*Be Gentle And Kind With Your Wandering Mind* (2020)

As someone who often finds it hard to turn off his mind — a condition that has cost me a lot of sleep over the years —, the practice of mindfulness has increasingly been a source of calm. And of course, in meditation one often has to gently pull the mind back from thoughts that would distract, without judging those thoughts—the idea is simply to observe and acknowledge them and quickly return to the practice.

Sometimes my mind doesn’t just wander, it gets stuck, like a record — that’s vinyl, for you younger folks. More frequently than I would like, I lie awake in bed with a repetitive sequence of notes or harmonies playing continuously in my brain, and, unfortunately, the notes usually are nothing I would ever want to use in one of my pieces. They usually seem redundant and banal, but I find it is very difficult to banish them.

*Be Gentle And Kind With Your Wandering Mind* was composed for saxophonist Andrew Steinberg and pianist Ashley Zhang, and received its premiere at the North American Saxophone Alliance Biennial Conference at Arizona State University on March 7, 2020. Here follows a brief account of its various wanderings:

A gently rippling piano solo opens the work, with repeated patterns of pitches, eventually interrupted by the saxophone, in declamatory phrases marked *appassionato*; the piano figuration outlasts the saxophone’s interjections, but ultimately peters out. Quasi-clusters in the piano usher in a passage that has something of a rock feel, but with mixed meters, and with the instruments mostly in rhythmic unison, ultimately reaching a climactic point with extreme high notes in the sax against big chords in the piano. The cluster-like chords return, and the music fades gradually to *pianissimo*.

Marked “Fierce. Relentless,” the next section once again begins with the piano clusters, and the sax has a timbral trill before introducing a motive featuring fast repeated notes. A multiphonic ushers in a new fast section, in a somewhat jazzy idiom, with lots of syncopation. The fast repeated notes in the sax return, but are interrupted by sudden cessation of motion and another multiphonic, leading to a cadenza for the sax. More stillness ensues with more multiphonics in a section marked *Cantabile*, which is the closest thing to a lyrical slow movement in the entire piece. This builds to a climactic high point in the sax, interrupted by rapid-fire staccato notes in the piano, which alternate with calmer slow music including low piano chords. All of this is wiped away with the onset of the final section (*Vivo. Scherzando*), a kind of bizarre, pseudo-medieval equivalent of a gigue that swerves back and forth between the raucously high-spirited and the relentlessly frenetic.

**Note to saxophonists:** The notation of the multiphonics in this piece was taken from *The Techniques of Saxophone Playing* by Marcus Weiss and Giorgio Netti (© 2010 by Bäreneiter Verlag Karl Vötterle GmbH & Co.KG, Kassel 4. Auflage/4th printing, 2018). Recorded examples of these can be accessed at:

[www.bärenreiter.com/materialen/weiss\_netti/saxophon](http://www.bärenreiter.com/materialen/weiss_netti/saxophon)

Because differences among players and instruments can produce varying results, performers should feel free to experiment with alternate multiphonic fingerings as needed to produce the approximate effect indicated.

Hayes Biggs