

On Tenterhooks

for percussion quartet

Christopher Fisher-Lochhead

On Tenterhooks [2012-13] for percussion quartet dedicated to Third Coast Percussion

On Tenterhooks is the result of over a year of collaboration with the members of Third Coast Percussion. The piece seeks to explore two fundamentally different ways of experiencing time: that of the pointillistic event that is always yet to occur or already past and that of the immediate presence of continuity in which past and future smoothly converge. In practical terms, this dichotomy is manifested in the difference between simple "percussive" attacks on wood, glass, and metal and a variety of groaning, whining, whimpering, and screaming metallic sounds. Springing from this fundamental difference in material is the problematic between rational and irrational methods of portioning out time, sometimes resulting in lukewarm regions of détente between the two, such as when ultra-striated time simulates smoothness and irrationally defined rhythms manifest a strident feeling of pulse.

On Tenterhooks was premiered by Third Coast Percussion (Peter Martin, David Skidmore, Robert Dillon, and Sean Connors) at Constellation in Chicago, IL on December 8th, 2013.

A full recording of the premiere is available to stream at <http://www.cflmusic.com/works/on-tenterhooks/>

To obtain click tracks, contact the composer directly at chris@cflmusic.com

Percussion Setup

Player 1	Player 2	Player 3	Player 4
1 bar of aluminum channeling* (alb)	1 bar of aluminum channeling* (alb)	1 bar of aluminum channeling* (alb)	1 bar of aluminum channeling* (alb)
3 glass bottles (btl)	3 glass bottles (btl)	3 glass bottles (btl)	2 wood planks (wpl)
1 wood plank (wpl)	2 wood planks (wpl)	1 woodblock (wbl)	1 earth plate (ep)
3 brake drums (bd)	1 double gong** (dg)	1 wood plank (wpl)	1 brake drum (bd)
1 china cymbal (cym)	1 earth plate (ep)	1 double gong** (dg)	1 woodblock (wbl)
	1 china cymbal (cym)	2 brake drums (bd)	
		1 china cymbal (cym)	

* These are long rectangular bars such as would be used to construct a Sixxen

** A “double gong” refers to an metallic African instrument consisting of two bell-shaped gongs joined by a thin connective bridge.
In the absence of this exact instrument, a comparable replacement is acceptable.

When multiple instruments of the same type are included in a single player’s setup, the instruments selected should be of distinctly different pitch. In addition, whenever possible, instruments played by different players should be as varied in pitch as possible. For example, the four aluminum bars distributed among all four players should each be of a distinct size/pitch. On a given system, if only one instrument is indicated when there are several included in the player’s setup, it is up to the player to choose.

Techniques

All of the techniques in this piece fall into one of two categories: percussive attacks or friction. Attacks are notated conventionally while friction is notated using a special staff like this:



All friction events require the use of both hands, one to damp the instrument, the other to create friction using an appropriate beater or mallet. The top line indicates damping while the bottom indicates the point of contact for the friction-causing implement (beater or mallet). The thickness of each line indicates pressure.

In addition to prescriptively notated friction events like the one above, descriptive words are sometimes employed to further specify the desired effects. Those words are explained below.

“whimper” : sustained friction using minimal pressure so that the instrument speaks erratically and unpredictably. The resulting sound is usually pure and quiet.

“scream” : a friction event created by an exponential increase of pressure, speed, or both. The resulting sound should be loud, aggressive, and timbrally distorted.

“stutter” : sustained friction using extremely heavy pressure and minimal damping so that the resulting sounds are loud, obstreperous, and speak unreliably.

“shake” : rapid oscillation back and forth so as to create a momentary feeling of pulse. The relative speed of the shake is indicated by the event’s horizontal spacing.

The exact execution of these friction techniques vary greatly from instrument to instrument, so the performers should feel free to experiment and adjust according to their specific equipment. Finding the appropriate beater or mallet is also left to the discretion of the performer, although experience has proven that one of the best options is the stick end of a rattan mallet without tape. Violin rosin can also be helpful to maximize the effectiveness of the friction techniques.

