

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

*“even and with great force”*

A Contextualized Pedagogical Performer's Analysis Exploring Evolving Groove  
and Structural Significance Within David Lang's "Press Release"

A LECTURE RECITAL/PERFORMANCE DOCUMENT

SUBMITTED TO THE BIENEN SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS  
Program of Clarinet Performance

By  
Andrew Hudson

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS  
June 2018



## ABSTRACT

*“even and with great force”*

A Contextualized Pedagogical Performer's Analysis Exploring Evolving Groove and Structural Significance Within David Lang's "Press Release"

Andrew Hudson

Perhaps better suited for the mosh pit than the orchestra pit, David Lang's 1991 tour-de-force for solo bass clarinet, *Press Release*, is a minimalist marvel. Comprised of seven "groove sections" that evolve in seemingly unpredictable ways, Lang cleverly employs monophony to tell a robust story of motivic and harmonic development. *Press Release* offers a series of evolving grooves that coyly surprise performers and listeners alike with their humor, wit, and strength. However, due to its blistering technical demands and challengingly nuanced rhythmic patterns, *Press Release* can be an intimidating work with which to engage.

Completed on Christmas Eve in 1991,<sup>1</sup> *Press Release* can be demystified and helpfully contextualized when placed in conversation with other groove-based unaccompanied clarinet masterworks from the same era. Libby Larsen's 1994 work *Dancing Solo*, a composition of sly humor and biting ferocity, plays with the concept of "stuck-groove" throughout, often employing a recurring rhythmic figure that skips like a vinyl record before launching into riffs of increasingly-virtuosic episodic material. Roberto Sierra's 1995 work *Ritmorroto* employs a "rhythmic language which comprises the juxtaposition of two incomplete units with different subdivisions"<sup>2</sup> and stubbornly refuses to settle into established rhythmic patterns, repeatedly subverting our expectations. Eric Mandat's 1996 work *Sub(t)rainS O' Strata 'sfearS* utilizes a

---

<sup>1</sup> David Lang. *Press Release*. (New York, NY: 1992, Red Poppy Music).

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Sierra. *Ritmorroto*. (New York, NY: 1995, Subito Music Publishing).

series of furious rhythmic cells that stack and evolve as the work unfolds, sometimes quasi-improvisationally, and at times requires the clarinetist utilize extended techniques to create a literal, audible backbeat. The collective consideration of *Dancing Solo*, *Ritmorroto*, and *Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS* as contributors to the excavation of *Press Release* provides insight into Lang's evolving groove structure and offers alternative methods of evolving groove to consider and helps in demystifying the work.

The general analytical approach within this paper employs elements of Edward Cone's early rhythmic-symbolic approach to quantifying stress and release, and draws on Mark Butler's approach to analyzing electronic dance music by splitting monophonic lines into imagined "tracks" to observe layering and motivic interaction. Utilizing this dual approach, *Press Release* can be explored in the context of its contemporaneous works to aid in effective performance, pedagogy, and perception of the work. Lang's work proves an effective moderator for the conversation to which Larsen, Sierra, and Mandat each contribute in turn as their works employ similar mechanics toward unique and virtuosic conclusions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to personally thank a number of important individuals, family members, and friends who have made the completion of this document and degree possible. As they say, “it takes a village,” and my village has been strong and supportive.

To my mentor and guide Steve Cohen, I offer my most sincere gratitude. Thank you for your tireless faith in me and for consistently pushing me to perform, teach, and communicate to the best of my ability. You have formed me as a musician, and I will ever be grateful to you for your guidance, support, and friendship.

I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to Mark J. Butler, the man who taught me to love music theory and who expanded my thinking about how musicians should engage with all kinds of music. Thank you for helping me believe that I had something to say, and for helping me to say it effectively.

Thank you to Mallory Thompson, my cherished collaborator and mentor, for believing so strongly in me, and for all the journeys you’ve led me on.

And, thank you to J. Lawrie Bloom, namesake of the J. Bass, and one of the finest men and musicians I’ve ever had the privilege of working with. Thank you for the countless moments of encouragement and for teaching me what a bass clarinet is supposed to sound like.

Thank you to Susan Piagentini, whose mentorship, inspiration, and encouragement have made all the difference for me as an educator.

And, thank you to David Lang, a composer and musician whom I deeply admire, for writing the work this research primarily concerns and for contributing to this paper with an

interview. Thank you also for establishing the Bang on a Can Summer Festival, where we first met, as a utopia in which misfits like me can find our people. I have finally found mine.

Thank you also to composer Eric Mandat, one of my true heroes, for contributing to this project and for the many years of mentorship and support. Thank you also for, in the year 2007, setting a fire in me for contemporary music that has never gone out.

And, thank you to Brandon Waybright, who has so often been willing to travel through the looking glass with me and whose artistic visual realization of this project was inspiring and compelling.

Thank you to Ben Cook, whose insightful observations about the similarities between Lang's writing and monophonic synthesizer techniques drew me to explore a world of performance possibilities I'd not previously considered.

And, thank you to Hannah Christiansen, whose blazing commitment to equity in music has inspired me to consider broader strokes and has laid an important groundwork in my life.

Thank you to Lisa Oberlander for shaping me and launching my career and for never giving up on me, even when I deserved it. Thank you also to Leslie Grimm for always seeing the person I was becoming, never the person I simply was.

And most of all, thank you to Brittany. I would be lost without you.

## DEDICATION

To Eli and Nora. Everything is for you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	3
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	5
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	7
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	8
<b>LIST OF EXAMPLES</b> .....	9
<i>“even and with great force”</i> .....	10
<b>APPENDIX A: Interview With David Lang</b> .....	61
<b>APPENDIX B: Global Form Chart</b> .....	63
<b>APPENDIX C: Accompanying Visual Artwork and Artist Statement</b> .....	67
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	77



## LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example 1: <i>Press Release</i> , David Lang, mm. 1-18.....	18
Example 2: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 1-18 + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction.....	21
Example 3: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 17.....	22
Example 4: <i>Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS</i> , Eric Mandat, mm. 29.....	24
Example 5: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 1-3, Tracking the Groove.....	26
Example 6: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 1-17, Hybrid Reduction.....	27
Example 7: <i>Press Release</i> , David Lang, mm. 18, Tracking the Groove.....	29
Example 8: <i>Dancing Solo</i> , Libby Larsen, Mvt. 4, mm. 1-8.....	30
Example 9: <i>Dancing Solo</i> , Mvt. 4, mm. 22-23.....	31
Example 10: <i>Dancing Solo</i> , Mvt. 4, mm. 66-77.....	32
Example 11: <i>Dancing Solo</i> , Mvt. 4, mm. 114-120.....	32
Example 12: <i>Press Release</i> , mm.26-30 + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction.....	33
Example 13: <i>Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS</i> , mm. 77-79.....	34
Example 14: <i>Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS</i> , mm. 80-88.....	35
Example 15: <i>Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS</i> , mm. 171-177.....	36
Example 16: <i>Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS</i> , mm. 198-199.....	37
Example 17: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 46-51.....	37
Example 18: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 46-55 + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction.....	40
Example 19: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 62-63.....	41
Example 20: <i>Dancing Solo</i> , Libby Larsen, mvt. 2, mm. 33-40.....	42
Example 21: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 62-65.....	43
Example 22: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 66-69.....	44
Example 23: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 68-79.....	45
Example 24: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 80-99.....	46
Example 25: <i>Press Release</i> , David Lang, mm. 80-96 (Tracking The Groove).....	47
Example 26: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 93-104.....	48
Example 27: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 120-143.....	50
Example 28: <i>Ritmorroto</i> , Roberto Sierra, Mvt. 1 (opening).....	53
Example 29: <i>Ritmorroto</i> , Mvt. 2 (opening).....	53
Example 30: <i>Ritmorroto</i> , Mvt. 3 (excerpt).....	54
Example 31: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 175-192.....	56
Example 32: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 179-190 (Tracking the Groove).....	57
Example 33: <i>Press Release</i> , mm. 1 and 179-190 (Tracking the Groove).....	58
Example 34: <i>Press Release</i> , mm.192.....	59

*“even and with great force”*

A Contextualized Pedagogical Performer's Analysis Exploring Evolving Groove and Structural Significance Within David Lang's "Press Release"

By Andrew Hudson

Like the structural innards of Chicago's most impressive buildings or the ticking gears within a meticulously crafted Swiss watch, music too contains a deeply interwound network of moving pieces that contribute to its outward stability. Works for large symphony orchestra are built of movements and forms, and works for string quartet similarly contain multitudes of motives and moments. This trope holds true even for works that feature just a single player: in the case of the present analytical and performance discussion, it will manifest itself with particular veracity in David Lang's 1991 masterwork for solo bass clarinet, *Press Release*.

During the five-year period from 1991 to 1996, three additional composers also contributed unaccompanied masterworks to the solo clarinet repertoire, each of which is in some way based on a subliminal architecture of rhythmic interest and harmonic nuance. These composers - Libby Larsen, Roberto Sierra, and Eric Mandat - have each created works that hang in a tightly constructed balance, and similarly explore the ideas of evolving groove and thematic subversion in unique and powerful ways. Like *Press Release*, their works are built on a unique and active groove structure, and they can be placed in a contextualized conversation with Lang and one another toward interesting theoretical and practical results.

In the same way architecture grows in majesty as we understand its careful construction, so too does an appreciation for music grow as we peek beneath the surface. As we peel back the layers on each work we gain a deeper appreciation for its construction and power, and we can draw conclusions to aid in effective performance, pedagogy, and perception of each piece. For

the sake of this discussion, we will focus our attention on peeling back the surface of *Press Release*. Along the way, we will place the other three aforementioned works by Larsen, Sierra, and Mandat into conversation with the themes we uncover within Lang's work. *Press Release* contains a complex rhythmic undercurrent, and its difficult structures can be off-putting to performers and students alike, but they needn't be with a careful analysis. As we explore, we will notice some commonalities between Lang's work and the contemporaneous works of Larsen, Sierra, and Mandat.

Perhaps better suited for the mosh pit than the orchestra pit, David Lang's 1991 tour-de-force for solo bass clarinet, *Press Release*, is a minimalist marvel. Completed on Christmas Eve in 1991 and premiered on March 16, 1992,<sup>3</sup> *Press Release* has become a cornerstone of the bass clarinet repertoire. Make it "gritty and hard... even and with great force,"<sup>4</sup> Lang insists in the style markings for *Press Release*. His markings refer to the overarching rhythmic pulsations of his work: that is, they refer to "the groove."

The groove is the great intangible, the force that gets our feet to tapping and our bodies to swaying. It wraps us up like a spider does its prey and dares us to escape its grasp. The beat presses on and on, a dominating rhythmic exertion that demands entrainment (that is, the phase locking of certain physiological rhythms to a periodic external stimuli<sup>5</sup> - think of your body synchronizing to a beat) - as it commingles our brains and bodies within its grip, leaving us with no option but to swing our hips or bob our heads. As organic as our very heartbeats and as

---

<sup>3</sup> David Lang, *Press Release*. (New York: Red Poppy Music, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Justin London, *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

flowing as our veins, the groove is a strong and passionate master, demanding our submission - willingly or otherwise.

