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Composition: Our Way (series of 10 pieces)

Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Carl

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OUR WAY

10 pieces for ensemble ad libitum

Dur.: all pieces last approx. 6 minutes unless
a different duration has been determined.

Hommage à Alexis Porfiriadis

... collective decisions ... dramatically change the relationship between performers. They do not just 'perform' their part or follow their individually prepared path. Performers are invited to build a team (even temporarily), and to discuss, negotiate and come to a decision (at least) concerning the form of a piece.

In these cases the creative process moves from the person to the group and this provides a fertile ground for a kind of creativity to grow that cannot be defined as a property of individuals but as a 'property of groups' (Sawyer 2003: 25)

Alexis Porfiriadis: Collective thoughts: a collaborative approach to preparation and performance of open form compositions for groups. PhD thesis. Bath Spa University, 2016, p.21.



Carl Bergstam-Nielsen 2021

revised 2022

OUR WAY PIECES

The "ensemble ad libitum" to play these pieces was thought of as large enough to be a diverse group, and small enough to enable you all to hear and react to each other. Use stop-watches to keep the approximate duration of the proposed standard duration of 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to change it.

According to the motto on the front page, the focus of this collection is on sharing form issues with the musicians playing. Below is an overview of its 10 pieces.

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	WHEN IS THE FORM DECIDED?
1	Graphic/verbal descriptions of 3 sections - choose sequence and invent transitions	Before playing
2	Verbal descriptions of 5 sections - choose 2, their sequence, and choose between 3 kinds of transitions and 2 kinds of ending	Before playing
3	Graphic score with one element missing - invent it	Before playing
4	Verbal descriptions of 2 sections with general pauses between them in a repeated cycle. Durations of sections to be varied	During playing
5	Verbal descriptions of 8 sections with general pauses between them in a cyclical sequence. Durations of sections to be varied	During playing
6	Suggestion to discuss motivations for playing an open piece. 2 or more sections and transitions to be chosen from a reservoir of 8, within 4 categories	Before playing
7	3 given, verbally described elements. Mainly their durations is to be determined.	Before playing / during rehearsing / during playing.
8	2 graphic/verbally described sections. In the first one, maximum tension should be built from repeated action.	During rehearsing/playing
9	2 sections. In playing, the last one may be omitted.	During playing
10	During improvised playing, a recurring element is brought in from previous observation, influencing the piece.	During playing

Our Way 1

In this piece, the composer wishes to share the process of deciding on how many different sections a piece should contain, and how they are to stand in a contrast to each other and how to change from one to another in case there is more than one.

Decide by common discussion whether you would like to use 1, 2 or all 3 of the graphic pictures provided and in which sequence. The total duration is in all cases to be 6 minutes. This total duration is in principle to be divided in three equally long parts between the graphic sections chosen (see more below).

The common discussion should include all members. Decisions should not be taken by any single person, and not settled by random procedures either.

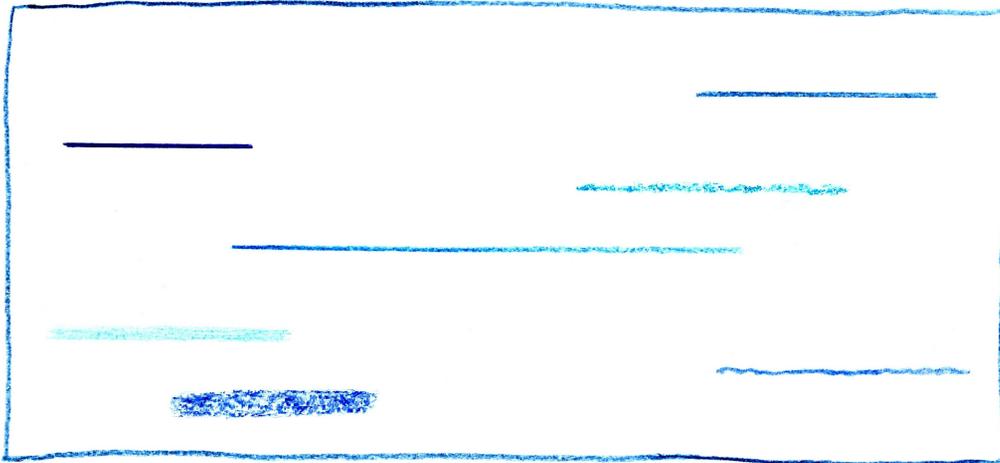
The graphics appear as stills, portraits, showing some selection of music material. They are not meant to be followed closely along a timeline, just to give an impression of characteristic textures. You can make your section dynamic according to your ideas and liking. The verbal instructions must be followed. Else, interpretation of the graphics is free.

