Kinetic, with energy.

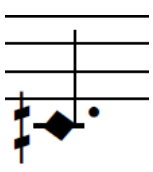
FLUTES



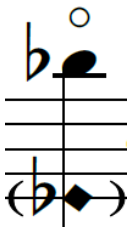
Tongue pizzicato, dry and poppy



Jet whistle: a very loud glissando-like sound produced by blowing a fast, high-pressure air stream through the instrument. The line indicates the pitch contour (here, low then high.)

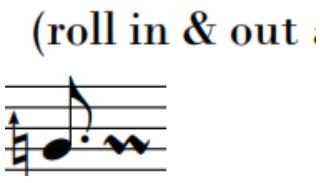


Whistle tone; change between partials ad. libitum.



Harmonic, produced by overblowing the lower (fingered) pitch.

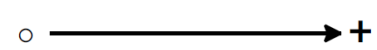
Completely into the flute, covering the embouchure hole, resulting in less audible pitch than a conventional aeolian sound. If articulated, this will result in a tongue ram. At quieter dynamics, this can be achieved with an inhale or exhale as opposed to a forte burst of air.



Rolling the mouthpiece in and out ad. libitum, creating a microtonally warbling result.

Clarinets (Bass & Eb) (card stock paper or similar required)

Please see notes on preparation above.



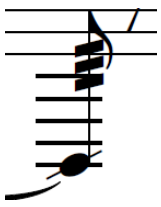
While the bell of the bass clarinet is prepared, the o indicates that the vent hole is open/unplugged, while the + indicates that is completely closed/plugged by the player's toe. The arrow indicates that the hole is being plugged or unplugged gradually. This will alter the pitch.

The noise of the preparation will, at a point, not grow any louder (while the normal clarinet tone can.) These star dynamics indicate the volume of the **preparation**; do not play beyond the loudest point of the preparation, as the clarinet sound will obscure the balance.

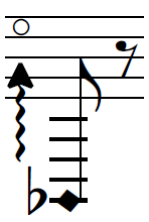
★★★ Preparation as noisy/activated as possible (unrelated to clarinet dynamic.)

★★ Preparation at medium noisiness/activated.

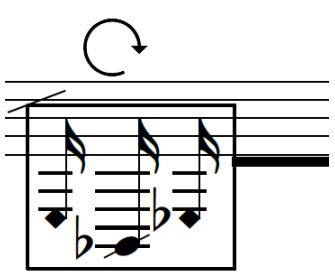
★ Subtle activation of prepared sound.



Cross-slashed notes indicate a vocalization/singing simultaneous with playing; this is intended to create distorted/noisy sounds. Also known as growling.



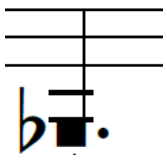
Low register diamond noteheads are spectral multiphonics, produced with the same fingering as the notated pitch but with an adjusted embouchure/air stream. They are loud, noisy, and complex.
The arpeggio arrow with circle indicates a spectral "sweep," isolating an overtone and ascending (or descending, depending on the arrow's direction) the harmonic series. This should be done quickly/arrhythmically.



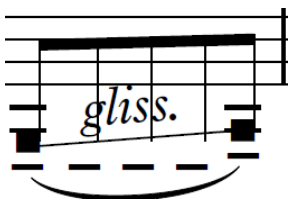
Slashed boxed gestures are performed rhythmically free and very fast, repeated for the length of the dark line that follows them. Boxed gestures are meant to be elastic and free of tempo, with **inexact repetitions and pushing and pulling** of the length of notes/silences between notes/silences between repetitions/etc. The semi-circle arrow

denotes that the notes can be played in ANY ORDER, and must change/cycle through orders. *Do not repeat the exact gesture over and over.*

Bassoon

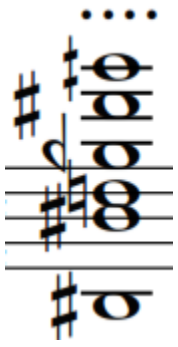


Performed directly into the bocal without the reed, square noteheads indicate a thunky and gummy **bassoon** articulation that is almost mechanical in nature. Ensure that this is audible as it is a very quiet sound.