“This Is Not a Clarinet” shouts the cover of Evan Ziporyn’s iconic album of works for solo bass clarinet of which *Press Release* is the centerpiece. Comprised of six distinct “groove sections” that evolve in seemingly unpredictable ways before a final section of rhythmic and harmonic stasis, Lang cleverly employs monophony to tell a robust story of motivic and harmonic development. While perhaps Ziporyn’s snarling instrument *is* in fact a clarinet, it behaves like something a great deal more visceral. The sheer dominance of the groove throughout the work contributes to a kind of animalistic fury that defines the piece. Due to its blistering technical demands and challengingly nuanced rhythmic patterns, *Press Release* can at times be an intimidating work to engage with. Even after repeat performances, the work continues to demand both soul and body from the performer each time he or she tees up to take a swing at it. The work’s complex series of grooves requires supreme flexibility and facility from the performer.

Groove. We use and have perhaps often heard that term, but what do we mean by it? When we speak to the “groove” of the music, we are speaking of the evolving beat, the pulse to which we begin to acclimate as it fills the space around and ultimately within us. The “groove” is a powerful force, dominating all it encounters, so much so that Walter Hughes refers to our response its sheer dominance as literally being “In the Empire of the Beat.”<sup>6</sup> It is this kind of dominant rhythmic structure that Lang invites - or perhaps demands - us to interact with.

---

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, “In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco,” *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, 147-57.

David Lang rose to prominence as one of the three founders of New York City's "Bang On A Can" collective, a group known for its collaboration, distinctively downtown musical sensibilities, curation of a vast community of musicians, and recent string of accolades, including two Pulitzer Prizes. Now sporting a record label, a touring ensemble, and a vibrant Summer festival, Bang On A Can has pushed its message of post-minimalist, rock-influenced, performer-focused writing squarely into the mainstream. It was against this backdrop that Lang penned *Press Release* for his friend, the bass clarinet virtuoso Evan Ziporyn.

Lang's performance directions reveal his perspective. After all, in the early 1990's Nirvana and Soundgarden were topping the popular music charts and the grunge aesthetic was king. The performer should make the work "gritty and hard." At times, the clarinetist is commanded to "squawk"<sup>7</sup> and is told at one point to play a particularly virtuosic musical strain "even and with great force." Lang treats the bass clarinet as something more primal than an instrument - after all, the performer is indeed instructed to "growl" out the last note. The agency and dominance that Lang gives the groove throughout *Press Release* contributes to the keen sense of driving fury that ultimately defines the piece.

A successful performance of *Press Release* relies on the clarinetist's ability to navigate swashbucklingly virtuosic techniques with confidence, and therefore the work is typically reserved for bass clarinetists of the highest order. When David Lang began the compositional process for *Press Release*, he conceptualized the work as a fiendish combination of divergent lines. Lang describes this goal in his program notes:

---

<sup>7</sup> Lang, *Press Release*.

*“I wanted to do something that was really rhythmic. The original idea behind this piece was that of a high melody alternating with a low bass line, so that you get a high pop and a low pop switching back and forth as fast as possible, and these two worlds coexist. I wanted the upper melody to be recognizable and the bottom bass line to be recognizable, to be a real bass line, a driving funk thing. In classical music, the bass is only there to support the melody, which is where the action is. But the bass line is the place where funk music really shines.”*<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere Lang confesses that the work was likewise influenced by the funk music of James Brown, and he certainly succeeded in creating a piece that firmly has one foot in the concert hall and one in the dance hall. When I asked David Lang to elaborate on his love for funk music, he coyly replied “I got soul and I’m superbad”<sup>9</sup> further corroborating his deep affection for James Brown.<sup>10</sup> The funk bass line at the beginning of the work was written also to honor Ziporyn, who shares Lang’s love for funk, and with whom Lang had often worked both during their time at Yale and in the Bang On A Can All-Stars.<sup>11</sup>

Funk influences aside, Lang similarly articulates that he was fascinated by the idea that a clarinetist would “press” keys for low notes and then “release” them for the higher notes (a fact Lang later came to realize was not exactly the way a clarinetist changes registers). What he’d actually accomplished was to repeatedly write one of the most mechanically difficult registral

---

<sup>8</sup> David Lang, “Program Note: Press Release” <http://davidlangmusic.com/music/press-release>

<sup>9</sup> David Lang, Interview By Author, Email Correspondence (November 14, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Lang, Interview by author.

transitions possible on the clarinet.<sup>12</sup> The clarinet family of instruments employs a register key which is pressed in order to cause the sounding pitch to ascend by the interval of the twelfth. A note's range is only partially determined by the number of fingers that are pressed down - it is also determined by whether or not the register key is being pressed, and sometimes even by the shape of the mouth or the position of the tongue. This means that in order to successfully play large leaps, many fingers are awkwardly rearranged between notes and the mouth is reshaped. The bass clarinet requires tremendous embouchure flexibility when attempting to produce the lowest pitches on the instrument (in the case of *Press Release*, the written "D" that begins the work is the third-lowest pitch on the instrument) and the shape of the mouth changes substantially as one ascends into the upper registers of the instrument. Yet another challenge is the sheer force required from the hands to repeatedly press the right-hand pinky keys or thumb keys that cause the lowest notes of the instrument to speak. Perhaps an alternate title for Lang's work might be *Press, Press Again, and Press Some More*.

The work was conceptualized "rhythm-first," something Lang mentioned in our interview:

*"The goal was to make a piece that was completely patterned - I never write notes or tunes or harmonies and then imagine how to animate them in time. I (almost) always start with working out the rhythmic patterning - without pitches - and when I know enough about how the patterns work I start looking for musical material that will make those patterns sound good."*<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Lang, "Program Note: Press Release."

<sup>13</sup> Lang, Interview by author.

Understanding Lang's rhythmic framework and the way the tyranny of each groove is developed and subverted in *Press Release* aids in effective performance, pedagogy, and perception of the work. Sorting out and interpreting the rhythmic skeleton of the work aids in conceptualizing the rhythmic progression Lang is after, and the "form making power of interruption"<sup>14</sup> within the work has powerful implications for performance decisions. Performers ought not allow the virtuosity of the work to hinder a performance attempt, because *Press Release* is a rewarding work for both performer and audience, one rich with rhythmic interest and motivic evolution. It's also just a lot of fun to bang out. I believe this work can be demystified and performed more often and with greater effectiveness - in spite of its challenges - with a proper rhythmic understanding.

*Press Release* blasts its way through six sections of groove before finally entering stasis and at last parting ways with the room in a powerful snarl, like a wild swell of feedback from an amplifier. The work unfolds as a series of evolving groove sections which are tethered together by increasingly clever transitional material, and these sections occasionally war with one another for dominance. Each groove offers a unique mood and harmonic or rhythmic emphasis, but they all share a common virtuosity and disjointed structure (and certain rhythmic cell elements). Lang mentions in his note that he is a bit weary of derivative works where the bass line might traditionally support a melodic line, and thus his spelling of the melodic material in *Press Release* puts all the action down under.

The patterned alternation of the bass lines in *Press Release* with their neighboring material offers a mindbogglingly tricky performance and pedagogical experience. This

---

<sup>14</sup> Carl Schacter, "Rhythm and Linear Analysis: A Preliminary Study," *The Music Forum* 4 (1976): 281–334.



complexity, when paired with the previously-mentioned difficulty of registral transitions on the bass clarinet, can make the work seem unapproachable. It would be a shame for a performer to allow the virtuosity of *Press Release* to hinder a performance attempt, because to learn the work is a rewarding pursuit, rich with rhythmic interest and motivic evolution, and the work is a real crowd-pleaser.

Understanding Lang's intention for the lines to alternate does open a series of interesting analytical pathways. For the sake of this "pedagogical performer's analysis," I have identified two analytical approaches which will aid in establishing performances that are true to the work and groove authentically, and will also aid in the teaching of this and other works to clarinetists who might want to perform them but find themselves put off by the sheer difficulty of entry.

The first of these analytical approaches will utilize elements of Edward Cone's early rhythmic-symbolic approach to quantifying stress and release, and the second will draw on Mark Butler's work analyzing electronic dance music and popular music. Through these lenses, we will seek to establish a visual "shorthand" to aid in teaching the rhythmic structure of *Press Release*. Because many of Lang's groove sections achieve his stated goal and evolve in patterned, predictable ways, a graphic "rhythmic-symbolic" notation which combines Cone's and Butler's methods will prove to be an invaluable pedagogical device, and will offer additional security for the performer.

Let us consider the first 17 bars of *Press Release*:

7

EVAN ZIPORYN

DAVID LANG

I have circled the thematic idea (or “hook”) for Groove Section 1<sup>15</sup> in red. The thematic bass line pitches D, F, G, A, C, D repeat in the same order throughout the first 17 bars of the piece (and again in bars 26-30). This riff is placed in conversation with a droning E in the upper voice beginning in the second bar. The higher-pitched written E functions in a variety of roles, and can even be heard as a kind of “slapback delay.” Lang seemingly creates the effect of a monophonic synthesizer in which a keyboardist presses two notes before lifting the lower-pitched key, allowing the higher pitch to sustain and sparkle out of the texture.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix B, “Global Form Chart”

In spite of the dependability of the bass line pitches, and the ever-present alternation of the droning E pitch (which always begins one sixteenth note after the “beat” pitch), the rhythmic structure of this passage is intense and varied. Each bar is comprised of a series of 6 triple and duple “beats” (not of even length, but each with a rhythmic accent), and each bar sees a different ordering to these 6 rhythmic cells. Bars 1 and 2 share a rhythmic structure, and set the scene for the rest of Groove Section 1, with the beat breakdown as follows: 3-3-3-3-2-2, 3-3-3-3-2-2. Over the next 15 bars, the groupings of 3 slowly diminish until we arrive at a measure 17, a bar with 6 groupings of 2.

When we apply the spirit of Edward Cone’s early rhythmic-symbolic notation<sup>16</sup> to this complex opening section, it immediately begins to come into focus. Cone, a longtime Professor of Music at Princeton University, employed a tripartite set of graphic symbols to quantify the musical phenomena of initial downbeat ( / ), musical motion ( ∪ ), and cadential downbeat ( \ )<sup>17</sup> (it is worth mentioning that Cone at times employed additional symbols for “preliminary anacrusis” (∧) and “feminine ending” (∨) in his analyses).<sup>18</sup> Expanding on the previous work of Grosvenor W. Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer,<sup>19</sup> Cone enlists his symbols to aid in understanding the formal structure and motion of a work by representing the felt motions in a literal, graphical way. I will attempt to accomplish something similar as I dissect *Press Release*.

---

<sup>16</sup> Edward Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> Grosvenor W. Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

In the spirit of Cone, for Groove Section 1 I have assigned the ( $\Delta$ ) symbol to represent any grouping of three, and the (/) symbol for any grouping of two. Hence the opening two bars of *Press Release*, each of which has four triple beats and two duple beats (ordered below):

3-3-3-3-2-2      3-3-3-3-2-2

can be symbolized by

$\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta //$        $\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta //$

Because of the consistent bass line and the consistent entry of the droning E on the second sixteenth-note following each note of the bass line riff, we can even functionally read and perform this section of the music from the symbolic notation. A rhythmic-symbolic notation of this portion of *Press Release* offers a clearer picture of the piece's true rhythmic motor than even the traditional notation Lang employs. Generally speaking, the ( $\Delta$ ) serves as the propulsive agent in the work, and the (/) serves as the stabilizing agent, grounding the music. Translating the opening Groove Section 1 into this rhythmic-symbolic notation offers us a glimpse into the fascinating way in which Lang begins with four propulsive groupings of 3 ( $\Delta$ ) and two stabilizing groupings of 2 (/) and ultimately settles at six groupings of 2 (/). This rhythmic-symbolic notation is modeled below (with the initial riff for Groove Section 1 marked "Hook" and circled in red):

**Example 2: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 1-18 + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction**

 △△△△|| ← Hook<sup>7</sup>

△△△△||

|△△△||

△|△△||

△△|△||

△△△|||

|△△|||

|△|△||

||△△||

△||△||

△|△|||

△△|||

|||△||

||△|||

|△|||

△|||

|||

EVAN ZIPORYN

DAVID LANG

Visualizing these 17 bars with this notation opens a fascinating new world of observations about Lang's rhythmic structure. Following the first two bars, we see that the number of (△) beats diminishes to three, and subsequently to two and then one before settling with six beats of (/). We can also now visualize the way in which Lang is allowing the duple beat to take over, and as each new duple beat enters the groove, it helps to force out a (△) beat to the left. We see this very clearly in the last five bars of this notation, where the final triple beat (△) gets ousted from the groove measure by measure. Groove Section 1 seems to be searching for stability, and yet, until the final bar of this section, each new duple beat that seeks to stabilize the groove simply *destabilizes* it in a new way. The result is a section that maintains its energy without maintaining its form.