If you have chosen more than one graphic element, then consider also the transitions between them and find out ways to make them musically meaningful. This could involve gradual moves and even contrapuntal strategies applied to a previous section - that is, something that may later emerge as belonging to the material of a new section. In all cases however, it is vital to contemplate the contrasts you are setting up (or not) and place them beside each other as you find musically interesting - or, in the case of only one section, to sustain (or vary) a musically interesting focus.

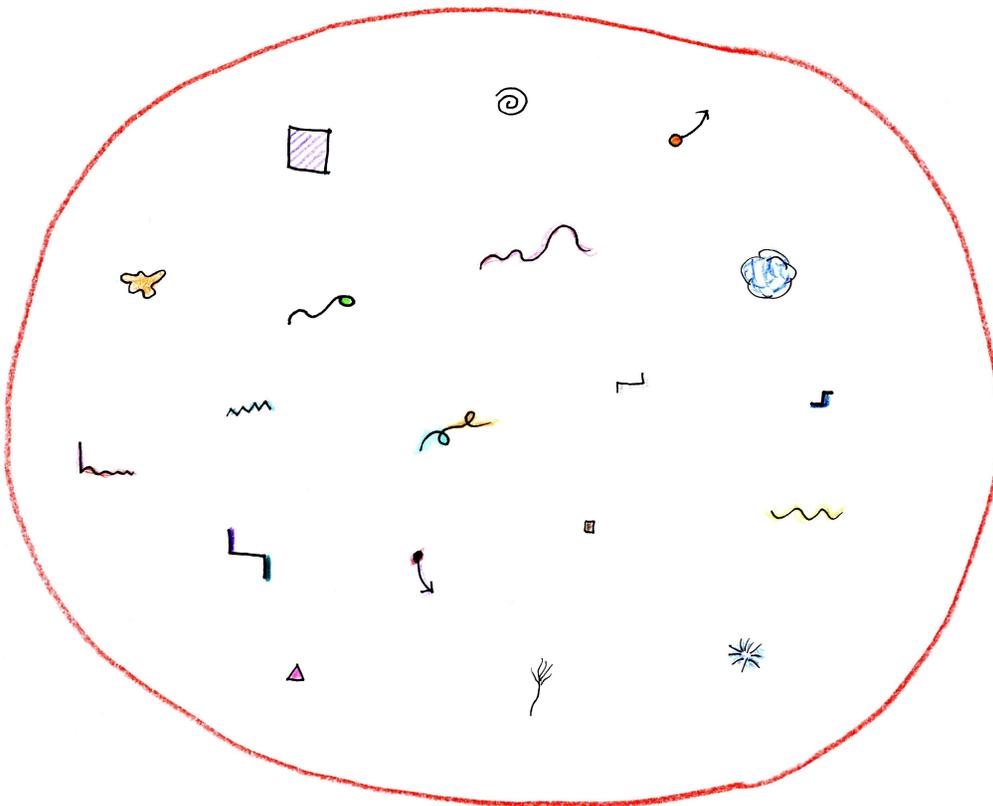
Using stop-watches is recommended for keeping the overall duration, but other, more organic, means to bring about the transitions/shifts between sections by ear would be preferable. Sections do not have to be measured exactly.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to choose a different one.

