

Song of the Roosting Crows

Chinese Guqin & Live Electronics (Max/Msp)

Jeff Roberts

Performance Notes

Nature of this Work

This piece for Guqin and live electronics works to bring together a collection of different yet resonant aesthetic and sound elements from a variety of different traditions (American Experimental, Chinese guqin traditional performance and modern guqin improvisation, Ili Uyghur vocal and instrumental melodies, melodic fragments of ancient pipa melody found on Buddhist Grotto walls in Dunhuang, China.

The piece reflects poetically on the Tang Dynasty Era in China (618-906) when cultures and music traveling along the Silk Road intermingled in the capital city of Chang'an (modern day Xi'an) and the Tang court. The title of the poem is taken from a famous poem by Li Bai, which reflects on the coming collapse of the Tang Court; roosting crows were symbolic of a family lineage that was in decline or about to collapse. I choose to use this poem's poetic impressions because it not only represented a new type of wild, creative imagination beyond formal poetry of the Tang era and before, it also seemed to capture a swirling array of image and impulse that seemed to capture the diversity and spontaneity of the Tang-Era.

Drawing on this impression, I attempt to swirl fragments of Central Asian and Chinese music, coupled with an expanded vocabulary of natural found object sound, to capture the feel of the natural, wild, spontaneity found in Tang Dynasty arts and try to evoke my own nostalgic impressions of this remarkable period in ancient East and Central Asian history.

Guqin Notation and an Improvisatory element

This score notates guqin in Western notation. For guqin performers who wish to perform this piece, there is a separate version notated in *jianzipu*.

The Notated element in this work are meant to be guidelines for performance, and durations and tempi are approximate. Use these

rhythms as a guide. Once a flow of the work has been achieved (in coordination with the live-electronic component), the performer should pay attention to spontaneous phrasing (within the designated timings) more than the rhythmic notation.

Max-Msp, Sampling and Playback

To perform this piece, the player should have the Max-Msp file in a folder with a collection of sampled sound and Version 5 of Max-Msp or Max-Msp runtime. The keyboard space bar starts and stops the timer and the key 'z' resets the timer to zero. The computer screen should be positioned so that the performer can watch the timer on the computer screen.

In the score the ***dotted red boxes*** represent ***sections of the performance which are sampled in real-time, as the performer is playing in live performance***. Special care should be taken by the performer to perform the music designated to be sampled at the precise time written in the score, with no extraneous sounds.

As the performer rehearses the piece, it is important to find a good amplification level for the guqin, in order to balance live sound with pre-recorded and playback sound. Smaller, Lavalier condenser (cardioid or omni) microphones are recommended for amplification.

Specific Techniques

String Raking at 1'28"

The Raking technique in the composition *Liu Shui* (Flowing Water) should be used for creating a texture of arpeggiated notes combined with accented melodic notes.

High Partial Harmonics

Please Refer to the chart of harmonics, locations and fingerings in the *jianzipu* score to locate the unconventional guqin harmonics.

Song of the Roosting Crows

Jeff Roberts
(2011)

Guqin

0'10" $\text{♩} = 60$
light and ephemeral

0'14"

0'17" $\text{♩} = 90$
improvise on Uyghur rhythmic pattern

mf *mp* *p* *mf*

live sample B1 live sample B2 (2") live sample B3 (6")

Max-Msp playback

B1 Playback (gliss) B1 Playback (gliss) B3 Playback (Uyg. Rhy)

wood tapping B2 Playback (gliss)

pot gesture & resonance rocks tapping rocks-2 tapping

qin

0'24" 0'25" 0'28" 0'30" 0'33"

l.v. *mp* *p* *l.v.*

live sample B4 live sample B4 (3")

Max-Msp playback

B3 Playback (Uyg. Rhy) B4 Playback (g harmonic)

B1 & B2 Playback (gliss) B1 Playback (processed, transposed)

Rocks - slow tapping Pot Resonance, Bottle & Glass Pings

Wood Stick - slow tapping

2

0'34"

ad libitum
RH raking technique (open strings and harmonics)

qin

p

live sample B6 (3")

0'40"

senza misura

0'43"

0'44"

Max-Msp
playback

B3 Playback (Uyg. Rhy)

B3 Playback (Uyg. Rhy)

B3 Playback (Uyg. Rhy)

0'46"

$\text{♩} = 120$

0'52"

qin

mp < *mf*

rit.

p

pp

0'56"

$\text{♩} = 120$

live sample B8 (10")

Max-Msp
playback

B4 Playback (g harmonic)

B6 Playback (raking - transposed)

B6 Playback (guqin raking - fragmented)

Wine Bottle - tapping

Wood Stick - tapping slow

qin

live sample B8 (10")

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

1'07" 1'12"

p.o. p.o. l.v.

