SPILL

For prepared harp and live electronics

Robert van Heumen © revised 2016

Spill is a musical response to fossil fuel disasters that often go unnoticed by the general public. In 7 miniatures Spill comments on ruthless oil companies, human tragedies and polluted environments. The processed harp is sometimes cold as ice, sometimes hot as giant flames that can be seen from 20 miles away. She cries, screams, explodes, gulps and rumbles. Each of these 7 miniatures focusses on a specific extended harp technique. Placed in an electronically enhanced environment the harp is forced to adapt to the environment or fight against it.

“While coal, oil, and gas are an integral part of everyday life around the world, 2013 brought a stark reminder of the inherent risk that comes with a fossil-fuel dependent world, with numerous pipeline spills, explosions, derailments, landslides, and the death of 20 coal miners in the U.S. Alone.”

Commissioned by Miriam Overlach with support from the Performing Arts Fund NL.
Audio-visual material can be found at http://west28.nl/Spill/.

Details for performance

Components
This composition is for prepared harp and live electronics. The harp is electronically processed in realtime. The instrument is accompanied by a soundtrack. All of these components are synchronized using a stand-alone program written in SuperCollider. Sections automatically follow eachother but can be triggered by the player using a MIDI foot pedal.

Microphones and speakers
To be able to electronically process the harp, the instrument should be close miked (putting a microphone on close distance from the instrument) with a condensor microphone as well as with a contact microphone. The soundtrack and the electronic processing should be amplified using a stereo sound system with a subwoofer. A Meyer system or comparable is advised. The harp can be amplified to match the sound level of the soundtrack and effects processing. Preferably the speakers are placed on both sides of the player as close as possible for the electronic and acoustic sounds to be coming from the same location. The added advantage is that there is no need for monitors for the player to hear the electronic sound.

Software setup
Follow the directions in the README file that comes with the SuperCollider stand-alone program.

Contact
For questions regarding this composition and its performance please contact Robert van Heumen at robert@west28.nl.

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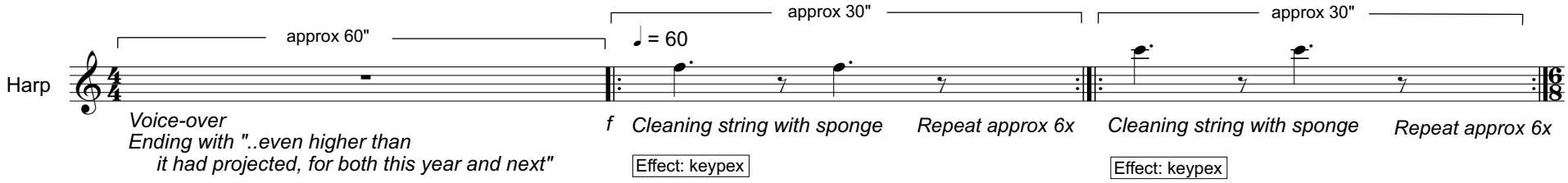
Playing the piece should be like operating a machine.
Preparations can be added clearly visible and audible to the audience.

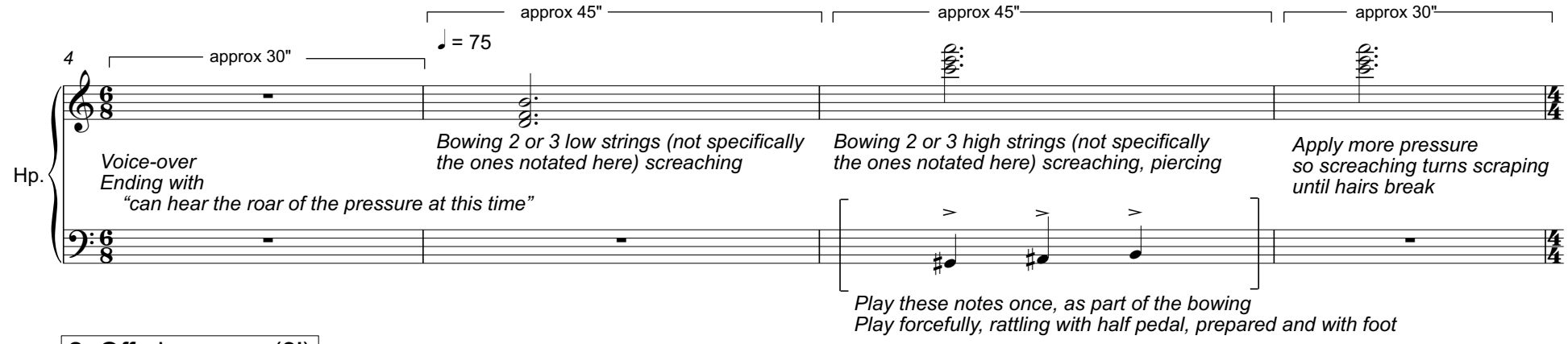
0. Introduction (2')

Extended technique: cleaning strings with sponge and water



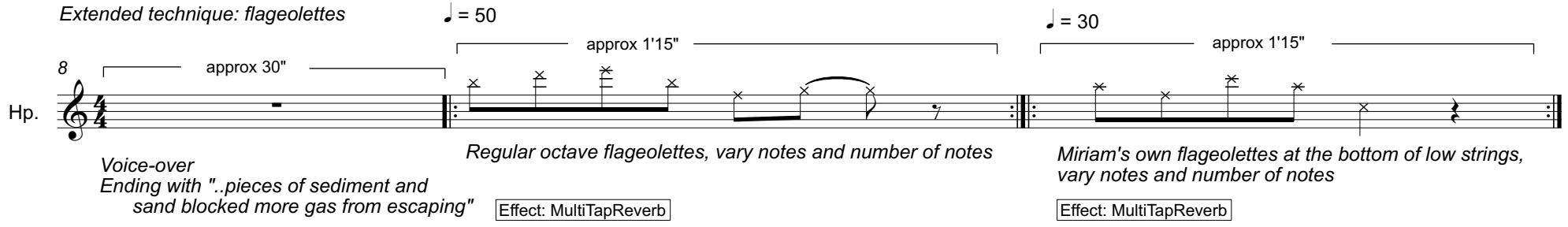
1. On-shore gas (2'30")

