

Alexander Wu

September 2023

Strained

for two saxophones and electronics

duration: 6'

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Program Note

Strained is an honest but reluctant negotiation with my [R|r]omantic tendencies. Dramatic gestures are often hollowed out and detuned, sometimes sabotaged by the impersonal vocoder. Quotidian details surround and undermine these figures, as if to foreshadow their failure. Ideas emerge but would not evolve without a digression.

Technical Notes

Score is transposed.

Saxophones

slap A standard slap should be played with the normal embouchure. It produces a clear pitch.

secco slap A secco slap should be played without blowing into the saxophone. The pitch should be barely audible.



A cross notehead indicates blowing into the mouthpiece from a distance of 1–2cm. It produces an airy noise.



(sop. sax only) Singing only occurs once in the soprano part in mm. 91–92. Diamond noteheads are the sung notes. The desired sound is distorted and crude.

Electronics

Both saxophones should be miked (but not amplified). The microphone inputs are fed into the Max patch, serving as a modulator for the vocoder. The speakers should be placed as close to the saxophones as possible.

The percentages below the vocoder part roughly indicate output levels, which do not always correlate with its absolute loudness.

The velocity of the MIDI keyboard controlling the vocoder is designed to have no effect on loudness or timbre.

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Ambiguous ♩ = 58

Soprano Saxophone

Baritone Saxophone

Electronics

Measures 1-4. Time signatures: 3/4, 4/4, 3/4, 5/8, 4/4. Dynamics: *p*, *fp*, *p*, *p*, *sf*, *p*. Performance instructions: *slap*, *3*.

Measures 5-8. Time signatures: 4/4, 2/4, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4. Dynamics: *f*, *p*, *f*, *f*. Performance instructions: *3*, *3*.

Measures 9-12. Time signatures: 3/4, 2/4, 5/8, 3/4, 4/4, 16/16, 4/4. Dynamics: *p*, *pp*, *p*, *f*, *ff*. Performance instructions: *secco slap*, *3*, *3*, *3*.

29 Playful

$\text{♩} = \text{♩} (\text{♩} = 116)$

(f) *p* *poss.* *f* *p* *f* *p*

p *poss.* *f* *p* *f* *p*

100%

33

secco
slap

36

secco
slap

secco
slap

secco
slap

f

f

40 flz.

3 *p* *f* *p*

p *f* *p*

0%

45 flz.

f *p*

f *p sub.* *sf* *p*

100%

49

mp *mf* *p* *f*

sf *p* *sf* *p* *sf*

secco slap

slap

slap

secco slap

slap

53

play 5x

p non cresc.

play 5x

p non cresc.

play 5x

0% cresc. through repeats 100%

56

p

very slightly longer pause

slightly longer pause (in time)

p

61 flz. **Stuck**

flz.

Stuck

f

p

flz.

f

p

3

64

secco
slap

3

mp

flz.

mp

3

3

Detailed description: This system contains measures 64, 65, and 66. The top staff features a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and slurs. A bracket labeled 'secco' and 'slap' spans the end of measure 65. The middle staff has a bass line with eighth-note triplets and slurs. A bracket labeled 'flz.' spans measures 65 and 66. The bottom staff is empty. Dynamics include *mp* in measures 65 and 66.

67

secco
slap

3

flz.

f sub.

slap

f sub.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 67, 68, and 69. The top staff has a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and slurs. A bracket labeled 'secco' and 'slap' spans the end of measure 68. The middle staff has a bass line with eighth-note triplets and slurs. A bracket labeled 'flz.' spans measures 68 and 69. The bottom staff is empty. Dynamics include *f sub.* in measures 68 and 69.

71

slap

flz.

3

3

flz.

3

3

Detailed description: This system contains measures 71, 72, and 73. The top staff has a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and slurs. A bracket labeled 'slap' spans the beginning of measure 71. The middle staff has a bass line with eighth-note triplets and slurs. A bracket labeled 'flz.' spans measures 71 and 72. The bottom staff is empty. Dynamics include *f sub.* in measures 71 and 72.

74

p sub.
secco
slap
p sub.
0%

78

f sub.
60%

Lyrical, much slower (but faster than double time)

82

$\text{♩} = 65$

pp *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *pp*
p *mf* *p* (away from mouthpiece) *mp*
100% > 0%

88

mf *p* *pp* (sung) *molto*

p < mp *p < mp* *p* *pp* *ff* *f*

93

p *pp* *f* *molto* *p* *pp* *ff*

pp *f* *pp*

98

molto *pp*

ff *pp*

100% 0%

102

secco
slap

mf p *f p* *mf*

3

3

(chromatic cluster)

60%

107

p *f p* *f p* *f* *ff*

mf p *f p* *f p* *f*

3

111

ff

0% 100% 0% 100%

115

slap

0% 100%

0% 100%

120

slap

p sub. *fp*

p sub.

0% 100%

0%

124

f *p* *p poss.*

ff *p poss.*

100%

0% 100% 0%