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**Title**

Resonating Abstractions

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Peer reviewed

# ***Resonating Abstractions***

Composed by Michael Dessen  
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## ***Resonating Abstractions***

Composed by Michael Dessen  
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Created for the Michael Dessen Trio:  
Michael Dessen, trombone/computer  
Christopher Tordini, bass  
Dan Weiss, drums

*Resonating Abstractions* has been made possible with support from Chamber Music America's 2011 New Jazz Works: Commissioning and Ensemble Development Program, funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

### **Premieres:**

11.26.12, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA  
11.27.12, Shapeshifter Lab, Brooklyn, NY  
11.28.12, Blue Whale, Los Angeles, CA  
11.30.12, Space4Art, San Diego, CA  
12.1.12, Winifred Smith Hall, Irvine, CA

### **Recording:**

Released on CD by Clean Feed Records, 2014  
CD title: *Resonating Abstractions*

### **About the score:**

Please note that this score below is not intended as sheet music for other bands to perform. The electronics are not notated at all, and this is also highly improvisatory music in which a lot of the key information and materials are communicated orally in the rehearsal process. However, I have posted this score online in the spirit of sharing tools and methods with my musical community, and also in response to students who have asked me about how this music works.

### **About the music (CD liner notes):**

*Resonating Abstractions* was created for this trio, and meant to be performed in a continuous set. We recorded it in that same spirit, shortly after a five-concert tour that gave us time to internalize all the music and explore different interpretations each night. With this band, my focus has always been on that kind of dynamic: we work on scored rhythmic and melodic materials that are sometimes very intricate, but in concert we approach them in a radically open way. The goal is to discover in each performance a deep sense of collectivity and flow, by maintaining a fluid relationship between structures that are precomposed in rich detail and structures that emerge through improvisatory dialogue. The chemistry we've developed over the years, along

with Dan and Chris' exceptional musicianship, make this possible, and I'm always grateful to them for bringing my music to life.

This composition is also inspired by the work of seven contemporary, abstract painters: Beatriz Milhazes, Allison Miller, Tomory Dodge, Jonathan Lasker, Mamie Holst, Julie Mehretu, and Odili Donald Odita. I didn't intend to depict or translate their paintings, but instead used their artworks as catalysts for exploring abstraction in diverse ways. Each track responds to a particular dimension of an artist's work; some tracks respond to formal features of a painting, but others might relate more to aspects of the artist's working process, or to ideas they have articulated. In today's visual art world, it is no longer meaningful to say simply that one works with abstraction, since that practice has accumulated so many histories and meanings. I have long been fascinated with abstraction, both in visual art and as a more general concept, so this music is another way for me to join that conversation.

Tracks 1, 4 and 7 are acoustic, and the other tracks involve the computer for live sampling/processing (tracks 2, 5 and 6) or algorithmic composition (track 3). Tracks 3 and 5 are solo features composed for Dan and Chris respectively. As I've written in previous liner notes, I use the computer in this trio to build upon what we do as acoustic performers, approaching it with that same creative tension between precomposition and improvisation. I also use technology to give the music a kind of dimensionality that a chordal instrument would traditionally provide, not by having the computer play chords, but by expanding the timbral and textural palette in a variety of other ways.

Thanks for listening.

Michael Dessen  
[www.mdessen.com](http://www.mdessen.com)

# #1: grid after grid

for trombone, bass and drums

Michael Dessen

All sections OPEN  
Slow build go D  
Bass/tbn begin, then drums

## A1 Slow triplet feel

Tbn

Bs

## A2 ♩ = 172-188 (tbn very loose templates only)

Tbn.

Tbn

Dr.

Bs

Tbn.

Tbn

Dr.

Bs

## B Tbn pitches:

Tbn.

Bs

BACK TO A  
or when ready  
GO ON TO C

**C**

Musical notation for section C. It consists of two staves: Tbn. (top) and Bs. (bottom). The Tbn. staff starts with a 6/8 time signature and contains four measures of rests. The Bs. staff starts with a 6/8 time signature and contains four measures of music, each with a whole note chord. The time signature changes to 2/4 for the final measure of both staves.

**D** ♩. = ♩ = 114-125

Musical notation for section D. It consists of two staves, both labeled Bs. The top staff starts with a 4/4 time signature and contains four measures of music. The time signature changes to 2/4 for the second measure, 7/8 for the third measure, and 4/4 for the fourth measure. The bottom staff contains the same music as the top staff. A triplet of eighth notes is indicated in the third measure of both staves.

Tbn out  
Bass solo, open

**E** Drum solo

Musical notation for section E. It consists of two staves: Bs. (top) and Dr. (bottom). The Bs. staff starts with a 4/4 time signature and contains four measures of music. The time signature changes to 2/4 for the second measure, 7/8 for the third measure, and 6/8 for the fourth measure. The Dr. staff contains a drum solo pattern corresponding to the time signature changes in the bass line.

Tbn alt layer:

Musical notation for the Tbn alt layer. It consists of two staves, both labeled Tbn. The top staff starts with a 6/8 time signature and contains four measures of music. The time signature changes to 7/8 for the third measure and 6/8 for the fourth measure. The bottom staff contains the same music as the top staff.

**F**

Speeding up very slightly, to modulate:

Bs

Musical notation for Bass Saxophone (Bs) showing a melodic line with a modulation from 2/4 to 3/4 and back to 2/4.