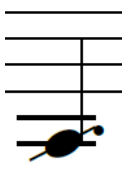


Fingering alternation in the indicated rhythm, ideally sounding like a microtonal ascending figure.

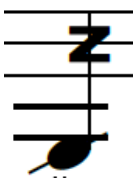
Note that there are both regular, tremolo articulation (tongued) and flutter tongue (flz.) in the opening section. Flutter tongue will always be accompanied by “flz.”



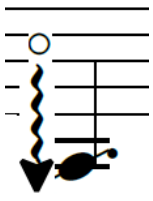
Four dots above indicate staccatissimo double tonguing as fast as possible (here, paired with a multiphonic.)



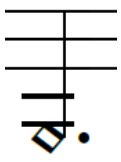
Cross-slashed notes indicate an “overblown” technique, with overtones changing quickly and randomly at will. The notated pitch is the fundamental/fingered pitch. The desired effect is noisy and unpredictable.



Two overtones activated at once; as aggressive/noisy a sound as possible.

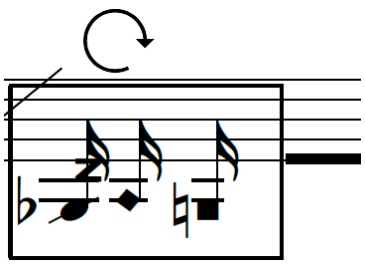


The arpeggio arrow with circle indicates an overblown “sweep,” isolating an overtone and descending (or ascending, depending on the arrow’s direction) the harmonic series. This should be done quickly/arrhythmically for the duration of the attached note.



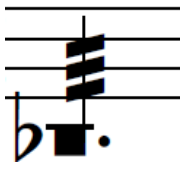
Indicates the fundamental pitch for a multiphonic.

Represents a vocalization or “growl” that accompanies the regular bassoon sound, creating a distortion.

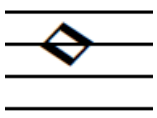


Slashed boxed gestures are performed rhythmically free and very fast, repeated for the length of the dark line that follows them. Boxed gestures are meant to be elastic and free of tempo, with inexact repetitions and pushing and pulling of the length of notes/silences between notes/silences between repetitions/etc. The semi-circle arrow denotes that the notes can be played in **ANY ORDER,** and must change/cycle through orders. *Do not repeat the exact gesture over and over.*

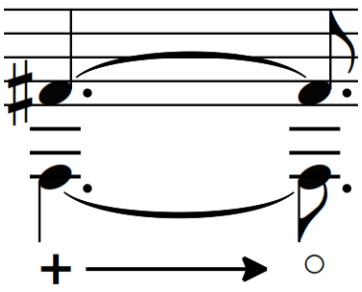
Horn (contrabassoon reed, trombone harmon mute required)



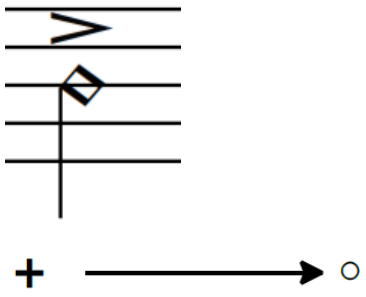
A low, rumbly sound with vague pitch produced with the lips over the mouthpiece and the tongue inside the mouth piece. Air is then blown into the instrument, with the tongue flapping. Should sound mechanical/industrial.



Mouthpiece whistle: air stream directed across the back/more narrow part of the mouthpiece while detached from the horn. Should make a high-pitched airy whistling sound.



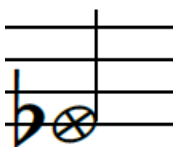
When the trombone Harmon mute is inserted, the + and o symbols indicate that the mute is either + covered/closed and o uncovered/open. The arrow indicates a gradual opening/closing.



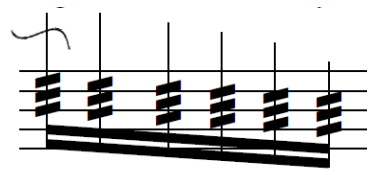
When the contrabassoon reed is inserted, a diamond notehead indicates a loud, distorted multiphonic sound.

Plugged horn to open (or vice versa.) Any change in pitch is desired.