Understanding this underlying rhythmic structure demystifies *Press Release* and opens the work to a larger pool of performers. The ability to memorize a recurrent string of bass line pitches and to remember that the upper pitch is E seems a doable task, and if that's the case, performers can work from the rhythmic-symbolic score and learn the nuance of the groove in a new and palpable way. This allows a greater emphasis on structural form and enables the “winding up” effect that Lang is after, and helps the clarinetist pace him or herself as they approach a single bar of stability - in this case, measure 17 (printed below).

**Example 3: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 17**



Lang was not the only composer in the 1990s to be exploring these metrical ideas in their works for solo clarinet. This inherent destabilization is similar to Eric Mandat's implementation of a quasi-improvisatory evolving groove in his 1996 work *Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS* (colloquially referred to as *SOS*). Written in 1996 for clarinet virtuoso Robert Spring, *SOS* employs a similarly conceptualized series of rhythmic cells which stack and evolve as the work unfolds, working to build stability with unstable components, keeping the evenness of the overall “beat” while destabilizing the material held within. Another example of a composer pushing the boundaries of performance by partnering with a virtuoso, *SOS* is often said to be among the most difficult works in the unaccompanied clarinet repertoire due its rigorous technical demands and

its pages upon pages of quarter tones, which require non-traditional fingerings and which must be executed at breakneck speed. Spring, a soloist praised by *The Clarinet Journal* for his “flawless technique” and current Professor of Music at Arizona State University, offered a blank musical check to Mandat in terms of difficulty. So much so that, in addition to the blistering technical demands and delicate multiphonic sections, *SOS* requires the performer to both circular breathe and double tongue, two uncommon and difficult clarinet extended techniques. Robert Spring is a master of both.

Mandat has also baked into the work small moments of agency for the performer. In the below-printed example, the cells in Mandat’s composition are added at the whim of the performer (he indicates for the performer to “add embellishments gradually”) but the strict “9/8” groove of the bar must always be preserved, even as subsequent embellishments are added. At times, it seems almost as if each new embellishment is being triggered from a digital sampler. Mandat’s arrows (see Example 4 below) indicate the importance verticality plays in his evolving groove: the initial groove is embellished and begins to expand in different spots until it reaches saturation.

The first embellishment (the grace notes on the second line) is relatively unobtrusive, but subsequent embellishments force additional notes into previously occupied space. Once the groove becomes functionally “full” (and once the performer grows weary of the mental and physical strain of the repetition), the evolving groove topples over into a new kind of steady, driving, almost “stuck” groove. *Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS* continues to grow in complexity (while keeping the same functional beat) before at last lashing out into a simplified but intensely

persistent groove, only find itself “stuck” both harmonically and rhythmically. I have added numbers that indicate the order of the added embellishments for the sake of clarity.

**Example 4: Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS, Eric Mandat, mm. 29**

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Example 4, titled "Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS, Eric Mandat, mm. 29". The score is written on six staves, with six numbered red boxes (1-6) indicating the order of added embellishments. The music is in a 4/4 time signature and starts with a tempo marking of "poco piu mosso" and a metronome marking of 58. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *f*, and performance instructions like "add embellishments gradually" and "repeat ad lib.". A box at the bottom left contains the instruction: "move fingers very loudly and percussively on principal notes throughout this section". The page is labeled "-page 3-" at the bottom.

Annotations in the score include:

- 1**: First measure, *mf* dynamic, "sub." marking.
- 2**: Second measure, *mf* dynamic, "sub." marking.
- 3**: Third measure, *mf* dynamic, "sub." marking.
- 4**: Fourth measure, *mf* dynamic, "sub." marking.
- 5**: Fifth measure, *mf* dynamic, "sub." marking.
- 6**: Sixth measure, *mf* dynamic, "sub." marking.

Other markings include "vib.", "ord.", "etc.", "repeat ad lib.", "molto", "sffz", and "sub. mp".

-page 3-



This same kind of transitional groove will be clearly on display in *Press Release* as we now consider the first 17 bars of Lang's work through a different lens. Having already employed Cone's work as an analytical approach to aid in wrapping one's head around *Press Release*, we will now draw from Mark Butler's approach to analyzing electronic dance music and popular music to gain a deeper understanding of the rhythmic intricacies of the work.<sup>20</sup> By splitting Lang's monophonic lines into imagined "tracks" to offer a clear perspective on the layers within each track and their interaction with one another, we can get a feel for how each component of the groove independently develops. This analytical approach (or "tracking the groove" as I will henceforth refer to it) provides unique and compelling pedagogical applications, and seeing the two voices in isolation offers the opportunity to master the rhythmic nuances of each line.

Throughout *Press Release*, Lang creates a kind of "monophonic hocket" (a composite rhythm created from the overlap of two independent sources).<sup>21</sup> While we would typically expect a hocket to develop from the overlap of multiple players, Lang functionally creates a hocket with himself as two clearly distinct lines are played by one performer. This becomes clearly visible as we track the groove, and conceptualizing the upper line of measures 1-17 as a series of "offbeats" enables a more cohesive sense of groove when the two parts are played together. Lang is quoted in his program notes as describing the upper notes in each Groove Section as a "release" (with the lower notes being the "press" - recall Lang's erroneous understanding of how the bass clarinet moves between registers), and tracking the groove allows us to see more easily the interplay Lang is after, and enables us to more easily achieve his desired musical goal.

---

<sup>20</sup> Mark Butler, *Unlocking the Groove* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Cohn, "A Platonic Model of Funky Rhythms," *Music Theory Online* 22, No. 2 (June 2016). <http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.2/mto.16.22.2.cohn.html>.

In isolation, tracking the groove for the first three bars of the piece would look something like this:

**Example 5: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 1-3, Tracking the Groove**

*♩=132 gritty and hard*

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a piano part with a complex, syncopated rhythm. The middle staff is a drum part with a steady, syncopated pattern. The bottom staff is a bass line with a steady, syncopated pattern. The score includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'sim.' and a tempo marking '♩=132 gritty and hard'.

Again, conceptualizing the upper line as a series of “offbeats” that respond to the bass line enables a truer sense of groove when the two parts are played together. This is the work’s titular “press” and “release,” and tracking the groove allows us to see more easily the interplay Lang is after. It also enables us to more easily achieve his desired musical outcome.

And so we begin to see the potential in this approach as a pedagogical and practice tool. To go a step further, tracking the groove becomes supremely useful and even more effective when taken in tandem with our previous rhythmic-symbolic notation. Taking the symbolic, “pulse-driven” symbols and understanding them alongside the individual, almost “hocketed” parts allows the performer to see in what ways each “track” interplays with the dominant rhythmic structure. A hybrid approach would give a the performer the score that follows:

# Press Release, 1-17

David Lang

The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number (4, 7, 10, 13). Each system contains two staves: the top staff is for Bass Clarinet and the bottom staff is for B. Cl. The Bass Clarinet part consists of rhythmic patterns of eighth notes, often with slurs and accents. The B. Cl. part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Above the Bass Clarinet staff, there are symbols: triangles (Δ) and slashes (/) that correspond to specific notes or rests in the rhythmic pattern.

## Tracking the Groove + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction *Press Release*, Measures 1-17

This section shows the final two measures of the piece. It consists of two staves: the top staff is for Bass Clarinet and the bottom staff is for B. Cl. The Bass Clarinet part continues with rhythmic patterns, ending with a double bar line. The B. Cl. part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment, also ending with a double bar line. Symbols (triangles and slashes) are present above the Bass Clarinet staff.

One immediate benefit to the combined implementation of these two analytic techniques is that it takes the responsibility of detailed memory out of the equation. I would argue that an effective practice regimen or pedagogical approach would be to *begin* with the combined analytical map of the piece (the above-printed combination of rhythmic-symbolic notation and a tracking of the groove), and subsequently move toward a simpler notation as the piece grows in familiarity - something it will do decidedly more quickly as this approach is implemented consistently and effectively.

A work such as *Press Release* moves so quickly that must be functionally memorized regardless, and this hybrid approach will aid in that memorization process. Still another benefit of this approach is the visualization of phrasing possibilities within the bass line: allowing the work to flow through each subsequent triple figure ( $\Delta$ ) offers an authentic contour to the melodic line, and further helps the piece groove and avoid pedantry or haplessness. By offering a contextualized view of the way in which each “track” interacts with the dominant pulse, these two analytical approaches help the performer visualize and subsequently communicate to an audience what is most salient about the work.

Measure 18 of *Press Release* begins a section of “retransition” back into Groove Section 1 (copied below with the hybrid notation):

**Example 7: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 18, Tracking the Groove**

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff has a treble clef and contains a sequence of notes with stems pointing up and down. The middle and bottom staves have a bass clef and contain a sequence of notes with stems pointing up and down. A large black arrow points left from the right side of the score towards a box that encloses the first two staves of measures 17 and 18. A red oval highlights the first two staves of measures 18 and 19. The score includes various time signatures such as 1/6, 3/8, and 9/16.

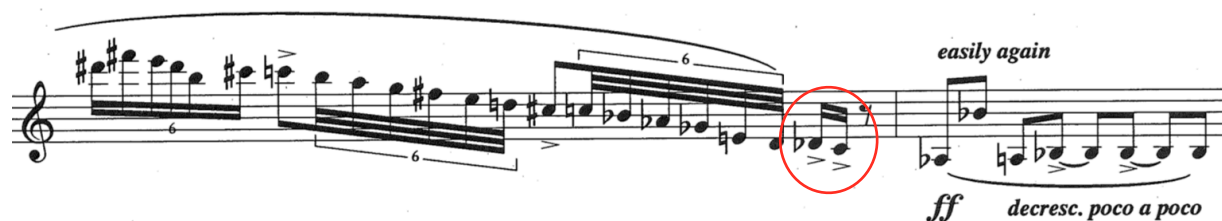
After achieving stability and arriving at the (// // // // //) or (2-2-2-2-2-2) pattern in measure 17, the work gets “stuck” and begins to try to break free from this newfound stability, making us wonder where the beat truly is. The retransition lasts from mm. 18 through mm. 25, and is primarily stabilized by the foundational pitches D and E. These two notes (which non-coincidentally also jump started the entire work’s hocketed alternation structure in measure two) once again alternate and bait one another as they persist in having the same circular conversation. At first, the piece seems to be experimenting with new tonal language, but this section can still be understood as re-transitional because of its deepest rhythmic desire to return to the strength of the duple beat ( $\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta /$ ) and its familiar pitch content. The piece *wants* to lock back into the stability it achieved in measure 17, but like a dog chasing its tail, it isn't sure what to do with this newfound stability now that it has achieved it - hence its “stuck-ness.”



noting that the groove always allows at least one full bar to go by - think of it as a full revolution of a vinyl record on a turntable). The number of repetitions varies between strophes, but with each moment of slippage back into the “stuck groove” comes increasingly virtuosic “episodes,” where the music does its level-headed best to break free completely from the hang-up with increasing levels of frustration. We can observe this musical vexation in the three examples below. Without fail, Larsen allows *Dancing Solo* to suck these musical flights of fancy back into the extant groove and holds them ever more tightly and with greater humor than before. In the end, it seems, the groove always wins, even if it must be “interruptive” to do so.

