st130.1.48



sumtone

:

michael edwards

skin

for 7-string bass viola da gamba and computer

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programme note

The form and rhythmic structure of skin is closely based on (generated with, even) the following poem by Eugenio Montale (1896-1981), as translated by William Arrowsmith:

Ciò che di me sapeste non fu che la scialbatura, la tonaca che riveste la nostra umana ventura.

Ed era forse oltre il telo l'azzurro tranquillo; vietava il limpido cielo solo un sigillo.

O vero c'era il falòtico mutarsi della mia vita, lo schiudersi d'un'ignita zolla che mai vedrò.

Restò così questa scorza la vera mia sostanza; il fuoco che non si smorza per me si chiamò: l'ignoranza.

Se un'ombra scorgete, non è un'ombra—ma quella io sono. Potessi spiccarla da me, offrirvela in dono.

What you knew of me was only a whitened skin, the cowl that cloaks our human destiny.

And perhaps behind the blue veil the air was blue and still; between me and the clear sky lay a simple seal.

Or else it was that wildfire changing of my life, the disclosure of the kindled clod I'll never see.

So then this husk remained my true substance; the name of unquenched fire for me was—ignorance.

If you glimpse a shade, it's not a shade—it's me.

If I could strip that shade away, I'd give it to you, gladly.

Technical Details

Along with amplification, sound file playback, and diffusion, the computer is used to perform real-time granular synthesis (with transposition) of the viol signal using a custom Max/MSP external written by the composer. The viol part was made using the composer's *slippery chicken* algorithmic composition software, as were the pre-prepared sounds triggered during the piece (using the same data and algorithms as the viol part, as well as sounds from that part as input to the sound processing).

Motivations

The nature of the piece is a reaction to a reaction from Mark Summers when he was considering whether to play a previously-written cello piece of mine: "Don't you ever write any long notes?"

Long notes combined with unnatural playing techniques create the potential for all kinds of wonderful failures over and over again. Rather than be avoided, these are desired, amplified, and celebrated. There is beauty there. As well as a detached structural rigour applied almost remotely, coldly, like destruction at a distance, technical sophistication applied to ugly, violent ends.

Which naturally leads to:

programme_note_version_2.0.the_other_side.neither_sophisticated_nor_elevated.but_heartfelt

Rant

and so I finally come back to britain with a real job paying real taxes and what do the bastards spend them on in my name? : bombing the shit out of some poor oppressed people several thousand miles away (as always)

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and with a view to robbing them (as always)
and calling it "acts of liberation" (as usual)
and still calling this a democracy (as if)
pisses me off
yeah right 51st state land of the free (free to
shut up
put up
fuck up (collectively of course))
I really tried I did I tried to concentrate on beauty even found myself a nice poem didn't work though
it came out really nasty this time shocked even me felt like dr (dj?...nah) frankenstein
consumed by monstrous algorithms
yeah skin
shards of it
dripping off your neighbours' wall
imagine that and tell me you still want those bombs
(it's not the actual crime of this war that gets to me most it's the boundless cynical audacity
of their lies so-called reasons justifications imagine them sitting in their clinically secure of-
fices marketing their abominations "[laughing] oh come on no one could believe that" "damn
straight they're gonna believe it 'cause we got the best goddamn pr firm ever existed an' if they
can sell bud to beer lovers..." (substitute suitably stiff limey equivalent for the downing street version)
saddest thing is they (we!) do believe
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because that's what makes it possible again and again and again (and again))

performance requirements

essential equipment:

- the Max/MSP audio programming environment (version 4.5 or above) running on a suitable Macintosh or PC computer
- multi-channel sound card (minimum 2 channels mic/line-in, 8 channels line-out)
- the Max/MSP performance patches supplied by the publisher on CDROM (email hire@sumtone.com, order online at http://www.sumtone.com/performance-materials.php, or write to the address at the front of this score)
- MIDI faders (8 minimum) plugged into the computer's sound card. These should send volume messages to Max/MSP on separate MIDI channels. If controller numbers must be sent instead of MIDI channels, then the "midi-faders" patcher in Max will have to be suitably reprogrammed. The MIDI faders attached to the computer are used to control playback level of the viol (no diffusion necessary from the mixing desk); the levels of the pre-prepared sound files; and the live granular synthesis.
- one overhead and one clip-on microphone for the viola da gamba, connected to the sound card either directly or via a mixing desk
- sound system: eight loudspeakers are preferred. They are to be placed around the audience as follows:
 - 12
 - 3 4
 - 5 6
 - 7 8

