

Bone Dry Holler

a two-handed puzzle etude

for four strings

attached to medium-sized bits of wood

(i.e., Viola solo)

2015

variable duration

(most likely between 2 to 6 minutes long)

Christopher Gainey (b. 1981)

Preface:

The physical demands associated with instrumental technique are often amplified when combined with the cognitive challenges of unusual or idiosyncratic musical contexts. If, to take things one step further, unconventional techniques are used within a singularly unorthodox work, then one is likely to be preoccupied with, if not intimidated by, the rather amorphous concept of "extended" technique. One imagines that a characterization of some techniques as "extensions" of standard instrumental practice may have arisen from a conception of certain techniques in relation to progenitors that are either less difficult or more idiomatic—a conception that may be particularly useful as a pedagogical guide. If, for example, one is in the process of internalizing the skills needed to play an instrument with an amount of proficiency equal to the demands of a particular repertoire, then it is wise to establish a set of basic techniques as a beachhead before beginning to explore the expressive range of the instrument.

An attempt to use "extension" as a guideline in musical situations, however, tends to raise more questions than it answers. How, for example, does one determine that a given technique is extended? Extended from where, and to what degree? To my mind, questions such as these are a bit too tree-focused to be entirely valid as much more than practical concerns that guide composers, theorists, and (in the sense that "extended" techniques are unusual or unexpected) audiences towards a more intimate understanding of the physicality of an instrument. Confounding the issue even further, one's perception of the affect of "extended" techniques is likely to be shaped by one's own familiarity, or lack thereof, with a given instrument. I am reminded of the pained expression on the faces of certain electric guitarists who, at a particularly tense moment, will reach a fermata point and, in seeming Herculean defiance of the envelope of a plucked string's sound, will steadily maintain a single pitch or chord for an unrealistically long time. This bit of pantomime is certainly exciting—the mark of a seasoned performer playing to his/her audience—but one's wonder is likely to be attenuated if one has ever encountered a device known as a "sustain pedal."

It seems to me that a pained expression—an embodiment of effort that expresses a musical function—is an essential element in the communication of the affect of "extended" techniques. Although the example I have cited is geared towards an audience unlikely to ever be aware of music like *Bone Dry Holler* (a statement that I make only in recognition of the regretful aesthetic divide between "pop" and "art" music—a mostly semantic distinction demeaning to both), it serves to highlight some of the assumptions that I have personally encountered when discussing "extended" techniques with people (musically experienced and otherwise) who are interested in such things. These assumptions may be boiled down to three statements that are, unfortunately, accepted as truth by some: "extended" techniques are 1) inherently more difficult, 2) almost exclusively used to produce isolated special effects, and 3) are primarily the purview of an elite class of "new music" specialists.

Bone Dry Holler, an etude that could be considered something of a contemporary music primer, has been designed as a challenge to these assumptions with the hope that it is also entertaining to both play and hear. I cannot speak with any confidence to the latter condition. If it is not met, then the former is, alas, musically invalid and I have failed to achieve my stated goals. If you are taking the time to read this rather self-indulgently verbose preface, however, I will (unsafely) assume that you find the music pleasing in some way and I invite you to consider the ways in which *Bone Dry Holler* might be seen to challenge the three "assumptions" identified above. Which is the more difficult aspect of *Bone Dry Holler*: the specific techniques or the unusual relationship between the hands? Although some of the techniques featured in *Bone Dry Holler* could be considered unusual "sound effects" in isolation, the prevalence of these effects elevates them to a level of greater structural significance. Furthermore, the score may appear, to some, to be of the type associated with some "elite" contemporary music, especially due to its idiosyncratic notation. The origins of *Bone Dry Holler* (as reflected by the title), however, are anything but "high brow." I play the banjo—an instrument often dismissed as "folk" or "old-timey" even when played with astonishing skill (kudos Bela Fleck, Ritchie Stearns, and the venerable Tony Trischka, among others)—and I would hope that anyone undertaking a performance of *Bone Dry Holler* would resist the temptation to, aesthetically speaking, take the music too seriously. In other words: make noise and share the fun.