In the first example, *Dancing Solo* attempts to break free from its stuck groove by offering cascading gestures that are immediately reminiscent of jazz riffs. These riffs come to an abrupt stop when the music resets at the circled two sixteenth notes.

**Example 9: *Dancing Solo*, Libby Larsen, Mvt. 4, mm. 22-23**



In the next example, the music attempts to break free by becoming a very martial progression of eighth notes, even going so far as to demand that the performer play his or her “highest possible note” in an attempt to break from gravity and into orbit. This second example also gets repeatedly interrupted by the hook as it tries to break free, even to the point of becoming comical.

**Example 10: *Dancing Solo*, Libby Larsen, Mvt. 4, mm., 66-77**

The musical score for Example 10 consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a melodic line with various intervals and a final note marked with a triangle and the text "highest possible note". Below the staff, a dynamic marking of *mf* is present. The second staff continues the melodic line, with a *detached* marking above it. The third staff also continues the melodic line, with another *detached* marking above it. The music is characterized by a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together.

Finally, the music will resort to good old technical virtuosity in an attempt to break free from the tyranny of the groove. The striking *ff* entrance of the printed Ab pitch enters angrily before easing back onto the dance floor, having asserted its dominance once and for all. The groove is stuck, and there's nothing Libby Larsen or the performer can seem to do about it.

**Example 11: *Dancing Solo*, Libby Larsen, Mvt. 4, mm. 114-120**

The musical score for Example 11 consists of two staves of music. The first staff shows a complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes, some beamed together, and a few eighth notes. The second staff continues this line, starting with a *ff* dynamic marking and the text "easily again" above it. The dynamic then changes to *mp* later in the staff. A second ending bracket labeled (2) is shown at the end of the second staff. The music is highly rhythmic and technically demanding.



These interruptions from the dominant groove also play out in Lang's writing. Similar to the interruptive hook motion of *Dancing Solo*, the initial hook of Groove Section 1 in *Press Release* (the aforementioned "funk bassline") interrupts the wavering retransition to make a final appearance in measure 26 to finally complete Groove Section 1. This time, the groove is able to quickly force its way back into a position of stability and power, and to more efficiently jettison the ( $\Delta$ ) from the groove. This time, the arrival back at the stabilized version of the 6 beat riff (// // // //) happens in a more succinct manner and feels like a complete cycle in a satisfying way. It almost feels as if measures 26-30 are a "key" to the rhythmic game Lang has been playing from the beginning and to all of Groove Section 1. Consider the rhythmic-symbolic analysis of the printed musical example below:

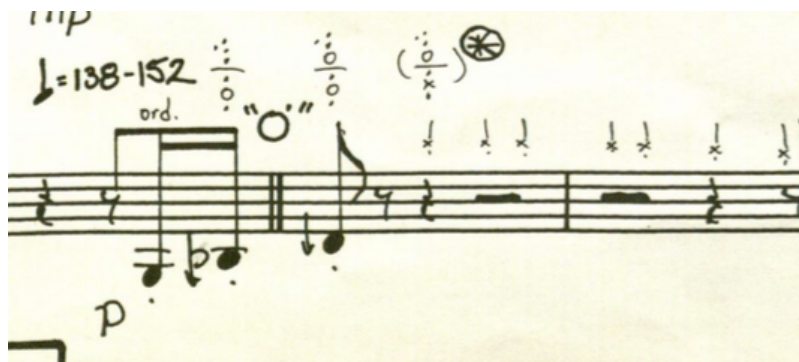
**Example 12: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm.26-30 + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction**

26  $\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta \parallel$   
 27  $\Delta \Delta \Delta \parallel \parallel$   
 28  $\Delta \Delta \parallel \parallel \parallel \parallel$   
 29  $\Delta \parallel \parallel \parallel \parallel$   
 30  $\parallel \parallel \parallel \parallel \parallel \parallel$

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system contains measures 26, 27, and 28, with measure numbers 13, 15, and 7 written above the staves. The second system contains measures 29 and 30, with measure numbers 13, 6, 8, and 8 written above the staves. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, and *sim* with an accent. The time signature is 8/8.

The “stuck-ness of the groove” we’ve now observed in the Lang and the Larsen also afflicts Eric Mandat’s central groove in *Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS*. Mandat highlights his own “stuck groove” by literally including an *audible version* of the tempo against which his groove has gotten “stuck” (which Mandat marks in the score with staccato quarter notes with an ‘X’ note-head). Mandat indicates for the performer to literally tap this backbeat on the rings of the clarinet with his or her right hand as the piece struggles against this newfound constraint. The tension this backbeat creates against the music is essential to the works efficacy, and in order to ensure audibility, some performers choose to tap their feet in lieu of (or in addition to) tapping their instrument.

**Example 13: *Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS*, Eric Mandat, mm. 77-79**



This section of *Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS*, titled “O” for its circular, wheel-spinning motion, pushes against the groove as hard as it can before, in a similar way to *Dancing Solo*, lashing out into a virtuosic series of strata that will evolve and unfold all the way to the end of the piece. In the example below, the backbeat is on full display against the evolving rhythmic

cells, which spin their wheels both rhythmically and harmonically. The work tries with fervor to break free from the backbeat's oppressive reign, even going so far as to attempt a measure of 7/8 and a measure of 15/16 as if trying to slip away unnoticed in the night. In the end, the groove is too strong, and it isn't until the piece resorts to violence that it will gain any kind of temporary respite from the dominating backbeat.

**Example 14: *Sub(t)rains O' Strata'sfearS*, Eric Mandat, mm. 80-88**

The image displays a handwritten musical score for Example 14, spanning measures 80 to 88. The score is written on four staves. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. Key features include:

- Staff 1:** Measures 80-84. Includes dynamic markings *mp* and *pp*. Features notes with stems pointing down and some notes with 'x' above them.
- Staff 2:** Measures 85-88. Includes dynamic markings *mp*, *pp*, and *p*. Features notes with stems pointing up and down.
- Staff 3:** Measures 89-92. Includes dynamic markings *mp* and *cresc.*. Features notes with stems pointing down and some notes with 'x' above them.
- Staff 4:** Measures 93-96. Includes dynamic markings *mp* and *pp*. Features notes with stems pointing down and some notes with 'x' above them.

The score is heavily annotated with musical symbols, including accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals), dynamic markings (*mp*, *pp*, *p*, *cresc.*), and performance instructions like *ord.* and *x*. The notation is dense and complex, reflecting the intricate rhythmic and harmonic structure described in the text.

However, try as it might, *SOS* stays mired “in the empire of the beat”<sup>22</sup> and lashes out in violent frustration, especially toward the final act of the work. Like a ticking clock on the wall, the fingered percussion groove indeed makes a return when things quiet down near the end of the work, as if to mock the previous ten minutes of insane virtuosity, and sends the work into a violent tizzy toward its dizzying conclusion.

**Example 15: *Sub(t)rainS O’ Strata’sfearS*, Eric Mandat, mm. 171-177**

The image displays a handwritten musical score for four staves. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. Key annotations include:

- Staff 1: *mf*, *ord.*, *see pg. 7*, *fff*, *sub*, *mf*, *ord.*, *p*, *cresc.*, *p*, *ord.*, *ord.*, *ord.*, *ord.*
- Staff 2: *ord.*, *p*, *cresc.*, *p*, *ord.*, *ord.*, *ord.*, *ord.*
- Staff 3: *ord.*, *ord.*, *ord.*, *ord.*, *mf*
- Staff 4: *f*, *ff* soaring

The score is written on aged, yellowed paper with some ink bleed-through from the reverse side. The notation is dense, with many notes and accidentals, and includes various performance instructions such as *ord.* (order), *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *f* (forte), and *ff* (fortissimo).

Mandat previously allowed *SOS* the willpower to attempt to break free from this domineering groove with rhythmic space and variation, sequences of flurried notes, and even an occasional changing of metric pulse. However, once the audible rhythmic backbeat makes its

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, “In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco.”

return, the work begins to spin out and Mandat pushes the pace to near-impossible levels before choosing to end *SOS* with his trademark wry humor - a gentle moment with a single, upper-register note that is to be played almost as an afterthought.

**Example 16: *Sub(t)rainS O' Strata'sfearS*, Eric Mandat, mm. 198-199**

Handwritten musical score for Example 16, showing a single melodic line. The score includes dynamic markings: *mp*, *dim.*, *poco a poco*, and *pppp*. Performance instructions include *ord.*, *dim. molto*, and *out of tempo ad lib.*. The notation features a series of eighth notes with stems pointing down, followed by a final note with a stem pointing up.

The groove has won.

A similarly dominant groove is on display in Groove Section 2 of *Press Release* (which follows Groove Section 1 after a period of transitional material) in the example copied below.

Again, the hook of the section is circled in red:

**Example 17: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 46-51**

Handwritten musical score for Example 17, showing a multi-staff piece. The score includes dynamic markings: *f*, *sim.*, and *pppp*. The notation features a series of eighth notes with stems pointing down, followed by a final note with a stem pointing up. A red circle highlights a specific section of the score, which is the hook of the section.

The metrical feel of Groove Section 2 is markedly different from groove Section 1. Despite intentionally extending every other bar by a single sixteenth note, Lang creates the artificial feeling of bars that are “in 4” throughout this section - meaning that each bar feels as if it has four “unequal beats” (or four “felt beats”) even though a deeper look reveals that each bar actually contains six beats (of  $\Delta$  or / ) within those four “felt beats.” As such, the first two measures of Groove Section 2 can be understood as:

**3-2-3-3-3-2      3-2-3-3-3-3**

which can be symbolized by:

$\Delta / \Delta \Delta \Delta /$        $\Delta / \Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta$

Two things become immediately apparent with this style of notation. The first thing to notice is the inclusion of the fifth propulsive triple beat ( $\Delta$ ) in the second bar, which highlights the nuanced discrepancy between the first two measures (the two bars are only differentiated by the final beat’s length - a single sixteenth note more). This is a departure from the groove that defined Groove Section 1, and provides a simultaneous sense of destabilization and the aforementioned “stuck-ness” as the groove expands its final beat in every other bar. It almost feels as if Groove Section 1 has returned, but this time donning a peg-leg and sauntering about, knocking over tables and spilling beer. The asymmetry of these two bars, when taken together, provides a profoundly unsettling listening experience, which is no less awkward for the performer. A strictly aural experience of the piece can be disorienting, and this section can be similarly off-putting during a visual analysis. A subterranean awareness of Lang’s rhythmic

structure enables the performer to make intentional decisions on the best ways to clarify - or to intentionally obscure - Lang's asymmetrical but inter-related rhythmic undercurrent.