Performances with less loudspeakers are possible by combining two or more channels onto one speaker on the mixing desk or in software (the outputs of Max/MSP or the sound card configuration).

For more details about the software or performance of this piece, please send email to info@sumtone.com or write to the address at the front of the score.

performance directions

A 7-string bass viola da gamba is required for performance. Tuning is as follows:



Figure 1: viola da gamba tuning

Accidentals carry throughout the bar but are repeated in parentheses as necessary.

Except where otherwise indicated, meter changes necessitate rhythmic units to retain the same temporal duration, i.e., when changing from 2/4 to 5/8, an eighth note is equal in both meters.

The first 32 bars of *skin* are optional. Almost no sound is made during this section, rather, a sort of theatre is made out of the act of preparing to play. (The exception is the "seat" direction which should be a shifting or readjustment of the seat: this may or may not result in an audible sound.) The aim of this section is to focus the

audience's attention onto the first sound, which appears in bar 33. This sound is very quiet (though amplified) and thus will benefit enormously from a concentrated audience with a heightened sense of aural expectation. If, however, the performance situation is not suited to this kind of preparative theatre, it may be omitted; the piece would then begin at bar 33.

key to symbols

prepare

Notes with strokes through their heads indicate that no sound is to be made; the rhythm indicated is the duration of a silent event. When "prepare" is written above the note, then the player should prepare to play, with the bow positioned over the string; no note will occur however, as this is merely a theatrical gesture.

Play on the bridge; try to avoid the strings completely (though accidents will happen and this is not necessarily a bad thing).

Dampen the (open) string(s).

Battuto attack.

Arrows indicate a transition from one playing state to another.

Harmonics: the desired partial number is indicated in square brackets below the notes.

ricochet ric....

spe sul ponticello estremo sul tasto estremo ste

col legno

Bow vertically up and down the strings as opposed to across;

also necessary as tremolo where indicated.

Scratch tone: lightly dampen the indicated string(s) at a non-nodal point and draw the bow flatly across the string(s) with a continuous downward pressure.

Sub-harmonic tone (on open string). This is a rough sound created by extreme bow pressure (pulling) on the string with little horizontal movement; the string stutters and produces a tone lower than that of the open string.

All blue notations are for the computer performer. An arrow indicates a trigger point (space bar on the computer keyboard); the number indicates the current bar number; g2 indicates that granulator 2 should be brought into the mix if not already present; g1> means fade out granulator 1 etc. "Nod" means that the viola player should cue the computer player at a trigger point.

