THE SAXOPHONE MUSIC OF ALEX MINCEK AND ERIC WUBBELS: USES OF FORM, REpetition, AND EXTENDED TECHNIQUE

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Composers Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels have both contributed significantly to the saxophone repertoire of the 21st Century. As members of the Wet Ink Ensemble, a New York City-based new music ensemble, they are both highly regarded performers and composers; Mincek is a saxophonist and Wubbels a pianist. While their contributions to the saxophone repertoire have been significant (seventeen works by Mincek, six works by Wubbels), there has been little scholarly attention to either composer or their saxophone works. This document provides the reader with biographical sketches and the philosophical approaches of each composer, comparing their similarities while drawing attention to what makes each unique in addition to highlighting the ways they have impacted each other as collaborators. It further examines Mincek’s Pendulum III and Nucleus and Wubbels’ This is This is This is and Axamer Folio, specifically evaluating the works through an analysis of form, unique uses of repetitive gestures, and extensive incorporation of extended techniques on the saxophone with the goal of providing a performer with analytical and performance tools to aid in the interpretation of these works.
This document is dedicated to my parents, Donald and Christine Younglove, whose unconditional love and support have made possible the pursuit of this passion.
I would like to acknowledge many individuals whose efforts went into the creation of this document.

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INTRODUCTION

Alex Mincek (b. 1975) and Eric Wubbels (b. 1980) are both prolific composers and active performing musicians who have contributed significant works to the saxophone repertoire. Little scholarly attention has been given to these composers and their saxophone works, despite the growing popularity of their music in the contemporary music community. Their successes are further evidenced by their many honors and awards. Alex Mincek has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Alpert Award, and multiple awards from the Academy of Arts and Letters. He has also been the recipient of prestigious commissions from the Barlow Endowment, the French Ministry of Culture, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, ASCAP, Radio France, and MATA.1 Additionally, Mincek’s works have been performed by many accomplished ensembles, including Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, Janacek Philharmonic, Ensemble Linea, Talea Ensemble, Wet Ink Ensemble, Ensemble Dal Niente, Yarn/Wire, Mivos Quartet, and the JACK Quartet.2 Similarly, Eric Wubbels’ music has received many awards and commissions, including a 2016 Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and commissioning grants from Chamber Music America’s Classical Commissioning Program, Issue Project Room, the Barlow Endowment, the Jerome Foundation, New Music USA, and the Yvar Mikhashoff Trust. Additionally, he has served in residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Djerassi Resident Artists Program, and Civitella Ranieri Center (Italy). His music has been performed throughout Europe, Australia, Asia, and the United States.3 Much of Mincek’s and Wubbels’ music is self-
published, reducing the availability through traditional distribution channels. It is often written for specific musicians, leading to notational systems that often lack the clarity of a work that has gone through a publishing house. For this reason, it can be difficult for a musician previously unfamiliar with their works to fully understand the depth and demands of their compositions.

Mincek and Wubbels are both members of the New York City-based Wet Ink Ensemble. Mincek serves as the group’s saxophonist and bass clarinetist (as well as artistic director) and Wubbels as the pianist. They frequently perform their own compositions, in addition to championing the works of “European composers little known in the USA.” The two composers also have similar pedagogical influences, both having studied at Columbia University with composers Tristan Murail and Fred Lerdahl. The influence of this ensemble experience provides aesthetic unity in their individual compositional styles, leading to frequent pairing of their compositions on programs for logistic and aesthetic reasons.

While little scholarly attention has been given to these composers, an interview conducted by Ryan Dohoney provided the impetus for the idea to explore these composer’s works together in a single document. That interview covers topics relating to the similarities in their music, their uses of extended, repetitive loops (using Wubbels’ This is This is This is as an example), Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy about difference and repetition, and the organizational aesthetics of Wet Ink in addition to the artistic benefits of being a part of such an ensemble. Since the publication of that interview, both composers have contributed more new works to the saxophone repertoire. Other than the composers’ individual websites, biographical details and

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4 Ryan Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion: An Interview with Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels of the Wet Ink Ensemble,” accessed September 6, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/2952619/Proximity_to_a_notion_of_fusion_An_Interview_with_Alex_Mincek_and_Eric_Wubbels_of_the_Wet_Ink_Ensemble?auto=download, 18-24.
5 Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 2, transcript.
6 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 18-24.
compositional analyses cannot be readily found. The depth of their compositional styles and unique aesthetic warrants scholarly attention.

This document explores two works by each composer of similar instrumentation; one by each composer for saxophone(s) and piano, and one by each composer for saxophone and drum set. The two pieces for saxophone and piano (*This is This is This is* and *Pendulum III*) were both written for and premiered by Eliot Gattegno and Eric Wubbels (Mincek was the second saxophonist for Wubbels’ composition), making the two works, written within a year of each other, connected from their inception. The two saxophone-and-drum-set pieces (*Nucleus* and *Axamer Folio*) are related by commission. Patchwork (Noa Even and Stephen Klunk) organized a consortium to commission Eric Wubbels to write what eventually became *Axamer Folio* after performing Mincek’s work *Nucleus*.

Chapter 1 begins with a biographical sketch of Alex Mincek, tracing his musical development and inspirations as a developing composer through his educational experiences to the present. Identifying as both composer and performer is central to his musical life and he discusses the advantages and disadvantages of being a saxophonist who composes for his own instrument. His father, a professional athlete, impacted the way he thought about physical gesture, and physicality plays a role in how he composes musical gestures. A section is devoted to the importance of coherence and logic within Mincek’s works as well as how he uses different types of musical repetition.

Chapter 2 presents a biographical sketch of Eric Wubbels, tracing his musical training and formal education, and then discusses an overview of his compositional process, philosophy, and aesthetic. Like Mincek, Wubbels’ music is influenced by his ruminations on physical
gesture. This section also discusses his approach to musical form, his approach to the saxophone, and his overall aesthetic.

Chapter 3 explores the Wet Ink Ensemble, combining biographical information that is readily available online with the accounts of two of the group’s members, Mincek and Wubbels, informing the reading about the group’s history and aesthetics. Understanding the significance of this institutional aesthetic reinforces how Mincek and Wubbels have developed their unique aesthetic, and offers insight into how their compositional styles are similar through shared experiences.

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the saxophone works of a single composer (chapter 4 to the works of Alex Mincek and chapter 5 to those of Eric Wubbels). Each section begins with an historical background of each work, followed by a performer’s analysis that evaluates the form of the piece and how it uses repetition, pitch content, and elements of free improvisation as appropriate to each work. Each subsection ends with comments from performers gleaned through interviews that assist in the preparation and performance of each work.

Analyzing these representative pieces of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels will familiarize a larger audience with their music, rendering it more approachable and comprehensible to saxophonists and musicians previously unfamiliar with their individual and composite aesthetics.
CHAPTER 1. ALEX MINCEK

Mincek’s Musical Development, Education, and Compositional Influences

Composer and saxophonist Alex Mincek is a prolific writer who has created at least seventeen works for the saxophone. His saxophone compositions include solos, duets, small and large chamber works, and one chamber concerto (see list of works in Appendix A). His popularity in contemporary music and saxophone circles has grown so much that he was one of eight composers whose works were featured by the Ensemble Linéa/Proxima Centari collaboration concert at the 2015 World Saxophone Congress in Strasbourg, France. It was at this conference where his new tenor saxophone chamber concerto, titled Pneuma, was premiered by Michael Ibrahim with an all-star ensemble.

Alex Mincek was born in 1975 and grew up in Jacksonville, Florida. He started playing saxophone in his beginner band class, and quickly fell in love with the instrument after observing his band director’s demonstration of the instrument. After learning a number of tunes from the radio, Mincek was invited to play in the jazz band in the 7th grade, an honor usually reserved for the 8th grade students. Thus began his musical journey. Mincek comes from an unusual family; his mother was a classically trained flutist and his father was a professional tennis player. This familial athleticism shapes the way Mincek views the physicality of playing any instrument, an idea that is explored in much of his music.8

Mincek started his undergraduate education at the University of North Florida (UNF), primarily studying with saxophonist Bunky Green. He credits Green’s ability to improvise in a way that was emblematic of free improvisation while still managing to stay in and around chord changes as one of the characteristics that inspired him to study jazz. Mincek had not yet been

8 Alex Mincek, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 1, transcript.
exposed to free jazz, and Bunky Green “provided [his] entry point into that sound world, and [Mincek] became a lot more interested as a result.” 9 Additionally, Green’s approach to the saxophone had a lasting impact on how Mincek writes for the instrument. He introduced the following sounds that Mincek still uses in his works for the saxophone:

[Green utilized] the idea of considering fingers outside the linear, directional design of the horn, playing things out of sequence to get multiphonics, alternate fingerings—he had a specific thing that he did that was basically bouncing across extreme ranges somewhat out of sequence by using the first two index fingers, meaning that instead of always opening from the bottom of the hand to go upward, he would open from the top, which leads to different sounds and an interesting sense of controlled randomness. There is something like that that I do, which comes from Coltrane and Dolphy and bleeds into Evan Parker as well, the kind of perceived polyphony in his solo language. 10

After two years of study at UNF with Bunky Green, Mincek longed to return to New York City, a scene he had previously experienced as a high school summer music camper at the Manhattan School of Music (MSM) 11. In 1995, he transferred to MSM with plans to study with Bob Mintzer. However, Mintzer was not teaching that semester, so he studied instead with legendary jazz saxophonist Richard Oatts, most often known by the name Dick Oatts. Due to the traveling schedule of these jazz musicians, Mincek ultimately worked with “a constellation of teachers,” including Rich Perry, Steve Slagle, and Ralph Lalama. This multitude of influences benefitted Mincek; he states that “there was a lot of difference between them, so it created a varied approach to my playing.” 12 It was during this time as an undergraduate student at MSM when he first considered composition as an outlet for his creativity. Ultimately it was the sound world of free improvisation that led him into composition, or rather led him “out of jazz.” He continues:

The more I improvised and got in contact with other improvisers, other stylistic notions opened up. That led me to the so-called new music, post WWII, such as European avant-

9 Mincek, interview 1.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
garde, American experimentalism, European free improvisation, or free jazz here in the States; improvisation led me into the world of that material.\textsuperscript{13}

While there was no single moment where he decided to become a composer, he recounts the following significant influences:

When I was at Manhattan School of Music studying saxophone, I came in contact with the music of Charles Ives and Morton Feldman. Those two composers hit me hard. My roommate at the time was a percussionist, and he took me to an open rehearsal of the New York Phil playing Mahler 5. The timing of these experiences led me to want to be a composer. Coming into contact with the novelty of Morton Feldman and then the sheer depth of craft and expression in Mahler—these events coming so closely together—got me thinking outside of being just a saxophonist and wanting to write for different combinations of instruments in various styles.\textsuperscript{14}

Additionally, the unconventional jazz pedagogy of his multiple teachers at MSM also helped open up Mincek’s mind into pursuing a career in composition:

Having the differences between the teachers led me to think more openly about what I could be as a saxophonist. I had a template in my mind of what I thought being a saxophonist was, in the context of jazz anyway, prior to moving to NY, but this greatly changed as a result of working with them, and living in NYC in particular. It really opened my mind to a multitude of possibilities. Perhaps most importantly I realized I didn’t even have to be a jazz musician just because I was a saxophonist. Sometimes I would go to Dick’s apartment and he would be like, “Let’s just play,” and we’d get our horns out and just play. I used to think about Dick Oatts as the quintessential lead alto guy, but he just wanted to play freely for an hour, which might also have been an easy way to give a lesson, but he seemed sincerely open-ended. This was about the same time I started studying composition, rather clandestinely, but I would tell a few of my teachers about my compositions and it turned out they were really interested and supportive. I recall having conversations with Rich Perry about Elliot Carter’s string quartets and the same thing with Dick, he really liked talking about what I was writing.\textsuperscript{15}

After finishing his undergraduate degree at MSM, Mincek decided to pursue an MA degree in composition with composer Nils Vigeland.\textsuperscript{16} This marked his first formal study of music composition. He ultimately earned his DMA at Columbia University where he also studied composition with Tristan Murail and Fred Lerdahl. Tristan Murail, a composer whose name is

\textsuperscript{13} Mincek, interview 1.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
inseparable from the musical language of spectralism and a composer of much international
renown, was someone Mincek was familiar with prior to his studies. Having known the aesthetic
of this famous composer, Mincek hoped to pursue the idea of “considering harmony as
inseparable from timbre, and having both of those things inseparable from the notion of how we
experience time.”

This proved important and novel to Mincek at the time; however, his music
does “something very different than that now.” Fred Lerdahl, the other primary pedagogue from
Mincek’s time at Columbia University, imparted a different set of values for Mincek. He states:

[Lerdahl] became really important because he has a keen analytical mind and could really
dissect what I was doing musically in terms of coherence and logic—both things I needed
to think about—and he was very challenging. He had this saying about being undeniably
“good” at something, which is hard to unpack due to the subjectivity of music and art, but
the essence is that one’s music should have undeniable quality, however one choses to
define quality. So he helped me figure out what that was for me.

This idea of having complete control over the musical material became very important for
Mincek, an idea that he still uses in structuring the formal elements of his music. His works for
saxophone have formal elements that impart values taught by both Murail and Lerdahl. These
pieces will be examined in more detail in the analytical chapter of this document.

Performer-Composer

As a saxophonist, Mincek falls into the unique category of performer-composer, a self-
given label, which is one who writes music that he or she can perform. Mincek does not
exclusively write for himself; in fact he has written for some of the significant performers of the
instrument (e.g., Michael Ibrahim and Eliot Gattegno). He has two personal divisions in
composing for saxophone:

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17 Mincek, interview 1.
18 Ibid.
I separate my writing into two categories: 1) music that I plan to someday play myself and 2) music that I write for somebody else. Regarding the first category, I’m overly practical. I’m not exceptionally aspirational with the materials in a piece I intend to play because I don’t have the interest or time to be a soloist—spending three to six months to learn a piece. I won’t write a piece for myself that requires that. I’m also just not that interested in traditional notions of virtuosity, in fact, I’m rather skeptical of them. There are some pieces I have written for saxophone that I just will not play. For the second type, music for someone else, I’m more aspirational, but my familiarity with the instrument still allows me to write something that is very idiomatic, which is important to me. I want it to feel good to play, but still be very challenging. As a saxophonist I have things that I think just sound good on the saxophone and as a result I tend to explore those ideas more than others.¹⁹

His experiences as a saxophonist have inevitably influenced the way he approaches composing for it, and he has therefore found a new voice in the instrument. He further credits very specific techniques to saxophonists Evan Parker and Bunky Green:

There are many Evan Parker things I find interesting. For instance, what I describe as his “polyphonic bagpipes” thing. The general idea is that on one level he is not playing in the correct sequence(s) that the horn is designed for, to produce singular resonant tones, which creates a kind of malfunction or unpredictability just by using these out-of-sequence fingerings, and on another level he is doing various contortions of the embouchure, which exacerbate the situation to produce even more extensions of the horn/sound. Bunky was doing a version of that which I thought was very interesting and has stayed in my own vocabulary. My work Ali is a total rumination on that idea: the malfunctioning of playing the horn out of sequence, yet still being really idiomatic on the horn.²⁰

Many of the techniques found in Mincek’s compositions for saxophone find their roots in the jazz movement of free improvisation, and these techniques will be explored in more specific detail in the analysis section of this document. Although Mincek is a saxophonist, his experience as a player is not always an advantage when composing for saxophone. Mincek believes his own limitations on the instrument impact the way he writes for it:

I do not consider myself a soloist. It’s not what I do. I can’t devote the amount of time and effort; also, I just never felt comfortable in that kind of role. So, already in the back of my mind I’m always thinking of the saxophone as an auxiliary instrument of sorts, I’m not thinking of it soloistically. I have written solo pieces, but it’s been very difficult for

¹⁹ Mincek, interview 1.
²⁰ Ibid.
me to enter that headspace—to think for somebody else, but I guess what I’m getting at as a significant difference, is an identifiable relationship with virtuosity. I think virtuosity is not something as identifiable in my music or that I need . . . I would say my music is more clandestinely or sneaky virtuosic, or not virtuosic at all. In fact, it can be excruciatingly simple.21

One can find examples of that range in compositional difficulty with *Karate*, which he intended to perform himself versus *Ali*, which is much more demanding and was written for saxophonist Michael Ibrahim. Mincek did not have the intention to personally perform that work.

Performers familiar with Mincek’s works often find a sense of comfort inherent in the idiomatic nature of a saxophonist writing for his own instrument. David Wegehaupt discusses this idiomatic nature:

> I am very appreciative of how wonderfully idiomatic Mr. Mincek’s piece is. Obviously, he is a saxophonist, so he is able to be sure that his writing ‘works’ and I would guess that parts of it may be developed improvisationally, or just overall through his experience playing the saxophone. The highly technical passages, leaps into and out of altissimo, the multiphonics, everything he writes just translates well for me on my saxophone. No time is spent wondering what the composer was hoping for with a given effect or passage, as it is all very clear and works very easily. The most difficult technical passages in this music are actually not as difficult as they may initially appear, as they lay well with the fingers and are written very thoughtfully. It is thrilling to execute very virtuosic and difficult sounding passages that are, to me, not as difficult to play as they might appear on the page at first glance.22

Not all of this idiomatic material comes from Mincek in isolation. Mincek’s working relationship with saxophonist Eliot Gattegno deserves partial credit. Gattegno, for whom *Pendulum III* was written, discusses that working relationship during the compositional process of writing that work:

> As Alex is a saxophonist, he knew what he wanted to do. I helped idiomatically and incorporated new techniques that I had developed. I also helped with notation and expand his vocabulary and knowledge of what ‘classically-trained saxophonists’ would expect/do.23

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21 Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 2, transcript.
22 David Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.
23 Eliot Gattegno, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.
This interaction with more classically trained saxophonists is part of the reason his music is comfortable at home in both the classical saxophone world as well as the jazz and contemporary music scenes.

**Gesture and Physicality**

Raised by a father who was a professional tennis player, Mincek was often exposed to sports analogies and comparisons. Mincek recalls:

My parents told me there was no way they would fund the various music camps I wanted to attend or fund going to college for music unless—they were very big on goals—I made first chair all-state in my home state of Florida, which was a notion my private lesson teacher accidentally put into their heads when he told them that he thought I had the potential to be first chair all-state. Again, my father—not necessarily understanding that this was not how being an artist works, that it was an inaccurate litmus test for musical achievement—set this as the bar. 24

Although Mincek never made first chair all-state, his parents still supported his musical development and careers, but his father’s athletic influence didn’t stop there. Mincek’s own approach to music is very physical and kinetic, and his approach to composition and performance has the residual influence from involvement in and around an athletic environment. Mincek recollects his experience in Zs below:

I used to play in this band called Zs—two saxophonists, two guitarists, and two drummers—and it was this incredibly kinetic experience. The music was very intense, very difficult, and it always felt like a workout. I wrote *Karate* for the other saxophonist, Sam Hillmer. We used to just get together and improvise, so I wrote us a piece. It was inspired by those large martial arts classes where everyone is going through the same motions, and when we were rehearsing it, Sam said to me, “It feels like we just did karate,” so the name just kind of stuck. Music has a very palpable physical dimension to it, and that is tremendously important to me. Not just in the sense of the physical movement of the body, but as representative of the physical movements all around us. When people think of the music of the classical canon a lot of it has to do with language and narrative, the telling of stories, the idea of a melody essentially being a metaphor of the human voice, so in that light a really good piece of music is one that tells this kind of lyrical story. My music is very strategically doing something different—representing what one sees and feels, and by “see” I mean shapes and colors and movements, and

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24 Mincek, interview 1.
other physical experiences whether tactile or durational—not narrative storytelling in a language sense, but more plainly representative of the physical world we observe via our senses.25

This theme of physicality can be traced from Mincek’s paternal influences to his compositional aesthetic, and can be heard in the music he played in Zs (leading to the creation of the saxophone duo Karate) and in the other music he writes (Mincek’s pendulum works are based on the physical motion of a pendulum).

Coherence and Logic

Mincek’s music is self-defined by its rigid adherence to the principles of coherence and logic, components of composition that Mincek developed during his time studying with Lerdahl. Mincek discussed this as a current state of his composition:

I’m obsessed with coherence. In fact, I need to loosen up. This is something that has progressed over the years, and I’m in a suffocating level of it right now, but having things seem inevitable and yet mysteriously correct is really important to me. Coherence and clarity are not the same thing. I want a mysterious coherence. I want things to feel correct without presenting themselves in a simple way. It creates a kind of wonder or awe for what has just happened, while still creating an acceptance that it’s exactly how things were supposed to have happened.26

This mysterious coherence can be approached through a variety of means. One method is having a plan but allowing mental spontaneity in the creative process, as long as one plants a seed for that deviation early in the piece. It is difficult to retroactively make sense of a crazy idea. Mincek explains further:

The best-laid plan is the one you can most easily deviate from without abandoning the principles of the plan. What I am saying is, I often try to write something really coherent, and then I get bored, so I proceed to write something next that doesn’t make any sense, but since this is against my principles of coherence, I simply add something retroactively, in front of where I began to change the entire context, rather than not making any crazy moves in the left-to-right trajectory of conception. We experience music from left to right

25 Mincek, interview 1.
26 Ibid.
but one of the joys of writing music is that you don’t have to write it that way. What works best for me is hardly ever starting at the beginning and writing to the end. I start in the middle, get to the end and then make the beginning.27

Mincek’s adherence to coherence and logic can be seen in his approach to form. In his piece Pendulum III, he structures the work like a large-scale crossfade with his musical material, as described by Eric Wubbels: “I remember the way in which you fleshed out [the form] for me, in some bar or something, when you were writing Pendulum III. . . the way in which you phrased it at that time was that the piece starts off dumb, then it goes dumber, then smart, then dumbest, then smarter, then smartest.”28 That progression is illustrated in the diagram below:

Dumb → Dumber → Smart → Dumbest → Smarter → Smartest

While very logical, it is also quite creative in the way that his material, labeled “dumb” and “smart” by Mincek in that discussion with Eric Wubbels, is used in the crossfade, a giant analogy for the sweeping gesture of a pendulum, one of the many pendulum analogies for which the piece is named. But to further understand how the material is used, we must further unpack the meaning of what Mincek meant by “dumb” and by “smart.”

I’ve always really like composers that in some ways make it clear that they really know what they’re doing, but in other ways make me think, “They are the dumbest person in the world.” It is so compelling. Lately I’ve been thinking that it takes a tremendous amount of confidence to be that vulnerable, and that is something that hits me in music. From Beethoven to Sciarrino, there are composers that just own it—that are able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses—and are capable of giving an aura of invincibility and utter vulnerability too. So when I’m saying things like stupid versus smart: smart is when I’m showing the listener that I know what I’m doing, stupid means they might think that I don’t know what I’m doing, on every level. Do I not know how to play my instrument? Do I not know anything about harmony? I’ve had Alvin Lucier come to me and say, “Do people think I just don’t know anything about music?” There are certain people whose aesthetic draws them to write music in which it is not obvious whether or not this person knows anything about music. I think this is really cool. I am not brave enough to have it all one way, I alternate smart with stupid, but I value stupid a lot.29

27 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
This clarification on the terms *smart* and *dumb* as Mincek uses them to label his and other’s material shows two staggeringly opposed methods of composing music, especially when used intentionally. However, Mincek likes to use diametrically opposed ideas—ideas the listener thinks are complete opposites—and then show us how they are not so different, how they are related through a continuum. By assigning two opposing ideas, or poles, as the extremes of a work, he is able to explore the area in between, much like a pendulum does as it travels on its journey from one pole to the other. They may seem distant when viewed in isolation, but they are deeply connected in a multitude of ways, and this is the inspiration for Mincek’s development of musical material and the form through which he lays it out:

I try to do crazy, fairly incoherent things from left to right and then add coherence by writing in the opposite direction from where I began. So I try to have fun with that way of thinking, because it is all going to be coherent in the end. But I have to start out with a pretty clear idea about what extremes the piece will be able to believably traverse. To give you a hypothetical example, if the idea of my piece is pure signal to pure noise, or the idea is textural unity versus complete undifferentiated saturation of texture, then I might find all the points connecting those poles from left to right, so to speak, and then juggle them in unpredictable non-linear ways, but all the while maintaining control by having a clear understanding of the extremities of the idea.\(^{30}\)

Although speaking in the abstract, Mincek is getting to the idea that he creates his forms by starting with two contrasting musical ideas and finding the way these materials are connected. Once he knows the connection, he can present that material in any way he wants. As a composer, he understands the continuum, but he controls the perspective in which the audience views this material. He can present material that doesn’t make sense until it has been explained with more material later in the piece. An example of this may be seen in *Nucleus* where he develops the initial hocket cell. Then seemingly out of nowhere, the saxophone explodes into a heavy funk riff that loops itself in a repetitive 3/8 metrical structure (see measure 53 in example 1.1). This

\(^{30}\) Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
doesn’t make musical sense based on the previous material, but it will come to make sense by the end of the work.

Example 1.1 – Alex Mincek, *Nucleus*, page 3, line 3, measure 50-53

In order to fully comprehend the complexity of organization in this continuum, it is important to know how Mincek begins to structure a piece in the beginning phase of writing a new work. Here is an example of how he might start the compositional process:

The well-laid plan has to do with—and each piece is different—but I think of a handful of ideas in a lot of different parameters; hypothetically speaking there may be three or four timbral ideas, three or four rhythmic ideas, five or six physical ideas (gesture or movement), three or four dynamic ideas. Some of these are conceived together at the beginning, but I’ll separate them, parse out everything I have, especially when there is more of one category than of another (four timbral ideas versus six rhythmic ideas, for example), this is how I start to organize the form. I’ll see how many rotations I can get out of permuting these different ideas. These forms end up being variations, but instead of variations on one theme, if you consider every version of every parameter as a theme, it’s a network of variations on numerous themes that are each in their own orbits, all out of phase with one another. So one the one hand, I get this tight cohesive clarity of materials, because I’ve organized my materials rather succinctly, but on the other hand, there are so many combinations of them I can generate a lot of momentum in the way they are all rotating, or orbiting around one another, or combining and colliding, or separating out.31

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31 Mincek, interview 1.
After discussing form in the pendulum analogy, one must also understand Mincek’s approach to form in a more abstract manner. Mincek presents the reader with the idea of formal unfolding while developing a coherent idea with maximum surprise as the variations reveal themselves. The sheer volume of variations, often with only minute changes, gives us the perception of repetition. Here is how Mincek explains this concept:

I use the word *unfolding* because we already have all the materials and there are certain ways we choose to reveal them. What I did not mention earlier, but I think is something [Eric Wubbles and I] have in common meant by unfolding, is a relationship to variation form, but instead of dealing with one theme and a series of variations on that theme, there is a constellation of materials/themes that is being constantly varied by the manners in which materials combine with the incremental addition of new materials. There are rotations of these materials in a kind of constantly varying form. You’re constantly hearing variations, but they are always rotating many objects and the objects are not always revolving in the same order. Perhaps *churning* is a better word than revolving or unfolding. With every churn there is essentially some variation on some previous thing.\(^\text{32}\)

This provides a framework for composing in a modern language that provides the needed logic and coherence while still maintaining a sense of unpredictability and the possibility of dialogue through his establishment of syntax. He often uses the beginning of a work to give his listener a musical key, allowing the listener to hear all the musical materials and fragments that will be used in the work. As the work progresses the audience is able to put all the pieces together. Treating his musical material like language, he creates syntax and allows that to coherently structure the piece. One example of this musical key idea can be found in the first two measures of *Pendulum III*, where Mincek presents the two contrasting materials around which the entire piece is constructed (see example 1.2). The first musical idea, the aggressive quintuplet played at the extremes of the piano and slap-tongued by the saxophone, is presented in the first measure. In measure 2 we find microtonal dissonance and dynamically soft material, which is a stark contrast to measure 1.

\(^{\text{32}}\) Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
Additionally, Mincek organizes his forms in a method reminiscent of his pedagogical spectral roots. He states that “every piece creates a form. For me, breaking down familiar formal devices and then reconstructing them is the most authentic way of creating something truly unique, because it requires an understanding and constant dialogue with the ideas you are trying to improve upon.” And these ideas that one improves upon are ingrained into the historically normalized forms, something that Mincek states have political derivations:

It’s a political thing to some extent. It’s something where you normalize a form to generate meaning around it by the ways in which you deviate from the norm. If it is not normalized, you cannot deviate. If you cannot deviate, then you cannot generate any kind of transgression. The clearest example I can think of is Bach’s 5th Brandenburg Concerto. He borrowed forms from Vivaldi (among others) that were popular forms. He was able to express specific social meanings in the manner that he chose to deviate from the expectations implicit in those borrowed forms.

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33 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 20.
34 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
And this deviation is how Mincek generates the syntax of his musical language, a language that
has yet to become normalized. In a discussion with Eric Wubbels and the author, Mincek further
elaborates on his creation of syntax for the sake of coherence:

> What is interesting, with this idea of form, Eric said something earlier about the similarity
of form and it being as if we are creating a syntax for what can be considered as correct
within the logic we have set up. It deals with the question that I mentioned about norms,
and that is if you don’t have the luxury of norms to work against, then you have to create
that norm in your piece. We are giving the listener a key to establish certain norms within
our piece at the get-go, and then these norms can be deviated from throughout the piece. I
think in our music one formal aspect is this idea of giving the listener some type of
syntax to generate expectations that may then be subverted or whatever.\(^{35}\)

Mincek’s approach to formal organization happens on multiple levels. He manipulates the
musical material in a way that functions formally, but may not be fully present aurally, especially
if his process of composition leads him down a path of predictability.

> When I approach form I might find myself writing a smooth transition from one block
that slowly mutates to another. Once I notice that this type of transition is banal, I might
split the transition into many small parts that each loop, so that the transitional function is
completely annihilated by repetition. But it still functions as a transition far back in one’s
perception.\(^{36}\)

This quote discusses one of Mincek strategies for avoiding the dilemma of banality, but it also
highlights one of Mincek’s many uses of repetition.

Repetition

If you examine a score by Alex Mincek, you will find many instances of repetition. The
most simplistic form of this, the repeat sign, is the easiest to locate. More subtle instances, such
as repeated material written out, may require a deeper look. Repetition is a loaded word, as it is
difficult to write any piece of music without repeating some material in some fashion. In the

\(^{35}\) Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
\(^{36}\) Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 19-20.
classical era, large sections of the form were repeated; it was typical for Mozart to repeat the exposition and possibly each theme of a work in the normalized sonata-allegro form. To fully understand and appreciate a composition by Mincek, one must understand the multitude of ways repetition is used and, more specifically, why they are used.

To first comprehend how something is repeated, we must accept that repetition can be notated many ways; it can be written in a loop between repeat signs, or it can be rewritten a second time, or a third, and so on. Mincek has found that how one chooses to notate repetitions impacts the psychology of how a performer plays them:

One thing I’ve noticed as a performer and composer, both in performing my work and handing it off to others, is that writing out repetitions versus signifying them within a repetitive loop elicits completely different reactions even if it’s, theoretically, the exact same thing. That influences how I notate music. Sometimes there’s music that on larger formal levels I won’t mark off with repeat signs. I’ll just write out the whole of the music. Performers and people perusing the scores don’t perceive that things are being repeated. However, when I do the exact same thing within the piece at the same structure level, but with a loop, it jumps out at them. The way you choose to mark the structural repetitions in a piece does have a relationship to how people perceive it and interpret it.37

Often material is repeated, but subtly changed which causes the need for re-notation, although the listening experience contradicts the notated or reading experience. An example is found in the opening of Mincek’s Nucleus for tenor saxophone and drum set. The composition opens with a repeated four-note cell, a hocket between the tenor saxophone and crash cymbal. This cell mutates on each restatement, in rhythmic as well as agogic variations. However, large-scale cycles of this pattern are repeated as well, using repeat signs. In the excerpt shown in example 1.3, one might count the hocket idea presented in five different ways, compounded by the modulating durations of rest in between, but another might also hear the same idea presented in a slightly varied form eighteen times in a row.

37 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 20.
The experience of playing it and listening to it are very different. As a performer, one might try to expertly execute the subtle differences. As a listener, one might hear the same idea with subtle variation as less significant, playing into how Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of *Difference and Repetition* influenced Mincek’s music. Mincek discusses Deleuze’s influence on the opening few bars of *Nucleus*:

> In *Nucleus*, just think of the title; it’s about a cell. That cell then replicates. The piece is about trying to represent this type of proliferation in both a very organic way and in the most mechanical way possible. And this idea came out of my interest in Deleuze to some extent. However, the music is not trying to embody his philosophy; it is just using the philosophy, or even my understandings and misunderstandings of it, for my own creativity. There are old arguments and continuing ones as well, about the granularity or continuity of time, or how color and light can be observed both as particles and as waves. Bertrand Russell and [Henri] Bergson have this feud of whether time is completely continuous or can be broken down into some constituent parts. For me, *Difference and Repetition* is part of that type of argument. It gets into the morphology of time and

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identity—how we identify our world and how we classify and order phenomena. How does something grow? How does something change in time? 39

Mincek further elaborates on the presence of repetition in his music, through the lens of Deleuzian philosophy40:

Some repetitions are obvious. Others are not. Sometimes the composite textures in my music obscure the repetitions of individual parts. As the composer, I know when something is looped and when something isn’t. However, for the listener it is perhaps not always so easy to identify certain types of repetition. To me, it’s interesting then to see how people judge the appearance of the non-looped repetitions while not even realizing that it’s simply a loop within a complex structure, rendered with different notation.41

Using repetition is in no way unique to Mincek’s music. However, his keen awareness of visual and aural differences opens an avenue for interpretational exploration.

Current State of Composition

As with any truly prolific artist, Mincek is working to continually adapt, grow, and develop as a creator of music. This document will examine only a snapshot of his work, and in no way attempts to generalize his compositional style. Rather, it will attempt to understand his compositional approach in understanding these two works, but it will not cover the entire scope of his musical voice. In order to look to the future, one must evaluate the past, and this provides a window into the mindset of how Mincek views his previous compositions, aiding the comprehension and artistic interpretation of those artworks. Here is how Mincek viewed his direction in January, 2016:

For me, I am trying to explore something different than I’ve done before but not in the same way. I’ve written so much music that has a lot meticulous detail and sectionality to it, it is this kind of motley, quilt-like patches. As a friend of mine put it in some

39 Mincek, interview 1.
40 For more information on understanding Deleuze, see http://htmlgiant.com/random/the-beginners-guide-to-deleuze/. For more information regarding Deleuzian philosophical concepts from Difference and Repetition, see Protevi (2010), available online at http://www.protevi.com/john/LearnDR.pdf.
41 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 20.
interview, “Its arrested flow is so unrelenting that it creates something rather continuous.” So now I’m trying to write music that, instead of having an arrested flow, is conceived in broader, smoother strokes. I’m trying to write music that is not essentially constructed in modules of 40 seconds to 2 minutes, which is kind of how my music has been constructed, to having larger swaths of music that are not necessarily monolithic either. They are doing some of the same processes that are in my earlier music, but just doing them on a larger scale. So think of visual art. If somebody went from spending the last ten years making works that are 8 feet by 4 feet, to all of a sudden wanting to do things that are 20 feet by 15 feet. That changes how the material must be conceived, even if you want to put the same types of images into the larger scale, it necessitates some reimagining. I just want to occupy a larger frame for a while, and I want to do it in terms of instrumental force as well. I feel like I’ve written so much chamber music to the point where I feel a bit spent. To write another piece for eight instruments that is roughly 10 minutes long does not seem fun for me right now, so I want to write either solos of long duration, or for large forces like orchestra. Somebody once described chamber music to me as a speed boat, very agile and speedy. They described orchestra as a cruise liner, where there is this hand on deck who yells, “We’re turning left,” and someone else yells, “We’re turning left,” and it’s this whole production just to do every small thing. I’d like to exist in that relay. I’ve written speed boat music and now I’d prefer to write some cruise liner music.42

This speedboat analogy is an apt one for the examination of his saxophone music, since most of these pieces feature solo or chamber works.

Conclusion

One goal of this paper is to develop the tools necessary for an informed performance of Alex Mincek’s saxophone works. His background in jazz and free improvisation has provided a musical language that he uses and develops in his compositions; understanding and identifying these influences is significant. Mincek’s deep connection with physicality and how that can become a part of musical gesture informs the way a performer approaches the related passages. Understanding the sectionality of form, his uses of the various types of repetition, and the unfolding of musical material through combinatorial constellations of his musical components will aid in the cohesive interpretation of Mincek’s works.

42 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
CHAPTER 2. ERIC WUBBELS

Wubbels’ Musical Development, Education, and Compositional Influences

Eric Wubbels (b. 1980) has written six works for the saxophone, most of which came through his friendship and musical collaborations with saxophonist, composer, and Wet Ink colleague Alex Mincek and saxophonist and former classmate, Eliot Gattegno. Wubbels’ composition *This is This is This is* (2010) is perhaps his most well-known work in the classical music circles, but he has been prolific in writing many lesser-known chamber works. These were composed primarily for performance with his Wet Ink Ensemble, “a New York collective devoted to creating, promoting, and organizing adventurous contemporary music.”43 This document focuses on *Axamer Folio* (2015) for soprano saxophone and drum set and *This is This is This is* (2010) for two alto saxophones in unison and piano (in addition to the works of Alex Mincek). A complete list of his works involving the saxophone can be found in Appendix B.

At the age of six, Eric Wubbels began playing piano, taking lessons in his hometown of Williamsburg, Virginia. Wubbels claims a significant benefit from “having lots of smart people around” in this small college town. His journey into the humanities proved formative for him; he attended a small public school that served as the county magnet school for literary and theatre arts. This educational situation provided the foundation for Wubbels’ future aesthetic interests and involvement with text-based materials:

It was a great thing for me at that age, being exposed to classic American literature, historical stuff, writing, and plays. It was rigorous and creative in a way that I think woke that up in my personality and that later served me well as a composer, although I wasn’t doing that at the time. I think that planted a lifelong engagement with text and literature as something that has a lot of meaning for me. In terms of some things I could look back on during that time and see as unusual and formative for my later personality, I was

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43 “Eric Wubbels - Composer/Pianist.”
always interested in the weirdest stuff I could play as a pianist. If I saw something that was strange or unfamiliar, I was completely captivated by it and gravitated towards that. This pull towards strange sounds in music eventually become a factor for the development of Wubbels’ aesthetic as a composer. In high school he had planned to major in English and he enrolled in Amherst College to do just that, opting to keep his piano skills in shape with a minor in piano performance.

A negative experience in a freshman English class led Wubbels to change his major to a Bachelor of Arts in Music at Amherst. He attributes this to many factors:

I thought that if that was how English was taught at that level, then it was not very interesting to me. . . I then got involved in the music department a little bit, and found it hospitable. They were small, but they were good faculty, and the fact that I was interested in new music was really interesting to the faculty. I had one other classmate, Steve Potter, who was also a great composer and pianist, and he and I found Lewis Spratlin, the composer on faculty, and he and other members of the faculty took us in under their wing. The second year I was there we started a new music ensemble. . . My sophomore spring I was playing Kreuzspie by Stockhausen with this all-faculty group, and amazing players. I was 18 or 19 and just thought this was great, that this was what I always wanted to do. The fact that I went to a small school like that, that wasn’t a conservatory, I didn’t get pushed into that traditional sort of training. I was never a great traditional pianist, and that’s another reason I was gravitating towards new music. I just had a different set of skills. . . So that was very formative and important for me to have gone to a school with a program like that, and get a taste of the do-it-yourself kind of thing from an early age and to see that it worked for me. This thing wasn’t here yet, but we had all the parts and could be doing something great, so let’s just do it. Let’s start an ensemble, let’s play Stockhausen and Pärt, Paul Lanksy, all this music that we were just discovering.

While at Amherst, Wubbels learned much from his study with Lewis Spratlin. In reflecting back upon this experience, he found Spratlin to have been the strongest musical mentor figure in his life, for reasons that went above and beyond composition:

The thing that was most important to me about him is his relationship to music. He has this incredible passion for music as a teacher. I took all these classes with him and seeing how excited he would get, how unrestrained he was about his relationships. . . The way in

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44 Eric Wubbels, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 3, transcript.
45 Ibid.
which he modeled being a musician, and loving music, and a sort of humanistic engagement with the arts was really important to me.46

In addition to finding a role model in Spratlin, Wubbels was—and is still—impressed with the way that Spratlin found balance in his compositional approach, especially given the historical framework of Spratlin’s training:

[Spratlin] was a little bit of a 60s guy. He was there during that time, he partook in everything, wrote these pieces that were totally off the wall. By the time I knew him he was back writing much more structured music, but he had an incredible sense of humor, incredible craft technique, intensely expressive music. I think he is a good example of someone from that era in this culture that produces really well-rounded and balanced music. Not many people of that time do, I would say. You chose sides. You wrote music that was either this way or that way. He is really one of the middle-of-the-path people. There is order, rigor, and structure but there is also emotion, humor, all these things that are taboo. Babbitt’s music is not really about timbre. It certainly can be expressive, but it doesn’t emphasize the humanistic thing that Lewis’ music does. He wrote an amazing opera that won the Pulitzer about ten years ago, it was deeply expressive music but also really successful melodic serial music. The fact that he was able to make that music expressive and humanistic was really impressive to me. From that perspective, it was a modeling thing, a well-rounded aesthetic world that is strong, clear, but is not dogmatic or orthodox; an open field of aesthetic engagement.47

This experience at Amherst made a lasting impact on both the faculty and Wubbels. The school offered him a postgraduate teaching assistantship as the orchestra assistant and instructor of ear-training classes, and Wubbels used this year to further sharpen his skills, compose, and apply for graduate school. In 2015, Wubbels returned to Amherst as a visiting professor, a role in which he served in during the writing of this document.

After a brief stint in San Diego at the University of California-San Diego (UCSD), Wubbels settled into his graduate study at Columbia University in New York City, where he lived from 2003-2009, earning both a masters and doctorate. It was at Columbia that Wubbels had the opportunity to study with Tristan Murail and Fred Lerdahl, and came to know fellow

46 Wubbels, interview 3.
47 Ibid.
Wubbels was particular thrilled with the chance to study with Murail, as he had become intrigued with the idea of spectralism. He recalls:

I was really interested in spectral music, Murail and Grisey. I had heard very little of it, but something about the re-engagement with harmony was something that I was ready for after being in a situation of mostly post-serial approaches to pitch organization. I was ready for a different kind of thing. . . I really wanted to go into a place where people were doing that sort of thing, so Columbia was the place to go.48

Murail’s international renown had additional benefits for developing Wubbels; his name attracted some of the best students in the world. This environment created an opportunity for enormous growth for Wubbels. He recollects:

The best thing about having Murail around was that he attracted this incredible group of students from all around the world, really interesting people, a lot of whom were a decade older that I was . . .they had publishing contracts with orchestra pieces being played in Sweden or Germany. . .I was a little kid, and that was great. I felt the need to catch up, to learn what all these guys are doing. . . New York is also a really great place for that as well. To be honest, some places aren’t. Certain kinds of small places can make you feel like a big fish, and it was really important for me to be here at this moment, to see what the level was and if I could hang with it. Studying with Tristan [Murail] himself, not to devalue it, but he was legendarilly an un-giving teacher. . . I don’t even really mind that, especially at the graduate level, sometimes it is really important to have an interesting important artist around. It matters just to watch how they talk about things, to see what they are interested in. Murail was really into Dukas, all these sort of funny things.49

Wubbels’ experiences with his other primary teacher at Columbia University, Fred Lerdahl, were quite different. Although Lerdahl’s music didn’t have the same level of renown as Murail’s, he was able to instill significant values in Wubbels as a developing composer. Wubbels found Lerdahl’s systematic mind to be of particular value:

Fred [Lerdahl] is really engaged with cognition and hearing, asking what sorts of things are audible and what things are not audible in music. He has a systematic mind, but he is also mistrustful of certain compositional systems, because he went through the whole serial era in academia in the United States, which was an era of over-generalizing systems without attention to what is possible to be heard. . . All these things are really slippery issues, but I find it really valuable to engage and to think about them. As a composer, how are you aiming your projects at hearing? What is your understanding of

48 Wubbels, interview 3.
49 Ibid.
hearing, and is it as multivalent and open as it could be? Are you asking something of a listener that you would need two years to be able to perceive in a piece? Being thoughtful about that stuff was one of the biggest things from Fred, in addition to a sense of structure in some of these forms we discussed earlier. The idea of a certain kind of organismism that is based on looser kinds of repetition and spiraling growth, something that I have used in certain pieces very explicitly, I got from Fred.\footnote{Wubbels, interview 3.}

Wubbels claims his ideas about music cognition (i.e., factoring in how people are able to hear and process the music as it is performed in real time) come in part from the pedagogical influence of Fred Lerdahl. This, in addition to philosophical influences, had a lasting impact on Wubbels’ uses of repetition and form in his works for the saxophone.

