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onwards

for three instruments and computer

©1999/2001

version for three instruments and CD playback

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Commissioned by the Konzerthaus Vienna
for the ensemble „trio accanto"

http://www.essl.at/works/onwards.html

Playing Instructions

Instrumentation

onwards is a composition for three instruments and computer (or CD). Each instrument has to be a member of a different family, while the computer part is played by the composer on a computer-based electronic instrument (called „m@ze°2") developed by himself. If the composer is not available, a special CD with the pre-recorded electronic layer can be used. It can be requested by sending an email to essl@eunet.at

The premier was played by an ensemble consisting of prepared piano, saxophon and percussion („trio accanto"). Another valid combination – for instance - could be: electric guitar, cello, and flute.

Score

The `score` represents the temporal and formal progression of the piece which lasts 21 minutes. The three instruments play the upper three layers of the score, whereas the fourth layer belongs to the computer-based instrument.

    onwards is composed of 4 different `structure-types` (DRONES, TEXTURES, REPETITIONS, POINTS) organized in a time score – using space notation – which determines the exact temporal position and duration of so-called `structure-events`.

    Each musician has to work out his own part individually, and it is up to him to decide how determined the result will be. In the ideal case, the musicians will improvise during the performance, following the temporal and structural constraints indicated in the score and reacting to the global context that is emerging at the moment of the performance. Each player has to use a stop watch.

structure-events
A `structure-event` ist represented in the score by a box with determined start and end time and a name indicating one of the 4 structure-types mentioned above. The length of a structure-event ranges between 10" and 105". This durations can be subdivided into several `phrases` (i.e. time filled with sound) separated by `pauses`. Both the durations of the phrases and of the pauses are freely determined by the performers. Example: a duration of 30" can be subdivided into: 15" phrase - 5" pause - 10" phrase. For a given structure-event all phrases should be built using the same material.

transitions
Whenever two structure-events are following each other without a silence in between, the musicians should make transitions from one structure-type to the next one: instead of a hard cut there should be a smooth fade-in/out. It is up to the musicians to decide when the transition starts and ends.

Structure types

DRONES

Long sustained homogenous sounds with slight variations in pitch and color. A drone phrase always starts „al niente", grows up to a maximum dynamic determined by the musician (between p and ff), roughly in the middle of its duration, and diminishes down to „niente" again.

   Recipe: Play a sound. Make an even swelling and fading over the entire `phrase` length. After you have played one drone make a `pause`. Play the same DRONE again, followed by another `pause`. Alternate this as long as the whole `structure` lasts.

Piano:
- bowed strings
- move a Superball mallet or a the rim of a drinking glass (or a cowbell) along the strings by applying some pressure

Percussion:
- tremolo on Gran Cassa or timpani using <u>very soft</u> beaters
- bowed keys on the Vibraphone
- bowed cymbal or TamTam

Saxophone:
- ordinary sustained tone (also with slight glissando)
- multiphonics

TEXTURES

Mass structure achieved by the dense overlapping of small sound grains. The inner tempo must be high enough so that the impression of a „moving static" is achieved. The shape of a TEXTURE can gradually vary in register, dynamic and tempo. As with all structure-events, it consists of the alternation of `phrases` and `pauses`.

Piano:
- fast attacks of the strings with sticks and/or mallets
- roll several table-tennis balls across the inner strings and use the right pedal in a creative way
- move a metal chain inside the strings
- place a metal string inside the strings and play on the keyboard or on the strings
- brush the piano strings (don't forget the pedal!)
- tremolando or trill-like movements („clouds") on the highest or lowest keys (which are damped!)
- press a small beer bottle on the strings and move it slightly along the strings while playing trill like figures and „clouds" with the other hand on the keys

Percussion:
- fast actions with brushes, mallets and/or sticks etc. on different surfaces
- play on the wind chimes or metal chimes
- fast, but always blurred play on Vibraphone (pedal depressed), Marimba or Glockenspiel - avoid to create the impression of comprehensible pitches

Saxophon:
- fast movements with pitches and/or noises, also using extrem sounds utilizing vocal techinques, slap tongues, key noises and clicks.

REPETITIONS

Pulsations created by repeating short percussive sounds in a freely determined tempo. Within a phrase, a certain amount of of pulsations may be replaced by rests, whilst the tempo can be stable or gradually (accelerando, ritardando). The dynamic envelope of a phrase can either be constant, changing, crescendo, diminuendo or fade-in/out. Superimpositions of several layers of repetetitions (each of them in a different tempo) are also possible.

Piano:
- damped keys (= highest or lowest keys)
- plucked strings inside the piano (using finger, nail or plektron)
- clusters played on the keyboard
- hit the inner metal frame with a Claves or the handle of a beater
- hit the resonance table of the piano with finger nails or a beater (mallet)

Percussion:
- short percussiv sounds on any instrument that allows its production

Saxophon:
- staccato notes
- slap tongue (pitched / unpitched)
- key clicks
- vocal sounds (consonants like „k", „t", „p", „tsch", „ts"; tongue clicks, etc.) spoken into the instrument

POINTS

Gestalt composed of a variety of heterogenous elements. As opposed to TEXTURES, the inner tempo must be slow enough so that single elements can be easily perceived. Treated with outmost love and care, POINTS can result into espressive gestures. When increasing energy, dynamic and density the „pointillistic" character can be transformed into a gestural relationship which eventually might result in a climax.

Sound examples

The enclosed audio CD contains examples for the 4 different sound structures. They have been played live by the composer on his computer-based electronic instrument „m@ze°2".

Here is the list of the CD tracks:

1 – 3	**DRONES**
4 – 6	**TEXTURES**
7 – 9	**REPETITIONS**
10 – 12	**POINTS**

Percussion instruments

Proposal for instrument selection...

Skin instruments

- Gran Cassa
- Snare Drum
- several TomToms (suspended / StandTom)
- BassDrum with pedal, strongly damped
- a pair of Bongos and ev. Congas
- ev. a pedal timpani

Metal instruments

- large TamTam
- several cymbals of different size (also: chinese and sizzle)
- ev. several Javanese gongs
- 1-2 cowbells
- pieces of scrap metal
- metal chimes

Wood instruments

- temple blocks
- wood blocks
- ev. slit drums
- Maracas / Cabaza
- wind chimes

Mallet instruments

- vibraphone
- ev. marimba
- Glockenspiel

Piano preparations

NB: in this piece, no normal piano sound (produced by traditional playing on the keyboard) should be used. (Exceptions, however, may occur.) Instead, view the piano as a sort of interesting percussion set and act on it with different tools such as:

- bow hair (used material, from a luthier) and colophonium
- Plektrons
- Claves
- Mallets
- a Superball-Mallet
- drinking glass
- brushes
- a real Cowbell
- a small beer bottle
- a metal chain (not too heavy!)
- table-tennis balls
- 2 blocks of wood covered with sand paper

The 5 lowest and the 6 highest strings must be prepared using damping wedges („Dämpfer-keile") so that these strings are completely damped – they should not produce any pitch.

Make several bushels of collophoniated bow hair and fix the ends with Scotch tape. Place those „piano bows" around select piano strings. Bowing up and down (while pressing the right pedal) will produce a long sustained sound. Its timbre can be changed by using different degrees of pressure and speed.