

Darren Stuart Bloom

The Solar System does not play  
well-tempered

for solo bass clarinet in Bb

2021

The slightly whimsical title *The Solar System does not play well-tempered* comes directly from a talk given by Dr Nicole Pawellek at the Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge, in which she looked at historical theories of ‘music of the spheres’ (the title of her talk) through the lens of modern cosmology and astrophysics. There was one particular slide that leapt out at me showing how, bizzarely, densities in the asteroid belt appear to exactly match the ratios of partials in the harmonic series! This became the starting point for my piece: on one side portraying the dramatic contrasts between the cold depths of space and violent encounters with asteroids, and on the other side, using the harmonics shared between a musical instrument in one’s hand and the asteroid belt as a source of harmonic and structural inspiration!

Written for the Royal Academy of Music’s 200 PIECES project celebrating the institution’s bicentenary, *The Solar System does not play well-tempered* was premiered by clarinetist Leo Kerr on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021 in the Angela Burgess Recital Hall.

### Performance notes

Voice: The voice should always be blended with the bass clarinet. It is notated to sound, like the bass clarinet, a major 9<sup>th</sup> below the written pitch. However, it may also be sung up one octave if this register is not possible.

Techniques:

 = extreme vibrato

*c.* = ‘colour trill’ employing alternate fingerings with slightly different tunings for the same note.

*k.* = ‘key trill’ employing a trill action on keys with no intended pitch.

*R.* = ‘register key trill’ – a subtle trilling of the register key to drop the pitch by a compound perfect 5<sup>th</sup>.



= ‘Growl’ – apply an unpitched vocal colour to the bass clarinet timbre.



X – headed notes indicate a combination of keys and air through the reed. Only the faintest hint of pitch should be present.



Diamond-headed notes indicate a ‘breathy’ tone containing ½ air, ½ pitch. While the timbre should be diffuse, the pitch should be clear.

Duration: 9.5 minutes

# The Solar System does not play well-tempered

for Leo Kerr

Darren Stuart Bloom

Very slow, very dark ♩ = 54

Bass Clarinet in B $\flat$

*fade to breath k.* *quiet growl* *k.* *breath to tone*

*ppp* *poco* *ppp* *p*

Voice

*pp* *c.*

*p* *pp* *pp* *p* *mf* *pp sub.* *f* *pp*

**A**

*ppp* *p* *pp* *p* *ppp* *pp* *p* *ppp sub.*

(no vib.)

(voice) *p* *mp*

*k.* *1/2 air*

*p* *ppp* *p* *pp* *mp* *mp* *p*

*pp dolce* *mp* *ppp* *mf* *pp sub.* *ff*

*growl* *pp* *f fuoco* *ff* *f*

**B**

Like a scream!

First system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a melodic line with dynamics *ffp*, *fff*, *f*, *ff*, and *fff*. A wavy line labeled "vib." is positioned above the first measure, and "no vib." is written above the second measure. The lower staff features a complex accompaniment with a five-fingered scale-like passage marked with a "5".

Second system of musical notation. The upper staff has dynamics *p warm*, *mp*, *ppp*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The lower staff continues the accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

**C** Flowing, listesso tempo

Third system of musical notation, starting with a section marked "C". The upper staff includes a wavy line labeled "k." with an arrow pointing to "breath". Dynamics include *p esp.*, *mf*, and *ppp*. The lower staff features triplet markings and a five-fingered scale.

Fourth system of musical notation. The upper staff has dynamics *p dolce*. The lower staff includes a five-fingered scale and a triplet. Dynamics include *p esp.* and *poco*.

Fifth system of musical notation. The upper staff has dynamics *pp*, *f esp.*, and *f 1/2 air*. The lower staff has dynamics *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. It includes a five-fingered scale and an "air" marking.

Sixth system of musical notation. The upper staff has dynamics *p*, *pp sub.*, and *f*. The lower staff has dynamics *ppp* and *p*. It includes triplet markings and a section labeled "To B. Cl." with a "nat." marking.