**Gesture and Physicality**

Often the way in which a composer uses material is more important than the material itself. This idea is particularly true in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when Philip Glass was composing in a new style of music using familiar tonal structures in a different way. However, with Wubbels, the material itself (in addition to its application) is equally significant in what makes his music unique. There are not many pre-existing molds for the musical material from which he composes. For Wubbels, this material usually originates as one of two elements: 1) something idiomatic on the instrument, or 2) something representative of a physical gesture, or deeply connected to a physical idea. An example of the first type can be found in the saxophone’s first measure of *This is This is This is* (see example 2.1). The opening note, a low Bb, is played by closing all of the stock open keys on the saxophone and represents the lowest note playable on an alto saxophone. Since it is articulated with a slap tongue, it is also potentially the loudest slap tongue note, and is arguably the easiest note in which to execute an aggressive slap tongue. The second note, a multiphonic, is performed by only removing the low C key (depressed by the fifth
finger in the right hand) from the low Bb fingering, producing an effortless aggressive
multiphonic. Although the score may look demanding upon first glance, one is quick to notice
how idiomatic these gestures are for an experienced saxophonist. An example of the second type
(something representative of a physical gesture) can be found in the same work in measure 124
(see example 2.2). This is an example where the saxophone part was created based on physical
gestures that are idiomatic to the piano but resultantly unidiomatic for the saxophone.51

Example 2.1 – Eric Wubbels, This is This is This is, page 1, line 1, measure 1-3

Eric Wubbels THIS IS THIS IS THIS IS
Copyright © 2010 by Eric Wubbels
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51 Eric Wubbels, e-mail message to author, August 16, 2016.
Much of Wubbels’ musical material comes from the realm of physical gestures and ideas around physically doing something. Wubbels states that many types of music try to be “rarified and away from the body,” while he strives to do the opposite in embracing the physicality of the body in musical performance. This stems from a multitude of sources:

- Wubbels views the body as a primary concern, and as a performer or composer one must cultivate one’s body—both physically and mentally—in order to achieve elite performance.
- Wubbels seeks a combinatorial transcendental experience from fellow athletes of concentration, seeing many parallels between musicians and athletes, particularly in the mental realm.
- In his article “The Mimetic Hypothesis” Arnie Cox asserts that listening is an

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52 Wubbels, interview 3.
embodied cognition, a process of mimetic engagement.\textsuperscript{54}

In elaboration of the above points, Wubbels’ views on physicality are related to athleticism and how activities are related to the body. To Wubbels, “mental cultivation and physical cultivation are both extremely important parts of being a musician and being a composer.”\textsuperscript{55} He often compares how time is perceived while doing various activities, such as running for 35 minutes, performing a work for 35 minutes, or listening to music for 35 minutes. Those all require various levels of a developed skill. If one accepts Cox’s theory on mimetic engagement in embodied cognition, then one must also realize that the development of physical parts of the body assists in the comprehension of musical ideas through mimesis.\textsuperscript{56}

Building upon the ideas of athleticism and intense focus that musicians exert while performing, the audience embraces this physicality through both mimetic engagement and the mental strain of staying focused throughout an entire concert-length experience. This is not nearly as draining for the listener as it typically is for the performer, but it is nonetheless a unifying experience between listener and performer. The customs that come with the concert setting are rather ritualistic in nature, and this ritual of the concert experience has become even more important for Wubbels in the modern age where one gets so little ritual in daily living. “The concert is a moment where we get together in a communal situation where everyone is paying attention to the same thing. For people who don’t go to church, where do we get that anymore?”\textsuperscript{57}

This idea of concert has directly influenced Wubbels’ structure of \textit{This is This is This is}. The composer borrowed concepts of ritual and routine from the late period writings of one of

\textsuperscript{54} Wubbels, interview 3.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Wubbels’ favorite authors, David Foster Wallace. Eric explains:

The excerpt from *The Pale King* that was published early I think was titled “The Good People” and was about this young couple in Ohio that were kind of dating, and he gets her pregnant and decides to marry her and have this normal life. It was interesting to see him grappling with these sorts of things, like ethics and what is a good life, those sorts of issues. That book is also very much about boredom, routine, and repetitive tasks, and the way in which a human life, especially in the way it relates to work, has to do with an incredible amount of repetition. [David Foster Wallaces’s] point was that there are these people, people who are so good at finding validation or some sort of mental balance in repetitive tasks, that they can live a happy life. It’s not that it just kind of grinds them down and crushes them through the daily life of literally breaking your back doing repetitive work, or staring at things in an IRS office. I think the point that book is trying to make is that the nature of life and work in our current social system is maybe kind of crazy. People have to deal with that in all sorts of ways. That is basically meaningless, so how are you finding meaning? Just drugging yourself up or down to get through? It’s crazy. At that same time, that is on some level just a deep part of human life and existence, and you have to find a way to deal with it. Again, what he is saying is in the absence of generally agreed upon cultural touchstones, like religions, how do you deal with it? Part of what is going into [This is] is secondary to that, just an engagement with the sound of repetition and repetitive music that was in circulation and the air at the time. Bernhard Lang, Orthrealm, and Alex [Mincek’s] earlier music are some examples.58

This work is structured by this idea of finding ecstasy through repetition and is idiomatic of how Wubbels generates his form from the material of the music.

**Musical Forms**

Like most career composers, Wubbels has used a multitude of methodologies to formally structure his works. One of his driving factors is the development of syntax—organizing materials in a way that creates expectation—thus being able to assert meaning through an assumed trajectory.59 In addition, he is acutely self-aware of the audibility of the work, ensuring that the piece progresses at a rate that is comprehensible by the listening sensitivities of the audience.60 Some of Wubbels’ works use an organic process for development (i.e., a process that

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58 Wubbels, interview 3.
59 Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 2, transcript.
60 Ibid.
mimics the natural biological process of replication through slow morphology), while some more recent works use a more modular approach (i.e., a process wherein a section of musical material shifts, sometimes dramatically, to a new and seemingly unrelated section). Both the organic and modular approach share the ability to use repetition to structurally organize the work while reinforcing the material in the listener’s ear to ensure comprehension. Wubbels wants his listener to hear the form of a work in real time, which many, including Wubbels, would say is a neoclassical ideology.

Wubbels’ early works tend to develop organically. As Alex Mincek states: “Some of Eric’s earlier music is more process-based with incremental growth in an additive way with an organic expansion. More recent works aren’t throwing the organic process away but are containing it with a more boxy approach.” Eric discusses this idea of organicism within the context of *Shiverer*, his flute and piano composition:

> A piece like *Shiverer* is pretty concerned with an organic metaphor. It’s a form of repetition in which each time the performers pass through the material it changes some way, step by step. That’s the only time I’ve used that formal or gestural strategy. In terms of organicism as a model for development, that’s not my go-to strategy, although I may be more inclined to use a transition in which things more clearly morph from one thing to another on a local level. In terms of using repetition as a structure, in a piece like *Viola Quartet*, it’s more of a Beethovenian idea of unifying the very local detail with the largest structure.

However, this idea of using repetition as a structure is used in *This is This is This is* in a completely different manner. Wubbels describes his outlook on repetition as used in the context of syntactical employment: “Repetition is another kind of post-serial taboo, so allowing that to come back in is a way of making complex sounds intelligible, syntactical, and grammatical for people on a first listening.” This is a tactic used in his saxophone and piano work, *This is This*.

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61 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 19.
62 Ibid.
63 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
is This is. Additionally, repetition plays a significant role in Wubbels’ music in a variety of formats. Wubbels asserts that repetition can cause increased focus, one of his methods for exploring the idea of athletes of focus as discussed earlier in this chapter. In the following passage, Wubbels discusses this context of viewing repeated passages psychologically, comparing repeat signs to rewriting the material without the sign(s):

To get back to the idea between a page of music repeating versus one little box, I think it does have something to do psychologically as a performer with your conception of what the present cognitive task is. When you see it in that little box, you know that this is my job, just this little thing. It shrinks the moment of attention to a focused point. . . if you have something that is extremely difficult, very short, and repeated a number of times that is difficult to count, then the psychological effect for the performer is that you can’t really think about what’s coming next because you have to focus so much on the task at hand. That’s something I’ve found to be a rewarding experience. My piece This is This is This is is an etude in being able to feel that way. That piece uses extended repetition, with individual loops repeated 39, 45, or up to 77 times. It’s something I haven’t done before or since.64

Wubbels uses repetition to create an experience for the listener and the performer that transcends the average daily experience of blasé life while simultaneously using the device of repetition to expand and comment upon the repetitive daily tasks. The process is complicated enough to require intense, super-human focus to make the ritualistic concert setting a place of experiencing something truly special. Wubbels elaborates:

It takes a certain amount of exertion to burn off whatever sense of everyday life there might be and to set it apart in some way and say it’s about something slightly different. I hate these words, but ritual—at least as it pertains to the concert experience—is something culturally valuable since we have so few other rituals at this point.65

Wubbels also uses repetition to exploit the cognitive benefits to the listener; hearing something repeated gives the brain more time to process that information, and this idea suggests a hint of formal structure. Wubbels describes both his and Mincek’s music as “a little more nuanced in its

64 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 21-22.
65 Ibid, 23.
self-aware articulation to audible, functional units of material.66 Lastly, Wubbels’ methods of repetition also assist the performer in learning the piece, since most performers use repetition in order to build muscle memory for complicated passages. Wubbels has personal insight into this as a performer of his own music, stating that:

There is no way to practice the piece other than to play it at a certain point. The number of times you repeat something may be different, but it is very coextensive; playing the piece and the mechanism for learning something are very similar. Repetition is the mechanism for learning something into your body. You’re kind of like paving neural pathways, carving them out. I also have, at various points, described that piece as a way of presenting a model to an audience, creating an image of a certain kind of attention that, rather than writing a text that says “People should pay more attention” and “Cell phones are bad” it is drawing attention to the fact that musicians are sort of athletes of concentration.67

Therefore, Wubbels uses repetition in formal ways to explore the cognitive benefits for both the performer and the listener, assisting in the audibility of a gesture and the amount of time it takes to mentally process a complex sound (which is more of a range than an exact time in a diverse audience), and in creating an environment that showcases the abilities of these athletes of concentration.

Some of Wubbels’ more recent compositions have taken a different approach to formal organization: modularity. His work Axamer Folio is one such example. Wubbels recalls his experience in modular forms while performing Extension by Mathias Spahlinger:

Almost the entire second half of the piece is modular, so you have material for the duos that can be arranged in any order, and then the final third of the piece is completely independent. It is like that 60s and 70s thing where there are eight things on the page, play them in any order for any duration of time, and it just worked. It blew my mind. I had never encountered a piece like that where I thought that that not only wasn’t it something that I was completely aware of as a listener, it didn’t feel directionless; it was just fascinating from both sides, as a listener and as one of the performers. It just felt like you could just make a universe. You could make something that you cannot even see the boundaries of, the borders of, with so little. That was just something I had to try. I had to

66 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
67 Wubbels, interview 3.
explore that idea.\textsuperscript{68}

In addition to the material influence from Spahlinger, Wubbels chose this new compositional direction in order to further push himself as a developing artist:

After many years of writing music that was very much about precision and about locking things down, and really specifying things in these really extreme ways, long pieces where everything was in unison. . . now I’m really interested to basically cultivating the other pole very strongly and to try to integrate them gradually as a lifelong process of trying to become a better artist. . . That includes things like \textit{Axamer Folio}, and things that are modular form that are very open and hard to know exactly how they are going to work. So it is this freedom, openness, improvisation, creativity in the broadest sense, just opening up in all kinds of ways. Now that I feel confident about the kinds of things that I built, that it was sort of protected and fixed and it had to be right, it had to be a certain way, so if I relaxed a little bit from that, how could things get messy and really interesting? How can a piece be free?\textsuperscript{69}

Wubbels, by his own description, has written music that can be broken down into phases: phase 1, where exactness, precision, organic development, and unison play significant roles; and phase 2, where forms become boxy, modular, and open. While ascribing phases to Wubbels’ works is done to simplify his music for comprehension, the author notes that Wubbels’ music has progressed along a continuum, and his two works evaluated in this document (\textit{This is This is This is} and \textit{Axamer Folio}) are representatives of a shifting aesthetic spanning a five-year interval.

\textbf{Approach to the Saxophone}

When Wubbels receives a commission to write for an instrument, he also chooses to write for a specific player of that instrument. Wubbels’ process begins like this: “Anytime I’m starting out on a piece I sit down with a player and try to find a lot of idiomatic gestures for their instrument.”\textsuperscript{70} He finds wind instruments particularly interesting due to their nonlinear fingering patterns, as opposed to the pianist’s perspective:

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{68} Wubbels, interview 3.
\item\textsuperscript{69} Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
\item\textsuperscript{70} Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.
\end{footnotes}
All keyed wind instruments are fundamentally mysterious to me as an outsider. There is not a linear relationship from what the hands do to what the sound does. You can find ones in certain ways, but for me, as someone who doesn’t really want to get past that veil, in a way it’s more that I only need to know a couple of things. I don’t need to understand everything about the mechanics of the instrument. What I’m looking for from the saxophone is that I want a small collection of objects that are of the highest idiomatic feel, just enough that I can create a field that has certain places you can move within it, but not too much. I have certain ideas of kinds of gestures that I want.\(^{71}\)

When it comes to writing for specific saxophonists, two of those performers are Eliot Gattegno and Alex Mincek, for whom Wubbels wrote *This is This is This is*. He has also worked with David Wegehaupt through the context of the Oakland-based new music group *Athletics*—a group that performed a special version of *This is This is This is* with drummer Nick Woodbury—and with Noa Even as consortium leader for the commission of *Axamer Folio*. These provided Wubbels with idiomatic material for the compositions. Wubbels’ unique process for working with an instrumentalist is outlined in the following quotation: “If it’s a saxophone [player] I’ll get together with someone and work out these things that are very easy to play, that sound great, that make the instrument really resonate and then I’ll try to translate them to another instrument. Like you’re making a bad copy of them. So you put those two things together and you get this comparison that’s illuminating.”\(^{72}\) In the context of this work, those bad copies are seen specifically through the lens of the piano and the drum set.

**Aesthetic**

Due to the nature of frequent collaboration, shared pedagogical influences, and overlapping personal tastes, much of Wubbels’ music is similar in aesthetic to that of his Wet Ink peers. In addition to Wet Ink’s collective ideologies, there are identifiable traits that are unique to Wubbels’ personal taste in music. His experiences as a pianist are the impetus in writing for

\(^{71}\) Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.  
\(^{72}\) Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22-23.
another instrument “through the prism of the piano”\textsuperscript{73} in his duo pieces. It can be inferred that Wubbels’ need for organization and precision in his early music stems from exposure to serial composition; extreme precision was an idea in the serial music of Milton Babbitt, and Wubbels’ self-proclaimed love for the music of early Webern as opposed to late Webern shows a proclivity for musical organization in its infancy. A compositional philosophy developed from his study of Ligeti:

There’s this idea that when you work with a group of instruments you’re creating a new set of metaphorical instruments based on the interaction between them. There are passages in Ligeti’s \textit{Hamburgisches Konzert} where the horn is playing very unidiomatic music, but it’s music that would be very idiomatic to the violin. It’s as if the horn is trying to be a violin in this bizarre way. I’ve found this to be a very productive spur to creativity for individual instruments or an ensemble context.\textsuperscript{74}

This idea can be found in much of Wubbels’ music for saxophone, from ideas as simple as how the percussive saxophone slap tongue overlaps the sound world of the drums, or how unison passages between the prepared piano with dimes in the strings and saxophone can sonically create a new instrument. And lastly, the element of the body, the physicality of gesture as explored through sound is an aesthetic choice made by Wubbels. Rather than try to hide the influence of the body, to shy away from the extra-musical element of physicality, Wubbels chooses to embrace this physicality, resulting in his athletic experiences as a long-distance runner informing his choices for musical duration and how those durations are experienced by both performer and listener.\textsuperscript{75}

\textbf{Conclusion}

As with the works of Mincek, the goal of this paper is to develop tools to enable a more

\textsuperscript{73} Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
\textsuperscript{74} Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.
\textsuperscript{75} Wubbels, interview 3.
informed performance of the selected saxophone works by Eric Wubbels. Wubbels’ deep connection with athleticism and experiencing time and music through the body, and how that can become a part of a musical gesture, instructs the way a performer should approach the related passages. His passion for experiencing the ritual of a concert through the intense focus necessary to be an athlete of concentration gives clarity into the mental preparations to perform one of Wubbels’ compositions. Understanding the artistic reasons behind the durations assigned to repetitive passages for artistic and cognitive reasons will aid in developing an informed interpretation of his works. Comprehensive understanding of the organic and modular approaches to the forms he employs will assist in presenting a clearer picture when learning and performing these compositions.
CHAPTER 3. WET INK ENSEMBLE

Wet Ink Ensemble History

Formed in 1998, the Wet Ink Ensemble is a “unique collection of composers, improvisers, and interpreters committed to making adventurous music.” While their instrumentation may vary as required for various repertoire, the ensemble’s core is a seven-member group, with the current players:

- Erin Lesser, flute
- Alex Mincek, saxophone and composer
- Eric Wubbels, piano and composer
- Kate Soper, voice and composer
- Josh Mooney, violin
- Ian Antonio, percussionist
- Sam Pluta, laptop and composer

The Wet Ink Ensemble was not always an ensemble; the group’s roots were initially a symposium of musicians beginning to navigate their careers after college graduation. Two of the members (Alex Mincek and Ian Antonio) were also in a band called Zs. The two ensembles formed a relationship as concert presenters. Wet Ink used these concerts to promote some of their own music, since many of the members were composers. As Zs’ popularity grew and the band began touring and recording more frequently, Alex Mincek left the group in order to focus on his own compositions. This schism happened in 2005, and soon after Wet Ink reorganized into an ensemble, adding Eric Wubbels and Jeff Snyder as members.

Wet Ink may appear to be a composer’s collective, but it is first and foremost an ensemble. This is an important distinction for Mincek:

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78 Alex Mincek, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 1, transcript.
Wet Ink is really just an ensemble. Four of us happen to be composers, so we often play our own music, but that’s not any formal part of the way we are structured. Wet Ink is first and foremost an ensemble. We don’t do what a lot of other groups do. There is this idea that it is somehow gauche to play one’s own music all the time. We don’t have that issue, or better yet, we don’t have that shame. We often program our own music. This is why it may come across as a composer’s collective, but it isn’t. The composers and the performers all interact on the same level of organization and tasks, whether that be artistic and aesthetic tasks or business and administrative tasks. It’s not a top-down, composer-then-performer structure; we are pretty democratic.79

The Wet Ink Ensemble has championed the music of European composers little-known in the US, including Peter Ablinger, Beat Furrer, and Mathias Spahlinger.80 It was through the Wet Ink Ensemble that Eric Wubbels came to develop a close kinship with Alex Mincek, and their interaction has shaped the way they both compose.

Wet Ink Ensemble’s identity as performers and composers creates an environment conducive to experimentation as well as a forum for aesthetic discussion and development. The opportunities for composers in Wet Ink can be summarized by this discussion from Mincek: “Can you imagine a large orchestra having an hour rehearsal just on multiphonic fingerings? In our rehearsals we spend thirty minutes figuring out one sound on one instrument. The resources of time have a huge result on aesthetics.”81 Mincek aptly describes the goals of Wet Ink in this statement: “We want to re-define what it means to be a composer-performer in America. The goal is to create a more open—and certainly more creative—environment for making music here and now.”82

79 Mincek, interview 1.
80 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 18.
81 Ibid, 24.
82 Ibid.
Wet Ink Ensemble Aesthetics

The four composers of the Wet Ink Ensemble—Alex Mincek, Sam Pluta, Kate Soper, and Eric Wubbels—are individual writers with unique voices and goals. Their relationships with each other as friends, colleagues, and collaborators, in addition to their similar pedagogical backgrounds, have also shaped the trajectories of their individual compositional aesthetics. Eric Wubbels suggests that:

The institutional forces on aesthetics are so strong. . . Having a group identity is a valuable thing. I enjoy working on the behalf of something that is larger than the individual. The experience of composing is an isolated and isolating one, the experience of being a performer is inherently social. It’s nice not to have to choose.83

When one explores a new idea or sound, that sound becomes a part of the group’s aesthetic, and may often appear in a composition by another member. One example is the use of dimes to prepare the piano strings, as found in both Pendulum III (2009) by Alex Mincek and in This is This is This is (2010) by Eric Wubbels. Written for saxophonist Eliot Gattegno, both works were being composed at the same time, with the goal of sharing a premiere at a concert in Prague, although Mincek’s work was the only one finished in time to be premiered at that concert. Wubbels’ work was finished the following year and premiered at a different event. Mincek elaborates on the dimes idea:

I got [the dimes] from Eric. He was planning on using that to prepare the piano. . . That has happened a few times in Wet Ink. The piece I just wrote, Concentric Circles, I chose the percussion template based on what is already in [Eric Wubbels’ work] Katachi. I don’t use all the same things, but there are these ideas that are just like, “Well we know we are going to be on the same concert, so what are you using?” And we won’t use anything more or less that that.84

As a group of like-minded individuals, it is easy to be inspired by one’s peers, and to find new ways of utilizing their ideas in one’s own music. However, this can lead to stepping on one

83 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 24.
84 Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 2, transcript.
another’s figurative toes, and Mincek describes the group process in maintaining their individual space:

I think we are probably keenly aware of the similarities and differences at this point, but probably completely oblivious to other ones, but I also think we have been in the group long enough—not just Eric and me but the others as well—to get a sense for what somebody has as their main obsession or their main project at any given time. As Eric [Wubbels] said, people can change, and I think there is a mutual respect thing where we all feel comfortable entering into the same kind of orbit of general interests, and there is enough respect where we realize that it is that person’s turn with that particular idea for a while; let them have that. When you say similarities and differences—and I think this is just true of our group in general—you have to be strategic about what is already existing, and what needs to happen. If person A is doing thing A, and person B is doing thing B, which are both interesting, I often ask myself, “What can I do to find some space outside or in between?” But I think you just take those things into consideration, and I think we are all doing that, which is why you get these similarities and differences. It’s because we are all attracted to a lot of the same things. I think we all have some sense of: “well, I don’t want to do too much of Pluta’s thing, or Soper’s thing…” so there is some juggling.85

It must also be noted that the similar group aesthetic didn’t come about as a result of being in the group together; these aesthetic tendencies existed prior to the group’s formation, and it was this similar taste that led the formation of this group. Wubbels recalls an early experience in hearing Alex Mincek’s music:

The first time I heard a piece of Alex’s was in 2003 and I had just moved to New York City. I ended up involved with Wet Ink in the first place because it was one of the first times I had encountered a music that I wished had existed. It confirmed something I had already been interested in and had thought about, but had heard only in little moments here and there. . . Over the years of being associated with the group and with Alex, I’ve definitely been influenced by the things he and others have been working on. In the end though, each of us has different goals in what we want to do. The things in common are more related to the style, language, or surface of our music.86

The similarities in style, language, and surface make for uniformity in aesthetic when preparing a concert program. Groups like YarnWire, JACK Quartet, and Patchwork have performed pieces

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85 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
86 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 18-19.
by both Mincek and Wubbels, often on the same program.\textsuperscript{87} The saxophone and drum set duo Patchwork, comprised of Noa Even and Stephen Klunk, toured Mincek’s \textit{Nucleus}, and it was this experience that led them to form a consortium for commissioning \textit{Axamer Folio} from Eric Wubbels. Saxophonist Noa Even is currently commissioning another Wet Ink composer, Kate Soper, for her \textit{Ogni Suono} saxophone duo. The similar aesthetic of the Wet Ink composers makes for a unified concert presentation, which is why many performers, including the author of this document, have paired these two composers’ works together.

Additionally, there is a relative safety net that accompanies membership in a group. Eric Wubbels expounds upon the compositional freedoms and support inherent of this group ideology:

\begin{quote}
I think that is totally a Wet Ink thing. . .not having to demonstrate how smart you are all the time, and just having there be other things. So, not having to have your scores be the most high-tech or the most notes per inch—which I actually think some people really do feel compelled to do when they are in school or in situations that are so much about proving themselves—all along these grounds. There are so few grounds that are accepted as ways to evaluate music, and that is one of the ones that you can use more reliably. If your score looks really tough, then people are going to think that you know what you are doing. It has been really interesting to be in a situation where we have been supported by each other to go do something really, really simple for a while. Even if it’s not going to work, but I know you guys probably are not going to think I’m an idiot.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

According to Wubbels, another unifying aesthetic factor is a “premise that a lot of people wouldn’t normally accept, be aware of, or value whatsoever: the idea that an instrument is not bound to a historical sonic conception but rather has a broader field of possibility.”\textsuperscript{89}

Furthermore, the group identity provides a testing ground for new compositional ideas without the perils of a concert stage or the pressure of a commission, thus removing the fear of failure that may cause an adventurous composer to abandon a new sonic idea. Eric Wubbels states that

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{87} The MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music Presents Music at the Forefront: Yarn/Wire. Bryan Recital Hall, Moore Musical Arts Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, March 24, 2014.
\textsuperscript{88} Mincek and Eric, interview 2.
\textsuperscript{89} Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.
\end{flushleft}
he “can call up any of these folks any given week and meet for an hour and a half and play
around with some stuff and they’re happy to do it.”

Another unifying aesthetic of the Wet Ink Ensemble composers, as defined by Alex
Mincek, is the idea of rhythmic vitality:

I think we all share a sense of rhythmic vitality that doesn’t shy away from pulse, but it is
often paired with sounds influenced by more experimental music rather than the
harmonies that are often associated with minimalist or post-minimalist music. There is
also a more complex rhythmic profile than what you would find in minimal or post-
minimal music. Even more specifically, our music has a rhythmic profile that has
consequences, which contrasts with so much of the music coming out of both the avant
garde and experimental traditions. I feel that all of our music is music of consequence,
meaning that you can hear when somebody messes up. One of the criticisms of modernist
music is that its complexities are inconsequential because nobody can perceive whether
something is even being performed correctly. Or beyond the performance, is there
something in the music that gives a listener enough information to detect consequences in
the music? That is a concern we share. The music presents a kind of key to the listener
from which they can discern what is right and wrong. We also share certain relationships
to timbre and harmony.

This music of consequence is an idea that stems pedagogically from the teachings of Fred
Lerdahl.

Both Alex Mincek’s and Eric Wubbels’ involvement in the Wet Ink Ensemble has shaped
their approach to composition. While it is impossible to map the impact of every experience in
their compositions, it is possible to note shared aesthetics and ideas, and this document also
seeks to analyze those elements.

Mincek and Wubbels’ Influences on Each Other

Comparing the music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels is not a novel idea. The two
have glaring similarities in their aesthetic approach, stemming from a number of reasons;
pedagogical roots and the development of a group aesthetic through the Wet Ink Ensemble are

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90 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 23.
91 Mincek, interview 1.
two of those reasons. As the pianist (Wubbels) and saxophonist (Mincek) for the Wet Ink Ensemble, it is logical to assert that they would be influenced by each other’s compositional styles when writing for the other’s instrument. With such a large emphasis on improvisation in the Wet Ink Ensemble, the way that Mincek approaches and improvises on the saxophone leaves a sonic imprint in the creative mind of Wubbels, and vice versa with Wubbels on the piano. The two admit that similarities exist. Even as students together at Columbia, they had similar aesthetics, even if it drew criticism from Murail. Wubbels states:

> At Columbia I can recall Tristan [Murail] being very amused with our willingness to write very square music, it was very anti- to everyone that came to study with him, who were very interested in the unscarred continuum of time, so no audible pulse, and here we were writing music [with an audible pulse] . . . “You don’t think that is corny? That’s not a fault?” He was sort of fascinated, or just thought we were stupid or something.

Mincek outlines other similarities in aesthetic:

> We both share a strong sense of harmony, meaning that we’re fascinated by the possibilities of combining instruments designed to resonate. That is something that we share, which may seem obvious. In today’s fragmented new music world, that’s not such an obvious similarity to have. Another thing we share is a certain interest in formal unfolding. You could say we think of form as organically leading from one thing to the next, or abruptly switching from one thing to another, rather than thinking of it in a more singularly monolithic, static way. Our differences are in how we navigate those forms and combine instruments. The way in which our materials evolve is the biggest difference between us.94

Building further upon how they approach harmony in a unique yet similar way, Eric Wubbels states that “there’s this idea that when you work with a group of instruments that you’re creating a new set of metaphorical instruments based on interaction between them.” Similarities exist in the way the two are willing to use unison, to explore that taboo harmony, and to go right at it; this willingness to be direct makes the two composers kindred spirits in aesthetic and in

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92 Mincek and Eric, interview 2.
93 Ibid.
94 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 19.
95 Ibid, 22.
personality. Their willingness to use repetition and their combined focus on the audibility of what they are attempting to achieve musically are very big similarities, and it affects how their music unfolds in real time.

Their differences condense into to three primary categories: 1) “minutiae of personal taste,” 2) development of their material, which is significant because their musical material may come from very similar places and sound sources (Evan Parker and Eliot Gattegno are two examples of the saxophone sounds they both use), and 3) individual or personal goals for each composition, or phase of composition. They have influenced each other’s works in the past, and as members of Wet Ink, they will most likely continue to do so.

96 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
97 Ibid.
CHAPTER 4. SAXOPHONE WORKS BY ALEX MINCEK

Pendulum III and Nucleus

Historical Background of Pendulum III

Pendulum III for alto saxophone and piano was written by Alex Mincek in 2009. Written for Eliot Gattegno (saxophone) and Eric Wubbels (piano), it was premiered on November 13, 200998 at the Contempuls Music Festival in Prague99. It is the third work in Mincek’s pendulum cycle, a series of ten works (to date) that all share this title. Its name comes from the multitude of analogies that can be drawn between a pendulum and the musical forces of the work. Pendulum III is based on the idea of a crossfade,100 an audio or video effect defined “to fade out (an image or sound) while simultaneously fading in a different image or sound.”101 Mincek explores the parallels between the concept of a crossfade and how two poles are connected through a continuum, much like how a pendulum moves through space. The idea for his first pendulum piece (Pendulum I) came from a work Mincek wrote for his band Zs. He describes his process:

Essentially the whole piece oscillates between high and low, in tandem with different versions of short and long. I was taking two parameters and exploring them as polarities . . . And that’s when I realized this metaphor is very rich for exploring all kinds of polarities. There was also something poetic about pendulums, from the standpoint that it has two amplitude peaks, a left and a right in two dimensions, yet the pendulum connects the two poles in an infinitely fluid continuum, because it moves through all of the space between the two oppositional peaks. I think this is beautiful because you have two things that are polar opposites, yet they are also, from a manner of perspective, seamlessly connected . . . And then there is also the quasi-mimicking of a clock in many of my pendulum pieces. That’s on a more light-hearted tip; there’s always some sort of clock-like or gear-like feature to all of these pendulum pieces. A ticking is always happening at some level, which happens a lot in Pendulum III.102

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99 Alex Mincek, interview by author, January 18, 2016, interview, transcript.
100 Ibid.
102 Mincek, interview 1.
Examples of Mincek’s pendulum analogies include: 1) polarities of pitch, 2) polarities of dynamics, 3) ticking of time measured in regular intervals, and 4) the crossfade of potential energy to kinetic energy as a pendulum swings. These ideas may appear polar when viewed in isolation, but are part of a continuum; this continuum provides the foundation for musical form and the opportunity for musical development. *Pendulum III* explores the polarity of pitch, observable on the second beat of the first measure of the work; the pianist must stretch to play in the extremes of the piano (see example 1.2) while the saxophonist plays pitches that would fall in the middle of the piano’s range. The very nature of a pendulum in motion is one of oscillation, and Mincek explores this idea through pitch with the oscillations or waves, produced by the microtonal tunings. An example can be found in measure 2 with a G flat in the piano against a G quarter-tone flat in the alto saxophone. This oscillation is one of dissipation, since the piano pitch will decay as the saxophone resonance stays stable; one finds this idea of dissipation and oscillation to be the foundational principles of the work as a whole, and it shapes the form of the work.103

Formal Elements and Analysis of *Pendulum III*

*Pendulum III* is formally structured as a large-scale crossfade,104 with “smart” and “dumb” musical material as the elements for this crossfade (see pages 12-13 for more discussion and clarification of these terms). Progressing from the over-simplified analogy of “dumb/stupid” (used interchangeably by Mincek) versus “smart,” Mincek states that the crossfade can be observed between two musical materials, one that is dissipating (the “dumb” material) and one

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103 Mincek, interview 1.
104 Ibid.
that is being proliferated as the work progresses (the “smart” material).\textsuperscript{105} This dissipating gesture is also one of oscillation; it is the microtonal pitch material, of which the oscillations inherent within the adjacent quarter-tones dissipate as the resonance of the piano fades into the sustain of the saxophone. As notated by Mincek with the text “Beating,” (see example 4.2) the gesture moves through time and the oscillation dissipates on both the local and the macro levels. The material that is proliferated—the growing section of the crossfade—is made up of five different musical gestures (see example 4.3). In order to fully see the large-scale crossfade, it is important to be familiar with the motives used in each gesture, as these are not always presented in the same way. Mincek’s sequential presentation of these materials is intentionally obscure, as he does not intend for his music to be predictable. Mincek elaborates on the crossfade elements:

The two materials are pretty distinguishable. One is identifiable as quiet “false unisons” between the piano and the saxophone but with fine microtonal tunings so that audible beatings occur at various rates of oscillation and decay. I say they are in decay because the piano is always dying out. And the audible beating you hear between the saxophone and the piano, as a result of the tuning, is also in dissipation, but in a crossfade sort of way since the saxophone is stable as the piano decays. It gurgles while the two instruments occupy the same amplitude, but the beatings fade as the piano decays, leaving a pure saxophone tone. That is what’s happening on the larger scale form as well to varying degrees; the material is dissipating and it is doing so at a rate of something along a Fibonacci curve. For example, if you count the number of bars that certain materials happen for, you will see very clear dissipation strategies that are structured in Fibonacci proportions. You will also find a different strategy for the accumulating material(s) being crossfaded. So one idea is clearly dissipating, while a collection of other material is increasing, but there is this sense of unpredictability because the collection that is increasing is also occurring in rotations.\textsuperscript{106}

For clarification, the gesture that Mincek refers to as “dumb” is the material of dissipation and will henceforth be referred to as material A. It is comprised of three primary motives (motives 1A – 3A). Likewise, the gesture that Mincek refers to as “smart” is the material of proliferation, and will henceforth be referred to as material B. It is made of five motives (motives 1B – 5B).

\textsuperscript{105} Mincek, interview 1.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
These motives, identified in examples 4.1 – 4.5, were determined by the author with suggestions about their locations from the composer. They are most easily identified by their drastic dynamic differences (material A is often soft and subtle, while material B is loud and intrusive). These motives are not directly from the composer, rather they serve as an analytical tool for the comprehension of the musical form for a performer as determined by the author.

Example 4.1 Alex Mincek, *Pendulum III*, page 1, line 1, measures 1-7 (Motives 1A, 2A, and 3A)
Example 4.2 Alex Mincek, *Pendulum III*, page 1, line 1, measures 1-7 (Motive 1B)

![Motive 1B diagram]

Alex Mincek PENDULUM III
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Example 4.3 Alex Mincek, *Pendulum III*, page 7, line 2, measures 90-96 (Motive 2B)

![Motive 2B diagram]

Alex Mincek PENDULUM III
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Example 4.4 Alex Mincek, *Pendulum III*, page 10, line 1, measures 127-133 (Motives 3B and 4B)

Example 4.5 Alex Mincek, *Pendulum III*, page 11, line 1, measures 141-145 (Motive 5B)
Material A is presented straightforwardly, living up to its name as the “dumb” material, and is often presented at soft dynamics (most often at piano, with motive 1A an exception at the forte dynamic). Motive 1A is a sequence of three notes, chromatically adjacent yet displaced across many octaves, presented in the sequence of saxophone (slap tongue) – piano – piano. The pitch content in the first iteration is Gb – F – E. Motive 2A contains microtones between the piano and the alto saxophone, creating a beating sound from the pitches in disagreement. Motive 3A is a subtle multiphonic, usually related in pitch to the surrounding microtones.

Material B is a “collection of materials,” presented at predictable times but with unpredictable musical motives, and often presented at loud dynamics (ff or fff). This is the material of growth—of proliferation in our crossfade analogy—and the motives won’t make sense until the performer reaches the musical material near the end of the work, when it has fully grown out of the crossfade. Motive 1B (see example 4.3) is a five-note gesture, with the pianist playing at the poles of the piano (e.g., extreme high register with right hand, extreme low register with left hand) while the saxophonist plays pitch material found in the middle of the piano’s range. Mincek de-emphasizes pitch in this gesture, using the ranges of the piano which lack clarity (i.e., the extremes) and applying the slap tongue articulation to the saxophone. Mincek further elaborates:

The most direct function is to de-emphasize pitch. In the opening of the piece I have the piano playing at two extremes in connection to the pendulum metaphor; two amplitude peaks being represented by the two ends of the piano. In terms of critical band hearing, those two extremes are also the least distinguishable in terms of pure signal. The saxophone quite literally splits the range symmetrically. It represents the point of equilibrium, and by way of slap-tonguing, it also functions as a filter of sorts to further de-emphasize the pitch of the piano and the saxophone itself.108

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107 Mincek, interview 1.
108 Ibid.
Motive 2B (see example 4.4) is a single multiphonic, presented at the fortissimo dynamic. As the work progresses, different multiphonics are added. Motive 3B features the saxophone at the poles of its pitch range with a written low Bb3 (example 4.5) followed by a written altissimo A6. While not the highest note of the saxophone, A6 is considered a high note by most professionals, and was most likely chosen because it is chromatically adjacent to the Bb (the lowest note of the saxophone). Also the half-step (A-Bb) is a significant motivic interval in this work (see Pitch Content Analysis). The piano accompanies these poles of pitch with chord clusters, obscuring any pitch content contained therein. Motive 4B (example 4.5) outlines a four-note motive with the saxophone ascending and the piano descending in a passage that chromatically encircles the pitch Eb, albeit through octave displacement. Motive 5B (example 4.6) is less organized, and presents a jazz-like, free improvisatory passage.

The large-scale crossfade is written out using the Fibonacci sequence to correspond to the metric durations of the dissipating material A and proliferating material B. Each instance of material A follows a near exact presentation of the Fibonacci sequence, a series of numbers with significance as explained below:

This pattern turned out to have an interest and importance far beyond what its creator imagined. It can be used to model or describe an amazing variety of phenomena, in mathematics and science, art and nature. The mathematical ideas the Fibonacci sequence leads to, such as the golden ratio, spirals and self-similar curves, have long been appreciated for their charm and beauty, but no one can really explain why they are echoed so clearly in the world of art and nature.109

The Fibonacci sequence is a series of numbers that is easily derived from adding the two previous numbers to arrive at the next number. The numbers in the sequence are 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, and so on. What makes this sequence special is that the further it goes, the

closer the quotient of two adjacent numbers gets to the golden mean, which is a mathematical
explanation of aesthetics:

As we go further out in the sequence, the proportions of adjacent terms begin to approach
a fixed limiting value of $1.618034 \ldots$ This is a very famous ratio with a long and
honored history; the Golden Mean of Euclid and Aristotle, the divine proportion of
Leonardo da Vinci, considered the most beautiful and important of quantities. This
number has more tantalizing properties than you can imagine.110

The first presentation of material A starts in measure 2 and is 55 measures in duration. The
second presentation starts in measure 58 and is 34 measures in duration. The remainder of the
presentations can be seen below in figure 4.1. The only deviations from the Fibonacci sequence
come in presentations 4 and 5, where the durations are 12 measures and 9 measures, respectively,
rather than the 13 measures and 8 measures as would be expected by the sequence. It is possible
that Mincek shortened one and elongated the other as a means of borrowing and replacing, but
Mincek’s predilection for not being predictable is another explanation. It is also interesting to
note that Mincek interrupts presentation 5 with motive 4B, and if you remove that added duration
the material becomes 8 measures long, corresponding with the sequence again.

**Figure 4.1 Order of Material A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation #</th>
<th>Measure #(s)</th>
<th>Duration (in measures)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>58-91</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>94-114</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>117-128</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Deviation from Fibonacci Sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>132-140</td>
<td>9 (8)</td>
<td>Interrupted by material from motive 4B; only 8 measures long when that material is subtracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>144-148</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The presentation of the proliferating material B does not grow in accordance to the Fibonacci sequence, but it is interesting to note that most of the metric durations are numbers from the sequence, though not presented in the order of the sequence. The most obvious exception is the last presentation (presentation 11), which is 64 measures long.

The fading out of material A is completed by measure 169, and from this point on material B is compositionally explored and developed, and new material is presented. Much of this material is stylistically emblematic of free improvisation, often moving from one idea to the next with little transition, a practice typical of Mincek’s boxy approach to disguising or avoiding...
predictable transitional material. The work ends on a unison B3 between the piano and the alto saxophone; this unison is symbolic of the calm after a storm, and its significance is better understood after evaluating the way Mincek uses his pitch content in this work.

**Pitch Content of Pendulum III**

This document does not attempt a full theoretical analysis of the works it presents. The author’s analyses are designed to offer insight in shaping future interpretations of the compositions. The discussions of pitch are in concert pitch, unless specifically notated otherwise.

On the large scale, this work explores the distance between major seconds and the unison interval. Allowing for octave displacement, which Mincek uses freely, there are a plethora of major seconds (M2), minor seconds (m2), and adjacent quarter-tones that explore even closer intervals. The composition opens with the piano presenting two pitches: Ab1 and Gb4. Allowing octave displacement, this interval is a M2. The work ends on a unison B3, played by both the alto saxophone and the piano. Paul Hindemith’s theoretical writings rank the relative stability of intervals in music. Based on that treatise, one may ascertain that the M2 interval is an unstable and dissonant interval, while the unison is the basis of consonance and stability. Following Mincek’s crossfade analogy, the work is a crossfade from this dissonance to consonance, from instability to stability. Taking the pendulum analogy one step further, the work spans the transition from unstable kinetic energy (dissonance) to stable potential energy (consonance).

The pitch content of material A is presented clearly through Mincek’s composition. There are three musical motives present in the first presentation of material A. Starting in measure .2 one finds motive 1A, a three-note motive that spans a M2, a sounding Gb3 in the alto saxophone.

