

“...and keep the clay wet”  
for string quartet

Nikolaos-Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis



*“...and keep the clay wet”*  
for string quartet

### Performance Instructions

Each system should last between 15 and 20 seconds, unless otherwise stated. If there is an accelerando or ritardando marking, the specified passage should last less or more than 15-20” respectively.

Each performer performs their own part, starting together but not necessarily ending together. The score is only meant to be a guideline and is not to be taken literally; as the parts move individually, the score is not a representation of the vertical sonorities that occur by the playing of the parts.

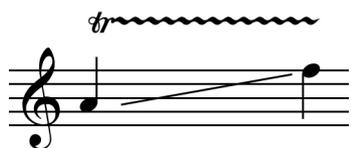
The performers should listen carefully to what is being played when they are playing (and when they are not). They should perform their part as if they are supposed to play exactly what they are playing, exactly when they are playing it.

The notation used (in terms of rhythm) is more evocative than it is authoritative. As there is a different number of notes per system, the duration of the quaver will vary from system to system. The performers should feel free to add ornaments or expressions, such as bending the notes or changing the timbre, especially on long notes.

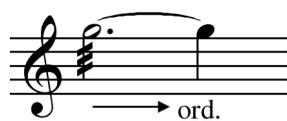
The spacing of the material on the page is relatively free – if the performer feels like playing a piece of material sooner or later than is indicated in the score (but still in a linear order) because of something else that was played by someone else, then they should be free to do so.

Trills are always on the semitone above, unless otherwise notated. Non-vibrato throughout (unless otherwise stated).

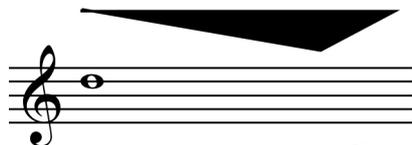
Duration: about 8'



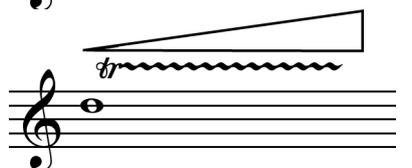
The trill is to be performed during the glissando.



The arrow indicates moving gradually from tremolando to normal playing. An arrow from a normal stem to a stem with tremolando lines indicates the opposite.



Gradually increased bow pressure, creating a “scratch tone”.



Gradually decrease pressure on the fingers of the left hand (like when playing harmonics), so as to create a kind of “ghost tone”.



Circular bow movement, from ex.ST to ex.SP

ST = sul tasto    SP = sul ponticello    ex.ST = extremely ST    ex.SP = extremely SP    N = normale

## Programme Note

"..and keep the clay wet" is a very personal composition. In the past, I had been trying to avoid writing a composition very personal (possibly avoiding taking the responsibility of writing something personal in fear of having it heavily criticised and thus avoiding hurting my ego) by falling back to using methods external to music with which I was familiar before taking up composition, such as mathematics, images, physics, poems, etc.

One of the aspects in which it is personal is that I have utilised folk music material from the three cultures that I consider have played the biggest role in my life and in who I am today: Greek (because of the history), English (because of the language) and Finnish (because of the land). The use of folk material is not meant to be audible, but was used as a base upon which I could compose with what I consider the important materials in this composition, which are extended techniques (such as increased bow pressure) and timbral changes.

With this piece I wanted to create a more "raw" soundscape than the soundscape we are used to listening to in a concert environment. Without claiming to be original or unique in my approach to composing such a piece, I primarily focus on creating such a soundscape for its own sake, to evoke a dance of wild sonic instances that these extraordinarily sophisticated instruments are capable of producing, which have been tamed for the sake of creating what –at a particular time and place– is considered "socially acceptable music". Someone in the workshop mentioned that the piece has an "archaic" feeling to it, but I would take it further and say that if I could use one word to describe the piece, I would use the word "primeval" or "feral". *Unease*, *uncertainty* and *indeterminacy* are also three words which describe the soundscape of this piece in a compositional approach. (Three words which are quite distant from our everyday Western middle-class lives, where things are quite safe, normal, predictable, determined for us, and we have a lot less to worry about than our fellow human beings in remote parts of the world whose natural habitat we destroy so we can keep living our ever-increasingly needy and consumer-oriented lives.)

