

FLATIRON

Alexander Elliott Miller

FLATIRON

by Alexander Elliott Miller
for solo classical guitar

- I. Flatirons
- II. The Town Below
- III. Wandering
- IV. Flatirons

Approximate Duration: 10 minutes

Notes

Flatiron is a four movement work inspired by my memories of the Rocky Mountains, from my time as a college student at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

In Boulder, the "flatirons" are large rock formations jutting out of the mountainside above a large park where I went hiking often. Movements 1, 3 and 4 are strongly influenced by my memories of this place. Movement 2, perhaps, then returns down to "street level" and is more a depiction of the youthful town of Boulder itself; this movement is influenced more by my background as a rock guitarist.

The composition makes use of several extended playing techniques for guitar. Several of these are in the second movement, the "rock guitar" movement. But others aim to capture my memories of being in the mountains:

A prominent feature of the opening movement, and its reprise as the final movement, is a constant "timpani effect" utilized in the background of the texture, created by drumming the fingers on the bass string percussively in a tremolo motion, this is my attempt to capture the "white noise" of the wind that one hears roaring over the flatirons from all directions when standing in the mountains.

Performance Notes

1. This piece makes use of a scordatura tuning:

6 = D 5 = A 4 = B 3 = E 2 = B 1 = E

The 6th string is retuned after the second movement to E, but audibly retuned to D as a "glissando" during the fourth movement (pg. 19).

2. A mild amplification may be used, when available. This may be especially desirable when performed in a large venue, as much of the piece is an exploration of unusual timbres, colors and playing techniques, some of which are quieter than "standard" playing techniques.
3. With respect to the many extended techniques used in this work, dynamics markings are relative, depending upon what technique is being used. Harmonics are quieter than *rasqueados*, therefore a harmonic marked *mf* will be understood to be quieter than a *rasqueado* with the same marking.

4. The descriptions and notations of the extended techniques used are as follows:

Brushing

The note “brush” appearing in the score above a chord indicates that the chord is to be played by gently brushing the surface of the six strings with no fingernail, and without depressing the strings far from their resting positions.

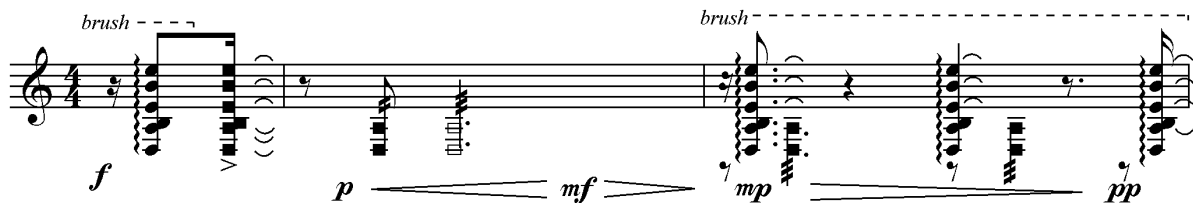
Tambura

Rectangular noteheads indicate that the strings are to be struck percussively close to the bridge with a right hand finger.

“Timpani” Effect

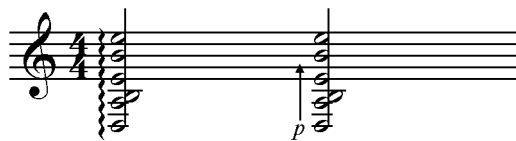
Similar rectangular noteheads with a tremolo sign on the stem indicate that two right hand fingers should gently “drum” the strings, producing a sound similar to the quiet, ominous trill of a timpani.

The opening measures of the work illustrate each of these first three techniques:



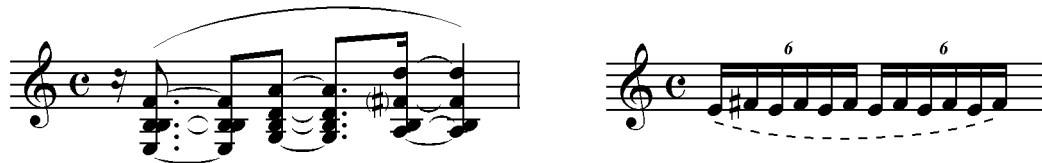
Arpeggiations vs. Thumb Sweeps

In this score, traditional arpeggiations indicated by a wavy line are distinguished from more powerful “thumb sweeps.”



Slurs

Left hand slurs are indicated with a dotted line, cross string slurs, as well as regular phrase markings, are indicated with a solid line



Pizzicati & “Palm-Muting”

Passages played *pizzicato* are indicated with a traditional note above the staff.