Rhythmic Notation

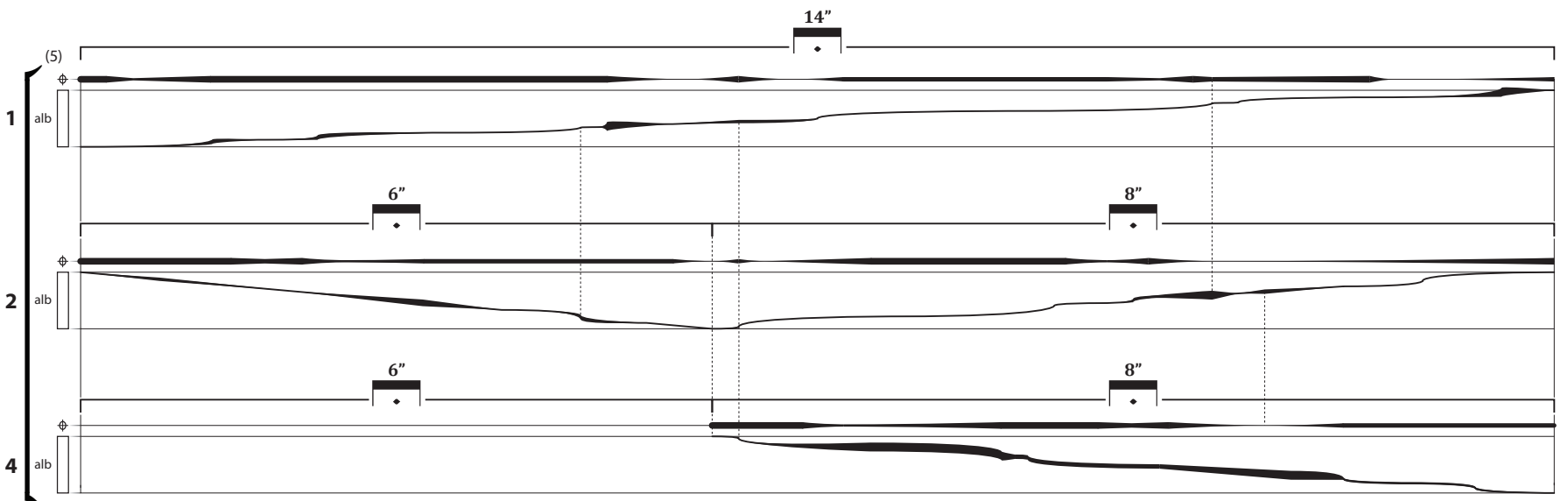
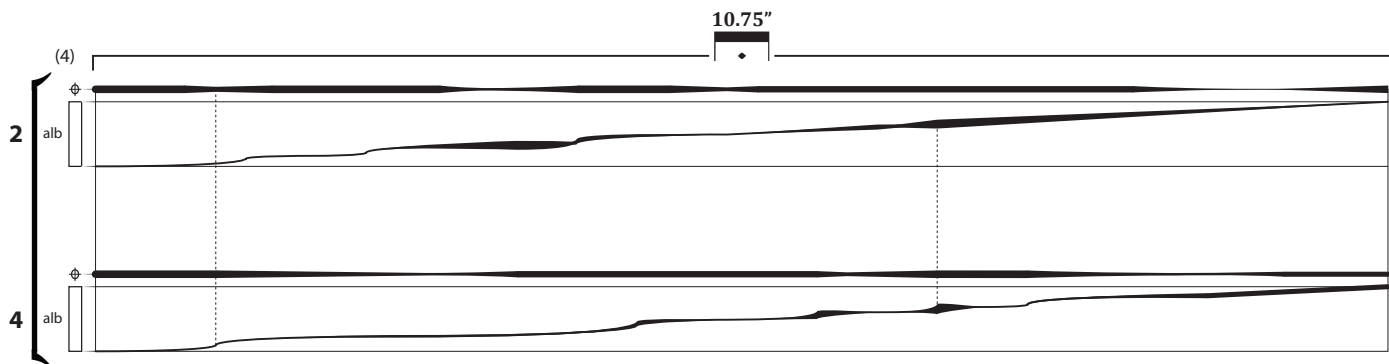
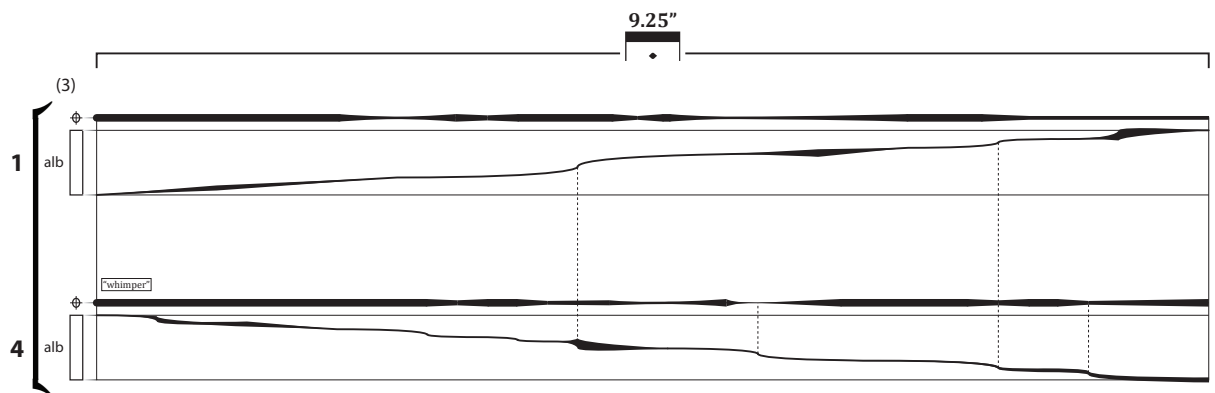
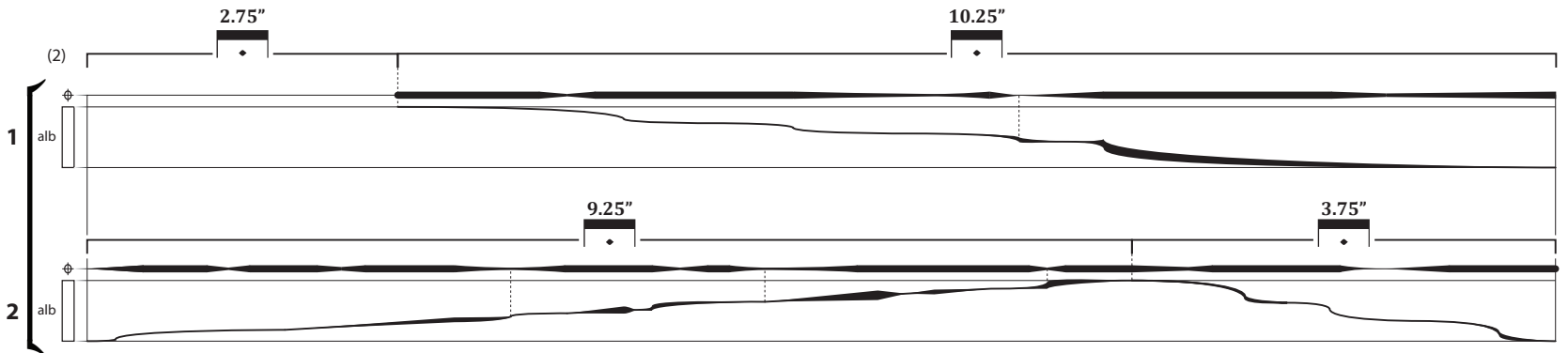
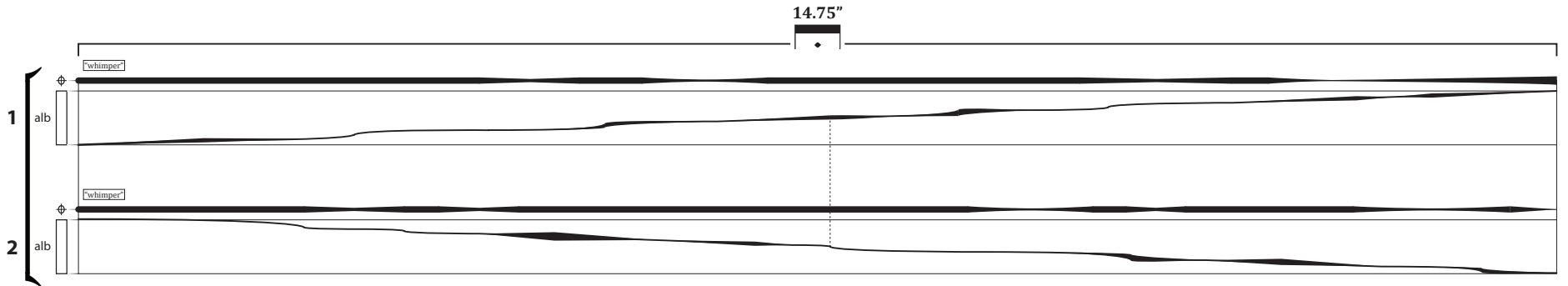
Two types of rhythmic notation are used throughout this piece. The first one, employed primarily at the opening, is irrational and does not rely on an underlying pulse layer to place and coordinate events. In this notation, square fermatas are used to indicate durations and the actual timing of events are left up to the performers (assuming no click track is being used). The horizontal spacing of this material is exactly proportional to its placement in time and should be followed as closely as possible. Dotted vertical lines indicate points of coordination between parts.

