

James W. Parker

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# S e r r a t

Alto Saxophone Solo and Electronics



## **Performance Notes:**

There are three main elements that need clarifying before one should dive into this piece. The first is the use of multiple staves, the second is the role of the electronics in determining the form, and the third is a general overview of the different notational devices used and the techniques associated with them.

### **- Multiple Staves:**

1. A small gesture followed by a horizontal arrow (see first system). These have no meters, bar lines, or rests. They imply that the performer should use the initial gesture as a starting place, and improvise within that gesture (remaining true to, loosely, the given tempo). Any dynamic changes should be spread out across the length of the section as you see fit. These sections can be as long or as short as you want (via the repeats). Think of these systems as a sort of foundation, they (with the help of the electronics) create a complex texture upon which to build.
2. Short gestures (see second system, lower staff). These have no meters, bar lines, rests, or arrows. Think of these as interruptions of what is going on with the repeated improvised gestures in the upper staff. As you see fit, stop playing the improvised gesture on the top staff, play the gesture on the bottom staff, then go back to the top. Durations and the distance between each gesture are up to the performer, though the relative duration and distance between each gesture should be observed. For example, the eighth notes should have a shorter duration than the quarter notes, and notes that appear closer together should be played closer together than those that appear far apart.
3. Traditional notation (see the top of the second page). These have meters, bar lines, rests, the whole nine yards. They should be played normally.

### **- Electronics:**

- The performer should play into an appropriate microphone that is used as an input to a computer running the provided supercollider patch. The signal should then be sent to 2 (or 4) speakers placed on either side of the stage (in the case of four speakers, one should be placed in each corner of the hall). In the end, both the audience AND the performer should be able to clearly hear the delay.
- The supercollider patch is essentially a delay in which many elements are left up to random. The piece is made up of several repeated sections. These sections should repeat at least twice, and until the performer hears a pitch shift in the delay. Once you hear the pitch shift, feel free to move to the next section whenever you see fit.
- The other vital element is the occasional "clearing of the delay." Periodically throughout the piece, the performer is encouraged to stop playing and allow all sound from the delay to die out before continuing where they left off. The only sections in which there should be no such breaks (except where notated), are any section in which you are using key clicks.
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### **- Non-Standard Notation:**

(Further guidance on use of these techniques can be found in the book *Hello, Mr. Sax!* By Jean-Marie Londeix)

- Mictotones
  - Standard microtonal notation is used, fingerings can be found in the Londeix book.
- Polyphonics
  - Consult the Londeix book for fingerings and advice for performance.
- Fermatas
  - Two types of fermatas are used in the piece. The first is the traditional fermata, which functions normally. The other is a square fermata, which indicates that whatever note or rest the fermata is applied to should be held until all other sounds fade from the delay, leaving only the implied note or rest.
- X note heads
  - X noteheads imply key clicks. The pitch of the key clicks is not terribly important, the location of the note heads on the staff is only a suggestion.

## **Program Note:**

I wrote this piece while in residence at the Can Serrat artists residency in El Bruc, a small town near Barcelona at the base of Montserrat, a chain of mountains that have great spiritual significance to the Catalan people. There's a story in El Bruc of a drummer, who in the face of one of Napoleon's massive armies wanted to help his fellow Catalan fighters in protecting the town. The militia turned him away, saying he was just a boy and couldn't do anything against the French army. In anger, he marched up to the mountain playing his drum. When he got to the base of the mountain, he found that the sound of his drum was echoing all over the place, making the French army think that the scrappy Catalan militia was a huge army lying in wait for them. These sounds instilled fear in the heart of the French generals, and deterred them from marching through El Bruc.

The idea of using certain tools to make yourself seem grander in stature than you are naturally is appealing to me, and how eventually we become beholden to those tools to live our lives. I'm specifically thinking about my own relationship with social media, and how easy it is to present myself as doing all of these exotic things and being happy all the time, when really I spend most of my time scrolling through Facebook and Instagram, never really seeing anything interesting but feeling like I need to do it anyways. The piece uses live electronics, a custom delay, to make the performer seem like 8 performers. However, the performer must also make decisions based on what they hear in the delay, making them at the same time enhanced by and reliant on the electronics.