Ø

cl

vert

scratch

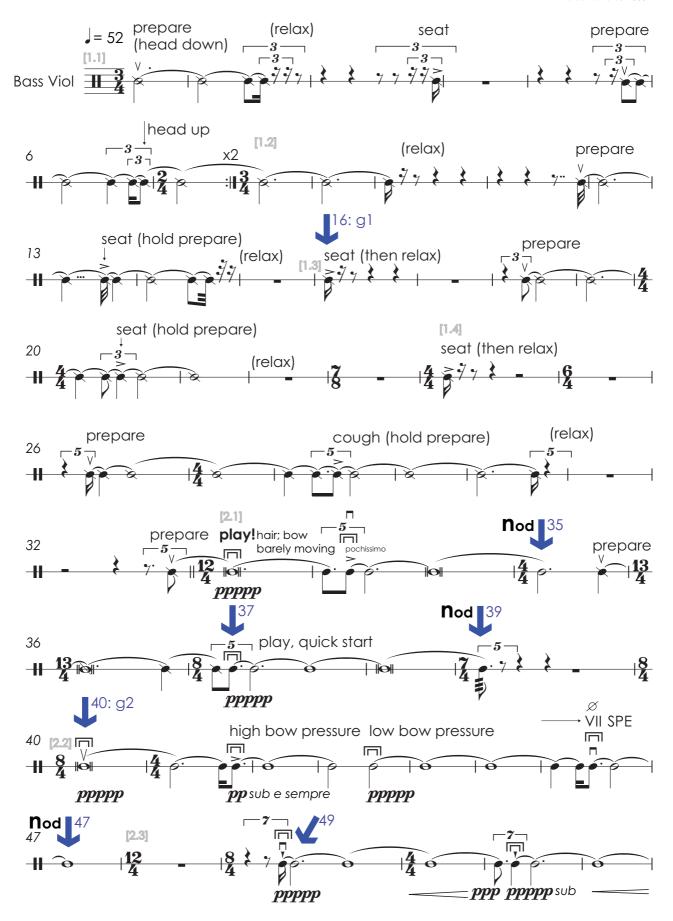


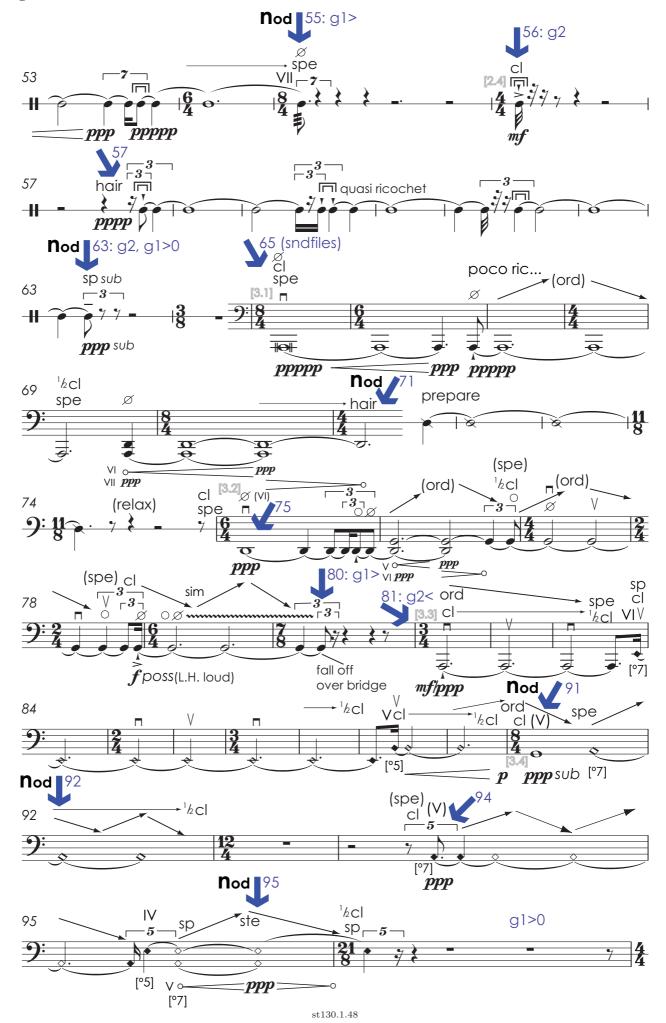


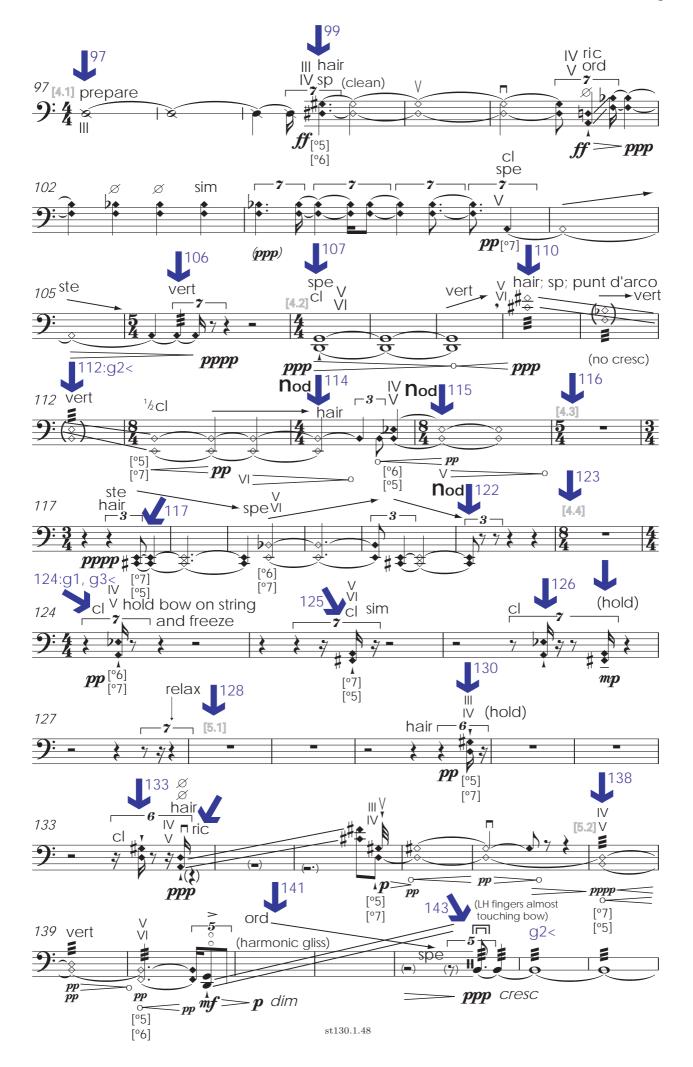
