



THE MAN IN BLACK

an Original Solo for Marching Snare Drum

Written & Arranged by:
ZACHARY L. BRUMFIELD

The Man in Black by Zachary L. Brumfield
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OVERVIEW

PREFACE

This piece was named in honor of HBO's Westworld, with the title referencing Ed Harris' character William—better known as "The Man in Black." A figure both complex and unnerving, he embodies qualities I sought to capture through music. I've always been drawn to exploring darkness and angst, and this solo became my interpretation of his aura.

I began working on this piece in March 2021, just a few months before leaving for spring training with the Bluecoats, and finished it less than six hours before my I&E recording session. From the start, my intention was to create an uncomfortable slow burn, and I'm extremely proud of how it took shape. As with my other snare solos, recurring motifs serve as anchor points for the listener. The three-against-two polyrhythm appears almost immediately and remains a constant thread throughout, while the rapid "pu-di-duh" figures (along with R-L-L/L-R-R stickings in general) form the primary motif, reappearing in a variety of rhythmic and stylistic contexts.

The solo opens with striking dynamic contrast: unlike my other works, it begins fortissimo with no established context, designed only to grab the listener's attention before vanishing into pianissimo. This sets up an uneven, unsettled surface for the rest of the piece. The opening passage is one of the most technically dense, meant to be both captivating and impressive from the very first measure.

The second phrase establishes how abnormal this work truly is. Musical phrasing is minimal, the tension builds relentlessly, and there is no obvious payoff—an intentional choice. Soon after, the piece shifts into a collection of fragmented motifs and tributes, some calling back to earlier works of mine, but still resisting a true climax. The following section is my own take on a groove passage. Written at a brisk tempo that made it difficult to weave in existing motifs, this part was simply about having fun and adding a touch of variety to the otherwise uneasy character of the solo.

A grittier transitional motif ushers in the closing section, which I wrote the night before recording and submitting. Here, the tension finally erupts into release: a barrage of notes delivered at a breakneck pace, bursting with energy. For me, this conclusion ties the entire piece together with urgency and resolve.

"The Man in Black" reflects not only the character's haunting complexity but also my ongoing fascination with exploring shadow, unease, and intensity through sound.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the ride.

Notable Achievements.

This original solo for marching snare drum was awarded 2nd place in the Virtual Individual & Ensemble (I&E) Competition Program in 2021.

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an original solo for marching snare drum by Zach Brumfield
2nd Place at I&E 2021



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