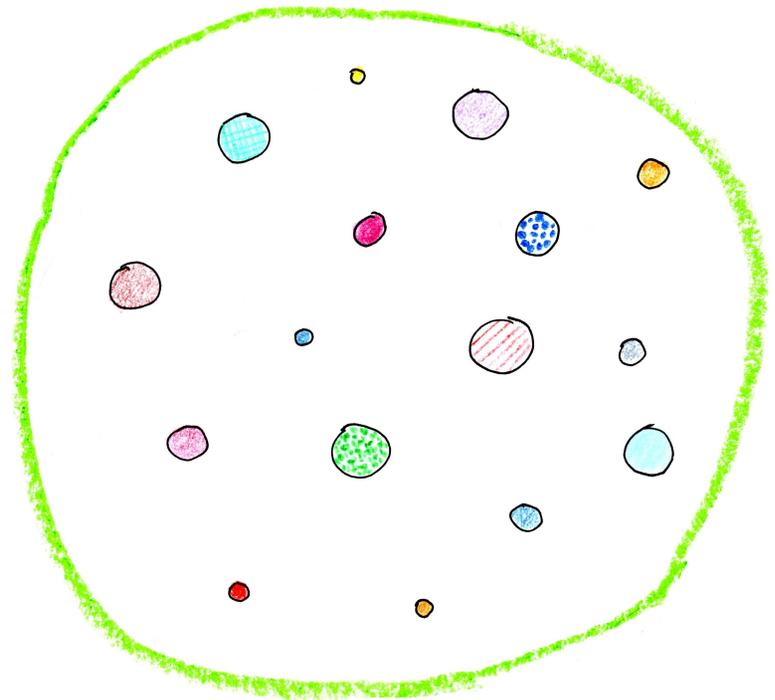
LONG TONES OF DIFFERING DURATIONS
AND WITH DIFFERENT TIMBRES AND INNER MICRO-MOVEMENTS



SMALL FIGURES / GESTURES / OUTBURSTS



SHORT, MOSTLY LIGHT, DIVERSE
TONES AND SOUNDS



Our Way 2

VERY FAST	STATIC & MAJESTIC	SUDDEN STATIC EVENTS BUT QUIET MOST OF THE TIME	STRANGE / FUNNY CONTRASTS	CONVERSATIONAL - ASKING MANY QUESTIONS
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In this piece, the composer wishes to share the process of picking which contrasts a composition consisting of two sections should contain, and how they make the transition between them as well as the end of the piece.

