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Somewhere In The Upstream, in memory of Yusef Lateef (1920-2013)

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Somewhere In The Upstream

for trombone, bass, drums and computer

in memory of Yusef Lateef (1920-2013)

Composed by Michael Dessen
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last updated July 13, 2016

Somewhere In The Upstream was made possible by
a grant from the Fromm Music Foundation.

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for trombone, bass, drums and computer

in memory of Yusef Lateef (1920-2013)

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Created for the Michael Dessen Trio:
Michael Dessen, trombone/computer
Christopher Tordini, bass
Dan Weiss, drums

Somewhere In The Upstream was made possible by a grant from the Fromm Music Foundation. I am deeply grateful to them for supporting my musical explorations.

About this score

This composition is takes the form of a “scorestream,” my term for an algorithmic, networked score that is displayed dynamically on computer screens for improvisers to interpret. In addition to a visually displayed score, this composition also integrates algorithmic audio and live processing and sampling.

The scorestream software presents the composition slightly differently in each performance, with varied pacing and sequencing of the visual and sonic materials. This music also involves a high degree of improvisation, so much information about interpretation of the notated materials is communicated orally in the rehearsal process.

For all these reasons, what follows is not a linear score that can be read in a traditional way, but instead an overview of the software's structure along with the collection of musical notations that the improvisers study in preparation to perform the piece.

Program Note

Somewhere In The Upstream is dedicated to Yusef Lateef, an acclaimed composer and saxophonist who created an expansive body of musical work that began in the late 1930s and continued up until a few months before his passing at the age of 93 last year. His career includes early sideperson contributions to ensembles led by jazz icons such as Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderly and Charles Mingus; influential recordings as a bandleader beginning in the 1950s, when he was one of the first artists to incorporate non-western instruments and technniques in jazz contexts; numerous fully-notated compositions for classical forces beginning with his first orchestral composition in 1969; four years of musical research and collaborations in Nigeria during the 1980s; many widely known publications on musical techniques as well as philosophical and literary writings; a doctoral degree in Education and fifteen years as a faculty member in the Music Department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and a vast collection of musical recordings under his own label produced during the last two decades of his life that integrate composition, improvisation and technology in a deeply individual way.

Lateef's musical legacy resists the categories through which we typically understand twentieth-century music, and offers a powerful example of the multidimensional legacies of twentieth century African American music traditions. Although he was named an "American Jazz Master" by the National Endowment for the Arts, Lateef himself declined to use the word jazz and chose instead to refer to his musical tradition with his own term, "autophysiopsychic music," which he defined as "that which comes from one's spiritual, physical and emotional self."

I was fortunate to study with Dr. Lateef for several years in the mid-1990s, and also to have opportunities to perform on one of his albums and publish writings about his work. He was the first mentor who helped me begin developing a musical practice that - as he might put it - "syncretizes" numerous traditions and ideas in an individual language. He profoundly influenced me through the depth of exploration that he brought to music making and, just as important, through the consistently kind and loving character of his words and actions. Conversations in my two years of composition lessons with Lateef often ranged far beyond the technical aspects of music, and even though we would often respectfully disagree on some topics, he modelled a practice of compassion that impacted me in ways I cannot adequately express in words.

Somewhere In The Upstream builds on the previous work that I have done with this particular trio, and although it does not in any way attempt to imitate Lateef's music, I realized as I was completing the piece that the soundworlds and methods I have been exploring with this band over the past decade owe more to Lateef than I had previously understood. Many of Lateef's albums on his YAL label, made when he was in his 70s and 80s and living in a rural area of western Massachusetts, used the recording studio in an alchemical way, bringing together pre-composed materials and improvisations to create otherworldly spaces infused with paradox: they are simultaneously humorous and deadly serious, abstract and referential, and original yet grounded in longstanding, communal traditions. Like my previous music for this trio, *Somewhere In The Upstream* was created in search of a similar spirit, but rather

than being a studio creation, this work is intended for live performance, and naturally reflects my own personal constellation of musical influences.

This composition also takes a form that I call a “scorestream,” in which precomposed score materials are displayed in realtime on screens for the improvisers to interpret, in coordination with electronic sounds and processing. In this sense, the score is not a predetermined linear narrative but more like a database of musical structures that are displayed in slightly different ways in each performance, following a certain logic built into the software I created. With respect to both scored and electronic materials, the line between what is composed and improvised in this music is often difficult to discern, but is also irrelevant; like many traditions of music making that use complex structures in highly improvisatory ways, we do not simply alternate between reading and improvising, but instead use intricate, precomposed materials as points of departure for realtime, collective composition and discovery. In that spirit, this music is also deeply indebted to the contributions of my collaborators, Chris Tordini and Dan Weiss, both of whom are exceptionally flexible, virtuoso musicians who pry open the compositions I bring to reveal new possibilities in each performance.

Thank you for listening.

- Michael Dessen

Technology notes/screenshots

Main components of the scorestream software:

in MAX/MSP

DASHBOARD: Master controls
- master on/off
- mode selector: manual (cue a graphic), section (rehearse a section), or director (for performance)
- menus containing graphic/section names, for use in manual/section modes
- slider (timing) controls

DIRECTOR: Cues flow of sections during performance
- chooses next section to cue, based on precomposed sequences
- sets the duration of the section, within stored max/min range

SECTIONS: Specify unique probabilities/order of specific graphic files
- grouped in three categories: cycles, lines and spaces
- uses custom software component to specify probabilities for next actions after each graphic
- each section also has stored data that specifies:
    - section duration
    - slider duration (i.e. speed)
    - slider display type (large, small, none)
    - multibone on/off

MULTIBONE PLAYER: Generates midi to "improvise" with Ableton sampler instruments
- four players, each with different settings and soundworlds (played by tracks 1-4 in Ableton)
- parameters (tempo, midi notes/patterns, effects, number of players) controlled by presets
- continuously cycles randomly among presets
- on/off controlled by Director, based on active section's stored data

SCORE DISPLAYER: Displays graphics and slider in window for musicians
- receives graphic filenames and slider settings from Director, compiles/displays
- window is shared with iPads via AirDisplay software

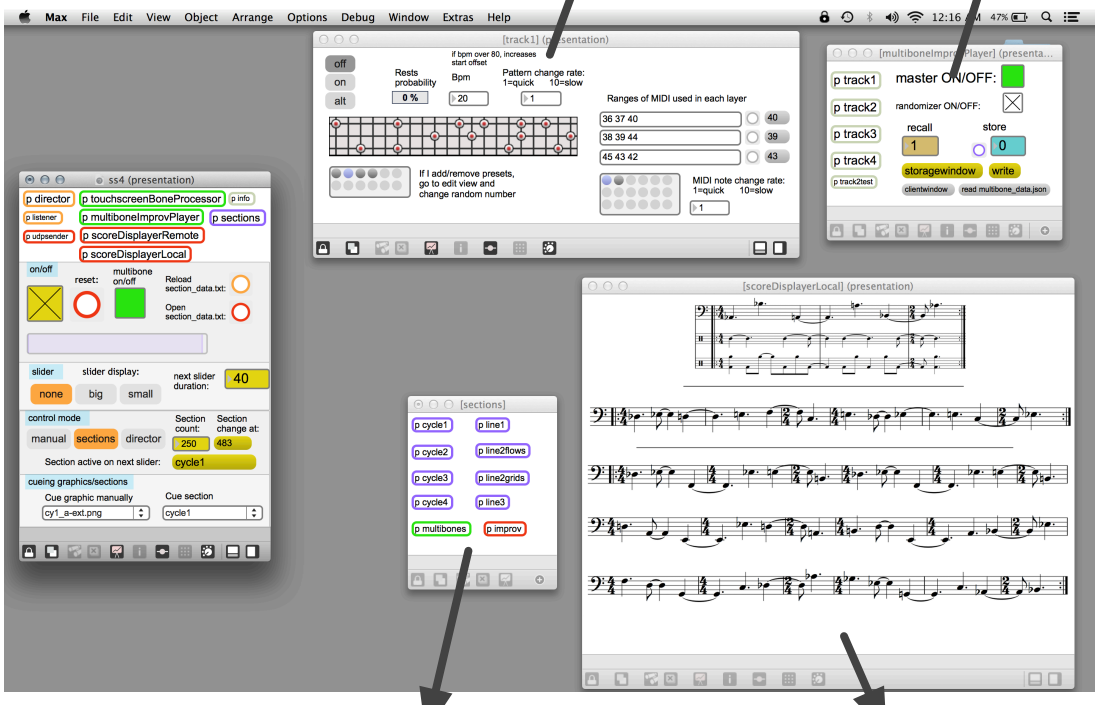
in Ableton Live

ABLETON LIVE SET: Hosts multisampler instruments and audio processing/sampling
- receives remote midi messages from Multibone Player, to control 4 multisampler tracks
- hosts other tracks with audio effects plugins for live processing of trombone
- hosts other tracks for optional live sampling

