

Frederic Rzewski: Performance Procedure for Coming Together

Voice: The first fragment of text ("I think") should be spoken as an upbeat to the beginning. Thereafter every fragment of text is spoken at the beginning of each measure. The speaker should try to suggest a different expressive character with each repetition of a sentence.

Instruments: *Coming Together* can be performed by any number of instrumentalists, although it is usually done with a group of 8 to 10 players. At least one of the players, usually an electric bass or bass guitar, plays the entire bass line as written. This may be reinforced by using also piano or synthesizer. For the remainder of the ensemble, there is a single basic playing technique which appears in a somewhat different form in each of the eight sections (letters A through H). In this technique, each player follows the written bass line without playing all of the notes, but only some of them, sometimes at random, sometimes in accordance with a given scheme, sometimes sustaining them and sometimes not. Whether a note is short or long, it must be played together with the bass line, either at unison or some octave doubling, depending on the instrument.

A: All instruments attack the first low G together *ff*, sustaining it (*diminuendo to pp*) for two to three measures, after which only the bass line is heard. Gradually, after a few measures of silence the instruments begin to enter in staggered fashion, very softly, with long sustained sounds *pp*. Each note should last at least a measure, and should be followed by a few measures of silence. This last depends on the number of instruments playing, but the general effect should be that of individual isolated sounds of different instruments fading in and out of each other.

B: Divide the ensemble into two groups, high and low. The higher instruments play only the notes with accents, the low instruments only the low G's, somewhat sustained.

C: Somewhat similar in character to A, but with more activity. Instead of playing single sustained notes of one or two measures' duration, as in A, each player plays short chains of two or three notes, *legato*, each note lasting two to four beats. Each chain should be separated by a silence of a few measures. As in A, let only one or two instruments play at a time.

D: Similar to B, but with the rôles reversed. High instruments play only the high B-flats, low instruments only the notes marked *staccato*.

E: Each player constructs short melodies by choosing notes *ad libitum* (but without ever playing two sixteenth-notes in succession), about three or four per measure, and playing them *legato* and *pp*. A melody may consist of five to ten notes. After each melodic phrase a player should rest for a measure or two, then play another melody. This is a rather difficult technique to master. It is important that not all instruments play at periodic intervals (e.g. on the beat). A player should choose beforehand what note he/she wants to play, wait for it to come up, then play exactly together with the bass line. At the end of E all the players drop out gradually with the exception of the bass line.

F: This section resembles E, but has a virtuoso character. Each player chooses notes at random and plays them *staccato sforzato*, as fast as he/she can play without ever playing two sixteenth-notes in succession, and taking care to be precisely together with the bass-line. The combined should be of a continuous rapid alternation of instrumental colors, without ever having more than one pitch sounding at the same time.

G: Continue the hocketing effect of F, except that now each player plays short groups of sixteenth-notes rather than individual notes. These groups are chosen at random by each player: short at first (3—4 notes) and separated by longer silences (a few beats), then becoming longer, with shorter silences between them, as H is approached.

H: Each player plays all of the notes, or as many as possible given the limitations of breathing, etc. The sound should be very full and all notes executed precisely together up to the end, which should be in strict tempo with a sharp cut-off.

ATTICA: The instrumentation is the same as for *Coming Together*. Some instruments sustain a drone on B-flat, or a B-flat major chord. The others follow the written melody, playing or resting *ad lib.*, reading either at the written pitch or playing a parallel melody a sixth below or a third above (always in the key of B-flat). Some instruments may improvise freely within this melody. The music begins softly, builds to *f*, then drops to *p* again on page 3, line 5, then builds to *f* again and ends very loud. The vocalist may speak or sing the words *ad lib.*