*"I feel ready, on yer toes ready, and I am tender to the motto Be Prepared, because, prepared, your future is like a sculpture, clay of tomorrow, moist in your palm. Live like this, damp side out to the world. It's all I'd tell my kids; live generously and keep the clay wet"*

(Jay Griffiths, "Anarchipelago")

# "..and keep the clay wet"

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Violin I: *ff* → *mp* → *p*. Includes dynamics *ff*, *mp*, *p*. Performance markings: S.T., N.

Violin II: *ff* → *sfz* → *mp*. Includes dynamics *ff*, *sfz*, *mp*. Performance markings: pizz., arco.

Viola: *ff* → *f*. Includes dynamics *ff*, *f*. Performance marking: ST.

Violoncello: *f* → *ff*. Includes dynamics *f*, *ff*. Performance marking: tr.

Violin I: *f* → *pp*. Includes dynamics *f*, *pp*. Performance marking: ex.SP, ST.

Violin II: *p* → *mp*. Includes dynamics *p*, *mp*. Performance marking: SP.

Viola: *p* → *mf* → *p*. Includes dynamics *p*, *mf*, *p*. Performance markings: pizz., arco.

Violoncello: *mp* → *p* → *sfz* → *f*. Includes dynamics *mp*, *p*, *sfz*, *f*. Performance marking: tr.

"...and keep the clay wet"

S.T. → S.P. → S.T.

Musical score system 1. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a melodic line starting at *mf*, reaching *ff*, and ending at *pp*. The second staff is a treble clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes and a quintuplet of sixteenth notes. The third staff is a bass clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is a bass clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics include *mf*, *ff*, *pp*, *f*, *p*, and *pp*. Performance markings include *N*, *ord. 3*, and *3*. A large black wedge-shaped dynamic marking is positioned above the first staff.

Musical score system 2. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a treble clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is a treble clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff is a bass clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is a bass clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics include *f*, *p*, *ff*, *pp*, and *mp*. Performance markings include *ex.SP*, *ord.*, *ST*, *N*, *ex.ST*, *pizz.*, and *5*. A large black wedge-shaped dynamic marking is positioned above the second staff. A wavy line with the text "decrease bow pressure" is above the second staff.

Musical score system 3. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a treble clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is a treble clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff is a bass clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is a bass clef with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics include *f*, *mp*, *p*, and *mf*. Performance markings include *arco*, *SP*, and *3*. A large black wedge-shaped dynamic marking is positioned above the second staff.

Musical score for the first system, featuring four staves. The top staff (treble clef) starts with *mp* and includes markings for *S.P.*, *N.*, and *ord.*. The second staff (treble clef) includes *pizz.*, *p*, *arco*, *ex.ST*, *mf*, and *pp*. The third staff (bass clef) includes *ex.ST*, *ex.SP*, and *p*. The bottom staff (bass clef) features a large, decorative flourish. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. Articulations include *ord.*, *pizz.*, *arco*, and *ex.ST*. Performance markings include *S.P.*, *N.*, and *ex.SP*.

Musical score for the second system, featuring three staves. The top two staves are mostly empty. The bottom staff (bass clef) includes *f* and *ff*. Performance markings include *SP*, *ST*, *SP*, and *ex.ST*. A large, decorative flourish is positioned above the staff. Dynamics include *f* and *ff*. Performance markings include *SP*, *ST*, *SP*, and *ex.ST*.

Musical score for the third system, featuring four staves. The top staff (treble clef) starts with *mf*. The second staff (treble clef) includes *accel.*, *ex.SP*, *ST*, and *ppp*. The third staff (bass clef) includes *mf*, *pizz.*, *arco*, and *pizz.*. The bottom staff (bass clef) includes *ff*, *pp*, *5*, *ord.*, and *ppp*. Dynamics include *mf*, *pp*, *ppp*, and *ff*. Articulations include *pizz.* and *arco*. Performance markings include *accel.*, *ex.SP*, *ST*, *ord.*, and *ppp*.

ex.S.P. N.

