# My Battery Is Low And It Is Getting Dark

Brian Ellis

2019

For Solo Keyboard Percussion
and Live Electronics

# Notes

Required Equipment:

- A keyboard percussion instrument
- A computer running Max/MSP
- An internet connection
- A microphone, audio interface, and necessary cables

The score on the following page should be taken as an example and a guideline. This work is generative, meaning that each time it is performed, a new score (and accompanying qlist) should be utilized for a unique living performance. Nothing should be taken as law.

The electronics in this piece feature live-captured samples of the percussionist looped to create a thick texture that would be impossible to create alone. This is accomplished by triggering the electronics to record via a foot pedal or some other computer-interfacing device.

Equipment-wise, this piece requires a microphone and associated interface and cables to route the audio of the percussionist to the laptop running Max/MSP. This laptop does not need to be manned or on stage, but the performer may find the information on screen a convenient safeguard if they are uncomfortable working with electronics. The output of this laptop should then be passed out to a house speaker system, through which the percussionist should also be mildly amplified.

To perform the piece, begin playing section one. After you have gotten into a stable sonic world, trigger the electronics to record. Continue grooving for at least 10 seconds, after which you may either continue to perform the same section with the new electronic accompaniment that automatically fades in, or you may gradually fade out and move on to the next section and repeat the process. If you stay in the same section, you should consider varying aspects of the musical content, a complete description of which can be found on the following page. After the numbered sections have all been played and appropriately sampled by the electronics, the piece ends with a bombastic upward glissando. The final que in the qlist will quickly silence the electronics, and this should be triggered at the beginning of the glissando.

X note heads are to be performed with the "wrong" end of the stick. Any hardness of mallet is acceptable for natural playing.

Time is not strict for any portion of the piece. The looping tracks that form the core of the sound world are intentionally aleatoric, and should result in an expressive, unbound, free-flowing piece.

A *fresh* full score, custom q-list, and up-to-date electronics for Max/MSP may be downloaded at: http://www.brianellissound.com/batterylow

# Notes

On variations:

After you record the sample into the electronics and it begins playing back the sound you have introduced into it, you may begin, if you feel so inclined, a mild form of improvisation. This may include varying the dynamics, texture, timbre, tempo, or rhythm of the prescribed pattern. Ideally this will be towards the goal of creating and releasing musical tension.

Pitch may also be changed, but variations should be much more cautious, and guidelines for variations are as follows:

- Pitch should not be varied in the first third of the piece.
- Newly introduced pitches should be diatonic with respect to the surrounding music.
- Pitch should not deviate more than a 4th from the prescribed pitch in either direction.
- The amount of pitch variation should increase gradually as the piece progresses.
- Newly introduced pitches should be lingered on for a long time. (Think drones, not arpeggiators)

Many of these principles may be generally applied to other parameters of music, such that the piece generally coheirs into a salient musical gesture.

On electronics:

The components in the presentation mode of the Max/MSP patch are as follows:

- Grey Status Bar: displays status messages containing information hopefully useful to you, the performer.
- Single Yellow slider: The master audio-in. This is mapped by default to channel one from whichever input device you select.
- Blue panels: Each of these represent one channel of looping electronics. All controls here are automated and triggered from the QList.
- Two red-ish slider: Left slider, “elct.” is the level of the electronics, and is automated. Right slider, “mic-in” is the input level from the microphone passed through.
- Green panel: contains buttons to start and stop recording. NOTE: This will record the audio-in on one track and the combined electronics on a second under a file named ‘myRecording#.wav’.
- Big grey button: Advance to the next queue.
- Big red button: reset qlist, triggering an instant mute of everything.

The only remaining challenge for you is to configure your foot pedal. I use a “butterfly” pedal on mode 3. If you want to configure it for something else, give it a shot, and if you can’t figure it out, or have any other questions, give me a hollar:
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# Notes

Program Notes:

The Mars Exploration Rover - B "Opportunity" was operational on the Martian surface from January 2004 until June of 2018. During this fourteen-year mission, an explosion of geological analysis, stunning images, and atmospheric data made its way back to our home planet from this outpost in the night sky. During its time on the surface, the rover took 228,771 photos, got stuck in a sand dune for two months, outlived its twin "Spirit" by nine years, and traveled the distance of more than a marathon before succumbing to power loss from dust on its solar panels. Missions like Opportunity's generally begin with dramatic landings on celestial bodies, followed by a great outpouring of data that slowly becomes repetitive, uninteresting, and eventually mundane before petering out. Its final transmission to Earth, basic logging information indicating charge remaining in the batteries and light levels from the solar panels, was poetically translated for the public as "my battery is low and it is getting dark". A fitting, if quiet, ending to a vibrant and storied piece of human ingenuity. This music takes a look backwards at this story.