In the second movement, however, several passages of fast 16th notes in the bass register of the guitar are marked “pizzicato,” and would be impossible at the given tempo with the

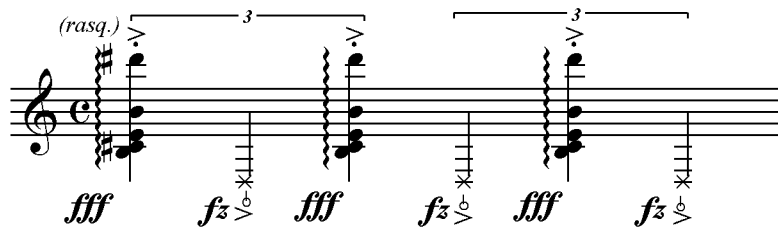
guitar's traditional pizzicato plucking technique. For these passages, the guitarist is asked to imitate the “palm-muting” technique used by rock and heavy metal guitarists: in addition to touching the strings near the bridge with the palm of the right hand, the notes may be struck with the down strokes of the right index fingernail, the index finger and thumb pinched together almost as if holding an imaginary guitar pick to gain the necessary velocity and precision.



Muffled Strings & “Smacking” Effect

Muffled, pitchless attacks are indicated with an “x” note head on the string they are to be performed.

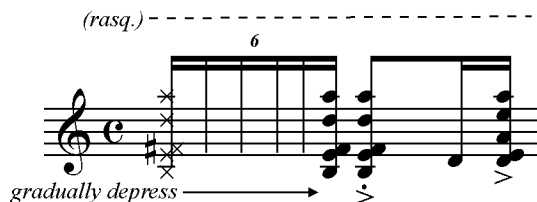
Muffled pitches with a snap-pizz. marking indicate a “smacking” effect, a loud percussive device performed only on the six string, by creating a snap-pizz. with the right hand thumb when the string is completely muffled by the left.



Rasqueados & “Dirty” Rasqueados

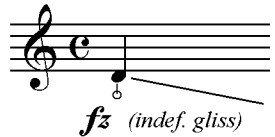
Rasqueados are indicated by a traditional note above the score.

“Dirty” Rasqueados involve the strumming of a chord with emerges from the percussive sound of strumming muffled strings. At first, set the chord indicated by “x” noteheads but do not depress the strings fully, creating the muffled sound, and start strumming the given rhythm. While strumming that rhythm, gradually depress the chord, so that it sounds by the time the chord is shown with normal noteheads.



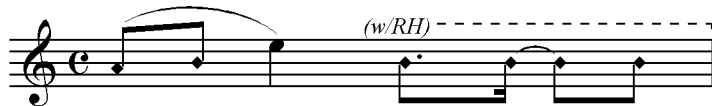
Falling Glissandi

Several fast, falling glissandi are performed on the six string from a starting pitch performed with a snap-pizz. These glissandi do not have definite final pitches.



Harmonics

Harmonics are notated with a diamond note head at the executed (rather than sounding) pitch. Natural harmonics performed entirely with the right hand, touching the node with the right index finger and plucking the string with the thumb, are shown as ordinary harmonics with a “w/RH” note above the score.



“After touch” Harmonics

A prominent feature of the third movement is the strumming of a chord followed immediately by a motion of the right hand, touching a harmonic node on all or several of the strings, producing a harmonic of some of the original pitches an octave or an octave and fifth higher.

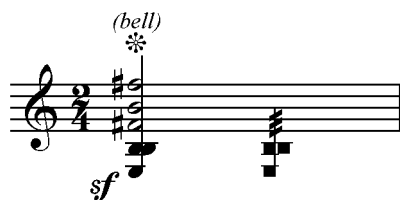
Following the strum of the chord, the right hand should move swiftly to the appropriate fret and lightly touch the strings with a single finger precisely parallel to and above the fret. The performer may be called upon to touch all six strings or only a few, in the latter case, normally the three bass strings.

When chords contain a combination of both open and stopped strings, touching the harmonic node will only affect the open strings; the stopped strings, being depressed closer to the fingerboard, will continue to ring with their original pitches.



“Bell” Effect

In the fourth movement, there are two occurrences of a special effect involving the attacking of a chord by firmly slapping the strings at the 12th with a right hand finger. As in the “after touch” harmonic effect described above, the finger should strike the strings precisely on the fret, at first creating a percussive effect similar to a tambura. After this initial attack, the stopped strings will vibrate and the harmonics on the 12th fret of the open strings will ring.



6 = D 3 = E
5 = A 2 = B
4 = B 1 = E

FLATIRON

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I. Flatirons $\bullet = 80-88$

Guitar

brush

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

3

brush

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

7

brush

mp

10

brush

mp *mf* *sfp*

13

brush

(mf) *mf* *mp* *(p)*

16

brush

mf (slur w/L.H. Only)

3 6 3

18 (L.H.) *mp* brush 3

20 (L.H.) *mf* 3 6 3

22 (L.H.) *f* 6 3 (sim.) 6 3

24 *mf* *mp* brush 3 brush 3

26 *p* *pp* brush 3 brush 3

28 *p*

31 *pp* *p* *mp* *rit.* *n* brush

II. The Town Below $\bullet = 100$

C III

pizz.-----
p p i m
mp
p sub.
fz

C III

pizz.-----
mf
mp sub.
sim.

