

Brush piece

for solo bassoon

Wilson Tanner Smith

April 2016



Program note

This piece grew out of an attempt to transcribe into sound an impression—or numerous impressions—of a simple brush stroke painting I made. The painting shows a clear initial point of contact between brush and paper and a tail that dissipates upward as the brush is gradually lifted. Understood as an image, it simultaneously reveals the fast, dynamic gesture that created it, and, as a permanent record of that action, allows the viewer to explore more deeply the nuances of ink's dissolution into blank page: flecks of white, twisting hairs, gradations, and various other undercurrents. The timbral possibilities of the bassoon, from rich, low sonorities to ethereal multiphonic sounds, make it very well-suited to this exploration of event and object.

Performance notes

Formally, *Brush piece* is divided into two large sections with a brief transition between them. These divisions are suggested by rehearsal marks A, A', and B. Roughly speaking, they are 'impressions' of different modes of interpreting a brush painting like the one on the title page. A can be seen as an intense focus on the core or originating locus of the gesture, and also as the understanding of image as action. Long-tone 'interruptions' to the active material reflect the mental space of the second formal section -- that is, a spacious, free-time exploration of minute nuances in sound. B can then be understood as analogous to the "image-centric" (versus "gesture-centric") viewing experience of a brush stroke.

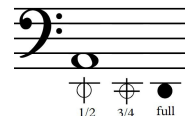
"Bright" -- refers to a buzzy/gritty tone; towards the tip of the reed

"Dark" -- more muted; ordinary position and/or towards the back of the reed


- ⊙ -- notehead indicating to play an alternate fingering for given pitch; specific fingering chosen according to preferences of performer. Alternate fingerings should be timbrally distinct from the ordinary fingering

Lines connecting noteheads are glissando/portamento figures -- smooth (as possible) slide/bend between pitches

Mute Key fingerings in the third and fifth systems are indicated by solid, crossed, and dashed circles depending on their degree of depression, as indicated below. These should not disrupt the continuous sounding of A, but should smoothly alter its overtone content/balance. Dotted lines to and from these notations indicate slow depression and lifting of indicated key; keys should be held in their position until the end of the note if there is no dotted line after these notations.

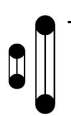


Multiphonics

 -- Finger ordinary notehead and release the key indicated by empty diamond. Higher ordinary noteheads refer to approximate sounding pitches (e.g. A and B \flat results from fingering low B \flat and releasing G)

Number scales above the B \flat minus G sonority refer to the relative prominence of either A or B \flat as controlled by minute embouchure adjustments. They should be understood as guides for interpretive decisions regarding balance and subtlety, not strict, precisely repeated sonorities.

1 = A only, 5 = B \flat only, and 3 = relatively equal balance.

 -- For denser fingered multiphonics and 'polyvalent' multiphonics (produced by using the standard fingering for a given pitch and lowering the chin while maintaining steady airflow and open embouchure), these symbols are used. Their relative sizes refer to the fullness of the chord/texture/timbre that results. Lines connecting these symbols mean to gradually enlarge or shrink the "spectrum"

Total performance time ca. 8'

A ca. 69; faster and slower as desired
 intense, gritty, pointed, obsessive
 Very bright, buzzy tone during active parts

allow sound to die
 (a pause between sentences)

ffmf *f* *sffz* *ffmf* *ff* *f* *p*

pause slightly shorter than prev.

shorter pause

slowing slightly
 (abruptly calmed)

mf *ffmf* *ff* *fff* *f* *ff* *mf* *p*

darker

ca. 10"

p *pp*

3 broad, equal cresc./dim. pulses

bright, as before

alt. fing. (timbrally distinct)

ord.

(quick breath)

(attempting too much too quickly)

f *ff* *fff* *sfz*

darker

ca. 11-12"

f *fmp* *pp*

bright, as before

fat

darker

fff *smf*

bright, as before

f *fp* *f*

muddy trem.

gradually darker

bend up slightly

fff (bright) *fffmf* *p*

(don't quite return to original pitch)

fff *ff* *mp* *mf*

bend up to B \flat , allow it to jump octave smoothly

ord. --- very bright (tension) --- ord. (release)

mp *ff* *mp* *ppp*

2 **A'** ca. 40

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *p*, *mfpp*, *mf*, *mp*, *pp*. Includes a triplet of eighth notes.

Sounding:

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *p*, *mfpp*, *mf*, *ff*, *sp*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *p*. Includes a triplet of eighth notes and a note with a 'full ca. 1/2 step' annotation.

B spacious, ethereal;
(subtlety of complexity, complexity of subtlety)

hold for as long as comfortably possible in 1 breath (at least 10 beats)

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *p*, *mf*. Includes a long note with a fermata.

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *mp*, *pp*, *mp*. Includes a triplet of eighth notes and a note with a fermata. Fingerings: 1 - - - 3 - - - 2 - - - 4 - - - 3 - - - 2 - 3 - - 1 - 5 [] - 3 - - 5. Annotation: 'silence before reaching isolated A'.

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *p*, *ppp* (soft as poss.), *pp*. Includes a triplet of eighth notes. Annotations: 'center microtones around A_b' and 'gradually-emergent undertone multi.'

Musical staff in treble clef. Dynamics: *mp*, *mf*, *pp*. Includes a long note with a fermata. Annotation: 'very slow, subtle spectrum fluctuations'.

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *mp*, *pp*. Includes a triplet of eighth notes. Annotations: 'lip bend down, keep full-spectrum multi', 'bend up slowly; do not reach original pitch', 'smooth coalescence up after just touching low dyad'.

Musical staff in treble clef. Dynamics: *mp*, *pp*, *p*. Includes a long note with a fermata.

Musical staff in bass clef. Dynamics: *p*, *f*, *p*, *n*. Includes a long note with a fermata. Fingerings: 1 - - 2 - 1.