Extended technique: bowing strings with bow-hairs



2. Off-shore gas (3')

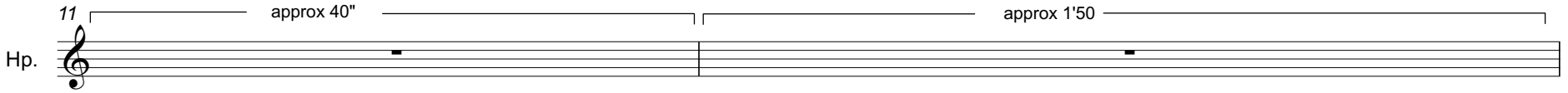
Extended technique: flageolettes



3. On-shore oil (2'30")

Preparation: alligator clips on strings

Prepare strings F0-C1 + G1 with clips, 2 per string, half-pedal



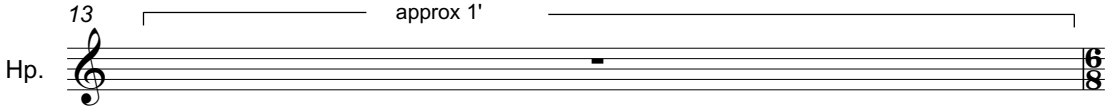
Voice-over
Ending with "..had gone unreported to the public since January 2012"

Effect: pitch-shift down with fixed speed vibrato

Improvise with soundtrack
Hectic, loud, pulling clips upwards and letting them fall back, hitting strings with metal tools

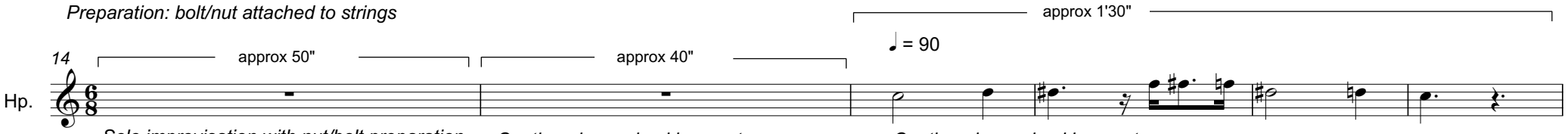
4. Intermezzo (1')

Remove clips, add bolt/nut preparation, make it part of the performance



5. Tar sands (3')

Preparation: bolt/nut attached to strings



Solo improvisation with nut/bolt preparation
Long notes, slowly paced, stay on same note for a while

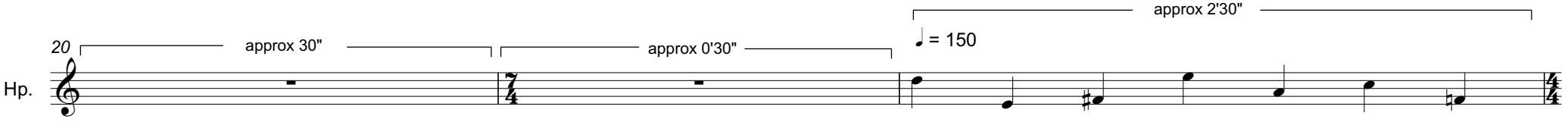
Effect: pitch-shift up with variable speed vibrato
Gradually decreasing effect level

Continue improvised long notes
Voice-over
Ending with
"..the acidic, marshy soil found in the forest"

Continue improvised long notes
Alternate with this line every now and then

6. Mining (3'30")

Extended technique: dampening strings



Voice-over
Ending with "..about 2,500 feet underground."

Start immediately with a pedal hit
Hit harp pedals incidentally
Gradually increase frequency of hits

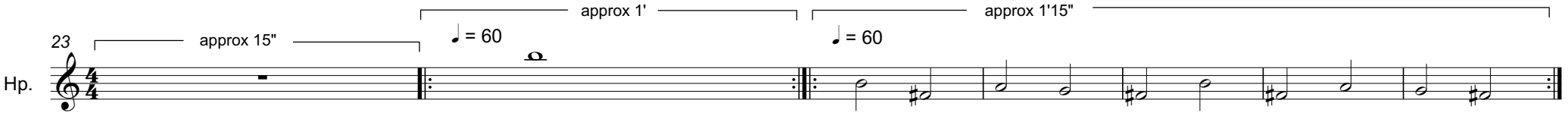
Effect: Schroeder reverb

Gradually increase frequency of hits

Start playing two of three notes from this pattern
Increase intensity of playing, inject full note pattern at will
Go into a fuge with these notes
Play a pattern with these notes when going to the next section.

7. Coda (2'30")

Extended technique: cleaning strings with sponge and water



Voice-over
Ending with
"..incredibly tragic fire and explosion."

Cleaning string with sponge
(Voice-over continues)

Effect: fast vibrato and pitch-down

Continue cleaning string with sponge
but less and less
Add note pattern

Repeat and fade out before soundtrack ends
Start cleaning up materials