Notes about the music, for the performer:

The form of the piece is the story of Opportunity's journey told backwards. It begins with a feeble string of information passed quietly back to the audience - the "my battery is low" message. As the piece progresses, we go further back in time as more tools, sensors, and research equipment was online, and more musical elements are introduced. These are morphed by the electronics in a number of different ways, illustrating the varied results they reported back in different environments and in conjunction with other sensors. Additionally, some of these sensors went offline for long periods of time before becoming functional again, which is again a musical element heard in this piece. The work ends with a giant crescendo - representing the incredible amount of information we learned in the first 90 days of the opportunity mission - before finishing with a dramatic upwards glissando across the range of the instrument, the exact reverse of the dramatic landing Opportunity made in 2004.

*Commissioned as part of the Electronic Integration Project by Jordan Walsh*

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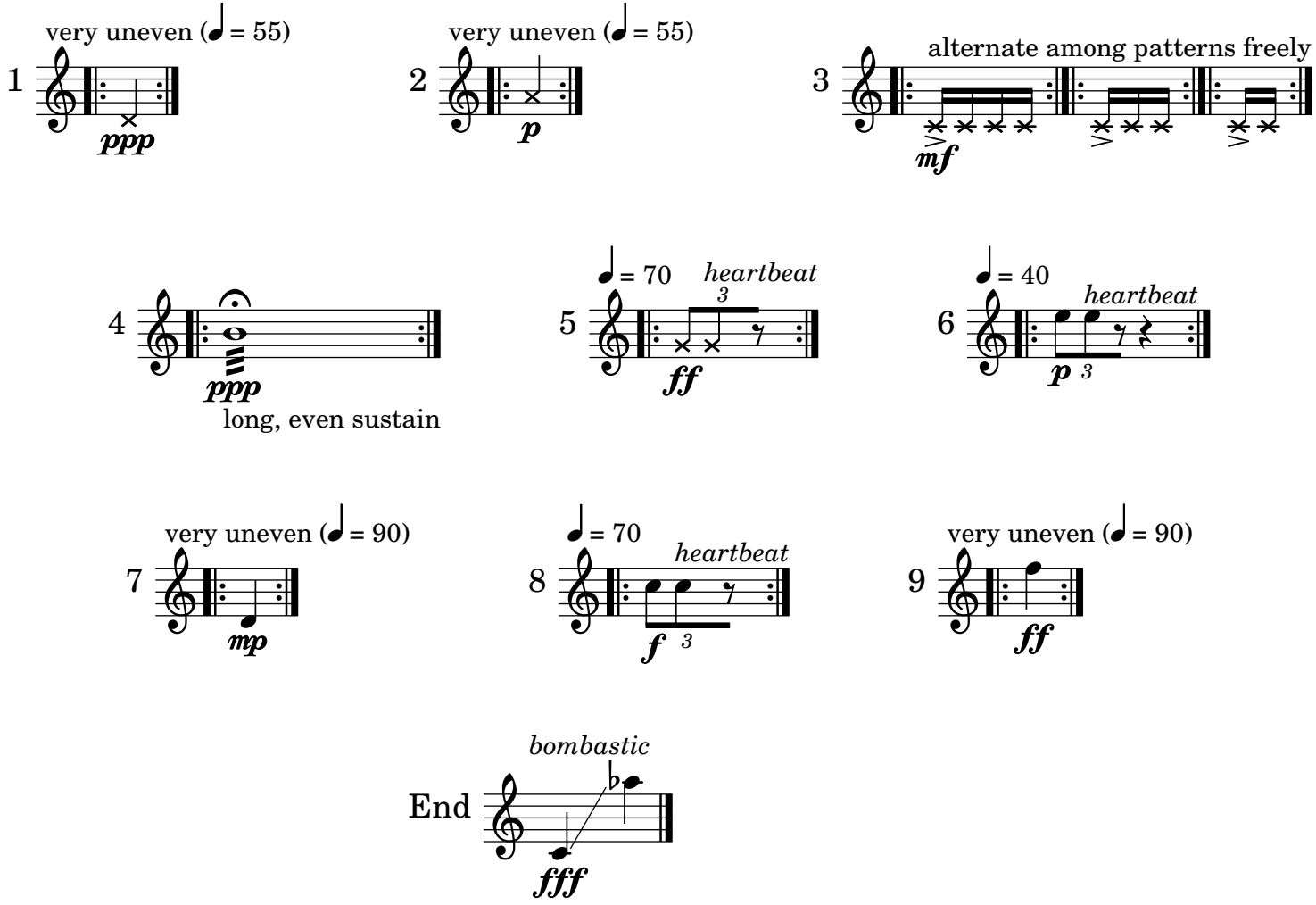


*A fresh score should be generated for every performance at*
www.brianellissound.com/batterylow