

Sam Gillies  
Red River  
For bass drum, cymbal and laptop  
2011

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# Red River [2011]

## Program Notes:

Inherently, "Red River" it is a piece about juxtaposition. The red river of the title refers literally to the blood being pumped through the individual's veins, and the piece itself is an examination on the experience of life and the inherent beauty and violence therein. Here, the rounded tones of the percussion are fused with the digital sound processing which begins as a gentle spectral pulse and gradually grows into a chaotic and violent texture. The video projection consists of close up still images of drum kit pieces that are twisted into perverse, skin-like landscapes. The black and white images help to reinforce to the audience that the title is functioning as a metaphor. As the video progresses the visuals grow to be more animated and less passive, as it loosely follows the macrostructure of the music.

"Red River" utilises an integrated max patch that combines the complex signal processing with a scrolling score that is activated by the performer. As the score progresses specific conditions are triggered within the signal-processing portion of the patch. The score component of the composition reflects my experimentation with graphic notation and gesturalism. Here, different actions are performed as the corresponding notation passes past a playhead. The notation itself represents key aspects of the performance, for example the strength of single hits are reflected in their relative height. The entire piece was composed by creating a series of musical 'gestures'. For example, through this process we get several series of soft hits spaced out over time, with each instance of this gesture utilising more hits and more space between them. Similarly, the piece begins by using rolls on the bass drum and cymbal that are relatively short, and that are elongated later in the piece. The key compositional idea that I used when ordering and arranging these gestures was to try to create juxtaposing passages of activity versus relative inactivity. This results in active phrases that utilise bursts of hits in varying rhythms and dynamics and relatively inactive passages of spaced out gestures at a similar dynamic or constant use of brushes to elicit a constant, noisy sound.

The digital sound processing creates an otherworldly environment in which the acoustic sounds of the bass drum and cymbal can resonate. Key passages of the acoustic gestures are captured in real time by the max patch and processed through custom spectral processing that, essentially, draws out and plays back patterns of frequencies from these recordings. This is the first of two instances in the works that comprise 'Points of Departure' where I utilise the harmonic spectrum of a sound in the creation of musical material.

Around one third of the way through the piece audio is channelled through a beat effect, which adds a pulsing rhythm to the performance that gradually grows in complexity over the remainder of the performance. Around two thirds of the way through the piece audio can be channelled through a distortion effect as well, which creates crescendos and diminuendos of sparkling distortion. My approach to the creation of the laptop processing in this piece is consistent with the idea of 'collapsing structures', an idea that has underpinned a number of my laptop works. Essentially, this involves creating foreground characteristics (particular effects or processing structures, etc...) and then, through controlled and deliberate random procedures, allowing these elements to fall in a self-devised direction, until they reach a desired state that qualifies the end of the piece.

## Performance Notes:

The piece is performed as a scrolling score. All processing is automated to occur at the corresponding parts of the score. The performer only needs to mic up the bass drum and cymbal and activate the score. Since the patch is processing sampled audio of the cymbal and bass drum, the use of different instruments can have important changes in the resulting electronic textures. Ideally, the resulting textures should be harmonically distinct from the acoustic percussion.

The size of an event refers to the strength of a hit. I.e: Larger events are stronger or louder, smaller events are softer or quieter.



Single hit – Bass Drum



Single hit – Cymbal



Roll/Swell – Length indicates cres./decre.