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111 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 19-20.
followed by the sequence of F5 to E1 in the piano. The listener is then presented with motive 2A—the dominating idea of the dissipating material—containing adjacent quarter-tones with a Gb4 in the piano and a G quarter-tone flat 4 in the alto saxophone. This creates a beating sound between the microtones, one that quickly dissipates as the piano sound decays underneath the sustain of the saxophone. Motive 3A presents a harmonic in the piano against a multiphonic in the saxophone. The harmonic in the piano is on the Ab1 string, pressed at the spot where the 7th partial resonates, creating a naturally occurring lowered Gb approximately a quarter-tone flat. The multiphonic in the saxophone presents the sounding pitches D3 quarter-tone sharp, E4 quarter-tone flat, F4 quarter-tone sharp, and E4. The harmonic on the piano should match the same pitch as the F quarter-tone sharp on the saxophone. This is the first of many instances where the conflicting microtonal pitch material (which perhaps sounds unnatural to a listener’s Westernized ears) is derived from a naturally existing multiphonic or harmonic, clarifying the reason for Mincek’s pitch selection from pre-existing harmonic material. Mincek scores the saxophone in the pitch space above and below notes on the piano, exploring the saxophone’s inherent ability to subtly manipulate pitch in the way a piano cannot. Example 4.6 shows the technique with piano presenting Gb4 and the alto saxophone playing a sounding F4 quarter-tone sharp just below it (measure 44), followed by a sounding G4 quarter-tone flat just above it (measure 45). Notice also that these instances are separated by the presentation of motive 1A.

When material A is presented the second time, starting in measure 58, it is at a new pitch level: microtones around the piano pitch G5. Motive 1A is gone from this instance, but its characteristic M2 interval remains in the grace notes in the piano and saxophone. The piano has two grace notes—spanning over two octaves—presenting pitch classes E and F before resting on G5. This is an augmented version of the pitch classes E, F, and Gb from motive 1A. The
saxophone grace notes are a version of motive 1A in diminution, sounding G quarter-tone sharp and Ab before resting on an enharmonic spelling of the first note, Ab quarter-tone flat (which is the same as G quarter-tone sharp). In presentation 4 of material A (commencing at measure 94), the alto saxophone is playing a sounding G quarter-tone sharp against the prepared Db in the piano—an Ab lowered approximately a quarter-tone—resulting in a unison. This unison is fleeting, as the piano oscillates between the Ab and the lowered harmonic as affected by the dime preparation. This juxtaposes the piano against the saxophone alternating between G4 quarter-tone sharp and Ab4 quarter-tone sharp, but this marks the first instance of stability in an otherwise unstable section. The last dying breaths of material A come as the saxophonist plays quarter-tones above and below the piano’s C5, before collapsing in agreement on the fourteen iterations of unison B4 in the closing measures of the work (measure 207, repeated fourteen times).

Example 4.6 Alex Mincek, Pendulum III, page 4, line 1, measures 39-45
The pitch content of material B is more complex and less predictable. In the first instance of motive 1B, the saxophone presents pitch classes [Bb,D,G,Db,C] (a member of set class 5-36[01247]), while the right hand of the piano plays [C,G,B,A,Bb] (a member of set class 5-2[01235]), and the left hand of the piano performs [A,C#,A#,C,B] (a member of set class 5-1[01234]). Mincek presents this material in a manner which de-emphasizes pitch by having the piano playing at two intervallic extremes of pitch while the saxophone quite literally splits the range symmetrically, a point of equilibrium that is obscured by the slap tongue articulation.\textsuperscript{113} Since Mincek’s goal was to de-emphasize pitch, the material shouldn’t be evaluated too meticulously, but it is interesting to note that in each vertical set of three notes, there is always a half step present, giving credence to the significance of the interval in the work as a whole (see figure 4.3). Each vertical alignment contains a half step, culminating with [012], a set significant to this work. This set is observable in motives 1A, 1B, and 4B, and the three pitch levels of the piano as presented in motive 2A throughout the work (Gb in measure 2, G in measure 58, and Ab in measure 93).

\textbf{Figure 4.3 Pitch Analysis of Motive 1B in measure 1}

\begin{tabular}{llllll}
Saxophone & Bb & D & G & Db & C \\
Piano RH & C & G & B & A & Bb \\
Piano LH & A & C# & A# & C & B \\
\end{tabular}

\begin{tabular}{lllll}
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{113} Mincek, interview 1.
The pitch material of the work as a whole is representative of this statement from Mincek: “A pendulum in a gravitational environment that encounters friction will come to a state of rest.”\textsuperscript{114} The dissonant M2 that opens the work collapses in on itself throughout the work to come to a state of rest, represented by unison, in the final measure of the piece.

Uses of Repetition

Nearly every piece of music contains some type of repetition; it is quite difficult to write a work of substance without repeating at least one element. Repetition can be used to create form on the large scale, to create syntax on the small scale. It can also be used to make new sounds audible and to create a context for a modern soundscape. Mincek’s use of small motivic cells in \textit{Pendulum III} (see material A and material B) necessitates repetition, albeit in a changing way. The five-note motive from measure 1 is restated multiple times, but often in a truncated four- or three-note version. The beating microtonal notes are often presented in groups of three or more, with varying durations to reduce predictability. There are many instances of repeated musical cells—rewritten throughout—that can be easily recognized by the listener as repeated material. Mincek chooses to use repeat signs (i.e., loops) near the end of the work as material B dominates the discourse and reaches its maxim in the crossfade structure. Measures 194-197 and 198-200 are played twice, measures 202-203 and 204-206 are played three times, and measure 207 is repeated fourteen times. With traditional Western tonal music, the repeated material is almost instantly recognized. In Mincek’s music, quite often the repeated material is complex, and may not be perceived by the listener as a loop. Due to the increased processing time of the complex material, it can take multiple hearings to notice the pattern, and Mincek often moves on to new material as soon as his loops become recognizable, preventing the sense of auditory stasis.

\textsuperscript{114} Mincek, interview 1.
Additionally, the layered cells in these looped sections are familiar. They have been presented individually at previous instances in the work, making this presentation familiar yet developmentally more complex. Mincek has prepared the listener for the most complex section of the work by providing him or her with the ingredients throughout the entire work. An example can be seen in measure 1 and measures 169-174. The five-note quintuplet motive in the first measure is a fragment of the musical idea that Mincek more fully composes in measures 169-174, justifying its out-of-place existence in the beginning; subsequent short outbursts throughout the first half of the work foreshadow this for a later section.

After experiencing the dissonance of microtonal beating in addition to the dissonance of the M2 and m2 pitch material, the piece provides stasis for which the listener has longed (i.e., unison). It presents this unison fourteen consecutive times, allowing for the figurative dust to settle after the maelstrom.

Elements of Free Jazz and Improvisation

Alex Mincek’s musical training as a saxophonist came largely through a jazz-oriented and pedagogically improvisatory framework. His musical language is inextricable from his pedagogical influences, albeit additional shaping was certainly realized through the multitude of contemporary classical and modernist influences of compositional study. This jazz improvisation and free improvisation background can be traced philosophically and materially in his works. *Jazz improvisation*, for the sake of this document, will be defined as improvising in the appropriate style of jazz music lineage over a fixed form with a relatively fixed harmonic progression. *Free improvisation*, a movement credited to Ornette Coleman and many of his
peers, is a reaction to the fixed constraints that evolved in the early 1960s. This free jazz can be defined as “new musical approaches [that] allowed for creativity unencumbered by the constricting harmonies, forms, and rigid meters of bebop and swing styles.” It is in this spirit of freedom that much of Mincek’s music finds its aesthetic identity. David Borgo writes about the nature of the free improvisers: “The primary musical bond shared among these diverse performers is a fascination with sonic possibilities and surprising musical occurrences . . . free improvisation moves beyond matters of expressive detail to matters of collective structure; it is not formless music-making but form-making music.” Mincek’s Pendulum III and Nucleus are both form-making music; the form is derived from the material itself. In Pendulum III Mincek’s gesture of dissipation, as suggested by its name, dissipates through the form as the gesture of proliferation—the rhythmically active and compositionally complex musical material—grows to its prominence, proliferating itself near the end of the work. The form is inseparable from the musical material.

Another significant parallel between Mincek’s music and that of earlier free improvisers is the significance of the usage of extended techniques. “Extended techniques—the exploration of unconventional sounds and devices on conventional instruments—have been, and continue to be, an important part of the vocabulary of many free improvisers.” Much of the material in Mincek’s music relies upon extended techniques for the saxophone as well as other instruments. In Pendulum III, one can locate multiphonics, slap tonguing, quarter-tones, and the extended altissimo range of the saxophone, in addition to extended piano techniques such as harmonics and piano preparations (e.g., dimes used to mute the strings).

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116 Ibid.
118 Ibid, 183.
Saxophonist David Wegehaupt summarizes his experiences in performing *Pendulum III*, commenting on the wildness of the end and how it has affected his interpretational choices:

I love the opportunity the piece gives to play the saxophone without worrying too much about a ‘classical sound,’ whatever that might mean to a given player. During the louder, aggressive parts of this piece, my feeling is that the saxophone should be played with an aggressive, bright, in-your-face sound that is not necessarily controlled in the way that one considers their tone when playing other repertoire. My main idea is ‘loud’ and the sound should be ‘saxophone-y.’ More akin to a jazz or rock sound than something classical. … I’m definitely not thinking about sounding pretty. Or even perfect technique! I, of course, practice and strive for perfect execution of each written note, but in this circumstance, if I squeak or crack a note, accidentally open slap instead of closed slap, or make some other mistake, it is not a disaster to me, as long as the overwhelming intensity is being maintained. This freedom to be aggressive, intense, and in your face is very satisfying, and is not something that occurs often in the repertoire that I’ve performed. This wildness can affect an audience deeply as well. My goal is to have mouths agape as they see me red-faced, trying to pin them to the wall with my sound while performing virtuosic, gymnastic leaps and bounds around the saxophone (of course, while perfectly in rhythmic unisons with the pianist, whose arms span the range of the piano, matching the saxophonist’s aggression).119

Wegehaupt captures the essence of Mincek’s aesthetic as derivative of his jazz and free improvisation background. The brighter core of the saxophone tone, the edge apparent for both tone and intensity, the wildness of the musical material—these are all more typically characteristic of free improvisation in the way that genre explores tone and timbre and uncharacteristic of the stiffer constraints of classical music.

**Relevant Material from Performer Interviews**

For a performer approaching this piece for the first time, the notation and sounds can be daunting. Professional contemporary saxophonists Eliot Gattegno and David Wegehaupt were interviewed and asked to share some of their insights into this music for the benefit of a newcomer. Wegehaupt suggests the following three tips:

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119 David Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.
1) Work with the pianist earlier than you might normally. Strategize how to communicate and work to make the first 2/3 of the piece work. Some conducting or cueing will be needed, but figure out how to do it without disrupting the mood. Do this a lot.

2) Practice all multiphonics in isolation. Be very comfortable in producing multiphonics immediately when articulated. Some of them are brief, and you want each of them to speak clearly so as to produce each written harmony accurately.

3) Practice your slap until your tongue can’t slap anymore … then keep on doing it. But avoid bloody injuries, or making the tongue too raw in the days just before the performance, at least.\(^{120}\)

In the third suggestion, Wegehaupt is referring to the process of slap tonguing, which can be violent, as the sharp edge of the reed can cut the tongue when executed improperly. Wegehaupt also notes the following challenges that are unique to Pendulum III:

[One challenge is] tutti playing with the pianist, specifically during the first 2/3 of the piece. Of course, the more virtuosic material is at the end, but I would say that the ensemble’s attacks on each quiet note and multiphonic at the beginning are deceptively challenging. . . . the pianist and saxophonist must be counting and subdividing perfectly in sync, so as to make each attack happen together. . . . I felt a need to be as still as possible, so the audience does not anticipate each re-articulation and slight change in the dissonance and beating that occurs with each. To pull this off requires a deep understanding with your duo partner, and lots of rehearsal. . . . [Another challenge is] slap tongue endurance. One must slap and slap, especially during the repeated cycle on system one of page 13. Also, the dynamic and intensity must not diminish. If anything, it must increase through the cycle in order to set up the rest of the end of the piece. I tend to think that I have a very well-developed slap tongue, but the amount of slaps in this piece required extra endurance practice in order to not tire. And avoiding slap-related injury was also an issue to consider.\(^{121}\)

Multiphonics on the saxophone can range in difficulty, depending on the player. Finding the correct oral cavity shape and tongue position to isolate the specifically notated pitches can be quite challenging, so Wegehaupt suggests practicing these in isolation for increased accuracy of performance. Wegehaupt also comments on the inherent stillness of the work, and how the body motions of the performer should not detract from the stillness of the music, asserting that the performer should be still and motionless. This offers additional clarity when viewed in

\(^{120}\) Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.
combination with the emphasis on physicality and gesture within the music, that the two should be connected and related as both Mincek and Wubbels agree. It is important that the message a performer sends with his or her body not negate the message of the music.

Saxophonist Eliot Gattegno believes that performing the music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels is “an experience, one like none other.” He believes the works require an elevated state of focus and increased endurance when compared to performing other works from the canon of saxophone repertoire. Despite being challenging, he does not find them frustrating, and this is because of how he approached practicing the works: “Learn them in chunks because that is how they were created. Then, put the pieces together as you would a puzzle.”

This reference to Mincek’s boxy approach to composition embraces the blocks of material to assist in the learning process.

Historical Background of *Nucleus*

The work *Nucleus* for tenor saxophone and drums was written in 2007 for the composer to perform with percussionist Ian Antonio. The premiere was given on December 1, 2007, at Symphony Space in New York City, NY. Alex Mincek discusses the impetus for the work’s creation:

I wrote [*Nucleus*] for me to play with Ian [Antonio], with a very specific intention. Ian was in Zs with me. We played together. When I left Zs, I didn’t stop playing with Ian, as he was in Wet Ink and still is. I wanted to make a piece that had a lot of what I loved about Zs, but I also wanted the freedom to do some of the things I couldn’t do in Zs. One of the things I could not do in Zs was write smaller music, quieter music, very subtle music, because we did not play in venues where that was something that could work. I had an interest in small sounds, but still wanted them to exist together with the kind of brutal chamber music characteristic of Zs, so this was going to be my opportunity to do that, to write a piece for Ian and myself utilizing my own physical relationship with the

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122 Eliot Gattegno, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.
123 Mincek, interview 1.
124 Alex Mincek, Facebook message to the author, December 16, 2016.
horn and knowing Ian’s sound really well and knowing the types of things I had not heard in terms of sheer force on the drum set.\textsuperscript{125}

The work uses many extended techniques for the tenor saxophone, including slap tonguing, multiphonics, singing or growling while playing, and air sounds (denoted with specific consonant sounds that vary throughout the work).\textsuperscript{126}

Formal Elements and Analysis of \textit{Nucleus}

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides multiple definitions for the word \textit{nucleus}, but the ones most appropriate for the comprehension of this work are the following:

1) A cellular organelle of eukaryotes that is essential to cell functions (as reproduction and protein synthesis), is composed of nucleoplasm and a nucleoprotein-rich network from which chromosomes and nucleoli arise, and is enclosed in a definite membrane.
2) The peak of sonority in the utterance of a syllable.
3) A basic or essential part.\textsuperscript{127}

The biological definition pertaining to the nucleus of a cell is pertinent per Mincek’s own description (see pages 20 – 21 for previous discussion). The opening of the work is representative of this idea of a musical cell; there is a single sound (slap tongue sounding E5) produced by the saxophone that is replicated by a china cymbal muted hit. This is done twice, in a call-and-response, hocket-like arrangement (see example 4.7).

\textsuperscript{125} Mincek, interview 1.
\textsuperscript{126} Alex Mincek, \textit{Nucleus} (New York: Alex Mincek Music, ASCAP, 2007).
This back and forth is an idea that Mincek explores in the opening section of the work. Mincek explains:

There is a kind of back and forth between the sax and drums taking turns triggering each musical event, which for me raises questions about identity and function: Which instrument is best suited for specific tasks? How can the instruments be strongly defined? How can their differences be blurred? In the beginning it is a very obvious relationship, the hocket. But then the hocket starts to reverse itself . . . The idea being that one person is the onset, one person is the decay . . . Different things grow out of these different combinations. There is an ongoing swapping of roles. The piece is essentially a collection of variations on this idea . . . You turn something on and turn something off. It starts to grow into something more melodic-ish—at the end there is a more melodic quality—but really it is about things growing from an impulse and I’m using pretty intuitive ideas of contrast. Meaning that when I feel I have grown in a certain direction and at a certain tempo and a certain dynamic for a long enough time, I’ll go in a direction that intuitively feels like the right decision.

Mincek’s description of how he and Eric Wubbels are similar in their views on musical form provides clarity when evaluating the formal structures of Nucleus: “[One thing] we share is a certain interest in formal unfolding . . . You could say we think of form as organically leading from one thing to the next, or abruptly switching from one thing to another, rather than thinking
of it in a more singularly monolithic way.”

This statement applies quite literally to how *Nucleus* is structured: the hocket idea found in the opening section is transformed organically into many variations, and then new musical material is abruptly introduced in an unpredictable way. The first violent outburst is in measure 13 when the percussionist, who has been playing only at the pianissimo dynamic until this point, plays two forte hits on the lower bongo with the saxophone emerging on a harmonic out of that sound (i.e., he is still exploring the cause-and-effect idea, but in an explosively contrasting way).

The idea of variation and the concept of unfolding musical developments in time through variation are central to how Mincek uses his musical material. The opening section of *Nucleus* is representative of how Mincek organically manipulates his material creating “some variation on the previous thing.”

I am loosely thinking about these things in a sort of chicken-or-the-egg relation to cause and an effect in the beginning of *Nucleus* . . . This cause-and-effect relationship is explored for a while and the amount of repetition is really a result of something I discussed earlier: me trying to think about the number of ideas that I’m presenting relative to what I want the listener to think about and be able to recognize and understand. . . I believe [the order] is saxophone–cymbal–saxophone–cymbal in the first measure, and there are four events, and then that happens a few times. I want the audience to hear the attack difference and slight latency that occurs in attempting to recreate that. Once I feel the idea has given any reasonable person enough presence to detect those subtleties, I will start adding or folding in other forms of difference—new materials in permutation . . . In a lot of my durations, and/or number of repetitions, the question I ask myself is “How much information do I want the listener to be able to process?” And so then I’ll repeat an event for the amount of time that I think allows for all the important aspects of the material to be parsed by the listener. This enters into the psychological relationship we all have with time; what it feels like to experience things over time. I find it very interesting how time can feel very different relative to what we have processed, are processing, and expecting to process. So having way too much information and plenty of time to understand it, is different from never having enough time, or way too much time—I think those are all interesting positions to be in relative to any particular material.

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128 Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 19.
129 Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
130 Mincek, interview 1.
Mincek quite literally unfolds his developing ideas in real time, with the goal of presenting materials that are audibly comprehensible. After presenting the hocket in the first measure, Mincek presents different versions of that idea in measures 2-5. To a listener, the subtle differences are the primary focal point of his or her attention.

Repetition in *Nucleus*

A cursory glance at the score reveals multiple instances of overt repetition. Some of these repeats exist for the sake of comprehension; when Mincek presents musical material and he wants some specific detail to be heard, he will repeat that idea for the duration he believes is required to process that idea.\(^{131}\) Measures 1-12 are examples of this type of repetition, as the subtle differences in attack quality and response time between stimulus and response are explored between the two musicians. Most of the looped sections in this work function in a similar way: new material is introduced, often suddenly, and is then repeated until Mincek is convinced the audience has had enough time to process the resulting sounds. For the performer, it is important to be aware of what idea one is attempting to sonically present, and then present it in a consistent and clear fashion. This means an awareness of the pitch differences between the multiphonic in measures 53, 55, and 59 (see example 4.8, measures 58-59 highlight these two multiphonics in close proximity) and the multiphonic in measures 56 and 58; both are approached from the same six 32\(^{nd}\) notes, so the response and clarity of the multiphonic is the changing material. Details like this can make or break the experience for the audience.

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\(^{131}\) Mincek, interview 1.
Example 4.8 – Alex Mincek, *Nucleus*, page 3, line 4, measures 56-59

Mincek uses repetition in a unique way in measure 158: the percussionist must strike the high bongo 100 times, and do it as loud as possible (notated $fff$). Mincek’s goal is for this musical gesture to break down. If it is played at the appropriate dynamic for the appropriate duration, then it cannot be executed as notated (according to Mincek). The sound will morph and technique will fail due to the human muscular limitations, and this is the musical idea.\textsuperscript{132}

**Form in Nucleus**

The structure for *Nucleus* can be broken down into eight sections, but it is important to note that the composer does not provide rehearsal markings, so these sections are delineated by the shifts in musical material. The eight sections are as follows:

- Section 1: Measures 1-17
- Section 2: Measures 18-36
- Section 3: Measures 37-52
- Section 4: Measures 53-83
- Section 5: Measures 83-117
- Section 6: Measures 118-141
- Section 7: Measures 142-158
- Section 8: Measures 159-end

\textsuperscript{132} Mincek, interview 1.
These sections are separated by the introduction of new musical material, not overtly related to the previous material. Section 1 is comprised of the hocket idea, the back-and-forth, stimulus–response study between the slap tongue sounding E5 on the tenor saxophone and the muted hits on the large china cymbal. This idea is explored throughout section 1, modulating in sequence and duration. The durational shifts can be observed in the rhythmic notation (16\textsuperscript{th} notes versus 8\textsuperscript{th}-note triplets) and in the amount of space between each gesture, modified by the use of changing meter. There is a transition section starting in measure 13 with the introduction of the two forte bongo hits followed by the emerging saxophone harmonic that leads us into section 2.

Section 2 explores an overlapping sound world between the saxophone and drums. It begins as an exploration between the ricochet snare hits and the harmonic tremolo in the tenor saxophone (this unique sound is generated by fingering written A and then producing a tremolo by opening and closing the C3 key, or side E as Mincek notates). For unity, the saxophonist and percussion should strive to emulate the other’s speed in this passage. The ricochet gesture will have a natural slowing down due to the natural physics of that drum stroke, so the saxophonist should enter into this sound at the same speed as the percussionist and then continue the gesture. It is up to artistic interpretation whether the saxophonist’s tempo follows the dynamic shape of the note, or whether s/he continually slows down, prolonging the decay inherent in the snare ricochet gestures. Each entrance for the tenor saxophone is preceded by the same idea on the snare, so it is important for the saxophonist to consider the overlapping sonic material.

Percussive slap tongues should match the drum sounds as closely as possible, and the tremolos should match the ricochets. The hocket gestures should sound like one musician rather than two, and the rhythmic complexities (such as the 16\textsuperscript{th}-note quintuplets versus the 8\textsuperscript{th}-note triplets in measure 29) should be executed with precision.
Section 3 reinvestigates the stimulus–response idea, with the percussionist acting as the stimulus with two adjacent 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes at the \textit{pp} dynamic and the response comprising varied material from the tenor saxophone. In measure 37, the musical material is inspired by the “polyphonic bagpipes” technique of his teacher, Bunky Green.\textsuperscript{133} Mincek achieves the effect of more subtle pitch gradation by venting the C2 key (also referred to as palm D# in Mincek’s notation) and then sequentially closing fingers 1–2–3–5–4. This achieves a complex sound while maintaining an idiomatic gesture on the instrument, a characteristic of Mincek’s writing for saxophone. He introduces two multiphonics in measure 39, which are used in various contexts throughout the remainder of the work. The saxophone’s arpeggiated material in measures 41–42 is another example of an idiomatic gesture for the saxophone. The C major arpeggio (one of the first learned by young saxophonists) makes up the first seven notes of the gesture. The last three notes are easiest to execute using front fingerings rather than palm keys. Mincek prefers the front keys as a performer and discusses his fingering selections: “If you just realize that [the F#] is front F with side Bb it is the easiest thing in the world, but if you are trying to [use the palm keys] you ask, ‘Why did he do this to me?’.”\textsuperscript{134} As many of Mincek’s gestures for the saxophone are idiomatic, the performer must keep this in mind when learning the work. If a passage feels technically complicated, there often may be a more efficient fingering choice. This is not to say that Mincek shies away from complex choices when the musical material demands it: “[My goal is] making the nicest combination of notes with the nicest combination of feeling on the horn. I don’t steer clear of awkwardness when the pitches really require it, but I try to come up with the most elegant kind of physical gesture—or maybe elegant isn’t the right word—but the most

\textsuperscript{133} Mincek, interview 1.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
efficient use of the design of the horn."\textsuperscript{135} This efficiency is an advantage when learning a work that can appear daunting to a performer upon first glance.

Section 4 begins with the introduction of the heavy-metal saxophone riff. Notated in 5/4 time, Mincek writes four groups of pitches leading to a multiphonic (the first one introduced in section 3) in a metric pattern that suggests a 5/16 meter. This section begins abruptly with five cymbal crashes at the \textit{ff} dynamic followed by the saxophone’s repetitive 5/16 pattern at the \textit{fff} dynamic, rhythmically reinforced by the percussionist’s two looped notes (see measure 52-53 in example 4.9).

\textbf{Example 4.9 – Alex Mincek, \textit{Nucleus}, page 3, line 3, measures 50-53}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example49.png}
\end{figure}

It is in section 4 that Mincek introduces human sounds into the sonic production of the material, utilizing vocalization through syllabic air sounds in the tenor saxophone part of measures 60-65 (a description of this technique can be found in Appendix C). Section 5 rounds itself off in an ABA form comprising the final third of the work (starting in measure 69). Here Mincek explores the inverse of the musical material from the heavy metal section in measure 53. The gestures

\textsuperscript{135} Mincek, interview 1.
begin with six notes leading to a multiphonic, but they descend (the opposite of measure 53) and are played at a much softer dynamic (pianissimo). The metric spacing and shifting meters are reminiscent of the opening few measures of the work. The listener may observe a different side of the familiar multiphonic, as different dynamics have varying impacts on the intensity of multiphonics.

The transition from section 4 to section 5 is triggered by a long altissimo D (written pitch) in the tenor saxophone part. The precise duration is determined by the performer, as it is notated with a fermata and with the word long. The author suggests playing this note as long as can be sustained at the notated fff dynamic with a consistent tone color. The percussionist triggers release of this pitch by playing five quintuplet 32nd notes on the snare drum, culminating with a cymbal crash on the downbeat of measure 84. Emerging from this comes the subtle, airy sound of the tenor saxophone exploring the overtones of its lowest note (written low Bb), exploring the harmonic richness of the saxophone body with all keys closed.

Section 5 is characterized by more airy exploration of overtones, with interruptions of sporadic, wild material. These interjections appear at measures 92 and 96-99, and then this material becomes dominant in measure 105. This segment is a microcosm of Mincek’s Pendulum III in regards to structure, although it predates that work by two years, showing that the ideas inherent in Pendulum III are here explored in their infancy. The compositional make-up of the interruptions is emblematic of free jazz improvisation, using idiomatic gestures and characteristic interactive dialogue between the saxophone and the percussionist. In measure 107, the saxophonist and the percussionist diverge, playing asynchronous, aleatoric music. To close this unmetered asynchronous music, Mincek uses the same material with which it began, the saxophone holding the altissimo D until the percussionist has completely performed the notated
material. Eric Wubbels discusses this asynchronous approach to saxophone and percussion writing in discussing *Axamer Folio*, a work of similar instrumentation:

> *Nucleus* is the piece that was initially in my ear, but I spent two months doing research on the internet, listening to saxophone and drum set duos, mostly from the free improvised world, going back to Coltrane and Rashied Ali, going forward to some of the British guys like Evan Parker (saxophone) and Paul Lytton (drums), John Butcher and Gerry Hemmingway, Roscoe Mitchell, Tyshawn Sorey, Chris Pitsiokos. And what I learned is that these two instruments don’t have to have anything to do with each other and it sounds great. Two people improvising in totally contradictory, perpendicular tracks, not even truly trying to play together, it just sounds great because the priorities of each instrument are independent. Their sounds worlds are not pitched based, where you need unison to get blend.\(^{136}\)

The close relationship between Mincek and Wubbels suggests that they were influenced by the same sources, signifying this section’s similarities to free improvisation while playing in “contradictory, perpendicular tracks.”\(^{137}\)

Section 6 begins in measure 118 with an ascending gesture into a timbral trill on the high altissimo D as introduced previously. This happens three times, with subtle variations, before the high note is truncated and the ascending gesture is explored with manipulated pitch content.

When asked about these choices for pitch material, Mincek states:

> There is a sequence [in that section] that is trying to suggest that there is a quartal center, if you will, or rather, that the interval of the fourth and fifth are the most important. I have a game that I play when writing things like this. I’ll decide the fourth is the most important interval, which for me means I can use fourths, tritones, fifths, contrasted with the least viable options like the diminished chord, or otherwise tertian chords, and after I’ve exhausted fourths and fifths, I’ll begin to contaminate the idea with the tertian intervals that don’t belong. I’m traversing the whole instrument . . . It is a way of churning around notes within, but not limited to, a specific quartal profile.\(^{138}\)

This approach to pitch makes the relationships more important than the pitches themselves. And highlighting the longer notes at the passage’s end can elevate contour as a dominating idea.

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136 Wubbels, interview 3.
137 Ibid.
138 Mincek, interview 1.
Section 7 is a rhythmic unison between the saxophone and the drum set. The saxophone presents an arpeggiated motive and an elongated multiphonic while the drum plays repeated 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes on the bongos; the low bongo sounds correspond exactly with the arpeggiated material in the saxophone while the high bongo notes relate to the saxophone’s static multiphonic. It is important to note that the saxophone part is not notated as a traditional multiphonic but with verbal instructions (keeping the low C key depressed throughout the entire gesture). This has the sonic result of producing a subtle multiphonic on the notated E5. This entire section builds to measure 158, where the percussionist plays 100 repetitions of a 2/8 measure consisting of 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes on the high bongo. Mincek describes the goal for this particular idea:

I had an interest in small sounds, but still wanted them to exist together with the kind of brutal chamber music characteristic of Zs, so this was going to be my opportunity to do that, to write a piece for Ian and myself utilizing my own physical relationship with the horn and knowing Ian’s sound really well and knowing the types of things I had not heard in terms of sheer force on the drum set. This was to be my opportunity to deal with that, thus the bongo solo at the end. I have heard quite a few performances of that, but I still think Ian’s is my favorite. The reason is that you are supposed to fail at that solo, and if you aren’t failing at it, you aren’t doing it well. You have to not make it to 100 repetitions. If you make it there, it means you are not playing loud enough; it should not work.\textsuperscript{139}

As a performer, this is especially critical to know. Many musicians train their entire lives to perfect passages and execute them in the exact manner that they have prepared. This this piece, Mincek wants to embrace the limits of the human body, to have the mechanism of sound production break down. If one plays at the right dynamic and strive for 100 repetitions, her/his muscular endurance will diminish and the sound will become inconsistent. This requires a willingness to be vulnerable and to not be afraid of the creeping inconsistencies while still fighting to keep as consistent as possible. \textit{Nucleus} puts that part of the human existence on display, and it can be an uncomfortable first experience for the performer.

\textsuperscript{139} Mincek, interview 1.
The final section 8, is a functional codetta, exploring the sound world between a harmonious saxophone multiphonic and the rhythmic scraping of the percussionist’s fingertips, interrupted only by an occasional saxophone slap tongue. This calm materia after the bongo solo concludes the composition while staying true to the aesthetic sound world in which Mincek’s music lives.

Relevant Material from Performer Interviews

Much like with *Pendulum III*, the demands and notation of *Nucleus* can be daunting to a performer when first approaching the work. Accomplished saxophonists Noa Even and Eliot Gattegno and acclaimed percussionist Gregory Beyer have all worked with Alex Mincek or have performed the work extensively. They were interviewed and asked to share some of their insights into this music for the benefit of a newcomer.

Even, who has performed *Nucleus* as a part of her saxophone and percussion duo, Patchwork (with Stephen Klunk), describes the learning process: “We were determined to play it as rhythmically precisely as possible, so we did many rehearsals under tempo with a metronome at the beginning.”\(^{140}\) Eliot Gattegno adds that it is best to learn the piece in chunks, as that was how it was created, “then, put the pieces together as you would a puzzle.”\(^ {141}\) This strategy can prove advantageous for both practice and rehearsal.

Even is a comfortable with improvisation; a technique which she studied while pursuing her DMA at Bowling Green State University. She finds many influences of free improvisation within the work, and adds an additional practice strategy to familiarize oneself with the musical material:

\(^{140}\) Noa Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.

\(^{141}\) Gattegno, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.
Due to the strong influence of free improvisation, it is definitely a good idea to improvise with some of the techniques used in the piece. I suppose that method works for learning other pieces as well, but is particularly helpful for this one. It’s important to be conscious of how the instruments blend, so toying with the types of cymbals and drums is a good idea and testing how they work with the saxophone is helpful. The saxophonist can also mess around with different quality slap tongues, tone quality in general (air versus tone), and so on. There is a lot that can be tailored to the duo performing the piece. I’m always shocked by how different the piece sounds from duo to duo. Every musician brings their own energy to it, their own set of sounds. That’s part of what makes the piece great!142

Even also suggests experimenting with timbre by way of testing different cymbals and drums and perfecting the exact type of slap-tongue sound to find the perfect blend and balance between the two instruments.

Greg Beyer, professional percussionist and member of Chicago-based contemporary music group *Ensemble dal Niente*, has performed *Nucleus* with saxophonist Ryan Muncy. Prior to playing *Nucleus*, he was a classmate of Mincek’s, and speaks about the work in addition to Mincek’s roots in jazz:

The music itself is compelling. I enjoy the rhythmic verve and drive of the piece and, for the drummer, it is incredibly rewarding to be inside the sound of the tenor saxophone. I know both Eric and Alex personally. I attended MSM with Alex and know him as both a jazz performer and an excellent composer with a unique voice. I appreciate how his personal connection to both jazz and the physical nature of playing the tenor saxophone with a solid command and a spirit of exploration of timbre have lent much to the vocabulary and the spirit of this piece…and much of his music, actually.143

Beyer also taps into the element of physicality that exists within Mincek’s music, something Even also discusses:

I love how physical it is. It’s a really visceral, action-packed piece . . . *Nucleus* stands out as a saxophone and percussion piece that’s unlike any other, mostly because of Alex’s unique language. It contains so many different kinds of energy and colors, and the rhythmic vitality for which Alex is known.144

This physicality and rhythmic vitality are aesthetic characteristics that unify the composers of the

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142 Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
143 Gregory Beyer, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2016.
144 Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
Wet Ink Ensemble.

There are a variety of extended techniques that are possible on both saxophone and percussion instruments, and Mincek utilizes some that are easy and some that require more delicacy, all while being idiomatic. Even expounds:

The saxophone part is full of extended techniques. In some cases, it took a while to get the exact sound I wanted. Some of the sounds are unstable or fragile, so it’s important to be able to embrace that. Alex is known for making the saxophone sound like it’s broken. The part lies very well under the fingers, though.\textsuperscript{145}

While differing opinions may exist, those that perform Mincek’s works for saxophone find the experience to be positive, albeit challenging, “visceral and action-packed,”\textsuperscript{146} “idiomatic and engaging to perform,”\textsuperscript{147} “full of surprises and contrast that keep everybody’s attention throughout,”\textsuperscript{148} “generally successful with audiences,”\textsuperscript{149} and “incredibly exciting to listen to and play.”\textsuperscript{150} While only time will truly tell, these works look promising for the future of the saxophone repertoire.

Conclusion

Both \textit{Pendulum III} and \textit{Nucleus}, in addition to other saxophone works by Alex Mincek, are works of substance with unique challenges for the performer. Understanding the musical form contextualizes the liberal use of repetitive structures. Familiarizing oneself with the style of \textit{free improvisation} offers clarity to Mincek’s musical language. Comfort and fluency with saxophone extended techniques are necessary for an accurate presentation of this music. These extended techniques (i.e. slap tongue) explore unique timbral combinations often through

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
\item Ibid.
\item Beyer, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2016.
\item Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
\item Beyer, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2016.
\item Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
musical ideas that present themselves over the entirety of the composition (i.e. the pendulum and nucleus analogies), requiring a large-scale comprehension for an informed performance of these works. The synthesis of this information will aid performers in achieving competent and informed performances of these works. Additionally, the concepts explored in this document can be applied to a broader scope of Alex Mincek’s music.
This is This is This is for two alto saxophones and piano was written by Eric Wubbels in 2010. The work was created for saxophonists Eliot Gattegno and Alex Mincek with the composer on piano. The premiere was given in May of 2010 at the Roulette, a former concert space in the Soho borough of New York City. The piece began as a duo to be premiered on the same festival concert that premiered Mincek’s Pendulum III (Contempuls Festival, Prague, 2009), but the increased demands of a new job for Wubbels prevented him from finishing the project in time. Eliot Gattegno had a significant influence on Wubbels’ writing for the saxophone; the two played in a duo (named The Kenners), and shared an apartment in NYC. Eliot Gattegno reminisces on that time and the moment Eric decided to turn this duo composition into a trio:

Eric and I worked together extensively for the creation of This is…. As we performed as a duo for many years, we lived, traveled, rehearsed, and performed together. We were and are close personal and professional friends. That’s an ideal situation, and we had it. We would both challenge each other in various aspects of life. This is… is a result of that. It incorporates a lot of the techniques I was working on at the time. We decided to do it as a trio with two saxophonists playing in unison as a result of a conversation that went something like “Wouldn’t it be ridiculous if ________?” We filled in the blank with the unison idea. This shows Eric’s desire to listen, learn from performers, and try things that we weren’t sure what the result would be.151

This piece marked a turning point in Wubbels’ compositional process. It was the first work where he primarily focused on physical gestures and approached the composition without making any pre-compositional decisions:

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151 Gattegno, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.
I worked on it with Eliot [Gattegno], developed the material directly face-to-face with him in a practice room. It was the first piece that I worked in that way, where I decided that I’m not going to make any pre-compositional decisions, but rather just find idiomatic gestures. From the instrument itself comes the material, then comes the form. That was an unusual process for me then, but it is now one that I always use. We worked like that over the summer of 2009, and the premiere was in May of 2010 at the old Roulette space downtown in Soho with Alex and Eliot playing the saxophones. I can recall the moment where I had the idea that this was not a duo piece. The doubled line is really important to this; the conception of the saxophone as its own voice compounded by seeing two people playing unison with no difference between the two for the entirety of the work, not even writing it on two lines, but on one line and trying to play it together.152

Wubbels chose to have this work performed as a unison duo for sonic and philosophical reasons, admitting to the perverse reality of the difficulty inherent in adding a second saxophone into the work:

It is the feeling of the sound of chorus that comes from unison doubling. . . It is both unison and difference, because the slight discrepancy, the slight difference between that and true unison is audible, as the sound of that round resonance with a slightly fuzzy pitch. It is just a crazy, inefficient way of getting that. So I need another person to learn this incredibly hard music and play it in unison with this other person. That is sort of perverse, but I was excited about that. It was so much in line with the kind of stuff we were talking about and doing, and if there is a direct impetus for it I think, at least right now, of the Ferneyhough percussion solo, Bone Alphabet. Ian [Antonio], at one point, was talking to us about this percussion duo, I believe from The Hague, and they play that piece in unison. So take that piece and play it in unison. That is the way to make that music good, we both thought. It goes from not complex to being complex. It is not necessarily complex if one person plays it, even if they are playing it correctly, because it is not fixed in the same way that it must be when two people have to do it. It becomes framed in a new way.153

For the reasons outlined above, the composer prefers the work as a trio. He has authorized it to be performed as a duo with only one saxophone and piano, but like a concerto reduction, this reduced version leaves a great deal out of the original composition.

Wubbels also arranged this work for alto saxophone, piano, and drum set, a version he created for his Oakland-based new music ensemble, Athletics. Wubbels currently has no intention to publish this version with drum set, though he doesn’t rule the idea out entirely. It

152 Wubbels, interview 3.
153 Ibid.
was conceived largely for a specific drummer (Nick Woodbury) and the part was worked out largely through discussion and improvisation and was never notated. Regarding this newer version of the work, Wubbels states:

At this point I do not consider that a viable alternative version of the piece; it is just something that we did for fun. Nick Woodbury was around and playing with us, we had made this quartet, Athletics, just for fun. We were all in the area, temporarily, passing through the bay area, but we thought, “We are all here, let’s make some music together,”. . . it is not published at all. Someone asked to play it recently, and I had to say no. Nick made a lot of his part himself. He got to know the piece really well, came in to rehearsal a couple times, and would propose an idea for each loop. Sometimes I would tweak them, sometimes they worked great, and we would go back and forth. He never even wrote it down, he just learned it. I would say it is half from Nick, in regards to the choices for timbre, but I was totally fine with that, given the circumstances of getting to be a part of that realization. It came out way better than I thought. At first, I didn’t even think it could be an alternate version of the piece, but I really liked the way it turned out, so maybe we’ll notate it at some point.\textsuperscript{154}

In the program notes for \textit{This is This is This is}, Wubbels discusses his affinity for writer David Foster Wallace, and the impact that Wallace’s suicide had on Wubbels. He dedicates this composition to Wallace and to “the struggle for a type of consciousness—a moment-to-moment vigilance of mind—that transforms the repetitious business of daily life into something sacred.”\textsuperscript{155} Wubbels elaborates on this work’s connection to David Foster Wallace:

\[\text{[This is This is This is]}\text{ was written in the aftermath of David Wallace’s suicide, so that was very much on my mind . . . the writing of his that it most relates to is not \textit{Infinite Jest} but \textit{The Pale King} . . . that book is also very much about boredom, routine, and repetitive tasks, and the way in which a human life, especially in the way it relates to work, has to do with an incredible amount of repetition.}\textsuperscript{156}

The themes of struggle and repetition—or the single theme of struggle through repetition—are defining characteristics of this piece.

The work is also an etude on the ability to focus through complex repetitions. Wubbels elaborates:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Wubbels, interview 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} Eric Wubbels, \textit{This is This is This is} (New York: Self-Published, 2009-10), Composer’s Note, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Wubbels, interview 3.
\end{itemize}
If you have something that is repeated a number of times that is extremely difficult, very short, and repeated a number of times that is difficult to count, then the psychological effect for the performer is that you can’t really think about what’s coming next because you have to focus so much on the task at hand. That’s something I’ve found to be a rewarding experience. My piece *This is This is This is* is an etude in being able to feel that way. That piece uses extended repetition, with individual loops repeated 39 or 45 or up to 77 times. It’s something I haven’t done before or since. It comes directly out of this band, Orthrelm, which is one of Mick Barr’s projects, a guitar and drums duo with Josh Blair. It’s a band Alex [Mincek] turned me on to.\footnote{Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.}

Composed of many looped sections with seemingly arbitrary numbers of repeats, this work challenges the most advanced musician’s ability to count through its juxtaposition of complex musical material repeated as many as 39 times (see measure 1). This complex and consistent repetition is a significant factor in analyzing the form of the work.

**Formal Elements and Analysis of *This is This is This is***

The form of this work is sectional, or boxy, with the musical material alternating between explorations of idiomatic saxophone sounds emulated by the piano and sections of timbral exploration of the piano and saxophone, where the piano takes the soloistic role. Wubbels wrote this piece in various sections, or modules, and organized them by creating a collage on one of his walls.\footnote{Wubbels, interview 3.} The work can be viewed as having been composed in six large sections (with section five having two parts due to an optional cut) as outlined in the table below.