General overview

Window for one multibone player (track 1)

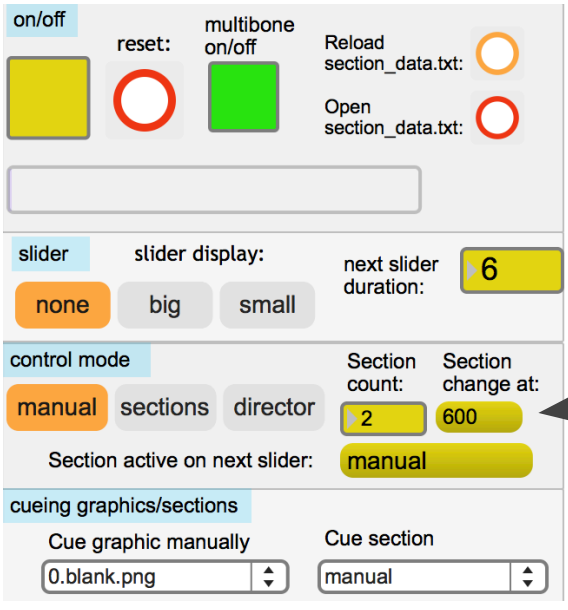
Master controls for all 4 multibone player tracks



Sub-patchers for sections, each containing "GraphicFollower" components

Score displayer (no slider visible for this section)

Dashboard



Slider choice (in manual or section mode)

Selector:
- Manual and section modes for rehearsing
- Director mode for performance

For cueing in manual or section modes

Info for display only (in director mode)

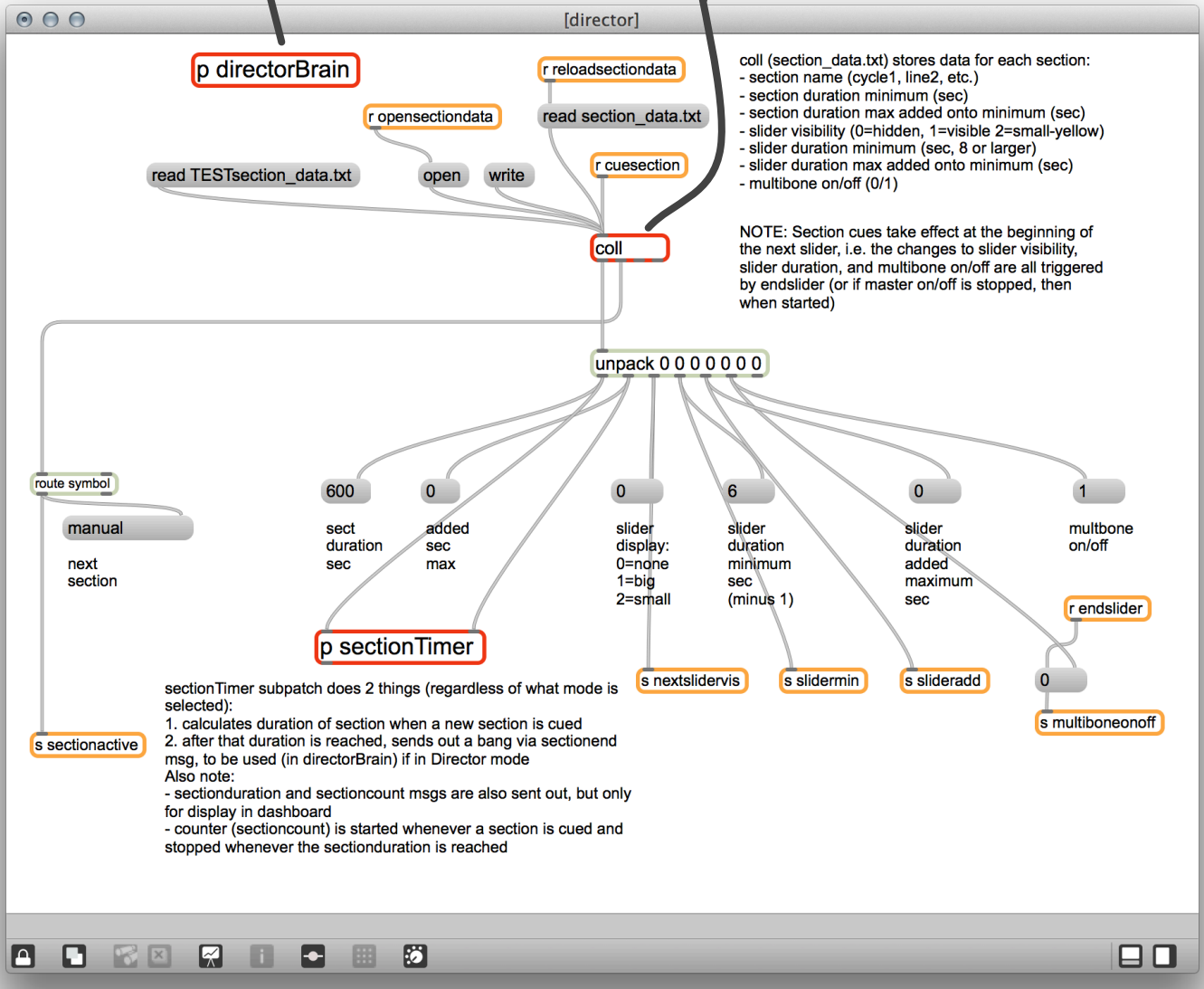
Director

Coll object:
Stores section setting data:
- section duration possible range
- slider duration possible range (i.e. speed)
- slider display type (large, small, none)
- multibone on/off

Director Brain:
- contains precomposed sequences of sections
- randomly chooses one to use in each performance
- sends out section cue messages when in Director mode
- easily edited to adjust possible sequences of sections in performance

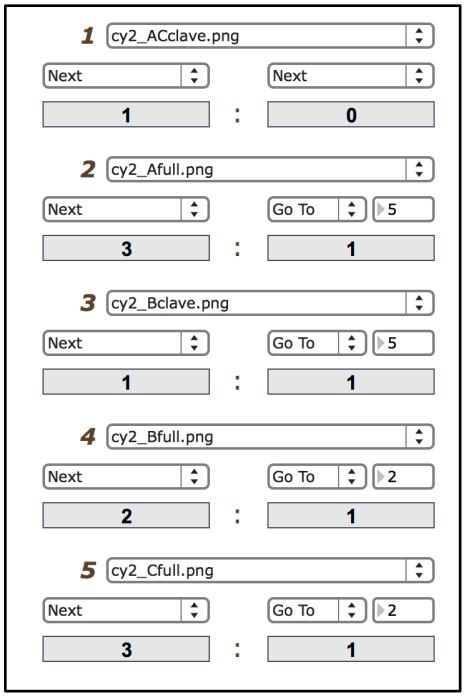
```
4  cycle3, 300 60 0 10 5 0;
5  cycle4, 210 120 0 20 0 0;
6  line1, 300 60 0 60 20 0;
7  line2flows, 180 90 1 10 25 0;
8  line2grids, 180 90 0 10 25 0;
9  line3, 240 120 1 40 28 6;
```