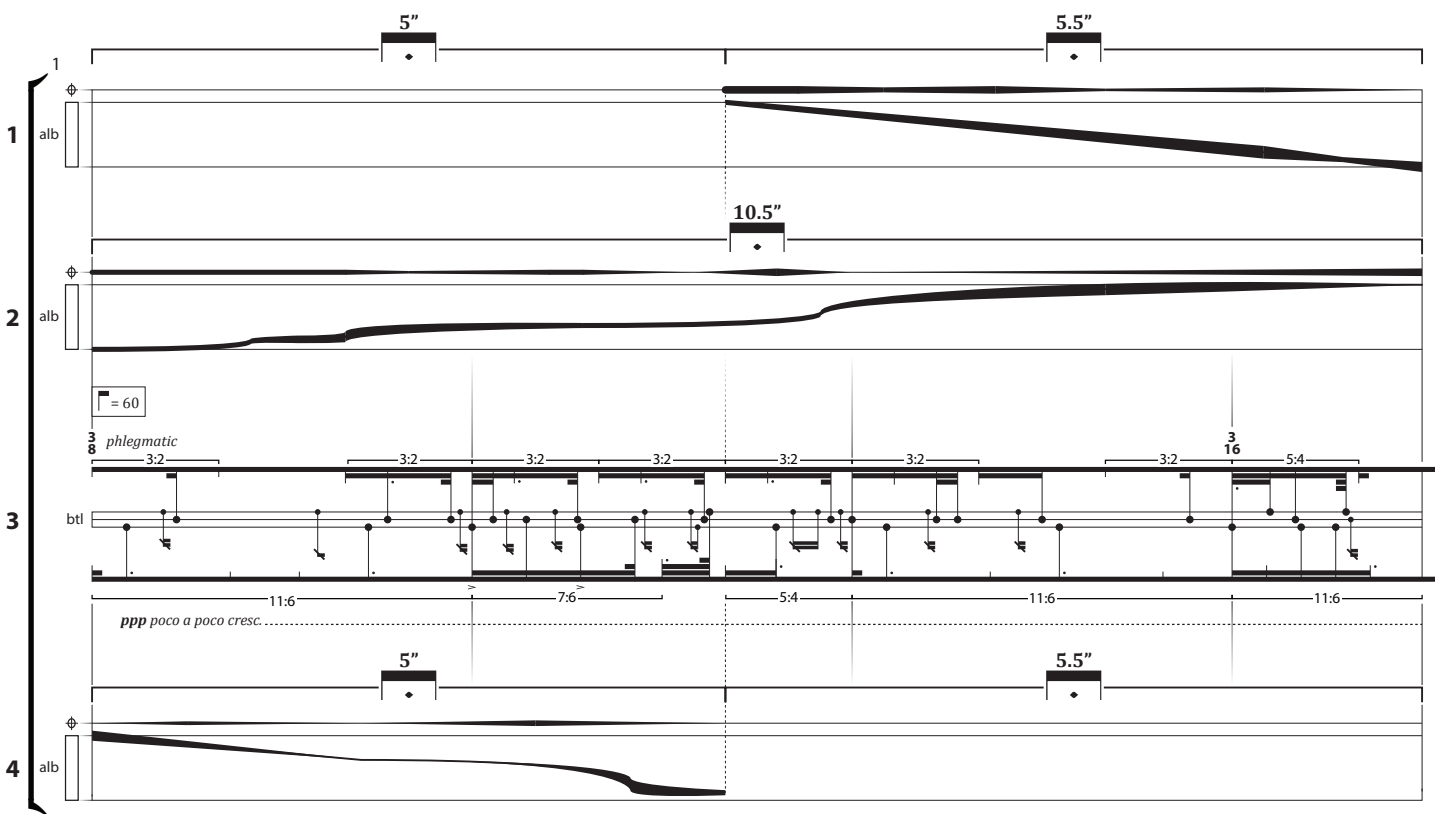
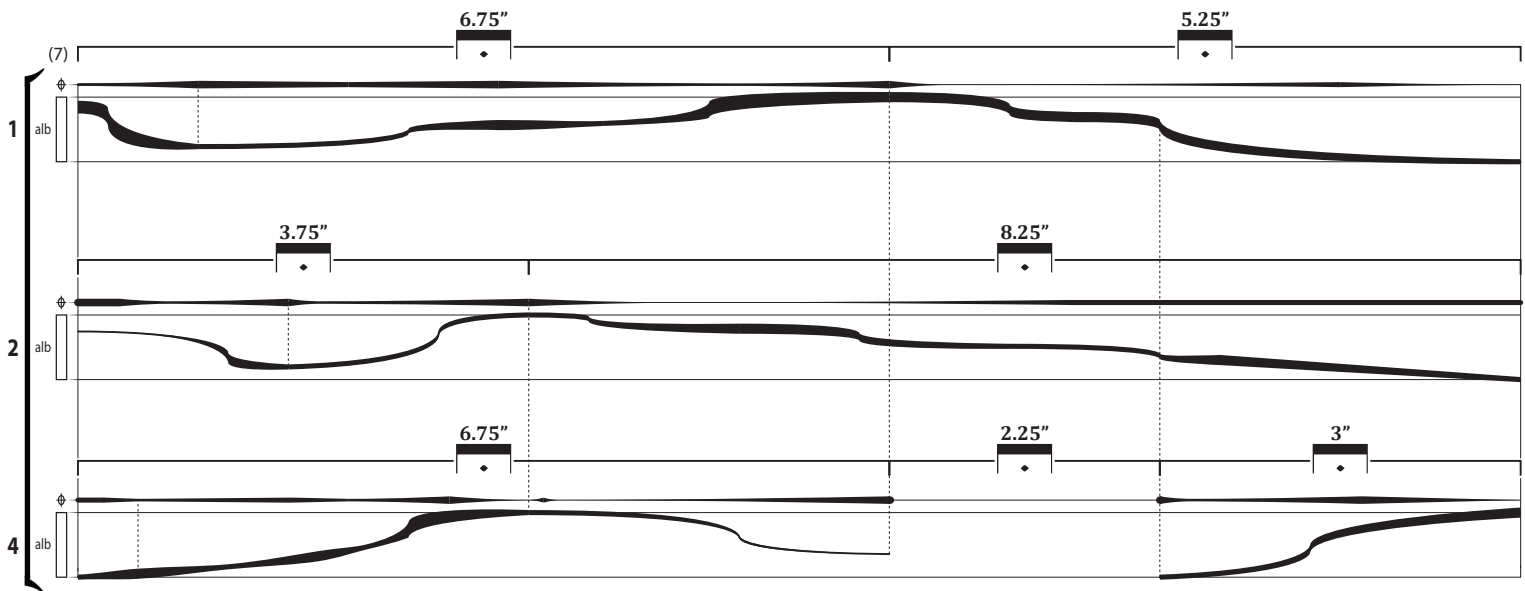
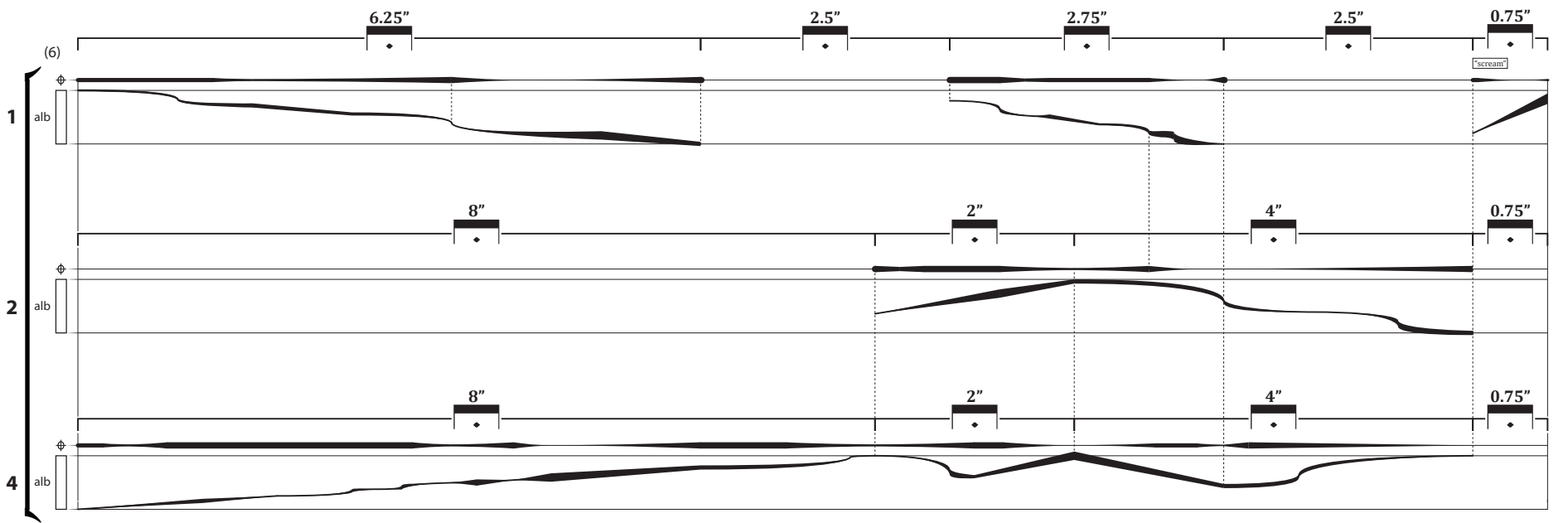
The second rhythmic notation employed is the conventional one that uses an underlying rational pulse to place and coordinate events. All material thus notated is connected by a rhythmic “staff” above the normal staff consisting of an extended eighth note beam. Grace notes should be executed as fast as possible.

