Massing

for viola
and
live electronics

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Massing is a semi-improvised piece for viola and live electronics. The viola part has 18 episodes – referred to as textures . The viola player follows any allowed sequence of these textures.

The electronic effects generate up to 16 loops from the viola sounds. These have durations between 5 and 60 seconds and build up around the performance space to create "massings" of moving sounds. The total piece should have a duration between 5 and 15 minutes.

Playing strategy:

You might commence with texture *A, B, C* or *P*. The textures which may be played next are indicated by the letters written at the right of each texture. No texture may follow textures *Q* or *R,* hence one of these textures will be the final texture played. For example, one sequence of textures for a performance could be:

A, I, E, D, F, H, I J, K, L, R

- To go from one texture to the next you may
- change dramatically from one to the next
- gradually merge the material of one into the next
- go back and forth between the two.
- By overlapping the effects, you can sometimes use up to three textures simultaneously

Technical Requirements

- one microphone
- a foot controller (or similar device) with one gradual pedal and three switches
- computer (the software is Max/MSP based and has been tested on a Mac PPC with Tiger)
- sound interface with one input and four outputs
- quadraphonic sound system (a stereo version of the software is available if necessary)

Operation of the effects:

The direct viola sound needs to be amplified enough for the player to be heard over the effects. The player should not forget in his/her presentation and playing that s/he is the soloist in front of the massed sounds that s/he is creating.

Control of the electronic effects is not complicated, but because of the improvised character of the piece it must be done by the viola player.

- One pedal <on> is used at the beginning40cm to switch on the effects.
- Another pedal <input off> is used to turn off the input of the viola sounds into the effects. It is used at the end of the piece. The result is that the looped effects gradually diminish so that the viola player finishes alone.
- Another pedal is a gradual control. It controls variably the speed of attenuation of the looped sounds. At the <null> position the sounds disappear completely after the first loop. At <low> the sounds will disappear in a few seconds; at <medium> the effects will take longer to disappear; at <high> longer still. At the <maximum> position of the pedal they will never disappear; (this is good for making very dense textures). These positions are notated in the score.
- You can have another pedal to switch <off> and clear the effects. You should not have any need for this during the performance but it would be very useful for rehearsing.
- For example, if you already have some effects sounding, and you set the gradual control pedal to <maximum> and press <input off>, then the effects sounds will stay like that for ever. They will not be affected by what you play on the viola. To revert to the 'normal' effects, press the <on> pedal.

$\longleftarrow -- - 5 \text{ to } 60 \text{ sec} -- - \longrightarrow$

start A

IV

sul IV

IV

tremolo

ff

I J K
L M N
O P R

if start ⟨on⟩ ⟨MAX⟩

start B

IV

sul IV

IV

tremolo
ponticello
p

D
O P

if start ⟨on⟩ ⟨high⟩

start C

IV

sul IV

IV

pizz

mf to f

J K
M N
O P

if start ⟨on⟩ ⟨high⟩

D

Tap the body of the viola with finger-tips. Change position on the front of the instrument.

E F
G H
I J
O P

⟨medium⟩

E

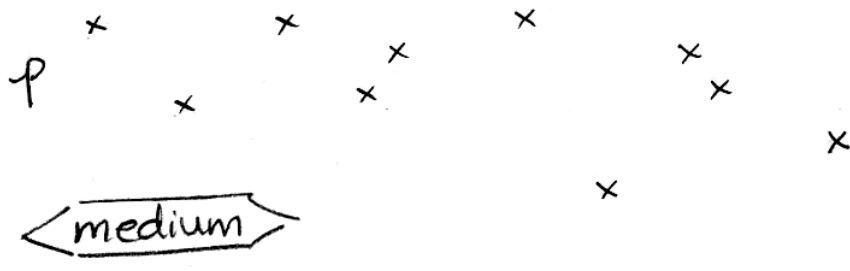Stroke the body of the viola with your finger tips. It will make a "shhhh" sound.