The rhythmic alternation of these two patterns persists for the first 8 bars of Groove Section 2 (which we will refer to here as Groove Section 2A), and then pivots toward an extended variation on the same pattern in measure 9 (which we will refer to here as Groove Section 2B). Groove Section 2B uses the second measure of the Groove Section 2A as its basis, creating a sense of transience and subtle propulsion. 2A therefore establishes the precedent on which 2B is built. Their close relationship can be visualized with the rhythmic-symbolic reduction below:

**Groove Section 2A ("6 Beat" Measures)**

*(this pairing of bars repeats four times, 8 total bars)*

△ / △ △ △ /      △ / △ △ △ △

**Groove Section 2B ("7 Beat" Measures)**

*(this pairing of bars repeats four times, 8 total bars)*

△ / △ △ △ △ /      △ / △ △ △ △ △

In the context of the score, 2A and 2B (circled in red) look like this, with the rhythmic-symbolic notation outlined below:

Example 18: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 46-55 + Rhythmic-Symbolic Reduction

The image displays a musical score for five staves, with a rhythmic-symbolic reduction below. The reduction uses triangles (Δ) and slashes (/) to represent rhythmic patterns. Two sections of the reduction are highlighted with red ovals: the first oval covers the first two measures of the first staff, and the second oval covers the last two measures of the fifth staff. The reduction consists of two main blocks: the first block has a sequence of triangles and slashes (Δ / Δ Δ Δ /) and the second block has a sequence (Δ / Δ Δ Δ Δ Δ).

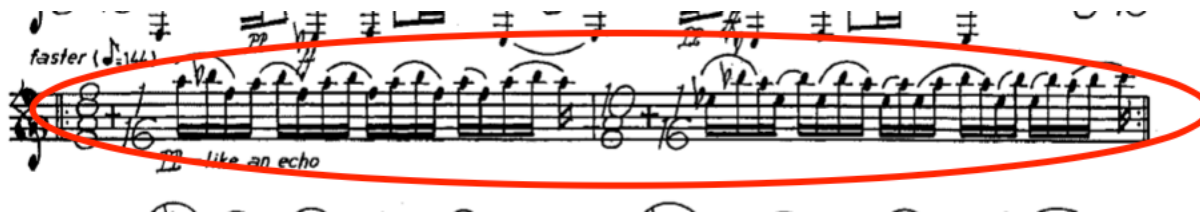
These bars contain a stronger sense of rhythmic dissonance due to their proximity to the larger metrical boundary.<sup>23</sup> Lang's evolving groove follows the same ebb and flow in each of the two subsections (2A and 2B), but his pattern seems to be slowly expanding before the piece pivots directly (with no transition) into the following section.

<sup>23</sup> Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 88.



Groove Section 3 is a departure from the other five Groove Sections for several reasons, not least of which that it includes a grouping of four notes (which we will symbolize □). The first (repeated) statement of Groove Section 3 is circled below:

**Example 19: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 62-63**



As he did with the two Subsections of Groove Section 2, Lang again employs a previously-established structure as the basis for a subsequent groove. The first bar of Groove Section 3 (△ △ △ △ / △) is the exact reverse of the second bar of Groove Section 2, and is constructed of similar building blocks. The second bar of Groove Section 3 is the first and only time we encounter the “quadruple beat” (□) in the piece. Until this point, *Press Release* has strictly been a game of 2’s and 3’s, but now we add the “4” to create a (△ / △ / □ // △) beat structure in the second bar of Groove Section 3. The introduction of this quadruple beat (which functions differently and with more propulsion than two subsequent duple beats) contributes to the sense that Groove Section 3 is an isolated incident, as does the fact that it is markedly smoother than the other sections and decidedly more stable in terms of tessitura and color.

Lang employs a rhythmic structure here that supersedes the printed pattern of slurs and beats, creating an effect reminiscent of the secondary rags of Joplin or Gershwin, a technique which “involves direct juxtaposition and cycling of fast and isochronous three-unit motives in a

pure duple context.”<sup>24</sup> We see a similar effect in movement 2 of *Dancing Solo*, titled “eight to the bar,” when Larsen superimposes idiosyncratic accents over a set of straight sixteenth notes. In the context of the movement’s general feeling of swing, Larsen creates a similar effect to Lang’s secondary rag in the episodic material she deploys in measures 33 and 38 of “eight to the bar” (the first and sixth bar printed below, circled in red):

**Example 20: *Dancing Solo*, Libby Larsen, mvt. 2, mm. 33-40**

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff begins with a circled section of sixteenth notes labeled 'straight'. This is followed by a section labeled 'swing' with a slur over a group of notes and a '7' above it. The second staff starts with a circled section of sixteenth notes labeled 'straight', followed by a section labeled 'swing' with a slur and a '7' above it. Dynamic markings include 'f' and 'mp'. There are also various rhythmic notations like '3' and '3' with brackets.

A similarly idiosyncratic rhythmic phenomenon begins to happen during Groove Section 3 of *Press Release*. This section begins with the work’s first moment of smoothness and placidity, and creates a tenuous sense of calm in its first two bars (which are repeated for optimal effect - circular breathing is recommended for the performer here). Beginning in the third measure, we see that pieces of the groove seem to begin “falling out” and at this stage of development, before the entry of the bass line, the groove simply appears to be going in and out of sync with... itself. We functionally see and hear Lang “withholding the beat”<sup>25</sup> (a common techniques used by DJs in electronic dance music), and his score notation here is reminiscent of our work tracking the groove - albeit without the alternating foundational bass line.

<sup>24</sup> Cohn, "A Platonic Model of Funky Rhythms," *Music Theory Online* 22, No. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 92.

**Example 21: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 62-65**

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is marked 'faster (♩=144)' and 'pp - like an echo'. It features a complex, rhythmic melody with many slurs and accents. The bottom staff continues the melody, with four red circles highlighting specific notes in the lower register, indicating a shift in the bass line.

We don't fully see the game that David Lang is playing until we reach the seventh bar of Groove Section 3 (bars 5-8 of this section are copied below): the growling, low-pitched snarls of Groove Section 1 are rearing their ugly heads and invading the pastoral groove we'd been tenuously enjoying. What we begin to realize is that Groove Section 3 functions *less* like the insistent, driving funk bass line of Section 1 and *more* like Section 1's repeated, colorful, higher-pitched drone. We have been hearing the slapback delay, the release of the lower hand on the monophonic synthesizer, but we haven't yet heard the bass line up to this point.

Lang then begins to slowly fill in the missing notes. Although it is spaced out at greater intervals than in previous sections, the dominance of the bass line is unmistakable as the previously pastoral groove now becomes a whimsical response to a bass line with the new and guttural descriptive marking to "squawk."<sup>26</sup> This newly-entered bass line works its way *very* slowly up a scale reminiscent of Groove Section 1 toward a full octave of realization (the octave-based arrival is something Lang employs throughout *Press Release*) and once it finally achieves its full octave, the piece mercilessly forges ahead to another section, never to return to this more sylvan material.

<sup>26</sup> Lang, *Press Release*.

**Example 22: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 66-69**

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff contains a series of notes with various articulations and dynamics. The bottom staff continues the piece and features a red oval highlighting a specific section of the music. Below the oval, there are dynamic markings: 'squaw' with a sharp sign and a '3' below it, and 'sim' with a sharp sign and a '3' below it. The music is written in a complex, rhythmic style with many notes and rests.

It is worth noticing that Groove Section 3 gradually increases the number of low-note “pulses” as it fills in the notes that have “fallen out” (although, you will also notice in Example 23 that two vacancies remain in the full measure even at its conclusion, and that the rhythmic progression seems to be something like “a few steps forward, a step back”). Upon arriving at the final bar of Groove Section 3, there are now *seven* equal ( $\Delta$ ) beats. It is curious that Lang chooses to arrive at a bar of seven beats (marked below with the green circles) rather than the previously-employed six beat arrival.

One possible reason for this is Lang’s desire for Groove Section 3 not to feel like an ending, but rather for Groove Section 3 to immediately blast through a quick transition into Groove Section 4 and then race to the end. With this conceptual understanding, the final ( $\Delta$ ) of the “seven-beat bar” (whose lowest pitches are marked with green) should rather be phrased as if it were a complete six-beat bar with a final musical gesture *through* the final ( $\Delta$ ) (marked with the arrow) and into the next section, as if it is a bridge into the subsequent transitional measure.

Example 23: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 68-79

The image displays a musical score for six staves of music. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. Red circles are drawn around specific rhythmic motifs, such as quarter notes with stems and beams, and eighth notes. A purple arrow points to the right from the end of the score. The score is annotated with various symbols, including 'squ', 'sm', and 'pp', and includes a sequence of notes in the final staff that are circled in green.

As we continue to apply the previously mentioned analytical techniques to the different sections of *Press Release*, we will see specifically in Groove Section 4 (copied below, beginning with the red-circled motive in measure 80) that these analyses hold the key to unlocking many of the work's most interesting rhythmic symmetries. In fact, the precedent for this kind of shorthand notation stretches back to the very first performance of *Press Release*. In our interview, Lang recounted the following anecdote from the work's premiere:

*“At the premiere, Evan [Ziporyn] showed up with half a sheet of his own music paper with some notes scratched on it and I asked him what that was. He said he just wrote down the*

notes in the first measure of each section and then wrote a description of the patterns for that section, in English. I felt very reduced!”<sup>27</sup>

Ziporyn’s approach is our own, and with this approach in mind, the similarities between Groove Section 4 and Groove Section 1 will become immediately apparent. Each section begins with a simplified version of its hook, which then gives way to the alternation of the stable bass line (in this case, F#-G#-A-B) with a seemingly static upper pitch, in this case the written C#. In contrast to Groove Section 1, this time we have an unfolding sequence of two-bar phrases which begins after the initial statement of the riff. Each 7/16 bar is a sequence of three beats, organized (// Δ) and each 9/16 bar is a sequence of four beats, organized (/// Δ).

**Example 24: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 80-99**

The image shows a musical score for Example 24, titled "Press Release" by David Lang, measures 80-99. The score is written for a single melodic line in 7/16 and 9/16 time signatures. The first staff features a red circle highlighting a specific phrase. Performance markings include "faster (♩ = 160)", "pp", "sim. →", and "cresc.". The score consists of five staves of music.

<sup>27</sup> Lang, Interview by author.

Tracking the groove for Groove Section 4 highlights this rhythmic undercurrent:

**Example 25: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 80-96 (Tracking the Groove)**

The musical score for Example 25 consists of three systems of staves. Each system has two staves: the top staff is for Bass Clarinet and the bottom staff is for B. Cl. (Bass Clarinet). The music is written in treble clef and features a complex, alternating rhythmic pattern. The time signatures are 7/16, 9/16, 7/16, and 9/16, alternating every two bars. The notes are primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first system shows the initial two bars of the groove. The second system starts at measure 4 and continues for two bars. The third system starts at measure 7 and continues for two bars.

The groove here is more peculiar than Groove Section 1, and operates from a less stable point of view due to the alternating beat pattern of the groove's "feet"<sup>28</sup> (F#-G#-A and F#-G#-A-B) as well as the way in which the note "B" changes function between the two bars. In the 7/16 bars, B is the third note of the third beat of the measure (the triple beat which begins with the note A, i.e., measure 81). In the 9/16 bars, the note B begins the fourth beat (a final triple beat which, it's worth pointing out, ends with the note C-Natural and therefore creates a sense of infinite perpetuity in the groove when it is understood against the initially droning C# pitch). The

<sup>28</sup> Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, 29.

shifting role of this pitch destabilizes the groove and helps us feel that it is simultaneously straining forward while “stuck” in its current state. The tracked groove above demonstrates that the bass line (or the “press” pitch) is functionally stuck and wrestling with itself, while the droning pitch (or “release” pitch) is now moving in cyclical, often contrary motion to the bass line, but typically only evolving by the measure (with a few exceptions).

