

Dam Patch, Dog Barking

(2012)

by Dan Senn

*For two percussionists playing Gamelydes Two and Four,
pre-recorded violin and video, and dance*

presentable in four versions.

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Introduction

Dam Patch, Dog Barking (DPDB) has a duration of 30 minutes and is for two percussionists playing Gamelydes 2 and 4, pre-recorded violin and video, and dance. It is presentable in one of four versions. The work was composed in the United States and Australia with the written score completed in Sydney, in February of 2012. The video was shot in Watertown, Wisconsin, in October of 2011, with the violin backing sounds added soon after at Waterhouse Studio in Beaverton, Oregon, where they were recorded in January 2011. The duration may be extended by twenty or so minutes for the dance variations, versions 3 and 4, as described below.

The video, mostly unedited, shows two men patching a dam on the Rock River on a warm autumn day in the upper midwest of the United States. Real-time ambient sounds have been eliminated. The pre-recorded audio (backing sounds) were performed by the composer while improvising on his mother's childhood violin using nylon fish line. The live percussion accompaniment (pre-recorded and included as part of the fixed media version described below) uses found instruments called lydes developed by the composer. These have been collected into Gamelydes 2 and 4, each with thirteen lydes.

Four Performance Versions

1. Fixed Media Alone: For this version, a DVD is available which includes the video, violin backing sounds, and the lyde sounds "performed" using the Sibelius notation software. The video is projected and accompanied by stereo playback using a sound system with 2-4 speakers, one channel per side. The loudness of DPDB should be calibrated to the "Dam Burst" beginning at 27' 22" (measures 411-428). It should be very loud here but not painful.

2. Fixed Media and Live Percussion: Another DVD is available which includes the video with timing cues, and the violin backing sounds. The cues appear in the lower right hand corner of the video: a) two grey fading dots, the first occurring a second before the other which initiates an event (see measure 2); b) a single dot which terminates an unusually long event (see measure 7); and, c) two sequential numbers, such as 5:01, then 5:02 (see measure 76) with the second starting the event. The piece is also calibrated at the "Dam Burst" as described above in version 1.

3. Fixed Media, Live Percussion and Dance: This version extends the *Fixed Media and Live Percussion* version 2 above. Here, the dance occurs below a large projection of the video. The percussionists should be positioned in full view to one side of the proscenium and considered a vital theatrical-dance element in the piece. *It is acceptable to project the video to the back of the auditorium* for use as a visual score for the dance, and a cuing source for the percussionists. Patron's will naturally turn to view the score at times providing an interesting perceptual dynamic. Interrupting traditional perceptual boundaries has long been of interest to the composer.

Full integration of the percussion, video and dance elements is encouraged. When Gamelyde 2 is not being performed as indicated by the score, its lydes may be played improvisationally by the dancers. The lydes, which are designed to be played by musicians and non-musicians alike, are utterly mobile. They are sonically beautiful while played in any combination. *As a prelude to DPDB, Gamelyde 2 lydes could be performed by the dancers and percussionist* using the continuous ringing effect (turning) while moving toward the stage through the audience, and again as an introduction. This will extend the duration of the overall work by twenty or so minutes. (Hear the lydes being performed in this manner at <http://homepage.mac.com/sennd/mp3/Lydes.mp3>)

Integration may take place between the backing sounds and dancers by extending, for example, the dog barks vocally amongst the dancers. An all out "barking" scene, beginning at 27'58" (see measure 420), could be absurdly dramatic.

Cross influences between the video and dance may be achieved by incorporating the pedestrian gestures of the workmen throughout. Furthermore, as the video is a stumbled-upon-scene with curious observers sometimes jiggling the camera as they chatted with the videographer (the composer), it may be treated "interactively" as if the dancers were physically impacting the video.

The DVD for the *Fixed Media Alone* version 1, should be used to develop the choreography and for early rehearsals.

4. Fixed Media and Dance: This version extends versions 1 and 3 with all the provisions listed therein. If lydes are integrated into the dance presentation, other Gamelydes or collections of lydes may be used.

The Percussion Instruments: Lydes and Gamelyde 2 and 4

The lyde instruments ("lyde" is the Danish word for "sound") are simple found instruments—cast aluminum pot lids designed to cover boiling water. Attached to each is a 5" pine dowel which allows the lydes to be held and performed using a continuous ringing technique known to Tibetan bowls (Crystal wine glasses produce a continuous ring using a cycling wet finger. Ben Franklin's Glass Harmonium uses a similar technique). The original lids were marketed by an American company called Club Mac during the 1960s and 70s and collected by the composer over many years from Goodwill and Salvation Army stores, and then from garage sales. The lids were produced in varying sizes, never intended for use as musical instruments, and naturally microtonal with a well-defined fundamental pitch in strong competition with an irregular set of overtones. Unlike Tibetan bowls, the lydes are much louder, mobile, with a broad timbral and performance range including the continuous ring, bell, wood block and many other sounds.

