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Matthew Whittall

*being the pine tree*

*for accordeon*

*dedicated to Veli Kujala*

2007

TEOSTO

SUOMALAISEN MUSIIKIN TIEDOTUSKESKUS  
FINNISH MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE

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Program note

The title is paraphrased from a quote by the poet Basho, "When you depict a pine tree, you must become the pine tree," referring to the Zen concept of non-duality between object and observer, or the dissolution of the self into the wider continuum of creation. Basho's point was that a painting of a tree must not be a faithful graphic representation of it, but rather a timeless distillation of the being of that tree in its surroundings, independent of any pre-existing concept of "tree". Simply put, to paint a thing must be to know it, and to know is to be. Thus, an artistic presentation of a thing becomes a devotional act, like meditation. Applying this to an instrument was a logical extension of the idea for me as a musician: to try to portray the instrument's "truth" through the process of composition, to know it on an essential level, to in fact become it. The accordion was an especially attractive vehicle, with its implicit physical connection to breathing, the most basic ritual act in meditation, as well as its sonic resemblance to the Japanese *sho*, a mouth organ played in *gagaku* music whose characteristic sound became the starting point for the piece. The form and duration of the piece are largely dictated by the instrument itself, specifically the space of time it takes to extend or close the bellows completely, in the manner of deep, calm breaths.

As one might expect from the above, the music is extremely, predominantly slow; it is marked by long pauses and contains few notated rhythms, though this came about for a more explicit reason. The extraordinary musicianship of Veli Kujala, the commissioner and dedicatee of being the pine tree, had already inspired other composers to the heights of transcendental virtuosity. I had thought to write him something along similar lines, but what eventually sparked my imagination was the intensity and commitment of his live performances, which seemed to have a parallel in meditation. I began to imagine what it would be like to turn that intensity inward, slowing down his virtuosity infinitely, reaching toward a pure state of awareness and focus, and bring the performing experience closer to the searing clarity of what, for lack of a better term, one could call enlightenment.

*being the pine tree* was commissioned with the generous support of the Madetoja Foundation.

Performance notes

-This piece was composed according to the system of accordion registration in use in Finland only, which may exceed the range of the indicated registers on instruments built employing other systems. Registration substitutions may be made freely for such instruments, as long as the general timbral quality of the indicated register is more or less preserved.

-In regards to p. 3, system 3, last measure and p. 5, system 2: Depending on weather and humidity conditions, the instrument may sound too early when the lower Db1 is depressed, ruining the slow "top down" effect of partial formation. In such cases, the effect can be faked by slightly depressing the Db2/Ab2 keys, allowing that register to sound quietly before sounding Db1/Ab1. The Db2/Ab2 can then be released. This substitution may become necessary in warmer, more humid conditions.

Duration: ca. 13 min.

*I follow my breath as it goes in,  
goes out. I want to know what I am –  
a bellows of flesh, but what else?*

*That's what the stillness sings about,  
day and night in the pine gloom.*

– Chase Twichell  
"Ignorant Poem"

Begin by slowly extending bellows slightly more than halfway, then remain still for several seconds before starting to play.



**FOR PROMOTIONAL  
USE ONLY**

Finnish Music Information Centre

*dedicated to Veli Kujala*  
*being the pine tree*  
*for accordion*

Matthew Whittall  
(2007)

## Timeless; Breathing deeply

Andantino, Breathing deeply

close bellows fully

extend fully

*mp* *pp* *poco f*

Do not attempt to make all pitches sound simultaneously. Let them fade in and out naturally, unless otherwise indicated as follows: \_\_\_\_\_|

indicated as follows:

*ff* *pp* *sub. mf* *p*

extend fully close fully

$\text{♩} = 72-76$  (applies to all notated rhythms)

FOR PROMOT

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

Gna

extend

\*Although the sounding register will be transposed, the fingering of this chord should not change.



8va

glassy

*mp* *pp* *poco* *mp* *mf* *ppp* *poco*

extend close

8va

*p* *mf* *ppp* (very long) *ff*

close fully extend fully

8va

*p* *poco* (short) *p* *pp* *ppp* *gentle mp*

Air valve: O Air valve: X

close fully extend fully

Play all R.H.

like a deep breath in... ...and out (short) longer this time (short)

*pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

Air valve: O Air valve: X

close to halfway extend back to max. close fully extend fully

15<sup>ma</sup> (short breath) 15<sup>ma</sup> (longer)

*pp* *poco f* *p* *mp*

close fully extend fully

\*Depress key, but do not allow to sound immediately.

8<sup>va</sup>

(extending)

close fully

8

(like a glassy harmonic)

pp

extend fully (duration as long as possible)

close partially (silent)

breathe in...

...and out

p

mf

pp

ff

ff

mp < f

mp < f

mp < f

extend

close fully

extend

"reverse attack": smearing pitches, more or less chromatic

sim.

Improvise freely, with increasing violence. Gradually develop into a continuous stream of chromatic notes (like a tape rewinding at high speed)

Move into low register toward end of improvisation.

bellows shake

(short)

(longer)

(long)

ff

ff

f

extend

close

extend fully

8<sup>va</sup>

ppp - pp etc.

allow pitch to move in and out of near-inaudibility at random

close fully (duration as long as possible)

let C<sub>b</sub> fade

let C<sub>b</sub> fade

\*Starting dynamic for Eb at this point is the level at which it was sounding at the end of the previous gesture (which will naturally sound softer than the bass register).

\*\*Allow pitches to oscillate freely, do not force to sustain throughout.

Very slowly, distant

8va

*sempre pp*

8va

extend fully

close fully

8va

*pp*

*f*

*fff*

*ppp*

(extremely long)

(loco)

extend fully

Change bellows as needed, but very smoothly!

(loco)

*mp* gentle

*p*

*pp*

let lower D $\flat$  fade

extend

close

extend fully

(short)

(longer)

(extremely long)

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp* (just barely audible)

close fully

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\*Depress but do not sound. Allow partials to form smoothly from the top down as crescendo builds.