skin

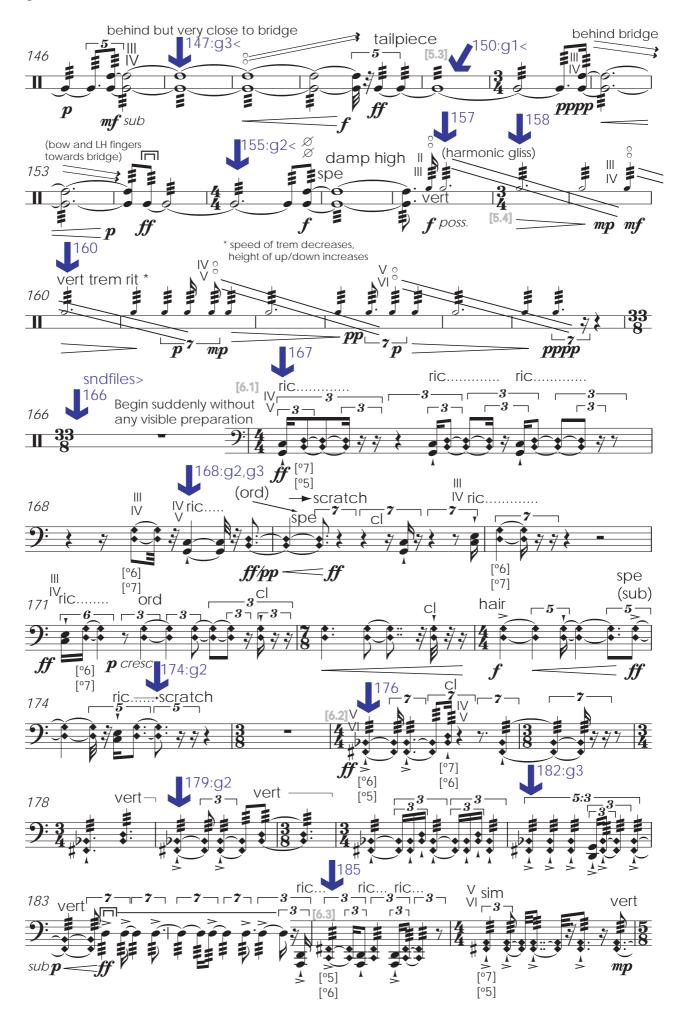
duration 17-19 mins.

michael edwards 2003-4









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