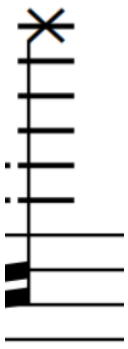
PIANO:



Played directly on the string with a coin rubbed across the string, towards the dampers.

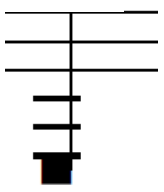


Fast as possible “guiro” sound performed on the keys; unspecified pitches but should be in the given direction/register. Can be more executed with a piece of cardstock/cardboard. Should be quiet but audible; percussive only.

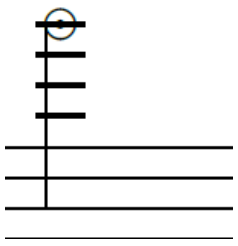


Plucked inside the piano with the finger.

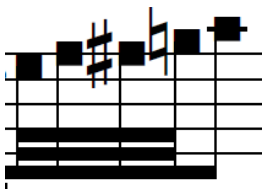
There are several preparations on the piano, divided roughly by register:



Lower register: C#/Db1, D1, Db2, F#2
Erasers or blue tackplaced to create a low, thunky almost gong-like attack.

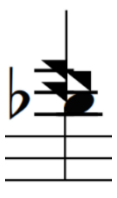


Upper mid register: A5, B5, D6, E6, G6, A6
Detuned by preparing with a coin or screw (or something similarly metallic) akin to Part’s Tabula Rasa.

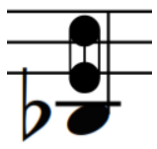


Extreme upper register: E7-A7.
Prepared with masking tape to create a muted, percussive attack but with clear pitch profile.

Played on the piano strings with a medium-soft/soft mallet.



A cluster of notes played with a mallet in/around the same register/pitches as the conventionally notated pitch (played ord.)



A cluster of notes above/around the conventionally notated pitch (which should continue resonating because of the Sost. Pedal.) The clusters are of varying sizes; the largest clusters should use the arm to activate as many notes as possible. Ensure that the clusters are always **very short,** with only the conventionally notated pitch resonating long.

Percussion

Instruments

1x Two-headed ratchet (provided by composer)
1x Sheet of plastic (large), must be malleable and noisy. Think wrapping plastic from packaging.
1x Concert bass drum (played with  beater,  wire brushes, and  superball mallet)
1x Large gong
1x Slapstick, bright and piercing
1x "Broken wood", replacement for a quiet ratchet sound
2x Woodblock, one each placed close to the gong and bass drum to create resonance
1x piece of Styrofoam
1x suspended cymbal
1x vibraphone
1x pair of finger cymbals or similar high, resonant metals
5x individual Crotale (written C5, C#5, G5, Bb5, B5)

Performance Notes

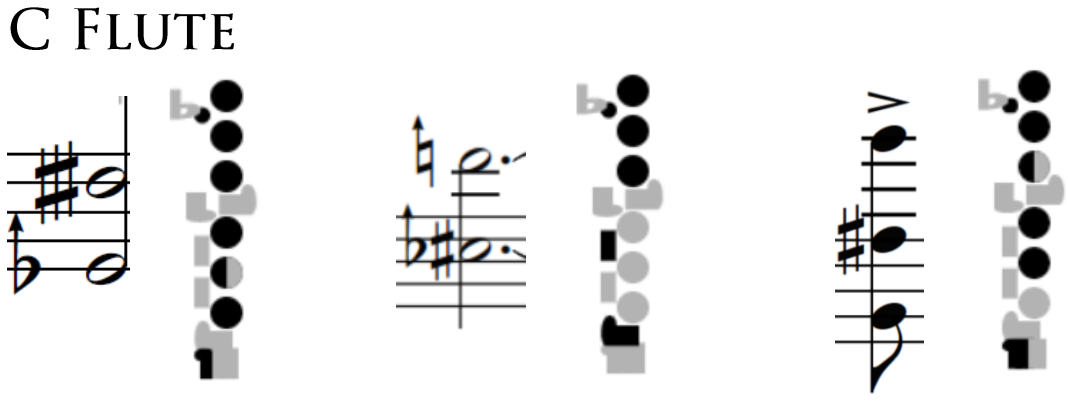
Tremolos are used throughout to denote the **relative** speed of the attack. Please ensure that these sounds are arrhythmic and irregular with swells and dissipation ad. lib., not highly metric sixteenths, eights, etc. These sounds are continuous but unmetered.