Coll object is text file, easily edited to adjust section settings

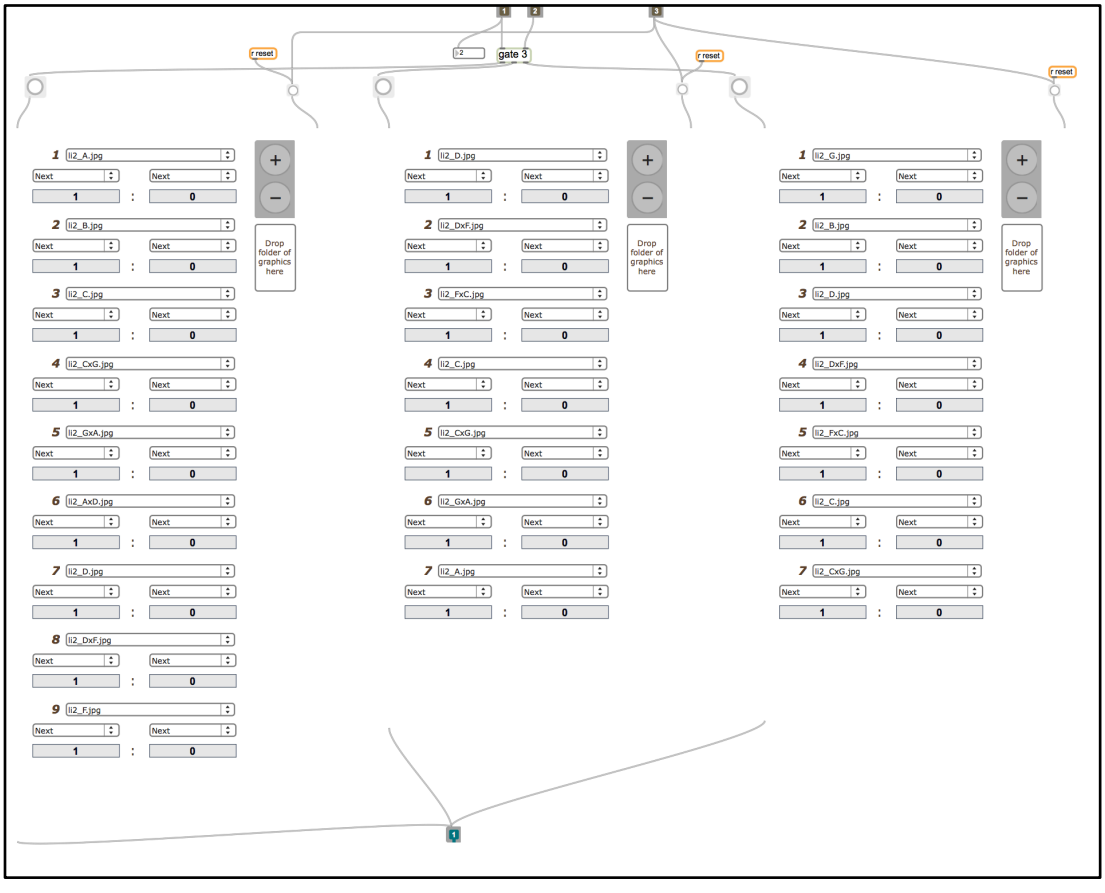


"Graphic Follower" component used inside section subpatchers

Simple example:
- sequence of 5 graphic files
- after each, two possible actions with weighted probabilities
- possible actions in menus are: next, previous, stop, repeat, go to (#), random any, random other

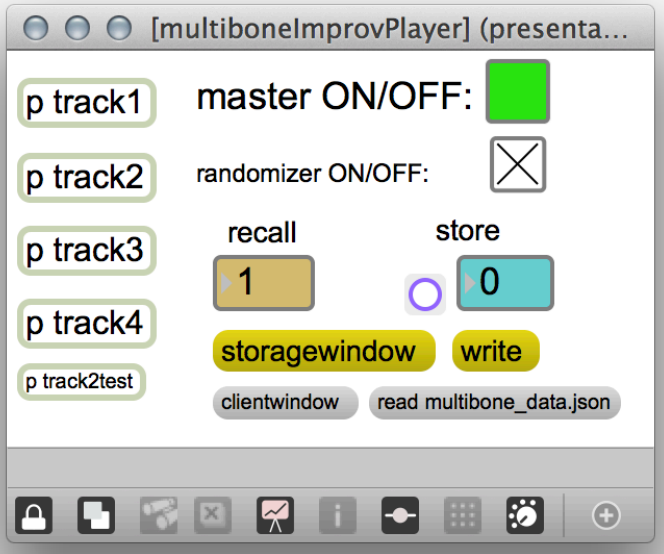


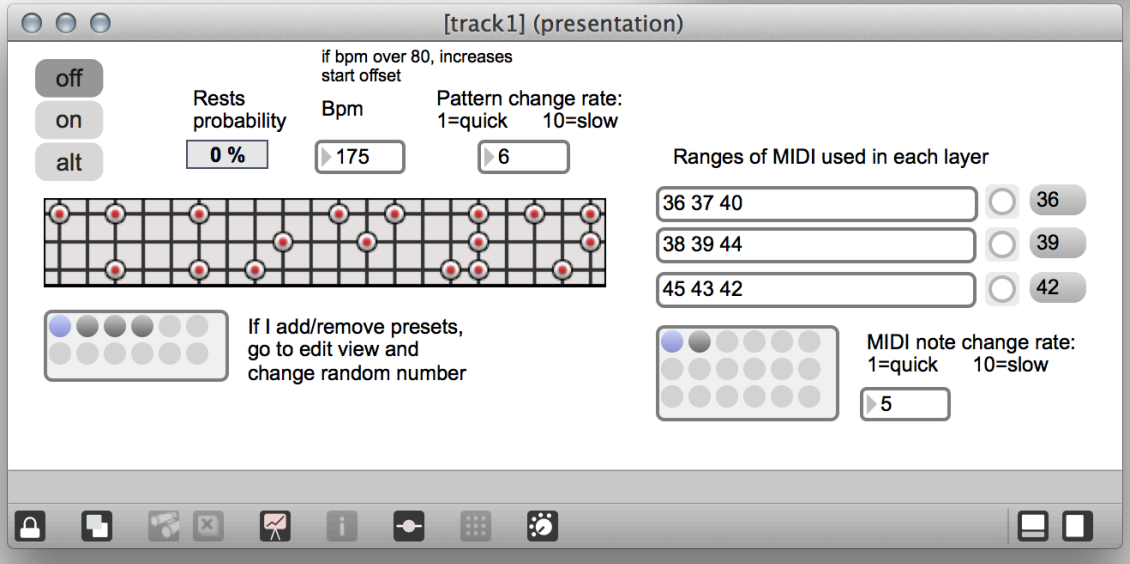
More complex example:
- three distinct flows of graphics
- software randomly chooses one to use each time section is active



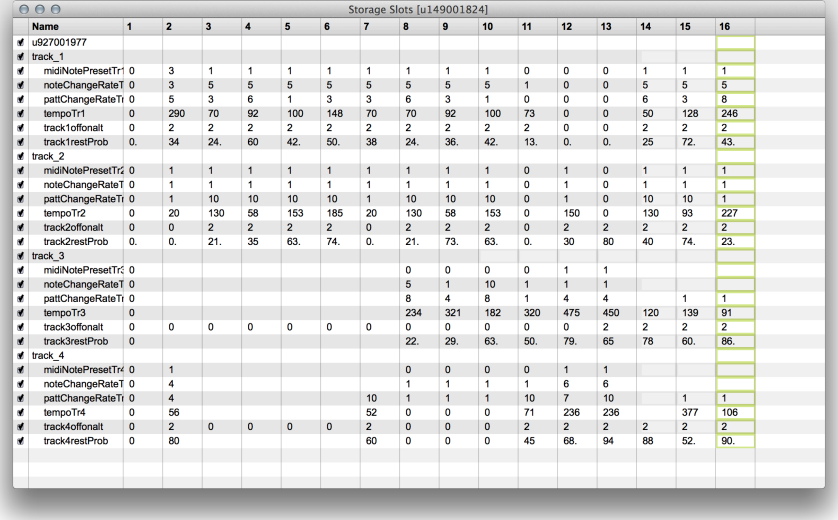
Multibone Players

Master controls for algorithmic audio being sent to 4 tracks in Ableton, each with its own multisample instrument





Settings for each track are saved in presets (track 1 detail)

