

# the bunyip

for alto saxophone and  
fixed-media electronic sounds

Thomas J Dempster

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*For Russell Thorpe, my jati brother, slayer of evils, real and mythic.*

### **Program Notes**

Across the first-nations people of Australia, in Wemba Wemba and other languages across the continent, the bunyip stirred fears and imaginations for centuries before the first white colonizers arrived. While generally *bunjil* could mean any sort of mean spirit or devil, the bunyip, as the story goes, was a foul, large beast – variously some sort of great cat that also had qualities of dogs, rabbits, and kangaroos. It lurked and skulked in billabongs and along riversides and had a rather impressive appetite. Hapless human wanderers would unwittingly sate that appetite, and, as the stories go, the bunyip was a voracious eater.

And yet, no one has ever really seen a bunyip. Occupying a position alongside North America's Sasquatch or South Asia's Yeti, its noted features from reputed sightings run the gamut from the creature having a duck bill or a platypus face, to eyes and a screech like a bittern, to fangs like a tiger to a face like a dog. Rather than a real beast – or even a mythic one – it could very well, this bunyip, be the cultural memory of a species long forgotten, one long extinct, despite the occasional “finds” by “men of science” in Australia as early as 1818. Perhaps the concept of the bunyip is a cautionary tale: do not disturb nature, do not purposefully seek out and rouse it... For, indeed there are consequences...

In this piece, the saxophone takes multiple roles: that of the hapless wanderer drifting too close; the bunyip – unleashing shrill cries at the beginning of the work; elements of nature (wind and rustle of leaves); and, an unseen narrator. The drama unfolds as a young person strays too close, innocently wandering, and, with his human affectation of song, accidentally wakes up the hungry beast. A chase ensues, and then a quick dinner for one... The fixed media accompaniment serves as both atmosphere and commentary in our grim tale, and enters into repartee with the saxophone extensively.

### **Performance Notes / Explanatory Notes**

Total duration of the work is approximately 8'25" – the digital audio plays without pause.

Page 3: circled 8 and 9 refer to multiphonics found in the alto saxophone section of Kientzy's *Les Sons Multiples aux Saxophones*. Fingerings are (for 8) 123 C1 Bb || 456; and (for 9) 123 C1 Bb || 456 Eb. These are somewhat unstable multiphonics; if they are unproducible for you (or you know of better ones), please ensure the written B and Bb are somehow sounded to complete the chromatic descent.

At rehearsal letter M (through to N), there are falls/glisses designated for the sax part. While I would prefer these to be nasty bends akin to shrieking and screaming, I understand a few of the pitches pose some problems. A quick chromatic fall coupled with a pretty nasal tone will do, particularly if that's easier to execute.

At the bottom of page 7 is some unstemmed notation for the sax. These gestures should be played as quickly as possible, and accuracy is merely a suggestion.

By contrast, stemmed gestures (marked “rapidly; struggling to escape”) should be highly pitch-accurate, but the gestures should be played as close together as possible. The quarter rests are basically spacers for the gnarly teeth of the bunyip.

On page 2, there is an abundance of key clicking and blowing-through-without-mouthpiece. Where noteheads are full / normal, these pitches should be fingered. X noteheads are range suggestions for key-clicks. At measure 11, the first blow-through-and-key-click moment, it may be helpful to buzz if you feel your breath sound is masked by the key clicking. (You may also elect to do this at “violently!” at the bottom of the page.) Dashed slurs designate blown-through passages to be untongued.

A general statement about timings: despite the digital audio being “fixed,” there is some leeway here. I have placed in the digital audio part a series of textures, gestures, and otherwise, designated by shapes, lines, and illustrations. Very important cues are given definite pitches, and most bear dynamics or articulations. The flexibility comes within sections (particularly early and late in the piece) between rehearsal letters. Coordination and 100% synchronicity between the sax and digital audio is not expected, nor is it necessarily warranted all the time, particularly when the saxophone is playing more “soloistic” passages. However, arrivals should be well-coordinated. Various fermatas are notated with a timing in seconds (or a brief range of time); these should be pretty strictly followed.