**Figure 5.1 – Form Table of *This is This is This is***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section #</th>
<th>Measure #s</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-25</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Rhythmic and timbral unison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26-69</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Pitch unison breaks way to exploring P5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>70-85</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Contrapuntal material is explored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>86-119</td>
<td>Simple pitch</td>
<td>Unison pitch and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the main themes that emerges from this work is the exploration of unison, and how Wubbels navigates that for the listener. Although the following quote is from a broad context, it adequately summarizes much of Wubbels’ approach to this work:

The building block of what I focus on is unison, both rhythmically and pitch-wise. Any time you’re working with a heterogeneous timbral situation, I want to find interesting ways of creating unisons, which means examining instruments physically, gesturally, from their technique, so you can find ways of matching them, find intersections in space.¹⁵⁹

As can be seen in the table above, the exploration of unison is one of the binding themes of this work.

Section 1, measures 1-25, is characterized by repetitive loops of complex musical material. Each loop is gestural, and throughout the piano emulates idiomatic saxophone gestures or vice versa. An example can be located in measure 1 (repeated 39 times), where Wubbels writes an idiomatic saxophone gesture: a low Bb (written), the alto saxophone’s lowest note, with a slap tongue articulation followed by a multiphonic that can be executed by removing only a single finger from the preceding Bb. This gesture is emulated in the piano by matching the saxophone’s lowest pitch with the piano’s lowest pitch in the same pitch class (notated as a C#1). Much like Mincek did in Pendulum III, Wubbels applies the slap-tongue technique to de-emphasize pitch. By choosing the muddy low register of the piano, he achieves a similar effect.

¹⁵⁹ Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.
On the second eighth note of measure one, Wubbels writes a multiphonic for the saxophone and matches the pitch content of the multiphonic on the piano, creating as close to a unison as one can expect from these mismatched timbres. He then rhythmically composes a passage in the piano, utilizing the metallic timbre of the prepared notes and the pitches within the saxophone’s multiphonic to make the resultant sound more complex. As instructed in the program notes, the piano has been prepared with dimes woven between the three wires of pitches Eb3, F#3, D4, G4, and G#4, and these are notated in the score with open triangle note heads. Measure 2 (repeated 21 times) is constructed in two parts. The first half is a unison gesture, with the saxophone playing a sounding Eb4 and the piano playing a complex harmony constructed over an Eb4, simultaneously reflecting the complex harmonics of the previous saxophone multiphonic and embracing the harmonic richness inherent in a single saxophone tone. The second half of measure 2 is an ascending gesture, an idiomatic tremolo in the altissimo register of the saxophone paired against a series of ascending thirds in the piano. The bottom notes of the piano’s gesture and the saxophone’s tremolo are in unison. It is a clear example of Wubbels’ characteristic “bad copy” approach to writing duo pieces.\(^{160}\) Wubbels further elaborates: “Every time I’ve written one of these piano-plus-other-instrument duos a part of the project is to just develop a conception of that instrument, but through the prism of the piano, so it’s always constrained by this other field of pianistic technique as a sieve for the other instrument.”\(^{161}\)

Measure 2 is a clear example of exploring the space between the piano and the saxophone. In another example (measure 4), Wubbels takes away the resonance of the saxophone by writing an airy sound, designed to blend into the tinny, resonance-impaired prepared notes of the piano.

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\(^{160}\) Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.
\(^{161}\) Mincek and Wubbels, interview 2.
Overall, the entirety of section 1 explores unison space by matching an idiomatic gesture from one instrument and creating a “bad copy” on the other instrument.

Section 2, measures 26-69, begins with unison, but then diverges to further explore the interval of the perfect fifth. After the piano drones on G#3 for 49 loops (measure 27), the saxophone joins in a unison, articulating every other note of the piano; this is notated as accented 16\textsuperscript{th} notes in the saxophone and 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes in the piano. The piano and saxophone reach rhythmic agreement in measure 28 (repeated 12 times). While the piano continues a drone on G#4, the saxophone and piano interject frequently with pitch class C#, a fifth below the piano drone, and the saxophone interjects with an altissimo C (sounding pitch class Eb/D#), a perfect fifth above the piano drone.

Section 3 (measures 70-85) marks a return of the complexity of sound from section 1, but with new gestures generated from similar material. The same multiphonics are used in the saxophone part, but primarily in reverse order from how they were used in section 1. The first three measures of section 3 (measures 70-72) are homorhythmic between the two parts. In measure 73 the two voices begin to diverge rhythmically, and Mincek explores contrapuntal music made from much of the previous material. Examples of this contrapuntal exploration can be found in measures 73, 78-79, and 81. Unison gestures (including the “bad copy” unisons) are employed throughout the remainder of this section.

Section 4 spans measures 86-119. In the first two measures of this section (measures 86-87), one finds the return of the piano drone introduced by a unison melodic passage, separated by one 16\textsuperscript{th} note and repeated five times. This piano drone, executed by repeatedly attacking the same key, is found on C1 in the lowest register of the piano, a register that is harmonically rich to the human ear due to the many overtones present within our audibility range. After repeating
this pitch with a slow crescendo for a duration of approximately one minute (the total duration can range from 55-68 seconds, depending upon the pianist’s chosen duration), rhythmic complexity is added with the pattern introduced in measures 91-93, removing the listener from the trance-inducing drone and preparing for the violent entrance of the saxophone on the idiomatically aggressive multiphonic in measure 94. This multiple sonority is easy to execute (in the opinion of the author) and one of the most aggressive sounding multiphonics on the saxophone. The subsection of measures 94-117 is the most rhythmically complex and unpredictable section of the work. An alternating pattern between the saxophone and piano creates the sense of rhythmic vitality, quickly shattered by instances of 21/32 measures and other mixed meter passages (1/4 + 3/16, 3/8 + 3/16). Although it is difficult to perceive as a listener, this is a repetitive metric structure that loops a total of four times as outlined below:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c|c}
\end{array}
\]

Overlapping these loops are patterns of alternating multiphonics and piano clusters. These alternate between unison agreement of the saxophone multiphonic and the piano pitch material (measure 97) and a dischord between an aggressive saxophone multiphonic and a piano cluster (measure 94). Interwoven into this material is the slowly accelerating repetition of B5 in the piano, increasing its presence in the pianist’s right hand from its introduction in measure 100 until measure 118, where its presence is understood as the first note of the recurring ascending gesture first introduced in measure 2, modified from its original pitch content. This B4 continues to grow in prominence and becomes the drone of the next section.

Section 5 is comprised of subsections 5A and 5B. Due to the length of the piece (approximately 20 minutes in its full form), Wubbels has written an optional cut from measure 120 to measure 148, and this section will be defined as section 5A. The remaining material from
measures 148-151 is section 5B, which comprises material functioning as a transition to the last section of the piece (section 6). Section 5A is defined by the familiar piano drone (now on pitch B5) joined in unison with the saxophone. The drone is interrupted by two gestures: the recurring saxophone low Bb slap tongue in unison with piano C#3 (same sounding pitch) and a descending gesture written over an 11/24 measure. Because 11/24 is not a common time signature, Wubbels explains how he mathematically determined this measure in the performance instructions: “The 11/24 bars signify eleven pulses of a 16\(^{th}\)-note sextuplet within the prevailing tempo. Figures in these bars move at the speed of 16\(^{th}\)-note sextuplets, but occur in patterns that cannot be subdivided into groups of six.”\(^{162}\) The author suggests feeling these measures in three groups of three notes and one group of two notes, or a composite group of six notes followed by a group of five notes. As this section progresses, the drone dissipates and the two interruption gestures become the primary material. It is interesting to note that the drone pitch is the first pitch of the descending gesture and the low Bb is its last note. Therefore, the descending gesture grows out of the drone and connects it to the note that previously felt like an interruption. The material ends in measure 148, at the start next section. Section 5b is composed of material reminiscent of Alex Mincek’s broken saxophone idea, also referred to as the polyphonic bagpipes, where the fingers of the horn are played in an idiomatic fashion, but out of sequence. Wubbels uses this idea by leaving a key open (finger 2) and then closing the remainder of the keys chromatically, creating a microtonal passage that he further disguises through applying the slap tongue articulation. The section ends with a multiphonic in the saxophone against a cluster in the piano. The piano material shares the same pitches as the saxophone multiphonic and adds a few higher ones for harmonic density. The duration (nine beats) and dynamic (\textit{niente to pp to niente} in the saxophone and a \textit{fp} attack in the piano) is a restful gesture after much previous kinetic energy.

\(^{162}\) Eric Wubbels, \textit{This is This is This is}, general notes, 2.
Section 6 (measures 152-194) is marked as the coda of the piece. It is a section of great contrast from the previous sections, which have all been explorations of various definitions of unison. Essentially a piano solo, the saxophone plays two events: one multiphonic at the beginning of the section and one microtonal note that creates audible beating in measures 172-176. The remainder of this section is a timbral exploration of piano resonance against the prepared piano sound (the dimes) in a pattern that provides modest rhythmic interest alternating between groups of four and five notes of either dotted 16th notes or 8th notes, creating a feeling of metric modulation. The piano begins this section forte, diminishing throughout to a ppp dynamic in the penultimate measure. The final measure is a rest, and this silence provides ultimate closure.

Repetition in This is This is This is

There are many forms of repetition present in This is This is This is. The most obvious are the instances of material between repeat signs (often a great number of repeats). The droned notes on the piano represent another form of repetition, albeit slightly more covert. Repetition is significant to the core of the work, as both a philosophical and musical influence. As already mentioned, the work was dedicated to David Foster Wallace. Wubbels explains this literary connection to his own use of repetition:

[The Pale King] is very much about boredom, routine, and repetitive tasks, and the way in which a human life, especially in the way it relates to work, has to do with an incredible amount of repetition. His point was that there are these people, people who are so good at finding validation or some sort of mental balance in repetitive tasks, that they can live a happy life. It’s not that it just kind of grinds them down and crushes them through the daily life of literally breaking your back doing repetitive work, or staring at things in an IRS office . . . That is, on some level, just a deep part of human life and existence, and you have to find a way to deal with it . . . Part of what is going into this
piece is secondary to that, just an engagement with the sound of repetition and repetitive music that was in circulation and the air at the time.\textsuperscript{163}

Wubbels marries this literary influence to his personal interests in athleticism, physical gesture, and what it feels like to do something. He elaborates:

The thing that is really driving the compositional decisions from that perspective of the piece is that it is really growing out of physical gestures. What does 39 times feel like as with this material? For almost all of those loops, it only starts to feel good after a while, so you have to get into them as a performer. And then you are in these units of basically eight, so eight is your box. That is something you can feel very easily. There is counting, but I don’t have to count every iteration and gritting my teeth like “1…2…3, etc.” Eight is circulating, so you have four groups of eight plus seven for the first loop.\textsuperscript{164}

Wubbels’ choices for the number of durations of the measures looped an extreme number of times were initially intuitive, but he came to understand those intuitions later, relating to the natural way that humans feel groups of four and eight:

You have the box with the number eight, which is squareness, and then you are modulating squareness in various ways. Sometimes you want stability, so that is eight or four. Sometimes you are at a point in the piece where you want it to push forward, you want momentum coming out of the loop. Seven or fifteen is a little too short, because as a listener you start feeling the cycling of the number four or eight also, so if something causes you to miss a step, it springs you off with energy into the next loop. Similarly, if you get nineteen or seventeen, you feel the big pattern come and then you think, “Oh man, it’s still going,” that sense of frustration can be valuable too, or even misdirection of that . . . Those kinds of things I feel in that piece that you have this quality as a physical thing in the air, which is inertia or momentum, and the piece gets to this thing where it is just spinning like a wheel, and it has this stable energy, and then it is pushing ahead all of a sudden and things are moving very fast.\textsuperscript{165}

For Wubbels, the physicality of the repetitions cannot be understated. As a runner, he often comprehends duration as it relates to extreme physical exertion, and compares how that duration feels in moments of total stasis, such as through meditation. This activity dependent experience of duration is how Wubbels navigates his looped material, factoring in both the performers’ and

\textsuperscript{163}Wubbels, interview 3.
\textsuperscript{164}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165}Ibid.
the audience’s perspectives.\footnote{Wubbels, interview 3.} The intensity of repetitive passages in this work has psychological impacts; the difficulty necessitates that the performer live in the moment, an experience Wubbels finds rewarding as a performer.\footnote{Dohoney, “Proximity to the Notion of Fusion,” 22.}

Relevant Material from Performer Interviews

In learning and performing \textit{This is This is This is}, Wubbels has found that the sheer amount of repetition makes the activity of practicing very similar to the experience of performance. He comments that at a certain point, “there is no way to practice the piece other than play it. . . The number of times you repeat something may be different . . . playing the piece and the mechanism for learning something are very similar.”\footnote{Wubbels, interview 3.} It is common for successful musicians to use repetition as a tool for developing muscle memory, often looping small passages many times. In many ways, this piece requires the development of such muscle memory.

Saxophonist Eliot Gattegno claims that most difficult part of the work is its demands on endurance and focus.\footnote{Gattegno, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.} Furthermore, saxophonist David Wegehaupt adds that the biggest endurance challenge for him was the slap-tongue technique. He elaborates:

The piece appears to be prohibitively demanding technically, but is so idiomatic, lays so well for the fingers that it is not as hard as one might think at first approach. The two biggest challenges in the piece, for me, were slap-tongue endurance during the repeated quintuplets (48-75 times, followed by 24-36 times), and the section that begins with repeated altissimo G#s and culminates with very fast, repeated, technically demanding, tutti runs. This lick and variations of the lick are pretty hard and just required tons of practice to execute accurately alone.\footnote{Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.}
Wegehaupt is a virtuosic saxophonist and specialist in contemporary music and has studied with some of the best pedagogues of the instrument: Jean-Michel Goury, Timothy McAllister, and John Sampen. He has worked with Wubbels personally and professionally; Wegehaupt premiered Wubbels’ alto saxophone, piano, and drum set version of this piece. Wegehaupt finds that this work demands much of the performers, specifically:

The piece encourages the player to be intensely engaged and vigilant throughout, even while repeating a one measure figure 50 or more times. This should not become comfortable. Each repetition should be executed perfectly, requiring attention to the repetition, transforming the repetition into something sacred. . . Part of this attention is brought by the need to count through each repetition [and] to not get lost. To listen to the players with whom you are performing to ensure that the cycles of each measure are consistent in intensity, balance, and tightness. A successful performance of this piece feels beautiful and satisfying. It feels like a bonding experience for the performers. I’ve felt more while playing this piece than any other music.171

Wegehaupt adds the following regarding his experiences in counting the repetitions of the looped passages:

Another thing that makes [This is This is This is] unique is the intense concentration needed to count through the repeats. It is best to count through them, but the composition is kind to the mistakes that can occur, and gives clearly audible cues in order to get out of many of the longer repeats. Group cueing is also useful or acceptable at times. However, it is most successful when the audience is sucked into a loop that keeps going and going, and then is jarred from this cycle without anticipating it because of physical cues from the performers.172

Group cueing can be beneficial to the execution of this piece. This work demands a level of ensemble virtuosity that is uniquely difficult. According to Wegehaupt, this can only be attained through:

Lots of rehearsal, especially in transitions from repeated bar to repeated bar, tempo changes, and rhythmic precision. Listening helped me, but shouldn’t be overly relied upon. Ensemble virtuosity cannot be accomplished without dedication and time spent to develop an understanding and complete comfort with your collaborators.173

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171 Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
Although demanding on performers, this work has been rewarding for both performers and the audience. The composition is David Wegehaupt’s favorite work for saxophone, while Eliot Gattegno claims “it is an experience, one like none other.”

Historical Background of *Axamer Folio*

*Axamer Folio* for soprano saxophone and drum set was written by Eric Wubbels in 2015. The commission was funded by a consortium of saxophonists and saxophone/percussion duos, and was led by Patchwork (Noa Even and Stephen Klunk). Its premiere was given by Patchwork at Kenyon College in Gambier, OH, on April 1, 2016. The consortium members (listed in saxophone-percussion order) were:

- Noa Even and Stephen Klunk
- Geoffrey Diebel
- Jonathan Hulting-Cohen and Ian Antonio
- Michael Ibrahim
- Nathan Nabb and Brad Meyer
- Jeffrey Siegfried
- David Wegehaupt and Nick Woodbury
- Matthew Younglove and Brandon Arvay

The work is a “modular network of 24 pieces . . . with no preset order, form, or duration” and is dedicated to the free jazz saxophonist Anthony Braxton and composer Mathias Spahlinger. The aesthetics of those two dedicatees greatly influenced the creation of this music:

The individual pieces (which include duos, solos, and duos that can be separated and combined with other pieces) project a small number of musical objects in an extremely diverse range of performative and notational contexts, from rigorously specified to indeterminate, graphic, text scores; from tightly synchronized duo music to phasing

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174 Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.
175 Gattegno, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.
176 Noa Even, text message to the author, December 16, 2016.
177 Eric Wubbels, *Axamer Folio* (New York: Self-Published, 2015), Title and Notes page.
loops, list structures, and free improvisation. The result is a kind of self-similar labyrinth of possibilities, within which the performers trace a path.179

This openness to form and willingness to relinquish control of the outcome of the work was a new compositional process for Wubbels, which he largely credits to his experience in performing Spahlinger’s Extension. Wubbels explains that:

The two [influences] were Anthony Braxton and Matthias Spahlinger. Two people, whose music I got to know in more detail around the time I was writing the piece, both of whom represented to me the idea of opening up your universe and embracing the benefits that you get from certain kinds of uncertainty, or freedom. I had just played this piece by Spahlinger called Extension, which is an hour-long violin and piano duo. Almost the entire second half of the piece is modular, so you have material for the duos that can be arranged in any order, and then the final third of the piece is completely independent. . . It just felt like you could just make a universe. You could make something that you cannot even see the boundaries of, the borders of, with so little. That was just something I had to try. I had to explore that idea. Braxton is another one of these people who just makes these universes of music.180

Wubbels found modularity to be artistically appropriate for a consortium of performing ensembles. It was a method of providing eight unique pieces for eight unique performing ensembles:

The biggest impetus for why I took that approach with this piece was that it was a consortium commission; eight difference saxophonists and eight different percussionists . . . I was trying to write a piece for eight different people with eight different backgrounds. Saxophone and drum set are two of the instruments where you tend to have the biggest difference in musicians, in the way they were trained, in their musical experiences. As a drum set player, you could be coming from a classical, orchestral background where you are playing drum set for this piece, or you could be coming from a rock background or a jazz background, a background as an improviser, as a noise musician. I wanted to make it a piece that would accommodate, or offer up to people all of those ways of being a musician and making music. So I had passages of totally free improvisation, passages of constrained improvisation where you have to make choices, like the text-based pieces. A piece that really asked you, as a performer, to be creative.181

180 Wubbels, interview 3.
181 Ibid.
This modular form provides numerous possibilities, and versions of the piece can range from 7-20 minutes in duration. The names of each movement come from small towns in Austria. As Wubbels explains:

I was [in Austria] with friends in Innsbruck and we just drove around and I saw the names on different street signs. It was just one of those things that you write down in a book somewhere and think ‘Axamer Lizum, that is a really funny name.’ I just wrote them down and didn’t know what was going to happen with it. But then as I was going into Google Maps and looking them up, I saw all these weird little paired towns, Fulz is one, Lanz is another, Tulfes and Telfes, and it’s hard to come up with good titles. Something about the fact that those names of those towns were good titles, they are interesting words and they have this kind of chewy element. Because they were paired in that way, it gave me these ideas about pairings for solo pieces that did certain things. They are weird copies of each other. I just took very big picture, metaphorical ideas from that.182

The title word Axamer comes from one of these towns, and Folio adequately describes the best method for binding these numerous movements together into a single entity. Wubbels provides three possible realizations with the work, but the possibilities of combinations are seemingly endless.

In December 2014, during the early stages of the compositional process, Noa Even and Steven Klunk visited Wubbels in New York City to workshop some ideas. Even recalls that experience:

While many composers bring some sketches or a list of ideas to work with, Eric asked us to come up with sounds that we enjoyed playing on our instruments. He wanted gestures that were diverse and idiomatic. The goal of the meeting was to collectively compile an alphabet of sounds that would be arranged in different combinations throughout the piece.183

This collaboration between performer and composer is the typical compositional process for Wubbels. Whether writing for colleagues in Wet Ink or for his roommate and colleague, Eliot Gattegno, Wubbels often interacts with the performers prior to completion of the musical work.

182 Wubbels, interview 3.
183 Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
Formal Elements and Analysis of *Axamer Folio*

The openness and modularity of this work create numerous possible realizations. Wubbels provides three in the score, as shown in figure 5.2. Patchwork (Noa Even and Steven Klunk) created their own version of the piece (see figure 5.3). When approaching this work for the first time, the uncertainty can be daunting. Noa Even had the following thoughts regarding this openness: “I’ve never heard a piece like it with a score that is so open-ended for the performers to create their own adventure. Although almost paralyzing initially, it was so fun to have ownership over that aspect of the piece.”

It is not common for a composer to give so many options to performers; making decisions on this scale can be difficult for a performer who is not versed in improvisation.

**Figure 5.2 – Wubbels’ Realizations**

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184 Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
The work is organized in 24 mini movements, divided into three subcategories: solos, duos, and paired or separable duos (see figure 5.5). Wubbels gives the following directions for making one’s own realization:

To make a realization, select the pieces you’d like to include in your version. To make an order, follow the routing diagrams on the title page of each movement, which show you the five most likely pieces to precede and follow any given piece (other choices are also possible, though). Arrange an order based on these guidelines, taking into account that various solos can be played simultaneously or as patches within the middle of other solos. Additional special rules governing the playing of certain pieces (MEDRAZ, AXAMS, GRIES AM BRENNER, etc.) are included on their title pages.185

Figure 5.3 – Patchwork’s Realization

Each movement includes a title page that outlines the various rules that govern that piece. Arrows next to the movement title point left and right to show the movements that can precede it follow it, respectively (Wubbels calls these “routing diagrams”). Below the title of the work are program notes that give additional rules or provide clarification for interpretation. At the bottom of the title pages, an approximate duration, or range of acceptable durations, is provided. An example title page is shown in figure 5.4.

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185 Eric Wubbels, e-mail message to Noa Even, June 1, 2015.
Following most of the above rules, Patchwork’s realization (see figure 5.3) was created with the following rational and aesthetic goals:

Beginning the piece with a drum solo (ALDRANS) gives the audience some time to absorb the drummer’s vocabulary and sound palette. It also starts things off with a bang. Continuing with INZIG, which briefly features solo saxophone in our realization, completes the introduction of the piece’s characters. The atmospheric texture and quiet dynamics of INZIG/RANGGEN contrast nicely with the sporadic gestures and sudden attacks in ALDRANS.

MEDRAZ brings the drum set and saxophone into audibly metric unison for the first time in the piece. The crab protocol leaves some contrast between the instruments in timbre and dynamics. The deliberate pace of MEDRAZ gives way to the wild rhythms and screechy gestures of AXAMS. This is immediately followed by the second iteration of MEDRAZ, which features a hocketed rhythm at the fastest tempo option provided by the composer. The drum set and saxophone come back into unison at a plodding tempo in the final iteration of MEDRAZ. This is both an anti-climax and a reprieve before the breathless second half of our realization.

RINN begins with a timid gesture and builds in density and tension over its course. The improvised final module of RINN provides a transition for the saxophone into GRIES AM BRENNER as the drum set begins RAITS. The relatively spacious beginning of RAITS allows for another short saxophone feature. The saxophone transitions to VÖLS as the drum set reaches peak intensity, which is maintained until the end of RAITS. The lack of rhythmic coordination continues into MIEDERS/NEDER, though there is a
noticeable shift in style and timbre. As NEDER ends, the saxophone continues to play up until the moment AXAMER-LIZUM begins. This is the first time in minutes that the drum set and saxophone have been obviously rhythmically coordinated.

After AXAMER-LIZUM, the high intensity that has been maintained throughout the second half of our realization suddenly dissipates into the freely drifting KÜHTAI. We purposefully play a rather long KÜHTAI in order to allow the dust to settle before ending the piece entirely. Though the modules in KÜHTAI can be played in any order, the mysterious groan of superball mallets on the drum set proved to be a very effective ending, and has remained the final sound at every performance we’ve given so far.

Piecing together our form was certainly challenging, because we did so before learning any of the material. As we made decisions based on score study and intuition, it was valuable to have Eric as a sounding board. We ultimately tweaked a few transitions once we were more acquainted with the music. Overall, our goal was to create a cohesive form with contrast, varying degrees of momentum, and diverse material. While we’re quite satisfied with the realization we created, it’s likely that we’ll explore other combinations in the future.¹⁸⁶

Even and Klunk mention that their realization involved consulting Wubbels, and that they view Axamer Folio as a work in progress; this piece provides a unique opportunity to continually evolve. The author has performed Wubbels’ first provided realization, but plans to incorporate different movements in future versions with duo partner Brandon Arvay.

In the TITLE and NOTES section of the work, Wubbels provides a musical key (one for each instrument) for the common source material of which each movement is composed (see the notation key in Appendix C). There is unity in the musical material of many of the works. Mastering the sounds on the key page makes learning many of the movements easier, as many are composed of the same material. Familiarizing oneself with that musical material will also inform a performer’s choice in filling the improvised space that is offered in many of the movements (see figure 5.5). A detailed explanation of each sound outlined on the musical key can be found in Appendix C.

¹⁸⁶ Even, e-mail message to author, September 8, 2016.
There are six solo works within *Axamer Folio*, three for soprano saxophone and three for drum set. The saxophone solos are AMPASS*, KREITH, and PATSCH*. KREITH has an alternate version, GRIES AM BRENNER, which is a free improvisation based upon the musical material contained within KREITH. PATSCH* is frame compatible (see explanation of frame compatibility on page 103), and AMPASS* becomes frame compatible on the fourth page of the work. The drum set solos are RAITIS*, GöTZENS*, and IGLS. GöTZENS* is frame compatible, and RAITIS* becomes frame compatible on page 3, where the patch symbol can be found. The solos pieces can also be played against other solos, creating aleatoric duos. An example of this can be seen in the saxophone solo in Wubbels’ first suggested realization. As the saxophone plays the solo work AMPASS, the percussionist can patch in the solo RAITIS, and these solos would overlap creating a duo. Both AMPASS and RAITIS can also be played as solos, without the patch option.

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187 This image used with permission from the composer’s website.

188 A “patch” within a work means that another indicated work may commence at the notated spot by the other performer, turning the solo into a duo (i.e. the patch in the saxophone solo AMPASS allows the percussionist to enter with the piece GÖTZENS, turning this section into a compatible duo).
Duos in *Axamer Folio*

There are eight total works that Wubbels places in the duos column. These works are strict duos that start and end together (most of the time). These works are composed as duos and their individual parts cannot be separated and performed as solos. AXAMS and AXAMER-LIZUM are related works. They were both notated on the same page of music in the original manuscript, but to make it more legible, Wubbels has since published them in separate versions. AXAMER-LIZUM is rhythmically and notationally identical to AXAMS, with repeated loops added to the mix. These loops complicate the metric structure, as they do not line up with the measure lines. Some loops are tiny, others larger. The entire work is also within one loop, so the largest loop is the duration of the piece. These loops make AXAMER-LIZUM sound like a badly scratched vinyl recording of AXAMS, causing many skips and bumps.

MEDRAZ is labeled as a catalogue of sounds, using most of the sounds from the notation key, and is organized in a method that avoids staleness. If chosen in a realization, it must be performed three times, either in succession or dispersed throughout the piece. It has four protocols and each instance must use a different protocol. The measures are labeled A – P in the saxophone part and a – p in the percussion part. The first protocol is a simultaneous duo, played exactly as notated. The second protocol is a combination of sequential solos, saxophone and then percussion (A-P, then a-p). The third protocol is a hocket, the saxophone playing the work as written and the percussion delaying the work by a single sixteenth note. The final protocol is a crab duo in which the saxophonist plays the measures as notated and the percussionist plays the work in the reverse order. It is important to note that in the crab duo, the percussionist must play the measures as notated (not reading the material within the measures backwards), but only playing the measures in a sequence that is the reverse order (p – a). The three versions must also
be performed at different specified tempi, and these tempi (sixteenth note at 66, 88, and 110 beats per minute) must only be used once each.

The three works ARZL – THAUR – RINN are notated on the same score, but are three different pieces. They are all performed from the same score, but have separate routing diagrams and different subsets of musical material. On the routing diagram, ARZL follows the double line, THAUR follows the single line, and RINN follows the dotted line. The numbers represent rehearsal markings that delineate various subsections, or loops, of the piece.

Paired and Separable Duos in *Axamer Folio*

The paired and separable duos provide more options. Written as pairs, they can be viewed as duo pieces, or they can be separated and played as solos. They may also be mixed and matched with each other to create new duos. Wubbels elaborates on how these can be arranged:

The main intention was that they could be something mixed and matched, due to their compatible meter and tempo (like IKEA components). But, in practice the saxophone part from one of these duos could be played over a non-frame-compatible drum set part (Patchwork’s version has a couple instances of this), for example. In theory, within the piece any of these could also function as a purely solo moment too.¹⁸⁹

Most of these paired and separable duos are frame compatible, which makes swapping them around quite easy, although TULFES/TELFES and NEDER/MIEDERS are not frame compatible. It is important to note that each of these works is only written for one instrument; they are duos only when paired up (i.e., TULFES is a drum set work, TELFES is for saxophone).

Frame Compatible Works in *Axamer Folio*

The works notated with an asterisk (*) are frame compatible, meaning “their pages are identical in duration and [metric] structure. Any of these can be separated from their paired piece

¹⁸⁹ Eric Wubbels, e-mail message to author, September 1, 2016.
and recombined with other frame compatible movements." Some have identical metric structure. Others have a similar structure (same meters, in different order). The most significant detail for these works is that the pages on which they are notated are identical in total duration, meaning that if executed correctly, they are the same duration. This allows for a multitude of combinations, even within one work. For example, the five pages of the saxophone work VöLS and the five pages of the percussion piece LANS can be arranged in any order, making 120 possible combinations of each of those works. Combined together, it creates 14,400 possible versions of that paired and separable duo.

Free Improvisation in *Axamer Folio*

The concept of free improvisation was largely influential in the formation of this work. From its dedication to free improviser Anthony Braxton to its use of a completely open form determined by the performer from the musical material, the work relies heavily upon the ideals of free improvisation. Some of the movements are entirely improvised. GRIES AM BRENNER is an alternate version of KREITH, where the saxophonist improvises on the musical material of which KREITH is composed. MIEDERS and NEDER are both text-based free improvisations, where the performers use the patterns inherent in the speech of provided text to create the piece. Loop 11 in ARZL-THAUR-RINN is a free improvised passage, and the pitch material in TULFES/TELFES is completely at the discretion of the performers. GöTZENS provides a strict metrical framework but leaves the sounds to be determined/improvised. IGLS uses a graphic score that dictates the creation of a catalog of sounds with which to play in the notated order by Wubbels. An instrumentalist with a background in improvisation is more likely to make

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190 Eric Wubbels, e-mail message to author, June 1, 2015.
musically appropriate decisions with this graphic notation. While it is entirely possible to perform the work and avoid any free improvisation sections, it is not possible to escape its influence in the aesthetic of chosen material. The author of this document encourages a thorough investigation into the recorded works of Anthony Braxton prior to performing this work.

Relevant Material from Performer Interviews

As already mentioned, Noa Even was organizer for the *Axamer Folio* consortium, and she directly contributed to the musical material of this work. Even and her Patchwork duo partner, Stephen Klunk, met with Wubbels in December of 2014 to workshop various ideas in the beginning stages of the formation of the work. While *Axamer Folio* was being composed, Wubbels was living in the bay area of San Francisco and was frequently collaborating with saxophonist David Wegehaupt, another consortium member and a member of the group Athletics with Wubbels. Wubbels relied on Wegehaupt’s expertise to try out the musical ideas. Wegehaupt recalls that time:

> I was working with Mr. Wubbels in Athletics while he composed this piece. He had me try some licks out and experiment a bit before and after rehearsals to be sure his ideas worked, or to find patterns that fit what he was looking for. Mr. Wubbels has a strong understanding of the saxophone, so unlike other composers who have simply asked me to sort of improvise or show them the cool things a saxophone can do, Mr. Wubbels comes with developed ideas, fingerings, and goals, and we figure out if they work, or develop solutions for any ideas that might not yet be fully figured.\(^{191}\)

Wegehaupt further elaborates on the idiomatic nature of Wubbels’ saxophone writing: “The saxophone part is pretty difficult, but as in all of Eric’s music, highly idiomatic. The material is reused and repurposed from movement to movement, so once one learns a few of the difficult pieces of material, it is useful for large portions of the piece.”\(^{192}\) This statement is useful to

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\(^{191}\) Wegehaupt, e-mail message to author, July 15, 2016.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.
someone approaching the work for the first time. There is much shared musical material across the 24 pieces that make up this work. Learning one of the movements often makes learning others easier. Noa Even had a similar experience:

In learning my own part, moving from one gesture to another proved difficult in certain spots. The satisfying aspect was that once I learned how to play certain gestures back to back, I had an easier time doing so in other combinations and in other parts of the piece. The same language is used throughout, so the whole thing felt more familiar as I made progress.¹⁹³

Even and Klunk realized that learning the entire piece before deciding on the form was not necessary (you cannot play all the movements within the given time constraints of the work). Even makes the following recommendation:

I would recommend getting familiarized with the techniques in the score and what the general sound palette is for both instruments. That will give an idea of how each movement goes, which will help in creating the realization of the piece. Stephen [Klunk] and I decided that it didn’t make sense to learn the entire piece before choosing the form, because we knew we wouldn’t be playing every single section. It’s important to consider in which movements the saxophone and drum set parts are synchronized versus which ones are more independent or improvised. Maintaining a balance is one approach to building a successful map for the piece.¹⁹⁴

Balance is one of many possible themes with which a performer can choose to organize this work. Having an idea, such as balance, provides a launching point for how a duo may choose to navigate and construct a work with so many possibilities. This artistic freedom is something Even and Wegehaupt both found to be a rewarding experience.

Conclusion

The saxophone works of Eric Wubbels are significant additions to the repertoire of the saxophone. *This is This is This is* and *Axamer Folio* share a similar aesthetic, and the form for each comes from the musical material itself. Comprehending the musical source material

¹⁹³ Noa Even, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2016.
¹⁹⁴ Ibid.
requires an understanding of the material’s roots in physical gestures and the process through which Wubbels interacts with performers in the initial stages of creating this material. This deep connection to physical gesture and the human comprehension of temporal physical experiences contextualizes Wubbels’ liberal use of repetitive structures. As with the music of Alex Mincek, the style of free improvisation is important to the comprehension of Wubbels’ music, as it provided direct source material for Axamer Folio and indirectly provided the gestures explored by Wubbels and Gattegno in the creation of This is This is This is. Saxophone extended techniques are ingrained the essence of many of the gestures in this music, necessitating that the performer be fluent in many of these techniques to accurately perform this music. Lastly, a certain creativity and willingness to explore form is required for a performer to prepare Axamer Folio due to it’s open-ended structure. The synthesis of this knowledge enables a more informed performance of these saxophone works by Eric Wubbels, and these concepts can be applied to a broader scope of his music.
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APPENDIX A. COMPLETE LIST OF SAXOPHONE WORKS

Saxophone Works by Alex Mincek

Chamber Orchestra

*Pneuma* (2015)
for tenor saxophone solo, flute, percussion, piano, trumpet, trombone, horn, 2 violins, alto cello and double bass

*Umflut* (2003)
for tenor saxophone, horn, and chamber orchestra

Chamber Ensemble (3 – 7 Players)

*Pendulum IV* (2009)
for contrabass flute, tenor saxophone, violin, and cello

*Subito* (2008)
for flute, clarinet, saxophone, piano, violin, viola, and cello

*Portraits and Repetitions* (2007)
for flute, clarinet, saxophone, percussion, piano, violin, and cello

*To Nowhere From Nowhere* (2006)
for voice, alto flute, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, piano, violin, and cello

*Perpetuum Mobile II* (2005-06)
for accordion and 2 tenor saxophones

for 2 tenor saxophones, 2 electric guitars, and 2 drum sets

for flute, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, cello, and CD

*Slalom* (2002)
for 2 tenor saxophones, 2 electric guitars, and 2 drum sets

*Mimesis* (2001)
for 2 tenor saxophones, 2 electric guitars, and 2 drum sets
Red on Still (1999)  
for 2 tenor saxophones, electric guitar, and trombone

Duos

Pendulum III (2009)  
for alto saxophone and piano

Nucleus (2007)  
for saxophone and drumset

Perpetuum Mobile I (2005)  
for 2 tenor saxophones

Karate (2001/03)  
for 2 tenor saxophones

Solos

Ali (2010)  
for alto saxophone

*The subcategories of this list were taken directly from the composer’s website, to most accurately represent the works as the composer has intended.*
**Large Ensemble / Orchestra (10 or more players)**

*Auditory Scene Analysis* (2014)
for 18 players, narrator, and electronic sound
Instrumentation: flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, bassoon /
trumpet, trombone, tuba / piano, sampler, 2 percussion /
2 violins, viola, cello, double bass / female voice / sound engineer

*Euphony* (2004-6)
for solo tenor saxophone and 14 instruments

**Chamber (4-8 players)**

*Auditory Scene Analysis II* (2016)
for oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, saxophone, and bassoon

*katachi* (2010-12)
for flute, tenor sax/bass clarinet, voice, violin, piano, percussion, and live electronics

**Duos/Trios**

*Axamer Folio* (2015)
for saxophone and drumset

*This is This is This is* (2010)
[Duos with Piano II]
for 1 or 2 alto saxophones and prepared piano

*The subcategories of this list were taken directly from the composer’s website,
to most accurately represent the works as the composer has intended.*
Matt Younglove: What was your musical experience growing up?

Alex Mincek: My mother was a classical flute player, and probably would have done that as a career except my father was a professional tennis player, on the tour, traveling around the world and such, so when it was time to raise a family she gave up on a music career. We always had music around the house as a result. We had a piano at home that I would constantly mess around with and improvise, and then in 7th grade my mom made me enroll in a beginning band class. I had to take a music aptitude test, which resulted in my initial assignment to the French horn. I had no interest in the horn. I wanted to play the clarinet, but then my band teacher demonstrated the saxophone and I found it immediately appealing. I wanted to play it desperately. It took some coercion to get him to agree, but he ultimately gave in. That was my first formal experience with musical training. I was immediately interested in the instrument and started learning pop tunes and various songs from the radio on the saxophone. That caught my band director’s attention and the following year he bumped me up into the jazz band in 8th grade, which was the most advanced band at the school—much too advanced for a kid right out of beginning band—but the experience was great for me. Every day, instead of going to
lunch, I would go to the band room and my band director (Nick Albanese) would work with me one on one—helping me learn my music. In 9th grade I got a private teacher named Russ Weaver, and started taking lessons outside of school as well. I would go to lessons two times a week over the summer and that’s when I really started to think seriously about a life in music. My parents told me there was no way they would fund the various music camps I wanted to attend or fund going to college for music unless—they were very big on goals—I made first chair all-state in my home state of Florida, which was a notion my private lesson teacher accidentally put into their heads when he told them that he thought I had the potential to be first chair all-state. Again, my father—not necessarily understanding that this was not how being an artist works, that it was an inaccurate litmus test for musical achievement—set this as the bar. Fortunately, though, I did make first chair in the all-state jazz band and stayed in the band through my senior year, so my parents started to support this career idea. All through high school I was playing the standard legit saxophone repertoire, French music from the turn of the century, and a lot of jazz music because I primarily saw myself as a jazz musician. It was the music I was most interested in. In Jacksonville, FL at that time the University of North Florida started to become a kind of interesting place because in the late 80s they hired the saxophonist Bunky Green who was previously at the University of Chicago (I believe), so I had my eye on going to UNF because I really wanted to study with Bunky. He had done clinics at some of the local high schools, which is how I first encountered him. He sounded so different from and all the records I had been checking out. And, the way he talked about music was also very novel and compelling to me. So I decided to
stay in Florida and study with him at UNF and that’s what I did. I did my first two years of college studying at North Florida with Bunky Green.

**MY: In your studies with Bunky Green, being a saxophonist and jazz musician, what was it about his sound that drew you to it? Any specific elements?**

**AM:** His tone is so immediate and direct. It’s bright, raw, edgy, in a way that sounds as if the saxophone is simply unable to contain the amount of expression being propelled into it. He also just sounded like he was *actually* improvising. That sounds overly generalized perhaps, but the jazz music I was interested in as a teenager revolved around folks like Charlie Parker on through late 50s bebop, hard bop, etc, where a lot of the virtuosity and harmonic practices were generally encompassed in the buffer or context of a limited number of chord changes. And so many of the improvisers that have followed in that stylistic tradition have a rather large vocabulary of mannerisms in that style that they can spontaneously arrange. Bunky had/has his own vocabulary. What Bunky seemed to be doing so well—it wasn’t bound to the harmonic structures and rhythmic norms of bop or post-bop, but it wasn’t quite what the AACM or Arts Ensemble of Chicago were doing either (the freer things, most typically labeled free improvisation)—he seemed to be having it both ways somehow, still playing within clearly laid out harmonic structures, but in novel ways to my ear. Also rhythmically, his conception of “swing” kind of rejected, or expanded the normal practice of endless torrents of eighth notes and 16th notes—he was doing something much different that I hadn’t experienced up to that point. There were lots of other saxophonists doing this as well I suppose, I just hadn’t become
aware of them yet. He provided my entry point into that sound world, and I became a lot more interested as a result.

**MY:** Are there any sounds from his playing that you still use today in your compositions?

**AM:** The idea of considering fingers outside the linear, directional design of the horn, playing things out of sequence to get multiphonics, alternate fingerings—he had a specific thing that he did that was basically bouncing across extreme ranges somewhat out of sequence by using the first two index fingers, meaning that instead of always opening from the bottom of the hand to go upward, he would open from the top, which leads to different sounds and an interesting sense of controlled randomness. There is something like that that I do, which comes from Coltrane and Dolphy and bleeds into Evan Parker as well, the kind of perceived polyphony in his solo language.

**MY:** I’ve recently discovered Evan Parker due to a call for improvisation in the style of Evan Parker in Eric’s new work for soprano saxophone and drum set *(Axamer Folio).*

**AM:** Yeah, there are many Evan Parker things I find interesting. For instance, what I describe as his “polyphonic bagpipes” thing. The general idea is that on one level he is not playing in the correct sequence(s) that the horn is designed for, to produce singular resonant tones, which creates a kind of malfunction or unpredictability just by using these out-of-sequence fingerings, and on another level he is doing various contortions of the embouchure, which exacerbate the situation to produce even more extensions of the
horn/sound. Bunky was doing a version of that which I thought was very interesting and has stayed in my own vocabulary. My work *Ali* is a total rumination on that idea: the malfunctioning of playing the horn out of sequence, yet still being really idiomatic on the horn.

**MY:** Are there elements of this in *Nucleus* as well?

**AM:** Yes, on a smaller scale, where you vent a palm key and close the fingers sequentially.

**MY:** When in your course of studying jazz saxophone did you start to envision yourself as a composer?

**AM:** I moved to New York in 1995 to study saxophone. I hadn’t even thought about composition yet, or still thought it was off limits to me. Having done summer camps in NYC in high school, I was familiar with the Manhattan School of Music. After doing two years at North Florida I went to MSM to study. I was supposed to study with Bob Mintzer, but he was off doing something else that semester, so I studied with Dick Oatts, which was fantastic for me. I had a semester with him, then he split, so I studied with Ralph Lallama, and then Dick again for a year, and then I was with Rich Perry, and Steve Slagle at some point too. I had a constellation of teachers, and there were a lot of differences between them, so it created a varied approach to my playing.
MY: While the differences in your teachers’ playing styles are evident upon listening to recordings, what are some of the pedagogical differences you experienced from working with so many different teachers in so short a time?