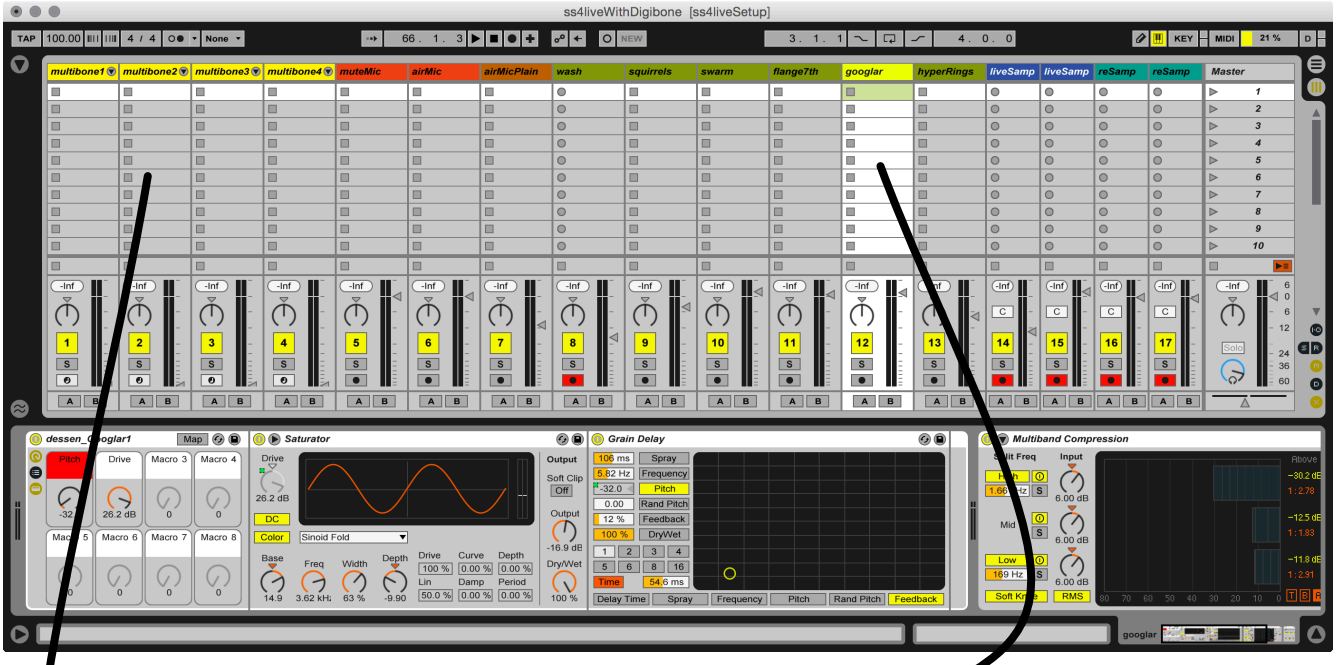


Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
u927001977																
track_1																
midiNotePresetTr1	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
noteChangeRateT	0	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	0	0	5	5	5
pattChangeRateTr	0	5	3	6	1	3	3	6	3	1	0	0	0	6	3	8
tempoTr1	0	290	70	92	100	148	70	70	92	100	73	0	0	50	128	246
track1offonalt	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	2
track1restProb	0.	34	24.	60	42.	50.	38	24.	36.	42.	13.	0.	0.	25	72.	43.
track_2																
midiNotePresetTr2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
noteChangeRateT	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
pattChangeRateTr	0	1	10	10	10	10	1	10	10	10	0	1	0	10	10	1
tempoTr2	0	20	130	58	153	185	20	130	58	153	0	150	0	130	93	227
track2offonalt	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2
track2restProb	0.	0.	21.	35	63.	74.	0.	21.	73.	63.	0.	30	80	40	74.	23.
track_3																
midiNotePresetTr3	0							0	0	0	0	1	1			
noteChangeRateT	0							5	1	10	1	1	1			
pattChangeRateTr	0							8	4	8	1	4	4		1	1
tempoTr3	0							234	321	182	320	475	450	120	139	91
track3offonalt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2
track3restProb	0							22.	29.	63.	50.	79.	65	78	60.	86.
track_4																
midiNotePresetTr4	0	1						0	0	0	0	1	1			
noteChangeRateT	0	4						1	1	1	1	6	6			
pattChangeRateTr	0	4					10	1	1	1	10	7	10		1	1
tempoTr4	0	56					52	0	0	0	71	236	236		377	106
track4offonalt	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2
track4restProb	0	80					60	0	0	0	45	68.	94	88	52.	90.

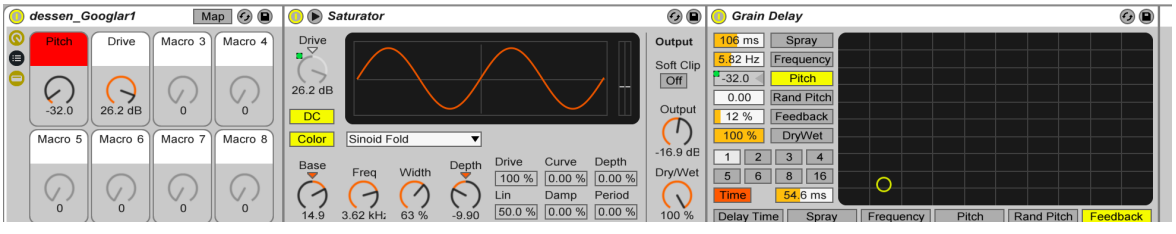
- Track 1 preset data
- Track 2 preset data
- Track 3 preset data
- Track 4 preset data

Ableton Live Set

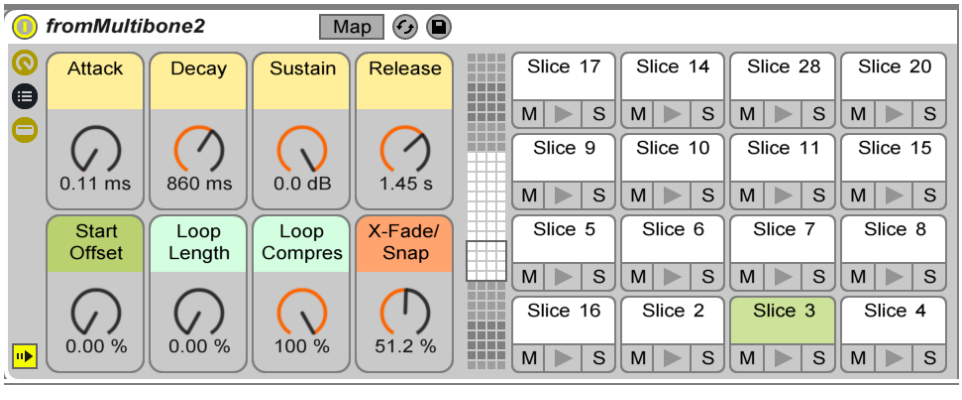
multibone players tracks 1-4 | input routing (tbn.) | tbn. processing effects tracks | live sampling tracks



Detail of live processing track,
with macro controls assigned to expression pedal



Detail of multibone track,
with samples in Ableton drum pad



Stage setup

audience

---

stage

tbn. practice mute w/ mic (for muffling acoustic sound)

mic

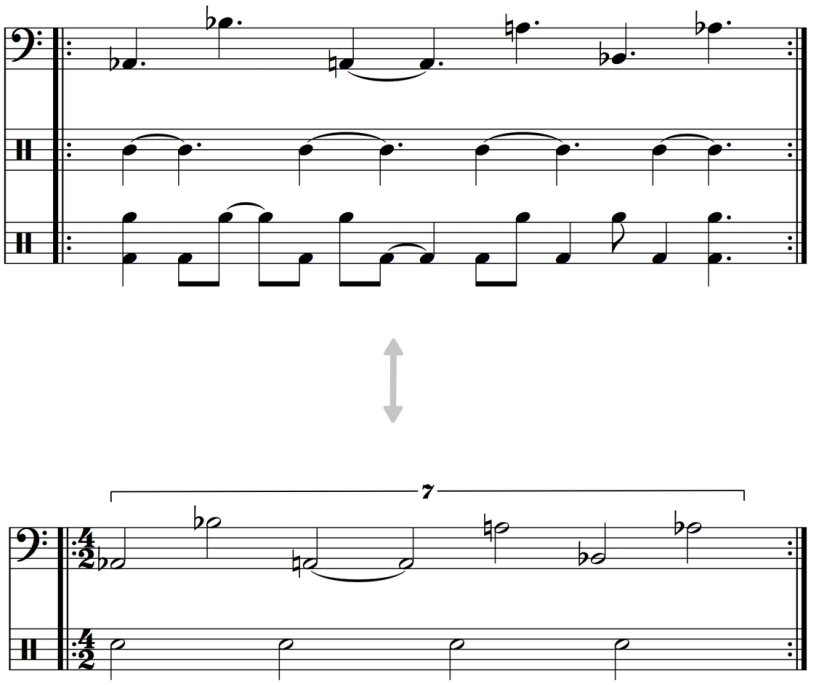
bassist and drummer read score on iPad screens via AirDisplay software