Meters are notated above the rhythmic staff. There is one moment around bar 94 where player 3 has different meters than the other players. Bar numbers start with the first rationally notated bar. Before that, the music is numbered parenthetically according to system.

for Third Coast Percussion
On Tenterhooks

Chris Fisher-Lochhead





System 1-4: This system contains four staves. Staves 1 and 2 are labeled 'alb' and show a thick black line representing a spectral or amplitude envelope. Staves 3 and 4 are labeled 'btl' and show musical notation with notes and rests. Above the staves, there are three time intervals marked with dots: 7.75", 4.5", and 1.75". Below the staves, there are several time intervals marked: 3/16, 3.2, 3/8, 11.6, 16:15, 7.6, 7.6, 5:3, 11.6, 11.6, and 11.6. A dynamic marking 'mp' is present. A 'wait (c. 1/2)" instruction is at the end of staff 4. The word 'scream' is written in a box at the end of staves 1 and 2.

System 1-4: This system contains four staves. Staves 1 and 2 are labeled 'alb'. Staves 3 and 4 are labeled 'btl'. Above the staves, there are three time intervals marked: 2.75", 5.5", and 4.75". Below the staves, there are several time intervals marked: 1/8, 3/16, 3/8, 5:3, 5:3, 5:3, 3/16, 3/8, 5:4, 3/16, 3/8, 3/16, 3/8, 11.6, 11.6, 7.6, 7.6, and 7.6. Dynamic markings include 'sf', 'p', 'pp', 'sff', and 'pp cresc.'. A 'wait (c. 3/4)" instruction is at the end of staff 4.

