

HERBSTLIED

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

Mikel Kuehn, Advisor

*herbstlied* or “autumn song” is a composition for two percussionists, two pianos, and fixed media. This work explores how bipolar disorder and subtle, seasonal light fluctuations can affect one’s emotional state and sense of stability (or lack thereof).

Reconciling ever-fluctuating emotional states with an exploration of timbre and colors, *herbstlied* formally consists of three modal areas, further subdivided into various textural spaces. The distinctions between these modal areas are obfuscated by assigning each player a partition of the composite and slowly interpolating between the modal areas at different rates. The sound of the ensemble is further augmented through the use of a multitude of implements, including glass bottles, EBows, protractors, and various sticks, mallets, and brushes.

Emotional fragility is represented in *herbstlied* through a limited dynamic range of *pppp* – *p* and a slow, nebulous tempo. This nearly constant state of dynamic frailty is punctuated and foiled by two aggressive *ff* outbursts at the end of the work. By filtering out the central bandwidth of the dynamic range, the ensemble is forced to operate between two dynamic poles, gesturally and literally representing a bipolar relationship.

I sincerely hope that *herbstlied* can be my small contribution toward greater mental health awareness and acceptance in the contemporary music and academic communities. Moreover, it is a sincere expression of gratitude to my wife, Autumn, who acts as my emotional ground in the times that I am most intensely affected by the bipolar phenomena explored in this work.

To *mein liebbling*, my baby bug

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Mikel Kuehn, Michael Laurello, and Elaine Lillios, for devoting their time and patience to both overseeing my work and graciously indulging me in many, many questions. Thank you to Joe Klingler for his generous donations and funding of the Klingler Electroacoustic Residency (KEAR). I also owe an additional thanks to the Spring 2021 KEAR guests: Matt Keown, Jeff Stern, Larry Weng, and Yevgeny Yontov of icarus Quartet for their enthusiastic and collaborative spirits.

Thank you to my former teachers and co-workers, Chris Burke, Brad Decker, Stefan Eckert, Dennis Malak, Dan Piccolo, Jamie V. Ryan, and Michael Thompson, for instilling within me the skills, knowledge, work ethic, and ability to ask for help, all of which have brought me to this point. I would also like to thank Chris Biggs, Per Bloland, Keith Kirchoff, Elaine Lillios, and Adam Vidiksis of SPLICE Institute for acting as the accelerant to propel me into the wild world of electroacoustic music and composition.

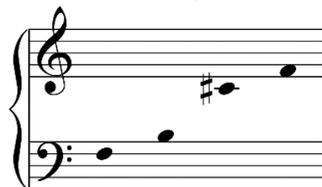
Further thanks must be expressed to my dear friends and colleagues, Laura Stephany Cohen Baskerville, Jacob Braslawce, Dan Brickner, Cheyenne Brickner, Cory Brodack, Sophie Browning, Courtney Boyd, Craig Buckner, Stephen Hennessey, Delanie Molnar, Steven Naylor, and Garrett Tanner whose constant reassurance and advice has been instrumental in the completion of this and many other projects.

Lastly, I would like to express my impassioned gratitude toward my parents, Ben & Mary Damann and Ken & Mandy Frykholm, for their unwavering support, and most importantly my wife, Autumn, for being everything I have ever needed and more.

## INSTRUMENTATION

### Piano 1:

- The lid should be removed
- The following notes should be prepared with Blu Tack:



- The following implements are used throughout the piece:
  - (1) Extra soft yarn mallet
  - (1) Medium rubber mallet
  - (1) Ebow, set to harmonic mode
  - (2) notched sticks
  - (2) small glass bottles, approx. 18.7cl volume
  - (1) guitar pick, thin

### Piano 2:

- The lid should be removed
- The following notes should be prepared with Blu Tack:



- The following implements are used throughout the piece:
  - (1) EBow, set to harmonic mode
  - (2) notched sticks
  - (2) small glass bottles, approx. 18.7cl volume
  - (1) plastic protractor, ruler, or similar

## Percussion 1:

- Instrumentation:

Wood slat 1   Wood slat 2   Wood slat 3   Wood slat 4   Junk Object 1   Junk Object 2

Vibraphone

- The following implements are used throughout the piece:

- (1) bass bow
- (1) thin wooden dowel or chopstick
- (1) thick wooden dowel, wrapped with moleskin
- (2) notched sticks
- (1) bundle stick, “hot rod” or similar
- (1) soft plastic mallet
- (1) medium plastic mallet
- (1) soft rubber mallet
- (1) hard rubber mallet
- (1) extra soft yarn mallet

## Percussion 2:

- Instrumentation:

Low Tom   High Tom   Low Bongo   High Bongo   Junk Object 1   Junk Object 2

Marimba

8<sup>va</sup>

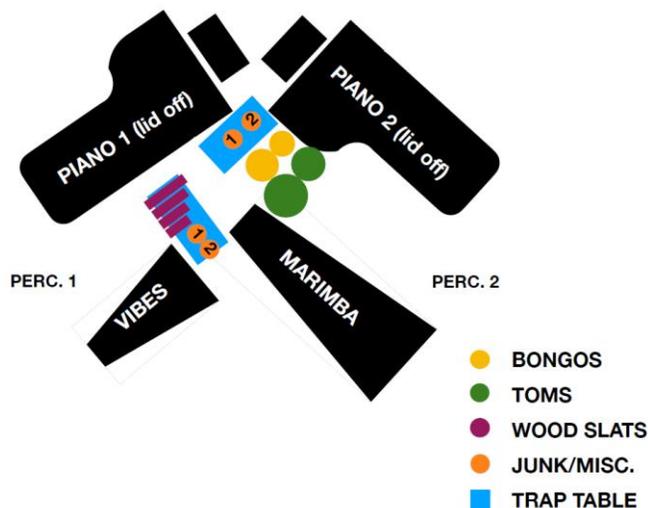
- The following implements are used throughout the piece:

- (2) bass bows
- (1) nylon brush
- (1) bundle stick, “hot rod” or similar
- (1) thin wooden dowel or chopstick
- (1) thick wooden dowel, wrapped with moleskin
- (2) notched sticks
- (1) soft rubber mallet
- (1) hard rubber mallet

## Percussion 2 Continued

- (1) medium plastic mallet

## STAGE SETUP



## PERFORMANCE NOTES

- XX time signatures indicate free time
- Bracketed durations indicate how long a free time gesture lasts
- Encircled numbers indicate electronic cues to be realized by pressing a USB foot pedal, sending a space bar ASCII message (32)
- Electronic cues should be triggered by Percussion 2
- Vertical, dashed lines indicate that the connected events are synchronous
- Boxed text indicates the current gesture in the fixed media part, lasting until the termination of the protruding line
- Various “implement keys” exist throughout the work. They delineate which mallet belongs in which hand and what note head is assigned to that implement.
  - LH = Left hand
  - RH = Right hand
  - 1 = left-most mallet in four-mallet grip
  - 2 = left interior mallet in four-mallet grip
  - 3 = right interior mallet in four-mallet grip
  - 4 = right-most mallet in four-mallet grip

## PERFORMANCE NOTES CONTINUED

- When using notched sticks, the attack of a note should strike the playing surface like normal, but the sustain should freely move back and forth across the surface
- Boxed musical gestures are to be repeated and improvised upon according to the accompanying instructions, until the termination of the protruding line
- Squared fermatas indicate a pause of increased duration
- Hairpins to/from a circle indicate a crescendo/diminuendo (d)al niente
- Vertical dashed arrows indicate a gradual shift between two techniques

## TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT

- Computer running Max 8.1.10 (64-bit) or newer
- USB foot pedal
- Two full-range speakers for playback

## TECHNICAL NOTES

- Out 1: electronics L
- Out 2: electronics R
- When possible lightly amplify the ensemble and mix until the fixed media and live instruments are balanced and homogenous

Full Score

for icarus Quartet  
herbstlied

Benjamin Damann

①

10s ♩ = 100

Bright texture

4/4

bassy plunk

Percussion I

RH: bass bow

arco

ped.

Percussion II

4/4

4/4

Piano I

pizz. w/ finger nail

ppp

1/2 ped.

Piano II

pizz. w/ finger nail

ppp

1/2 ped.



A

slowly detune until Reh. D

fx. md.

▲ 1: soft plastic × 2: thin dowel  
■ 3: extra soft yarn ◆ 4: hard rubber ord.

p.1

p

ppp

no ped.

pn.1

pn.2

**B**

12

fx. md.

p.1 *ppp* *pp*  
ad. lib. between no ped. & 1/2 ped.

p.2 *pp*

pn.1 *ord.* *p* *pp*  
inside piano w/ mallet  
ad. lib. between no ped. and 1/2 ped.

pn.2 *pizz. w/ flesh of finger* *pp*

◆ LH: nylon brush  
■ 3: bundle stick × 4: wooden dowel

◆ LH: extra soft yarn mallet  
× RH: med. rubber mallet

any stress bar(s)



17

fx. md.

p.1

p.2 LH: bow arco

pn.1

pn.2 *ord.* *p* *pp*

22 C

fx. md.

p.1 *pp* *p*  
1/2 ped.

p.2 *pp* *p* ord. arco *p* ord. arco

pn.1 *pp*  
1/2 ped.

pn.2 mute w/ finger at the agraffe

27

fx. md.

p.1

p.2 *ppp* *p* ord. RH: bass bow arco

pn.1 LH: put mallet down

pn.2 *p*

no ped.