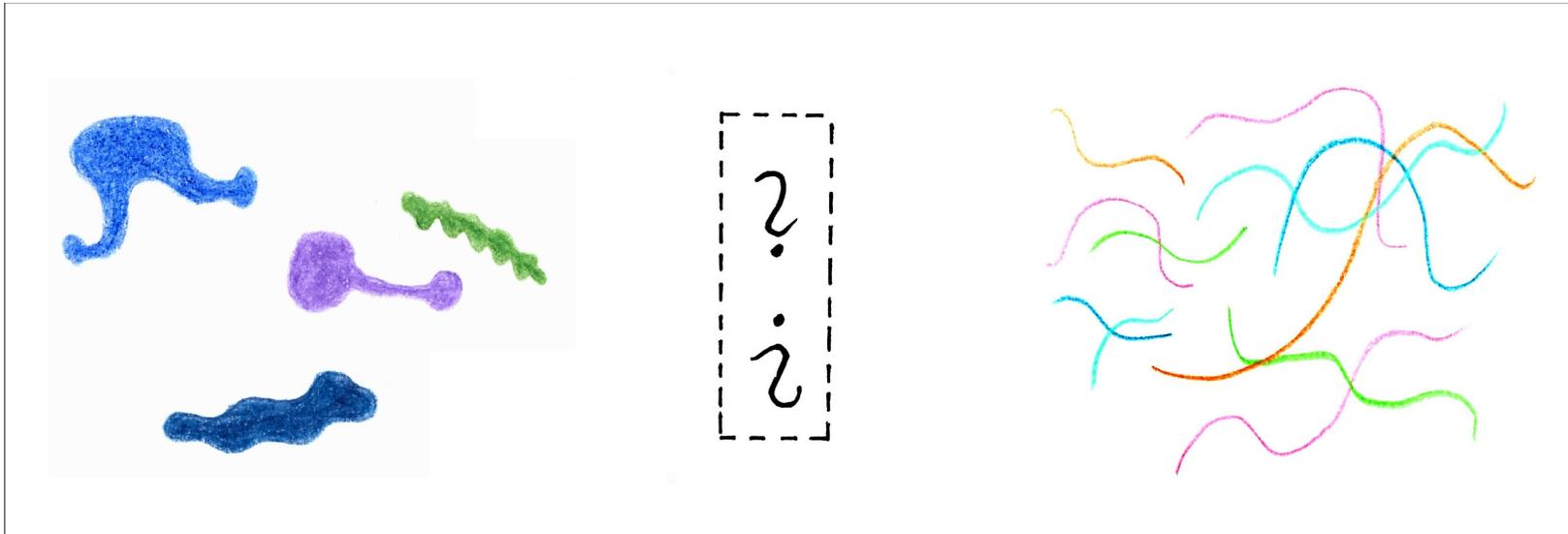
Choose by common discussion 2 of the elements and choose a sequence in which to play them. The total duration is in all cases to be 6 minutes. This total duration is in principle to be divided into two approximately equally long sections. Conclude with determining how the transition between the two elements should be: a) by a general pause - b) by a crossfading accomplished by ear (and how long it should be) - c) by a gradual transition transforming one into the other (maybe difficult but you could try). Also decide on how the piece should end: I) by fading out (and how long?) - II) by ending by ear abruptly

The common discussion should include all members. Decisions should not be taken by any single person, and not settled by random procedures either.

Using stop-watches is recommended for keeping the duration. Sections should be considered of equal duration, but this does not have to be measured exactly (this is especially important if ending II) is chosen. You may for instance look away from the watch at 5:30 and from then on rely on ears alone).

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to choose a different one.

Our Way 3



In this piece, the composer wishes to share the task of creating a new element to go in between two existing ones.

The graphics are to be read and interpreted freely from left to right. They are not meant to be followed strictly, rather to give an impression of characteristic textures. Some preparation is due:

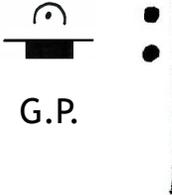
First, find out together whether you would like to read the graphics the way it appears here, or with this page turned upside down.

Second, create a middle section to replace the question marks. What would be a good idea to have in between the first and last graphics? This does not have to be a rendition of the whole picture. You may agree on describing the middle section in any way (graphic, verbal for instance) in a supplementary way. Also find out how you would like the transitions to and from it. After this, you will have the complete playing material.

Discussions should include all members. Decisions should not be taken by any single person, and not settled by random procedures either.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to choose a different one.

