Argrophylax

Michael Young
Performance Notes

Electronics
The Max/MSP patch has mono input (oboe mic) and stereo output. The patch progresses through a series of pre-set functions which are instigated either by MIDI pedal (oboist) or at the computer. The balance of live/electronics should always ensure that the live instrument is immersed, but not obscured, by the electronics.

Timing
Each time frame is c. 8-10s. Rhythmic timing is open to interpretation by the performer, depending on his/her response to the Max/MSP computer behaviours.

Multiphonics
Performers should, if there are problems, try to find fingerings which match as closely as possible the stated pitches. Bar 9 is a double trill on the f# key whilst trilling the lh g# key as well. Bar 17 moves from the multiphonic to the individual pitch and back again. Use embouchure to create stated effects e.g. multiphonics ‘form gradually’ (bar 20) or ‘dissipate intermittently’ (bar 21) the embouchure should be used to create these effects. The second stave at the beginning of the work indicates where the jaw should be dropped in order to facilitate a move from the trilled pitches to the multiphonic sounds.

Air tone
The air tone in bar 5: the fingering should hint at the pitches stated but should be unstable and fluctuate freely from noise-pitch.

High notes
Bar 19 has a high c: this should be intermittent, the pitch should also fluctuate using fingerings.

Fast notes
From bar 64 onwards the demi-semi quavers should be tongued quickly (double/triple tongue when possible) using the written pitches as a guide and filling in the others. Bar 119 onwards is as fast and furious as possible pushing the breathing as far as possible – snatch a breath where needed but do not make big gaps.

Other instructions
Bar 34: finger pitches in the lower part of the instrument from Bb to Gb – maintain a very high pressure embouchure so that most of the pitches do not speak and only the occasional pitch escapes sfz. If they will not speak then drop the embouchure pressure violently and return it to the high pressure immediately.
In myth, Argrophylax is a silver stone with magical properties found in the river Pactolus, bought by wealthy Lydians and placed at the threshold of treasure houses. If thieves ever tried to enter, it emitted piercing trumpet-like alarm sounds and, deranged, the would-be robbers would “go over the cliffs” as if chased by guards. This story can be found in Concerning Rivers, a text attributed to Plutarch. The term itself does not exist outside of this source, but is close to other words; “argos” (bright) and “arguros” (silver). An “agrophylax” was a rural guard in charge of farmlands where as an “argrophylax” was a church father and keeper of silver. All these references have served as inspiration for this piece; although not ‘programme music’ as such, it intends to create strong musical evocations of these references: alarms and surprise, intensely shining objects, the swirling waters of a river, maddening confusion and flight.

The oboist negotiates a proportional score with rhythmic and pitch freedoms while the computer processes the live sound in real-time. It employs spectral and granular techniques creating drastic timbral transformations, reiterations, webs of echoes and sheets of dense sound. The player has to react and adapt to these events. The Max/MSP system 'listens' to the oboe, and is at times empathetic, reactive or provocative, but generally unpredictable in behaviour.

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M Young 2006.
unusually strident and aggressive!

**Oboe**

\[ \text{fff} \quad \text{ff} \quad \text{fff} \]

weak, struggling

[\text{ebbing away}]

[\text{1st oct}]

[\text{2nd oct}]

**M - jaw**

\[ \text{ppp} \quad \text{mf/f} \]

leisurely at first

[\text{sub f}]

[\text{sub ff}]

[\text{mf/f}]

[\text{fff}]

[\text{ff}]

[\text{ff > mf}]

[\text{mf > p}]

[\text{pp sempre}]
rattling with bumps

low oct., high press. pitches speak at random

p:(sfz)

as if listening

fff

air tone: M speaks at will

bumps again

air tone: M speaks at will

pp:(mf/f)
Eb 1st oct
G#
pp:(mf/f)

air tone:
M
speaks at will

...shuddering every time

still fluid, with hiccups

losing it

sort of tentative

then in a red mist
Disintegrating

As if decapitated

Shaky!

To sound higher than reasonable [not B!] allow pitch to drop out at will: c. 45°

Allow electronic sounds to continue...

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