Thomas Metcalf

All Dead Paper

for soprano and viola

2020



Composer's Note:

All Dead Paper focuses on the musical potential of pixelating text, affecting the visual layout as well as the text's meaning. The cover illustration shows variations of pixelation on the titular phrase, as well as a line showing the path taken through the array. These pixelated images were analysed and musical details (particularly texture and rhythm) were generated. The metaphor of pixelation is implied through the increasingly nonsensical text in the vocal part, which then begins to semantically deteriorate following a rupture at b. 20.

The text is from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's (1806-1861) *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1846). These sonnets have a deliberately misleading title in order to mask their intimate nature (they are not translations of Portuguese originals, as one would assume), and this seemed appropriate for a musical exploration of a visual process which causes obfuscation. Similarly, the phrase 'all dead paper', taken from the opening of the 28th sonnet, particularly appealed to me for the tension between technology and modernity/antiquity, as well as the fact that one of the causes of visual display errors are 'dead pixels'.

Performance Notes

Soprano

Any fragmentation of the soprano's text e.g. b. 26 '–lous' should be pronounced in the same way as in the original word, in this case 'tremulous'.

International Phonetic Alphabet characters:

ʒ as in 'vi**s**ion' (voiced, sibilant)
ʃ as in '**sh**e' (unvoiced, sibilant)

Viola

s.p.	sul ponticello
o.p.	overpressure
𝅝	snap pizz.

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This piece was written for Sarah Dacey (soprano) and Stephen Upshaw (viola) as part of the Nonclassical Academy 2020.

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Duration: 2'

[My letters!] **all dead paper, ... mute and white! –**
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands [which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.]

Sonnets from the Portuguese, No. 28
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

for Sarah Dacey and Stephen Upshaw

All Dead Paper

for soprano and viola

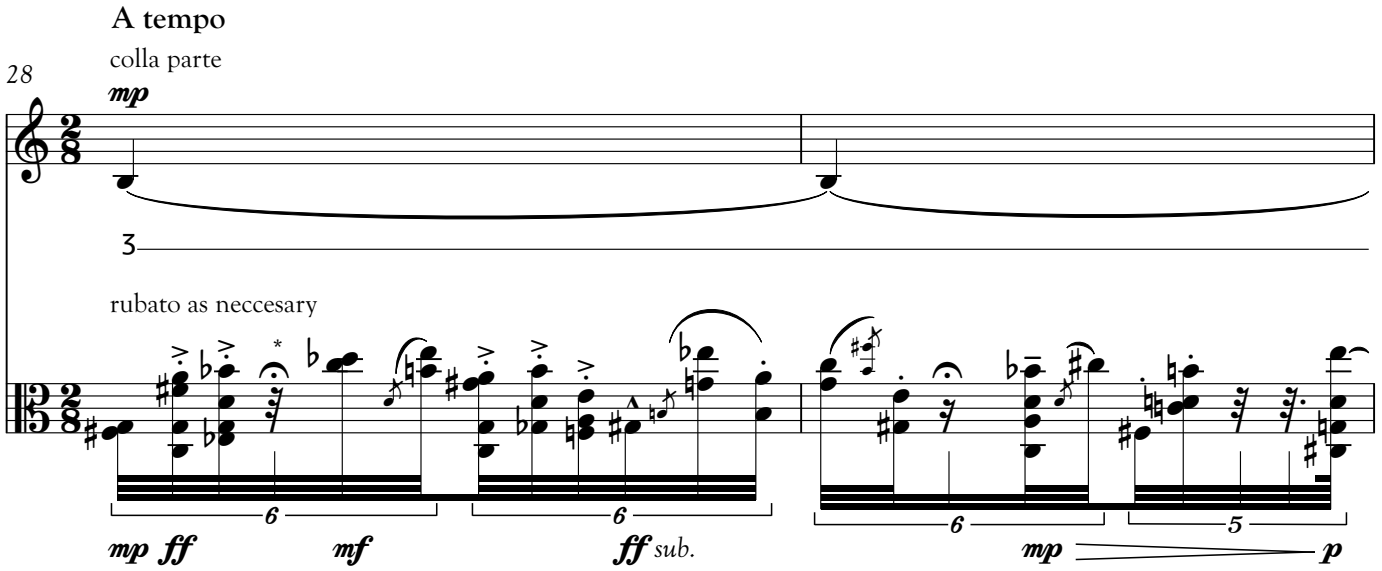
Thomas Metcalf (b. 1996)