Interface
laptop
controllers

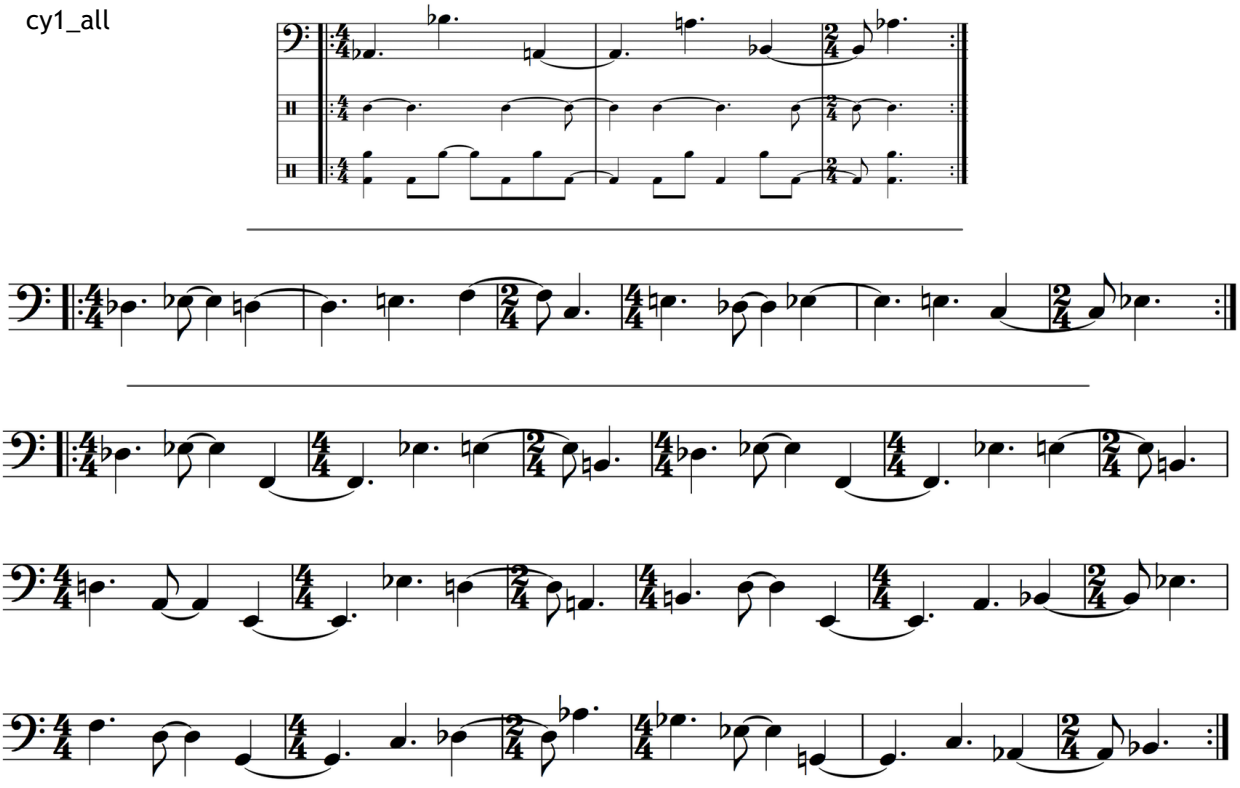
audio out to PA

Music notation graphics

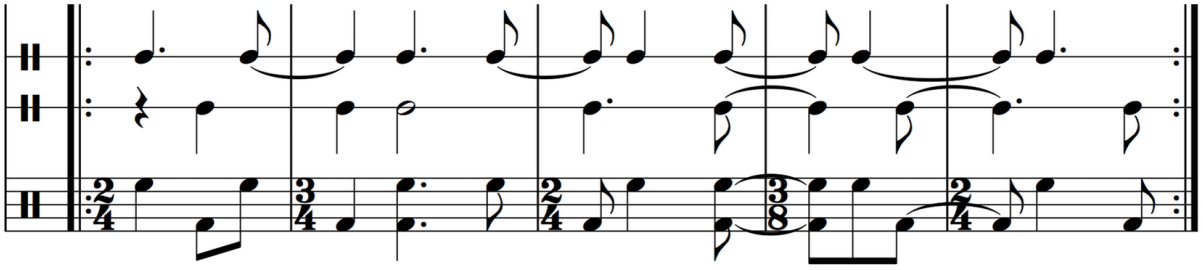
cy1_a-ext



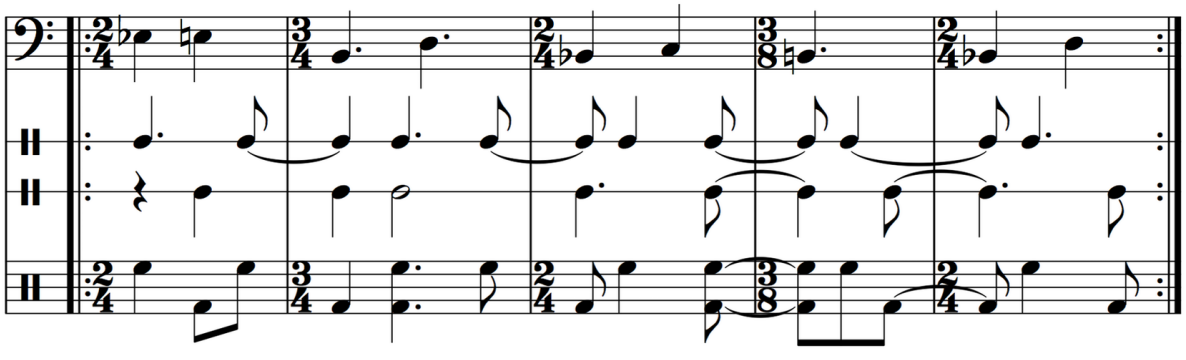
cy1_all



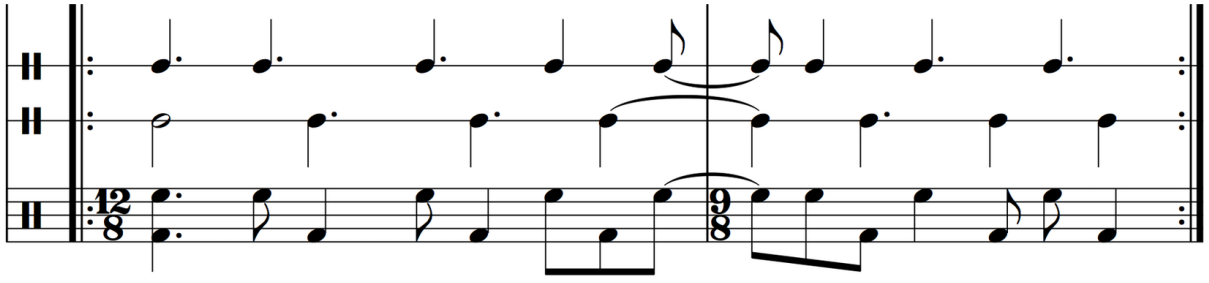
cy2_ACclave



cy2_Afull



cy2_Bclave



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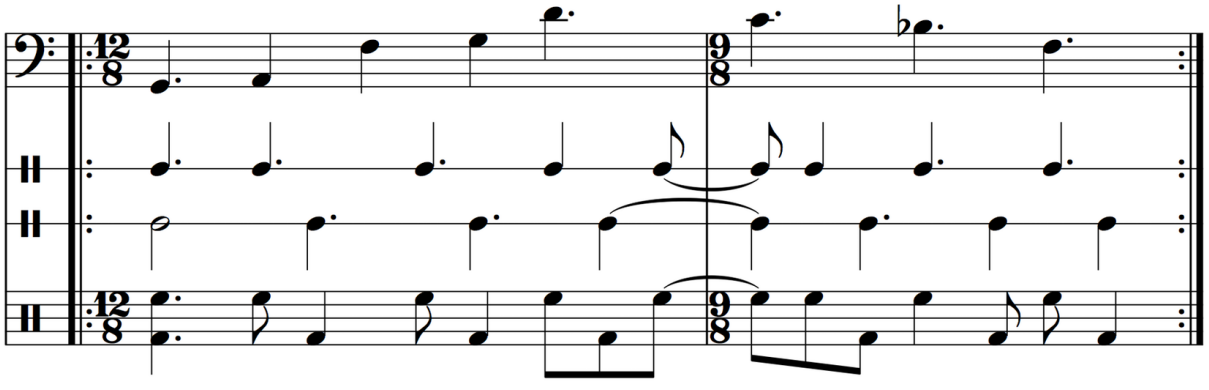
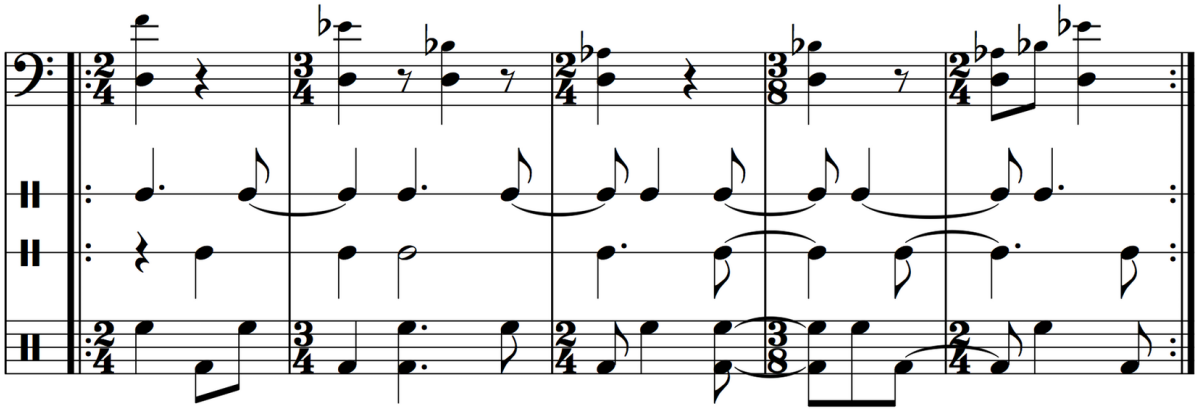
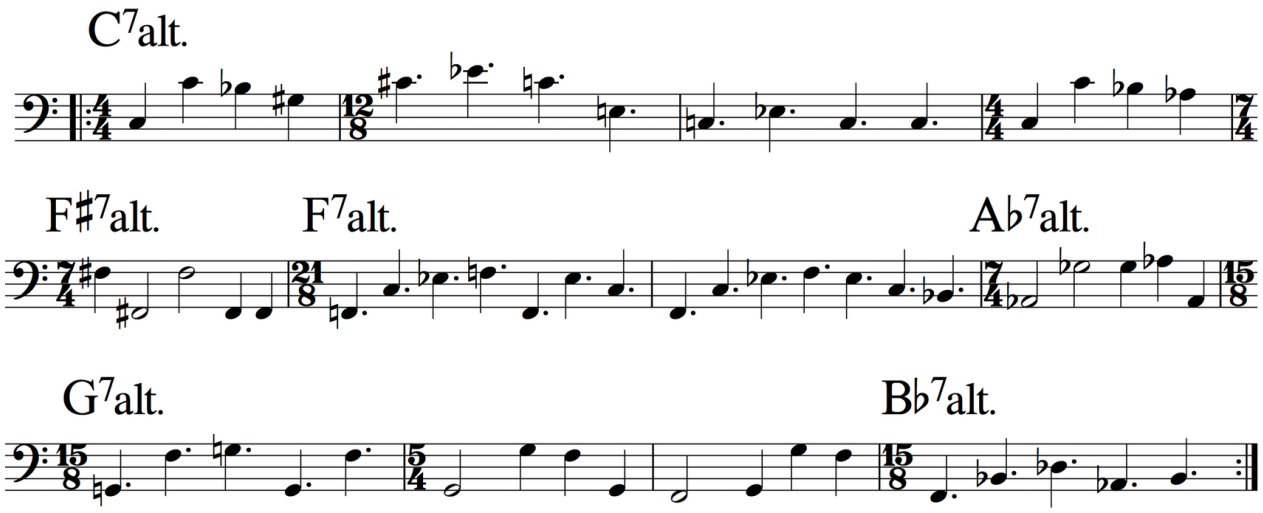