D F I
J O
P Q

⟨medium⟩

F

Pluck the strings on the other side of the bridge

DE
H

<medium>

G

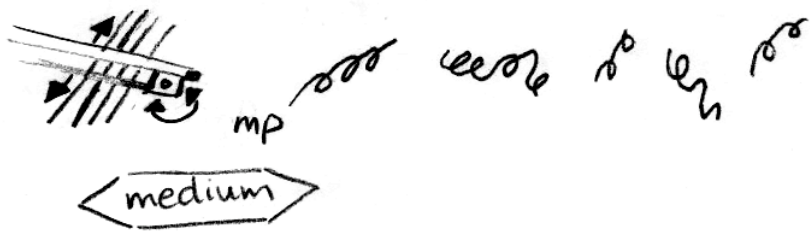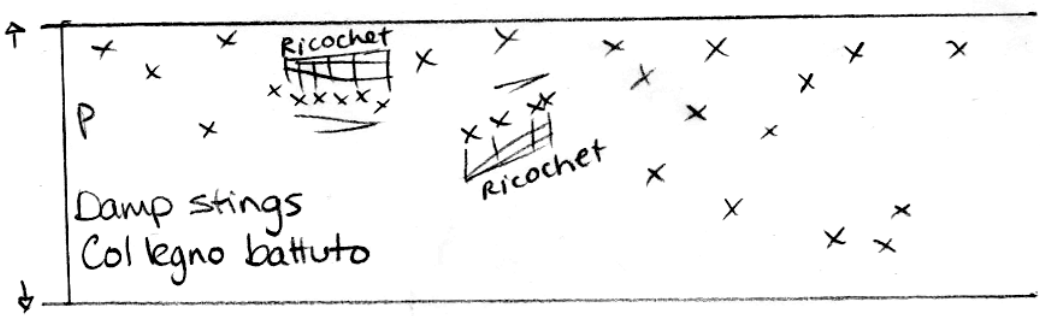Damp strings, use the rough part of the bow

DE
H

<high>

H

Damp strings, place the bow on the string normally. Move it parallel to the direction of the string, twisting the bow: makes a "crunch" sound
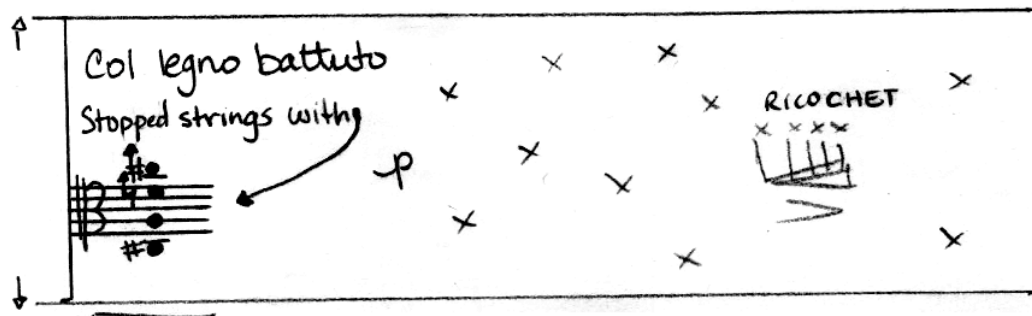
I

mp

<medium>

I

Ricochet

Damp stings
Col legno battuto

Ricochet

B H
J D
E

<high>

J

Col legno battuto

Stopped strings with

Ricochet

I
K

K

use these notes

p   poco a   poco   crescendo   ff

⟨high⟩

C J
L O
R

L

ff
Random chords

⟨max⟩

C E
I R

M

(pizz could be left hand)