**D**

fx. md. *detuned bright texture*

p.1 *p* ped.

p.2 *p*

pn.1 *p* ped.

pn.2 *p*

freely choose direction, chromatic cluster in approx. area  
*w/ flesh inside piano*



35

fx. md.

p.1

p.2 *pp* *p*

pn.1

pn.2 *p* *8<sup>vb</sup>*



55

**G**

quick crossfade to notched texture at m. 60

fx. md. *cup chime*  
L.v.

p.1 *ppp*

p.2 *ppp*

pn.1 *ppp* LH: notched stick RH: notched stick  
*remove EBow* any two stress bars  
ped.

pn.2 *ppp* LH: notched stick RH: notched stick  
*remove EBow* any two stress bars  
ped.



60

fx. md. notched texture

p.1

p.2

pn.1

pn.2

H

63

fx. md.  $\frac{3}{4}$

p.1 *ppp*

p.2 *ppp* (15)

pn.1 *ppp*

pn.2 *ppp*

× RH: nylon brush  
◆ LH: soft rubber mallet

*p*



66

fx. md.  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$

× RH: bundle stick  
◆ LH: hard rubber mallet

p.1 *p*

p.2 *n* *p*

pn.1

pn.2 LH: small glass bottle

*pp* manipulate glass bottle within specified range.

ped.

68

fx. md.

p.1

p.2

pn.1

pn.2

RH: small glass bottle

manipulate glass bottle within specified range.

pp

ped.

RH: small glass bottle



71

fx. md.

p.1

p.2

pn.1

pn.2

LH: small glass bottle

pp

8<sup>va</sup>

8<sup>vb</sup>

reversed reverb

**I** **3**

fx. md. 14s  
glass bottle texture

p.1 14s  
wood slats only *using any many different implements as possible, improvise a sparse, pointillistic texture*  
*pp*

5s

p.2 9s  
bongo edges & tom shells *using any many different implements as possible, improvise a sparse, pointillistic texture*  
*pp*

11s

3s  
gently manipulate on tuning pins  
*pp*

14s

pn.1  
ped. ad lib.

pn.2  
ped. ad lib.



75

fx. md. 12s 4s  
*reversed reverb*

2s 10s 4s

p.1  
wood slats only *slowly decrease density to nothing*  
*pp*

6s 10s

p.2  
bongo edges & tom shells *slowly decrease density to nothing*  
*pp*

9s 7s  
*slowly reduce manipulations until nothing* remove bottles

10s 6s  
*slowly reduce manipulations until nothing* remove bottles

pn.1

pn.2  
gently manipulate on tuning pins *slowly reduce manipulations until nothing*  
*pp*

76 ♩ = 100 **J**

fx. md. *metallic drone*  
*metallic articulations*  
*light distortion*

p.1  
× RH: thin dowel  
● LH: thick dowel  
*pp*

p.2  
× RH: thin dowel  
● LH: thick dowel  
*pp*

pn.1  
harmonic  
*p*  
8<sup>vb</sup>  
1/2 ped.

pn.2  
mute  
15<sup>ma</sup>  
*p*  
no ped.



81

fx. md.

p.1  
*pp*

p.2  
*pp*

pn.1

pn.2

(8)  
(15)

86 K

fx. md. *distortion* *distorted slats and toms*

p.1 *pp* *ff*  
● LH: soft rubber  
× RH: med. plastic

p.2 *pp* *ff*  
● LH: hard rubber  
× RH: med. plastic

pn.1 *p* *ff*  
RH: rubber mallet  
*stress bar*

pn.2 *p* *ff* *aggressively scrape*  
LH: plastic protractor  
*8<sup>ub</sup>*  
ped.

90

fx. md.

p.1

p.2

93

fx. md.

p.1

p.2

95

fx. md.

p.1

p.2

*ff*

*distortion*

9

● LH: soft rubber  
× RH: thin dowel

● LH: soft rubber  
× RH: thin dowel



**L**

fx. md.

p.1

p.2

pn.1

pn.2

*glitchy rhythms*

*long reverb tail*

*p*

*p*

*p*

*no ped.*

*no ped.*

6

101

fx. md. 3/4

p.1 *pp*

p.2 *pp*

pn.1 *p*

pn.2 *p*



103

fx. md. 3/4

p.1 *ppp*

p.2 *ppp*

pn.1 *f*

pn.2 *f*

1/2 ped. ----- ped.

**M**

15s  
to piano 1

p.1

15s  
to piano 2

p.2

15s

pn.1

ord. *choosing freely from the given pitches, create a pointillistic texture that grows less dense over time*

*pp*

ped.

3s

12s

pn.2

ord. *choosing freely from the given pitches, create a pointillistic texture that grows less dense over time*

*pp*

*ff*  
ped.

pizz.

pizz.



**N**

3s

12s

p.1

pizz. *sparsely repeat the given pitch*

*ppp*

6s

9s

p.2

pizz. *slowly alternate between the given pitches*

*ppp*

9s

5s

1s

pn.1

pizz. *maintain sparse density*

*ppp*

RH: guitar pick

*15<sup>ma</sup>*

*pppp*

12s

3s

pn.2

pizz. *maintain sparse density*

*ppp*