
Recent Music for Other Ensembles

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A few pieces for other groups (some of which incorporated members of Comma and Gray Code).

Over the years, a few other groups have performed my verbal scores, often taking them in unexpected directions. Two outside groups have performed my “Walden Sounds” on page 155. Each performance, while yielding unique pleasures, revealed ambiguities in the scores as written that surprised me. To a great extent, the teaching of works like these rests in an oral tradition, where the cracks within the language, once exposed, can be filled in or intentionally left open.

I’m eager to write more pieces for outside groups, especially large ensembles, should the chance arise.

Hi, My Name is G Sharp

Hi, My Name is G Sharp

for multiple people
playing identical portable instruments

Preparing

Each person selects or is assigned
a unique pitch
from a contiguous set of pitches.
(Any tuning may be used.)

For example,
in a group of twelve people
playing in equal temperament,
each would have a unique pitch
from within a single octave.

To help the players
of the various pitches
to identify each other
(in what may be a crowded and
confusing situation),
they may wear signs or name tags
indicating their pitches.

Written as an “icebreaker” for a class of beginning improvisors.

Hi, My Name is G Sharp

Beginning

Starting from silence,
one or more people play
long tones or rhythmic patterns
on their individual pitches.

Continuing

You may play long tones,
rhythmic patterns,
or other combinations
at any time
in any articulation.
Move around the space,
joining up with others
with whom you wish to collaborate.
Wordlessly organize and negotiate
to create sounds and silences together
that work well with
what others are playing.

Ending

The piece ends
after a predetermined amount of time
or by consensus.

Candles for Sarah

Candles for Sarah

for multiple voices

Beginning

Sing the syllable “donn”
(pronounced as in German)
simultaneously
on a steady pitch in a middle range.
The start of the syllable can be triggered
throughout the performance
either intuitively
or through visual or other signals.

After a pause, sing it again,
simultaneously
on the same pitch or one near it.
If you triggered the singing of the previous syllable,
wait for another person to trigger the current one.

Composed in memory of Sarah Angel Easterwood (09/19/1978 — 10/25/1998), a close friend of a close friend. A large group of friends premiered this piece in Austin, Texas, on December 30, 1998. Sarah’s mother, Mysti Easterwood, attended the performance.

Continuing

Continue to repeat the syllable, as before,
singing it with different lengths
and with pauses of different lengths,
always starting the syllable simultaneously.
Independently, switch to singing the syllable
on a pitch rising slowly from the bottom of your range.

Once everybody is singing the rising pitches,
independently move to other ways of singing the syllable,
with different pitches, durations, and articulations,
always starting the syllables simultaneously.

Ending

Independently, move to singing the syllable in a high range
as a wavering between two pitches,
each person using differing pitches
and a different rate of wavering.

When every one is singing the wavering pitches,
switch to singing single high pitches
near the pitches that the others are singing.
Move the pitches close enough
to bring out beats and difference tones.
End together.

Shimmer/Ascension

Shimmer/Ascension

for handbell choir

This piece consists of two elements
that are played together.

Shimmer is an ensemble background
that continues throughout the performance.

Ascension is a series of solos and duets
that involve different players
throughout the performance.

When you are not involved in playing **Ascension**,
you should be playing **Shimmer**.

Other elements could be created to be played
together with **Shimmer**
or with **Ascension**
or with both.

The performance proceeds
without an indicated key or tempo.

Composed at the request of a member of a local handbell choir (though
the choir has decided, for now, to stick to more traditional material).

Shimmer/Ascension

A conductor may work with the players
to help with the balance of the ensemble
and with the progress
among the parts of the performance.

Shimmer

Shimmer

Beginning

Starting together,
ring one of your bells quietly,
letting it vibrate.

When its sound has faded away, either
ring the same bell again, or
ring another of your bells
that is a half-step away.
(For example, after ringing an A,
you may either ring the A again
or ring A flat or A sharp.)

Continuing

Continue in this way throughout the piece,
staying with the same bell
or moving among bells by half-steps
when you feel that it is time to do so.

Shimmer

Ending

After a predetermined amount of time,
at a signal,
or by consensus,
let your last note fade away
until all the bells are silent.

Ascension

Ascension

Beginning

Starting with the player
of the lowest set of bells:

Play a solo improvisation,
more prominent than the ensemble background,
sounding your bells
in any way that seems appropriate,

If you choose not to improvise,
you may create a part for yourself ahead of time,
or use a previously created part,
or play your part of the ensemble background
more prominently than usual.

The player of the next higher set of bells
then joins that player in a duet,
more prominent than the ensemble background,
sounding the bells
in any way that seems appropriate,
interacting with each other.

The lower player then drops back
into the background texture.

Continuing

Proceed upward through the players, in order,
with each

- joining a duet with the next lower player,
- playing briefly solo when that player drops out,
- being joined in a duet by the next higher player,
- then dropping back into playing the ensemble background.