System 1-4: This system contains four staves. Staves 1 and 2 are labeled 'alb'. Staves 3 and 4 are labeled 'btl'. Above the staves, there are three time intervals marked: 2.75", 2", and 7.5". Below the staves, there are several time intervals marked: 5:3, 5:3, 7.6, 3:2, 3:2, 3:2, 11.6, 11.6, 11.6, 11.6, 5/16, 3:2, and 3:2. Dynamic markings include 'mf' and 'f'. 'wait (c. 3/4)" instructions are at the end of staves 2 and 4. Below the staves, there are three time intervals marked: 4.75", 5", and 2.5".

20
1 btl
2 btl
3 btl
4 alb

mf *sf*

mp poco a poco cresc.

3/8 3/8 3:2 11:6 11:6

4" 6"

This system contains the first four staves of a musical score. Staff 1 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamics *mf* and *sf*. Staff 2 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamic *mp poco a poco cresc.*. Staff 3 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamic *mp poco a poco cresc.*. Staff 4 (alb) is a thick black line representing a volume envelope, with two rectangular pulses labeled "4" and "6".

24
1 alb
2 btl
3 btl
4 alb

6" 3" 4.25"

stutter

5/32 5/32 5/32

7:6 7:6 7:6 7:6

11:6 5:3 11:6 11:6 11:6

6" 3" 4.25"

stutter

This system contains the next four staves. Staff 1 (alb) is a thick black line with a volume envelope and three rectangular pulses labeled "6", "3", and "4.25". Staff 2 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamics *ff*, *fff*, and *f*. Staff 3 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamics *ff*, *sff*, and *sf*. Staff 4 (alb) is a thick black line with a volume envelope and three rectangular pulses labeled "6", "3", and "4.25".

29
1 alb
2 btl
3 btl
4 alb

6" 4.25" 3.75"

Scream

cresc. *fff* *sff* *sf* *mf*

5:4 5:4 5:4 5:4

mf cresc. *ff* *p*

1.5" 8" .75" 3.75"

stutter

This system contains the final four staves. Staff 1 (alb) is a thick black line with a volume envelope and three rectangular pulses labeled "6", "4.25", and "3.75". Staff 2 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamics *cresc.*, *fff*, *sff*, *sf*, and *mf*. Staff 3 (btl) has a 2/8 time signature and contains notes with dynamics *mf cresc.*, *ff*, and *p*. Staff 4 (alb) is a thick black line with a volume envelope and four rectangular pulses labeled "1.5", "8", ".75", and "3.75".

35

1 btl *ff*

2 btl *f cresc.* *ff*

3 btl *f cresc.* *ff*

4 alb

4.75" 8"

41

1 wpl bd btl *sff* *mf*

2 alb *mf*

3 wbl wpl dg btl *sff* *mf*

4 alb

51

1 wpl bd btl *mf* *mp* *mf* *sf* *mp*

2 wpl ep btl *f* *mf* *sf* *mp*

3 wbl wpl dg btl *f* *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *ff* *p* *mp* *sf*

60

1 wpl alb bd btl

2 wpl ep btl

3 wbl wpl dg bd btl

4 wpl alb bd

68

1 alb bd

2 wpl ep btl dg

3 wbl wpl dg bd btl

4 wpl alb ep bd

75

1 alb bd

2 dg

3 wbl wpl dg bd btl

4 wpl alb ep bd

82

1 alb
bd

3 wbl
wpl
dg
bd
btl

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

ff *p sempre*

sff *p sempre*

suddenly subdued

"shake"

90

1 alb
bd

2 dg

3 wbl
wpl
alb
dg
bd
btl

4 ep

sf *p sempre*

97

1 alb
bd

2 dg

3 wbl
wpl
alb
dg
bd
btl

4 ep

mp

103

1 alb
bd

2 dg
cym

3 wbl
wpl
alb
dg
bd
btl

4 ep

109

1 wpl
alb
bd
btl

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

112

1 wpl
alb
bd
btl

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

115

1 wpl
alb
bd
btl

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

118

1 wpl
alb
bd
btl

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

121

1 wpl
alb
bd
btl

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

124

1 wpl
alb
bd
bti

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

127

1 cym

2 cym

3 cym

4 wbl
wpl
alb
ep
bd