Performance Notes:

General Guidelines:

- *Bone Dry Holler*, as stated in the subtitle, is a puzzle—a fact reflected not only in the layout of the score but also in the variety of choices that face anyone preparing a version of the work for performance. In short, all the pieces are there, but some assembly is required.
- Throughout *Bone Dry Holler*, the right and left hand are notated on separate staves. The logic behind this division is not always clear, however, and some of the ambiguities related to this notational choice are discussed in more detail below.
- Little, if any, attempt should be made to alter the natural acoustic tendencies of certain techniques. For example, it is expected—and, more importantly, aesthetically appropriate—that left hand and right hand pizzicati should sound noticeably, if not strikingly, different. Furthermore, "artifacts" (unexpected sounds that are not directly accounted for by the notation) should be embraced as an essential part of the music unless there is an idiomatic—and, more importantly, musically interesting—way to correct for them. For example, the sound of the harmonics in the third module of the "Trio"—the "pitched" elements of which are often less prominent than is reflected by the notation—will necessarily contain a significant amount of "hiss" as the bow hair scrapes the strings.
- Some of the techniques featured in *Bone Dry Holler* are, admittedly, rather quiet. It is entirely appropriate—should either the acoustics of a particular venue or personal taste make it desirable—to use amplification. I would add, however, that a microphone tastefully positioned so as to produce the most "natural sound" is, in my opinion, preferable to the use of a contact microphone (a.k.a., "piezo" or "pickup") attached to the instrument. Should this issue arise, however, I happily defer to your judgment.
- Dynamics, as you are likely to notice immediately, are not indicated in the score. There are three reasons for this apparently glaring omission. First, the relative loudness of certain techniques may differ based on both the strengths of different performers and the acoustic qualities of their equipment (i.e., instrument, strings, etc.). Second, the version of the piece that makes it to performance is, I hope, a highly personal interpretation based on a set of choices about the form of the piece (more about this below). I would rather that you choose dynamics that support the dramatic shape of the form that results from how you choose to assemble the puzzle. Finally, in a consideration of only indirect significance, omitting dynamics—or, more appropriately, leaving the dynamics up to you—is one way to avoid notational clutter in an already visually busy score.

More specific issues:

Right and Left Hand:

In his "How to Play the Five-String Banjo," Pete Seeger shares a story that highlights an important contrast between different conceptions of left-hand technique with regard to plucked string, and bowed string instruments. It seems that when Mr. Seeger explained the common (at least to plucked-string instrumentalists) techniques of "hammer-on" and "pull-off" to his step-mother, her eyes brightened with the recognition of a technique she knew only as "left-hand pizzicato." The story is especially interesting given the fact that Mr. Seeger's step-mother is Ruth Crawford Seeger—an example of the type of aesthetic/stylistic intersection of which I am especially fond.

Although my well-worn copy of Mr. Seeger's book did not survive my last move and my memory of the pertinent details is probably, at least partially, inaccurate, my purpose in mentioning it here is to introduce various aspects of left hand pizzicato in *Bone Dry Holler* which, not surprisingly, have been adapted from bits of plucked-string left hand technique. Should my brief descriptions here prove inadequate, and/or having gotten a firm hold on the basics, you would like more detailed advice on how to get the most musically appealing sound from similar, if not virtually identical, techniques, then I enthusiastically refer you to Aaron Shearer's *Learning the Classic Guitar Part I* (pp. 96-98). Mr. Shearer's careful and detailed prose devoted to this issue is, to my knowledge, the most

efficient (and, with regard to purely musical concerns, the most complete) account of the physical procedures at the heart of techniques that, assuming the legends are true, Ruth Crawford Seeger would have recognized as left-hand-pizzicato.

Thankfully, the right hand techniques in *Bone Dry Holler* (with and without the bow) are, in my experience, almost universally recognized as conventional. However, in the hope that any confusion may be avoided, both right and left hand techniques have been included in Table 1—six situations, briefly explained, that constitute a quick-reference summary of the most prevalent left and right hand techniques in *Bone Dry Holler*. In essence, Table 1 may be considered a set of basic guidelines for adapting a plan of left hand fingering that suits (if not enhances) a nuanced interpretation of *Bone Dry Holler's* more ineffable qualities.