AM: Having the differences between the teachers led me to think more openly about what I could be as a saxophonist. I had a template in my mind of what I thought being a saxophonist was, in the context of jazz anyway, prior to moving to NY, but this greatly changed as a result of working with them, and living in NYC in particular. It really opened my mind to a multitude of possibilities. Perhaps most importantly I realized I didn’t even have to be a jazz musician just because I was a saxophonist. Sometimes I would go to Dick’s apartment and he would be like, “Let’s just play,” and we’d get our horns out and just play. I used to think about Dick Oatts as the quintessential lead alto guy, but he just wanted to play freely for an hour, which might also have been an easy way to give a lesson, but he seemed sincerely open-ended. This was about the same time I started studying composition, rather clandestinely, but I would tell a few of my teachers about my compositions and it turned out they were really interested and supportive. I recall having conversations with Rich Perry about Elliot Carter’s string quartets and the same thing with Dick, he really liked talking about what I was writing.

MY: You studied composition with both Tristan Murail and Fred Lerdahl during your time at Columbia. What impact did each of those composers and teachers have on you as a developing composer?

AM: I knew about Tristan’s music before having studied with him, so compositionally I had an idea of what it was I thought he was doing, and I already had an idea about what
parts of that I wanted to bring into my own compositional practice. I wanted to learn to
deal with harmony as inseparable from timbre, and inseparably linked to how we
experience time. When I first started studying with him, I had been led to believe that
Tristan was overly concerned with students directly following his methods and
spectralism orthodoxy more broadly, and while I did see a little of that, I found it not to
be my personal experience. We had really productive lessons where I had enough in
common with his ideas of composition that we got along well, but we had many
differences that I initially thought would ruffle his feathers. They didn’t. He was really
supportive both of my ideas and with helping me get my music out and known.

Fred, whom I didn’t know until I was at Columbia, became really important because he
has a keen analytical mind and could really dissect what I was doing musically in terms
of coherence and logic—both things I needed to think about—and he was very
challenging. He had this saying about being undeniably “good” at something, which is
hard to unpack due to the subjectivity of music and art, but the essence is that one’s
music should have undeniable quality, however one choses to define quality. So he
helped me figure out what that was for me. Many people may have an issue with this, I
realize, but he advocated having a palpable control over your material that, whether
people like it or not, is undeniable and transcends aesthetics. I don’t think people think
about quality enough. I’ve heard composers say things after a concert like, “That was
something,” which is meant as a compliment, but which may not mean that they liked the
work in question. They respected and understood that it had substance. This is a type of
positive quality I like. The ability to thoroughly understand and command your material is something Fred imparted to me.

**MY: You mention a coherence and logic to your music. Does any of that apply to how you use form, or how form applies to your pieces?**

**AM:** Absolutely! I’m obsessed with coherence. In fact, I need to loosen up. This is something that has progressed over the years, and I’m in a suffocating level of it right now, but having things seem inevitable and yet mysteriously correct is really important to me. Coherence and clarity are not the same thing. I want a mysterious coherence. I want things to feel correct without presenting themselves in a simple way. It creates a kind of wonder or awe for what has just happened, while still creating an acceptance that it’s exactly how things were supposed to have happened.

**MY: This reminds me of a quote of yours about writing transitional material…realizing its banality, and then chopping it up to disguise its banality while maintaining its function. How does this relate to the coherence?**

**AM:** That has to do with the mysteriousness of inevitability. For instance, sometimes I come up with material and I realize it might be banal or have a banal function, but it also somehow seems absolutely necessary, so I look for ways to maintain its function in tying things together while disguising its presence by utilizing other tactics to make it speak differently than it might otherwise speak. In a way, I try and make it malfunction somehow, not unlike the way I try and make the instruments themselves malfunction.
MY: This reminds me of how some people talk about writer’s block, working on something and then frustratingly discarding it due to its banality. Rather than discard this it seems you have found an alternative solution. When your process has taken you down a compositional path and you find the material too logical or too predictable, you’ll take that material and chop it up into pieces so that you still get the basic function but generate new material that is less predictable. Am I summarizing this accurately?

AM: That’s right. I’ll be working out a plan and when I notice something unattractive or banal or whatever, I’ll start improvising within my plan. That’s a process that gives me a lot of enjoyment. The well-laid plan has to do with—and each piece is different—but I think of a handful of ideas in a lot of different parameters; hypothetically speaking there may be three or four timbral ideas, three or four rhythmic ideas, five or six physical ideas (gesture or movement), three or four dynamic ideas. Some of these are conceived together at the beginning, but I’ll separate them, parse out everything I have, especially when there is more of one category than of another (four timbral ideas versus six rhythmic ideas, for example), this is how I start to organize the form. I’ll see how many rotations I can get out of permuting these different ideas. These forms end up being variations, but instead of variations on one theme, if you consider every version of every parameter as a theme, it’s a network of variations on numerous themes that are each in their own orbits, all out of phase with one another. So one the one hand, I get this tight cohesive clarity of materials, because I’ve organized my materials rather succinctly, but on the other hand, there are so many combinations of them I can generate a lot of
momentum in the way they are all rotating, or orbiting around one another, or combining and colliding, or separating out.

MY: This is enlightening in my own experiences in playing your works. It’s amazing how when I first look at a score, I overestimate the amount of time it will take to learn, but after practicing I realize there are so many gestures that are similar, that as a performer, I get a lot of (for lack of a better term) bang for my buck in regards to the time I spend practicing your works. The way repetition and looped cycles are used, and the sheer multitude of sound that you get out of your ideas is impressive.

AM: And also the multitude of views you can generate around certain material. Now that I have composition students, it’s interesting how they bring in work and estimate that they need to generate more material and I tell them, “You have too much material! What you need to do is figure out what it is and how it works together. You have plenty of stuff. Quit looking for more stuff. Figure out more interesting ways of combining, deconstructing and (re)-contextualizing the material you already have.” That’s still a big part of my thinking: What are the essential components of my composition, and what are the most interesting ways to have those components come in contact with each other, and what do these interactions mean?

MY: You spoke earlier about physical ideas and gesture. Your father was a professional tennis player, so that leads me to ask if there is an element of athleticism, more specifically expertise in athleticism, that influenced you to think about gesture in the musical context?
AM: Totally. I used to play in this band called Zs—two saxophonists, two guitarists, and two drummers—and it was this incredibly kinetic experience. The music was very intense, very difficult, and it always felt like a workout. I wrote *Karate* for the other saxophonist, Sam Hillmer. We used to just get together and improvise, so I wrote us a piece. It was inspired by those large martial arts classes where everyone is going through the same motions, and when we were rehearsing it, Sam said to me, “It feels like we just did karate,” so the name just kind of stuck. Music has a very palpable physical dimension to it, and that is tremendously important to me. Not just in the sense of the physical movement of the body, but as representative of the physical movements all around us. When people think of the music of the classical canon a lot of it has to do with language and narrative, the telling of stories, the idea of a melody essentially being a metaphor of the human voice, so in that light a really good piece of music is one that tells this kind of lyrical story. My music is very strategically doing something different—representing what one sees and feels, and by “see” I mean shapes and colors and movements, and other physical experiences whether tactile or durational—not narrative storytelling in a language sense, but more plainly representative of the physical world we observe via our senses.

**MY:** You grew up as a saxophonist and through improvisation you entered the compositional world. Is that an accurate assessment?

AM: Sure. And the more I improvised and got in contact with other improvisers, other stylistic options seemed to open up. That led me to the so-called “new music” which for
me envelopes post WWII European avant-garde, American experimentalism, European
free improvisation, or free jazz here in the States. Improvisation led me into the world.

**MY: Is that where your compositional interest began, or had you been composing from a young age?**

AM: No, because I was also interested in the classical lineage of Haydn, Mozart,
Beethoven, Schoenberg, Webern, etc. When I was at Manhattan School of Music
studying saxophone, I came in contact with the music of Charles Ives and Morton
Feldman. Those two composers hit me hard. My roommate at the time was a
percussionist, and he took me to an open rehearsal of the New York Phil playing Mahler
5. The timing of these experiences led me to want to be a composer. Coming into contact
with the novelty of Morton Feldman and then the sheer depth of craft and expression in
Mahler—these events coming so closely together—got me thinking outside of being just
a saxophonist and wanting to write for different combinations of instruments in various
styles.

**MY: What was it about Feldman that attracted you to his music the most?**

AM: I had just never heard anything like it. I’ve always been pre-disposed to this idea of
reoccurrence, whether that be through repetition, various forms of redundancy, and very
slow morphologies. I had never heard anyone do it so austerely and unabashedly. I found
it very inspiring and it confirmed something that I had been thinking a lot about
internally. I had heard music by Philip Glass but it didn’t have the same impact on me.
The familiarity of the harmonies in tandem with his particular use of repetition somehow
didn’t mean as much to me. I guess I wasn’t attracted to the pseudo-ritualistic and quasi-multicultural domain that some of Glass’ and Reich’s music seem to reference. It was something about Feldman—his more abstract, modernistic context—mechanically and/or fluidly looping a language seemingly so detached from the functions of repetition that seemed like such a provocation. Not from the standpoint of confirming this idea of reoccurrence, but from bringing seemingly incompatible ideas together. If Modernism was, generally speaking, a rejection of the Judeo-Christian values propped up by so much of the classical canon, it was interesting to have somebody who would use something as familiar as repetition—which is an extremely conventional device in Western music—with harmonies and timbres that reject so many aspects of the past. To see that those things could be compatible was very interesting. My music desperately attempts to have that dialogic quality. I’m interested in very new things, but I’m not compelled to throw away what I find valuable from the past. I like them to be in dialog.

MY: Not every composer who writes for the saxophone can play the saxophone at the same level as you, which puts you into that category of performer-composer (especially considering how frequently you still perform). I’m not a huge fan of this label, but it brings me to the question of how your abilities on the saxophone translate to your ideas and aesthetics about the instrument, specifically relating to your jazz influence and how it fits into this contemporary classical and modernized world.

AM: First, I separate my writing into two categories: 1) music that I plan to someday play myself and 2) music that I write for somebody else. Regarding the first category, I’m
overly practical. I’m not exceptionally aspirational with the materials in a piece I intend to play because I don’t have the interest or time to be a soloist—spending three to six months to learn a piece. I won’t write a piece for myself that requires that. I’m also just not that interested in traditional notions of virtuosity, in fact, I’m rather skeptical of them. There are some pieces I have written for saxophone that I just will not play. For the second type, music for someone else, I’m more aspirational, but my familiarity with the instrument still allows me to write something that is very idiomatic, which is important to me. I want it to feel good to play, but still be very challenging. As a saxophonist I have things that I think just sound good on the saxophone and as a result I tend to explore those ideas more than others.

**MY:** What are some of those things that sound good on the saxophone?

**AM:** It is context to one degree. There are certain notes in certain registers. This may be exposing some of my own deficiencies as a saxophone player, but altissimo C is beautiful, altissimo B is not, for me. Low C I love, low C# I don’t. It’s just the way certain notes speak on the instrument to me.

**MY:** So you’ll pick sounds to explore timbre more than pitch?

**AM:** Yes. And even beyond that, there are certain choices I make where I feel that I need a particular fingering because I like the way it sounds, and then I structure things around that idea. This goes for all the instruments I write for. I often structure things with a certain follow-the-leader quality (with the leader changing again and again…) where for one section I find some particular idea I want to explore that is specific to a particular
instrument, and everyone else (whether it’s a chamber work, orchestral work, etc.) will in some way revolve around the necessity of that instrument, or the particular quality the material has on that instrument. For example, in one section it may be a very specific saxophone multiphonic, for the next section it could be something special for flute, and so on. I create a series of relays throughout a piece—people having a moment to explore something special to their instrument, and everyone else reacting to that exploratory idea.

**MY:** You cofounded Wet Ink Ensemble in 1998. What were some of the formulating ideas and principles for the formation of that group?

**AM:** It was meant to be just a meeting group at first; a symposium of sorts. We were a group of people who were all finishing school at the same time and we didn’t really know what we wanted to do yet in terms of gigs, or how to describe our music, or whether we were going to be composers, performers, improvisers, or some combination of all of those things. I know this is a familiar story, but we just formed this group to strategize and think these things over as we began to navigate what might be our next steps as musicians trying to make a living. We planned shows and came up with different constellations of ensembles between all of us, and that’s really how it began. Then things started to solidify in regards to certain ensemble instrumentations. At the same time, Sam Hillmer and I started this group, Zs, which functioned together with Wet Ink, but Wet Ink was more of a presenter of concerts rather than an ensemble. Wet Ink presented these split concerts with Zs—sometimes three-bill concerts with other groups—and we used these concerts as a way to perform some of our own music. When Zs started to change in such a drastic way—touring a lot, recording—and my composing began to become a
bigger priority, we parted ways and that is when Wet Ink reorganized into an ensemble. That reorganization was in 2005, when Eric Wubbels and Jeff Snyder came into the mix.

**MY: How was it that you first came to know Eric?**

AM: It was when I was out of school, between my time at Manhattan School of Music (MSM) and Columbia University. I went back to Manhattan for a masters in composition after the undergraduate degree in saxophone, but took a couple years off to teach, write music and play gigs. So from 1995-1998 I was at MSM as a saxophonist, then I took two years off, I went back as a composer from 2000-2002, and then took another two years off. At that point Wet Ink and Zs were an active part of my professional life and that’s when I met Eric Wubbels. Eric was somebody who would come to Wet Ink and Zs shows, and I just knew him as somebody who came to our shows. He was attending Columbia at the time. He would check out our shows, and heard Sam and me play *Karate*. He sought us out after that concert and became a loyal concert attendee. I started attending Columbia the following year and started to know his music. He was trying to start something like an ensemble of his own at the time Wet Ink was taking a new direction, so I saw an opportunity to invite both Eric and Jeff to join Wet Ink. They were transitional for us, because they both knew our old presenter format, but were interested in helping build the ensemble.

**MY: So Wet Ink has two sides, the ensemble and the composer collective?**

AM: Wet Ink is really just an ensemble. Four of us happen to be composers, so we often play our own music, but that’s not any formal part of the way we are structured. Wet Ink
is first and foremost an ensemble. We don’t do what a lot of other groups do. There is this idea that it is somehow gauche to play one’s own music all the time. We don’t have that issue, or better yet, we don’t have that shame. We often program our own music. This is why it may come across as a composer’s collective, but it isn’t. The composers and the performers all interact on the same level of organization and tasks, whether that be artistic and aesthetic tasks or business and administrative tasks. It’s not a top-down, composer-then-performer structure; we are pretty democratic.

**MY:** I can’t help but notice a similar aesthetic of the group’s composers, especially between you and Eric. Is that because of the group’s influence on you as a composer, your influence on the group, or some mixture of the two? How would you describe this similar aesthetic between the group?

**AM:** I think we all share a sense of rhythmic vitality that doesn’t shy away from pulse, but it is often paired with sounds influenced by more experimental music rather than the harmonies that are often associated with minimalist or post-minimalist music. There is also a more complex rhythmic profile than what you would find in minimal or post-minimal music. Even more specifically, our music has a rhythmic profile that has consequences, which contrasts with so much of the music coming out of both the avant garde and experimental traditions. I feel that all of our music is music of consequence, meaning that you can hear when somebody messes up. One of the criticisms of modernist music is that its complexities are inconsequential because nobody can perceive whether something is even being performed correctly. Or beyond the performance, is there something in the music that gives a listener enough information to detect consequences in
the music? That is a concern we share. The music presents a kind of key to the listener from which they can discern what is right and wrong. We also share certain relationships to timbre and harmony.

**MY:** Building upon this idea of rhythmic vitality, how do your works *Pendulum III* and *Nucleus* play into this idea?

**AM:** Those pieces are both dialectical and dialogical. They are switching back and forth from extremes of riotous outburst to almost complete stasis, but not in order to always find a mediated third way so to speak. In terms of rhythm, there is a grid quality that we [Wet Ink] all share to some extent, and that is certainly true of the two pieces you mention. You can understand the contexts of the rhythms because the music reveals clear points of reference. Often the idea of unison is something we share also, which is also on display in both Nucleus and Pendulum III. This idea of people doing things at the same time, or perhaps a hipper way of saying it is that we all have an affection for an expansive morphology of texture. For example, when writing for a sextet, let’s say, it is important to hear all six instruments being treated in numerous ways: as one instrument (all six in unison), or as two groups of three instruments, or three groups of two, or one against five, or some variation of the myriad combinations possible.

**MY:** This rhythmic vitality, or grid idea, makes me think about the repetitive nature of a pendulum, something you have explored in depth in your series of works bearing the namesake. Can you expound about this rhythmic element, this cyclical idea, and how it plays into your work *Pendulum III*?
AM: I’ve written ten pendulum works now, and the idea came from a piece I wrote for
Zs, which is Pendulum I. Essentially the whole piece oscillates between high and low, in
tandem with different versions of short and long. I was taking two parameters and
exploring them as polarities:

High – Looooooow, High – Loooow,  Hiirriigh – Low, High – Loooookkkuuuow

And many different variations of that sort of thing. And that’s when I realized this
metaphor is very rich for exploring all kinds of polarities. There was also something
poetic about pendulums, from the standpoint that it has two amplitude peaks, a left and a
right in two dimensions, yet the pendulum connects the two poles in an infinitely fluid
continuum, because it moves through all of the space between the two oppositional
peaks. I think this is beautiful because you have two things that are polar opposites, yet
they are also, from a manner of perspective, seamlessly connected. So in a way the pieces
explore continuums as well oppositions. It’s a way of connecting two seemingly disparate
poles. So rhythm functions as one of these basic parameters. The idea relates to the
philosophy of Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition. And then there is also the quasi-
mimicking of a clock in many of my pendulum pieces. That’s on a more light-hearted tip;
there’s always some sort of clock-like or gear-like feature to all of these pendulum
pieces. A ticking is always happening at some level, which happens a lot in Pendulum III.

MY: What are the formal elements at play in Pendulum III?
AM: The piece is a large, weirdly oblique crossfade. There is one material that is
dissipating in one direction at one rate and another collection of materials that is
accumulating and proliferating at the same time, but at a different rate. This is what I
mean by crossfade, one thing is on the way out, one thing is on the way in. The two
materials are pretty distinguishable. One is identifiable as quiet “false unisons” between
the piano and the saxophone but with fine microtonal tunings so that audible beatings
occur at various rates of oscillation and decay. I say they are in decay because the piano
is always dying out. And the audible beating you hear between the saxophone and the
piano, as a result of the tuning, is also in dissipation, but in a crossfade sort of way since
the saxophone is stable as the piano decays. It gurgles while the two instruments occupy
the same amplitude, but the beatings fade as the piano decays, leaving a pure saxophone
tone. That is what’s happening on the larger scale form as well to varying degrees; the
material is dissipating and it is doing so at a rate of something along a Fibonacci curve.
For example, if you count the number of bars that certain materials happen for, you will
see very clear dissipation strategies that are structured in Fibonacci proportions. You will
also find a different strategy for the accumulating material(s) being crossfaded. So one
idea is clearly dissipating, while a collection of other material is increasing, but there is
this sense of unpredictability because the collection that is increasing is also occurring in
rotations. You can hear a snippet of it at the beginning (see below).
So this disrupts one’s expectation for how the materials relate and are developed.

**MY**: How does this material, or these materials, relate to the title? Are the motives or ideas drawn from the pendulum analogy?  

**AM**: The crossfade idea comes from the pendulum analogy. A pendulum in a gravitational environment that encounters friction will come to a state of rest, thus the decay idea. A pendulum is also a palindrome. It moves from one amplitude peak down to the point of equilibrium until it proceeds to move through and up to the opposite amplitude peak, thus the opposing material being accumulated. These are not ideas that the piece is supposed to necessarily be expressing to a listener, rather these are ideas that make imagining the piece easier for me. Having that sense of organization, even if the idea behind the organization is not made obvious to the listener, helps create what I
described earlier as a coherent mystery. You do not need a complete narrative as long as you can tell that what you are listening has been lovingly put together. When I call things pendulum, people want to know in precisely what way is it a pendulum. My response is that they are thinking too hard about the metaphor. The pieces generally focus on oscillations between opposites that are either being mediated by various forces of “motion” or are manifested as parallel paths in dialogue.

MY: As someone who approaches your music from outside your head, I often want to attach it to its titles, striving for deeper meaning, when perhaps those things are chosen relatively arbitrarily, or even assigned after the fact.

AM: I should make those distinctions, and perhaps I should right better program notes. There are pieces that are casually and almost humorously titled; Karate is one of those. Even within this entire pendulum cycle of pieces there are a lot of subtitles that I started to include for this very reason. There is a more general idea of motion culminating in equilibrium and many other facets of pendulum behavior, mixed with poetic ideas. The subtitles I mention point to more specific relationships to the pendulum metaphor or to more poetic ideas that may not relate to the pendulum idea at all.

MY: Who was Pendulum III written for?

AM: Eric [Wubbles] and Eliot [Gattegno]. They were planning a recording and asked for a piece from me to be a part of it.

MY: Was it premiered here in NYC?
AM: It was premiered in Prague. Did you guys (speaking to Eric) do it at Issue Project Room before that? I was not there in Prague but I saw them perform it here afterwards.

MY: We have discussed the microtonality already, but let us talk about the slap tongues. I assume your usage of slap tongues in Karate are for a very different purpose…

AM: That’s correct.

MY: So what was the idea behind combining the saxophone slap tongues with piano? How did this idea come about?

AM: The most direct function is to de-emphasize pitch. In the opening of the piece I have the piano playing at two extremes in connection to the pendulum metaphor; two amplitude peaks being represented by the two ends of the piano. In terms of critical band hearing, those two extremes are also the least distinguishable in terms of pure signal. The saxophone quite literally splits the range symmetrically. It represents the point of equilibrium, and by way of slap-tonguing, it also functions as a filter of sorts to further de-emphasize the pitch of the piano and the saxophone itself. It is often very simple thinking like this for me. It’s called Pendulum, the piano is at its extremes and the saxophone is right in the center, and the rest of the piece is the saxophone and piano clashing over where that center is going to be, and when and how exactly it will be reached.

MY: That is really interesting, I may not have connected those dots as a
saxophonist. I don't necessarily think about the physicality of gesture on the piano when I'm evaluating a score.

AM: Yes, and these physical relationships can be as rudimentary as “I noticed that to do a glissando one person will need to move their arm in this specific way all the time, so let me see what happens if I give that same physical gesture to somebody else to see how it will sound differently.” It’s an idea of creating different sounds on different instruments that result from subjecting all of the instruments to a uniform physical gesture, or creating different gestures on all of the instruments as a result of having them attempt to make the same sounds.

MY: Your piece *Nucleus* predates *Pendulum III*. Repetition, while present in both, is visually very different in *Nucleus* than in *Pendulum III*, with overt looped sections with repeat signs very prominently used in *Nucleus*. How does repetition play a role in *Nucleus*, and does it have a philosophical approach that shares ideologies with Deleuze?

AM: In *Nucleus*, just think of the title; it’s about a cell. That cell then replicates. The piece is about trying to represent this type of proliferation in both a very organic way and in the most mechanical way possible. And this idea came out of my interest in Deleuze to some extent. However, the music is not trying to embody his philosophy; it is just using the philosophy, or even my understandings and misunderstandings of it, for my own creativity. There are old arguments and continuing ones as well, about the granularity or continuity of time, or how color and light can be observed both as particles and as waves. Bertrand Russell and [Henri] Bergson have this feud of whether time is completely
continuous or can be broken down into some constituent parts. For me, *Difference and Repetition* is part of that type of argument. It gets into the morphology of time and identity—how we identify our world and how we classify and order phenomena. How does something grow? How does something change in time? I am loosely thinking about these things in a sort of chicken-or-the-egg relation to cause and an effect in the beginning of Nucleus: {Alex sings the first measure of *Nucleus* (see below)}

![Nucleus sheet music](image)

Alex Mincek NUCLEUS
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This cause-and-effect relationship is explored for a while and the amount of repetition is really a result of something I discussed earlier: me trying to think about the number of ideas that I’m presenting relative to what I want the listener to think about and be able to recognize and understand. DUH-duh–DUH–duh has an order, I believe it is saxophone–cymbal–saxophone–cymbal in the first measure, and there are four events, and then that happens a few times. I want the audience to hear the attack difference and slight latency that occurs in attempting to recreate that. Once I feel the idea has given any reasonable person enough presence to detect those subtleties, I will start adding or folding in other
forms of difference—new materials in permutation. In some ways my use of repetition is related to how I think about subtitles in movies. You know? Because the subtitles have to be on the screen long enough to be read, but not so long that they extend past an edit or create too much distraction from the visual flow of the film. It’s not an exact science, but you kind of have an idea about what it is going to take for somebody to read that amount of language and you have to leave it on the screen for that amount of time. In a lot of my durations, and/or number of repetitions, the question I ask myself is “How much information do I want the listener to be able to process?” And so then I’ll repeat an event for the amount of time that I think allows for all the important aspects of the material to be parsed by the listener. This enters into the psychological relationship we all have with time; what it feels like to experience things over time. I find it very interesting how time can feel very different relative to what we have processed, are processing, and expecting to process. So having way too much information and plenty of time to understand it, is different from never having enough time, or way too much time—I think those are all interesting positions to be in relative to any particular material.

MY: From my own perspective, as I begin to understand the language of the music I also become more acutely aware of time, but I’ve also experienced that when one doesn’t fully understand the language they can be very acutely aware of time, but this is usually due to a lack of finding engagement in the material due to the lack of comprehension. How do you want to affect people’s perception of time? Do you want them to be aware of time? Or is it a back and forth between awareness of time and being lost in the moment?
AM: I’d say back and forth. With the idea of repetition there are so many functions that can be utilized. Take a composer like Beethoven. If you were to ask Beethoven “How do you use repetition?” there are so many options to discuss. In his Sixth Symphony, in the development he is creating a sense of distance with the repetitions, in tandem with dynamics. The repetition provides a point of reference. It defines the sonic object, while the dynamics place the object in various points of space: As repeating musical figures fade, one has a very clear sense of musically “seeing” the “object” getting smaller as it moves through space. That’s one function of repetition. In that same piece he has different functions of repetition that are just to unpack various relationships having to do with timbre, which call into question more specific issues of identity. In any case, there are many different functions.

**MY: What are the functions of the types of repetition that you use in Nucleus?**

AM: Much of it has to do with creating a nuanced recognition of change within margins signified as static or redundant. The longest loop is repeated 100 times, but it is actually tricky to say the amount of times that something repeats without being privy to its structural boundaries—without knowing its beginning middle and end, because when you see something in a loop, you think of it differently from something seemingly repetitive that is not signified by a loop (repeat signs). For example, look at the first page of *Nucleus*, the four-note gesture at the beginning happens for about two minutes. But since it is made to slightly change and vary in certain ways, I had to write it out rather than stuff it all in a loop. The result is that it signifies itself more as representing “difference” rather than pure repetition. However, I would argue that there is more perceived variance
in the 100x bongo loop than there is in the opening page hocket, but it is signified
differently and that translates into how it will be perceived by the performer and the
listener. So I guess throughout the piece I’m kind of calling into question how we
perceive and classify various forms of difference—how we choose to recognize change—
which structures are easily recognized as having a fixed identity and which ones need to
have boundaries added via repetition to clarify their structural identity. I think in *Nucleus*
I was also simply handling some of the material very much like I described earlier; using
repetition to control the amount of information I wanted the listener to be able to parse.
Finally, I would also say there is one another function of repetition that was used: The
devaluing or displacing of various associations to the material. For example, whenever
something that might come across as sort of rock-ish or jazz-ish, I feel like the
repetitions—even though that seemingly puts it more into the kind of grid that could
actually be more closely associated with jazz and rock—the repetitions, if properly
proportioned have the opposite effect and devalue the association of the figures. So if
there is a particularly jazzy sort of lick, by repeating it over and over I sort of erase its
meaning in the same way that if you start to say the same word over and over and over
and over and over and over… “And and and and and and…” it changes from a
conjunction with a grammatical function into a more abstract sonic object. It is just a
sound, a vowel and a consonant. It is now some other thing. It now has a different
meaning. So often repetitions are—if I take something that has a stylistic association—a
way to devalue or recontextualize one’s association with what was/is familiar to them
outside the domain of my piece.
MY: Is this related to the Lucier kind of repetition where it changes…

AM: I haven’t thought about it that way, but yeah, except that in his case the material is physically changing. The listener is changing in my scenario. The listener is always a part of the process, of course.

MY: I see what you mean, it is more tactile change with the Lucier.

AM: The Lucier [I am Sitting In A Room] is an actual morphing. Each loop being fed back into the room over and over. The material literally changes. With mine sometimes that’s the case, but there is more of a subjective, phenomenological, free variation idea at play perhaps. You know, like thinking about a chair in your mind. You can see all the different ways a table can be represented and viewed. I can also usually say that I’m trying, in terms of repetitive proportion, to fit between—again thinking about the experience of time—the thresholds of earlier styles of repetition; 19th century, 17th century, or even more recent jazz and pop music forms, and then more folk traditions of repetition: very long spans of repetition, and even trance/hypnotic forms of repetition. I’m trying to not be any of those things. I’ll go into those territories for contrast, but generally I’m trying not to be associated with more common types of repetition, so often I try to find these pockets of repetition that seem less common—neither too stable nor too fleeting: somewhere in between.

MY: What is the goal of trying to avoid those certain types of repetition?

AM: Fleeting stability perhaps? Not knowing what is coming next. Having enough reassurances and stability that you don’t feel totally disoriented. You kind of know
what’s going on, but you know that what you’re listening to is not going to be there all that long, and yet you are still not prepared for what comes next.

**MY:** I’ll paraphrase Ryan Dohoney in discussing your music with you. He says that the moment a listener is able to establish a groove in your music, they must not get too comfortable with it because it will not be around much longer. This notion of fleeting stability fits that statement well.

**AM:** There are all these kinds of rhetorical devices in older music that if you are interested in newer music you have to kind of give up, and I find that there are certain strategies that can still give the same types of feelings as the things that we have given up. In tonal music you have all these different kinds of cadence that are deployed for different rhetorical effect and that create a rich tapestry of meaning. If you are not writing tonal music, how can you generate the same feelings of arrival, suspension, surprise or tension? I have tried to formulate some of my own answers for that, and they work, and one of them is this idea of fleeting stability that can generate feelings similar to a kind of V-I, or V-vi feeling; away from a center, back to it, and away again and then something unexpected yet logical somehow…

**MY:** What was the impetus for the creation of *Nucleus*? Was it a commission?

**AM:** No, I wrote *Nucleus* for me to play with Ian [Antonio], with a very specific intention. Ian was in Zs with me. We played together. When I left Zs, I didn’t stop playing with Ian, as he was in Wet Ink and still is. I wanted to make a piece that had a lot of what I loved about Zs, but I also wanted the freedom to do some of the things I
couldn’t do in Zs. One of the things I could not do in Zs was write smaller music, quieter music, very subtle music, because we did not play in venues where that was something that could work. I had an interest in small sounds, but still wanted them to exist together with the kind of brutal chamber music characteristic of Zs, so this was going to be my opportunity to do that, to write a piece for Ian and myself utilizing my own physical relationship with the horn and knowing Ian’s sound really well and knowing the types of things I had not heard in terms of sheer force on the drum set. This was to be my opportunity to deal with that, thus the bongo solo at the end. I have heard quite a few performances of that, but I still think Ian’s is my favorite. The reason is that you are supposed to fail at that solo, and if you aren’t failing at it, you aren’t doing it well. You have to not make it to 100 repetitions. If you make it there, it means you are not playing loud enough; it should not work. Maybe it is my own fault for not providing clearer notes for that piece, but I never intended that piece to get out of my hands the way that it has.

**MY:** What are the formal elements, compositionally, for *Nucleus*? You mentioned that this work was written more for the people than an abstract instrument, capitalizing on the things you did well and that Ian did well. How did you construct those ideas formally into the work?

**AM:** Well, there is a kind of back and forth between the sax and drums taking turns triggering each musical event, which for me raises questions about identity and function: Which instrument is best suited for specific tasks? How can the instruments be strongly defined? How can their differences be blurred? In the beginning it is a very obvious relationship, the hocket. But then the hocket starts to reverse itself, it goes from sax-
drum-sax-drum to drum-sax-drum-sax, the idea being that one person is the onset, one person is the decay. But then what would it be like to imagine it the other way? Different things grow out of these different combinations. There is an ongoing swapping of roles. The piece is essentially a collection of variations on this idea. So now I’ll pick a new trigger, or impulse, for the next section and a new decay and see how each of the instruments handle each of those roles. So at its core, the piece is really just exploring onset and offset and the relation those functions have to each instrument in various contexts. You turn something on and turn something off. It starts to grow into something more melodic-ish—at the end there is a more melodic quality—but really it is about things growing from an impulse and I’m using pretty intuitive ideas of contrast. Meaning that when I feel I have grown in a certain direction and at a certain tempo and a certain dynamic for a long enough time, I’ll go in a direction that intuitively feels like the right decision.

MY: A lot of the arpeggiated gestures are very idiomatic. Was pitch material important in the creation of those or was the idiomatic feel on the saxophone the impetus?

AM: It is the two meeting. I’m making the nicest combination of notes with the nicest combination of “feeling” on the horn. I don’t steer clear of awkwardness when the pitches really require it, but I try to come up with the most elegant kind of physical gesture—or maybe elegant isn’t the right word—but the most efficient use of the design of the horn.
MY: I remember a few instances where I was using palm keys and having issues in attaining the notated speed, when I realized the front key made the gesture significantly easier to play.

AM: Oh, yes.

MY: It was interesting trying to get into your head as a saxophonist as I learned this work.

AM: Was it in measure 41?

MY: Yeah, that passage in particular!

AM: If you just realize that it is front F with side Bb it is the easiest thing in the world, but if you are trying to go (demonstrating using palm keys with hands), you ask, “Why did he do this to me?”

MY: {laughing} Yes! It is amazing how obvious the fingerings can be once you’ve discovered the right ones. Would you have any issue with me publishing fingerings and various notes on making the piece easier to learn?

AM: No I wouldn’t. I should have written some and still haven’t written notes for that piece yet.

MY: The triplets at the end [insert example] {singing}. Is the pitch content there, are they all related?
AM: If I remember correctly, there is a sequence that is trying to suggest a quartal center, if you will, or rather, that the interval of the fourth and fifth are the most important. I have a game that I play when writing things like this. I’ll decide the fourth is the most important interval, which for me means I can use fourths, tritones, fifths, contrasted with the least viable options like the diminished chord, or otherwise tertian chords, and after I’ve exhausted fourths and fifths, I’ll begin to contaminate the idea with the tertian intervals that don’t belong. I’m traversing the whole instrument. I’m not looking at the score so I cannot remember all the exact notes. I’ll look at the score at some point and show you. It is a way of churning around notes within, but not limited to, a specific quartal profile.

MY: Alex, thank you very much!
Interview 2 with Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels

Vandoren Artist Studios

January 18, 2016

3:00pm

Matt Younglove: Greetings to you both, Alex and Eric. The launching point for this interview was my exposure to a similar interview conducted by Ryan Dohoney with you both. I found that interview very interesting, but being a performer of your music, I had even more questions. I read statements by Alex, from that interview, about his own music that to me directly impacted how I was approaching a piece of Eric’s at the time (*This is This is This is*) and started to realize that there was a connection between your music, at least in aesthetic, but possibly even more. I want to explore the similarities in, but also the differences between, your music. As friends and colleagues of Wet Ink, I can imagine that at some point you’ve grabbed coffee together and had good discussions that have influenced each other’s aesthetic, but this is difficult to trace via normal research methods. Nonetheless, I hope to discuss with you some of the similarities and differences, and let’s use this statement of Eric’s from the Dohoney interview to get the discussion started: “The things we have in common are more related to the style, language, and surface of our music.”

Would you each be willing to discuss how your styles, languages, and surfaces are similar? What are some of those similarities that an outside interpreter might not immediately notice?
Eric Wubbels: Sure. I took a ton from Alex in terms of style. It is overall just ways of fixing certain ideas together when I first got involved in New York. I remember from early on, I was going to a concert of Zs, I think it was in 2002, and I came up to you [Alex] and talked to you after that about Karate, which was a certain kind of unison, a certain kind of thing that I was very interested in and ready to engage with but hadn’t really heard someone else doing. So that was very exciting to me, saying, “How are you doing that? How are you thinking about that?” At the age I was at that point, it sort of showed me how to do it, it showed me a way of fixing some of those ideas in a compelling way. You asked about an outside observer, and how they would see some of those things relative to other aesthetics. My answer would be working with things, a willingness to be direct with things, to go right at it, to use unison even, which I think is still totally taboo in certain places as an extension of certain pitch taboos coming out of serialism, those being very consonant intervals: fifths, octaves, unisons. So that, and the kind of acoustic blossoming that comes with unisons, I would say for both of us, is a kind of key component. It is rhythmic unison and pitch unison both. Repetition is another kind of post-serial taboo, so again just allowing that to come back in as a way of making complex sounds intelligible, syntactical, and grammatical for people on a first listening. [Another similarity is] engagement with timbre; a very detailed work with timbre, but keeping that in a language that is rhythmic. At Columbia I can recall Tristan [Murail] being very amused with our willingness to write very square music, it was very anti- to everyone that came to study with him, who were very interested in the unscarred continuum of time, so no audible pulse. And here we were writing music [singing rhythmic deet-dut-deet-dut] and he was like “Wait, you don’t think that is corny? That’s
not a fault?” He was sort of fascinated, or just thought we were stupid or something {Eric laughs}.

Alex Mincek: Not to digress, but I’ve often thought that there are so many musics that just get associated with a handful of qualities, and we get so blinded by those qualities as a fixed collection. We were talking about Minimalism and Philip Glass a little while ago, and there is this idea that this type of repetition gets coupled to a certain kind of classical gesture, with a certain kind of familiar triadic harmony, and you just think of them as this package, you don’t think of decoupling that package. The same thing happens with Serial music and Spectral music, where too many people think it’s somehow really weird for certain characteristics of these musics to get decoupled from a packaged orthodoxy. It reminds me of a commercial from the 80s for Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups where a peanut butter truck and a chocolate truck would crash and it was this accident and they’d be like “Who knew this would be so good?” I often just think about that, you just take one thing and synthesize it slightly differently in this other way, and it seems very different when it is clearly coming from these two sources and nobody had just thought of combining them.

MY: Building upon that, there is another quote from the [Dohoney] interview from Alex which is “I think that sometimes our sound worlds end up sounding close, even though we each have our own language.” How do you, Alex, see your language as different from Eric’s, specifically as it pertains to writing for the saxophone? How do you think your sound world overlaps his?
AM: I think it comes down to personal taste. I think what [Eric] laid out as fundamental similarities is true. So there’s an idea of not just fine timbral sounds and combinations, but an idea of representing a kind of physical acoustic that generates harmony. So those are all similarities, but there is a lot of space to navigate within all of that and I think the ways in which we handle these ideas differently is just a reflection of our personal tastes. I don’t think there is anything too ideological at play, there are just certain formal scenarios and sonorities that I find more attractive than Eric and vice versa.

**MY:** The ratio of peanut butter to chocolate.

AM: [laughs] Yeah, that’s not a bad analogy. In terms of the saxophone, I think the difference is obvious. I’m coming from my own relationship to the instrument, physically, and Eric is not. There are pros and cons to each. I’m maybe too reliant on myself, and Eric perhaps can be too reliant on others. It’s a shared strength, but from opposite directions.

**MY:** I’ll ask the same question to you, Eric. How do you see your language as different to Alex’s as it pertains to writing for the saxophone?

EW: The saxophone is not an instrument, like a string instrument, that I understand fully. All keyed wind instruments are fundamentally mysterious to me as an outsider. There is not a linear relationship from what the hands do to what the sound does. You can find
ones in certain ways, but for me, as someone who doesn’t really want to get past that veil, in a way it’s more that I only need to know a couple of things. I don’t need to understand everything about the mechanics of the instrument. When someone looks at the piano and sees 88 keys, you are overwhelmed. What I’m looking for from the saxophone is that I want a small collection of objects that are of the highest idiomatic feel, just enough that I can create a field that has certain places you can move within it, but not too much. I have certain ideas of the kind of gestures that I want, so that’s going to end up being very different from somebody who has a rich lifetime of associations with an instrument, both as a performer and as a listener coming from a rich tradition as a jazz musician. As a musician I’m coming later to jazz and improvised music than your typical jazz musician, and I have a whole host now of favorite saxophonists and mental images of sounds of what the saxophone is to me, but it’s way different than having grown up with that kind of intimacy with the instrument and with its sound. I have way less range with it in a way that I make it work for me, but it seems like there is a much broader natural conception that Alex can draw on when he writes for the instrument and have that immediate feedback as a player, so for me it’s more like a distance.

**MY:** As a result, due to your knowing each other through Wet Ink and knowing each other as friends, does a lot of your language come from what Alex already knows about the instrument?

**EW:** In some cases, yeah. I think my ideas about the saxophone in a new music context were totally shaped by his music. But also, working with Eliot [Gattegno], and getting
into detail about certain kinds of things, or things that I found through him that he was getting from Sciarrino or from other places, and I was like, “Oh wow, I didn’t realize you could do that kind of thing,” and every time I’ve written one of these piano-plus-other-instrument duos, a part of the project is to just develop a conception of that instrument but through the prism of the piano, so it’s always constrained by this other field of pianistic technique as a sieve for the other instrument. But yeah, as a starting point, yeah for sure.

AM: This is a nice segue. I don’t want to jump the gun on this, but it brings up another difference in how we are viewing the saxophone. It has to do with one of my limitations on the saxophone; I mentioned to you earlier, that I do not consider myself a soloist. It’s not what I do. I can’t devote the amount of time and effort; also, I just never felt comfortable in that kind of role. So, already in the back of my mind I’m always thinking of the saxophone as an auxiliary instrument of sorts, I’m not thinking of it soloistically. I have written solo pieces, but it’s been very difficult for me to enter that headspace—to think for somebody else, but I guess what I’m getting at as a significant difference, is an identifiable relationship with virtuosity. I think virtuosity is not something as identifiable in my music or that I need, but I think it plays a strong role in your music {talking to Eric}, and you can correct me on that {Eric nods in agreement}. And so in terms of how we view not only the saxophone, but most instruments, I would say my music is more clandestinely or sneaky virtuosic, or not virtuosic at all. In fact, it can be excruciatingly simple.
EW: I was remembering on the train ride over, did you tell the story already, or maybe you don’t even remember, but I remember the way in which you fleshed out for me, in some bar or something, when you were writing *Pendulum III*, the form.

AM: This is going to be funny, as you walked in, I don’t know if you remember, but I was talking about this crossfading plan and all this stuff, so if you say something that completely contradicts all of that… {laughing ensues}.

EW: That is actually it, but the way in which you phrased it at that time was that the piece starts off dumb {Alex laughs}, then it goes dumber, then smart, then dumbest, then smarter, then smartest.

AM: I do remember that.

**MY:** That is a brilliant crossfade simplification. With formal elements, I can certainly see how that makes sense. Alex, would you like to comment on that?