### **The Plot of Our Sad Tale**

A young man is told of a wild beast by an elder at the beginning of our journey: a wild beast with jaws like a panther, a snarl like a wild dog, claws like a hawk, ears like a rabbit... Our young man finds this particularly hootworthy and decides to wander, alone, into the bush to play, walking away from the elder as the elder shouts his warnings. Meanwhile, in a billabong, the bunyip stirs, deep aslumber; his belly begins to bubble with hunger.

The young man reaches a bluff and sees the majesty of the world, the wind blowing, the sun alight on his face. “One day,” he thinks, “I will rule this all, and I will do to it as I please. I will clear the creeks of their tangles and move the water to our farms. I will move all the beasts into a pen and use them how I wish. I will build new cities and no one shall stop me.”

Something in the bush stirs. Startled, he remembers the old man’s warning about the bunyip. He laughs it off, nervously. He proceeds to wander through the bush, slowly swiping his machete at vines, humming some naïve tunes as he marks his path back to the village. Again, something stirs and rumbles in the distance. Stopped in his tracks, the boy whistles a happy melody to himself to calm down.

This, unfortunately, wakes the groggy, ravenous bunyip from the depths of his pool. He emerges slowly, from torpor to anger, one ear, then another, one eye, then another, one tooth, then another, then another, then another, then another... The boy, terrified, scrambles and runs, tripping, and falling, finding no refuge. The bunyip ultimately catches up with him, bats him with his mighty paws, and tosses him into his jaws. Four mighty crunches, a gulp, and a burp. In the belly of the bunyip and in the ears of the villagers ring the last echoes of the warning, of the fable, of the futile screams. The bunyip, momentarily sated, beds down for a nap. But he will again wake up, even hungrier...



# the bunyip

a folktale retelling for alto saxophone and digital sounds

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Transposed Score

**Explosive** ♩ = 52

Alto Sax. *ff*

Digital Sounds *ff* THUMP! Sax echoes. *mp* Glass. *mp* Key clicks... *f* *sfz*

**Calm; suspended.** ♩ = 52

A. Sax. *mp* *f dim.* *n.*

Audio Drum taper. E, G swells. glassy slow glissandi and sweeps *p*

**Poco vivo; bubbling.** ♩ = 120

A. Sax. *p - mp* *poco sotto voce*

Audio metal chunks rattle Bubbling, shifting. Something deep beneath stirs.

## the bunyip

**B** 3" *the earth yawns* Remove mouthpiece. 6" 2"

A. Sx. *n.*  $\langle f \rangle$  *n.* *Blow through horn without mouthpiece.* *n.*  $\langle f \rangle$  *n.*

Audio *p* *gliss/sweep* *echoes* *metallic gesture*

11 *ad lib.* *blow through AND key-click* *f* *n.* *legato* *mp* *blow through; ad lib*

Audio *gliss/sweep* *sand/rattles/jitters* *electro-sizzle* *Bass tone*

14 *marcato* *blow through AND key-click* *violently!* 6" Mouthpiece ON.

A. Sx. *ff possible* *ff*

Audio *rattles, dust, moths of history* *12 unevenly spaced "fwooms"*



**C** ♩ = 70+

A. Sx. *ff* *p-mp* 5 5 7 5

Audio *f* *echoes* *...tapering...* Echoes, etc.

20 *mf* *mp* *ff* *slap!* ~ 6" **D** Naive, unaware ♩ = 66 + (\*) *mp* *mf* 3

Audio *...tapering...* *echoes* *"fwoom"* *"fwoom"* *"fwoom"* *"fwoom"* Sax echoes. Various wailings and textures fade away through til E.

24 *mp* *f* *mf* *ff* *mp* *mf* 5 3 5

Audio *"fwoom"* *"fwoom"* *"fwoom"*

\*) -- "Fwooms" do not regularly appear on beats and exact coordination between the sax and the audio at this point is not necessary. Between rehearsal D and E, there are six total fwooms. Rushing in this section is ill-advised.

Freely. Singing. Nervously casual.

27

A. Sx.

mp

3

3

20"

6"

**E**

**F**

something rumbling beyond the bend...

*p*

*mp*

Audio

glassy textures

The beast groans!

slap!

*n.*

slap!