Max-Msp playback

ping *ping* *ping* *ping*

B3 Playback (Uyg. Rhy)
Pot/Guqin har. resonance
Wine Bottle - tapping

qin

1'15" 1'17"

p *mf* *p* *f* *p.o.* *p* *f* (ad lib dynamic contrasts p-f-p)

ad libitum
RH raking technique (open strings and harmonics)

live sample B9 (7")

etc...

Max-Msp playback

Guqin - body tapping
(Uyg. Rhy.)
(pot/qin res.)

Wine Bottle - tremolo

B8 Playback - Uyghur Melody
(Wine Bottle - tapping)

B9 Playback - Harm. raking B9 Playback - Harm. raking

qin

1'23" (continued - harmonics raking)

1'25" 1'26" 1'27" 1'28"

ad libitum
RH raking technique (open strings and harmonics)

f *mf*

live sample B10 (7")

B10 Playback (string raking)

Max-Msp playback

(wine bottle tremolo continued)

B10 Playback (string raking)

qin

1'35" 1'42"

... slowly transition to accented notes ...

... slowly transition to plucked harmonics ...

live sample B10 (7")

Max-Msp playback

Wine Bottles (tapping)

B10 (string raking)

B10 Playback (string raking)

Wine Bottle (tremolo)

B6 (string raking)

Qin Body Tapping

Muted String Raking

High Harmonics

B6 (string raking)

B10 (raking & accented notes)

Wine Bottle (tapping)

qin

... transition to higher harmonic partials. ... becoming sparse. ... dying out

live sample B11 (9")

Max-Msp playback

B10 Playback (string raking)

(wine bottle-trem)

B10 Playback (string raking)

High Harmonics (processed)

B6 Playback (fragmented muted raking)

Guqin Body Tapping

qin

p

ad libitum
qin body tapping (thud sound)

slow & irregular

mp

live sample B12 (7")

Max-Msp playback

High Harmonics (processed)

Wine Bottle Rubbing

B3 Playback (Uyghur rhythm)

B8 Playback (Uyghur melody)

Wood Stick Tapping (slow)

Qin body tapping (fast)

B12 Playback (qin body tapping)

B12 Playback (qin body tapping)

B12 Playback (qin body tapping)

B12 Playback (qin body tapping)

qin

2'27''

l.v.

2'35''

2'38''

Detailed description: This block contains two musical staves for the qin. The first staff is in treble clef and shows a single note with a diamond-shaped articulation mark and a slur, labeled with a time signature of 2'27'' and the instruction *l.v.*. The second staff is in bass clef and shows a sequence of notes with a slur, labeled with time signatures 2'35'' and 2'38''.

Max-Msp playback

B12 Playback (guqin tapping)

Wine Bottle - overblow

Wood Sticks - irregular tapping

Metal Pot and Guqin Harmonics

Wine Bottle - tapping

Detailed description: This block contains five horizontal lines representing different playback techniques. The first line is labeled 'B12 Playback (guqin tapping)'. The second line is labeled 'Wine Bottle - overblow'. The third line is labeled 'Wood Sticks - irregular tapping'. The fourth line is labeled 'Metal Pot and Guqin Harmonics'. The fifth line is labeled 'Wine Bottle - tapping'.

qin

2'39''

p

2'40''

mp

l.v.