Very fast ratchet tremolo indicate a free flourish with the crank.

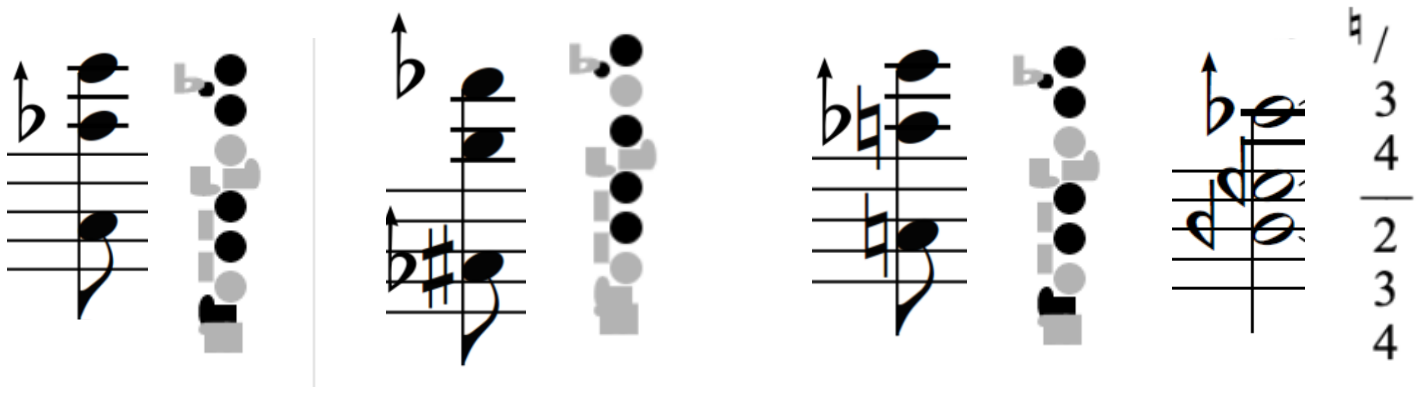
When performing with the plastic, feel free to incorporate crumping, uncrumpling, rustling etc.