Ending

The player of the highest bells
continues in a solo
when the next lower player drops back
then drops back into the ensemble background.

Ascension

Alternate Method

If the players are positioned
so that each can see and hear all the other players:

The series of solos and duets
can proceed in any order,
except that you may only
enter into a duet with a player
if you have not yet played a duet together
in that performance.

Any player may choose
to refrain from participating in the foreground
and remain in the ensemble background
throughout the performance.

The piece may end
when all players have returned
to the ensemble background.

The group may agree upon a signal
(such as the end of a processional)
at which time they must
return to the background and end,
or they may end by consensus.

Welcome, Elijah

Welcome, Elijah

for one or more voices, instruments, or dancers

The Environment

The piece integrates
the sounds of the performance environment
with the sounds of the performers.
If the performance space environment
contains too few sounds,
you may place at least two microphones
in a more sonically active space
(such as outdoors)
and direct their output to amplifiers and speakers

Composed for a joint performance by Comma and the Choir of the Church of St. Stephen and the Incarnation in Washington, DC.

As we set up for the performance, we decided that too few sounds were coming in through the windows, so we set up a microphone pointing out the window and an amplifier in the space. That picked up too little sound too, so for the performance we opened all the doors and windows. Enough sound came in for the piece to proceed successfully.

We have also used this piece at improvisation workshops as an opening exercise in listening and sounding.

The title refers to the Jewish custom of opening the doors of the house to welcome the Prophet Elijah to the Passover Seder.

Welcome, Elijah

arranged in the performance space
so that their relationship
to the performers and audience
is the same as that of the microphones
to the virtual listener
in the monitored space.

If this is not possible,
you may use an unedited accurate recording
of an active space
from the point of view of a stationary listener.

Ideally, each performance of the piece will use
a previously unheard segment of the recording
so that the performers are not familiar with
the order and distribution of the events
to which they will respond.

Preparing

Decide on a cueing sound or class of sounds
to which you will respond
from those that occur
in the performance environment.

Determine what sound or action
you will use as a response,
and, optionally,
how selected parameters of the sound
will determine aspects of your response.

Your response must be
loud or active enough
to be perceived by the audience,
yet quiet enough that you can clearly hear
the end of the cueing sound.

The duration of the response should closely match
the duration of the cueing sound.
For example, a response to a dog bark
would be short,
and a reaction to a passing siren would last
as long as the siren takes to pass.

Welcome, Elijah

If you have not had a chance
to listen to this environment
before the performance,
you may quickly make these choices
in its opening moments.

Beginning

The performance begins
at a predetermined signal
or by consensus.

If using a remote or recorded environment,
the sound is gradually faded up
to mix with the room ambiance.

Welcome, Elijah

Continuing

The performance continues,
with performers reacting to their cueing sounds
in as close to real time as possible
and remaining still
when the cueing sounds are not happening.

Performers may join and exit the performance
as it goes on.

Optionally, audience members may be allowed
to join the performance.
Those who wish to join
a performance in progress
should be provided a copy of this score, and
should quietly direct any questions
to a person who has volunteered
to answer them.¹

1. This feature of the piece is directly inspired by the score of Robert Ashley's "She Was A Visitor".

Welcome, Elijah

Ending

The performance ends
at a predetermined time
or a predetermined signal
or by consensus.

If using a remote or recorded environment,
the sound is gradually faded down to silence.

Raising the Sukkah of Sound

for multiple voices

“Light waves of joy continuously flow; one wave ascends and immediately, without pause, a second wave, brighter and more cheerful than the first, descends and emanates. Yet the sukkah is stationary and therefore appears to be one sukkah, whereas in truth, every second, every moment, there is a completely new sukkah.”

*Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook,
Celebration of the Soul, p.70*

Aramaic Source Text (by Rabbi Isaac Luria)

u-lu enter	ush-pi-zin guests	i-la-in exalted	ka-di-shin sacred
u-lu enter	a-va-han ancestors	i-la-in exalted	ka-di-shin sacred
te-vu be seated	ush-pi-zin guests	i-la-in exalted	te-vu be seated
te-vu be seated	ush-pi-zin guests	m'-hem-nu-ta faithful	te-vu be seated

Composed on the Jewish Renaissance Havurah *Ayin Shel Eytz* in Washington, DC, as part of a service for the holiday of Sukkot.

Raising the Sukkah of Sound

General Note

At any point, if you don't know what to do (or even if you do), it's OK to listen quietly and attentively to the sounds around you, sounding again when you feel like doing so.

Beginning

Listen in silence to your surroundings.

When you are ready, sing the word **u-lu** at any steady pitch, at any speed, at any volume.

Pause as long as you'd like and listen to what the others are singing, then sing it again, at a different steady pitch, at any speed and volume that fits with what others are singing. (Don't worry about singing it "wrong"; listen clearly and trust your instincts and it will sound right.)