(rasq.)

(rasq.)
pizz.-----
f fz
f

C III C VI

p
f

C III

pizz.-----
f fz
p sub.

rasq.

f
ff

C III

mp
pizz.-----
p

50 *mp*

pizz. *p* *pizz.*

52 *mf* *pizz.* *i* *i*

p *p* *pizz.*

54 *mp cresc.* *rasq.*

pizz. *rasq.*

57 *f*

gradually depress *f* *C II* *CV*

59 *rit.* *rasq.* *a tempo* *f*

(indef. gliss) *rit.* *rasq.* *a tempo* *f* *C II* *CV*

61 *rasq.* *f*

rasq. *f*

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

sfz *f* *p* *f*

65 *ff* *mp pizz.* *ff* *mp pizz.* *mf*

67 *p* *mf* *p* *mp* *pizz.*

70 *pizz.* *p* *mf* *p* *mp*

73 *f* *pizz.* *CV* *pizz.*

75 *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *sim.*

77 *mf* *p* *mp* *pizz.* *pp*

79 *mf* *mp* *pizz.* *p*

81 *mf* *mp* *pizz.* *p* *m* *i* *mf* *mp*

83 *mfz* *mp*

85 *p* *i* *m* *a* *m* *i* *f*

88 *fz* *C II* *C I*

90 *fz* *C IV*

92 *mf cresc.*

94 *f* *pizz.* *rasq.* *pizz.*

96

3 6 rit. a tempo rasq. sempre

(indef. gliss) fz f pizz.

98

6 3 6

p sub.

100

6 4 4 2 1 6

ff ff

102

6 3 4 4 2

ff

104

rasq. 3 6

ff pizz. f pizz.

106

rasq. 3 6

p f

108

6 4 3 2 6

ff f

110 C VI CI CI-----, C VI *sim.*

113 C VI (rasq.) C III

pizz, muffle 5 only w/RH

115 C V-----, rasq.

117

ff

119

121 C V

mp

123

125 ④ *mf* *mp*

127 *pizz.* *p* *pizz.*

130 *pizz.* *p* *m* *i*

132 *pizz.* *sempre poco cresc.*

134 *pizz.* *mf* *pizz.*

136 *rasq. sempre* *6* *3* *3* *3* *ff*

138 *4* *1* *0* *0* *1*

140

142

fff fz> fff fz> fff *p* *f*

ord. ③ ②

retune 6 = E

III. Wandering ♩ = 76

pont.
145 *w/nail* (very free & improvisatory)

145

mf *p* *mf* *pp*

147

mp *mf* *p*

④ ⑤ (w/R.H.)

149

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

pont. w/nail *ord.*

152

mp *mf* *p*

(w/R.H.)

154

mf *pp* *mf* *p*

pont. w/nail *ord.*

157 *mf* *mp* *mf* (w/R.H.)

160 *mf* *p* *mf*

163 *f*

166 *pp sub.* *tr tranquil, freely*

168

171 *rit.* *a tempo* *mp*

174 *mf cresc.* *p* *f*

176 *f* *mp sub.*

179 *bright* *pp* *mp* *pp*

182 *a tempo* *rit.* *(w/R.H.)*

185 *a tempo* *mp* *C I*

188 *mf* *mp* *C I*

190 *mf* *mf*

193 *f* *(p)* *f* *(p)* *f* *(p)* *f* *(p)* *f* *(p)*

196 *f* *p* *ff* *fff* *rasq.* 3

198 *fff* *rasq.* 3

201 *fff* *rasq.* *ff* *ord.* 3

204 *f* *mp*

208 *ppp* *rit.* *molto rit.* *grad. gliss.* *attacca subito:*

IV. Flatirons ♩ = 80 88

211 *pp* *mp* *mp* C III

214 *sf* *mp* *mf* (bell) C VII (2/3)

217 *mp* *mf* *p* *pp*

freely, somewhat slower

C VII (1/2)

220 *p* *pp* 3

223 *a tempo* *f* *molto* *sf* *ff* (bell) 3

226 *(audibly retune E to D)* *pp* *mp* (dim. on repeat) brush

229 *pp* *mp* *pp* 3

232 *pp* *rit.* *n* brush

(repeat as desired. the "brushing" in mm. 232 may fade out and diminish in dynamics during the repetitions to the point that the pitches of the chord are less audible than the metallic sound of the "brushing" itself.)