Table 1: A summary of left and right hand techniques in *Bone Dry Holler*

Situation	Left Hand	Right Hand
a)	- pluck 1st string with any free finger	- normal pizz.
b)	- finger B4 on 1st string, - pluck 1st string anywhere above B4* with any free finger - "pull-off" B4, plucking during release * possibly, but not necessarily, at the location of the parenthesized pitch	- strike strings with wood of bow
c)	- "strum"* with any free finger from low to high * since all l.h. pizz. double stops in <i>Bone Dry Holler</i> are played this way, the "strum arrow" is only included in the score for the first two	- normal pizz. - begin slide (i.e., gliss., if you prefer)
d)	- pluck as in a) - "hammer on" with any free finger at C#5 on the 1st string to sound the pitch	- end slide - articulate destination pitch (pizz. again)
e)	- pluck as in a)	- arco (continue into next pitch as slur indicates) - begin slide
f)	- "strum" - "hammer-on" - "pull-off"	- end slide - cut destination pitch short, but do not rearticulate

Harmonics:

The third module of the "Trio" is almost entirely made-up of harmonics. Since the notation of harmonics (at least in the style used in *Bone Dry Holler*) prioritizes the location of the left hand fingers over a representation of the sounding pitch, the "right hand" (lower) staff is entirely devoted to showing the sounding pitch of the harmonics, notated in the (to some) standard fashion, on the "left hand" (upper) staff. "Angled" fermatas have been used instead of the usual rounded fermatas as a symbol that indicates a brief, rather than relatively protracted, extension of the sound/gesture in question. Thick horizontal lines are used to show the continuation of a certain harmonic, and thin slanted lines indicate a harmonic glissando (i.e., slide fingers along the strings, without pressing down) between the first and second fermata point.

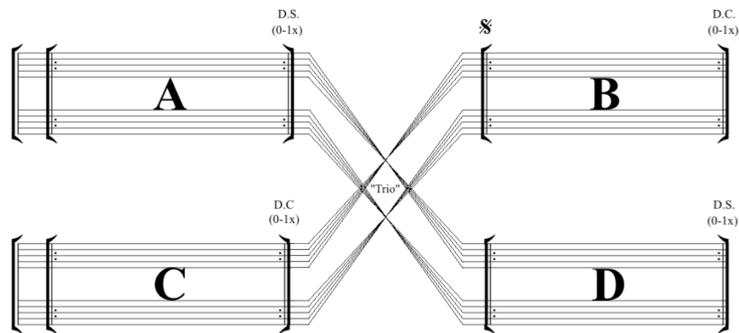
Rhythm and Meter:

Since the sixteenth note pulses in *Bone Dry Holler* are grouped in a way that is somewhat unpredictable, it is not quite appropriate to think of the rhythms in the context of identifiable meters. However, dashed barlines and beams have been carefully placed to reflect not only an embedded structural pattern, but also a loose metrical logic (manifested in performance, according to your taste, as a deeper pattern of subtle metrical accents) that may help you cognitively organize the constant stream of twos and threes. Regardless of the extent to which you foreground this metrical interpretation in performance, the sixteenth note pulse stream should be as steady as possible.

Form:

- This piece is, in a broad adaption of a classical (as in the era, not the elitist label) tradition, a "Scherzo and Trio"—two somewhat independent pieces that are formally intertwined. You have four choices, listed below in order of preference, concerning how to realize all or part of this structure. The "A" section of the Scherzo is the first page of the score, the "B" section of the Scherzo is the second page of the score, the "Trio" is the third page of the score, and the coda (a.k.a. the Scherzo's A¹) is the last page of the score.
 1. Play as notated: A-B—Trio [D.S.]—2nd 1/2 of B (r.h. arco), coda and end
 2. Play just the Scherzo (r.h. arco and/or pizz.)
 3. Play as a "true"(ish) Scherzo and Trio: Scherzo A(A)-B-A¹ (r.h. pizz.)—Trio [D.C.]—Scherzo A-B-A¹ and end (r.h. arco)
 4. Play just the Trio (it might be difficult to make this sound like a "complete" piece on its own, but you're welcome to try).
- Repeats: "1x" = repeat once; "0-1x" = repeat once or don't repeat; "0-2x" = repeat once, twice, or don't repeat; "nx" - repeat as many times as you like
- The "Trio" (the 6 "chunks" of music on the third page of the score will be referred to as "modules")
 - Entry module: Continue from the second page of the score into the first module on the third page. Repeat the latter portion as many times as is necessary to pick up the bow and set up the slightly more relaxed affect of the Trio. When you are ready, proceed to the first of the Trio's modules.
 - "Wormholes," "Jumps," and Repeats: At the end of each of the Trio's modules, you are presented with three alternatives:
 - Proceed through the "wormhole" of lines connecting diagonally adjacent modules. Keep in mind that you can "bounce" off of the repeat sign at the end of the 2nd and 4th modules of the Trio, bypass their beginning repeats, and proceed through their "wormholes" in reverse until you reach the diagonally adjacent module. This is purely a conceptual "motion" (i.e., you do not have to play any of the music backwards)
 - "Jump" to either the first (D.C.) or second (D.S.) module of the Trio.
 - Repeat (no more than once) the module you have just played.
 - Although you are asked to not repeat more than once, this type of limitation is not stipulated with regard to the other two choices. However, you may choose to extend this limitation to the other choices if you wish (i.e., if you have just "jumped," don't "jump" again right away).
 - Exit module: When you have played each module of the Trio at least once, you have a fourth choice about what to do at the end of a module. You may, if you feel that the "Trio" has gone on long enough, jump to the "exit" module at the bottom of the page. Repeat this as many times as is necessary to clear the air and set up the slightly more energetic affect of the Scherzo. When you are ready, proceed in accordance with your choice concerning the overall form of *Bone Dry Holler*.
 - In the interest of convenience and clarity, I have included an abstract graphic representation of possible "paths" through the Trio on the next page.

