2019.1 for double bass, computer and transducer
[Sebastian Adams, 3.2.2019 [draft one] – for Malachy Robinson]

duration: indeterminate

this piece can be adapted for other instruments if desired, although the bank of material is designed with bass in mind.

BACKGROUND:

This piece is a prepared improvisation using a set of structures and a set of "allowable material".

The double bass should be fitted with a tactile transducer (such as those made by Dayton Audio) and a contact microphone or close microphone (such as a DPA gooseneck).

The transducer effectively turns the body of the bass into a loudspeaker, meaning that the performer's actions are intertwined with the sound being piped into the instrument. No loudspeaker should be used other than the transducer on the instrument.

The piece involves feedback loops created by feeding the output of the microphone into the transducer via the computer.

Either the bassist or the sound engineer should have a method of controlling the level of feedback, for example, a volume pedal or a mixer knob.

There is no prescribed Max patch for the piece, although the composer will provide the one used for the initial performance if requested. Any form of audio processing can be used (e.g. delays, harmonisers, modulation effects), and it would even be possible to eschew using a computer and simply use (for example) a delay pedal or the onboard effects of a mixer.

The Max patch made by the composer for the first performance should therefore be regarded as a non-essential component of the score.

PREPARATION:

The piece can be as improvised or prepared as the player wishes. Two acceptable extremes might be:
(a) internalising the instructions and performing a totally free improvisation interpreting them, with no preparation of the actual performance.
(b) creating a fully notated score based on the instructions OR improvising repeatedly until a fully formed piece/interpretation develops from the improvisations.

FREEDOM:

Once the score has been carefully read and internalised, the performer should feel free to alter the

rules of engagement in any way (embellish, adjust, discard etc.), as long as they feel they are acting in accordance with their understanding of the spirit of the piece.

STRUCTURE:

Two structures are overlaid and work in tandem.
One deals with pitch, the other with material.
The two structures should overlap in a complex manner so that the block-based structure of the piece is obscured from the listener. The structure can be improvised or prepared in advance.
An example of what I mean by "overlap in a complex manner" is attached at the end of this score.

STRUCTURE LAYER A concerns pitch area. A set of "pitch centres" should be chosen. Examples are: the four strings of the instrument, or a set of physical locations for the left hand (with all four strings playable in each location).

[Any other system could also be used, but I would recommend avoiding traditional conception of sectional pitch centres such as sets of specific tones or a set of scales]

The performance should be divided into sections according to this system. The sections should be roughly even in duration, and should be separated by short silences.

Internally, the sections of Structure Layer A do not have to be completely strict – e.g. a section rooted in the portion of the strings above the fingerboard could slip lower in the middle and then return to its main "home".

STRUCTURE LAYER B involves material. The list of allowed "material" is listed overleaf, and can be expanded by the performer if considered necessary. The list of allowed material is divided into two banks by the performer. It is important that these two banks of material are inherently oppositional, and therefore this process may need careful consideration.

[Not all material types need to be used in any given performance – a very spare performance (e.g. with one material type in each bank) is possible]

The two banks of material should be alternated in strict order throughout the piece (i.e. (1)(2)(1)(2)(1)(2) etc.)

The pacing of this alternation should be done in a manner that generates internal structural tension. (e.g.: start with long sections, gradually get shorter)

Ideally, ends of long sections in structure layer B should not line up with the ends of sections from the Structure Layer A.

INTENSITY/SHAPE:

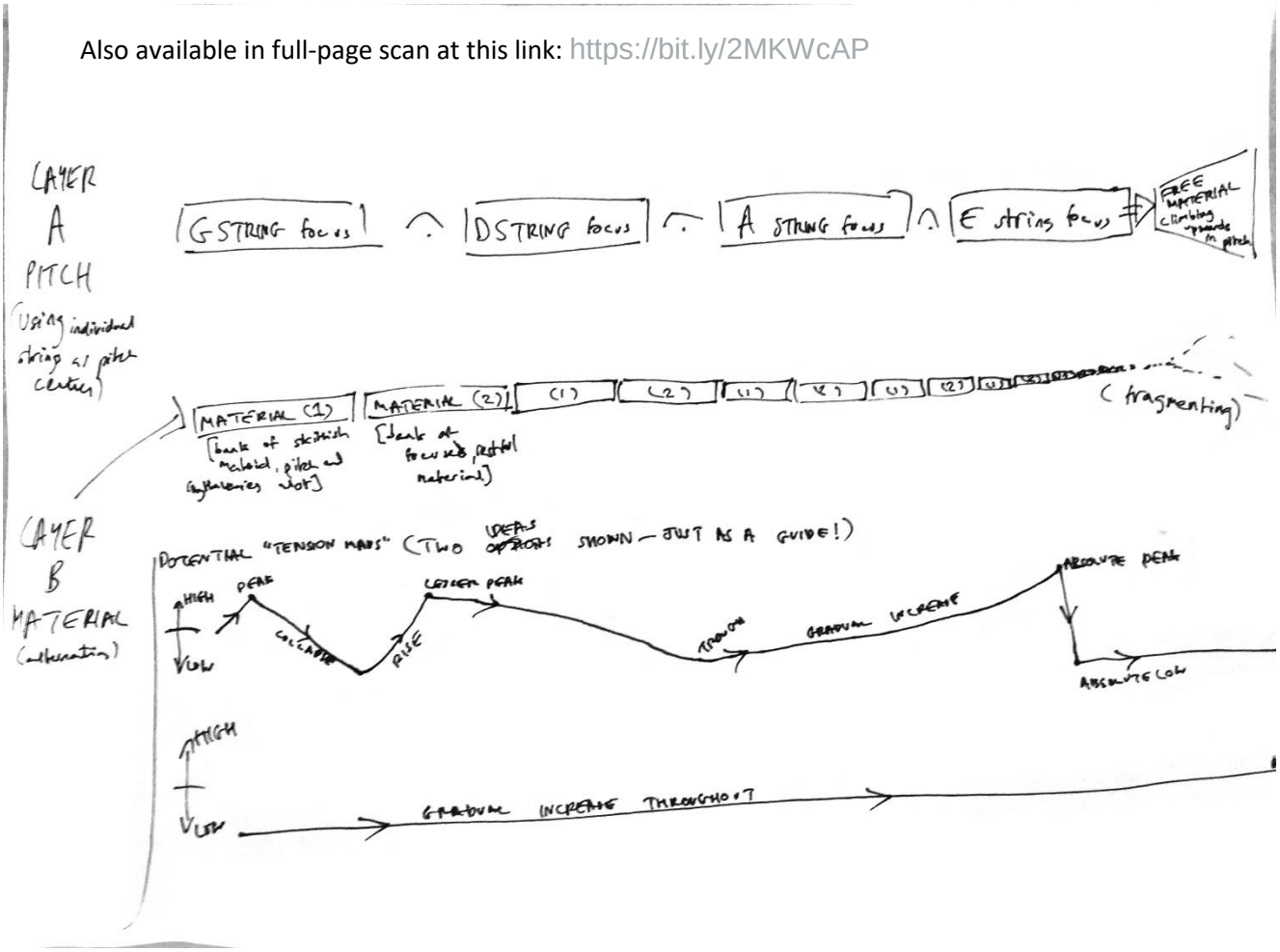
The intensity/shape/narrative of the piece can be worked out be finding the natural peaks created

by the structure above, but this does not need to be done in any particular fashion. For example, it might be desirable to ignore the obvious climactic points in the worked out structure and make them weaker points instead.

If desired, the performer can layer a third, totally separate structure for intensity over those prescribed by the composer.

EXAMPLE STRUCTURE:

Also available in full-page scan at this link: https://bit.ly/2MKWcAP



ALLOWED MATERIAL:

mute held to string and bowed on top of (see composer's work 2018.2)

super quiet scrabbling left hand pizz.

high harmonics (short)

high harmonics (long – incorporating double stops, seeking interactions)

open string partials (e.g. searching out high partials via sul pont.)

non-Western melodic fragments (generally veiled and unrecognisable)

creaking sounds

wild, short attacks

flailing, rapid movement (creating an impression of random "Neue Musik" notes)

shifting double stops, seeking beats, crunches and difference tones

[N.B. this list may be added to by the composer during workshops]