AM: I would say that speaks to a different level of aesthetic, though, I don’t know the right way to put it. I’ve always really like composers that in some ways make it clear that they really know what they’re doing, but in other ways make me think, “They are the dumbest person in the world.” It is so compelling. Lately I’ve been thinking that it takes a tremendous amount of confidence to be that vulnerable, and that is something that hits
me in music. From Beethoven to Sciarrino, there are composers that just own it—that are able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses—and are capable of giving an aura of invincibility and utter vulnerability too. So when I’m saying things like stupid versus smart: smart is when I’m showing the listener that I know what I’m doing, stupid means they might think that I don’t know what I’m doing, on every level. Do I not know how to play my instrument? Do I not know anything about harmony? I’ve had Alvin Lucier come to me and say, “Do people think I just don’t know anything about music?” There are certain people whose aesthetic draws them to write music in which it is not obvious whether or not this person knows anything about music. I think this is really cool. I am not brave enough to have it all one way, I alternate smart with stupid, but I value stupid a lot. I think Eric does too.

EW: I think that is totally a Wet Ink thing, above all, the balance of the two. You don’t have to put them in pejorative terms, but not having to demonstrate how smart you are all the time, and just having there be other things. So, not having to have your scores be the most high-tech or the most notes per inch—which I actually think some people really do feel compelled to do when they are in school or in situations that are so much about proving themselves—all along these grounds. There are so few grounds that are accepted as ways to evaluate music, and that is one of the ones that you can use more reliably. If your score looks really tough, then people are going to think that you know what you are doing. It has been really interesting to be in a situation where we have been supported by each other to go do something really, really simple for a while. Even if it’s not going to work, but I know you guys probably are not going to think I’m an idiot. [laughter]
MY: You were both writing your saxophone and piano pieces around the same time, 2009 and 2010. Was there discussion between the two of you about how you were going to write those pieces, or how you were going to write for the saxophone?

AM: Yeah, I guess we were writing those at the same time. I don’t think so. [To Eric] Did we [discuss them]?

EW: Here is what I remember: I originally was writing a piece for that same festival (the one where Eliot premiered Pendulum III) and I just couldn’t get it done. I didn’t finish it, but it was going to be for one alto and piano. And then I finished it later in the year, and it became This is This is This is with two altos, but it originally was for that same show; it was for Eliot. And the dimes are another thing that was similar.

AM: That’s right, I got that from Eric. He was planning on using that to prepare the piano and now that he says that I remember and it makes sense. That has happened a few times in Wet Ink. The piece I just wrote, Concentric Circles, I chose the percussion template based on what is already in Katachi. I don’t use all the same things, but there are these ideas that are just like, {directed to Eric} “Well, we know we are going to be on the same concert, so what are you using?” And we won’t use anything more or less than that.
EW: As a general thing, a lot of these contexts in which they’ve gotten us in the same room, they are like, “Your music is really similar,” and well, yeah, we are in a group together. [laughter] It’s not a mystery.

MY: Well, it pairs so well together. One, it is obvious just for logistics. You have both written pieces for saxophone and drum set. How many saxophone and drum set pieces are there? I am going on tour with saxophone and drum set, and at some level, logistics come in to play in decision making. But there is also the aesthetic element. The group YarnWire came to Bowling Green while I was there, and they played a work by each of you; one opened the concert, the other closed it. There are obvious connections there, with Ian from Wet Ink who is also in YarnWire, but the pairing of the aesthetic made a strong enough impression on me that I feel strongly in writing about both of your works for the saxophone. I do not want you guys feeling that I am trying to compare you and saying that your music is too similar or anything.

AM: I think we are probably keenly aware of the similarities and differences at this point, but probably completely oblivious to other ones, but I also think we have been in the group long enough—not just Eric and me but the others as well—to get a sense for what somebody has as their main obsession or their main project at any given time. As Eric said, people can change, and I think there is a mutual respect thing where we all feel comfortable entering into the same kind of orbit of general interests, and there is enough respect where we realize that it is that person’s turn with that particular idea for a while;
let them have that. When you say similarities and differences—and I think this is just true of our group in general—you have to be strategic about what is already existing, and what needs to happen. If person A is doing thing A, and person B is doing thing B, which are both interesting, I often ask myself, “What can I do to find some space outside or in between?” But I think you just take those things into consideration, and I think we are all doing that, which is why you get these similarities and differences. It’s because we are all attracted to a lot of the same things. I think we all have some sense of: “well, I don’t want to do too much of Pluta’s thing, or Soper’s thing…” so there is some juggling. I think we can say that everybody in the group thinks that way, right?

EW: Yeah, for sure.

MY: I can imagine that is difficult to navigate, without stepping on each other’s toes. If you were to sum it up, and I would like for you each to answer this question, in your current state of mind, what are your current goals, your current ideas in music, what are you trying to accomplish? What are the goals you have for your art and your aesthetic?

AM: I’ll let Eric go first with that one.

EW: I can’t give you the big answer, but I can mention one thing. I think after many years of writing music that was very much about precision and about locking things down, and really specifying things in these really extreme ways, long pieces where
everything was in unison, and that sort of stuff, now I’m really interested in basically cultivating the other pole very strongly and trying to integrate them gradually as a lifelong process of trying to become a better artist. [That is,] this is my wheelhouse, I know what it is about, [but then also] here is this other thing out there, and I’ll try to develop it little by little. That includes things like *Axamer Folio*, and things that are modular form that are very open and hard to know exactly how they are going to work. So it is this freedom, openness, improvisation, creativity in the broadest sense, just opening up in all kinds of ways. Now that I feel confident about the kinds of things that I’ve built, that it was sort of protected and fixed and it had to be right, it had to be a certain way, so if I relaxed a little bit from that, how could things get messy and really interesting? How can a piece be free? That’s the biggest thing at the moment.

*MY: Alex, perhaps you want to comment on your own, or respond to what you just heard Eric explain?*

*AM: Well, I’ve only heard about it. I haven’t heard the piece. I’ve heard Eric and Sam Pluta play *Hydra*, and we all improvise more and more these days. But that makes perfect sense, that direction. And it also makes sense on a personal level. I feel like that experience lends itself well to cultivating very special relationships where you can really get into all the possibilities that are more performer informed, where the composer may have imagined how certain decisions should be made, and others left more open, but I haven’t seen the score, so I don’t really know. But it can also lend itself well to very impersonal situations, I imagine, where you are just letting people make their own
decisions. For me, I am trying to explore something different than I’ve done before but not in the same way. I’ve written so much music that has a lot meticulous detail and sectionality to it, it is this kind of motley, quilt-like patches. As a friend of mine put it in some interview, “Its arrested flow is so unrelenting that it creates something rather continuous.” So now I’m trying to write music that, instead of having an arrested flow, is conceived in broader, smoother strokes. I’m trying to write music that is not essentially constructed in modules of 40 seconds to 2 minutes, which is kind of how my music has been constructed, to having larger swaths of music that are not necessarily monolithic either. They are doing some of the same processes that are in my earlier music, but just doing them on a larger scale. So think of visual art. If somebody went from spending the last ten years making works that are 8 feet by 4 feet, to all of a sudden wanting to do things that are 20 feet by 15 feet. That changes how the material must be conceived, even if you want to put the same types of images into the larger scale, it necessitates some reimagining. I just want to occupy a larger frame for a while, and I want to do it in terms of instrumental force as well. I feel like I’ve written so much chamber music to the point where I feel a bit spent. To write another piece for eight instruments that is roughly 10 minutes long does not seem fun for me right now, so I want to write either solos of long duration, or for large forces like orchestra. Somebody once described chamber music to me as a speed boat, very agile and speedy. They described orchestra as a cruise liner, where there is this hand on deck who yells, “We’re turning left,” and someone else yells, “We’re turning left,” and it’s this whole production just to do every small thing. I’d like to exist in that relay. I’ve written speed boat music and now I’d prefer to write some cruise liner music.
MY: How do you each define this idea of formal unfolding? This term comes from the Dohoney interview, and is mentioned multiple times, suggesting a significance to both of your writing, perhaps even to these pieces with saxophone. How do you define it, and how does it play into your music?

AM: I believe it was a term I was using, and I wasn’t defining it, it was pretty general. I have an idea of what it means, but I don’t know if it is something that we somehow share. I don’t think it is a word we have agreed on meaning something significant to us.

MY: The form element is a big part of the analysis I want to do, so is there something there?

AM: I guess what I meant prior was that some aspects of the music stay consistent while new elements are added, folded in, creating a sense of incremental change. So, that is overly vague and I’ll start to get more specific. There is music that is goal-oriented, and music that is static, or music that is changing but is neither goal-oriented nor static, it is permuting elements but without placing much value on what comes next necessarily, as long as something different comes next. I feel like there is some friction or energy in our music that arises from each of those formal profiles somehow coexisting in a sort phenomenological way. I guess I use the word *unfolding* because we already have all the materials and there are certain ways we choose to reveal them. What I did not mention earlier, but I think is something we have in common meant by unfolding, is a relationship
to variation form, but instead of dealing with one theme and a series of variations on that theme, there is a constellation of materials/themes that is being constantly varied by the manners in which materials combine with the incremental addition of new materials. There are rotations of these materials in a kind of constantly varying form. You’re constantly hearing variations, but they are always rotating many objects and the objects are not always revolving in the same order. Perhaps *churning* is a better word than revolving or unfolding. With every churn there is essentially some variation on some previous thing. But I’m happy to leave this explanation vague. It is just a term that is very natural for me to use, but I don’t mean it as a *term*, with a specific meaning.

EW: I don’t think it’s a term that we both use, but the general idea encapsulates a number of different strategies that from piece to piece we might draw on as an engine of developing material. That could be something like a Fred Lerdahl idea of things spiraling, starting from one thing, adding another element, like a rondo kind of, but a little more teleological. Some elements of process, some elements of classical engagement, just like global kinds of things, developing variation, etc. Maybe the thing that I would say, if we zoomed out a bit, that these pieces in our stuff have in common and contrast to other people’s approach to form, is that it’s maybe a little more nuanced in its self-aware articulation into audible, functional units of material. I think there is some music coming out of minimalism that formally, through whatever process it has going on, is not as rigorous as it was in early minimalism, which was heavily focused on rigor and process, or maybe you find a huge swath of music that really is monolithic, where there is never a B section, just A. In those cases, what you are being asked, as a listener, to use to
generate meaningful difference in some cases is very hard to do because it is something like degrees of noise in sound. I like the engagement with listening to form in time that I think both repetition and the willingness to be clear in articulating form audibly allows both of us to use. I think that is something that is engaging for me as a listener. Even in the classical era way, you are trying to figure out the form as it is happening and you are being helped, at least a little bit.

**MY:** In trying to figure out the form as you are listening, I have always wondered with composers if it was intended, and if so, when that became a thing. In school you are taught form, you are taught to hear things that way, a way that critics are apt to listen and analyze, it is a part of the traditional music school experience.

**AM:** Well, it’s a political thing to some extent. It’s something where you normalize a form to generate meaning around it by the ways in which you deviate from the norm. If it is not normalized, you cannot deviate. If you cannot deviate, then you cannot generate any kind of transgression. The clearest example I can think of is Bach’s 5th *Brandenburg Concerto*. He borrowed forms from Vivaldi (among others) that were popular forms. He was able to express specific social meanings in the manner that he chose to deviate from the expectations implicit in those borrowed forms. Another example: Beethoven’s 9th Symphony is special because of the ways it deviates from the normalized expectations of how and what a symphony is supposed to do. Throughout the canon of Western classical music, the most special pieces, for me, tend to come towards the end of what has been a long normalization process. I am not a musicologist, so take this with a grain of salt, but
through my experience it meaning is typically made the most clear by people who are not doing something revolutionary, they are actually working incrementally against something quite normalized, so that they can say something new with it. If nobody knew what to expect from a concerto, how could subversion arise?

MY: This idea, about which I can tell you are passionate, that when the language itself shifts and you no longer have the body behind it, how do you then generate that expectation? How do you use expectation to change and tweak within your own music specifically?

EW: That is a fascinating question. I mean, look at the moments in which people have tried to do that. Look at Berg and Webern, or early Monteverdi, or something like that. People don’t know what they are doing, and as a result, usually that music gets set aside in the long run, in favor of the stuff that is more systematized or normalized. Thomas Tallis, or someone like that, where the vertical and the horizontal are completely contradictory, they have separate rules that have not been resolved into the rules for counterpoint, and Berg and Webern turning into Serial music. But for about 10 years, it is just some of my favorite music, because they don’t really know how to make it work.

MY: So you like that it doesn’t have the weight of normalization behind it?

EW: I prefer that Webern to the later Webern.

AM: There is something you’re leaving out for me, because I think they actually do know
what they are doing, but not in a way they might have been able to articulate beyond musical expression. What is interesting, with this idea of form, Eric said something earlier about the similarity of form and it being as if we are creating a syntax for what can be considered as correct within the logic we have set up. It deals with the question that I mentioned about norms, and that is if you don’t have the luxury of norms to work against, then you have to create that norm in your piece. We are giving the listener a key to establish certain norms within our piece at the get-go, and then these norms can be deviated from throughout the piece. I think in our music one formal aspect is this idea of giving the listener some type of syntax to generate expectations that may then be subverted or whatever.

**MY: Eric, how do you navigate that?**

**EW:** In a very similar way to what Alex was just describing. It is a left-to-right thing, so imagining yourself as a listener to the piece and listening to your piece as you are writing it. What is the movement you make at the beginning, from the first thing to the second thing? That immediately establishes syntax. It is the first germ of syntax. And then from there, you ask yourself whether or not you are establishing a pattern. Once you establish one pattern you then have meta-patterns that come up based on repetition. Or do you choose to divert from that? And so, to draw from a previous analogy, if you go dumb and then dumber, you would next expect dumbest, but then you interpolate smart, which is unexpected. These kinds of things, which I just explained on a very small scale, are how you do that. Additionally, the idea of establishing a trajectory; if I show you one thing,
you can expect it is going to continue, you see a pattern that is starting to be created. Anytime you establish a kind of pattern or regularity like that, it gives you something to work with or push against, and then a sense of expectation or surprise. Modulating that feeling, like in some cases I think of it as this actual quality of inertia, like when you are driving and you aren’t really pushing the gas pedal or the brakes, but when do you speed things up? When do you slow them down? When do you reach back in the piece for something familiar? When do you do something totally new? At what point in the form would it be a bad idea to do something new? Because if you are, then you are in a phase of completing trajectories rather than opening up paths.

AM: I would add to that, personally, I think the left-to-right thing leads to a kind of myopic directionality that can become a bit stifling. I try to do crazy, fairly incoherent things from left to right and then add coherence by writing in the opposite direction from where I began. So I try to have fun with that way of thinking, because it is all going to be coherent in the end. But I have to start out with a pretty clear idea about what extremes the piece will be able to believably traverse. To give you a hypothetical example, if the idea of my piece is pure signal to pure noise, or the idea is textural unity versus complete undifferentiated saturation of texture, then I might find all the points connecting those poles from left to right, so to speak, and then juggle them in unpredictable non-linear ways, but all the while maintaining control by having a clear understanding of the extremities of the idea.
MY: I’m trying to think about the best analogy here. You have two things, and you are trying to fill the area in between to make them connect. Kurt Isaacson, a composer friend of mine, and I were discussing the idea of being completely addicted to a system and knowing when to leave it, when to deviate from your own system.

AM: Definitely depends on your system. I would use the word plan rather than system. The best-laid plan is the one you can most easily deviate from without abandoning the principles of the plan. What I am saying is, I often try to write something really coherent, and then I get bored, so I proceed to write something next that doesn’t make any sense, but since this is against my principles of coherence, I simply add something retroactively, in front of where I began to change the entire context, rather than not making any crazy moves in the left-to-right trajectory of conception. We experience music from left to right but one of the joys of writing music is that you don’t have to write it that way. What works best for me is hardly ever starting at the beginning and writing to the end. I start in the middle, get to the end and then make the beginning.

MY: Eric, anything you would like to add to this discussion?

EM: I want it to be clear that I didn’t actually write that piece from left to right.

AM: Right, I did not mean to insinuate that.
EM: In fact it was written as a collage up on my wall, ordered one module after another.

MY: Are we talking about *Axamer Folio*?

EM: No, *This is This is This is*.

MY: I should show you the wall in my office devoted to *Axamer Folio*, it is quite a collage of its own. In conclusion, thank you both for this wonderful discussion.
Matthew Younglove: Matthew Younglove here with composer Eric Wubbels. So, growing up, what were your musical experiences? You mentioned you come from a musical family.

Eric Wubbels: Yeah, so I started out with piano lessons from age six onwards. My dad was a classical music fan so that was going on in the house. My mom also was bringing in a lot of pop music from the 60s that she was listening to: Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, the Beatles, and all kinds of stuff. I grew up in Williamsburg, VA, kind of the South, kind of not. It was a college town, so lots of smart people around. I was lucky in that respect. I went to a small public high school, but that school was the seat for the county magnet school for literary and theatre arts, so that sort of saved me in high school from being super bored.

MY: What were your literary influences in high school? You mentioned being really interested in creative writing.

EW: I got into that program because it was along the track of the gifted and talented program in that school and fell in with the smart kids and that was the best place to do that. It was a great thing for me at that age, being exposed to classic American literature, historical stuff, writing, and plays. It was rigorous and creative in a way that I think woke
that up in my personality and that later served me well as a composer, although I wasn’t
doing that at the time. I think that planted a lifelong engagement with text and literature
as something that has a lot of meaning for me. In terms of some things I could look back
on during that time and see as unusual and formative for my later personality, I was
always interested in the weirdest stuff I could play as a pianist. If I saw something that
was strange or unfamiliar, I was completely captivated by it and gravitated towards that.

**MY:** What are some of the examples that you thought were strange at the time?

**EW:** The first time I heard Messaien for example. Or if I was looking through an
anthology, I always went to the 20th-century stuff. It actually felt more immediate to me.
That is not a normal thing that I think people experience in classical music. Usually they
hear things they recognize from the radio and it sounds normal, but to me that just
sounded really old.

**MY:** Did you have a teacher that encouraged that?

**EW:** Yeah, to an extent, sure. They saw that I was really excited about that stuff and they
didn’t push me away from it. It wasn’t like, “Eat your vegetables, practice your Haydn.” I
was certainly allowed to explore that. I remember one summer when I was a teenager on
the swim team; I was either at the pool all day or sitting around sight-reading Scriabin. I
couldn’t play it at all, his sonatas are incredibly difficult. But there were some days where
there were 5-6 hours of sight-reading.

**MY:** The frustration of not being able to play it didn’t turn you away from it?
EW: I was always really good at sight-reading. I was never good at polishing. Teachers always had to force me to do the last 5-10% of getting ready for a performance, because I would lose interest at that point. I was much more about devouring things very quickly, getting all I could get, and I just didn’t care about the polishing. So that was unusual in a musical upbringing; I can still see that in myself too, but I think the xenophilia as opposed to xenophobia manifested early on as something that was important.

MY: You mentioned that lack of wanting to polish, and I wonder if there is a connection to this modern idea of an incredible focus and attention devoted to a single task. Is that possibly a development of your youthful frustration with polishing? I’m thinking specifically of the incredibly difficult gestures in your music that are repeated an incredibly difficult number of times that require multiple layers of focus. Additionally, it exposes the process on the concert stage that goes on in a practice room, repeated something that many times. It is hardest to keep count, because I often loop things without counting in my practice. Is that a connection that you thought about?

EW: With that piece for sure. The thing that I found most interesting about that piece [This is This is This is] was that there is no way to practice the piece other than to play it at a certain point. The number of times you repeat something may be different, but it is very coextensive; playing the piece and the mechanism for learning something are very similar. Repetition is the mechanism for learning something into your body. You’re kind of like paving neural pathways, carving them out. I also have, at various points, described that piece as a way of presenting a model to an audience, creating an image of a certain
kind of attention that, rather than writing a text that says “People should pay more attention” and “Cell phones are bad” it is drawing attention to the fact that musicians are sort of athletes of concentration. There is a certain, really specific training that you go through to get to the ability to stand up on stage in front of people and execute an extremely complex and difficult series of tasks in real time as a way of communicating with them. It requires mastering your sense of nervousness and fear, of being able to calm yourself, and overcoming all of those autonomic body and brain processes. It is very similar to the things you develop as an athlete.

MY: This leads me to two questions about athleticism. The first being your group Athletics in the San Francisco area. Was the idea you just discussed somehow the impetus for that group’s aesthetic? Additionally, David Wegehaupt, another member of Athletics, is both a musician and an athlete, having competed in an Ironman competition. David was one of the people that got me into the sport of triathlon. I have found benefits to my performing the saxophone through the hours of triathlon training, and I find the two very related. Is there a relationship to athleticism that you find personally as well as musically?

EW: There has become one. It’s funny because I was the least athletic kid. I guess that isn’t totally true, I really liked sports and I played baseball and soccer, but I had skipped a grade so I was really small compared to the other kids in school. Within the last five years I have become a runner, and that is an important thing for me. I think more and more about the body as something that is not a secondary concern but as a primary one; it is inextricable from mental stuff as a performer. Something to be taken care of and
cultivated; mental cultivation and physical cultivation are both extremely important parts of being a musician and being a composer. To give an example along these lines, I just did this string quartet project for the last two years. I tried to write a piece that was an hour long, so messing with duration on a big scale. One of the things that I did was trying to understand different durations as physical things, for example duration in the body. You can see certain things being repeated to the limit of where they fall apart. In the course of writing that piece, I started out with 35 minutes of duration, asking myself what it feels like to do one thing for 35 minutes. To run for 35 minutes at a certain speed? To sit and listen for 35 minutes? And then I gradually increased that until the length of the piece that I was shooting for was the length of my longest run. I was also getting involved in various types of seated meditations, what is it for 25 minutes? What is it for 45 minutes? Pure durations being mapped and experienced in different ways, in physical ways, in mental ways. All those things kind of dovetail together. I have no condescension to athletics in that respect. I also get really interested in training, and in people who have developed these body–mind skills, I see musicians and athletes as two strong examples of that. I try to take advantage of that as an artist, because I’m really interested in the people that have cultivated those skills, especially what they can do together and not just as demonstrations of ego or one person’s ability, but what does that allow you to do when three people come together and decide, make a conscious and social choice, that we want to express a level of connection and unity with each other by doing the same thing for twenty minutes. That to me is something that I am interested in existing, seeing, and experiencing.
MY: I’m discovering the significance of physicality and gesture for both you and Alex.

EW: Before moving away from that, I think it is another thing that you could say as an aesthetic or thing to articulate that is not always seen as a value. What I’m saying is not condescending the physicality of the body, not trying to erase it from the sound. There is music that wants to be very rarified and away from the body, and not express bodily things, but I think that the music of Alex and me and our other members of Wet Ink, Sam and Kate, is very much about the body and gestures. If you haven’t read this article, it is kind of a foundational article for me and for a lot of music cognition these days, *The Mimetic Hypothesis* by Arnie Cox at Oberlin, embodied cognition. It is a really fascinating article, which basically says that listening is a process of doubling, in the sense of mimetic engagement. So, you’re imitating, when you hear someone play a cello note, and if they put a lot of force into it, pay attention to what your larynx or your vocal chords are doing as a result. You’re tensing up when someone else plays. You are trying to mirror in your own body the qualities that you hear in the sound as a way of helping you hear it, and it reinforces those things. That is so fascinating, and to begin to unpack that idea completely opens up all different ways of understanding why some people who are not trained in classical music find it so difficult to get into Haydn or Baroque music. It is because the physical gestures symbolized in the sound are aristocratic, courtly gestures, which are very graceful and short or quick. Ornaments in Baroque music and Haydn are very constricted in the body and how it moves, whereas dance music is very relaxed; you are moving your body in a different way, one that is encoded in the signal of the music itself and is immediately palpable to people in this unconscious way. So, what I
think is that in the kinds of music that we write, all of these gestures are physical
gestures. You could dance them in a way, if you wanted. They have that kind of meaning
in them, they are directional, they are energetic in a lot of ways. They have a kind of
body-meaning, and not all music goes for that. Some music tries to, consciously or
otherwise, emphasize other things, or de-emphasize that physicality. I think about that
more and more, like talking to the body in music.

MY: So filling in some biographical holes, what was your musical training like in
college? What degrees did you pursue and at what schools? What was your formal
upbringing?

EW: When I graduated high school and got to college, I was a pianist first and foremost,
and also a writer. I went to Amherst College in Massachusetts. I was thinking English
major and piano minor. Within my first year that switched around because I had a bad
experience in freshman English classes. I thought that if that was how English was taught
at that level, then it was not very interesting to me. I was a 17-year-old, snotty kid, who
thought he was better than everyone else. I then got involved in the music department a
little bit, and found it hospitable. They were small, but they were good faculty, and the
fact that I was interested in new music was really interesting to the faculty. I had one
other classmate, Steve Potter, who was also a great composer and pianist, and he and I
found Lewis Spratlan, the composer on faculty, and he and other members of the faculty
took us in under their wing. The second year I was there we started a new music
ensemble, or rather we resurrected this defunct new music performance group. My
sophomore spring I was playing *Kreuzspiel* by Stockhausen with this all-faculty group,
and amazing players. I was 18 or 19 and just thought this was great, that this was what I always wanted to do. The fact that I went to a small school like that, that wasn’t a conservatory, I didn’t get pushed into that traditional sort of training. I was never a great traditional pianist, and that’s another reason I was gravitating towards new music. I just had a different set of skills, and I was missing that sort of thing that is about 100% polish, my mind would get bored. So that was very formative and important for me to have gone to a school with a program like that, and get a taste of the do-it-yourself kind of thing from an early age and to see that it worked for me. This thing wasn’t here yet, but we had all the parts and could be doing something great, so let’s just do it. Let’s start an ensemble, let’s play Stockhausen and Pärt, Paul Lanksy, all this music that we were just discovering. This was the age of early Internet, so everything wasn’t so readily available, we’d have to go to the library and go through it. I had heard of spectral music and the names of those composers, but we didn’t have any scores or recordings, so I couldn’t even hear that music until I went to grad school. That was my experience at Amherst, I got into composition and wrote pieces for my friends, for the orchestra there, and I finished with a BA in music in composition. They have this program at Amherst where two people can stay on the year after you graduate as a graduate associate in the music department, so I did that, I was the orchestra TA and I taught ear-training classes. During that year I applied to grad schools, and it was basically between Columbia and UCSD, and I chose UCSD because I wanted to pursue both performance and composition at the graduate level, and that was the one place that said you could do that. I got out there, and they backtracked on that, told me they accepted me for composition, and that is what they wanted me to do. It ended up not being a great fit for me, so while I was there I got back
in touch with the people at Columbia, and they let me transfer in. I got my masters and doctorate at Columbia; I was living here [NY] between 2003-2009, and I defended in 2010.

**MY:** You studied with Tristan Murail while at Columbia. What were his influences on you pedagogically, and what impact did his music have on you?  
**EW:** When I was going out to San Diego, I was really interested in spectral music, Murail and Grisey. I had heard very little of it, but something about the re-engagement with harmony was something that I was ready for after being in a situation of mostly post-serial approaches to pitch organization. I was ready for a different kind of thing. I felt that I always had this kind of engagement as a performer and in hearing the sound of various instruments, you get the overtone series. It is in there subconsciously. It’s part of any vibrating sound. I was subconsciously attracted to things like Bartók and Messaien, where they had that engagement with resonance as a structuring harmonic idea. Bartók has all these kinds of overtone series chords and scales that he used before they had computers to do spectral analysis, but the idea there. Ives had these moments too that were clearly derived from that intuitive discovery of sonority based on the overtone series. I really wanted to go into a place where people were doing that sort of thing, so Columbia was the place to go. The best thing about having Murail around was that he attracted this incredible group of students from all around the world, really interesting people, a lot of whom were a decade older that I was, I was 23 and they were in their 30s, they had publishing contracts with orchestral pieces being played in Sweden or Germany, or wherever. I was a little kid, and that was great. I felt the need to catch up, to learn what
all these guys were doing. I’ve often found myself in that position, and I like it. It’s
helpful for me to always feel a little bit behind. You should always be working hard, not
uncomfortable but not comfortable either. It was important for me to have a sense of
being surrounded by really great people and that I needed to be great too. New York is
also a really great place for that as well. To be honest, some places aren’t. Certain kinds
of small places can make you feel like a big fish, and it was really important for me to be
here at this moment, to see what the level was and if I could hang with it. Studying with
Tristan [Murail] himself, not to devalue it, but he was a legendarily un-giving teacher. I
never had a problem with him on a personal level, he was perfectly nice, but if you ask
anyone who studied with him, a lot of lessons were him just sitting quietly, sometimes
not saying anything. It was hard to get stuff out of him. And then every now and then
you’d get something great, something really important, something really interesting. But
again, I don’t even really mind that, especially at the graduate level, sometimes it is really
important to have an interesting, important artist around. It matters just to watch how they
talk about things, to see what they are interested in. Murail was really into Dukas, all
these sort of funny things. What pieces was he really attached to? What would he choose
to do in analysis class? He loved Scriabin. The Debussy Preludes were what we had to
orchestrate in orchestration class with him. He wasn’t the sort of person that you would
have a deep mentor relation with; it was a very old world approach to pedagogy. I don’t
know if you’re going to ask about Fred, so I could segue into that.

MY: Yeah, Fred Lerdahl and Lewis Spratlan. What did you get from each of them?
EW: Again, I don’t want to devalue what I got from being around Tristan and the people he brought it, and his music; it was absolutely crucial to me at that time, to encounter that music. To put myself in the middle of it and feel a part of it was also significant, but I never really adopted the orthodox spectral stuff that some of the other students engaged with more directly. There were also a lot of really important things I got from being around Fred [Lerdahl]. One aspect was that this person was here, so I should listen to all their stuff and read all their stuff. Those kinds of things are not transmitted into the lesson, necessarily. So in principle it’s like, this is a person with a really strong point of view about music, so let me engage that point of view. What can I learn from it? How much do I accept, what do I push against? Fred is really engaged with cognition and hearing, asking what sorts of things are audible and what things are not audible in music. He has a systematic mind, but he is also mistrustful of certain compositional systems, because he went through the whole serial era in academia in the United States, which was an era of over-generalizing systems without attention to what is possible to be heard. *Possible* is perhaps too strong a word, but what are the natural orientations of hearing? All these things are really slippery issues, but I find it really valuable to engage and to think about them. As a composer, how are you aiming your projects at hearing? What is your understanding of hearing, and is it as multivalent and open as it could be? Are you asking something of a listener that you would need two years to be able to perceive in a piece? Being thoughtful about that stuff was one of the biggest things from Fred, in addition to a sense of structure in some of these forms we discussed earlier. The idea of a certain kind of organicism that is based on looser kinds of repetition and spiraling growth, something that I have used in certain pieces very explicitly, I got from Fred.
MY: What about Lewis?

EW: Lew and I are still friends, I’m teaching as a visiting professor at Amherst this year, and he is still around. He is the person that I’ve had the closest relationship with as both a mentor and a role model in music and is someone whom I learned a lot from at an age where I was probably too young for it to shape me stylistically, I just wasn’t mature enough as a composer to draw much from him musically. He is a remarkable musician. The thing that was most important to me about him is his relationship to music. He has this incredible passion for music as a teacher. I took all these classes with him and saw how excited he would get, how unrestrained he was about his relationships. You can always have that professor that when you were 19 really impressed you by swearing or something, but he was just so open with us and so generous with us as students. The way in which he modeled being a musician, and loving music, and a sort of humanistic engagement with the arts was really important to me.

MY: I can certainly see how that developmentally helps as a professional musician, and as an artist. How did it shape your music? Did it alter your approach of what music fundamentally should be?

EW: Well, another thing that I saw in him, he was a little bit of a 60s guy. He was there during that time, he partook in everything, wrote these pieces that were totally off the wall. By the time I knew him he was back writing much more structured music, but he had an incredible sense of humor, incredible craft technique, intensely expressive music. I think he is a good example of someone from that era in this culture that produces really
well-rounded and balanced music. Not many people of that time do, I would say. You chose sides. You wrote music that was either this way or that way. He is really one of the middle-of-the-path people. There is order, rigor, and structure but there is also emotion, humor, all these things that are taboo. Babbitt’s music is not really about timbre. It certainly can be expressive, but it doesn’t emphasize the humanistic thing that Lewis’ music does. He wrote an amazing opera that won the Pulitzer about ten years ago, it was deeply expressive music but also really successful melodic serial music. The fact that he was able to make that music expressive and humanistic was really impressive to me. From that perspective, it was a modeling thing, a well-rounded aesthetic world that is strong, clear, but is not dogmatic or orthodox; an open field of aesthetic engagement.

**MY: Do you feel that some of that humor has been brought into how you approach music? Is there intentional humor?**

**EW: That is a good question. There are pieces, especially older pieces where I was more willing to engage with that. In recent years I have taken it very seriously, maybe taken myself too seriously. I love comedy, I am a huge comedy fan. I love funny people, I love hanging out and those sorts of things. But I think my music emphasizes other sorts of things. We were talking about attention and treating the concert as a ritual, I think right now my focus is away from that, towards other kinds of things. Because I feel it is so hard to find the sense of anything sacred at the moment, as a cultural landscape, that is where I have put my attention in the last couple of years. The concert is a moment where we get together in a communal situation where everyone is paying attention to the same thing. For people who don’t go to church, where do we get that anymore? In the absence**
of what church represents—which is mono-cultural agreements about fundamental questions of human existence—I don’t want that, let’s say we don’t have that. There is still this element of what you are missing when you don’t have that, it is a communal experience, a social experience. It is just that feeling of getting into an ecstatic space.

**MY:** This sounds like it relates directly to the aesthetic of *This is This is This is*, even the program note at the beginning references the ecstasy of sound, ecstasy of repetition, and this ritualistic nature. There is the stated influence of David Foster Wallace in the program note, but how did this all come together into what that piece embodies?

**EW:** That is a good question. It is not all one or the other thing. It definitely was written in the aftermath of David Wallace’s suicide, so that was very much on my mind, but the writing of his that it is most related to is not *Infinite Jest* but *The Pale King*, which had not come out yet, but was drawing upon things that he was talking about in the Kenyon [College] commencement address, which was later published, and there had been parts of *The Pale King* published in The New Yorker and a couple other places. I was really interested in seeing him going in another direction, almost a renunciation of *Infinite Jest*, of that sort of maximalism of that book and focusing in on these things having to do with what it means to be a good person. The excerpt from *The Pale King* that was published early I think was titled “Good People” and was about this young couple in Ohio that were kind of dating, and he gets her pregnant and decides to marry her and have this sort of normal life. It was very interesting to see him grappling with these sorts of things like ethics and what is a good life, those sorts of issues. That book is also very much about
boredom, routine, and repetitive tasks, and the way in which a human life, especially in the way it relates to work, has to do with an incredible amount of repetition. His point was that there are these people, people who are so good at finding validation or some sort of mental balance in repetitive tasks, that they can live a happy life. It’s not that it just kind of grinds them down and crushes them through the daily life of literally breaking your back doing repetitive work, or staring at things in an IRS office. I think the point that book is trying to make is that the nature of life and work in our current social system is maybe kind of crazy. People have to deal with that in all sorts of ways. That is basically meaningless, so how are you finding meaning? Just drugging yourself up or down to get through. It’s crazy. At the same time, that is on some level just a deep part of human life and existence, and you have to find a way to deal with it. Again, what he is saying is in the absence of generally agreed upon cultural touchstones, like religions, how do you deal with it? Part of what is going into this piece is secondary to that, just an engagement with the sound of repetition and repetitive music that was in circulation and the air at the time. Bernhard Lang, Orthrelm, Alex’s earlier music are some examples.

**MY:** Alex exposed you to Orthrelm, correct? He had just heard that at the time, and that exposed him to repetition over much longer forms. Am I recalling this correctly?

**EW:** He had known Mick Barr and those guys in the band for a while from playing in Zs.

**MY:** Are they a NY band? I don’t recall them being from New York.

**EW:** Hard to say. I think Mick Barr lived on people’s couches and was on tour for ten
years and ate cereal for three meals a day. That was my understanding. He spent serious
time in New York. The aspect of hearing that one particular album, \textit{OV}, stood out for me
that it was one track, 45 minutes, and all loops, and it is way more extreme than anything
either of us has ever done. The second loop, I think, of that piece goes on for two minutes
and it is $4/10$ths of a second in duration.

\textbf{MY: So it is very trance oriented?}

\textbf{EW:} I guess so. It is what you would get if you have guitar in these shreddy patterns in
unison with drum set for three to four minutes at a time. There is nothing for your mind
to do but begin to vary its focus to find things to listen to. It is the same thing if you
stared at a wall from an inch away; the brain will start hunting for things to focus on, and
shifting its perspective in various ways.

\textbf{MY: In that vein, you wrote it for two saxophones, and what inherently happens,
much like in \textit{Nucleus} where Alex writes the bongos for 100 times, is it is past the
point of human ability to play the exact same way, and then you’ve doubled that by
adding a second player. When you zoom out and listen to something 39 times, like
the opening gesture, you hear different things every time. I realize each listener
brings his or her own baggage to any listening experience, but every time I listen to
this work, I hear different things, and that is very Deleuzian.}

\textbf{EW:} That is also my experience in performing the work. I think the aspect of it, the thing
that is really driving the compositional decisions from that perspective of the piece is that
it is really growing out of physical gestures. What does 39 times feel like with this
material? For almost all of those loops, it only starts to feel good after a while, so you have to get into them as a performer. And then you are in these units of basically eight, so eight is your box. That is something you can feel very easily. There is counting, but I don’t have to count every iteration and gritting my teeth like “1…2…3, etc.” Eight is circulating, so you have four groups of eight plus seven for the first loop.

**MY: What made you pick those numbers?**

EW: At first they were intuitive, but in retrospect and having talked about the piece a number of times now, I feel that I understand those intuitions, which is that you have the box with the number eight, which is squareness, and then you are modulating squareness in various ways. Sometimes you want stability, so that is eight or four. Sometimes you are at a point in the piece where you want it to push forward, you want momentum coming out of the loop. Seven or fifteen is a little too short, because as a listener you start feeling the cycling of the number four or eight also, so if something causes you to miss a step, it springs you off with energy into the next loop. Similarly, if you get nineteen or seventeen, you feel the big pattern come and then you think, “Oh man, it’s still going,” that sense of frustration can be valuable too, or even misdirection of that. You think you are settling in for another four or eight, but then that goes on in a new direction. Those kinds of things I feel in that piece that you have this quality as a physical thing in the air, which is inertia or momentum, and the piece gets to this thing where it is just spinning like a wheel, and it has this stable energy, and then it is pushing ahead all of a sudden and things are moving very fast. After the first series of loops there is the one moment at the first half of the piece where you have these two or three bars that just burst out and it is
not looped at all, it is just a phrase [measures 12-15 of *This is This is This is*]. I think putting that material after a long period of things that were very static and repetitive makes it feel twice as fast as it would normally feel. There are other moments in the piece that are these two pillars of piano solo that are just on a single note, and I think those are moments of stopping the time. Your brain just focuses on hearing all the complexity of that one pitch. Both spots are repeated notes, they are both fast on the local level, but I think they are very slow moments in the piece because things are not moving forward at all. You really are stopped in the moment. As a performer those are really important sections to make feel successful, at least for me when I performed it. It was a realization for me, because so much of the music that I was playing at that time was so terrifying to perform {laughs}; it was so complex and everything had to be together all the time or it sounded bad. As a result, you very rarely got to truly listen, in the moment, as a performer, to just sit back a little bit and think, “Oh this is great, I’m just hammering away on this one note, I feel comfortable, I have a general sense of how long I need to do this for, but I don’t need to count.” You are just playing, listening, and shaping the sound. It was a realization that I wanted to do more of that. I want to have this feeling of having a little more space in the music to breath and to enjoy it.

**MY: What was the impetus of the creation for this work? Commission? Was it written for Eliot and someone else? Who gave the premiere?**

**EW:** Yeah, Alex was the other saxophonist. The history of it is a little complicated. I believe what happened was that it was supposed to be for this festival in Prague, the Contempuls Festival, which was the fall of 2009. I had just started a job and couldn’t get
the piece done. So I set it aside until later in the year and worked on it with Eliot, developed the material directly face-to-face with him in a practice room. It was the first piece that I worked in that way, where I decided that I’m not going to make any pre-compositional decisions, but rather just find idiomatic gestures. From the instrument itself comes the material, then comes the form. That was an unusual process for me then, but it is now one that I always use. We worked like that over the summer of 2009, and the premiere was in May of 2010 at the old Roulette space downtown in Soho with Alex and Eliot playing the saxophones. I can recall the moment where I had the idea that this was not a duo piece. The doubled line is really important to this; the conception of the saxophone as its own voice was compounded by seeing two people playing unison with no difference between the two for the entirety of the work, not even writing it on two lines, but on one line and trying to play it together.

**MY:** It reminds me of a chorusing technique in the recording studio. That seems like an elementary comparison from my interpretation standpoint, I’m sure your idea had more depth to it than that, but was that the general idea?

**EW:** Not so much difference actually, sonically that is the biggest part of it. It is the feeling of the sound of chorus that comes from unison doubling. It is a beautiful sound, and I really like it. It is both unison and difference, because the slight discrepancy, the slight difference between that and true unison is audible, as the sound of that round resonance with a slightly fuzzy pitch. It is just a crazy, inefficient way of getting that. So I need another person to learn this incredibly hard music and play it in unison with this other person. That is sort of perverse, but I was excited about that. It was so much in line
with the kind of stuff we were talking about and doing, and if there is a direct impetus for
it I think, at least right now, of the Ferneyhough percussion solo, *Bone Alphabet*. Ian, at
one point, was talking to us about this percussion duo, I believe from The Hague, and
they play that piece in unison. So take that piece and play it in unison. That is the way to
make that music good, we both thought. It goes from not complex to being complex. It is
not necessarily complex if one person plays it, even if they are playing it correctly,
because it is not fixed in the same way that it must be when two people have to do it. It
becomes framed in a new way.

**MY:** Alex mentioned, too, this ability of holding people to knowing whether or not it
is right, that accountability. You automatically up the ante when you add that
second player.

**EW:** Absolutely!

**MY:** There is another version of this, done recently, with drums in the group
*Athletics*. Tell me a little more about that.

**EW:** At this point I do not consider that a viable alternative version of the piece; it is just
something that we did for fun. Nick Woodbury was around and playing with us; we had
made this quartet, Athletics, just for fun. We were all in the area, temporarily, passing
through the Bay area, but we thought, “We are all here, let’s make some music together.”

**MY:** So it is not a notated or published version?
EW: No, it is not published at all. Someone asked to play it recently, and I had to say no. Nick made a lot of his part himself. He got to know the piece really well, came in to rehearsal a couple times, and would propose an idea for each loop. Sometimes I would tweak them, sometimes they worked great, and we would go back and forth. He never even wrote it down, he just learned it. I would say it is half from Nick, in regards to the choices for timbre, but I was totally fine with that, given the circumstances of getting to be a part of that realization. It came out way better than I thought. At first, I didn’t even think it could be an alternate version of the piece, but I really liked the way it turned out, so maybe we’ll notate it at some point.

MY: That is good to know. I have had many people ask me about whether or not that was a published version. It is on YouTube, and YouTube has its own energy and almost legitimates that version.

EW: It’s like being published in its own way. I’m fine with it. I don’t want to be too controlling of that stuff, but at the same time that is a piece that I have seen get very popular and I do, on some level, want to protect it until we get a recording out that says, “Look, here’s the piece.” You have to prevent it from becoming like the Arvo Pärt Fratres, where it’s for orchestra, for twelve cellos, for whatever. My piece is for two saxophones and piano, that was a specific decision about it.

MY: Let’s chat about Axamer Folio. Brand new, not even performed yet. Noa Even will be performing it just before me, and I’ll be performing it April 4th and 6th of 2016 with my percussion colleague, Brandon Arvay. We chose one of your
realizations for the work as a launching point to help us get our heads around it, and may make our own version down the road. The piece is quite daunting, being about 80 pages to print when you print the whole thing out.