The asymmetrical beat structure of Groove Section 4 demands resolution, but rather than achieving stability (which Groove Section 1 managed to accomplish earlier in the work), Groove Section 4 crescendos and erupts abruptly into Groove Section 5 (I daresay it is interrupted by it), before settling back into Groove Section 4 once more. It is tempting to think that the episodes that comprise Groove Section 5 are merely retransitional (which would make this section a direct analogue to Groove Section 1), but due to the forceful entry of Groove Section 5, its stable and predictable harmonic content, and its recurring role throughout the second half of the work, we may clearly see that Groove Section 5 demands its own nomenclature, and that it enters in a position of diametric conflict with Groove Section 4.

**Example 26: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 93-104**

The image displays a musical score for Example 26, titled "Press Release" by David Lang, measures 93-104. The score is written for a single melodic line in 9/16 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A red oval highlights a specific section of the score, which is labeled "Groove Section 5" in a red box. Below this, another section of the score is labeled "Recap: Groove Section 4" in a red box. The score also includes a "cresc." marking and a "p" dynamic marking.



Groove Section 5 is indeed episodic in nature, and continues to add tension to the work by interrupting and alternating with recaps of Groove Section 4 before finally wresting dominance once and for all and continuing the race toward the climax. Occurring five times, Groove Section 5 ultimately proves to be the strongest of any section, as it clearly asserts its explicit dominance over Groove Sections 4 and 6 through the power of interruption (and implicitly, its dominance over the previous sections as well). Part of Groove Section 5's unpredictability comes from each measure's common ending: the printed pitches A-G#. Each time Groove Section 5 appears, it always ends with these two notes and, when planning to move to another section (whether that be Groove Section 4, Groove Section 6, or even the final section of stasis), it signals its departure by adding a rest of any length after these final two pitches. In this way, it is the momentary respite from the groove's tyranny that a rest provides that signals a contrasting groove is coming. Each subsequent groove seizes on this opportunity and makes itself known, as Groove Section 6 does on three occasions.

Groove Section 6 can be clearly seen as derived from the pitch, motion, and contour content of Groove Section 5 before it. While this new section will attempt to be primary and will make three impassioned attempts to maintain its primacy (numbered on the score below), Groove Section 5 continues to assert its dominance by foiling all three attempts. It isn't until the cleansing stasis of the closing section that the aggression of Groove Section 5 can be fully quelled. It is worth noting that, as Groove Section 5 thrice wrestles back control from Groove Section 6, each subsequent interruption is more forceful and displays more frustration than the last (each of these reversals is denoted by a star in the Example 27 below).

Example 27: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 120-143

**Groove Section 6: 1**

*even and with great force*

**Groove Section 6: 2**

*very light*

**Groove Section 6: 3**

*cresc.*

The second time that Groove Section 5 takes back over, Lang employs a curious metrical device, using a series of bars whose time signatures are: 11/16, 12/16, 13/16, 14/16, 15/16,

16/16, and 17/16. We literally see the groove evolving in length and complexity during this stretch (again, denoted by the second star on the figure below). This is a kind of incomplete durational inversion of measures 26-30 (the aforementioned “key” to Groove Section 1) and can be understood as a kind of corresponding “key” to Groove Section 5.

For its third and final attempt to regain control, Groove Section 6 tries something entirely new. Like a hostage negotiator, this section (labeled Groove Section 6:3) lowers its voice and speaks quietly but insistently in an attempt to enact its will. This moment of quiet courage is ultimately shouted down for good by Groove Section 5’s final recap, a brief and violent display of sheer dominance (marked by the third star in the diagram above). In this ferocious display, Groove Section 5 not only conquers Groove Section 6, but also asserts its dominance over all of the previous material.

The now-defeated Groove Section 6, composed entirely of triple beats ( $\Delta$ ), is in some ways set up as the opposite of Groove Section 1. While Lang opened *Press Release* by forcefully expelling all “triple beats” in his initial bass line out and “to the left,” he allows Groove Section 6 to exist in a state of constant propulsion ( $\Delta$ ). Whereas Groove Section 1 ultimately proved satisfying because of its arrival at a measure of 6 stabilizing duple beats, Section 6 *fails*, as it is entirely composed of the *propulsive* element ( $\Delta$ ) but lacks any of the *stabilizing* element ( $/$ ).

The endless propulsion of Groove Section 6 sets up the final portion of the piece, a section of timeless stasis that is built entirely of duple beats ( $/$ ) wherein the second pitch is sustained. Again, when taken in conversation with the previous section’s straight-ahead triple groupings, this is a striking development. As *Press Release* sought stability during Groove Section 1, so too does it seek stability as Groove Section 6, a section of only ( $\Delta$ ) beats, works its

way toward a section comprised of only ( / ) beats - the final section of stasis. The only thing standing between the two is the final recap of Groove Section 5.<sup>29</sup> This aids in form-making<sup>30</sup> by interrupting the more-obvious rhythmic flow, and subsequently allows the final section of stasis to at long last bring a kind of subversive sweet release to the work (and the performer).

Over the course of *Press Release*, David Lang repeatedly circumvents the logical conclusions of his rhythmic patterns. Similarly subversive is Puerto Rican composer Roberto Sierra's 1995 work for solo clarinet *Ritmorroto* - in fact, in many ways this subversion is the defining characteristic of the piece. The title *Ritmorroto*, which literally means "broken rhythm," describes a work that stubbornly refuses to settle into established rhythmic patterns. Rather than becoming stuck *in* the groove, like Lang, Larsen, and Mandat, Sierra purposefully subverts his groove constructs time and time again, employing a rhythmic lexicon of his own making that, in his words, "generates a succession of irrational durations or pulses."<sup>31</sup> Over and over, Sierra employs a "rhythmic language which comprises the juxtaposition of two incomplete units with different subdivisions"<sup>32</sup> and stubbornly refuses to settle into established rhythmic patterns, repeatedly subverting our expectations. Sierra deliberately causes his piece to get stuck *outside* the groove. Consider the very opening of *Ritmorroto*, a movement coyly titled "Con absolute precision ritmica" which is printed below.

---

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix B, "Global Form Chart."

<sup>30</sup> Schacter, *Rhythm and Linear Analysis: A Preliminary Study*.

<sup>31</sup> Roberto Sierra. *Ritmorroto*. (New York, NY: 1995, Subito Music Publishing).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

**Example 28: *Ritmorroto*, Roberto Sierra, Mvt. 1**

Con absoluta precisión rítmica ♩ = 104

ROBERTO SIERRA

The musical score consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 104 and the instruction 'Con absoluta precisión rítmica'. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and various dynamic markings: *mf*, *sfzp*, *sf*, *mf*, *sfzp*, *sf*, *mf*, *f*, and *fff*. The second staff starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a *cresc.* marking. The third staff continues the rhythmic complexity with a *mf* dynamic and includes a sharp sign (#) on a note.

Sierra deploys incomplete rhythms that seamlessly elide with differing metric subdivisions toward an unstable, peg-legged conclusion. The first movement repeatedly sets up almost-complete subdivisions of familiar rhythms (three triplets, four sixteenth notes, an eighth note and two sixteenth notes) which then elide with subsequent pulses from differing rhythmic families. Rather than subverting the groove by breaking free from its power, *Ritmorroto* subverts the groove by refusing to enter its dominance in the first place. The result is an evasive work that is slightly off-kilter by design.

This rhythmic conflict continues in the second movement, “Con calma,” as Sierra repeatedly interrupts the gentle melodic flow with aggressive intrusions. The destabilizing force of Sierra’s interjections (the gestures or notes marked *ff*) further upset the tenuous flow he sets up in each melodic cell (the lyrical sections marked *p*):

**Example 29: *Ritmorroto*, Roberto Sierra, Mvt. 2 (opening)**

Con calma ♩ = 96

The musical score for Example 29 is a single staff of music. It begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 96 and the instruction 'Con calma'. The music features a melodic flow with aggressive intrusions. The dynamic markings are *p*, *ffp*, *ff p*, *ff p*, *ff p*, *ff p*, and *ff*. The score includes a fermata over a note, a sharp sign (#) on a note, and a five-fingered scale (5) on a note.

The third and final movement, “Agresivo,” resorts to all out rhythmic war (albeit with a large dose of good humor):

**Example 30: *Ritmorroto*, Roberto Sierra, Mvt. 3 (excerpt)**

The musical score consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It features a sequence of notes with a fermata over a group of five notes, followed by a dynamic marking of *molto p subito*. The tempo/mood is labeled 'Serenio' above the first measure and 'Agresivo' above the second measure. There are triplet markings over groups of three notes. The second staff continues the piece, starting with a dynamic marking of *p* and a triplet. It then shifts to *f* and includes a sixteenth-note run. The tempo/mood is labeled 'Serenio' above the first measure and 'Agresivo' above the second measure. The piece concludes with a *molto* marking.

The second and third movements of *Ritmorroto* can be understood in conversation with the struggle between Groove Sections 4, 5, and 6 in *Press Release*, except that in Lang’s work, three grooves fight for dominance whereas in Sierra’s work, the war is between between objective groove and “anti-groove,” presented in the moment as the battle between two stylistic characters. When considered in conversation with the works of Lang, Larsen, and Mandat, Roberto Sierra’s *Ritmorroto* offers a wholly different approach to groove and its subversion that, in spite of itself, kind of makes one want to get up and dance. Whether or not Roberto Sierra’s piece lives up to the name *Ritmorroto* and fully breaks the rhythmic construct that it also works within remains to be seen.

*Press Release*, however, does indeed live up to its name, and ultimately “releases” after about seven frenzied minutes of “pressing” forward. This final Coda section’s sustained pitches again offer the illusion of a stuck groove, which never gets past the initial interval, further

subverting the expectations Lang has previously established with “a kind of virtuosic relaxation.”<sup>33</sup> Lang spoke of this stark contrast in our interview:

*“This coda was a reaction to every hard piece I had ever seen performed. One thing I noticed with all pieces that end loud and hard is that the player comes off stage exhilarated and exhausted, panting, sweating - it is hard work to play a hard piece and it is very physical. Backstage after such a piece the player has to cool down, has to relax, has to become calm, and that can take a while, and it can be very difficult for them. I had the idea in press release to put the cool down section on stage - the player has finished with the more obviously virtuosic music and now, at the end, has to play this other kind of really hard music to come down from it.”<sup>34</sup>*

We can understand the final section to be entirely composed of duple ( / ) beats, wherein the second part of each duple lingers into eternity, ringing to fill the space that has previously been so electric with motion. A new pattern emerges in this section, where the expanding “groove” (although it unfolds so slowly, it’s hardly appropriate to refer to it as such) follows a new bass line (F# - A - B - C# - D - E - F#, again resolving at the octave) and follows the previously set precedent of Lang’s “slow unfolding.” This groove evolves on its own terms, beginning with the first four pitches before restarting the sequence and adding a new pitch each time. The final time through the bass line progression ends on the E - one note short of the full octave. It is worth noting that the anticipated final F#, which complete’s Lang’s octave journey,

---

<sup>33</sup> Lang, Interview by author.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

comes in the “release” octave, in the upper voice, symbolizing the collective release for the entire work.

**Example 31: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 175-192**

In *Playing With Something That Runs*, Mark Butler, whose research has informed the analytical approach taken in this paper, reflects on the differences between classical performance and DJ performance. Butler, a classically-trained pianist with experience as a DJ, mentions the odd sensation of being able to “step outside a sound while I was making it happen”<sup>35</sup> during the process of DJing. The final section of stasis in *Press Release* offers the performer a similar kind of out-of-body experience. During the closing minutes of the work, Lang finally slows the rhythmic and harmonic motion of the work to a crawl and enables the bass clarinetist to enjoy the harmony implied by *each individual note*, rather than by the furious unfolding of evolving grooves. This experience is disorienting to say the least, and there will be a very real temptation

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Playing With Something That Runs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 106.



for performers to rush through this section. To do so would be a grave mistake: musically speaking, the more patient a performer can be during this closing section, the more effective and satisfying the performance will ultimately be.