**D** ♩ = 68 Più mosso, capriccioso - with increasing energy

Musical score for section D, measures 1-12. The piano part consists of two staves with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *pp*, *ppp*, *p*, *ppp*, *pp*, *ppp*, *p*, *pp*, *pp*, *p*, *ppp sub.*, *mp*, and *mf*. The voice part is on a single staff with melodic lines and triplets. Dynamics include *mp* and *mf*. A *k.* (crescendo) marking is present in measure 12.

Musical score for section E, measures 13-20. The piano part consists of two staves with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *pp*, *pp*, *mp*, *pp*, *mp*, *pp sub.*, *f*, and *p*. The voice part is on a single staff with melodic lines and triplets. Dynamics include *pp* and *f*.

Musical score for section F, measures 21-24. The piano part consists of two staves with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *pp*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*, *ff*, and *ppp*. The voice part is on a single staff with melodic lines and triplets. Dynamics include *ppp*.

♩ = 80 Più mosso, con fuoco

*ff* *the voice in this passage may be omitted for the purpose of pitch clarity in the bass clarinet*

*ff* *pp*

**F**

*ff* *ff*

**G**

*p* *ff* *sf* *ff* *p sub.* *ff* *pp* *ff* *pp sub.* *f* *pp* *ff*

First system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a slur and a dynamic marking of *sfp* followed by *ff*. A wavy line above the staff is labeled 'c.' and a box containing the letter 'H' is positioned above the music. The lower staff contains a bass clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *pp* followed by *fff*. The system concludes with a 4/4 time signature and a melodic line with a slur and a dynamic marking of *pp* followed by *ff*. Fingerings '6' are indicated above the notes in the final measure.

Second system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a treble clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *fp* followed by *f* and *p*. The lower staff contains a bass clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *ff*. A wavy line above the staff is labeled 'c.'. The system concludes with a 3/4 time signature and a melodic line with a slur and a dynamic marking of *ff*. Fingerings '3', '3', '6', and '11:6' are indicated above the notes.

Third system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a treble clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *p* followed by *ff*. The lower staff contains a bass clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *p* followed by *ff*. The system concludes with a 3/4 time signature and a melodic line with a slur and a dynamic marking of *ff*. Fingerings '3', '5', '6', and '5' are indicated above the notes. The instruction 'poco rall.' is written above the staff.

Fourth system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a treble clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *f* followed by *ff*, *mf*, and *ff*. The lower staff contains a bass clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *mp* followed by *mf* and *pp*. The instruction 'a tempo' is written above the staff. Fingerings '3' are indicated above the notes.

Fifth system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a treble clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *pp* followed by *f* and *mf*. The lower staff contains a bass clef and a 3/8 time signature, with a melodic line featuring a slur and a dynamic marking of *p* followed by *ppp* and *p*. The instruction 'warm' is written above the staff. A box containing the letter 'I' and the text 'Tempo 1 (♩ = 54)' is positioned above the staff. Fingerings '5' are indicated above the notes. A chord diagram for G7 (G, F#, C, B) is shown above the final measure.

First system of musical notation. The upper staff contains a melodic line with dynamics *p*, *pp*, *mf*, *mp*, and *pp*. The lower staff contains a bass line with a dynamic of *pp* and a measure marked with the number 5. The instruction "fade to breath" is written at the end of the system.

Second system of musical notation. The upper staff features various articulations: *k.* (accents), *c.* (crescendos), and *R.* (ritardandos). The lower staff has dynamics *p* and *f*. The instruction "fade to breath" is present at the end.

Third system of musical notation. The upper staff has dynamics *ppp*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The lower staff has dynamics *p*, *pp*, *p*, and *ppp*. The instruction "1/2 air → nat." is written above the lower staff. The instruction "fade to breath" is present at the end.

Fourth system of musical notation. The upper staff has dynamics *pp*, *p*, and *pp*. The lower staff has dynamics *ppp* and *pp*. The instruction "fade to breath" is written above the lower staff. The instruction "fade to breath" is present at the end.