Our Way 4

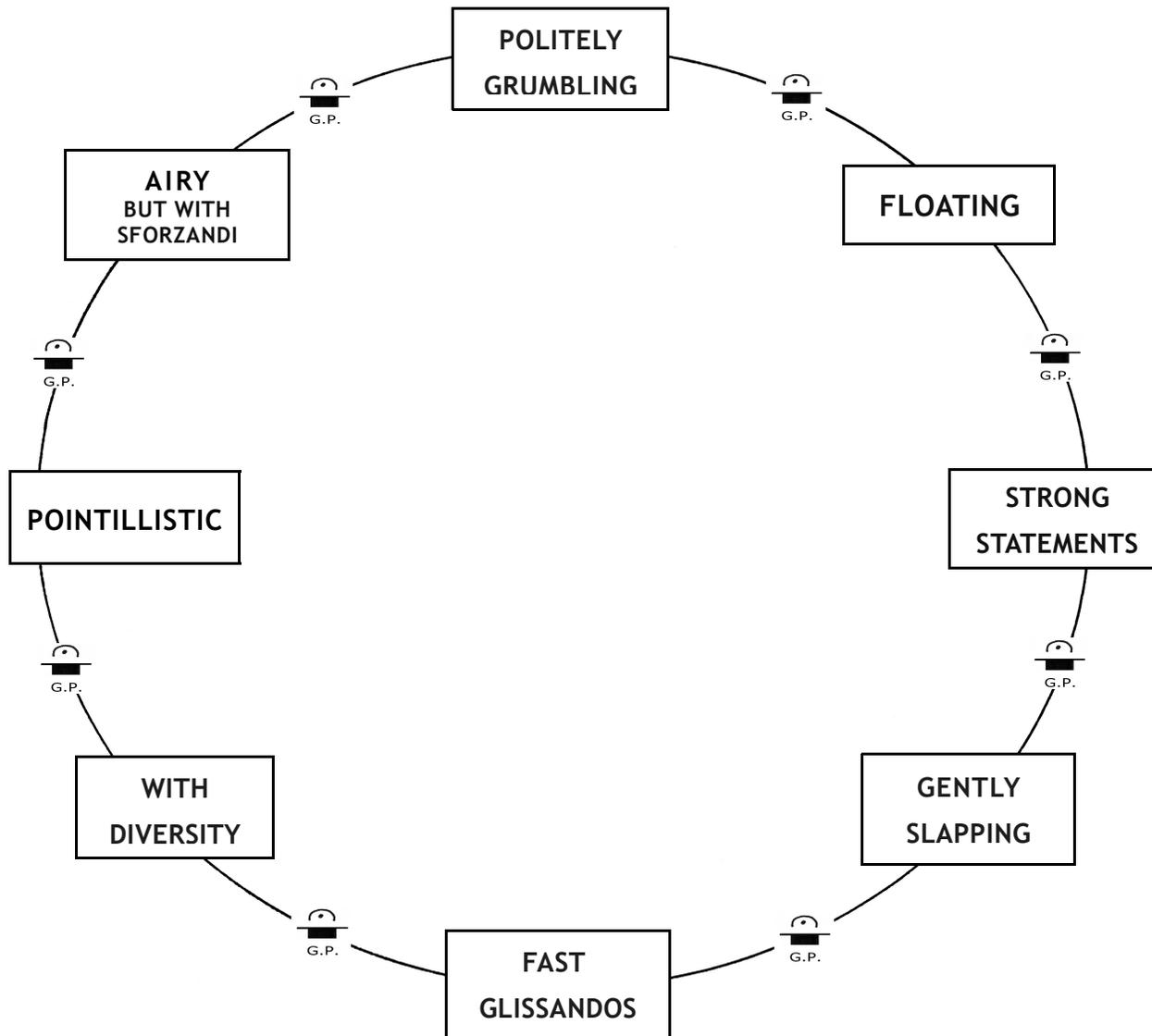
<p>VERY SHORT TO SHORT</p> <p>MAX. 25 SECONDS</p> <p><u>Polyrhythmic tone repetitions:</u> repeat individually one tone, but choose different ones and keep them throughout this section. Individual tempos should be different or very different – from extremely slow to extremely fast.</p>	 <p>G.P.</p>	<p>MEDIUM TO LONG</p> <p>1-3 MINUTES</p> <p><u>Start with swirling figures first 15 seconds</u> of this section – then proceed ad libitum.</p>	 <p>G.P.</p>
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In this piece, the composer wishes to leave the exact number of sections and their durations to the musicians' collective inspiration and negotiation together solely during playing, non-verbally and by ear. Individually, success with this depends upon initiative/holding back, listening to and empathising with each other and of course having an overview of the process till then.

Play the sequence above - repeat it until you approach the total duration, then seek an ending together. Proceed collectively from one section to the next - take your time for the general pauses. Seek to vary the sections - especially the “medium to long” one should have marked differences.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to choose a different one.