Figure 1: "Maps" of possible "paths" through the Trio

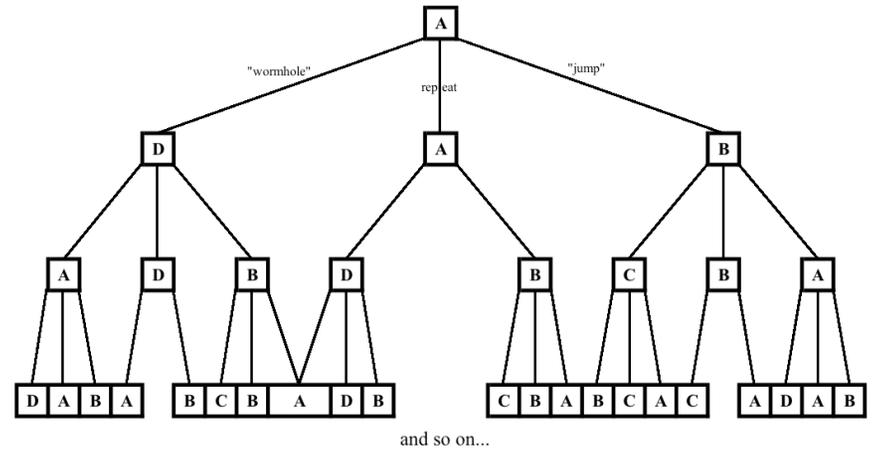


This piece has been written for, and is dedicated to, Sarah Kwok.

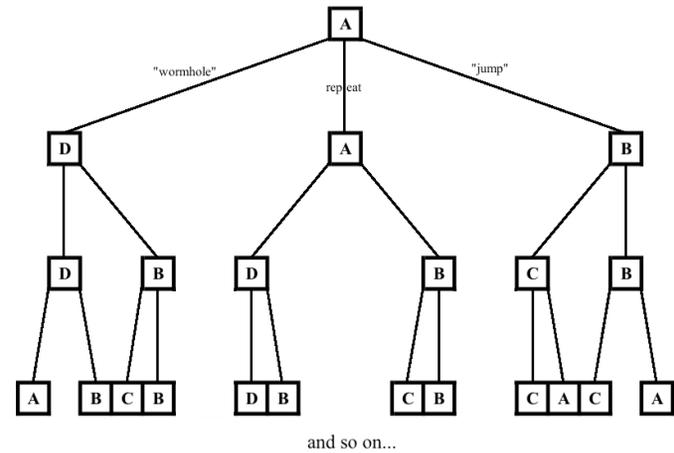
Special thanks to Ray Chester, Manuel Barrueco, Bruno Amato, Paul Mathews, David Gompper, John Roeder, Hope Grietzer and Kristin Gainey.

For more information, please visit www.christophergainey.com.

Repeat no more than once before doing something else "rule"



Do nothing more than once before doing something else "rule"



for Sarah
Bone Dry Holler
a two-handed puzzle etude for
four strings attached to medium-sized bits of wood

Christopher Gainey (2015)

"Scherzo"

Vibrant (Play this music as fast as you are confidently able to maintain a steady sixteenth-note pulse, but please no slower than ♩. = 92.)



(nx) Play this intro figure either
l.h. pizz. or regular pizz.



l.h. (sim.)

pizz.
(sul III)

1. 2.
(1x)

(0-1x)