31

A. Sx.

*mp*

5

*p*

3

*mf*

5

*mf*

3

Audio

"fwoom"

34

A. Sx.

*f*

*mp*

5

*f*

3

*fp*

*f*

5

*fp*

Audio

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 60$

A. Sx. 37 **G** 4" **mf** 6 **n.** **mf** 7 6 **fp** 7 **pp** 6

Audio chime, then bubbles textures continue, lightly...

A. Sx. 40 **H** 2" **p** **mf** **mf** 5 **f** **p** **pp**

Audio textures continue, lightly... textures disappearing **n.**

Digital Silence. Play again once sounds have disappeared.

A. Sx. 43 (accelerate) **pp** **p** **mf** (\*)

Audio **mf**

\*) Hold until Eb chord/attack in digital audio. Don't arrive too late (or too early!)

## the bunyip

45

A. Sx.

*deliberately*

**I**

about 45"  
Interlude.

*it awakens, angered and with great hunger*

*the creature is seen; terror takes hold; it starts to give chase*

Audio

Familiar jitters.

A warning wail.

glassy textures

Another wail.

First growl.

Second growl.

Third growl. Loudest. Get ready.

**J** With a growing unease ♩ = 66+  
*accel.*

A. Sx.

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

3"

**K** Anxious; unsteady ♩ = 110+

Audio

echo-whines

low echoes

low echoes

textures continue, gaining intensity

57

A. Sx.

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

Audio

textures continue, gaining intensity

16th-note pulse becomes more apparent in audio during previous few measures. Start trying to lock into pulse through this passage.

61

A. Sx.

*p* *mf* *mf* *f* *ff* (short - take a breath)

Audio

drums continue to increase in intensity and appearance

66

A. Sx.

*f* *mf* *fp*

gliss / squawk

Sax and audio should be 16th-synched.

"drums" on every 16th...

continues...

electro-jitters

70

A. Sx.

*f* *f* *ff* *ff*

rapidly

continues...

echo grains

## the bunyip

**L** In time. ♩ = 108 +

A. Sx. *f* *stumbling and falling; the creature fills its jaws* *ff* *tongue slaps*

Audio *continues...* *...tapering...* *...tapering...* Drums disappearing...

A. Sx. 75 *flzg.* *pleading.* *f* *mf* *mp* *mf* *swell/gliss*

Audio *swell/gliss*

**M** Screaming for dear life.

A. Sx. *f* *f+* *rapidly; struggling to escape*

Audio *"drums" on every 16th...* *continues...*

the bunyip

the beast chews

82

A. Sx.

quick breaths -- rushed! no stopping! **ff**

Audio

drums continue to increase in intensity and appearance

everything is quickly getting

84

A. Sx.

the beast swallows **N** the beast burps

about 45" \*

**ffff**

CRUNCH! CRUNCH! CRUNCH! CRUNCH!

Big ol' slap!

Residues and echoes in the belly and in the ear.

**pp** \*\*

Prominent sax pitch held

electro-metal-gesture

Audio

considerably crazier

91

A. Sx.

**p - mp**

textures continue, lightly...

...tapering...

**mf** (reverb)

**mf** (reverb)

\* saxophone may remove mouthpiece and blow/key click on *p - mp* ranges through this section, but don't overdo it.

\*\* poco espressivo - but never exceed *mp* marking. These are fragmentary residues.

A. Sx.

95

*ad lib.*

5

*n.*

5"

(or, if you've beaten the digital audio, wait for it to fade.)

Audio

...tapering...

textures disappearing

textures disappearing

*n.*

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "the bunyip". It consists of two staves: "A. Sx." (top) and "Audio" (bottom). The "A. Sx." staff begins at measure 95 and contains a melodic line with a sharp key signature. It includes a five-measure rest marked "5", a section marked "ad lib." with a five-measure rest marked "5", and a final measure with a five-measure rest marked "5". A slur connects the first two measures, and a dashed line connects the first two measures of the "ad lib." section. A wedge-shaped dynamic marking leads to a fortissimo "f" (written as "n.") at the end of the section. The "Audio" staff shows a dotted line labeled "...tapering..." followed by two dashed lines labeled "textures disappearing". A final measure of the "Audio" staff has a five-measure rest marked "5". A note at the bottom right indicates a 5-second duration: "5\" (or, if you've beaten the digital audio, wait for it to fade.)".