**G**

$$\text{♩} + \text{♩} = \text{♩}$$

♩ = 162 Tbn end in slower time level feel

Tbn

Bs

Dr

Musical score for Tbn, Bs, and Dr. Tbn and Bs have melodic lines with modulations. Dr has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

END ON CUE, to #2

Tbn

Bs

Dr

Musical score for Tbn, Bs, and Dr, ending with a cue for measure #2.

Tbn alt:

Tbn.

Tbn.

Two alternative musical lines for Tbn in bass clef.

# #2: organic and unnatural objects

for trombone/computer, bass and drums

Michael Dessen

Form: Digibone solo intro

**A**  
expanding sections, improvising w/ tempo shifts

**B**  
bass/dr cue

**A** Acoustic tbn w/ processing  
Half valve/air tones

Continue, extend/expand pitches etc...

Tbn

Bass/Drums: Loosely together on feel level, making tempo changes together

**SLOW**  
pizz

Drums: Hi-lo (any sounds):

**FAST**

**MEDIUM**

**VERY SLOW**



Drums: Loose time feel and support bass line  
Tbn: Sparse acoustic tones and bknd electronic texture

**B**



Bass

Bass

Bass

Bass

Bass

rit...

The image displays five staves of musical notation for a bass line. The first staff begins with a box containing the letter 'B'. The notation is written in bass clef and includes various rhythmic values such as quarter notes, eighth notes, and half notes, along with rests and ties. The fifth staff is marked with 'rit...' above it, indicating a ritardando. The notation concludes with a double bar line.

# #3: ignite

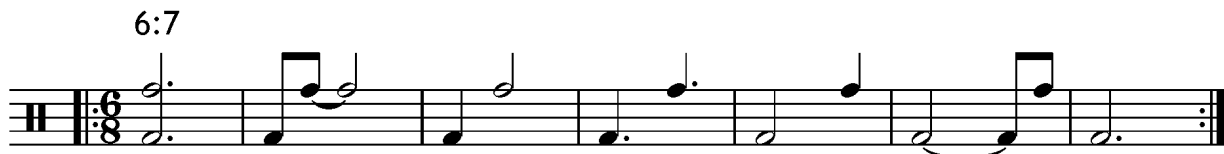
Michael Dessen

for drums and live electronics  
for Dan Weiss

Drum part mostly improvised, using patterns below

Electronics are algorithmic 2-layer stream of sounds, with live processing

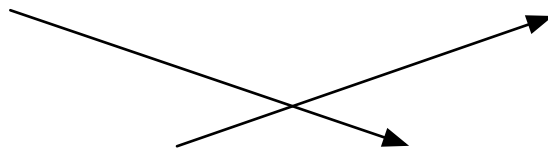
## Rhythmic patterns to extend:



**Form:** Cross fade, with long build and conflict between 2 layers in middle section:

slow, spacious gestures  
with silences

fast, dense gestures  
filling up the space



tight, loud ending  
then immediately  
bass enters, to #4

# #4: the infinite and the invitation

for trombone, bass and drums

Michael Dessen

A A B B  
Cycle form, improvise

**A** ♩ = 184

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with three staves: Drums (Dr), Trombone (Tbn), and Bass (Bs). The first system (measures 1-4) is in 7/8 time. The second system (measures 5-8) features a key signature change to one flat and a time signature change to 5/8. The third system (measures 9-12) is in 6/8 time. The fourth system (measures 13-16) is in 4/8 time. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

**B**

Dr

Tbn

Bs

Dr

Tbn

Bs

Dr

Tbn

Bs

Dr

Tbn

Bs

# #5: while in the subterrain

for bass and live electronics  
for Chris Tordini

Michael Dessen

- Repeat optional. Dwell more on 2nd x.
- All accidentals are notated.
- Improvise with tones and explore harmonics freely. Pitches are notated in sounding octave.
- Live sampling/processing will be extremely minimal/subtle



# #6: where does time go

for trombone/computer, bass and drums

Michael Dessen

Tbn solo

arco bass w/drums:

tbn cues  
cutoff:

(open)

Drum solo  
(open)

+ tbn

Tbn/elect  
pedal/gliss w/ flails

+ bass

Bass/Drums  
loud, loose, heavy, open



WHEN TROMBONE STOPS



Bass solo

Drums bknd: sparse, gong-like  
MD bknd: distant samples

Bass (alone) transitions to #7

# #7: to make real

for trombone, bass and drums

Michael Dessen

♩ = 104

loose time feel at first

Bs

OPEN

## A

Bs

Bs

Bs

1.

Bs

2.

Bs

3X then to B

1x - Bass/Dr  
2x - + Tbn

## B

OPEN ♩. = ♩. = 138

Tbn

Bs

Dr.

Drums: 5:11



Tbn

Bs

Dr.

sim...

Tbn

Bs

Dr.

Open, use to modulate

Bs

**C** 1.  
OPEN ♩. = ♩ = 138

Bs

Dr.

Trio improvise then back to B

## 2. OPEN / END

(tbn ad lib)

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves: Tbn (Tenor Trombone), Bs (Baritone Saxophone), and Dr. (Drum). The time signature is 12/8. The Tbn part begins with a melodic line in the first measure, marked with a first ending bracket and a repeat sign. The Bs part provides a harmonic accompaniment with sustained notes and some movement. The Dr. part features a rhythmic pattern with 'x' marks indicating cymbal hits. The system concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The second system continues the musical score with the same three staves: Tbn, Bs, and Dr. The Tbn part continues its melodic line, also marked with a first ending bracket and repeat dots. The Bs part continues its accompaniment. The Dr. part consists of a series of rhythmic slashes, indicating a steady drum pattern. The system concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.