



Retrocoagulant Vox
for bass trombone and computer-realized sound

BRET BATTEY
Commissioned by Chad Kirby

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Duration approximately 12 minutes, 30 seconds.

Requirements

Written for bass trombone with D and F attachments, but tenor trombone may also be used. Didjeridu technique and circular breathing. Sound reinforcement and tape operator for performance.

Time

Specific rhythms are notated with conventional rhythmic notation. Such notation may appear unmetered or metered with barlines. In metered cases, tempo is provided by the tape part. In unmetered cases, the performer can and should exercise considerable creative freedom in shaping the rhythms. Proportional spacing or a mixture of proportional and conventional notation is used elsewhere. When conventional notation appears in this context, it is intended to designate the relative length of notes rather than specific time values at a particular tempo. A stemless black notehead followed by a thick horizontal bar indicates a held note. In some cases the approximate duration of the note is indicated above or below the thick bar in a form like ~1" (meaning: approximately 1 second).

Tape cues are indicated with upward-pointing, dotted-line arrows from the tape part. The cues are usually relative, indicating that a trombone action should start or end shortly before or after an event in the tape part. For example, the arrow at rehearsal mark B shows that the performer should hold the A/G# tone through the time that the tape part starts, then begin playing the F-with-rapid-slides. Sometime the arrows will point at a particular event, indicating a more precise relationship. For example, the measure before rehearsal mark B4 shows that the performer should wait about 1 second after the attack in the tape part to begin playing. The third measure of C3 indicates that the performer should stop playing at the instant the 'plink' occurs in the tape part.

Some long rests are indicated with a whole-rest measure with an approximate time in seconds indicated above the measure. In cases where the tape part is not playing, the player (or the tape operator in some instances) has a great deal of discretion in choosing how long to actually hold these rests.

Pitch

Heavy black lines between different pitches indicate slide glissandi. In some cases the line is curved, indicating a particular shape for the glissando. Conventional linear glissandi should be assiduously avoided in these cases; the glissando should be weighted to remain longer near the starting or target pitch as implied by the shape of the line.

In cases where a glissando must move to a particular pitch but the target pitch is not articulated, the target pitch is shown as a grace note slurred from the starting note.

In sections utilizing extended technique emphasizing overtones — such as the didjeridu sections — the performer must still ensure that the fundamental remains in tune with the tape part, where applicable.

Engagement of the D and F attachments is indicated with small **v** symbols.

Slide Technique

A roman numeral over the note indicates a specific slide position for that note.

A roman numeral with a straight line to its right over several notes indicates a single slide position held over several notes.

A roman numeral with a straight line to its right over several notes ending with another roman numeral indicates continual motion of the slide between the two positions over the notes. A slur is implied. Two measures before rehearsal mark B3, such slide movement is indicated over a fixed embouchure position for F. The curved glissando marking on the tied half note indicates the pitch curve resulting from the long slide movement between VI and IV.

Two roman numerals joined by a straight line with arrow heads on both ends indicates movement of the slide back and forth several times between the two given slide positions.

Didjeridu and Vocal Effects

Square note heads indicate didjeridu technique. Diamond note heads indicate a sung pitch. Triangle note heads indicate falsetto yelped tones on specific pitches.

Specific syllables for annunciation are indicated below the note, when applicable. Breath marks within a line of text indicate circular breathing points specified to reinforce the intended rhythmic quality.

Metered didjeridu sections are intended to sync strongly with the pulse of the tape part. Therefore the rhythmic pulse will need to be emphasized very strongly, unlike in conventional didjeridu performance. The performer should feel free to improvise additional elements — yelps, howls, etc. — to reinforce the musical intent and impact of the passage. The performer may also find it necessary, due to the nature of the way didjeridu tones speak, to delay or rush rhythms in order to clearly maintain the sense of pulse.

Breath

Circular Breathing is required for numerous passages. In those cases where specific points of breath intake are required, those points are shown with circled breath marks.

"GS" indicates a Gut Slap: an explosive burst of air generated forcibly from the diaphragm.

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Tape Part / Rehearsal Tracks

The tape part is divided into six segments: INTRO, A, B, C, D, and E. Each segment must be cued during performance. In each case the tape part leads and provides the tempo and entrance cues for the performer.

The rehearsal markings in the score reflect this division of the piece. A large tape segment such as section B is divided into useful subsections such as B2, B3, etc.

The rhythmic notation of the tape part is only approximate, providing a general idea of the rhythmic functions. Therefore in the metered sections of the work the performer will be best served by tracking and performing with the implied tempo and meter rather than trying to follow and coordinate with the tape part notation explicitly. For practice purposes, click-track enhanced versions of the tape part are provided for the following sections: B2-B3, B5, D-D2, D4-D5.

Sound Reinforcement

A particular challenge for presentation of this work lies in the wide dynamic range produced by the trombone. The didjeridu technique tends to diffuse the power of the trombone through the spectrum, creating a relatively quiet, subtle tone, while effects like the triple-forte split tone can generate amplitudes difficult for some microphones to handle. Therefore sufficient time and resources will need to be provided to sound check the work prior to performance to ensure sufficient and undistorted pickup of the trombone and proper balance with the tape part.

A compressor/limiter on the trombone signal will significantly facilitate keeping the tape and trombone signals in balance. A 3:1 ratio thresholded such that it does not engage during didjeridu passages but does engage on loud passages has worked well.

The tape part is provided dry; it is expected that house reverberation will be available to add to the tape and/or trombone if needed.

Score revision: June 2004