arco   pizz   arco   pizz   arco   pizz   arco   pizz   arco

mp

⟨low⟩

A
K
L

N

Gliss

II

Sul II
and
Sul III

III

⟨high⟩

C D E
G H
L M

O

ponticello
gliss of harmonics

⟨medium⟩

A C
D E
G H
K L
Q

start
P

very high stop harmonics

P

A C
D E
G H
K Q

if start ⟨on⟩ ⟨MAX⟩ or ⟨low⟩

Q

mp

⟨null⟩ ⟨input off⟩

R

P

⟨null⟩ ⟨input off⟩
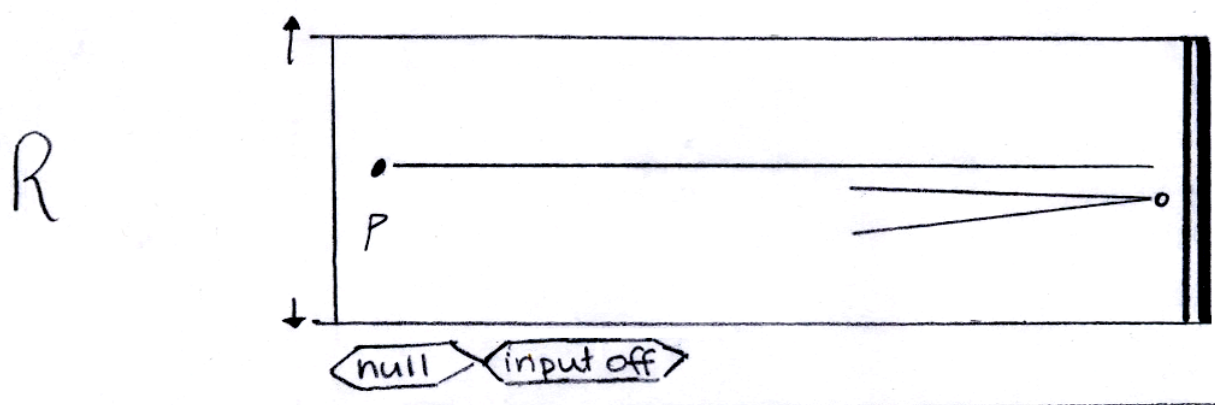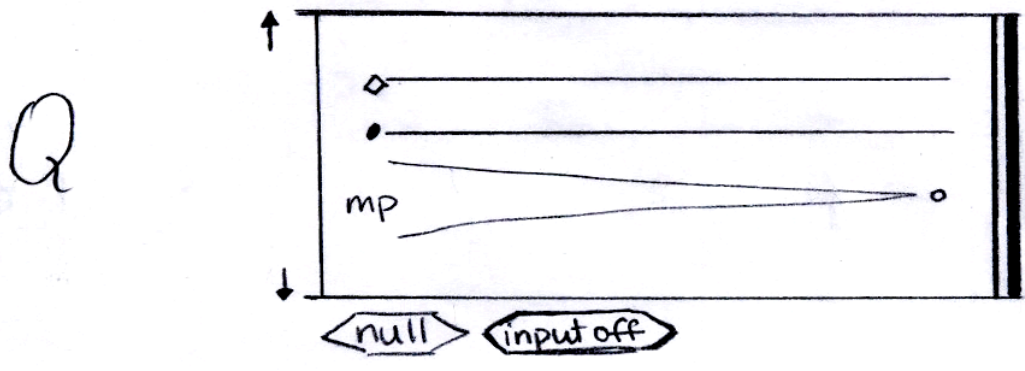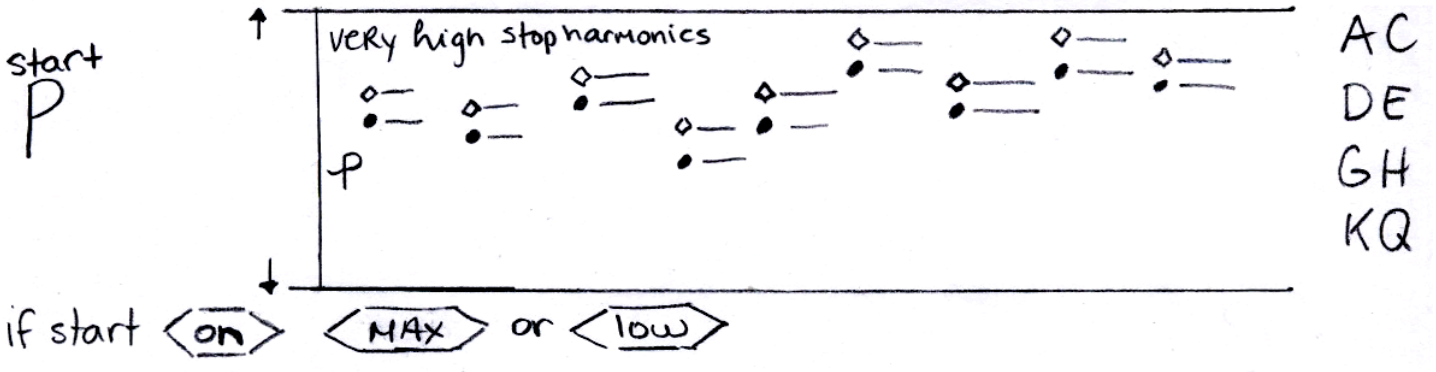
Notes

start
A : a possible texture to start with

C E
I R : indicate the choice of textures to be played next.

⟨ ⟩ : pedal indication

if start ⟨on⟩ : if you begin with this texture press ⟨on⟩ before starting

↑ — highest note possible
• ← high note
↓ — pitch somewhere in middle range
← low note
— lowest note possible

IV
sul
IV
IV

— highest note on IV
pitches on string IV
— open IV

↑
II
sul
II
and
sul
III
III

— highest note on II
pitches on II or III
— open III

⁝ : downwards arpeggio

◇
• : stopped harmonic

damp
Strings : put finger lighly on the strings to stop them resonating