Eve Beglarian

Until It Blazes

for piano or plucked string instrument

Until It Blazes (2001) is an amplified solo piece for piano, guitar or other plucked string instrument, harp, marimba, or vibes. The piece requires a stereo multi-tap digital delay for processing. You can also perform the piece using a MIDI keyboard or mallet controller. If you're using a MIDI instrument, I can supply a Max patch that implements the delay as MIDI delay, if it's easier to do that than to use an audio delay.

The piece's duration is variable: I imagine it could work at any duration between six and twenty minutes. I have made a twelve minute version, which you can hear at www.evbvd.com, but it is only one possible version of the piece: please don't regard it as definitive.

The overall idea of the piece is to set up various repeating patterns and then gradually group the notes so that new melodies grow out of the accents. For example, when you are playing a three-note pattern, if you accent every fourth event, you will get one melody; if you accent every fifth event, you will get a different melody.

There are six patterns in **Until It Blazes**, each an outgrowth of the previous pattern. In each case, you will first want to establish the pattern very softly with no accents at all, and then very gradually begin to stress a grouping that creates a slower melody arcing across the pattern. This accenting happens gradually during a slow overall crescendo, reaches some high point, and then the accenting recedes as you diminuendo. The length of the piece will vary depending on how slowly you want the cross-melodies to build and recede. The most interesting place is where you can hear both the pattern and the melody that cuts across it.

Prior to beginning to play the piece, you can (optionally) say the words: "I have cast fire upon the world, and watch, I am guarding it until it blazes." This line is attributed to Jesus in the gnostic **Gospel of Thomas**.

Cory Arcangel is creating a visual component to the piece that can be played back on a laptop and projected for live performance. If you are interested in this aspect of the piece, please contact me.

The stereo delay should be set up as follows:

The left channel should have a delay time of 454 ms (equivalent to a dotted eighth at MM = 99) and should give three repeats. The right channel should have a delay time of 303 ms (equivalent to an eighth note delay at MM = 99) and have four repeats. The delay should be set to approximately 70% of the volume of the direct sound. The direct sound should come from the center of the stereo field.

Until It Blazes is dedicated to Kathy Supové with love and thanks.

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some additional notes regarding **Until It Blazes**

During 6C, you want to build very slowly to triple forte with no accents and then stop abruptly, sustaining the last repetition if your instrument can do this. You can also very gradually add distortion to the mix along with the crescendo. The distortion should be a warm full tube sound, not a grungy overdrive.

There are three patterns that have two different sets of melodies growing out of them. You have various choices for how to get from one melody to the other.

  * you can recede back to the unaccented pattern, and then crescendo again into the B melody
    (in my version, I do this from 6A --> 6B)

  * you can abruptly jump from A to B at the climax (in my version, I do this from 5A --> 5B)

  * you can conflate A and B and do both sets of accents for a while
    (in my version, I do this from 3A --> 3B)