Tracking the groove in this closing section offers a clearer insight into Lang's intentions. When we remove the printed D from the lower track and include the final F# in the upper track, we see that the intervallic content of the final ascent matches exactly the intervallic content of the first measure of the work. The full "tracking" of measures 179-190 are printed below:

**Example 32: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 179-190, Tracking the Groove**

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.).

The first system, labeled "Example 32", shows measures 179-190. It consists of two staves. The upper staff is labeled "Bass Clarinet" and contains a melodic line with a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, some with slurs and accents. The lower staff is also labeled "Bass Clarinet" and contains a bass line with a few notes and rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

The second system, labeled "B. Cl.", shows the initial measure of *Press Release* for comparison. It also consists of two staves. The upper staff is labeled "B. Cl." and contains a melodic line starting with a quarter note followed by a half note. The lower staff is also labeled "B. Cl." and contains a bass line starting with a quarter note followed by a half note. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. A measure number "10" is written above the first staff of this system.

And now consider the same view, but with the salient bass line pitches circled in red (the initial measure of *Press Release* is offered below for comparison):

**Example 33: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 1 & 179-190, Tracking the Groove**

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Bass Clarinet and B. Cl. (Bass Clarinet). The score is in 3/4 time. The first system consists of two staves for Bass Clarinet. The second system consists of two staves for B. Cl. (Bass Clarinet). Red circles highlight specific notes: a quarter note with a sharp sign in the first Bass Clarinet staff, a quarter note in the second Bass Clarinet staff, a quarter note with a sharp sign in the first B. Cl. staff, and a quarter note in the second B. Cl. staff.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The first staff has a treble clef and the second staff has a bass clef. The score is in 3/4 time and is marked "gritty and hard". The first staff has a quarter note with a sharp sign, followed by a series of eighth notes. The second staff has a series of eighth notes. Red circles highlight the first two staves.

Lang brings the work full circle and employs the initial hook as a slowly progressing driver for the final section of stasis. This brings to mid important phrasing considerations. If possible, the performer should seek to highlight this symmetry by accenting the low pitches that correspond to the opening funk bass line (F#, A, B, C#, E, F#) with great strength while treating the D as a passing tone. These notes should similarly be lengthened slightly with a tenuto marking to provide maximal harmonic impact. A phrasing decision which allows the final F# to

feel like the logical completion of this funk bass line, while also embodying its necessary role as a “release” for the entire work, is supremely desirable.

And then there is the shocking final sound of *Press Release*. Rather than reset the work to the most recent groove’s tonic pitch of F# or even the opening groove’s low D, Lang ends the piece with a low C (the lowest pitch on the bass clarinet) and has a marking that the clarinetist should “growl” this pitch (effectively referring to an added snarl of some kind, perhaps an overtone, multiphonic, a physical growl, or a wild sonic modification).

**Example 34: *Press Release*, David Lang, mm. 196-197**

The image shows a musical staff with two systems. The first system has a single note on a very low line, marked with a circled 'C' and the word 'long' above it. Below the staff, a piano key diagram shows the note C1 (the lowest C on the bass clarinet) with the dynamic marking 'ppp'. The second system shows a note on a higher line, marked with the word 'growl' above it. Below the staff, a piano key diagram shows the note C2 (the lowest C on the bass clarinet) with a dynamic marking that appears to be 'ppp' or similar. A curved line connects the two notes, indicating a glissando or a sustained low pitch. To the right of the staff, the date '24 December 1991' is written.

In these four works, we’ve seen Lang, Larsen, Sierra, and Mandat each intentionally subvert their expected outcomes in differing ways, and this visceral, animalistic ending embodies Lang’s tendency throughout *Press Release* to break from the patterns he’s established. This growl acts as a final interruptive act of defiance against the oppression of the groove. With this primitive cry, *Press Release* succeeds in releasing us from its domineering groove by pressing us further into its mystery, pivoting starkly toward a new rhythmic horizon and an uncertain future. The ending is absolutely unrelated to any other material in the piece, and thus offers one final

moment of delineating interruption to challenge the listener (and performer) to consider all previous material in a new light.

In summation, David Lang's *Press Release* is a structural marvel oozing with groove and grit, and is smartly constructed to take the listener (and the performer) on a meaningful journey. Contemporaneous works by Libby Larsen, Roberto Sierra, and Eric Mandat similarly engage with ideas of evolving groove and rhythmic subversion in unique and powerful ways. This contextualized analysis of *Press Release* helps us begin to demystify the work and see its underlying complexities, symmetries, and subtleties. As we understand Lang's work in the context of other works from the same era, we draw from their conversation theoretical explorations and performance considerations. We see each of these works in light of one another, and a clarinetist would be well-served to study, perform, and teach all four of them over the course of a satisfying career, and to engage with the unique moments of groove present within each work. The collective process of contextualizing and deconstructing each work makes for a compelling program, and their collective performance makes for intense and satisfying theater.

*Press Release* is raw, aggressive, and visceral with moments of supreme tenderness and clarity: it deserves informed, carefully conceptualized performances. It also holds a great deal of pedagogical value, not only for its elite demands of technical and musical deployment, but also for its robust rhythmic structure, which begs a nuanced analytical engagement. *Press Release* offers a meticulously constructed playground for the brave bass clarinetist, and deserves a prominent position on recital programs and in private lesson studios the world over.

## APPENDIX A

Transcript of Interview with Composer David Lang**1) Please briefly describe your recollection of the compositional process for *Press Release*.**

*I went to Yale with Evan - I was a graduate student when he was an undergrad - and his great musicianship made him a big part of the early years of Bang on a Can. In 1991 I wrote a solo percussion piece for my friend Steve Schick, called the anvil chorus, and people seemed to like it, so I started looking around at all my other friends and thinking I should write solo pieces for them as well. So I wrote press release for Evan in 1992.*

**2) What was it like to write a piece for Evan Ziporyn? In what ways did the performer himself, musically or otherwise, influence the composition of *Press Release*?**

*Evan is of course a great player and really smart. One of the things I remember about the premiere is how he dealt with all the patterns - I had worked so hard to make the piece out of overlapping, really complicated patterns that collide with each other, that govern every section of the piece. At the premiere Evan showed up with half a sheet of his own music paper with some notes scratched on it and I asked him what that was. He said he just wrote down the notes in the first measure of each section and then wrote a description of the patterns for that section, in English. I felt very reduced! There are things I put in the piece just for his interest - the funk bass at the beginning, the pseudo-Balinese mode section in the middle, etc. And I guess the puzzle aspect of the patterns was for his enjoyment as well.*

**3) Was there an intentional rhythmic device you employed during the composition of *Press Release*, or did you begin to notice rhythmic patterns as you saw the piece unfolding before you? In either case, was a goal of yours to intentionally interact with those rhythmic patterns?**

*The goal was to make a piece that was completely patterned - I never write notes or tunes or harmonies and then imagine how to animate them in time. I (almost) always start with working out the rhythmic patterning - without pitches - and when I know enough about how the patterns work I start looking for musical material that will make those patterns sound good.*

**4) At the end of *Press Release*, you make a stark pivot and transition into a suspended, almost “stasis-like” section of sustained notes and intervallic jumps. Can you talk a little bit about the effect or musical idea you are attempting to generate with this stylistic pivot?**

*This coda was a reaction to every hard piece I had ever seen performed. One thing I noticed with all pieces that end loud and hard is that the player comes off stage exhilarated and*

*exhausted, panting, sweating - it is hard work to play a hard piece and it is very physical. Backstage after such a piece the player has to cool down, has to relax, has to become calm, and that can take a while, and it can be very difficult for them. I had the idea in press release to put the cool down section on stage - the player has finished with the more obviously virtuosic music and now, at the end, has to play this other kind of really hard music to come down from it. It is a kind of virtuosic relaxation.*

**5) Can you describe your recollection of where you were as a composer in the early 1990s, and what influences (musical or otherwise) were especially meaningful to you during that time?**

*I really don't remember who I was then. I was trying to push myself in a lot of different directions and it is hard not to look back at the 1990's me as an inferior version of the 2017 me. Sorry!*

**6) How did the evolution of Bang On A Can as an entity impact your compositional output in general? Do you feel the collective liberated you to experiment with a more diverse output of works?**

*The thing about Bang on a Can that probably had the biggest influence on me compositionally was getting to work with the same great musicians over and over again. When you work with someone only once you try to show them what you know. When you work with someone many times, over many years, your relationship becomes much deeper and you become aware of things those particular players do that are open for exploration. Probably the most meaningful thing about who I was in the early 1990's was that I was learning so much from musicians like Evan, Steve Schick, Maya Beiser, Mark Stewart, Lisa Moore, and Robert Black, among many others.*

**7) You mention in your program note that you were influenced by James Brown for *Press Release* in particular. That is just awesome. Do you have a background in funk, soul, or rock music?**

*I got soul and I'm superbad.*

## APPENDIX B

Global Form Chart

<b>Global Form Chart</b>	
<i>Press Release</i> <b>David Lang</b>	
<u>Measure Numbers</u>	<u>Event</u>
1-17	Groove Section 1
18-25	Retransition
26-30	Groove Section 1 (Recap)
31-45	Transition
46-61	Groove Section 2
(46-53)	2A
(54-61)	2B
62-79	Groove Section 3
80	Transition
81-98	Groove Section 4
99-102	Groove Section 5
103-122	Groove Section 4 (Recap)
123-126	Groove Section 5 (Recap 1)
127-129	Groove Section 6:1
130-131	Groove Section 5 (Recap 2)
132-134	Groove Section 6:2
135-141	Groove Section 5 (Recap 3)
142-144	Groove Section 6:3
145-149	Groove Section 5 (Recap 4 - Final Statement)
150-197	Final Section of Stasis

Representative material from each of *Press Release*'s seven major sections is copied below, along with the measure numbers of each time that material occurs.

Groove Section 1  
Measures 1-17, 26-30

$\text{♩} = 132$  *gritty and hard*

Groove Section 2  
Measures 46-61

Groove Section 3  
Measures 62-79

*faster* ( $\text{♩} = 144$ )

*pp* - like an echo



Groove Section 4  
Measures 81-98, 103-122

*faster* (♩ = 160)

*sim.* →

Groove Section 5  
Measures 99-102, 123-126, 130-131, 135-141, 145-149

*cresc.*

Groove Section 6  
Measures 127-129, 132-134, 142-144

*even and with great force*

(#)

*sim.*

Final Section of Stasis  
150-197

The image shows a musical score for the final section of Stasis, measures 150-197. The score is written for two staves, likely representing different instruments or voices. The tempo is marked "slower" and the time signature is 3/4, with a metronome marking of 60. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The music features a series of chords and melodic lines, with some notes marked with accents and dynamic markings like "pp". The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, and there are some horizontal lines below the staves, possibly indicating fingerings or breath marks. The overall style is minimalist and contemplative.

## APPENDIX C

### Accompanying Visual Artwork and Artist Statement

As I began to explore the themes that had revealed themselves during my research, I knew that this paper and its corresponding lecture recital would benefit greatly from a visual element that captured the spirit of the music held within. To that end, I commissioned Brandon Waybright, a visual artist based in the Portland, Oregon area who has often engaged with contemporary music, to construct a series of recital posters that would also serve as accompanying visual artwork for this project. His artist statement is copied below, along with the eight posters.