Appendix 1: Wind MULTIPHONIC FINGERINGS

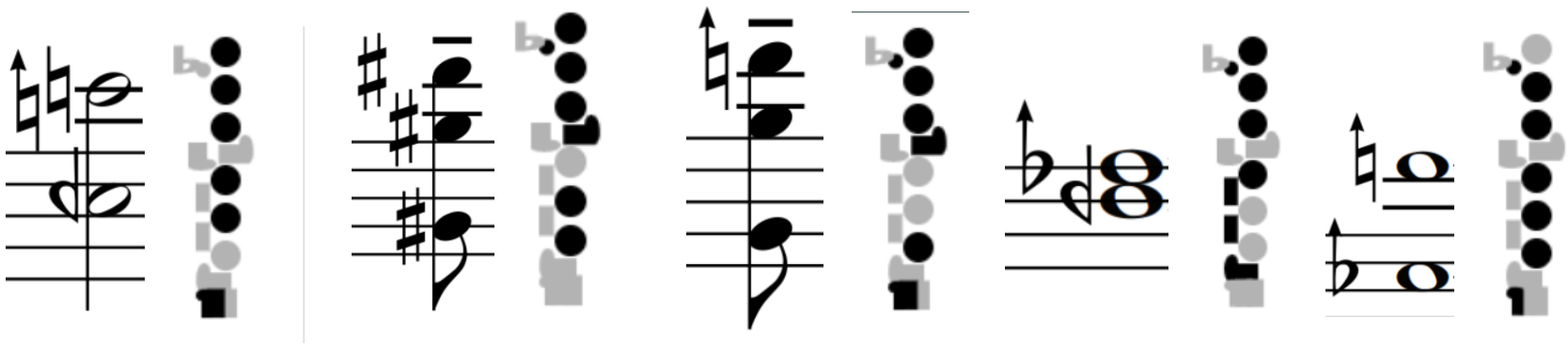
C Flute



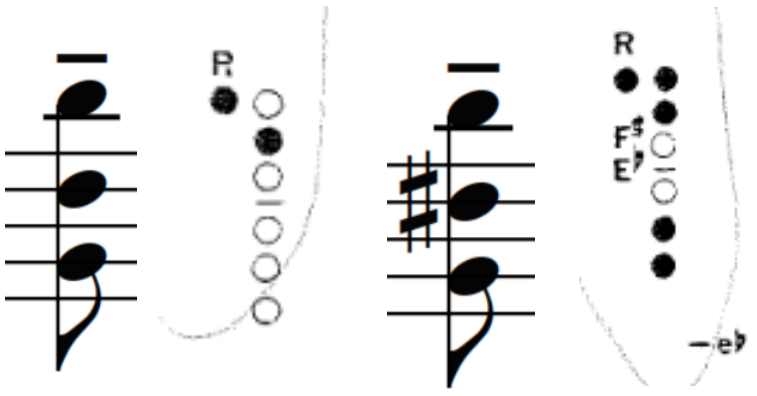
Bass Flute



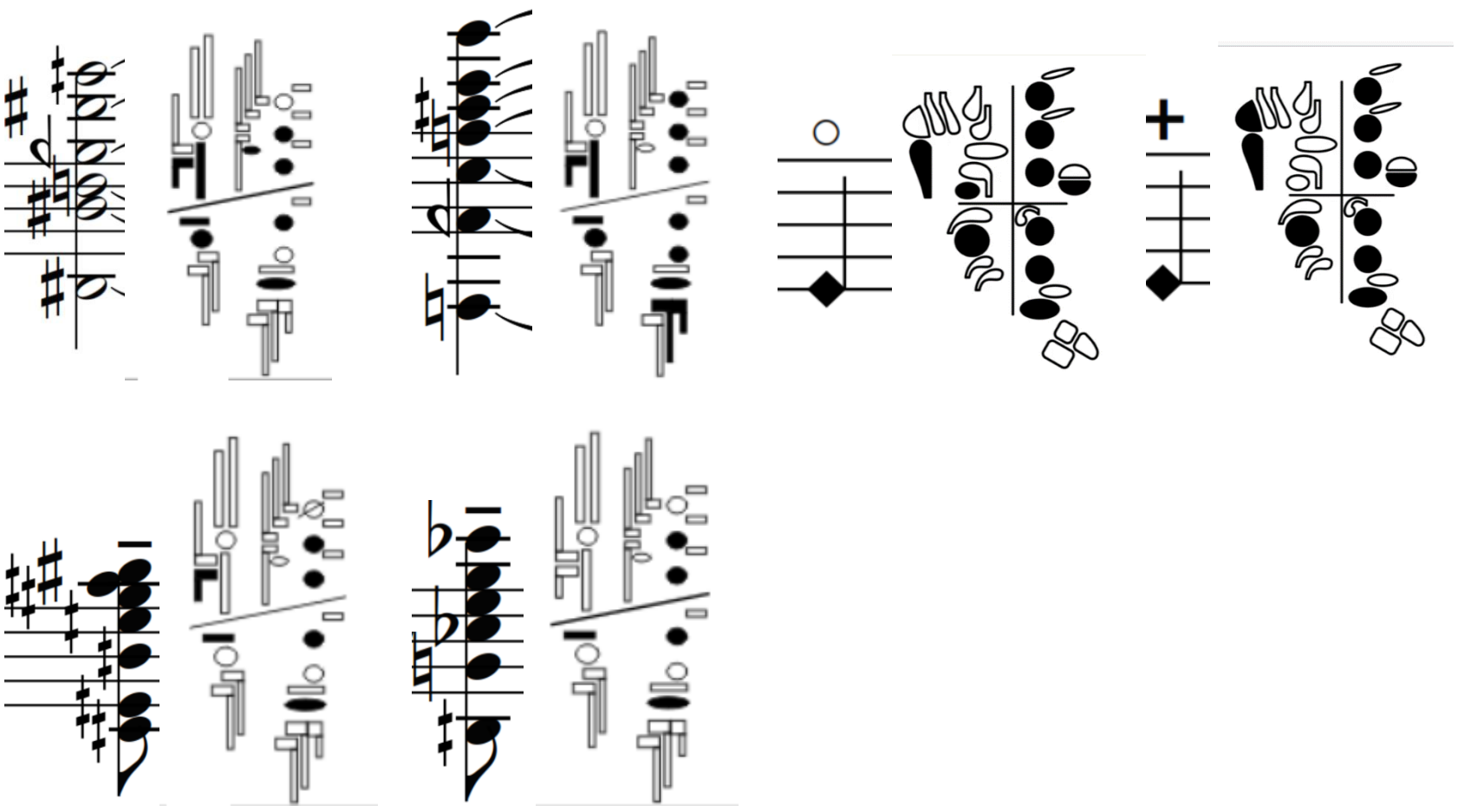
Alto Flute



Eb Clarinet



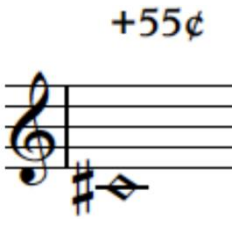
Bassoon

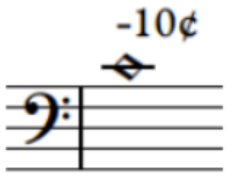


Appendix 2: String Multiphonic results

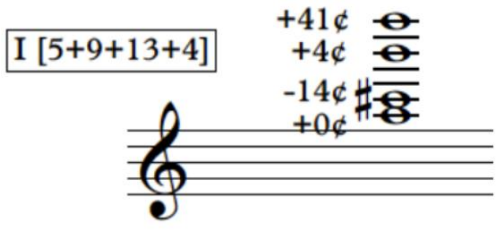
A string (examples for cello - octave transpositions applicable for other instruments)

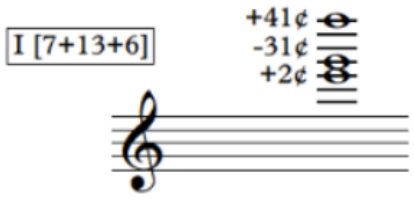
Played:

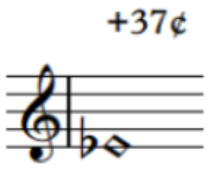


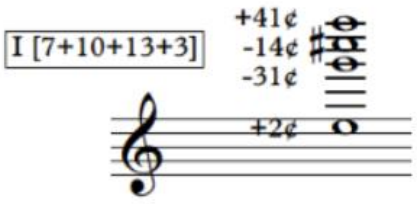


Sounding:



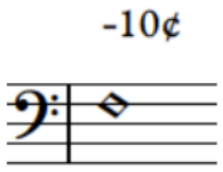


