

UPON HIS RETURN FROM PROXIMA CENTAURI

For Electric Guitar, Effects Pedals, and Computer

Jordan Watson

Instrumentation

Electric Guitar, Effects Pedals, and Computer

Duration

10 Minutes

Required Effects Pedals and Software

Digitech Whammy Pedal, any overdrive pedal, any delay pedal with at least 10 seconds of delay time (Boss DD-20 is recommended), any volume pedal, Keith McMillen Softstep 2, Ableton Live Suite 9 (with Max For Live), accompanying Ableton Live set with all external files and Max For Live plugins.

Notes for the Performer

Copy the folder that includes the Ableton Live set, the Max For Live plugins, the Sigmund~.mxo file, and the SoftStep 2 “Prox” preset file. Then load the “Prox” preset file into your Soft Step 2 via the Soft Step 2 basic editor. Buttons one and two act as triggers to turn on and off the Pitch Shifters from section A and the Buffer Shuffler/Beat Repeat/Ring Mod from section B. Button four will start the Live transport and the clock, meaning you can start the piece. Button five will stop the piece if needed, and the main Nav button on the right side of the Soft Step 2 will turn the master volume up or down by applying pressure along its Y axis. This will allow for a fadeout at the end of the piece.

The plugin called “Prepared Guitar Sample Triggers” will randomly select a set of eight prepared guitar samples from a library of fifty. Throughout the piece, these samples will change along with the notes that trigger them and their speed and pitch. The goal for this piece is to try to react to the sounds you hear and weave those motives into your playing without losing the direction provided by your own improvised ideas.

Additionally, the plugin called “Microtonal” is programmed through a system of probabilities to turn itself on and off as well as change the microtonal tuning system being used. As the piece progresses, the microtonal tunings will increase in probability until they are always happening in the Coda.

Before starting the piece, be sure to click on the MIDI Tracker track and open up the clock by click on the “C” button in the fp.clock plugin. Then click on the Track/Trigger track to allow yourself to see the “Prepared Guitar Sample Triggers” plugin which will display the pitches that trigger the samples.

Program Notes

In Philip K. Dick’s 1965 novel, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, the eponymous character returns to the solar system after a ten year journey to the planetary system of Proxima Centauri, an actual red dwarf star located about 4.24 light-years from the Sun. With him, Palmer Eldritch brings back an alien form of lichen, which is marketed as a drug called Chew-Z. When ingested, Chew-Z allows a person to experience a solo trip to an alternate reality, every aspect of which is supposed to be controllable by the user of the drug. However, Palmer Eldritch frequently appears in another character’s Chew-Z fueled psychoscapes, exerting his control and manipulating that reality when he chooses. *Upon His Return From Proxima Centauri* draws on this idea of an alternate reality wherein control is not always in my own hands. My standard electric guitar setup has been augmented by a computer system that, much like Palmer Eldritch, can interrupt and exert control over my sound by microtonally retuning it and triggering a small set of prepared guitar samples that can be re-pitched in addition to being sped up or slowed down. The form of the piece is loosely mapped out using parameters such as dynamics and density, while elements like pitch, rhythm, and motivic development, are primarily improvised. The challenge for me in this piece becomes figuring out how to successfully wrestle with and shape musical ideas while inside an unfamiliar, alternate reality that is unpredictably controlled by my duet partner, the computer.

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00:00 - 00:30 Opening Motive: Turn on Whammy (Octave Up), Overdrive, Delay (~350 ms, ~60% feedback). Play loud, fast tremolos of tritone intervals in the highest register possible. Slowly move the Whammy pedal toward the heel position, while reducing speed and dynamics. Let last notes ring out with the Delay.

00:30 - 02:45 A: Play short, pointillistic gestures. This section will also make use of two Max For Live Pitch Shifters that randomly change pitch. Incorporate pitch bending using the Whammy pedal.

02:45 - 05:45 B: Play long, drone notes with the Whammy pedal set for an Octave down, and the Delay set to ~1000 ms with ~90% feedback. Use the volume pedal to fade in the drone notes, and create a shifting drone loop. Then begin to play melodically over the drone by about 04:00. This section will also make use of Ableton Live's Buffer Shuffler/Beat Repeat/Ring Modulator.

05:45 - 08:00 C: Set the Delay to ~8000-10000 ms and ~95% feedback. Begin playing short, pointillistic gestures again only now these gestures start to loop and build to a dense climax. Make use of the Pitch Shifters and Buffer Shuffler/Beat Repeat/Ring Modulator effects as desired. Decrease Delay time as desired.

08:00 - 08:30 Opening Motive

08:30 - 10:00 Coda: Play a mixture of short gestures, long notes, and melodic lines. Start in a high register and make your way down to the lowest register (using the Whammy Pedal with Octave Down). This section will feature increasing Reverb and Tremello/Vibrato effects in Ableton Live.

