

*With No Name* – Jamie Leigh Sampson  
Analysis by Brian Kauth

Music for an unaccompanied instrument presents special challenges to the performer—a single instrumental timbre, no musical interplay with another player, etc.—but can be a very rewarding endeavor when done well. Jamie Leigh Sampson ([www.jamieleighsampson.com](http://www.jamieleighsampson.com)) has contributed a wonderful solo work for alto saxophone that deserves wider dissemination. *With No Name* was composed in 2012 for this author and premiered at Salem State University in March 2013. I will outline the most salient features of the work, and how other saxophonists may be able to interpret them.

Unlike many other works for the saxophone, it is no easy feat to determine the form of this piece. There are no recurring melodic or rhythmic motives, causing the music to have an improvisatory quality. However, by observing the various tempi found throughout the work and extrapolating that to include elements of musical form, we find that *With No Name* is constructed of eight different sections preceded by a short introduction, creating an arch-like form.

Tone color, or timbre, is the most important musical element to consider when preparing *With No Name* for performance. Rather than using traditional melody or implied harmony as the basis for the composition, Sampson requires that the saxophonist be able to alter the tone color of various pitches through a variety of means (i.e. fingering variations, quarter-tones, articulations) in order to move the piece forward. The composer even uses special symbols to indicate when each timbral technique is to be used in the score. The specific techniques consist of belltones, timbre trills, timbre alterations, slap tongue, flutter tongue, air attacks, and embouchure pitch bends. The symbols which accompany these techniques are displayed at the beginning of the score for easy reference.

Along with timbre variation, pitch manipulation is also extremely important. Sampson frequently employs quarter-tones as expressive devices to alter traditional pitches. These subtle pitch variations also create a timbral contrast, as the quarter-tone fingerings frequently darken the tone color of the pitch (by lowering a pitch by a quarter-tone) or lighten the tone color (by raising a pitch by a quarter-tone). This is evident from the very first pitch of the piece, an A, which is repeated four measures later as an A quarter-tone sharp, lightening the timbre. Similar examples are found throughout the piece. Saxophonists should embrace these timbre changes to create further musical interest for the listener.

Pitch manipulation is also created through register changes and/or embouchure pitch bends. These register changes also add a timbre change, as well, since the different registers of the saxophone possess different tonal characters. As stated above with reference to quarter-tones and their inherent timbral possibilities, the saxophonist must also utilize the timbral possibilities created by register shifts in this work to generate more interest for the listener.

Sampson does not use traditional meter in *With No Name*. Though the work does use measures in order to group pitches together, there is no prevailing meter to generate a definite, constant pulse. The performer should adhere to the specific tempo and durational directions that the composer provides, and keep strict rhythm. The only exception is the last pitch, which the composer asks to be played “as long as possible.” Subsections of the work are delineated by double-bar lines, and are useful for determining phrasing. The performer should make every attempt to emphasize the beginning of each section in order for the listener to hear the change.

Jamie Leigh Sampson’s *With No Name* is a challenging, yet rewarding work for the saxophone, utilizing many extended performance techniques. By eschewing traditional melodic and harmonic procedures, Sampson challenges audiences to listen more attentively to the subtleties and nuances of color in her music. The musical challenges faced by the saxophonist in preparing and performing her music are well worth the effort, as the saxophone’s coloristic possibilities are incorporated to great effect. Saxophonists interested in extended techniques should definitely study this work.