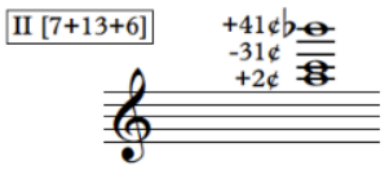


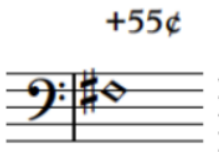


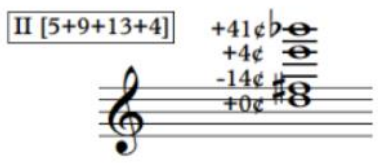
D string (examples for cello - octave transpositions applicable for other instruments)

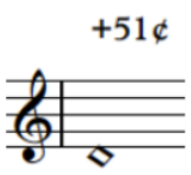
Played: **Sounding:**

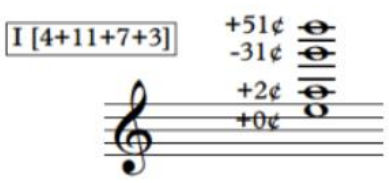


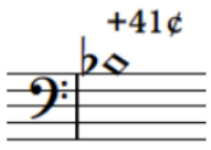


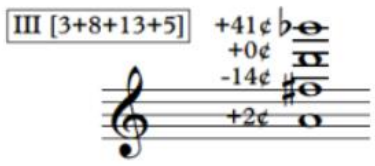






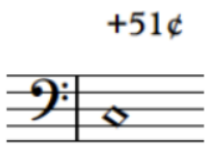


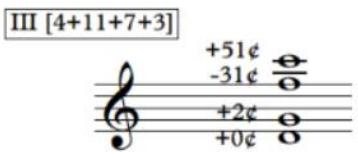


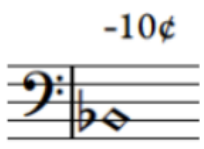


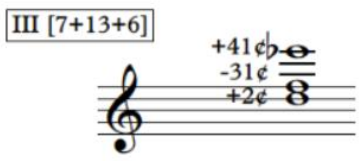
G string (examples for cello - octave transpositions applicable for other instruments)