EW: Is it that much? {laughs}

MY: It is awesome, and is incredibly complex, but I may have initially over-structuralized it. I’m starting to realize just how free it is. Compositionaly, why did you make that decision to break from your normal, strict notation? What was the impetus for this completely different ideology?

EW: It comes from two places. Since giving you guys all these scores, I came up with a brief program note. The two places were Anthony Braxton and Matthias Spahlinger, two people whose music I got to know in more detail around the time I was writing the piece, both of whom represented to me the idea of opening up your universe and embracing the benefits that you get from certain kinds of uncertainty, or freedom. I had just played this piece by Spahlinger called *Extension*, which is an hour-long violin and piano duo. Almost the entire second half of the piece is modular, so you have material for the duos that can be arranged in any order, and then the final third of the piece is completely independent. It is like that 60s and 70s thing where there are eight things on the page, play them in any order for any duration of time, and it just worked. It blew my mind. I had never encountered a piece like that where I thought that that not only wasn’t it something that I was completely aware of as a listener, it didn’t feel directionless; it was just fascinating from both sides, as a listener and as one of the performers. It just felt like you could just make a universe. You could make something that you cannot even see the boundaries of,
the borders of, with so little. That was just something I had to try. I had to explore that idea. Braxton is another one of these people who just makes these universes of music that everything is going to be a version of. There is never going to be The One. It is ephemeral; it prevents things from getting too precious. But probably the biggest impetus for why I took that approach with this piece was that it was a consortium commission; eight different saxophonists and eight different percussionists. That is one aspect of it. I was trying to write a piece for eight different people with eight different backgrounds.

Saxophone and drum set are two of the instruments where you tend to have the biggest difference in musicians, in the way they were trained, in their musical experiences. As a drum set player, you could be coming from a classical, orchestral background where you are playing drum set for this piece, or you could be coming from a rock background or a jazz background, a background as an improviser, as a noise musician. I wanted to make it a piece that would accommodate, or offer up to all those people ways of being a musician and making music. So I had passages of totally free improvisation, passages of constrained improvisation where you have to make choices, like the text-based pieces. A piece that really asked you, as a performer, to be creative, because I feel like that idea had this moment where it was in style in the 60s and 70s and then we went to this very rationalized thing, and I feel like there hasn’t been another moment where that idea has taken a new form. I’m specifically talking about performer engagement, creativity, and authorship combined with material that is rigorously specified and thought through and attempts to give implications and possibilities, which is not a completely open playing field but is simultaneously an infinite field of possibility. I have all these plans for the piece. Phase 1 was writing it; phase 2 will be seeing what happens in all these first
performances. I don’t think it is even done yet, I may even add more movements. I’ll probably edit, revise, and engrave. Phase 3, I can even see it being, in my most elaborate thoughts about it, a website. Maybe the piece is this thing that gets put up somewhere where the all of the linking patterns between the movements can be visualized, a bunch of people just record it, and so you can set up this sort of thing where you hit “Generate Version” and from the archive of twenty different groups playing the piece, it generates a form according to the rules, it pulls recordings from the various people who have played it, splices them together, and makes some sort of weird, diffuse instance of the piece. I think the piece itself is this network of possibilities.

MY: Where did the idea of the source material come from? Were you influenced by Nucleus as a preexisting form for that unnatural combination of two instruments at all?

EW: Yeah, Nucleus is the piece that was initially in my ear, but I spent two months doing research on the Internet, listening to saxophone and drum set duos, mostly from the free improvised world, going back to Coltrane and Rashied Ali, going forward to some of the British guys like Evan Parker (saxophone) and Paul Lytton (drums), John Butcher and Gerry Hemmingway, Roscoe Mitchell, Tyshawn Sorey, Chris Pitsiokos. And what I learned from that was that these two instruments don’t have to have anything to do with each other and it sounds great. Two people improvising in totally contradictory, perpendicular tracks, not even truly trying to play together, it just sounds great, because the priorities of each instrument are independent. Their sounds worlds are not pitched based, where you need unison to get blend. It sounds great when things are heterophonic
and polyphonic, so much of my other music has been monophonic or homophonic based on single lines and on unisons. I took a chance with these two instruments that really lend themselves to polyphony and to things that don’t line up all the time, I used that as a project to explore what polyphony is to me, to try to develop my chops at polyphony in all kinds of ways. In some cases where I try to control the polyphony and specify it, in other cases where I try to design a situation where polyphony can be generated through indeterminate procedures like creating a metrical frame in the same tempo that all these movements use, where you can take the saxophone line from one and put it with the drum line from another and it still works, it is still interesting, but they were composed with zero attention from one to the other, except for the frame.

**MY:** The word *folio*, does it draw from your experience in creative writing?

**EW:** I think the most direct reference is to an Earl Brown piece. Earl Brown was an early example of someone engaging with modular form, it is a good word, and it fit the rhythmic “da-da-da / da-da-da” scansion of the title that I wanted to go for. The implication of it is also important for the form; it is not a closed form, it is an open form. It is a folder of material. It is not a map, telling you to go from A to Z, you can juggle things around, take a different order. It gives you a sense of how to listen to it and how to approach it as a performer.

**MY:** My last question here, the titles of the movements come from cities in southern Austria. Is there any significance to the piece in that, in terms of structure, or following the map analogy further?
EW: I can tell you where it came from. I was there with friends in Innsbruck and we just drove around and I saw the names on different street signs. It was just one of those things that you write down in a book somewhere and think, “Axamer Lizum, that is a really funny name.” I just wrote them down and didn’t know what was going to happen with it. But then as I was going into Google Maps and looking them up, I saw all these weird little paired towns, Völs is one, Lans is another, Tulfes and Telfes, and it’s hard to come up with good titles. Something about the fact that those names of those towns were good titles, they are interesting words and they have this kind of chewy element. Because they were paired in that way, it gave me these ideas about pairings for solo pieces that did certain things. They are weird copies of each other. I just took very big-picture, metaphorical ideas from that.

MY: If you can map your own journey through the countryside, you can map your journey through this piece.

EW: Yeah, but I wouldn’t recommend doing it on the map first.

MY: Right, I don’t mean to make it that simple. I’m thinking about it more abstractly.

EW: Metaphorically, it is just another thing that it puts in your mind as a context for the piece.

MY: Wonderful, thank you very much, Eric.

EW: You’re welcome.
Matt Younglove: Did you participate in the creation of Axamer Folio?

Noa Even: Yes. My saxophone and drum set duo, Patchwork, organized the consortium of performers that commissioned Eric Wubbels to write Axamer Folio.

MY: Please describe your communications with the composer while Axamer Folio was written.

NE: In December 2014, Stephen Klunk (my duo partner) and I met with Eric at Columbia University to workshop. While many composers bring some sketches or a list of ideas to work with, Eric asked us to come up with sounds that we enjoyed playing on our instruments. He wanted gestures that were diverse and idiomatic. The goal of the meeting was to collectively compile an alphabet of sounds that would be arranged in different combinations throughout the piece. As far as I know, Eric had not yet made plans for the piece to be open form, comprised of two dozen or so miniature movements of solos and duos.

After workshopping in December, we didn’t hear from Eric for months. He had already written for saxophone and did not need to communicate with us with questions. Once we received the score on June 1, 2015 and began working on it in the early fall, we had many questions and sought Eric’s feedback. It was an involved process to come up with our own unique form for the piece. On September 2, 2015 we sent Eric the realization for feedback. He gave suggestions, and from there it evolved. By the middle of October, we were more or less settled on the form of the piece, although we made a
couple of minor changes down the road as we were able to run through larger sections of
the piece.

We kept Eric updated about our performances of the piece, although he didn’t
hear a recording of our version until June 7, 2016. That was just a few days before he was
going to hear us play live in New York City at Spectrum. It was great to have the
opportunity to play it for him in person. At this point, it’s possible that we’ll make
changes to the form for our future performances, but we haven’t made any decisions just
yet.

**MY: What are your thoughts on the work Axamer Folio overall?**

NE: From a performer’s standpoint, our version of the piece is quite fatiguing, both
mentally and physically. The saxophone part—at least, the way I put it together—is
speckled with high Ds that are surrounded by contrasting material. The sudden dynamic
and register shifts are quite taxing on the embouchure. Some of the finger technique is
awkward and requires some quick hand position shifts that proved difficult when we
played this at the end of a full program. Rhythmically, much of the piece is challenging,
particularly the way the saxophone and drum set parts fit together. Again, this is partially
to do with the way in which we constructed it. Overall, it’s quite a thrill to perform.
Patchwork’s version is consistently 20 minutes and a few seconds long, but it does not
seem that long in the moment because there is so much going on and the piece is
constantly switching gears.

When I listen to the piece objectively, I find that it is intriguing, intricate,
exhilarating, sometimes confusing, repetitive, almost groovy in some spots, and totally
ungroovy in others. I’ve heard several people who have heard us play it describe *Axamer Folio* as epic. It certainly feels epic while we’re playing it.

As a saxophonist, I find the piece to be an excellent addition to our repertoire. I’ve never heard a piece like it with a score that is so open-ended for the performers to create their own adventure. Although almost paralyzing initially, it was so fun to have ownership over that aspect of the piece.

**MY:** When learning *Axamer Folio*, what were the biggest challenges?

**NE:** In learning my own part, moving from one gesture to another proved difficult in certain spots. The satisfying aspect was that once I learned how to play certain gestures back to back, I had an easier time doing so in other combinations and in other parts of the piece. The same language is used throughout, so the whole thing felt more familiar as I made progress.

There is one section of the piece that was particularly rhythmically challenging. The drum set part has no sense of pulse and my part corresponded very little to it. In order to save practice time and Stephen’s energy, he made me a track of him playing his part with a metronome at different tempos. This helped a tremendous amount. While he is playing that section, he cannot keep track of my part because his is so challenging physically and mentally. I practiced with the track enough that rehearsal went incredibly smoothly the next time and we were able to play the movement accurately and stay together.

Once we were ready to play through multiple sections of the piece at a time, we had to figure out where to take pauses, how long they would be, who would cue the next
part, etc. In some cases, it took a while to make those decisions. If we had a hard time, we would record different options and listen back.

There are several parts of the piece that require counting many repetitions of the same measure or two before moving on to another repeated module. One movement has nested repeat signs. On top of challenging combinations of gestures and complex rhythms, counting up to fifteen or twenty six times takes a lot of focus.

**MY: What makes Axamer Folio unique to perform?**

NE: Performing our twenty-minute version is definitely immersive—probably for the audience, too. The open form of the piece is uncommon and adds a new dimension to the learning process. The drum set part is incredibly physical, complex, and captivating. The gestures he came up with are wild and amazing to watch. The score combines standard notation, graphic notation, and improvisation, so there are many options for the performer. The level of communication one must maintain with their partner to navigate this piece is extremely high—almost euphoric. It’s like being on another plane with your duo partner. We’ve played another piece like that, but I’d say Axamer Folio is even more intense in that regard.

**MY: What pieces of advice do you have for a musician that is approaching Axamer Folio for the first time?**

NE: I would recommend getting familiarized with the techniques in the score and the general sound palette for both instruments. That will give an idea of how each movement goes, which will help in creating the realization of the piece. Stephen and I decided that it
didn’t make sense to learn the entire piece before choosing the form, because we knew we wouldn’t be playing every single section. It’s important to consider in which movements the saxophone and drum set parts are synchronized versus which ones are more independent or improvised. Maintaining a balance is one approach to building a successful map for the piece.

**MY: What is your favorite aspect of performing Axamer Folio?**

NE: I love how the piece forces me to be focused on each moment as it goes by. I don’t have a choice. I think that’s the aspect of the piece that gives me a rush every time. I also believe that learning, rehearsing, and performing the piece has made me a better listener (and even continues to do so). There’s just so much there and I hear something new almost every time.

**MY: What are your overall thoughts on the work Nucleus?**

NE: *Nucleus* is incredibly exciting to listen to and play. It’s full of surprises and contrasts that keep everybody’s attention throughout. I’ve been playing it on and off for a few years and haven’t tired of it yet—it stays fresh.

**MY: When learning Nucleus, what were the biggest challenges?**

NE: This was the second piece Stephen and I worked on together, but the first major work we did as an official duo. We were determined to play it as rhythmically precisely as possible, so we did many rehearsals under tempo with a metronome at the beginning. At the time, we were still learning how to play well together and mesh as an ensemble, so
it was a slower process than it would be now. Making sure to count the numerous repeats properly every time was challenging at first.

The saxophone part is full of extended techniques. In some cases, it took a while to get the exact sound I wanted. Some of the sounds are unstable or fragile, so it’s important to be able to embrace that. Alex is known for making the saxophone sound like it’s broken. The part lies very well under the fingers, though.

**MY: What makes *Nucleus* unique to perform?**

NE: There are not many saxophone and drum set pieces out there, but this is part of what inspired Stephen and me to form a duo specifically of that instrumentation. We thought it was amazing how well the instruments can blend and form an interesting composite, both rhythmically and timbrally. I wasn’t aware of the piece until about four years after it was composed. At that time, Alex’s music was really starting to take off in the saxophone world and now a lot more people are playing it. *Nucleus* stands out as a saxophone and percussion piece that’s unlike any other, mostly because of Alex’s unique language. It contains so many different kinds of energy and colors, and the rhythmic vitality for which Alex is known.

**MY: What advice do you have for a musician that is approaching *Nucleus* for the first time?**

NE: Due to the strong influence of free improvisation, it is definitely a good idea to improvise with some of the techniques used in the piece. I suppose that method works for learning other pieces as well, but it is particularly helpful for this one. It’s important to be
conscious of how the instruments blend, so toying with the types of cymbals and drums is a good idea and testing how they work with the saxophone is helpful. The saxophonist can also mess around with different quality slap tongues, tone quality in general (air vs. tone), etc. There is a lot that can be tailored to the duo performing the piece. I’m always shocked by how different the piece sounds from duo to duo. Every musician brings their own energy to it, their own set of sounds. That’s part of what makes the piece great!

**MY: What is your favorite aspect of performing Nucleus?**

**NE:** *Nucleus* is always difficult to play, which is part of what makes it fun to come back to and relearn. Much of it goes by fast and requires non-stop focus, much like *Axamer Folio*. In fact, it was a perfect precursor to playing the Wubbels in that way. I also love how physical it is. It’s a really visceral, action-packed piece.
Matt Younglove: What are your overall thoughts on *Pendulum III*?

David Wegehaupt: I like the structure and form of the work. It is abnormally patient in its development. Without looking at a clock with the recording, it feels as if at least the first 70% of the work features the repeated, quiet, dissonant chords, with brief, violent interjections. These interjections lengthen slightly each time until page 13, where the piece becomes a wild, violent, and loud cacophony of virtuosity until the finish. The material that makes up the first section of the piece does hint at development towards this, but I’m not sure the audience quite expects the unrelenting intensity for the final 1/3 of the piece.

**MY: When learning the work, what were the biggest challenges?**

DW: Tutti playing with the pianist, specifically during the first 2/3 of the piece. Of course, the more virtuosic material is at the end, but I would say that the ensemble’s attacks on each quiet note and multiphonic at the beginning are deceptively challenging. While the tempo is marked eighth note = 144, the piece should feel essentially still and static between the slap-tongue interjections in the first twelve pages. However, the pianist and saxophonist must be counting and subdividing perfectly in sync, so as to make each attack happen together. How to accomplish this? Certainly one should not be conducting the whole time in eighths. But even conducting in quarter notes felt as though it distracted from the musical content. I felt a need to be as still as possible, so the audience did not anticipate each re-articulation and slight change in the dissonance and beating that occurs
with each. To pull this off requires a deep understanding with your duo partner, and lots
of rehearsal. All of the more difficult, virtuosic, rhythmic playing later in the piece was
much easier to put together, for me, using standard rehearsal techniques, conducting,
cues, etc.

Also, slap-tongue endurance. One must slap and slap, especially during the
repeated cycle on system one of page 13. Also, the dynamic intensity must not diminish.
If anything, it must increase through the cycle in order to set up the rest of the end of the
piece. I tend to think that I have a very well-developed slap tongue, but the amount of
slaps in this piece required extra endurance practice in order to not tire. And avoiding
slap-related injury was also an issue to consider.

MY: What advice do you have for a musician that is approaching *Pendulum III* for
the first time?

DW:

1. Work with the pianist earlier than you might normally. Strategize how to
   communicate and make the first 2/3 of the piece work. Some conducting or
cueing will be needed, but figure out how to do it without disrupting the mood.
   Do this a lot.

2. Practice all multiphonics in isolation. Be very comfortable in producing
   multiphonics immediately when articulated. Some of them are brief, and you want
   each of them to speak clearly so as to produce each written harmony accurately.
3. Practice your slap until your tongue can’t slap anymore … then keep on doing it.
But avoid bloody injuries, or making your tongue too raw in the days just before
the performance.

MY: What is your favorite aspect of performing this music?
DW: My answer may be similar for most of these pieces… Hopefully it’s okay to have
multiple favorite aspects, because I have at least two general themes that I love about Mr.
Mincek’s and Mr. Wubbels’ music.

First of all, I am very appreciative of how wonderfully idiomatic Mr. Mincek’s
piece is. Obviously, he is a saxophonist, so he is able to be sure that his writing works
and I would guess that parts of it may be developed improvisationally, or just overall
through his experience playing the saxophone. The highly technical passages, leaps into
and out of altissimo, the multiphonics, everything he writes just translates well for me on
my saxophone. No time is spent wondering what the composer was hoping for with a
given effect or passage, as it is all very clear and works very easily. The most difficult
technical passages in this music are actually not as difficult as they may initially appear,
as they lay well with the fingers and are written very thoughtfully. It is thrilling to
execute very virtuosic and difficult-sounding passages that are, to me, not as difficult to
play as they might appear on the page at first glance.

Secondly, I love the opportunity the piece gives to play the saxophone without
worrying too much about a classical sound, whatever that might mean to a given player.
During the louder, aggressive parts of this piece, my feeling is that the saxophone should
be played with an aggressive, bright, in-your-face sound that is not necessarily controlled
in the way that one considers their tone when playing other repertoire. My main idea is loud with a saxophone-y sound more akin to a jazz or rock sound than something classical. I’m definitely not thinking about sounding pretty. Or even perfect technique! I, of course, practice and strive for a perfect execution of each written note, but in this circumstance, if I squeak or crack a note, accidentally open slap instead of closed slap, or make some other mistake, it is not a disaster, as long as the overwhelming intensity is being maintained. This freedom to be aggressive, intense, and in your face is very satisfying, and is not something that occurs often in the repertoire that I’ve performed. This wildness can affect an audience deeply as well. My goal is to have mouths agape as they see me red-faced, trying to pin them to the wall with my sound while performing virtuosic, gymnastic leaps and bounds around the saxophone (of course, while perfectly in rhythmic unisons with the pianist, whose arms span the range of the piano, matching the saxophonist’s aggression).

MY: Did you participate in the creation of This is This is This is?

DW: Not the original creation, but I did participate in creating a version for saxophone, piano, and drum set.

MY: Please describe your communications with the composer as This is This is This is was created.

DW: We worked together in rehearsal, as we were in a group together, Athletics. The composition of the percussion part happened entirely in the rehearsal process, and was not notated in a detailed fashion. It was developed via experimentation and discussion.
MY: What are your overall thoughts on *This is This is This is*?

DW: This is probably my favorite work for saxophone. First, conceptually, I admire the work’s engagement with the ideas explored in the later works (and interviews) of David Foster Wallace, who is probably my favorite writer. This piece engages with ideas (see the program note for details or read late interviews, his speech *This Is Water*, and *The Pale King* for more on that) in a more direct, clear, and successful manner than any piece I know of. Perhaps my partiality towards Wallace colors my admiration of the piece and the success of it to some extent. The piece encourages the player to be intensely engaged and vigilant throughout, even while repeating a one-measure figure 50+ times. This should not become comfortable. Each repetition should be executed perfectly, requiring attention to the repetition, transforming the repetition into something sacred (to paraphrase and interpret (probably badly) parts of the program note and Wallace).

Unison, concentration, and attention. Part of this attention is brought about by the need to count through each repetition. To not get lost. To listen to the players with whom you are performing to ensure that the cycles of each measure are consistent in intensity, balance, and tightness. A successful performance of this piece feels beautiful and satisfying. It feels like a bonding experience for the performers. I’ve felt more while playing this piece than any other music.

I love that the piece is over twenty minutes long. So many works that I play are six to twelve minutes long. The weighty subject matter and the material of this piece call for something more, and the piece delivers, clocking in at over twenty minutes long.
And wow, the creativity in the saxophone and piano writing. Every sound in the piece is to me, interesting, exciting, perfect. It’s idiomatic for the saxophone. It’s surely idiomatic for the pianist (considering Mr. Wubbels is an incredible pianist)!

For me, there’s nothing like this piece in the repertoire. I will find as many opportunities as I can to play it for new audiences for the rest of my career. The passages are natural to my fingers. It never gets old. I could go on and on…

**MY: When learning the work, what were the biggest challenges?**

**DW:** One theme in Mr. Wubbels’ music is ensemble virtuosity (to me at least). Leaving an audience amazed at the players playing so perfectly together, such complicated music, rhythmically, technically, all aspects. Ensemble virtuosity cannot be achieved without hours and hours spent working together, forming a natural understanding of the players with whom you collaborate.

The piece appears to be prohibitively demanding technically, but it is so idiomatic and lays so well for the fingers that it is not as hard as one might think at first approach. The two biggest challenges in the piece, for me, were slap-tongue endurance during the repeated quintuplets (48-75x, followed by 24-36x), and the section that begins with repeated altissimo G#s and culminates with very fast, repeated, technically demanding *tutti* runs. This lick and variations of the lick are pretty hard and just required tons of practice to execute accurately alone. Then, playing it with others requires more work. But, goddamn, does it sound great when it’s played perfectly.

**MY: What makes this work unique to perform?**
DW: So many things, but I guess I’ll focus on the various instrumentations with which I’ve played it. The piece is written for two alto saxophones playing in unison, with piano. It can also be performed as a solo saxophonist with piano. And as stated, I’ve performed a version we developed for saxophone, piano, and drum set. I have performed it the most times as a solo saxophonist with piano, however I would encourage players to always try to add a third saxophonist. The piece sounds much better with two saxophones, and the idea of unison, concentration, and attention is much more obvious, more virtuosic, and affecting this way.

I am not sure if the piece will be done again with drums (at least, not exactly as we did), as I don’t believe Mr. Wubbels has plans to codify what we played into a drum part. Perhaps he’ll authorize other groups to develop their own version with drums, but I don’t know. In any case, I thoroughly enjoyed that version as well.

Another thing that makes it unique is the intense concentration needed to count through the repeats. It is best to count through them, but the composition is kind to the mistakes that can occur, and gives clearly audible cues in order to get out of many of the longer repeats. Group cueing is also useful or acceptable at times. However, it is most successful when the audience is sucked into a loop that keeps going and going, and then is jarred from this cycle without anticipating it because of physical cues from the performers.

MY: What advice do you have for a musician that is approaching This is This is This is for the first time?
DW: Lots of rehearsal, especially on transitions from repeated bar to repeated bar, tempo changes, and rhythmic precision. Listening helped me, but shouldn’t be overly relied upon. Ensemble virtuosity cannot be accomplished without dedication and time spent to develop an understanding and complete comfort with your collaborators.

**MY: What is your favorite aspect of performing This is This is This is?**

DW: Similar to *Pendulum III* answer, the piece does not require a beautiful tone, but is more successful with a bit more of a wild, open, abrasive sound that fits well with the material of the saxophone part.

I love everything about performing this piece. I think that it can transport an audience to a place that most contemporary music for saxophone does not come close to doing. The piece is significantly longer than the average piece on most contemporary music concerts, at least the ones I play on, but usually after the concert, a common audience response is that they didn’t realize how long it was, and that they could have enjoyed it for a significantly longer period of time.

**MY: Did you participate in the creation of Axamer Folio?**

DW: Yes, as a part of the consortium headed by Patchwork.

**MY: Please describe your communications with the composer as Axamer Folio was created.**

DW: I did not communicate about the logistics of the commission.
MY: Did you meet with the composer during the compositional process of *Axamer Folio*? If so, please describe that event.

DW: Yes. I was working with Mr. Wubbels in Athletics while he composed this piece. He had me try some licks out and experiment a bit before and after rehearsals to be sure his ideas worked, or to find patterns that fit what he was looking for. Mr. Wubbels has a strong understanding of the saxophone, so unlike other composers who have simply asked me to sort of improvise or show them the cool things a saxophone can do; Mr. Wubbels comes with developed ideas, fingerings, and goals, and we figure out if they work, or develop solutions for any ideas that might not yet be fully figured.

MY: What are your overall thoughts on *Axamer Folio*?

DW: The idea of creating a modular work, so that each group in the consortium can create their own version of a work was incredibly creative. I love leaving some creativity (and thinking to do) to the performers, and allowing for all kinds of creative combinations of the various movements is something I hadn’t seen before, at least not on this large of a scale. I have not heard a recording of the performances yet, nor have I performed it, so my thoughts on this are not fully developed.

MY: When learning *Axamer Folio*, what were the biggest challenges?

DW: The saxophone part is pretty difficult, but as in all of Eric’s music, highly idiomatic. The material is re-used and re-purposed from movement to movement, so once one learns a few of the difficult pieces of material, it is useful for large portions of the piece. I have
not yet put this together with a drummer, but I imagine that it is very challenging to put together as an ensemble.

**MY:** Have you participated in the creation of any other works by Mincek or Wubbels?

**DW:** Mr. Wubbels won a Barlow Endowment for Music Composition grant to write a new work for my reed quintet, Splinter Reeds.

**MY:** Please describe your communications with the composer as this new work was created.

**DW:** Being close collaborators, I simply asked him if he might be interested in writing for Splinter, and he said yes. We then searched for grants, and got one. The piece is currently being written.

**MY:** Did you meet with the composer during the compositional process? If so, please describe that event.

**DW:** Yes. While many composers like to say they want to collaborate closely, I’ve found that many do not come through, as scheduling can be difficult, organizing travel, etc. However, Mr. Wubbels traveled to San Francisco to meet with Splinter Reeds during one of our rehearsal/performance periods. We met at least three times to develop material that he will use for the piece.

Mr. Wubbels came to the sessions very well-prepared, with some clear sketches, architecture, and ideas that he wanted to explore. He started by having individual sessions
with each player in the group, to explore sounds that he was thinking about, to see both what they sound like and how the players feel about them, and to experiment. He was more knowledgeable about some instruments (like saxophone) than others (double reeds) so he spent longer working with the double reeds.

In my session, he had some fingering patterns, multiphonics, and ideas from things he had heard that he wanted me to attempt. We spent approximately 30 minutes making all kinds of raucous sounds. When we found things he particularly liked, he attentively noted fingerings, discussed notation, etc.

The third meeting involved the full quintet, and we began putting together sounds that he’d worked out with all five players. He had some specific sketches, and would adjust on the fly. He recorded all of these sessions for his use during the composing process.

These were some of the best-organized meetings I’ve had with a composer. He had clear ideas and goals, and we worked out some material that will be translated into his fully-composed version of the work, due in August, to be premiered this October.
Matt Younglove: Did you participate in the creation of the mentioned work(s)?

Eliot Gattegno: I participated in the creation of *Pendulum III, Nucleus*, and *This is This is This is.*

**MY:** Please describe your communications with the composer as the work was created.

**EG:** We worked together extensively in person throughout the creation of the pieces. We would also communicate via phone and e-mail as follow-ups.

**MY:** Did you meet with the composer during the compositional process? If so, please describe that event.

**EG:** Yes, we met numerous times throughout the creation of these works. As Alex is a saxophonist, he knew what he wanted to do. I helped idiomatically and incorporated new techniques that I had developed. I also helped with notation and expanded his vocabulary and knowledge of what classically-trained saxophonists would expect or do.

Eric and I worked together extensively for the creation of *This is This is This is.* Because we performed as a duo for many years, we lived, traveled, rehearsed, and performed together. We were and are close personal and professional friends. That’s an ideal situation, and we had it. We would both challenge each other in various aspects of life. *This is This is This is* is a result of that. It incorporates a lot of the techniques I was working on at the time. We decided to do it as a trio with two saxophonists playing in
unison as a result of a conversation that went something like “Wouldn’t it be ridiculous if _______?” We filled in the blank with the unison idea. This shows Eric’s desire to listen, learn from performers, and try things even when he isn’t sure what the result will be.

**MY:** What are your overall thoughts on the works?

EG: I love the works overall. They were challenging but never frustrating.

**MY:** When learning the works, what were the biggest challenges?

EG: Endurance and focus.

**MY:** What makes these works unique to perform?

EG: They are works to be performed and to be experienced. There is something ceremonial about them.

**MY:** What advice do you have for a musician that is approaching this work for the first time?

EG: Learn them in chunks because that is how they were created. Then put the pieces together as you would a puzzle.

**MY:** What is your favorite aspect of performing this music?

EG: As I said before, it is an experience, one like none other.
Email Interview with Gregory Beyer (response received July 27, 2016)

Matt Younglove: What are your overall thoughts on the saxophone works of Alex Mincek?

Gregory Beyer: I have only played Nucleus. It is idiomatic and very engaging to perform. It is generally successful with audiences, too.

MY: When learning Nucleus, what were the biggest challenges?

GB: I built a click track to help with the changing meters and repetitions.

MY: What makes Nucleus unique to perform?

GB: It is really fun to count a hundred repetitions on a single bongo! It is also not so common to play a really great drum set part that is (nearly) fully through-composed.

MY: What advice do you have for a musician that is approaching Nucleus for the first time?

GB: Take the figures one at a time and allow each gesture to become a part of your body. Memorize as much of the work as possible to allow it to feel more in the moment and improvised. Definitely work with a click track until the meter changes and repetitions become second nature.

MY: What is your favorite aspect of performing Nucleus?

GB: The music itself is compelling. I enjoy the rhythmic verve and drive of the piece and,
for the drummer, it is incredibly rewarding to be inside the sound of the tenor saxophone. I know both Eric and Alex personally. I attended MSM with Alex and know him as both a jazz performer and an excellent composer with a unique voice. I appreciate how his personal connection to both jazz and the physical nature of playing the tenor saxophone with a solid command and a spirit of exploration of timbre have lent much to the vocabulary and the spirit of this piece…and much of his music, actually.
APPENDIX C. EXTENDED TECHNIQUES RESOURCE GUIDES

Matthew Younglove

This resource is designed as a guide for the learning the works referenced in this document, and the ideas present in this guide are largely from the author. The fingerings graphics are generated from an online resource created by Bret Pimentel.196 The suggested fingerings come from a multitude of sources: some from the composers, some from external resources, and others from the author of this document. The notes are intended as helpful suggestions determined through research, study, and rigorous practice of each technique. The opinions of the author expressed in the notes of the below sections are not reflections of the opinions of the composers of the works, and these appendices do not serve as definitive how-to guides for each technique. Consultation of the texts referenced in this section by Marcus Weiss197 and Jean-Marie Londeix,198 among others, is strongly suggested by the author.

Extended Techniques Resource for *Pendulum III*

**Slap Tongue**

The slap tongue is a percussive articulation technique, often compared to the pizzicato articulation used by string instrumentalists. There are three main variants of the slap tongue: the standard slap, the secco slap, and the open slap. The standard slap is has a clear pitch and percussive attack. The secco slap is mostly devoid of pitch (no air enters the instrument). The open slap requires a removal of the embouchure, where “the embouchure is opened abruptly and completely at the moment of attack producing a strong, percussive, truncated, forceful sound.”

The type of slap chosen in the music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels requires careful consideration. The open slap is typically indicated with a unique symbol (').'</p>

But the difference between the secco slap and the standard slap is subtle, and exists along a spectrum of variation rather than two isolated points. The appropriate balance of pitch and attack must be delicately weighed against the purpose of the musical example. It is the author’s opinion that in a work with percussion, the technique should aim to explore the similarities between the slap tongue and the natural percussion sound (whichever instrument with which it may be paired). This can also be inferred through Mincek’s writing of the effect in *Nucleus*, where the slap tongue is used as a direct comparison to a muted china cymbal crash (discussed in detail later in this appendix). In a work with piano, it may have a different function. Exploring all possibilities gives a performer the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding his or her interpretation.

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In *Pendulum III*, the slap tongue technique can be found as early as measure 1 (see below). Mincek’s purpose for using this articulation was to de-emphasize pitch\textsuperscript{200} so the author recommends that the saxophonist explore a secco-style slap tongue.

\*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 1

\textsuperscript{200} Alex Mincek, interview by the author, January 18, 2016, interview 1, transcript.
**Quartertones**

Alex Mincek uses microtonal pitches to explore the natural beating that occurs between these tunings. Mincek uses quartertones, or notes halfway in between an adjacent half-step. A piano that has been tuned using equal temperament tuning system cannot produce these pitches. While the saxophone was not designed to play resonant quartertones, they can be produce using non-traditional fingering combinations. This resource serves to provide fingering suggestions from available resources in addition to some suggested fingerings provided by the author, discovered through experimentation. It is important to note that differences in individual horns can have a drastic impact on microtonal fingerings, so this resource can be used as a launching point rather than a final destination in one’s discover of possible fingering choices. All instances are shown and referred to in written pitch.

**E quartertone flat 5**

* this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 2

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202 Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 28.
D quartertone sharp 5

\[ \text{D quartertone sharp 5} \]

* this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 9

F quartertone flat 6

\[ \text{F quartertone flat 6} \]

* this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 12

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203 Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 28.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
207 Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 29.
208 Ibid.
E quartertone sharp 5

*Saxophone part, measure 58

F quartertone sharp 5

*Saxophone part, measure 96

211 Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 28.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
A quartertone flat 5

\[ \text{\small 224} \]

\[ \text{* this example is in treble clef} \]

Saxophone part, measure 143

A quartertone sharp 5

\[ \text{\small 224} \]

\[ \text{* this example is in treble clef} \]

Saxophone part, measure 151

\[ \text{\small 224} \]

\[ \text{\small 215} \] Weiss and Netti, *The Techniques of Saxophone Playing*, 23
\[ \text{\small 216} \] Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 28.
\[ \text{\small 217} \] Ibid.
\[ \text{\small 218} \] Ibid.
\[ \text{\small 219} \] Ibid.
\[ \text{\small 220} \] Ibid.
Multiphonics

Multiphonics (also referred to as *simultaneous sounds*²²¹) are produced when the normal sequential fingerings of the saxophone are disrupted, creating an acoustic scenario that produces two or more tones. Each requires a specific fingering, and often these must be adjusted on an individual basis to obtain the desired sound. In many cases, the embouchure must be manipulated in order to obtain the desired sound, sometimes taking in more or less mouthpiece and/or adjusting the oral cavity shape to get the correct response of all notes involved. Pedagogue Jean-Marie Londeix writes that multiphonics “are affected by the mouthpiece and reed used, and also by the make and model of the instrument itself. The performer practices and is trained to correct the variables.”²²² The fingerings provided in this appendix are compiled from the scores of the mentioned works, supplemented by consulting available saxophone treatises and additional suggestions found to be successful by the author. Successful execution of saxophone multiphonics is a deeply personal endeavor, largely dependent upon the individual, and the author’s suggestions may not work for every individual.

²²¹ Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 31.
²²² Ibid.
* this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 5

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

- B quartertone sharp 4
- C quartertone sharp 5
- D quartertone sharp 5
- C#6
Saxophone part, measure 18

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

D quartetone flat 5, E quartetone flat 5

Notes: A slightly sharp D6 can sneak its way into this multiphonic. The author found it easiest to execute this multiphonic by starting with the D quartetone flat 5 and raising the tongue within the mouth only enough to allow the E quartetone flat 5 to speak.
Saxophone part, measure 39

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

D5, E6

Notes: The author found the second fingering option (indicated \textit{ossia}) to contain incorrect pitch material.

\textsuperscript{223} This fingering provided by the author.
*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 92

Fingering(s):

A4, B flat 5, F 6 (out-of-tune, slightly flat)

This fingering provided by the author.
Saxophone part, measure 115

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

\[ \text{A}\#4, \text{B}_5, \text{F} \text{ quartertone sharp 6} \]

Notes: Both the low C key and low Bb key are notated in the score as optional keys, to be added or subtracted based on the response and intonation subtleties of your instrument. The author found that adding both optional keys tend to raise the pitch of the B5 to a C5, but makes the multiphonic more responsive.
Saxophone part, measure 162

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

C6, E6

Notes: The author found this multiphonic fingering to produce the correct interval of a major 3\textsuperscript{rd}, but almost an entire half-step higher than indicated in the pitch material of the score, resulting in a slightly flat C\#6 and a slightly flat E\#6.
Saxophone part, measure 164

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

E5, C6

Notes: The author found that without the use of the octave key, there was a low note present (E quartertone flat 4) that distorted the desired interval and harmonic content.
**Growling/Singing While Playing**

“It is possible to sing while playing the saxophone, within the respective individual vocal range. . .The sound of “singing” while playing resembles more of a buzzing in the throat and head area. . .To achieve a balanced dynamic between instrument and voice, one must play *p* to *mf* and “sing” *f*. If this balance of presence in the two-voiced counterpoint is not achieved, then the result has the effect of a rough coloration similar to the distortion of electronically modified sounds. This appears to be the main aspect of this technique.”

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*Saxophone part, measure 194*

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Harmonic Glissando

The harmonic glissando is a newer extended technique, with no specific mention in the Londeix and Weiss/Netti treatises on saxophone extended techniques. In an email communication with the author, Alex Mineck references a similar technique, referred to as a lip glissando, by bass clarinetist Michael Lowenstern. In a reference video on YouTube, Lowenstern describes the proper way to execute this technique: “You play one of the lowest notes you have, and then drop [your] jaw to release all pressure keeping [your] mouth on the mouthpiece… then, once the note is split, [which] feels kind of fun in your mouth, it almost tickles to play, then you move your tongue backwards in your mouth to play the different partials.”

\[ \text{\textit{this example is in treble clef}} \]

Saxophone part, measure 200

Notes: Much like Lowenstern’s description, Mineck chooses fundamental low B for this technique. As Lowenstern describes, you need to “Play the note, drop the jaw until the note splits, move your tongue back and forth.”

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227 Ibid.
Extended Techniques Resource for *Nucleus*

**Slap Tongue** (see technique description on page 219)

In *Nucleus*, the slap tongue technique is used to explore the overlapping sound worlds of the saxophone and the drumset. In measure one (see below), the slapped F#6 in the tenor saxophone is written against muted china cymbal hits. The slap tongue should be executed in a manner that matches as closely to the china cymbal as possible. Additionally, rehearsal time should be devoted to finding similar attacks, timbres, and durations in this section.

*Nucleus*, measure 1

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Saxophone part, measure 1} \\
\text{Notes: Match the sound of the china cymbal, in both attack and resonance.}
\end{align*}
\]
**Multiphonics** – (see technique description on page 225)

All fingerings provided in this section come from the score, unless otherwise indicated. Fingering charts are provided as a supplement to the composer’s non-standard notation found within the score.

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 38

Fingering(s):

Notes: This multiphonic is also known as Weiss/Netti #64,\(^{228}\) listed as containing the written pitches C#5 and E6 (slightly sharp). The author found the above fingering to generate pitch material that deviates from what is listed in the Weiss manuscript, and to contain a C#5 and D6.

---

\(^{228}\) Weiss and Netti, *The Techniques of Saxophone Playing*, 100.
Saxophone part, measure 39

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

Bb4, B5, F quartertone sharp 6

Notes: This multiphonic is also known as Weiss/Netti #31. This resource suggests that the low C can be added as an optional key.229
*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 39

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

A4, Bb5, F quartertone flat 6

Notes: This multiphonic is also known as Weiss/Netti #26. 230

Saxophone part, measure 53

Fingering(s):

Notes: The first fingering provided is from the score; this multiphonic is also known as Weiss/Netti #31. Weiss provides an option of adding the low C—this is notated in the second fingering option—providing a suitable alternative that provides approximately the same pitch material while being more responsive. The trill A key (Ta) (shown in the third fingering) may be substituted for finger 2 due to its placement on the body of the saxophone, resulting in the third fingering option. The note that follows this multiphonic is a low Bb, which the author found more technically feasible using the third fingering option, utilizing the Ta key in place of opening finger 2.

---

231 From the score.
232 Londeix, Street, and Street, Hello! Mr. Sax, 36.
Saxophone part, measure 76

Fingering(s):

*this example is in treble clef

Notes: Mincek’s preference for idiomatic technique and natural harmonics of the instrument suggests using his indicated fingering choices over the resultant pitch material. The fingering selection (adding “low C” to the natural fingering for F5) dictated the notated pitch material of the multiphonic, so an alternate fingering should be avoided despite notated pitch variations.
*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measures 74-75

Fingering sequence:

Notes: Mincek’s preference for idiomatic technique and natural harmonics of the instrument suggests using his indicated fingering choices over the resultant pitch material. The fingering sequence should generate a unique multiphonic sound on each notated pitch. Some are easier to sound than others.
Saxophone part, measure 96

Fingering(s):

*this example is in treble clef

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

C#5, D6

Notes: The bottom note of this multiphonic is C#5. The above screenshot does not capture the accidental that carries through from the beginning of the measure.
Saxophone part, measure 142

Fingering sequence:

Notes: Due to the depressed low C key, the notated D5 in this excerpt will result in a low C fingering with the octave key added (see third fingering in the sequence above). It will result in a harmonic that sounds a G5, matching the pitch but not the timbre of its neighbor tones. The last note will result in a multiphonic, which Mincek notates with “(MP).”
Saxophone part, notated measure 159 (unmetered end section)

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

C6, E6

Notes: This multiphonic is also known as Weiss/Netti #70. The author found the resultant pitch material to vary from the notated pitches, instead producing C#6 and E6.

---

Alternate Fingerings/Harmonics

The saxophone is a harmonically-rich instrument, and the spectrum of the saxophone’s tone includes both the odd and even harmonics from the overtone series. With careful practice, various overtones can be isolated through manipulation of the vocal tract and position of the back of the tongue. This, in essence, is also achieved through the saxophone’s octave key mechanism, venting at or near a node to produce a higher harmonic. When “harmonics” as an extended technique are indicated by the composer, it often implies a less-clear, airy tone. As Weiss explains, “a sound with a typical ‘harmonic quality’ on the saxophone could be described as somewhat less centered, ‘more airy’, also more colorless.” Mincek’s use aligns with Weiss’s description above.

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 13

Fingering:

---

Notes: This passage is improvisatory, and the performer should aim for exploring the overtone series of fundamental written Bb3 (all keys closed) while maintaining an air sound as the primary timbre. The overtones are present within the air sound and can be isolated/extracted by changes in the vocal tract and the position of the back of the tongue.