*p* *mf* *f* *p*

*a tempo* *pizz.*

*arco*

*mf* *sfz* *p* *pp*

*p* ex.SP ex.ST

*pizz.* *f* *arco* *p*

*8va* *SP* *pizz.* *N*

*expression ad lib*

→ ord.

ex.S.T. N.

*p* *pp* *mf*

*arco*

*mp* *p* *pizz.* *arco* *pizz.*

*sfz* *mp* *sfz*

First system of musical notation. It consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo hairpin. It features a triplet of eighth notes. The middle staff is in treble clef, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic, followed by piano (*p*), sforzando (*sfz*), and piano (*p*). It contains a complex rhythmic pattern with slurs and accents. The bottom staff is in bass clef, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a decrescendo hairpin, followed by mezzo-piano (*mp*). It includes the instruction "arco" and features a five-note slur.

Second system of musical notation. It consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and a crescendo hairpin, followed by fortissimo (*ff*). It includes the instruction "ex.S.P." and a triplet of eighth notes. The middle staff is in bass clef, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a decrescendo hairpin, followed by fortissimo (*ff*). It includes the instruction "pizz." and a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a decrescendo hairpin, followed by piano (*p*). It includes the instruction "ord." and a five-note slur.

Third system of musical notation. It consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a decrescendo hairpin, followed by a ritardando (*rit.*) hairpin and a decrescendo hairpin. It includes the instruction "ex.ST" and a five-note slur. The middle and bottom staves are in bass clef and contain mostly rests.

"...and keep the clay wet"

S.T. → S.P. → N. → ex.S.P.

*a tempo*

*f*

*pizz.*

*arco*

*p*

6"

10"

*pp*

3"

5

6

5

*p*

*mf*

5

3

15" *expression ad lib*

*p*

*ex.SP*

*ppp*

*pizz.*

*arco*

*p*

5

3

5

*pizz.*

S.P.

N.

*pp*

*mf*

*pp*

*f*

*mf*

15"

2"

*arco*

*mp*

5

6

3

3

"...and keep the clay wet"

ex.S.P. → ord. → ex.S.T.

*p* *f* *sfz* *p*

ord. ord.

SP → ST ord. → 3 → ord.

pizz. *sfz* *p* arco pizz.

S.T. → S.P. → S.T. → S.P.

30" -----

*mp*

ord. *δ<sup>va</sup>* pizz. arco

SP → ST *mp*

3 *p* *f* *p*

arco *mf*

*p* *f* *mp* *p* 5 5

pizz. arco ST *f* → ex.SP

ord. 3

40" -----

*pp* ord. → SP → ST

30" -----

*p* *f* *mf* *p*

The musical score consists of four staves. The first staff (treble clef) begins with a *pizz.* instruction and a *sfz* dynamic, followed by a *ff* dynamic. It then transitions to *arco* with a *S.P.* instruction. The second staff (treble clef) starts with *pp* and includes a *10"* measurement, *ord.* instruction, and *ST* markings. It features a *decrease bow pressure* instruction and ends with *ff*. The third staff (bass clef) starts with *p* and includes a *30"* measurement, *SP* and *ST* markings, and a *ppp* dynamic. The fourth staff (bass clef) starts with *pp* and includes a *molto vibrato* instruction, *SP non vibrato*, *ST*, and *ex.SP* markings. The bottom section of the score (staves 5-8) includes a *40"* measurement, *ova* marking, *ord.* instruction, and dynamics of *p*, *mp*, and *pp*. It also features *ex.S.T.* and *ex.SP* markings. The final staff (bass clef) includes a *40"* measurement, *ST* marking, and dynamics of *p* and *pp*.