Played: **Sounding:**









Score in C (with octave transpositions)

for Véronique Lacroix and the ECM+

FROM VOID

Bekah Simms

♩ = 42, alive and heavy and quiet

Flute

Bass Flute

(mouth covering the mouthpiece) flz.

Bass Clarinet in B♭

prepared bell - see notes

Bassoon

without reed

fast & regular as possible

p - match B. Cl. dynamics

ppp *p - match*

quasi flz. - gutturally - white noist, static-y

(quasi flz.)

Horn in F

Percussion

Two-headed Ratchet: small head

Two-headed Ratchet: big head

(regular - not too fast)

Crotales

Terre frog buzzer

Piano

♩ = 42, alive and heavy and quiet

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

9

Fl.

(mouth covering the mouthpiece)

bisb.

B. Fl.

flz.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

p *ppp*

pp - underneath B. Cl.

flz.

Hn.

Perc.

(fast - one turn)

(longer)

Crot.

Crotales
very soft mallets

Pno.

Terre Frog Buzzer
(matching the Ratchet)
slow → fast

Vln. I

with wooden mute

II - whole tone artificial harmonic
molto flaut.

Vln. II

with regular mute

II - whole tone artificial harmonic
molto flaut.

Vla.

bowed tailpiece -
lowest partial possible, wispy & airy

Vc.

bowed tailpiece -
lowest partial possible, wispy & airy

15

Fl.
B. Fl.
B. Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Perc.
Crot.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

♩ = 52 ♩ = 42

ppp
across the tone hole - more residual pitch
pp
(bottom pitch sung)
whistle tone, into upper partials
p
mf
ppp (bottom pitch sung)
s.t.
mp
(mp)
(steady tone - attempt beating w/Bsn.)
(bringing out D♯3)
non. flz. - fast & regular as possible
(insert reed)
(steady tone - attempt beating w/B. Cl.)
(same sound as before but with reed)
non. flz.
flz.
(air with residual pitch)
remove mouthpiece
to plastic
Large sheet of plastic
very irregular, exploratory
accents = sharp crumple
slow
fast
(ord.)
MSP
1/2 SP
SP
sub.

21

flz.
bisb.
dbl. tongue staccato, fast as possible
as irregular as possible
Trombone Harmon mute
(top pitch sung)
Two-headed Ratchet
to Vibraphone
Piano (ord.)
(silently depress)
Terre Frog Buzzer
Piano
molto flaut.
(1/2 pressure)
(harmonic pressure)
trem. fast as possible - pressure ord.
Small metal Ratchet
Regular and not too fast
Placing the bow behind the bridge, scraping it along the wood, changing pressures
mf possibile
p - match B. Cl.
c.l.t

28

Fl.
B. Fl.
B. Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Perc.
Vib.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

to Terre Frog Buzzer
Terre Frog Buzzer
fast
(fast) slow fast slow sim.
slow
fast
bisb.
non. d.t.
(bringing out A1/4♭ 2)
s.t.
slow, irregular
(noisy as possible, irregular)
Vibraphone
motors on - very slow
soft attack, long decay
Terre Frog Buzzer
(slow, steady)
Piano
1/2SP
MSP
1/2 SP
ORD.
MST molto flautando possible - AIR
ord. pressure
Small metal Ratchet
arco
ORD
(underneath the surface - rattle barely audible)

34

slow
(bringing out D♯3)
* sub.
remove card
mute out;
Contrabassoon reed in mouthpiece
arco
ord.
to Crotales
remove blue tack
MST molto flaut. possible - AIR
ord. pressure
SP
MSP slow bow ord. bow
1/2 SP
MST molto flautando possible - AIR
III
I
II