Saxophone part, third loop after notated measure 107 (non-metered section)

Fingering options:

Notes: This is a harmonic tone. Chose the fingering that provides correct intonation and ease of response.
*this example in treble clef

Saxophone part, notated measure 110 (non-metered section)

Fingering options:

Notes: This is a harmonic tone. Chose the fingering that provides correct intonation and ease of response.
**Growling/Singing While Playing** (see description on page 233)

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 105

Fingering(s):

A6       Ab6

Notes: Singing while playing in this register is particularly demanding. The chosen pitch to be sung should be in the vocal range where the altissimo notes will also respond. Although different from person to person, this often necessitates singing in the higher tessitura of the human voice.
**Air Sounds**

Air is a fundamental component in the sound production of any wind instrument. In the normative saxophone tone, an audible air sound is to be avoided. In contemporary music, this sound can be explored for varied timbres and textures. Weiss states that “air sounds can be produced in most varied ways and in all registers of the saxophone… even just blowing air into the tube without creating a tone results in such air sound. This is usually difficult to hear and not very distinct, but it can be reinforced by forming consonants in the oral cavity.”236 Alex Mincek explores air sounds in *Nucleus* in this manner, often providing a consonant sound to dictate the desired oral cavity shape. ‘FT,’ ‘T,’ ‘H,’ and ‘F’ are all provided consonants (see measures 60-65). These air sounds should be made without the mouthpiece being removed from the mouth. When no consonant is provided, the performer should aim for as pure an air sound as possible, fingering the notated pitch. When no pitch level is notated, the performer should finger the lowest possible pitch to provide the most resonant tube length for air sound, maximizing its directionality through the bell of the saxophone. Below are some examples of this effect found in *Nucleus*.

![Saxophone part, measure 28](image)

**Notes:** This air sound technique is combined with the flutter-tongue effect.

---

Saxophone part, measure 54

Notes: This is an articulated air sound. The performer should articulate as normal, but not producing a tone.

Saxophone part, measures 60-62

Notes: Use the indicated consonant shapes inside the mouth to provide timbral variety to the air sounds.
Notes: Use the indicated consonant shapes inside the mouth to provide timbral variety to the air sounds.
**Out-Of-Sequence Fingerings**

The out-of-sequence fingerings are a technique where a tone hole is vented in the upper stack of the horn, impacting all of the tones below it due to the disruption of the “proper” sequence of the fingering system. It produces an unpredictable sequence of subtle gradations of pitch, uncorrelated with the normalized fingering sequence. With the exception of the vented key, the fingerings are normal patterns on the saxophone, creating a unique sound world while maintaining idiomatic saxophone technique.

![Example in treble clef](image)

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 22

Fingering Sequence:

![Fingering Diagram](image)

Notes: The resultant sound will not reflect the contour of the notated material.
Other/Miscellaneous

*Saxophone part, measure 18

Notes: This trill is executed by playing the notated pitch (A) and adding/removing the C3 key (notated as “side E” by the composer). It produces a trill between the notes A4 and D quartertone sharp 5.

*Saxophone part, measure 41

Fingering(s):  

Front E  Front F  Front F# (option 1)  Front F# (option 2)

Notes: This passage is most idiomatic when executed with the front-key fingerings for E6, F6, and F#6. Multiple fingerings are provided for intonation subtleties.
E quartertone sharp 5

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 77

Fingering(s):

Notes: Although there are three fingering options above, the third is the best choice when considering the composer’s preference for idiomatic fingerings.

---

238 Londeix, Street, and Street, *Hello! Mr. Sax*, 28.
239 Ibid.
Saxophone part, second looped section of notated measure 107 (non-measured section)

Fingering(s):

```
\[\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} \\
\text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} \\
\text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} \\
\text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} \\
\text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} \\
\text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} & \text{\textbullet} \\
\end{array}\]
```

\(C4\) \hspace{1cm} \(Eb4\)

Notes: This tremolo between written C4 and Eb4 is problematic if the traditional fingerings are attempted. The composer provides an alternate fingering for Eb4, based on the C4 fingering, which produces a less resonant tone yet facilitates a more idiomatic technical flow.
Saxophone part, measure 118

Fingering(s):

D7        Trill Fingering

Notes: Although many options exist for this timbral trill on altissimo D7, the author suggests using the X key and adding finger 4 to minimize the pitch change while maximizing the timbre change. If pitch is to low on the X key, you can add Ta and/or Tc to assist in raising the pitch.
*this example is in treble clef*

Saxophone part, second looped section of notated measure 110 (non-metered section)

Fingering(s):

```
C#5    E5
```

**Notes:** Although the pitches written are C#5 and E5, the fingering that the composer provides does not provide the same pitch material (the E5 ends up closer to an Eb5 when using the C3/side E key). Mincek’s predisposition for idiomatic fingerings over resultant pitches suggests that the performer use the suggested fingering for it’s desired sonic effect than stress the exactness of the notated pitch in this instance.
Extended Techniques Resource for This is This is This is

It is important to note a significant measure number discrepancy between the score and the saxophone part. In the saxophone part, measures 94-99 are notated as repeated 5x, where the score notates out these measures due to subtle changes in the piano part (the saxophone part has the same material all five times). Due to this discrepancy, the measure numbers in this resource reference both the saxophone part and the score for any measures after measure 94.

**Slap Tongue** (see technique description on page 220)

In This is This is This is, the slap tongue technique is often used to provide a percussive contrast to the sounds of the saxophone and piano. An aggressive pitched-slap is the suggestion of the author. The standard symbolic notation can be seen in the example below:

\[ \text{*this example is in treble clef} \]
**Multiphonics** (see technique description on page 225)

Saxophone part, measure 1

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

D4, Bb4, Eb5

**Notes:** This multiphonic is labeled as $M^3$ by the composer at a later point in the work.

The M within a diamond symbolizes a multiphonic.
Saxophone part, measure 11

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

M\(^1\)  E\(_4\), F quarter-tone sharp 5, B\(_5\)

M\(^2\)  F\#4, G\(_5\), C\#6

M\(^3\)  D\(_4\), Bb\(_4\), Eb\(_5\)

Notes: This key within the score provides a nomenclature for the multiphonics employed by the composer. Named M\(^1\), M\(^2\), and M\(^3\), the composer uses these labels as shorthand notation for the desired multiphonics.
this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 94

Fingering:

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

F#4, G5, C#6
*this example is in treble clef*

Saxophone part, measure 75

Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

B quartertone flat 4, C#6 (low/out-of-tune), G6
**Growling/Singing While Playing** (see technique description on page 233)

```
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{saxophone_example1}
\end{center}
```

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 74

Notes: Singing and playing this pitch on the saxophone may not be possible for all vocal ranges. Octave displacement of the sung pitch is acceptable, but the performer should make every attempt to get the proper octave to speak on the saxophone.

```
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{saxophone_example2}
\end{center}
```

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 13

Notes: Wubbels’ indication of “scream” rather than sing implies a more extreme version of the growl. The performer should aim to “scream” the same pitch as notated, while pushing enough air to simultaneously activate the reed. The effect will be harsh, aiding the execution of the $sffz$. 
**Quartertones/Microtones** (see technique description on page 221)

![Musical notation](image)

*This example is in treble clef*

Saxophone part, measure 13

Fingering sequence:

First triplet

Second triplet

Third triplet

Notes: The notated pitches may not perfectly match the resultant pitches of the fingerings provided. The saxophonist should not radically alter the fingerings to get the pitches, as the idiomatic nature of the palm keys and the resultant timbre are the priorities of this passage.
Saxophone part, measure 73

Fingering sequence:

G# quartertone sharp  A  A quartertone sharp  A#  B quartertone flat

Notes: These fingerings are the suggestion of the author, and may need to be modified depending on the make and model of each saxophone. These fingerings were chosen for pitch accuracy with an emphasis on keeping a natural sequence of fingering patterns.
A quartertone flat 5

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 154

Piano score, measure 172

Fingering(s):

Notes: This fingering suggestion, provided by the author, has a covered timbre, making it ideal for hiding within the piano’s sound during this delicate section of the composition. This pitch will directly clash with the pianist’s pitch material; this clashing should be embraced.
Out-of-Sequence Fingerings (see technique description on page 252)

\[\text{\#this example is in treble clef}\]

Saxophone part, measure 74

Fingering sequence:

Notes: Both Mincek and Wubbels compose with the sounds generated by these out-of-sequence fingering patterns. Wubbels refers to these as “Sciarrino scales” in his work *Axamer Folio*, suggesting a development of this idea with external influence. The fingerings provided above are graphic realizations of what is suggested in Wubbels’ notation.
Saxophone part, measure 130

Piano score, measure 148

Fingering sequence:

Notes: This measure combines to extended techniques: slap-tonguing and out-of-sequence fingerings. A secco-style slap is the suggestion of the author, while maintaining enough resonance to hear the subtle pitch variations.
**Harmonic Glissando**

This extended technique is not mentioned in the saxophone treatises currently published during the writing of this document. As notated, this idea is to glissando, or smear, across the harmonic spectrum of fundamental low C#. Unlike some other glissando types, the fingers should not move for this effect. Wubbels explains it as “just a kind of smeared arpeggio down the harmonic series on that fundamental fingering. My understanding is that starting with teeth on the reed just more easily activates the highest partials as a starting point for that gesture in this case.”

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 70

**Notes:** The”teeth on the reed” indication exists as a means of aiding the saxophonist to get the highest possible overtone on fundamental low C#. Sliding the teeth forward in addition to voicing down across the glissando can aid in executing this technique.

---

240 Eric Wubbels, e-mail message to author, November 22, 2016.
**Air Sounds** (see technique description on page 249)

*Saxophone part, measure 4*

**Notes:** The performer should strive for the most amount of air sound while maintaining a faint presence of the notated pitch. The air sound in the alto saxophone(s) is mirrored with the prepared notes in the piano.

*Saxophone part, measure 87*

**Notes:** Despite the note head notation showing a clear switch between a clear tone and air sound, the underlying instructions indicate that the sound is to transition smoothly from a clear pitch to an air sound, culminating in a *decrescendo to niente*. The performer should strive for a smooth transition, where the tone fades away into an airier sound, while maintaining clarity of articulation (as indicated with the *staccato* notation).
**Other/Miscellaneous**

*Saxophone part, measure 14*

**Fingerings suggestions:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A#6</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>C#7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** This passage presents a tremolo/trill over notes in the altissimo register. Mincek indicates that the tremolo/trill must be executed with the C5 key regardless of what note is being played, resulting in a slightly varied tremolo/trill top pitch. The fingerings above are suggestions from the author, chosen for technical facility and intonation accuracy while leaving free the C5 key for the execution of the tremolo/trill. The performer should strive for an even tremolo/trill while simultaneously executing the changing pitches underneath. The author utilizes finger 5 for the tremolo/trill key (C5).
Notes: For the *bisbigliando*, the performer should choose a key that most changes the timbre of the altissimo B6 without modifying it’s pitch. The open circle-closed circle notation is commonly used to indicate the alternation between an open and resonant fingering and a closed, covered fingering.

*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 72
*this example is in treble clef

Saxophone part, measure 106

Score, measure 124

Fingerings suggestions (first three notes):

G#6       G6        F#6

Notes: The first three notes of this passage are in the lowest range of the alto saxophone’s altissimo register, a cumbersome range for technical clarity. Choices must often be made for response and technical facility. Often the most facile fingering combinations have response issues, and while the fingerings that provide ease of response present technical challenges. The fingerings above, suggestions of the author, are one possible combination that creates simplicity of technical facility.
A notation key is provided by Eric Wubbels as a part of the score for *Axamer Folio*. This key (shown below) highlights many of the techniques used in the many pieces that contained within the work. This guide exclusively focuses on the techniques shown in the key below.

*Axamer Folio Notation Key*
**Multiphonics** (see technique description on page 225)

Fingering(s):

\[ \begin{align*}
\bullet & \\
\bullet & \\
\bullet & \\
\bullet & \\
\circ & \\
\bullet & \\
\bullet & \\
\end{align*} \]

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

F#4, G5, C quartertone sharp 6
*this example is in treble clef

Fingering(s):

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<tr>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Fingering Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Fingering Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Fingering Diagram" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E4, F5, C6</td>
<td>Eb5, G6, Db6 (slightly flat)</td>
<td>C#5, D5, D6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The three multiphonics in the image above are related by a fingering sequence, but produce different resultant pitches and pitch ranges. Their similarities provide for an idiomatic flow between these otherwise complex techniques.
Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

B4, D5, C quartertone sharp 6
Fingering(s):

Pitches contained within (written pitches):

Notes: This multiphonic is also known as Weiss/Netti #66.241

---

**Spectral Vibrato**

The technique of “spectral vibrato” is not a technique frequently referenced in saxophone pedagogy. The premise of this technique is to produce a sound where the vibrato is so wide that it causes a spreading, or smearing, across the harmonic spectrum.

This technique is explained by Noa Even:

> For the wide, spectral vibrato on fundamental low Bb, I relax my embouchure and lower my jaw quite a bit for the vibrato. I don't necessarily voice for any of the harmonics at the louder dynamics, but assume that they'll come out if I shoot for a spread sound. The extreme width of the vibrato produces a raunchy tone at the loud dynamics. When the marking appears at softer dynamics and slower tempos, I slow down the vibrato and voice more. The sound is breathy or whispy. This matches well with superball mallet effects and ringing cymbals.  

Much experimentation is needed to fully discover and develop comfort with this technique.

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242 Noa Even, e-mail message to author, September 1, 2016.
**Decoupling Staff**

This notation, unique to Wubbels, is for an effect where the saxophonist’s embouchure and fingers are no longer working as one, but playing sounds in counterpoint. While the saxophonist’s fingers are performing the notes as notated in the bottom staff, the saxophonist is using her/his embouchure to create the air sounds as notated in the top staff, resulting in a phasing in and out of the repetitive patterns notated in the bottom staff (see PATSCH score).

**Notation key example**

![Notation Example](image)

**PATSCH, measures 1-2**

![PATSCH Score](image)
**Out-of-Sequence Fingerings** (see technique description on page 252)

In *Axamer Folio*, Wubbels uses the concept of out-of-sequence fingerings through two uniquely-named sub-categories: the “X2 – Circuit” and the “Sciarrino Scales.” Both are variations on the concept explore earlier in this document. Explanations of each can be located in the notes below each image.

Fingering Sequence:

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Notes: The name “X2 – Circuit” is derivative of the fact that this fingering sequence, or circuit, starts with the combination of the X key, or front key, and finger 2. This sequence can be played in its entirety with or without the octave key (notated +/- 8ve key) producing wildly different sounds and contours. The fingerings above include the use of the octave key, so it is important to note both versions as indicated in the image above.
"Scamino scabs"

Fingering Sequence: [-1]

Fingering Sequence: [-2]

Fingering Sequence: [-3]
Notes: Wubbels’ use of the out-of-sequence fingering technique in these “Sciarrino Scale” passages are related by a common theme. One key in the left hand is vented while a chromatic fingering sequence is employed below the vented key. They have a similar sonic effect of subtle pitch variation to the pitch indicated in parentheses above the notation.

**Miscellaneous Articulations**

**Slap Tongue** (see technique description on page 219)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{open step} & \quad \text{ord. step} \\
\text{\( \theta \)} & \quad \text{\( \delta/\varphi \)}
\end{align*}
\]

**Flutter Tongue**

The flutter tongue technique is a timbral effect that resembles a “tremolo on one tone.”\(^{243}\) There are two methods in which this sound is produced: 1) a rolling of the tongue at the front of the mouth resulting in a rolled “rrr” sound, and 2) a rolled “rrr” in the throat, using the uvula against the tongue (also called a “French r”).\(^{244}\) The first method is preferable to the second, but it should be noted that some people are genetically incapable of producing the first kind and must use the second method.

\[
\text{flutter}
\]

---


\(^{244}\) Ibid.
Singing While Playing (see technique description on page 233)

Double-tonguing

The normal articulation on the saxophone can also be referred to as the single-tongue. This is achieved by an area slightly behind the tip of the tongue making gentle contact with the tip of the reed, briefly interrupting its vibration and resulting in an audible interruption to the tone. This is similar to the tongue motion when saying “tuh.”

The double-tongue technique builds upon the single tongue by utilizing an air interrupting technique in the back of the mouth, similar to pronouncing “kuh” or “guh.” When used in alternation, the double-tongue turns the one-stroke single-tongue into a two-stroke motion, emblematic how the tongue moves when vocalizing “tuh-kuh-tuh-kuh.” Perfecting this technique takes much practice, as the “kuh” or “guh” sound uses a part of the tongue that can affect pitch and general response when used incorrectly. This articulation technique was not commonly used by saxophonists until recently (Al Gallodoro and Rudy Wiedoeft are two exceptions). The technique is becoming a normalized articulation for the saxophone in the 21st Century.
Teeth-on-reed

This technique is produced by the teeth being placed on the reed rather than the lower lip which is used in the normalized saxophone embouchure. The resultant sounds are very high tones in the altissimo register, the characteristic of which is dependent upon the dynamic performed. At the piano dynamic, a chirping or soft squeaking results. At the forte dynamic, a shrill squeak results. By shifting the teeth forward and backward, one can manipulate the pitch of this squeaky sound. In the image below, Wubbels notates staccato articulations under a slur with an ascending diagonal line, suggesting that the resultant sound should rise in pitch. By sliding the teeth from a forward to a back position, the pitch will rise in a chirpy, diastematic manner, simultaneously achieving the articulation style emblematic of a staccato under a slur.

Notes: The author found that this technique may irritate sensitive teeth, and suggests using some sort of medical tape or thin protection over the bottom teeth if you encounter this irritation.

Air Sounds (see technique description on page 249)

Notes: Unlike Mincek’s use of this technique, Wubbels does not provide consonant shapes for the mouth to manipulate the timbre of the air sound. Rather, Wubbles uses three distinct pitch ranges: one high, one mid-range, and one low. Each performer may choose her/his desired vocal shape, with respect to the pitch contour as suggested by Wubbels. The resultant differences in the realized sound will be subtle, but are significant.
APPENDIX D. HSRB INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS

Matthew Younglove  
Bowling Green State University  
College of Musical Arts  
DMA 2016

Introduction and Informed Consent Form for Interview with GREGORY BEYER

Research Document: The Saxophone Music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique

(This document is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts)

Dear Greg Beyer,

You are invited to participate in a research study on The Saxophone Music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique in the Department of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University. I will be submitting this research document in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this project. You are henceforth referred to as “interviewee” for the remainder of this document. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as your right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Purpose

This document will examine the compositional style of the music for saxophone by composers Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels through analysis of Mincek’s Pendulum III and Nucleus and Wubbels’ This is This is This is and Answer Folia with an analytical focus on form, repetition (and the reasons for said repetition), and use/function of extended techniques. These analyses will be considered alongside interviews with the composers Mincek and Wubbels, in addition to interviews with performers who have championed their works. The selected works analyzed in this paper represent a large category of works within the two composers’ individual oeuvres that include saxophone, many of which were created through their relationship with the Wet Ink Ensemble. The purpose of this document is to gain insight into the interpretation and performance of these and similar works by both composers by synthesizing each composer’s musical approach, analytical data obtained through score study, personal interviews, and scholarly work about the aesthetics of form, repetition, and pre-existing artistic uses of extended techniques for the saxophone.

Procedure
Step 1: Read, review, and sign informed consent document and return to Matthew Younglove via email at mattyyounglove@yahoo.com.

Step 2: Complete interview questions via email about your experiences in preparing and performing Alex Mincek’s Nucleus, which you performed with saxophonist Ryan Muncy. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than March 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by April 1, 2016.

Step 3: Complete follow up interview questions (if any arise at the discretion of the principle investigator) via email. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than April 13, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by May 1, 2016.

Benefits and Risks

1. This document will directly benefit undergraduate and graduate students studying the saxophone in various music degree programs, as well as applied saxophone faculty at universities and conservatories. The saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbeln grows in popularity each year, and through numerous recordings by esteemed saxophonists it has earned its permanent place in the repertoire for the instrument. They both use some of the same musical elements such as extended techniques (multiphonics, microtonality, slap tonguing, altissimo) and repetition, but despite a surface similarity their goals are quite different. Additionally they have some similar goals with formal elements but very different means of developing a work formally, which make discussion, and comparison, of their works a subject worthy of study. Their similar aesthetic has lead to a frequent pairing of their works on concert programs, further justifying the significance of this research.

2. There are no direct benefits to you (interviewee), and the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

3. This study will request that you answer all questions during the interview as completely as possible, and that you consider any further questions as they may arise following the initial interview.

4. The interview for this project will be over email. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, therefore it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your responses prior to publication in this document. If you would rather choose to meet in person or have a phone conversation, I (Matthew Younglove) will record your answers and generate a transcript following our discussion. Your answers may be included in part in the body of the document; the full answers or transcript will be included in an appendix.

Confidentiality

5. This is not a confidential or anonymous interview. As a participant and the composer and/or performer of the saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbeln, you will be quoted at length, and your answers will appear in full in the appendix. Your name will be included in the published material.
6. Your contact information will not appear in any published material.

7. I will hold all collected data (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, and your written answers) on a separate hard drive until publication. After completing your email responses, it is recommended that you clear your internet browser and delete your page history for your own confidentiality.

**Voluntary Participation**

8. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you.

9. Acceptance or refusal of participation will in no way impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

**Contact Information**

10. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me (Matthew Younglove) at (704) 609-9259, or at mattyyounglove@yahoo.com. I will answer any questions about the study that you have. You may also contact my advisor, John Sampen at (419) 372-2498 or via email at jsampen@bgsu.edu.

11. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or at hrsb@bgsu.edu.

12. You may request a copy of the finished document if you wish. You may also request a copy of the document proposal at any time.

13. You will be provided with and should retain a copy of this consent document for your records.

14. By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the above document, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this study.
I, ( Gregory Beyer) have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

______________________________  _______________________
Participant Signature          Date

Check any that apply:
1) ___ I would like a copy of my interview transcript.
2) ___ I would like a copy of the document proposal.
3) ___ I would like a copy of the finished document.
4) ___ I am willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview.

______________________________  _______________________
Matthew Younglove               Date
Matthew Younglove  
Bowling Green State University  
College of Musical Arts  
DMA 2016  

Introduction and Informed Consent Form for Interview with NOA EVEN

Research Document: The Saxophone Music of Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique

(This document is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts)

Dear Noa Even,

You are invited to participate in a research study on The Saxophone Music of Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique in the Department of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University. I will be submitting this research document in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this project. You are henceforth referred to as "interviewee" for the remainder of this document. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as your right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Purpose

This document will examine the compositional style of the music for saxophone by composers Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels through analysis of Mineck's Pendulum III and Nucleus and Wubbels's This is This is This is and Axmer Foko with an analytical focus on form, repetition (and the reasons for said repetition), and use/function of extended techniques. These analyses will be considered alongside interviews with the composers Mineck and Wubbels, in addition to interviews with performers who have championed their works. The selected works analyzed in this paper represent a large category of works within the two composers' individual oeuvres that include saxophone, many of which were created through their relationship with the Wet Ink Ensemble. The purpose of this document is to gain insight into the interpretation and performance of these and similar works by both composers by synthesizing each composer's musical approach, analytical data obtained through score study, personal interviews, and scholarly work about the aesthetics of form, repetition, and pre-existing artistic uses of extended techniques for the saxophone.

Procedure
Step 1: Read, review, and sign informed consent document and return to Matthew Younglove via email at mattyounglove@yahoo.com.

Step 2: Complete interview questions via email about your experiences in preparing and performing Alex Mincek’s *Nucleus* and Eric Wubbels’s *Axamer Folio* which you performed with percussionist Stephen Klunk. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than March 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by April 1, 2016.

Step 3: Complete follow up interview questions (if any arise at the discretion of the principle investigator) via email. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than April 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by May 1, 2016.

Benefits and Risks

1. This document will directly benefit undergraduate and graduate students studying the saxophone in various music degree programs, as well as applied saxophone faculty at universities and conservatories. The saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels grows in popularity each year, and through numerous recordings by esteemed saxophonists it has earned its permanent place in the repertoire for the instrument. They both use some of the same musical elements such as extended techniques (multiphonics, microtonality, slap tonguing, altissimo) and repetition, but despite a surface similarity their goals are quite different. Additionally they have some similar goals with formal elements but very different means of developing a work formally, which make discussion, and comparison, of their works a subject worthy of study. Their similar aesthetic has lead to a frequent pairing of their works on concert programs, further justifying the significance of this research.

2. There are no direct benefits to you (interviewee), and the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

3. This study will request that you answer all questions during the interview as completely as possible, and that you consider any further questions as they may arise following the initial interview.

4. The interview for this project will be over email. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, therefore it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your responses prior to publication in this document. If you would rather choose to meet in person or have a phone conversation, I (Matthew Younglove) will record your answers and generate a transcript following our discussion. Your answers may be included in part in the body of the document; the full answers or transcript will be included in an appendix.

Confidentiality

5. This is not a confidential or anonymous interview. As a participant and the composer and/or performer of the saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, you will be quoted at length, and your answers will appear in full in the appendix. Your name will be included in
the published material.

6. Your contact information will not appear in any published material.

7. I will hold all collected data (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, and your written answers) on a separate hard drive until publication. After completing your email responses, it is recommended that you clear your internet browser and delete your page history for your own confidentiality.

**Voluntary Participation**

8. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you.

9. Acceptance or refusal of participation will in no way impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

**Contact Information**

10. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me (Matthew Younglove) at (704) 609-3259, or at mattyounglove@yahoo.com. I will answer any questions about the study that you have. You may also contact my advisor, John Sampen at (419) 372-2498 or via email at jsampen@bgsu.edu.

11. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or at hsrb@bgsu.edu.

12. You may request a copy of the finished document if you wish. You may also request a copy of the document proposal at any time.

13. You will be provided with and should retain a copy of this consent document for your records.

14. By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the above document, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this study.
I, (Noa Even) have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature 7/2/16

Date

Check any that apply:

1) ___ I would like a copy of my interview transcript.

2) ___ I would like a copy of the document proposal.

3) ___ I would like a copy of the finished document.

4) ___ I am willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview.

Matthew Younglove 6/16/16

Date
Matthew Younglove  
Bowling Green State University  
College of Musical Arts  
DMA 2016  

Introduction and Informed Consent Form for Interview with ELIOT GATTEGNO

Research Document: The Saxophone Music of Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique

(This document is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts)

Dear Eliot Gattegno,

You are invited to participate in a research study on The Saxophone Music of Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique in the Department of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University. I will be submitting this research document in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this project. You are henceforth referred to as “interviewee” for the remainder of this document. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as your right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Purpose

This document will examine the compositional style of the music for saxophone by composers Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels through analysis of Mineck’s Pendulum III and Nucleus and Wubbels’s This is This is This Is and Vexner Folio with an analytical focus on form, repetition (and the reasons for said repetition), and use/function of extended techniques. These analyses will be considered alongside interviews with the composers Mineck and Wubbels, in addition to interviews with performers who have championed their works. The selected works analyzed in this paper represent a large category of works within the two composers’ individual oeuvres that include saxophone, many of which were created through their relationship with the Wet Ink Ensemble. The purpose of this document is to gain insight into the interpretation and performance of these and similar works by both composers by synthesizing each composer’s musical approach, analytical data obtained through score study, personal interviews, and scholarly work about the aesthetics of form, repetition, and pre-existing artistic uses of extended techniques for the saxophone.

Procedure
Step 1: Read, review, and sign informed consent document and return to Matthew Younglove via email at mattyounglove@yahoo.com.

Step 2: Complete interview questions via email about your experiences in preparing and performing Alex Mincek’s *Nucleus*, Alex Mincek’s *Pendulum III*, and Eric Wubbels’s *This is this is this is*. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than March 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by April 1, 2016.

Step 3: Complete follow up interview questions (if any arise at the discretion of the principle investigator) via email. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than April 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by May 1, 2016.

**Benefits and Risks**

1. This document will directly benefit undergraduate and graduate students studying the saxophone in various music degree programs, as well as applied saxophone faculty at universities and conservatories. The saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels grows in popularity each year, and through numerous recordings by esteemed saxophonists it has earned its permanent place in the repertoire for the instrument. They both use some of the same musical elements such as extended techniques (multiphonics, microtonality, slap tonguing, altissimo) and repetition, but despite a surface similarity their goals are quite different. Additionally they have some similar goals with formal elements but very different means of developing a work formally, which make discussion, and comparison, of their works a subject worthy of study. Their similar aesthetic has lead to a frequent pairing of their works on concert programs, further justifying the significance of this research.

2. There are no direct benefits to you (interviewee), and the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

3. This study will request that you answer all questions during the interview as completely as possible, and that you consider any further questions as they may arise following the initial interview.

4. The interview for this project will be over email. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, therefore it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your responses prior to publication in this document. If you would rather choose to meet in person or have a phone conversation, I (Matthew Younglove) will record your answers and generate a transcript following our discussion. Your answers may be included in part in the body of the document; the full answers or transcript will be included in an appendix.

**Confidentiality**

5. This is not a confidential or anonymous interview. As a participant and the composer and/or performer of the saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, you will be quoted at length, and your answers will appear in full in the appendix. Your name will be included in the published material.
6. Your contact information will not appear in any published material.

7. I will hold all collected data (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, and your written answers) on a separate hard drive until publication. After completing your email responses, it is recommended that you clear your internet browser and delete your page history for your own confidentiality.

**Voluntary Participation**

8. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you.

9. Acceptance or refusal of participation will in no way impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

**Contact Information**

10. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me (Matthew Younglove) at (704) 609-3259, or at mattyounglove@yahoo.com. I will answer any questions about the study that you have. You may also contact my advisor, John Sampen at (419) 372-2498 or via email at jsampen@bgsu.edu.

11. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or at hsrh@bgsu.edu.

12. You may request a copy of the finished document if you wish. You may also request a copy of the document proposal at any time.

13. You will be provided with and should retain a copy of this consent document for your records.

14. By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the above document, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this study.
I, (Elita Gattegno) have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature

Date

Check any that apply:

1) _____ I would like a copy of my interview transcript.

2) _____ I would like a copy of the document proposal.

3) _____ I would like a copy of the finished document.

4) _____ I am willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview.

Matthew Younglove

Date
Matthew Younglove  
Bowling Green State University  
College of Musical Arts  
DMA 2016

**Introduction and Informed Consent Form for Interview with ALEX MINCEK**

Research Document: *The Saxophone Music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique*

(This document is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts)

Dear Alex Mincek,

You are invited to participate in a research study on *The Saxophone Music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique* in the Department of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University. I will be submitting this research document in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this project. You are henceforth referred to as “interviewee” for the remainder of this document. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as your right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Purpose**

This document will examine the compositional style of the music for saxophone by composers Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels through analysis of Mincek’s *Pendulum III* and *Nucleus* and Wubbels’s *This is This is This is This* and *Axmer Folio* with an analytical focus on form, repetition (and the reasons for said repetition), and use/function of extended techniques. These analyses will be considered alongside interviews with the composers Mincek and Wubbels, in addition to interviews with performers who have championed their works. The selected works analyzed in this paper represent a large category of works within the two composers’ individual oeuvres that include saxophone, many of which were created through their relationship with the Wet Ink Ensemble. The purpose of this document is to gain insight into the interpretation and performance of these and similar works by both composers by synthesizing each composer’s musical approach, analytical data obtained through score study, personal interviews, and scholarly work about the aesthetics of form, repetition, and pre-existing artistic uses of extended techniques for the saxophone.

**Procedure**
Step 1: Read, review, and sign informed consent document and return to Matthew Younglove via email at mattyounglove@yahoo.com.

Step 2: Complete in-person interview with Matthew Younglove. Interview will take place on January 18, 2016, at 2:00pm at the Vandoren Artist Studios in New York City, NY (244 W. 54th Street, #612). This interview will take two (2) hours.

Step 3: Following the interview, and transcript will be generated, which will be emailed to you for publication approval by March 1, 2016. Included with this transcript will be follow up questions, which I ask you to complete within 21 days (please return responses by March 21, 2016). The follow up emails will take a maximum of six (6) hours, divided over as many as three (3) email correspondences.

Benefits and Risks

1. This document will directly benefit undergraduate and graduate students studying the saxophone in various music degree programs, as well as applied saxophone faculty at universities and conservatories. The saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels grows in popularity each year, and through numerous recordings by esteemed saxophonists it has earned its permanent place in the repertoire for the instrument. They both use some of the same musical elements such as extended techniques (multiphonics, microtonality, slap tonguing, altissimo) and repetition, but despite a surface similarity their goals are quite different. Additionally they have some similar goals with formal elements but very different means of developing a work formally, which make discussion, and comparison, of their works a subject worthy of study. Their similar aesthetic has lead to a frequent pairing of their works on concert programs, further justifying the significance of this research.

2. There are no direct benefits to you (interviewee), and the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

3. This study will request that you answer all questions during the interview as completely as possible, and that you consider any further questions as they may arise following the initial interview.

4. The interview for this project will be over email. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, therefore it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your responses prior to publication in this document. If you would rather choose to meet in person or have a phone conversation, I (Matthew Younglove) will record your answers and generate a transcript following our discussion. Your answers may be included in part in the body of the document; the full answers or transcript will be included in an appendix.

Confidentiality

5. This is not a confidential or anonymous interview. As a participant and the composer and/or performer of the saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, you will be quoted at length, and your answers will appear in full in the appendix. Your name will be included in the published material.
6. Your contact information will not appear in any published material.

7. I will hold all collected data (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, and your written answers) on a separate hard drive until publication. After completing your email responses, it is recommended that you clear your internet browser and delete your page history for your own confidentiality.

**Voluntary Participation**

8. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you.

9. Acceptance or refusal of participation will in no way impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

**Contact Information**

10. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me (Matthew Younglove) at (704) 609-3259, or at mattyounglove@yahoo.com. I will answer any questions about the study that you have. You may also contact my advisor, John Sampen at (419) 372-2498 or via email at jsampen@bgsu.edu.

11. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or at hsrb@bgsu.edu.

12. You may request a copy of the finished document if you wish. You may also request a copy of the document proposal at any time.

13. You will be provided with and should retain a copy of this consent document for your records.

14. By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the above document, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this study.
I, (Alex Mincek), have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

[Signature] 12/10/16

Participant Signature Date

Check any that apply:

1) ✓ I would like a copy of my interview transcript.

2) ___ I would like a copy of the document proposal.

3) ___ I would like a copy of the finished document.

4) □ I am willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview.

Matthew Younglove 12/18/16

Matthew Younglove Date

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IRBNet ID # 645124
Introduction and Informed Consent Form for Interview with DAVID WEGEHAUPT

Research Document: The Saxophone Music of Alex Minck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique

(This document is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts)

Dear David Wegehaupt,

You are invited to participate in a research study on The Saxophone Music of Alex Minck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique in the Department of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University. I will be submitting this research document in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this project. You are henceforth referred to as “Interviewee” for the remainder of this document. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as your right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Purpose

This document will examine the compositional style of the music for saxophone by composers Alex Minck and Eric Wubbels through analysis of Minck’s Pendulum III and Nucleus and Wubbels’s This is This is This is and Axmer lofty with an analytical focus on form, repetition (and the reasons for said repetition), and use/function of extended techniques. These analyses will be considered alongside interviews with the composers Minck and Wubbels, in addition to interviews with performers who have championed their works. The selected works analyzed in this paper represent a large category of works within the two composers’ individual oeuvres that include saxophone, many of which were created through their relationship with the Wet Ink Ensemble. The purpose of this document is to gain insight into the interpretation and performance of these and similar works by both composers by synthesizing each composer’s musical approach, analytical data obtained through score study, personal interviews, and scholarly work about the aesthetics of form, repetition, and pre-existing artistic uses of extended techniques for the saxophone.

Procedure
Step 1: Read, review, and sign informed consent document and return to Matthew Younglove via email at mattyounglove@yahoo.com

Step 2: Complete interview questions via email about your experiences in preparing and performing Eric Wubbels’s *This is this is this is*, which you performed with the composer at the piano in a newer version including drumset in the group *Athletics*. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than March 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by April 1, 2016.

Step 3: Complete follow up interview questions (if any arise at the discretion of the principle investigator) via email. This will take a maximum of one hour. You will receive these interview questions via email no later than April 15, 2016, and it is asked that you respond to the questions by May 1, 2016.

Benefits and Risks

1. This document will directly benefit undergraduate and graduate students studying the saxophone in various music degree programs, as well as applied saxophone faculty at universities and conservatories. The saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels grows in popularity each year, and through numerous recordings by esteemed saxophonists it has earned its permanent place in the repertoire for the instrument. They both use some of the same musical elements such as extended techniques (multiphonics, microtonality, slap tonguing, altissimo) and repetition, but despite a surface similarity their goals are quite different. Additionally they have some similar goals with formal elements but very different means of developing a work formally, which make discussion, and comparison, of their works a subject worthy of study. Their similar aesthetic has lead to a frequent pairing of their works on concert programs, further justifying the significance of this research.

2. There are no direct benefits to you (interviewee), and the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

3. This study will request that you answer all questions during the interview as completely as possible, and that you consider any further questions as they may arise following the initial interview.

4. The interview for this project will be over email. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, therefore it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your responses prior to publication in this document. If you would rather choose to meet in person or have a phone conversation, I (Matthew Younglove) will record your answers and generate a transcript following our discussion. Your answers may be included in part in the body of the document; the full answers or transcript will be included in an appendix.

Confidentiality

5. This is not a confidential or anonymous interview. As a participant and the composer and/or performer of the saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, you will be quoted at length, and your answers will appear in full in the appendix. Your name will be included in the published material.
6. Your contact information will not appear in any published material.

7. I will hold all collected data (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, and your written answers) on a separate hard drive until publication. After completing your email responses, it is recommended that you clear your internet browser and delete your page history for your own confidentiality.

Voluntary Participation

8. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you.

9. Acceptance or refusal of participation will in no way impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Contact Information

10. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me (Matthew Younglove) at (704) 609-3259, or at mattyounglove@yahoo.com. I will answer any questions about the study that you have. You may also contact my advisor, John Sampen at (419) 372-2498 or via email at jsampen@bgsu.edu.

11. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or at hsrb@bgsu.edu.

12. You may request a copy of the finished document if you wish. You may also request a copy of the document proposal at any time.

13. You will be provided with and should retain a copy of this consent document for your records.

14. By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the above document, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this study.
I, (David Wegchaupt) have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature           Date

Check any that apply:

1) ____ I would like a copy of my interview transcript.

2) ____ I would like a copy of the document proposal.

3) ____ I would like a copy of the finished document.

4) ____ I am willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview.

Matthew Younglove           Date

6/16/2016
Matthew Younglove  
Bowling Green State University  
College of Musical Arts  
DMA 2016

Introduction and Informed Consent Form for Interview with ERIC WUBBELS

Research Document: The Saxophone Music of Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique

(This document is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts)

Dear Eric Wubbels,

You are invited to participate in a research study on The Saxophone Music of Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels: Uses of Form, Repetition, and Extended Technique in the Department of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University. I will be submitting this research document in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this project. You are henceforth referred to as “interviewee” for the remainder of this document. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as your right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Purpose

This document will examine the compositional style of the music for saxophone by composers Alex Mineck and Eric Wubbels through analysis of Mineck’s Pendulum III and Nucleus and Wubbels’s This is This is This is and Axmer Folia with an analytical focus on form, repetition (and the reasons for said repetition), and use/function of extended techniques. These analyses will be considered alongside interviews with the composers Mineck and Wubbels, in addition to interviews with performers who have championed their works. The selected works analyzed in this paper represent a large category of works within the two composers’ individual oeuvres that include saxophone, many of which were created through their relationship with the Wet Ink Ensemble. The purpose of this document is to gain insight into the interpretation and performance of these and similar works by both composers by synthesizing each composer’s musical approach, analytical data obtained through score study, personal interviews, and scholarly work about the aesthetics of form, repetition, and pre-existing artistic uses of extended techniques for the saxophone.

Procedure
Step 1: Read, review, and sign informed consent document and return to Matthew Younglove via email at mattyounglove@yahoo.com

Step 2: Complete in-person interview with Matthew Younglove. Interview will take place on January 18, 2016, at 3:00pm at the Vandoren Artist Studios in New York City, NY (244 W. 54th Street, #612). This interview will take two (2) hours.

Step 3: Following the interview, and transcript will be generated, which will be emailed to you for publication approval by March 1, 2016. Included with this transcript will be follow up questions, which I ask you to complete within 21 days (please return responses by March 21, 2016). The follow up emails will take a maximum of six (6) hours, divided over as many as three (3) email correspondences.

Benefits and Risks

1. This document will directly benefit undergraduate and graduate students studying the saxophone in various music degree programs, as well as applied saxophone faculty at universities and conservatories. The saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels grows in popularity each year, and through numerous recordings by esteemed saxophonists it has earned its permanent place in the repertoire for the instrument. They both use some of the same musical elements such as extended techniques (multiphonics, microtonality, slap tonguing, altissimo) and repetition, but despite a surface similarity their goals are quite different. Additionally they have some similar goals with formal elements but very different means of developing a work formally, which make discussion, and comparison, of their works a subject worthy of study. Their similar aesthetic has lead to a frequent pairing of their works on concert programs, further justifying the significance of this research.

2. There are no direct benefits to you (interviewee), and the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

3. This study will request that you answer all questions during the interview as completely as possible, and that you consider any further questions as they may arise following the initial interview.

4. The interview for this project will be over email. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, therefore it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your responses prior to publication in this document. If you would rather choose to meet in person or have a phone conversation, I (Matthew Younglove) will record your answers and generate a transcript following our discussion. Your answers may be included in part in the body of the document; the full answers or transcript will be included in an appendix.

Confidentiality

5. This is not a confidential or anonymous interview. As a participant and the composer and/or performer of the saxophone music of Alex Mincek and Eric Wubbels, you will be quoted at length, and your answers will appear in full in the appendix. Your name will be included in the published material.
6. Your contact information will not appear in any published material.

7. I will hold all collected data (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, and your written answers) on a separate hard drive until publication. After completing your email responses, it is recommended that you clear your internet browser and delete your page history for your own confidentiality.

Voluntary Participation

8. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you.

9. Acceptance or refusal of participation will in no way impact your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Contact Information

10. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact me (Matthew Younglove) at (704) 609-3259, or at mattyounglove@yahoo.com. I will answer any questions about the study that you have. You may also contact my advisor, John Sampen at (419) 372-2498) or via email at jsampen@bgsu.edu.

11. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or at hsrb@bgsu.edu.

12. You may request a copy of the finished document if you wish. You may also request a copy of the document proposal at any time.

13. You will be provided with and should retain a copy of this consent document for your records.

14. By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the above document, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this study.
I, (Eric Wubbels) have been informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature

Date

Check any that apply:

1) ☒ I would like a copy of my interview transcript.
2) __ I would like a copy of the document proposal.
3) ☒ I would like a copy of the finished document.
4) ☒ I am willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview.

Matthew Younglove

Date
December 2, 2016

Mr. Matthew Younglove
2613 McDowell Street
Farmdale MI 48220

RE: Alex Mincek NUCLEUS (2007), excerpts
    Alex Mincek PENDULUM III (2009), excerpts

Dear Mr. Younglove:

In accordance with your request of November 30, 2016, we hereby grant a non-exclusive license for you to use the above mentioned excerpts in your doctoral dissertation, provided the conditions listed below are satisfied:

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2. Mention will be given us in the prefatory or appendix acknowledgements, if any.

3. This permission is valid providing your doctoral dissertation is completed within one (1) year of the date of this letter.

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Agent for Schott Music Corporation

Accepted and agreed to this 21st day of December, 2016.

By: ________________________________
    Caroline Kane, Vice President

By: ________________________________
    Matthew Younglove
Hi Matt,

Yes, they're both self-published and you have my permission to publish excerpts in your paper.

Answers to your other previous emails coming up...

E

On Mon, Sep 12, 2016 at 4:09 PM, Matt Younglove <mattyounglove@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hi Eric,

I have a couple of questions regarding rights to publish musical examples within my paper. First question, are This is and Axamer Folio self-published? If not, what publishing company are they published through? If they are self-published, may I have your permission to use screenshots of the score for musical examples in the paper?

Thank you,
Matt Younglove, M.M.
Instructor of Saxophone
Director of Athletic Bands
Wayne State University
Detroit, MI

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