#### Artist Statement

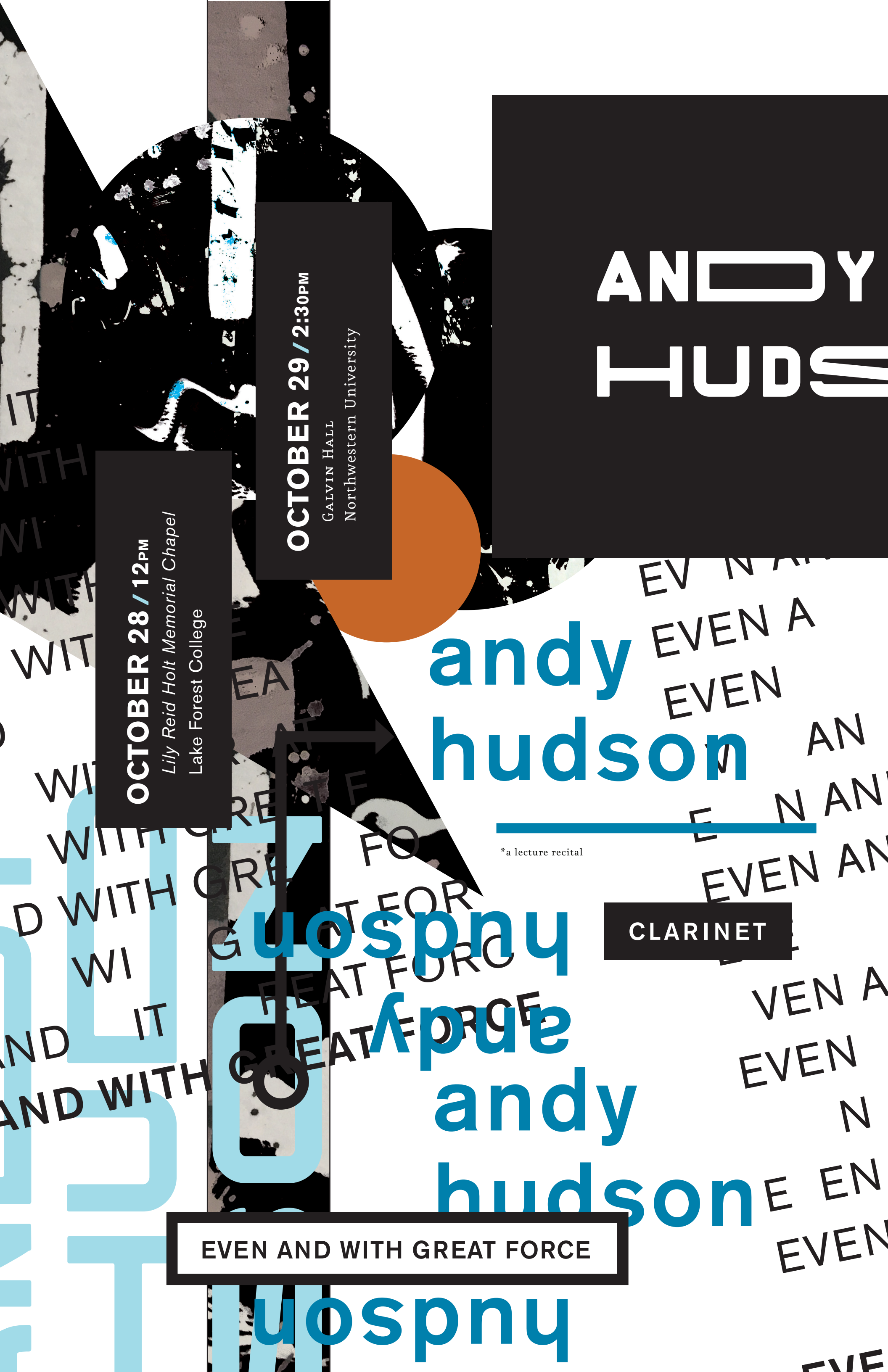
*“The design of a poster should reflect its content. In developing this series of posters, I was interested in the idea that a composition, though consistent in structure, produces a new experience for listeners with each performance. There is a tension between the systematic nature of the chosen compositions and the room the musician has to interpret them. This is at the heart of what I find beautiful in contemporary music and also in live performance.*

*Accordingly, I set out to construct a system for creating the posters that was like creating sheet music and would allow me to develop a similar tension. I began by constructing a series of visual marks with both found and traditional design tools. These marks would serve as notes in my composition. I then established some rules about the volume or scale each visual mark was meant to have as well as the number of times a mark would be repeated within a composition.*

*Each poster is a performance of the composition that I created; each work follows the same rules and uses the same elements, yet there are significant visual differences. Those differences come in the placement of each element and how far forward or backwards the layer of that element is—a visual choice which is similar to the change in aural experience based on where someone sits in a room and what kind of hall a piece is performed in.*

*The tension present in the consistent dissimilarity of the posters explores the tension between mechanical precision and the freedom of interpretation that can often be found in contemporary classical music. While the same sheet music may sit in front of two different performers, the experience of each performance is never the same. Likewise, though the same elements exist in all the posters, each poster draws different elements out of the composition.”*

Brandon Waybright, MFA  
Co-Chair for Applied Design, George Fox University  
Founder, CAPE design



ANDY HUDSON

andy hudson

quospny  
pue  
andy hudson

OCTOBER 28 / 12PM

Lily Reid Holt Memorial Chapel  
Lake Forest College

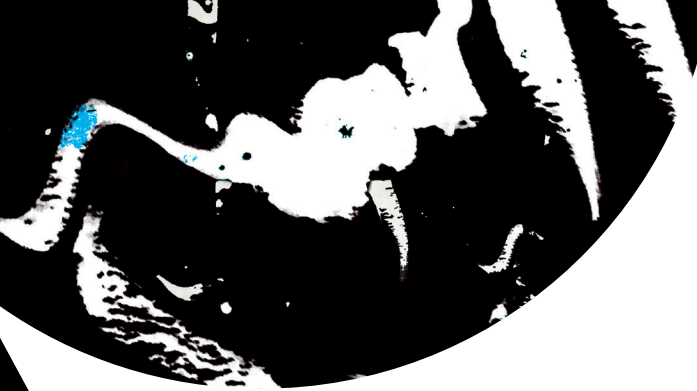
OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

EVEN AND WITH GREAT FORCE

CLARINET

\*a lecture recital



# andy hudson



E  
V  
E E  
EVEN  
EVE A  
EVEN AN  
E ND  
EV N AND W  
EVEN A WI  
EVEN WIT

**SATURDAY**

\*a lecture recital

**OCTOBER 28 / 12PM**

LILY REID HOLT MEMORIAL CHAPEL  
Lake Forest College

**SUNDAY**

**OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM**

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

E EN A D WITH  
EVEN A WI G AT FOR  
AND IT REAT FOR

**CLARINET**

**EVEN AND WITH GREAT FORCE**

**AAAN**

**A**

**LOW**

EVEN AND WITH GREAT FORCE

andy  
hudson

\*a lecture recital

uospny

andy

**SATURDAY**

**OCTOBER 28 / 12PM**

LILY REID HOLT MEMORIAL CHAPEL  
Lake Forest College

**SUNDAY**

**OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM**

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

CLARINET

EVEN AND WITH GREAT FORCE

AND IT REAT FORC

EVEN AND WITH GREAT FORCE

# andy hudson

spring

CLARINET

AND

\*a lecture recital

**OCTOBER 28 / 12PM**

*Lily Reid Holt Memorial Chapel*  
Lake Forest College

**OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM**

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

AND IT

REAT FORC

EVEN AND WITH GREAT FORCE



WEEN

EVEN

ANDY

AND

HUDSON

WITH

SATURDAY

OCTOBER 28 / 12PM

LILY REID HOLT MEMORIAL CHAPEL  
Lake Forest College

GREAT

\*a lecture recital

SUNDAY

OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

FORCE

CLARINET

CLARINET

EVEN

ANDY

AND

HUDSON

WITH

SATURDAY

OCTOBER 28 / 12PM

LILY REID HOLT MEMORIAL CHAPEL  
Lake Forest College

GREAT

SUNDAY

OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

FORCE

\*a lecture recital

HUDSON

EVEN

ANDY

A

AND

HUDSON

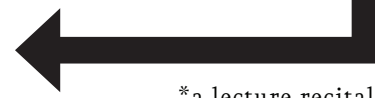
WITH

O

OCTOBER 28 / 12PM

Lily Reid Holt Memorial Chapel  
Lake Forest College

GREAT



\*a lecture recital

OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

FORCE

CLARINET

CLARINET

EVEN

ANDY

AND

HUDSON

WITH

GREAT

FORCE

an  
hu

SATURDAY

OCTOBER 28 / 12PM

LILY REID HOLT MEMORIAL CHAPEL  
Lake Forest College

SUNDAY

OCTOBER 29 / 2:30PM

GALVIN HALL  
Northwestern University

\*a lecture recital

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Attas, Robin. "Meter as Process in Groove-Based Popular Music." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2011.
- Bader, Rolf. "Perception and Analysing Methods of Groove in Popular Music." *Systematische Musikwissenschaft* 2 (1): 145–54, 1994.
- Biamonte, Nicole. "Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music." *Music Theory Online* 20 (2), 2014.  
<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.2/mto.14.20.2.biamonte.html>.
- Butler, Mark. J. "Turning the Beat Around: Reinterpretation, Metrical Dissonance, and Asymmetry in Electronic Dance Music." *Music Theory Online* 7/6 (2001). Available from <<http://www.societymusictheory.org/mto/issues/mto.01.7.6/toc.7.6.html>> (accessed 2 March 2016).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Playing With Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Butterfield, Matthew W. "The Power of Anacrusis: Engendered Feeling in Groove-Based Musics." *Music Theory Online* 12 (4), 2006.
- Cohn, Richard. "A Platonic Model of Funky Rhythms." *Music Theory Online* 22, No. 2.  
<http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.2/mto.16.22.2.cohn.html>
- Cone, Edward. *Musical Form and Musical Performance*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.
- Cooper, Grosvenor W., and Leonard B. Meyer. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Danielsen, Anne. *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*. Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series. Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate Farnham, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006.

- Davies, Matthew E.P., Guy Madison, Pedro Silva, and Fabien Gouyon. "The Effect of Microtiming Deviations on the Perception of Groove in Short Rhythms." *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 30 (5): 497–510, 2013.
- Hughes, Walter. "In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco." *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, 147-57. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Krebs, Harald. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Lang, David. "Program Note: Press Release." Accessed June 1, 2017.  
<http://davidlangmusic.com/music/press-release>
- Lerdahl, Fred and Ray Jackendoff. *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 1983.
- London, Justin. *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rhythm in Twentieth-century Theory." In *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Street Christensen, 695–725. *The Cambridge History of Music*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Lozada, Alejandro L., "Roberto Sierra's Compositions for Solo Clarinet." DMA Student Research, Creative Activity, and Performance Document, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008.
- Morrison, Amanda R. "Eric Mandat: His Musical Life, a Performer's Perspective of *Preludes, Book 1* and *Rrrowzer!*, and a Descriptive Catalog of His Published Clarinet Works (1980-2010)." D.M. Dissertation, The Florida State University, 2011.
- Schachter, Carl. "Rhythm and Linear Analysis: A Preliminary Study." *The Music Forum* 4: 281–334, 1976.
- Zbikowski, Lawrence. "Modeling the Groove: Conceptual Structure and Popular Music." *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129 (2): 272–97, 2004.