Continuing

Continue singing the word **u-lu**. Sing it each time at a different pitch than the previous time, at any speed, at any volume.

One at a time, sing each of the five words

ush-pi-zin
i-la-in
ka-di-shin
a-va-han
m'-hem-nu-ta

Raising the Sukkah of Sound

either generally rising or generally falling in pitch. Take as long or as short a time as you'd like with each word, up to a full breath per syllable.

In between the five words, continue to sing the word **u-lu**.

You can also sing the word **te-vu** in the same way that you sing **u-lu**.

Ending

Once you have sung all five words, continue to sing the word **te-vu** in the same way that you sang **u-lu**.

Once everyone is singing the word **te-vu** repeatedly, gradually stop singing, either all at once or independently, until everyone is silent.

If not now...

If not now...

for multiple voices or instruments

“If I am not for myself, who is for me?
But if am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?”

Rabbi Hillel, Sayings of the Fathers, 1:14

General Note

At any point, if you don't know what to do (or even if you do), it's OK to listen quietly and attentively to the sounds around you, sounding again when you feel like doing so.

I have had the opportunity to perform this piece with a large number of different groups since I first composed it for the Jewish Renaissance Havurah *Ayin Shel Eytz* (which has since disbanded). The congregation, the ensembles Comma, Gray Code, and SciDolomRah, workshops led by each, and the rock band Elevator Noir are among the groups which have performed it.

The piece sounds quite different with the different groups. In its first performance, which was at an *Ayin Shel Eytz* service, the sound was rather tentative; however, later performances by other groups of “non-musicians” have been more direct. Most performances turn out somewhat arrhythmic and drifting. With Elevator Noir, however, it tended to settle into a Coltrane/Santana-like groove.

Direct influences on the piece include traditional Jewish chant, “Dreaming of the Masters” by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and John Coltrane’s “A Love Supreme”.

If not now...

Beginning

Play and sing the note **e**, getting the pitch from the instruments.¹

After a while, sing the following melody repeatedly, quietly, at a medium speed. You can wait while the melody goes around a few times before joining in, if you'd like.

e b a ... e c b g ... e g ... e g a a ...

(where the note **e** is the lowest of the pitches.)

1. The melody may be transposed to fit the available voices or instruments more comfortably. I originally set it in **e** to accommodate a drone on guitar, but we have performed it in other keys as well.

If not now...

Continuing

Gradually slow the melody down. As it slows, you can add embellishments to it, such as:

- singing a harmony line
- adding bits of melody between the notes
- changing the rhythm
- changing the phonemes with which you are singing.

While this is happening, you are still free to:

- sing the melody itself together with others
- sing the e drone
- listen quietly and attentively.

You may switch among these strategies at any time, as well as joining what others are singing and creating embellishments to their soundings.

If not now...

Ending¹

Join in the melody or sing the E drone again.

Once everyone is either singing the melody or the E drone or is silent, if you are still singing, gradually rejoin the E drone or fall silent.

Once everyone is either singing the E drone or is silent, gradually fall silent.

1. In practice, performances of this piece have ended differently from the original score: we recapitulate the opening melody twice before returning to the drone.

The piece has also occasionally ended on a drone of A, instead of or in addition to the E.

In Traffic

In Traffic

for multiple voices

Beginning

Everybody starts together
sounding looping vocal phrases
of any length or content.
Gradually shift speeds
until everyone is sounding
at a common tempo.

Continuing

Continue sounding,
shifting phrases whenever you want,
but maintaining the same tempo.
Do not duplicate phrases
that others are performing.

Conceived for SciDolomRah and completed for the QslashC ensemble's 2000 tour. Inspired by the music of King Crimson, Ornette Coleman's Prime Time band, and King Sunny Ade and by the visual interactions of Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

The Stop Signal

In a Stop action,
everyone simultaneously stops sounding
then starts again after a pause.

To request a stop action
stretch out one arm
with the palm out and facing forward.

Others acknowledge the stop request
by also stretching out one arm
with the palm out and facing forward.

When all have acknowledged the signal
simultaneously raise your arms, pointing upward,
and stop sounding.

After a brief pause,
drop your arms and resume sounding as before.

In Traffic

The Shift Signal

In a Shift action,
everyone shifts simultaneously to new phrases.

To request a Shift action,
stretch one arm forward,
elbow bent,
pointing to one side.

Others acknowledge the Shift request
by also stretching out one arm
elbow bent,
pointing to one side.

When all have acknowledged the signal,
simultaneously drop your arms,
pointing downward,
and shift to a new pattern.

Ending

To request an end to the piece,
stretch both arms forward,
palms facing each other.

Others acknowledge the End request
by also stretching both arms forward,
palms facing one another.

When all have acknowledged the signal,
simultaneously pull your arms inward and together
and stop sounding.

