

# Sferics

for vibraphone, seasonal electronics, and video

Commissioned by a Consortium of 28 percussionists  
Consortium Director - Victor Pons



8 min

2016

**Commissioned by a Consortium of 28 Percussionists  
Consortium Director – Victor Pons**

Thad Anderson  
Andrew Angell  
Alex Appel  
Brandon Bell  
Daniel Benson  
Aaron Butler  
Jon Clancy  
Daniel Edwards  
Peter Ferry  
Stuart Gerber  
Robert Guilford  
Sean Hamilton  
Von Hansen  
Emory Hensley  
Aaron Levy  
Collin Malloy  
Tyler Mashek  
Robert McCormick  
Evan Miller  
Mike Minarcek  
William Mullen  
Victor Pons  
Felix Reyes  
Jonathan Sharp  
Ryan Smith  
Steven Snowden  
Andrew Wright  
Wannapha Yannavut

## **Program Note:**

In summer 2015, I completed a bike trip from San Diego, California to Fort Davis, Texas, collecting sounds, images, and environmental data during my 1,000-mile journey. For *Sferics*, my primary interest was recording electromagnetic energy from lightning (called sferics) in parallel with nearby acoustic storm sounds. I set up a pair of regular microphones and my VLF microphone (a type of radio antenna able to record sounds produced by radio signals, lightning, sunspots, and other invisible phenomena). Caught in one electrifying storm in West Texas with a staggering amount of lightning, I saw the lightning, instantaneously heard the sound from the VLF mic, and one to five seconds later, heard the acoustic sound of thunder, through the regular microphones. It was stunning to hear lightning in both its electromagnetic and acoustic manifestations.

In addition to use of site-specific field recordings, I connected the piece to Fort Davis, Texas, in real time, via an audio software program I developed using Cycling 74's Max/MSP. During each performance, a computer program gathers wind speed data from the McDonald Observatory and translates the data in real time into a new layer of audio. This seasonal layer mirrors the sound of the current wind speed using the wind samples I recorded on my trip. Depending on the season, this sound ranges from gentle whisking to thunderous gusts. In this way, *Sferics* is both an audiovisual travelogue and an exploration of the current natural energy of the American Southwest.

## **About the Composer:**

American composer Thomas Rex Beverly is a graduate of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas where he received a bachelor's degree in music composition. At Trinity, he studied with Timothy Kramer, David Heuser, Jack W. Stamps, and Brian Nelson. He has had pieces performed at the 2013 Electroacoustic Barn Dance Festival, the 2014 Biennial Symposium for Arts and Technology at Connecticut College, the 2014 SCI Iowa New Music Symposium, the 2014 TransX Transmissions Art Symposium in Toronto, Canada, the 2014 Sweet Thunder Electroacoustic Festival, 2015 New York City Electroacoustic Festival, the 2015 International Computer Music Conference and the 2014 So Percussion Summer Institute. In addition, he won second prize in the 2015 ASCAP/SEAMUS Student Commissioning Competition for his piece *Ocotillo*. He is a recent graduate of Bowling Green State University in their Master of Music Composition degree program where he studied with Elaine Lillios, Christopher Dietz and was a Music Technology Teaching Assistant.

## **Technical Needs:**

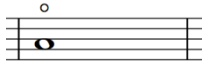
1. Mac Laptop
2. Audio Interface with at least 3 output channels
3. Headphones/In-Ear Monitors for the click track
4. Projector (1080p if possible)
5. 2-channel speaker setup
6. Mixer
7. 2 condenser microphones for vibraphone amplification

## **Technical Setup:**

1. Instructions for operating the Mac application are included in the software.
2. Email [trbeverly@gmail.com](mailto:trbeverly@gmail.com) for the application. The application only works on Mac computers.
3. Click track is outputted on channel 3. If needed, click the audio setup button and make adjustments for your audio interface in "I/O Mappings".
4. The click track changes from a metronome to a crotale sound 4 beats before each rehearsal mark.
5. Please visit the *Sferics* blog (<http://www.thomasrexbeverly.com/sferics-blog/>) for more information. Victor Pons will post a video demonstrating the percussion and electronics setup in the next few weeks.

