

Nicolas Collins
English Music
for four or more wind or brass instruments and prepared CD

General Notes

This is a piece for CD playback and live acoustic instruments. The backing CD consists of parallel tracks of two examples of English 16th century consort music, elongated by skipping of the playback mechanism. Each CD "pause loop" lasts about 10-15 seconds before advancing to the next fragment. The CD determines the tuning, tonality, tempo and phrasing of the live instrumental performance.

This is a rather static work: the CD has no obvious tonal progression, and the live performance consists of freely sequenced techniques for improvising harmonic and rhythmic variation on the sounding CD. There is no sense of linear development. The instrumental performance should be approached with the goal of highlighting material already present in the recording.

The variation techniques are divided into two groups: "Individual" and "Group." Players choose independently and freely amongst the Individual Techniques, whilst Group Techniques must be coordinated by the group. Each musician should not play (ie, remain silent) for at least 50% of the performance.

The CD

Play back the CD through a good stereo sound system. Volume level should be loud enough that the acoustic instruments can "hide" within the electronic texture. The CD is 18 minutes long; the performance duration can be anywhere from 8 to 18 minutes long. If the performance ends before the end of the CD the CD level should be muted quickly rather than fading out, unless you choose to end with the *one long chord* section, in which case it is faded (see below.)

Variation Techniques -- Individual

Any player may select any one of these techniques at any time, without coordination with any other player (ie, one player may be *Ticking* while one is playing *One Long Tone*, one playing *Staccato* and two are resting.) Each event lasts for one or two "pause loops." **After playing wait at least one full pause loop before playing again.** Never perform the same technique twice in a row.

- *Ticking*
Make percussive, relatively unpitched sounds: key slaps, reed slaps, tongue clucks, tapping instrument with hard object. Play sparsely and quietly -- a maximum of six attacks per pause loop phrase.

- *One Long Tone* <>
A tone of one full breath duration, long crescendo-decrescendo shape. Play a single pitch, chosen from the CD chord sounding at the time of attack and sustain it for the duration of one full breath.
- *Two Tone Suspension/Resolution* <>
Play a pitch, chosen from the CD chord sounding at the time of attack; suspend it over the change to the next pause loop; resolve it to a pitch of the new CD chord. To be played on one breath.
- *Staccato*
Repeat a single pitch rhythmically, observing the pulse of the CD skip but with a rhythmic pattern of your choice (simple or complex.) If possible vary the timbre with each articulation.

Variation Techniques -- Group

Since these techniques require co-ordination among players, the musicians must agree in advance on some silent signal that can be used to indicate the choice of technique and cue its articulation. Each of these methods can be used only once in the performance.

- *Passing Tone*
A single pitch, chosen from the CD chord sounding at the time of attack, is sustained for a minimum of four full pause loops by being "passed" from one player to another to another -- the attack of the new player should overlap the release of the old player to create a seamless sound, a single, suspended pitch going through a series of timbre transformations before finally resolving. The event ends when a player decides to resolve the tone to a pitch present in the current chord.
- *One Long Chord* <>
A chord, long crescendo-decrescendo shape, attack coordinated among the four players. Each player chooses a pitch from the CD chord sounding at the time of attack and sustains it for the duration of his or her own breath -- the attack is synchronized (and may be cued by any player) but the decay is staggered according to breath capacity. Repeat 3-5 times, waiting at least one full pause loop before each new attack.

If you choose to end the performance with this section you must cue the sound engineer to fade the CD out under your last chord, but before you end, so that the instruments decay into silence.

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