cy2_Cfull



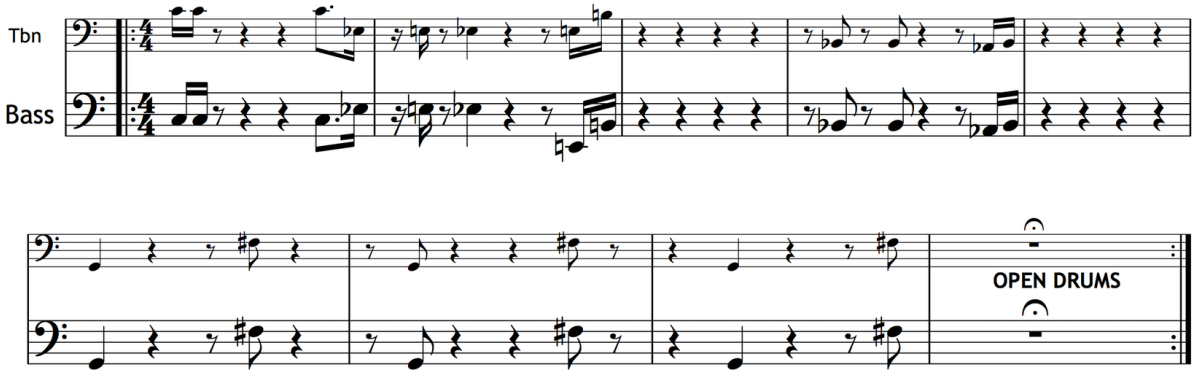
cy3_A



cy3_B

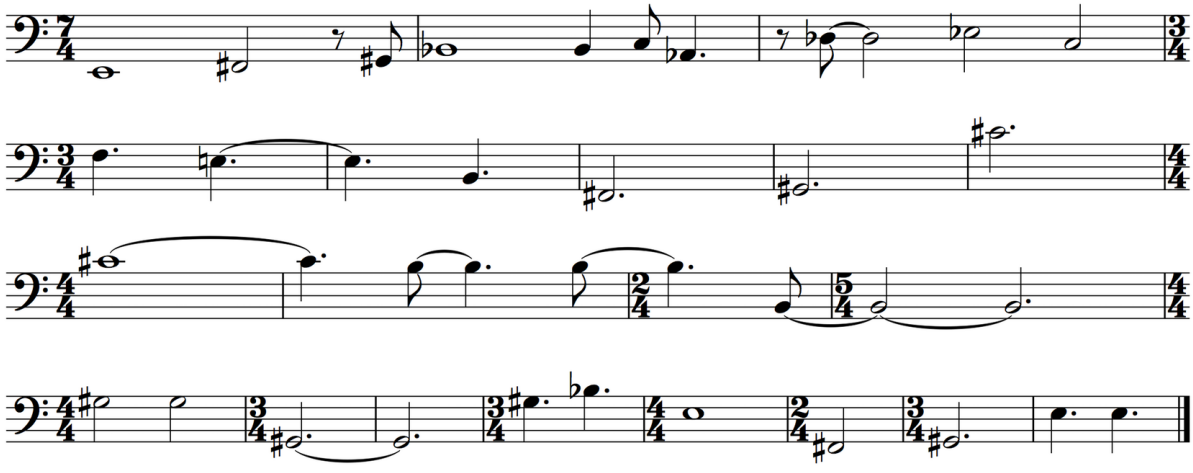
DRUM SOLO throughout

Bass/Tbn:

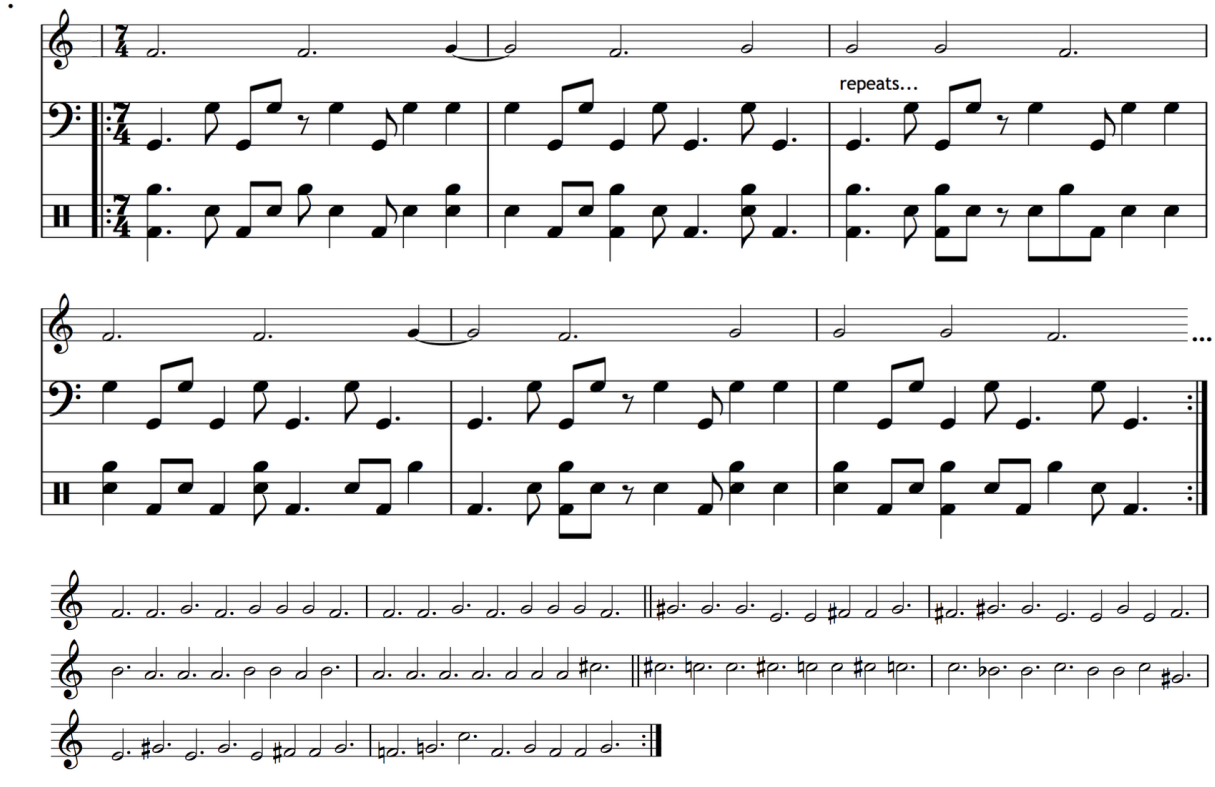


cy4_A

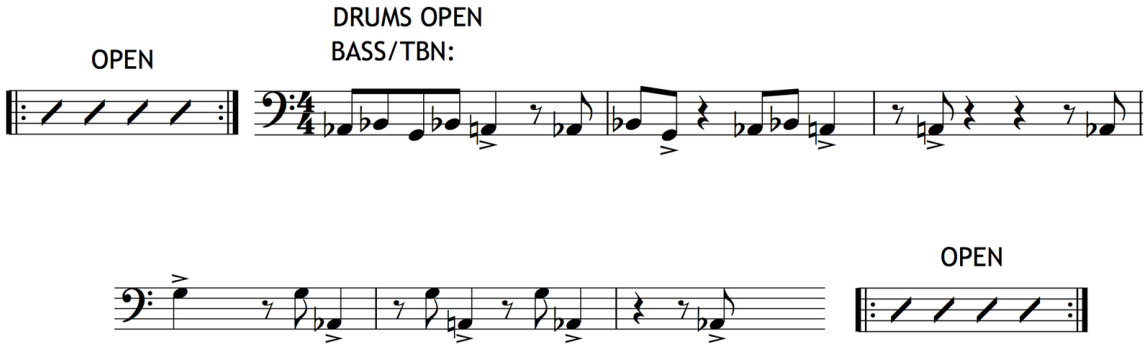
medium/slow



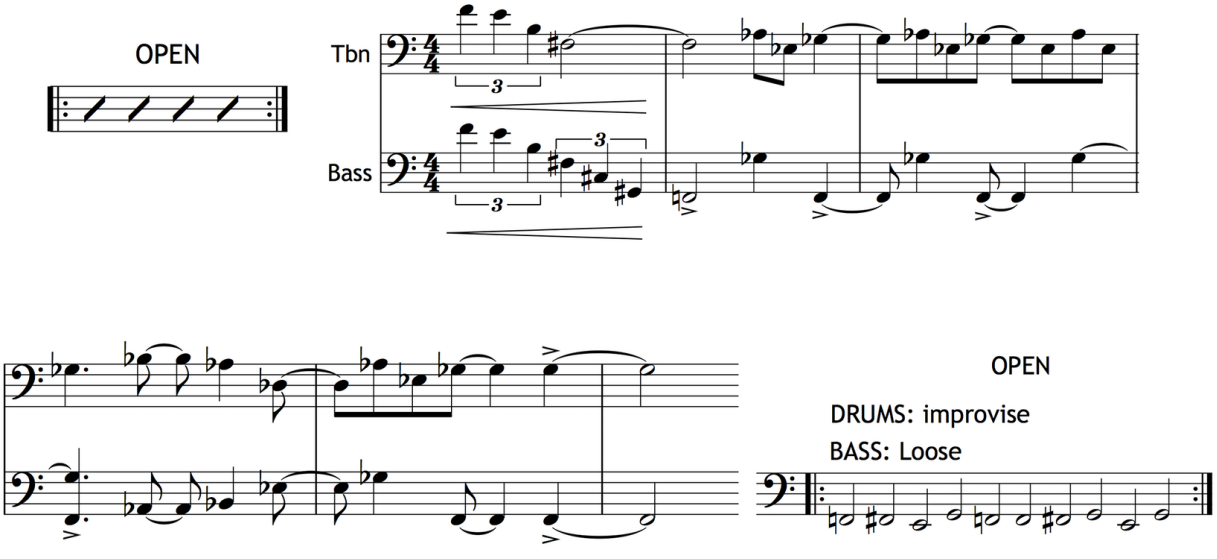
cy5



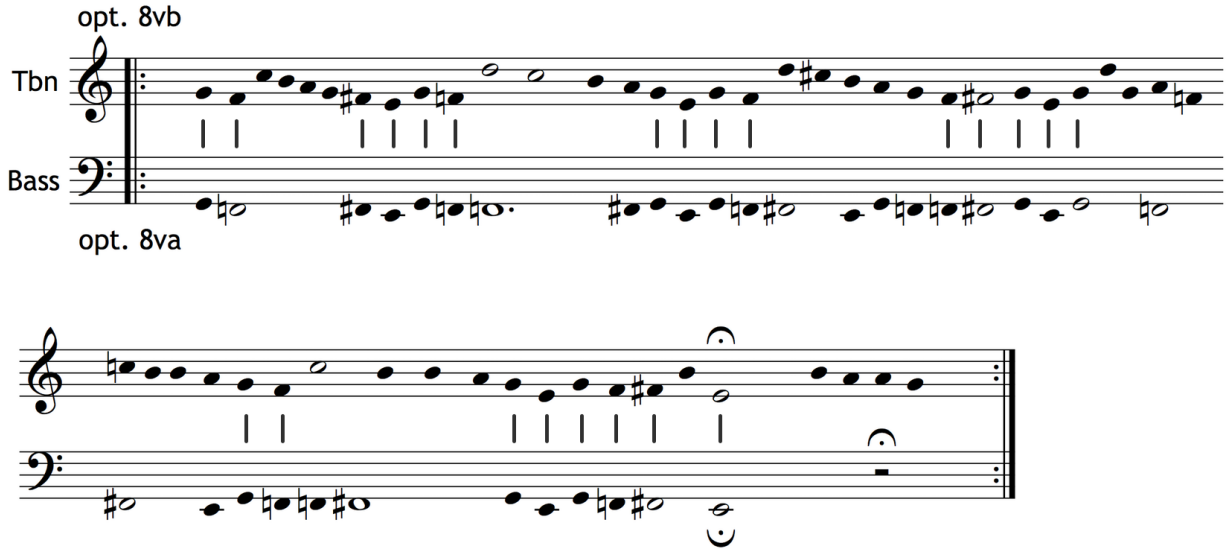
li1_a


OPEN
DRUMS OPEN
BASS/TBN:
OPEN

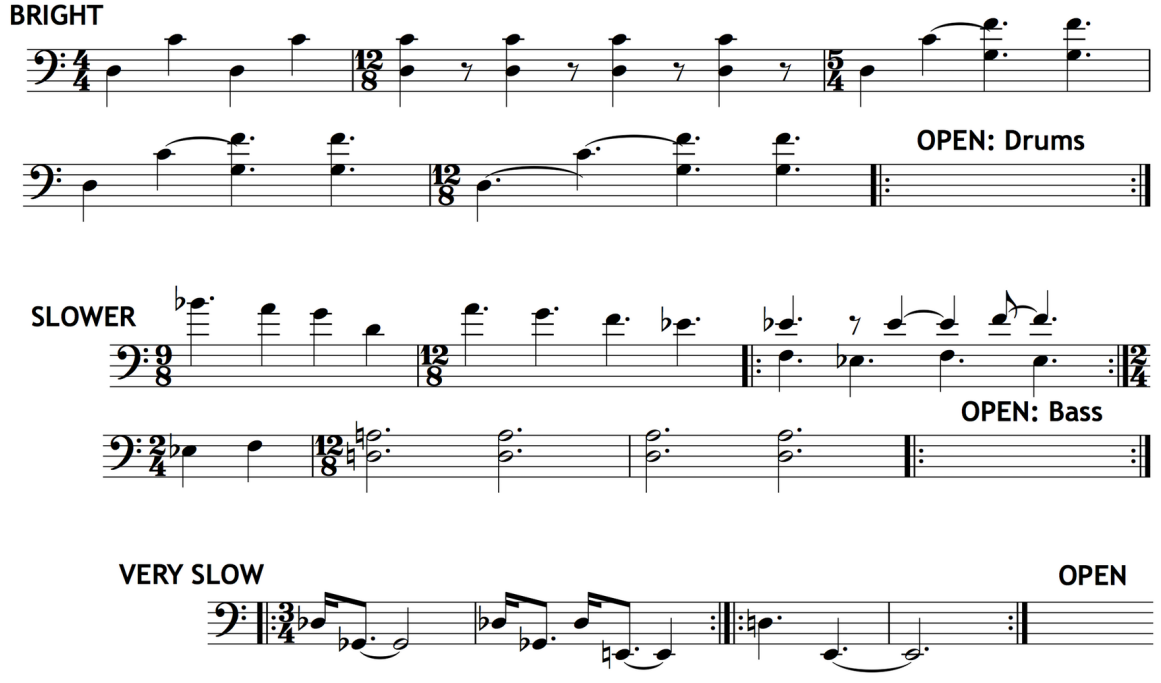
li1_b


OPEN
Tbn
Bass
3
3
3
OPEN
DRUMS: improvise
BASS: Loose

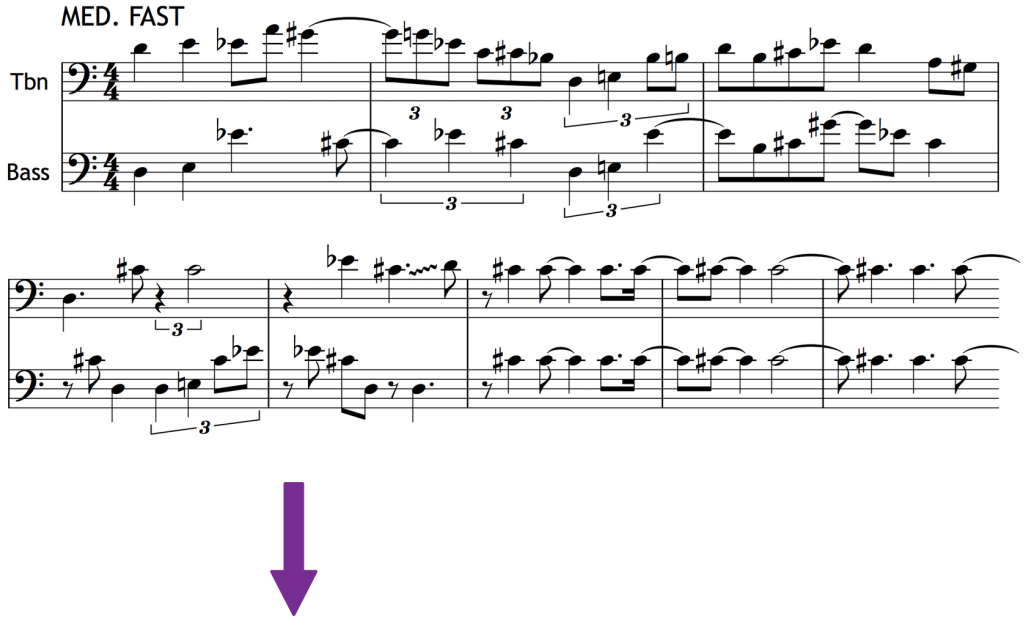
li1_c


opt. 8vb
Tbn
Bass
opt. 8va

li2_A

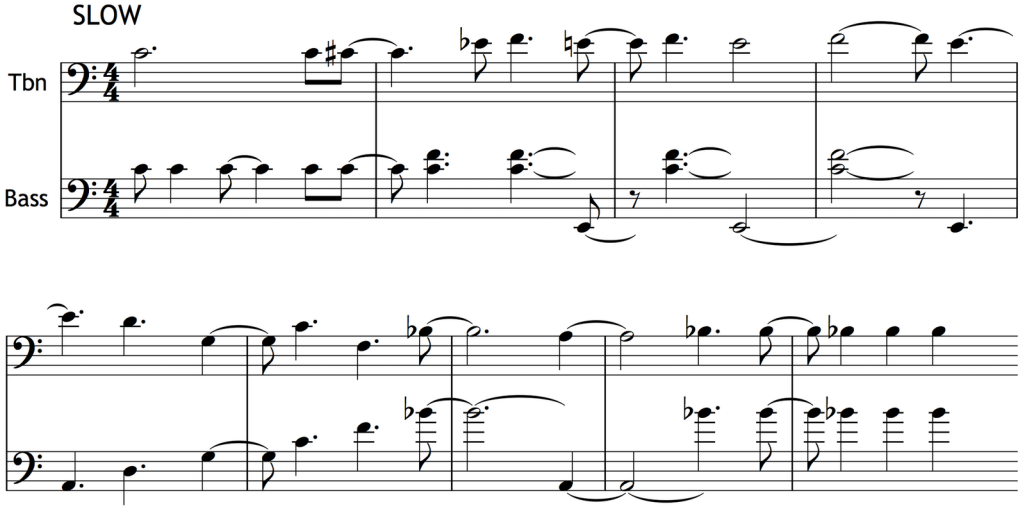

BRIGHT
OPEN: Drums
SLOWER
OPEN: Bass
VERY SLOW
OPEN

li3_a