### Performance Note:

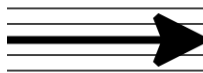
1. Use an 8-inch splash cymbal on the hi-hat
2. Hi-hat rod is inserted between the low G3 and A3 on the vibraphone.
3. Hi-hat should sit on a rug below the vibes. If it is not placed on a rug, it can move and created unwanted vibrations against the G3 and A3 bars of the vibes.
4. Use 4 yarn mallets and a bow at m. 108. Hold the bow in a reverse grip in addition to the two mallets already in your left hand.



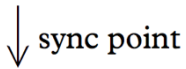
1. Touch center of bar with index finger while bowing to play the harmonic



2. First note is struck with yarn mallet and then bent down a quarter step using hard plastic mallet

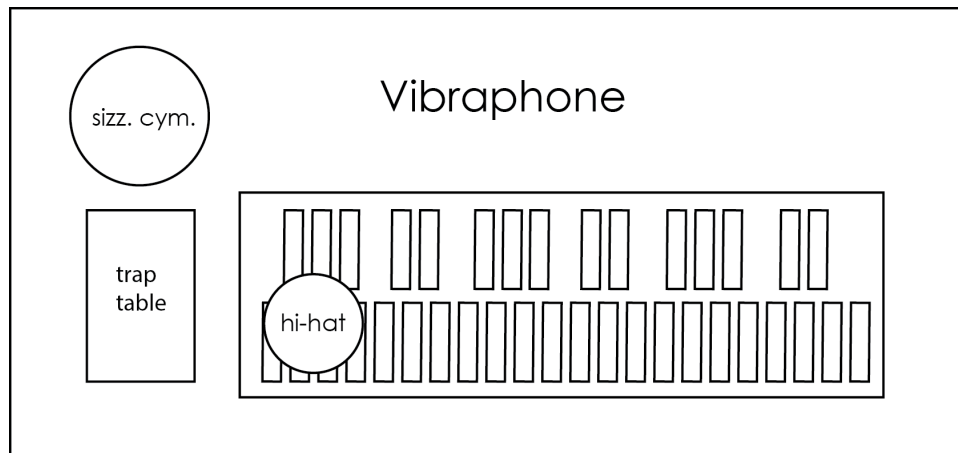


3. arrow indicates length of aleatoric improvisation



4. Downward arrows indicate major sync points with the video. Timing is essential at these points.

### Setup Diagram



for Victor Pons

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Thomas Rex Beverly

$\text{♩} = 80$  bowed \*

Vibraphone

Vib.

Cym.

hi-hat slowly changing from half open to open

Vib.

18

**A** ↓ sync point, yarn

Cym.

sizz. cym.

$p \text{---} mf$

Vib.

24

Vib.

bowed

\* click track starts 4 beats before the start of score

29

Vib.

Vib.

Cym.

hi-hat

35

Vib.

2 yarn, 1 hard plastic

*mp*

41

Vib.

Cym.

sizz. cym.

**B** sync point, 3 yarn 1 hard plastic

*f*

*pp < p*

*ppp*

47

Vib.

Cym.

*p*

*ppp*

51

Vib.

Cym.

drop plastic mallet

*p*

*ppp*

*ppp < p*

56 **C** 4 yarn

Vib. *f*

Vib. *ppp*

58

Vib. *f*

Vib. *ppp*

61 **D** sync point

Vib. *fff*

Vib. *p*

Cym. *ff*

hi-hat

foot splash hi-hat against bars and then let ring

64

Vib. *fff*

Vib. *mp*

Cym. *ff*

66

Vib.

Vib.

68

Vib.

Vib.

70

Vib.

Vib.

Cym.

*fff*

*f mp ppp*

*ff*

73

Vib.

*pp*

**F** Structured Improvisation: play continuous single-note, non-periodic 32nd notes figures using indicated pitches, dowels

79

Vib.

*p*

**G** (A3, E4, A4, E5)

**H** (A3, E4, A4, E5, A5)

84

Vib.

**I** (A3, E4, A4, E5, A5, E6)



**J** gradually add double stops through m. 103  
(A3, E4, A4, E5, A5, E6, F6)

90

Vib.

approx. number of 32nd note hits on the hi-hat per measure, freely mix open, half-open, and closed hits, dowels

hi-hat

Cym.

**K**

96

Vib.

begin adding strikes to sizzle cymbal in addition to hi-hat, dowels

hi-hat and sizz. cym

Cym.

**L** Ad lib, follow contour, dowels

100

Vib.

*ff cresc.*

101

Vib.

102

Vib.

*fff*

**M** 4 yarn, 1 bow \*

104

Vib.

*f*

\* See performance note