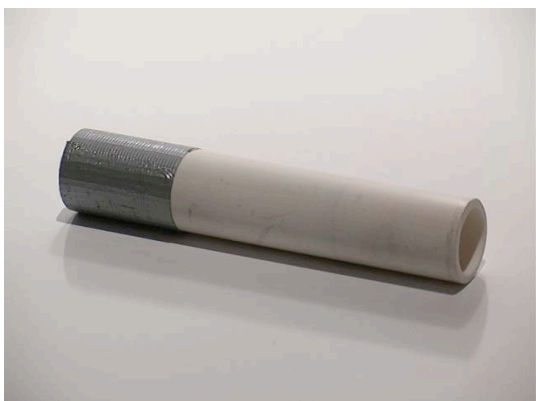
A Gamelyde is a collection of thirteen high-to-low, small-to-large lydes selected by the composer and notated in two fundamentally different ways. Lyde notation (see efemera-ephemera.org/isb/notes/notation.html), a graphic notation not used in this piece, gives a textural picture of sound in time. *For DPDB, a traditional five-line staff is used.* The lowest lyde (see Gamelyde Setup below) is notated on the first ledger line below the staff, the second lowest on the first space beneath the staff, and then step-wise to the highest pitched lyde. *The lydes may be played in many ways,* but for this piece, the bell is struck, turned (continuous ringing), or the handle ends hit with the bells muted or unmuted. All these techniques use special mallets described further on. Circular pieces of carpet (see photo below), with a cutout at the center, are used to hold the lydes upright. The lydes are turned down for muting and to effect wood block-like sounds when struck on the handle ends. In this position, they can also be struck while holding lydes aloft (off the carpet) to produce a subtle ringing (see measures 256-270). *There are two turning methods* used in DPDB; a "strike turn" (see measure 303) where the lydes are tapped and turned immediately. The other method uses a simple turn which sets the instrument vibrating gradually in a natural crescendo (see measure 2). The loudness of the lydes is easily controlled by the strength and speed of the turning rotation. *Performers must be careful* to never strike one bell against another as it will dent the edge of the bells. A stranded abrasive or a metal sandpaper sponge should regularly be used to clean the edges of the lydes as they respond best when dry and gum free.

The mallets (see photo below) are made from 1-1/4 inch white pvc pipe cut to 7 inches. The smaller lydes require mallets with only two layers of duct tape wrapped evenly at one end. The larger lydes respond more evenly to thicker layers of tape. The lydes can be over-driven, an effect not used in this piece. This happens when the lyde is vibrating so

strongly that it wobbles and knocks against the mallet itself. *The direction of the turn is important*—left and right handed players will need to wrap the tape in opposite directions to avoid lifting the duct tape which gums the outer edge of the lydes. Duct tape on the smaller lydes should be wrapped fresh, with the old tape removed, before rehearsals or performances. Additional mallets may be prepared to insure fresh mallets throughout, if necessary. A fresh layer of tape should be added for the larger lydes without necessarily removing previous layers of tape.

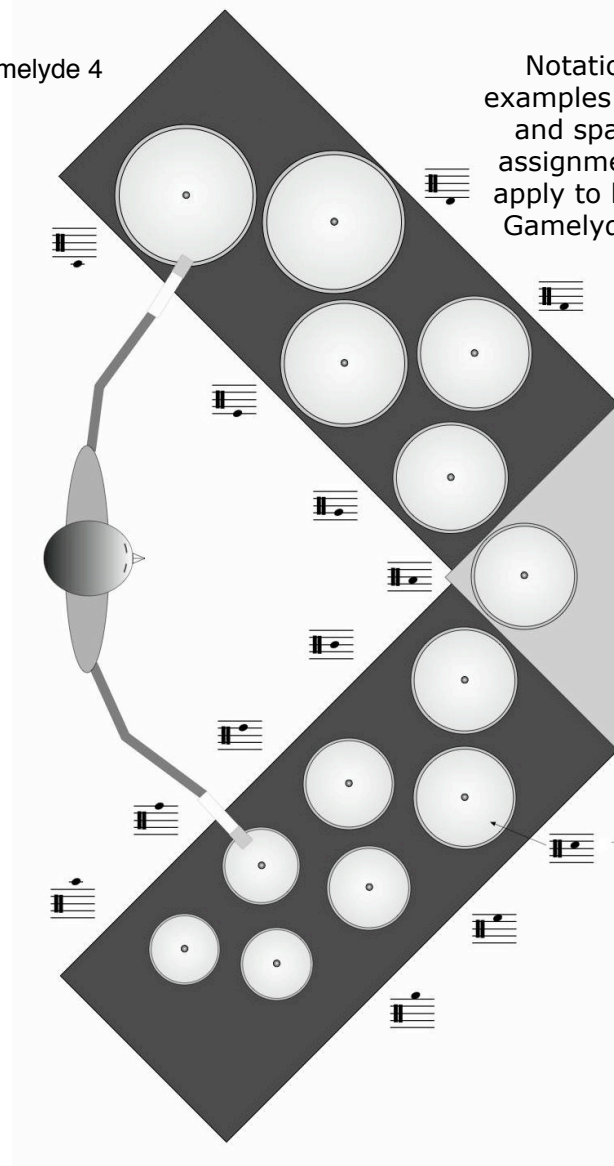
The extended violin sounds comprising the pre-recorded backing sounds have been tuned to Gamelyde 4 providing a sense of modality and tonal homogeneity throughout.

Pictured below is a disassembled lyde, mallet, and Gamelyde in the upright position.



Gamelyde Setup

Gamelyde 4



Notation
examples: line
and space
assignments
apply to both
Gamelydes.

Percussionists must
have room to move
between the tables
gaining access to
the lydes from
either side.

audience
direction



Gamelyde 2