Progress/pacing bar displayed here
Arrow indicates moment at which to perform notated line

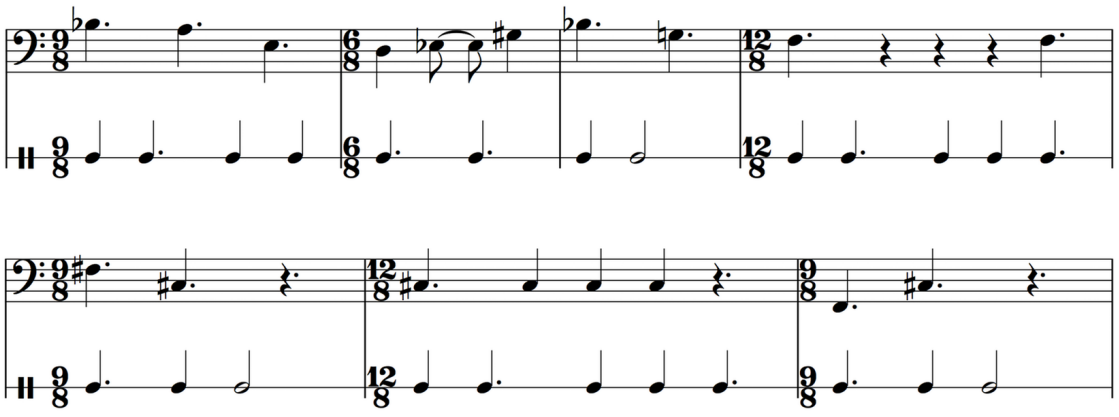
li3_b



Progress/pacing bar displayed here
Arrow indicates moment at which to perform notated line

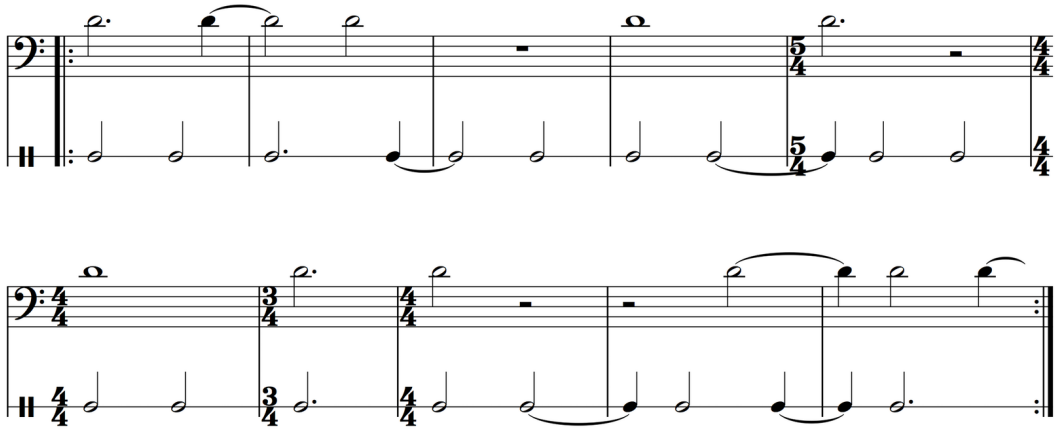
li3_c

SLOW



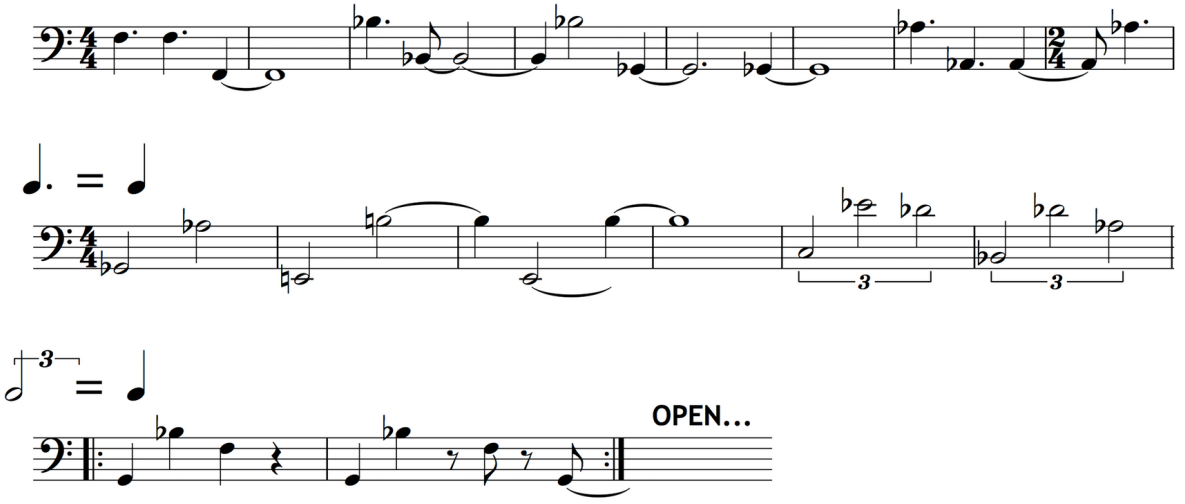
Progress/pacing bar displayed here
Arrow indicates moment at which to perform notated line

li3_d



Progress/pacing bar displayed here
Arrow indicates moment at which to perform notated line

li4_A



open

drum solo

bass solo