2'47''

Detailed description: This block contains three musical staves for the qin. The first staff is in treble clef, showing a sequence of notes with diamond-shaped articulation marks and a slur, labeled with a time signature of 2'39'' and the instruction *p*. The second staff is in bass clef, showing a single note with a diamond-shaped articulation mark and a slur, labeled with a time signature of 2'40'' and the instruction *mp*. The third staff is in bass clef, showing a sequence of notes with diamond-shaped articulation marks and a slur, labeled with a time signature of 2'47'' and the instruction *l.v.*

Max-Msp playback

Uyghur Melodic Fragments

Wood Stick - rocking

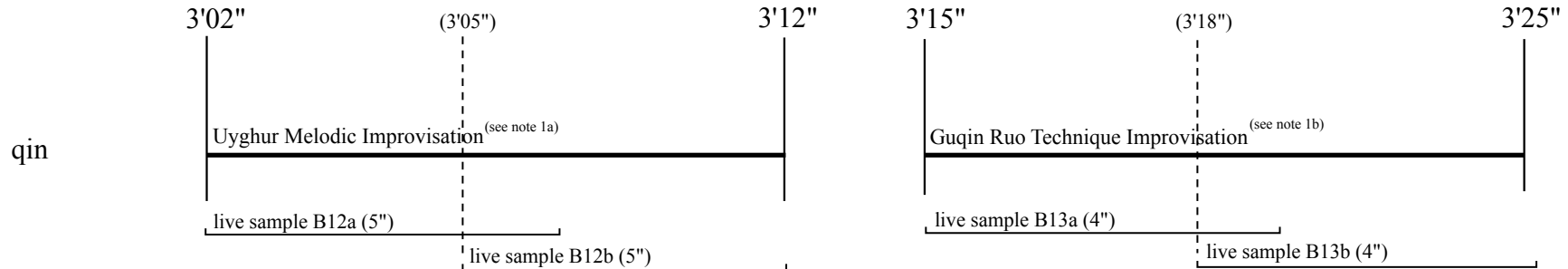
(wood stick-irregular tapping)

(wine bottle-tapping)

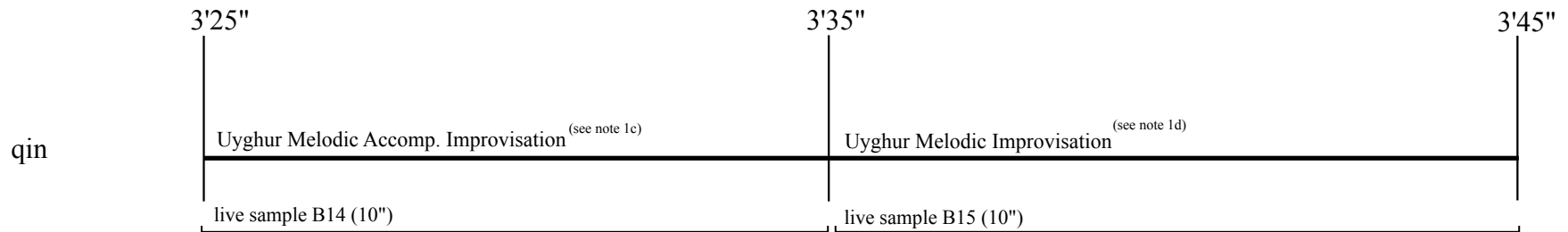
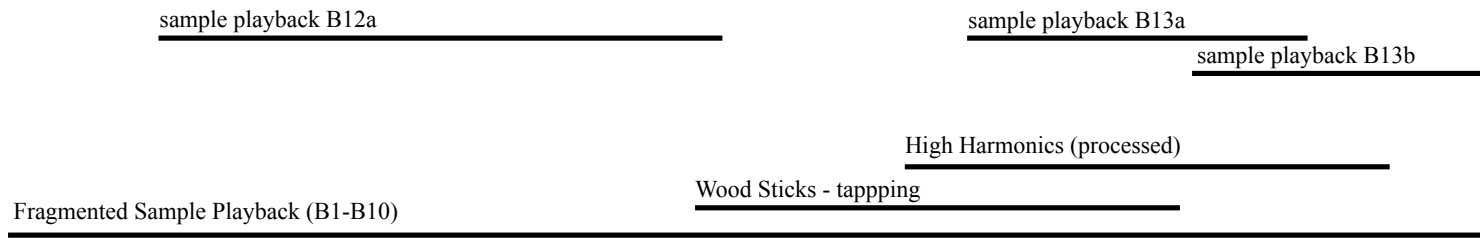
Metal Pot and Guqin Harmonics