\* in the form of *molto vibrato*

## Commentary for “...and keep the clay wet”

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“...and keep the clay wet” is a very personal composition. In the past, I had been trying to avoid writing a personal composition (possibly avoiding taking the responsibility of writing something personal in fear of having it heavily criticised and thus avoiding hurting my ego) by falling back to using methods external to music with which I was familiar before taking up composition, such as mathematics, images, physics, poems, etc. to help me compose.

The basic underlying pitch and rhythmic material I have used in the piece comes from folk music of the three cultures I consider have played the most important role in my life, and in who I am today: Greek (because of the history), English (because of the language) and Finnish (because of the land).

The use of folk music material was not intended to be audible in the final result - it rather provided a base material which I could mould and shape with the use of what I consider the important sonic materials of my composition. My main working materials are extended techniques such as increased bow pressure, timbral changes (sul pont, sul tasto etc) or trills and tremolos in unusual combinations, which need pitches and rhythms to be applied on, but whose sonic result does not necessarily depend on the notes they are played on.

I admire the more free interaction folk performers have with their material, which is something I attempt to do in my composition, albeit in a different way and in a substantially different context. Every time the piece is played it is different, but retains various characteristic elements: much like stories (which are different depending on who tells them, where, and to whom - representing an emergent and more folk-like mindset) and much unlike histories (which are established, once and for all, unchanged, stated, there - representing an established and more control-obsessed and western mindset).

With this piece I wanted to create a more “raw” soundscape than the soundscape we are used to listening to in a concert environment. Obviously, some of 20th-century and contemporary music sounds quite “raw” in the sense that the sounds produced during performances of such pieces are very remote from the earlier classical tradition of the west, and have adopted in their array of accepted “musical” sounds a vast number of what would simply be called “noise” in earlier days or other contexts. However, I believe that in many occasions these soundscapes were the result of other compositional processes or attitudes in composition, and were not so much explored for their own sake. Without claiming to be unique in my approach to composing such a piece, I primarily focus on creating such a soundscape for its own sake, to evoke a dance of wild sonic instances that these extraordinarily sophisticated instruments are capable of producing, which we have tamed for the sake of creating what—at a particular time and place—is considered “socially acceptable music”. Someone in the workshop mentioned that the piece has an “archaic” feeling to it, but I would take it further and say that if I could use one word to describe the piece, I would use the word “primeval” or “feral”. *Unease, uncertainty and indeterminacy* are also three words which describe the soundscape of this piece in a compositional approach. (Three words which are quite distant from our everyday Western middle-class lives, where things are quite safe, normal, predictable, determined for us, and we have a lot less to worry about than our fellow human beings in remote parts of the world whose natural habitat we destroy so we can keep living our ever-increasingly needy and consumer-oriented lives.)

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*(Jay Griffiths, “Anarchipelago”)*

### Post-workshop comments

In the workshop which took place in the first week of term, I received some very helpful comments from the string quartet which played this piece. The material given to the players was intended to be played a lot more slowly, and had a lot less extended techniques and more “clean” sounding notes. However, it turned out that the character of the piece (which was the more scratchy, ethereal and “weird” kind of soundscape) was more disturbed by the clean notes than I expected. In turn, they suggested I should fill in the score with a lot more “weird” stuff (in their words) so as to make sure that the performers know what kind of atmosphere they should be creating in the piece, so when they are familiar with the material and perform it, they will be more free to act on the material (as it is asked in the performance instructions) in a way that will be faithful to my intentions. The second time they performed the piece, we decided to make each system a lot faster (twice the speed), and almost eliminate any clean notes and add as much ‘crazy’ and ‘weird’ things they thought would be appropriate. I much preferred that end result, and I decided to use the clean notes with the—sometimes—folk reminiscences as a decorative element to the piece rather than as an equal and polarising element in the composition which is what they were in the beginning.

Unfortunately there is no recording of the workshop due to an error with the recording equipment, but I believe a recording wouldn't be very representative of the composition anymore as it has changed significantly since the workshop.