Brush on kit piece/noise – Blue: Tom, Green: Cymbal



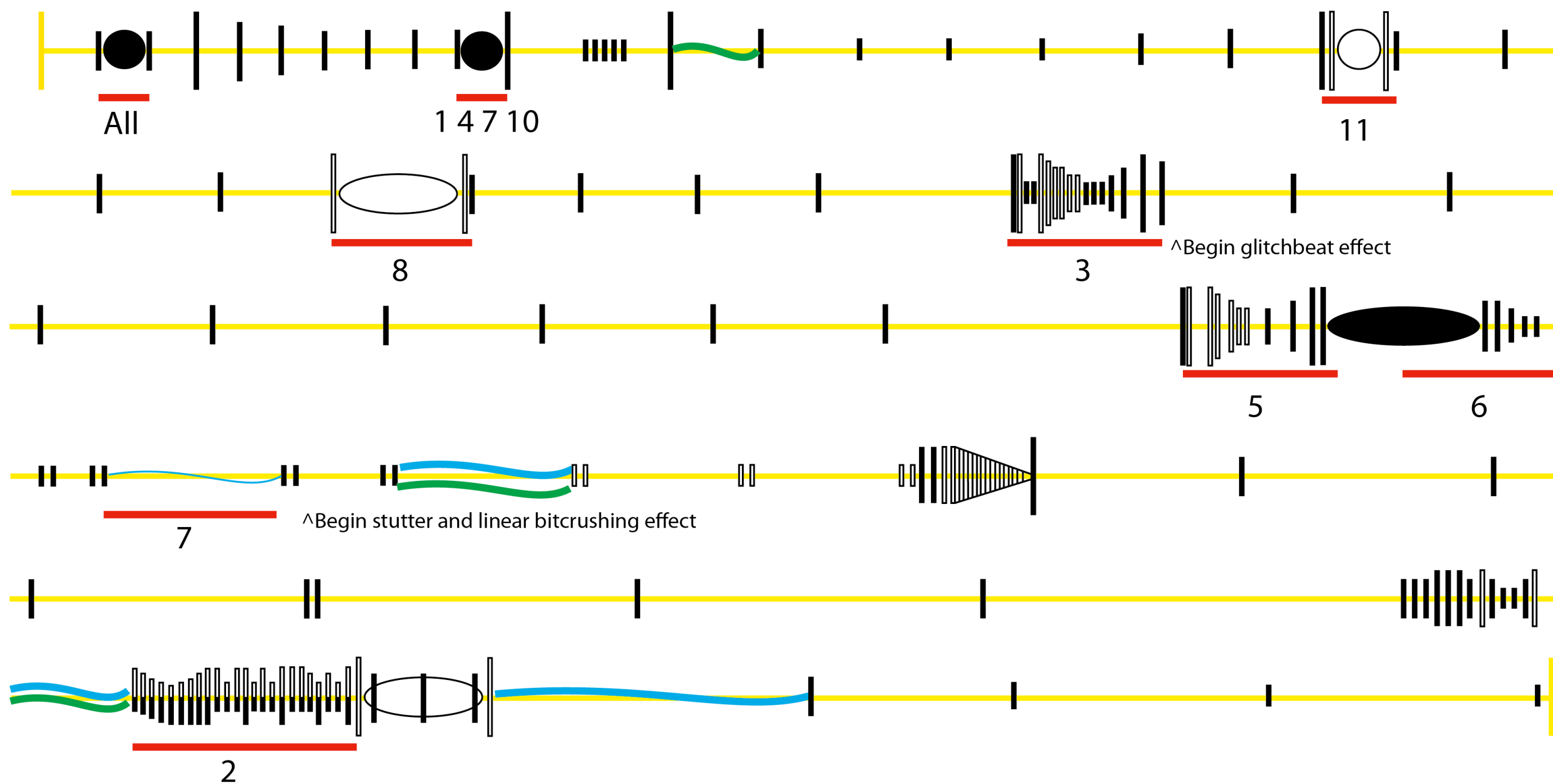
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Record to buffer (number) as indicated for length of red line (action performed by redriver.maxpat)

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## Tech Requirements:

- 2x Laptop w/ Max/MSP/Jitter
- Score and sound processing
- Video Projection
- 1x Soundcard
- Minimum 2ch In, 2ch Out
- 1x Bass Drum
- 1x 18" Ride Cymbal
- 2x Microphones (condensator preferred)
- 1x Video Projector
- 2x Powered Speakers
- 1x Projection Screen or surface