Wine Bottle - overblow

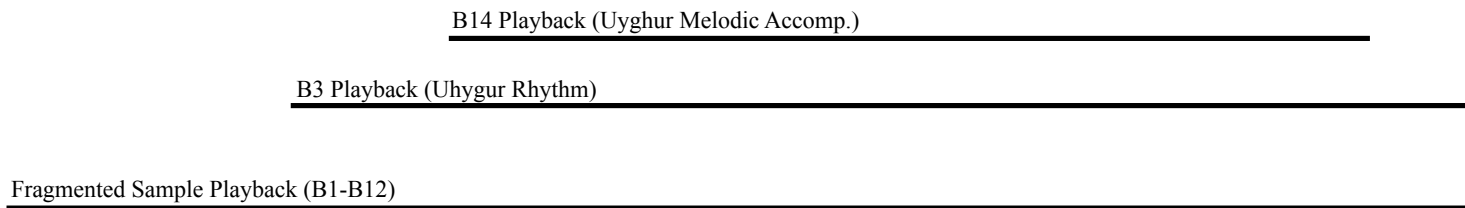
Detailed description: This block contains five horizontal lines representing different playback techniques. The first line is labeled 'Uyghur Melodic Fragments'. The second line is labeled 'Wood Stick - rocking'. The third line is labeled '(wood stick-irregular tapping)'. The fourth line is labeled '(wine bottle-tapping)'. The fifth line is labeled 'Metal Pot and Guqin Harmonics'. The sixth line is labeled 'Wine Bottle - overblow'.

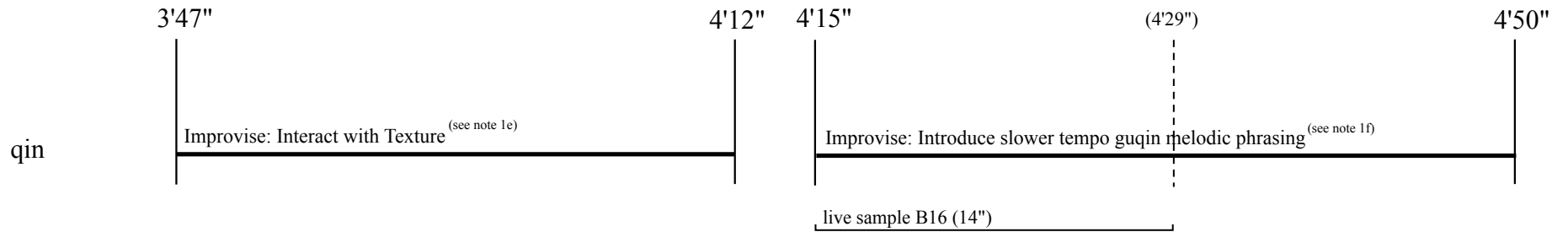


Max-Msp
playback



Max-Msp
playback





Max-Msp
playback

Built-up Live Sample Uyghur and Found Object Texture

5'00" - c.a. 6'00" Live guqin and MIDI triggered sample improvisation (see note 1g)

MIDI KEYBOARD SAMPLE TRIGGERING [AKAI LPK25 Laptop Performance Keyboard (suggested)]

C1	C#1	D1	Eb1	E1	F1	F#1	G1	Ab1	A1	Bb1	B1
Guqin gliss. 1	Guqin gliss. 2	Harmonics B11 Sample	Harmonics B11 Sample	Harmonics (processed)	Harmonics (processed)	G harmonic (fragmented) B4 Sample	Metal Pot Resonance	Metal Pot Resonance	Metal Pot Resonance	Metal Pot Resonance	Wine Bottle Overblow
C2	C#2	D2	Eb2	E2	F2	F#2	G2	Ab2	A2	Bb2	B2
Bottle - Blow (G-natural)	Bottle-sliding (G-natural)	Uyghur Melodic Fragment	Uyghur Melodic Fragment	Uyghur Melodic Fragment	Uyghur Melodic Fragment	Wood Sticks Tapping	Wood Sticks Tapping	Guqin Melody B16 Sample	Guqin Body Tapping	Guqin Body Tapping	Guqin Body Tapping

qin

END