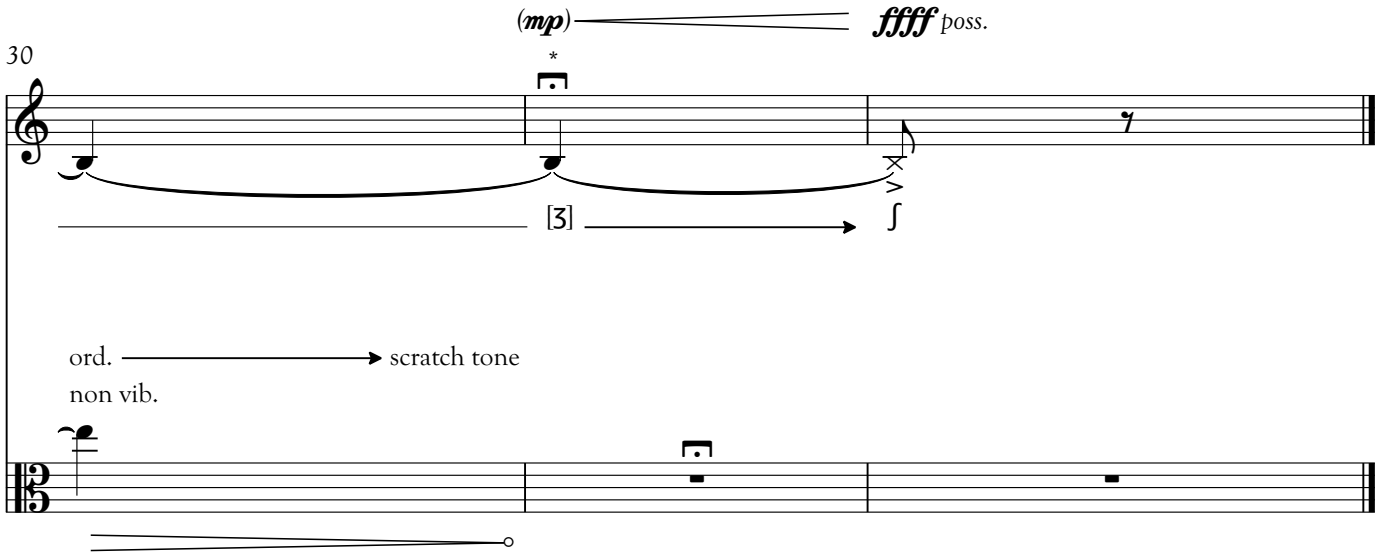
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A tempo
colla parte
12
mf pp
hands...
ord.
con rubato
ff mp
ff
mp ff
mp
ppp
mp confused
14
all pa - per dead, pa all per dead
f sub.
mf
mp f mf
ff
p f
molto vib.
pizz.
(spoken)
exasperated, panicked
f
p
mf
p
16
white mute and dead pa - per tre - mu - lant qui - v'ring my dead
vib. ord.
arco
mp
ff pp
mf


colla parte
non vib.
molto vib.
18
hands...
all
[nn]
(A)
s.p.
21
vib. ord.
semplice
tre
mute
v'ring
[r]
(A)
ord.
poco o.p.
ord.
Elide all syllables; no
break in the line
rit.
ord.
25
gliss.
de
pa
my
lous
all
per
why?
pizz.
arco
molto vib.
vib. ord.
arco
pizz.
arco



* long enough to hear the voice briefly isolated in the texture.



*change sound from 3 to ∫ gradually, losing pitch.