Our Way 5



In this piece, the composer wishes to leave the duration of sections and their number to the musicians' collective inspiration and negotiating together during playing.

Start anywhere in the wheel in an agreed upon box. Move collectively within it - clockwise or counter-clockwise according to previous agreement. Do not strive to play all elements but end with any one. Concentrate strongly on the characters stated so that sections can be clearly different. Make general pauses very clear - take your time to be sure all have perceived the silence and use eye-contact.

The special task here is to make durations of sections very different without previous agreement, solely by negotiating during playing! Very different may mean from 5-10 seconds to several minutes. Also that durations should not just consist of extremes, but of many degrees of duration. Success with this depends upon individual initiative/holding back, listening to each other and of course having an overview of the process till then - and a view to have fun with ever new combinations! A critical, individual initiative with persisting to play may be an idea if a really long section has not appeared after some time. Short and very short sections may be very funny, also for the audience. Remember, you will probably not play all the elements. - The more you practise the piece, the more you should be keen to avoid doing boxes the same way as previously.

When the fixed time-frame approaches, then try to match it approximately.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to choose a different one.

Our Way 6

Take a discussion about the cardinal question: why do you plan to play an open composition (and not a closed detail-fixed one or a free improvisation)?

Do you for instance wish for challenge... for diversity in experience or in the concert programme under preparation...for exploring the music...?

Once this is reasonably clear, choose 2 or more elements from the categories below, according to your liking. Focusing on convenience is just as legitimate as focusing on challenges and complexity. Put them together according to collective agreement.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a very good reason to choose a different one.

	STATIC	DYNAMIC	CONVERSATIONAL	INDETERMINATE
MAJESTIC	Very long tones and sounds - slowly change into less long ones or vice versa	With many short outbursts (like when frequently laughing and/or interjecting (like “yes”! “oh!” “hmmm” etc etc)	Think of a random letter (A-Z). Observe what is the first thing coming to your mind when you focus on that letter. Then play an interpretation of this for approx. 30 seconds, keeping this focus while listening to the others too. Then take 15 seconds of pause. Take a new letter - etc.	
QUIET AND VIBRATING	Prestissimo, pointillistic - slowly developing into activity with more pauses, getting gradually slower, and with more marked sounds. Finally few marked portamento sounds for a while	Like a ritual or a collective reading of a story. Solos in phrases of approx. one breath's duration which are passed on all the time. They may overlap, and the others may make accompaniments.	Take a newspaper or a book (maybe one with pictures). Play from what you notice on a random page for a while. Make a pause and wait for a cue in the total sound which seems the right moment to go on. Then find a new random page - etc.	

Our Way 7

LONG TONES PIANO
SOMETIMES WITH
SFORZANDO ATTACKS

LIKE A MOUNTAIN

LIGHT AND
ELEGANT

In this piece, the composer wishes to share experimentation with how durations may shape a piece.

This sequence of sections is fixed, but durations should be markedly different. Find out collectively how proportions should be, in minutes and half-minutes approximately. The discussion should involve all of you and no random procedures. Also think about how you would make transitions and end, non-verbally and by ear.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a good reason to choose a different one.

Our Way 8 for melody instruments / voices ad lib.

Hommage à Henrik Ehland Rasmussen

Solely
tone-repetitions

G.P.

Light, swirling, fast
and whimsy figures

In this piece, the composer wishes to share the decision of how much one can extend a section in which tension is built up.

By playing and by common discussion involving all of you, determine the approx. duration of each section - find out how long you can build up tension during the first one, until releasing it in the second one. Also give the second one a suitable duration for providing a clear impression of the change. Note that the first section is the less free: it should consist strictly of repetitions of the same tone - no trills, figures of any kind, noises, just steady repeating of a tone until you pause and shift to a different tone and speed. Take care that tones are reasonably clear and steady, not complex sounds that vary. - No such limitations affect the second element, other than they should fit the description. Other than this - the graphics are not meant to be followed closely along a timeline, just to give an impression of characteristic textures. The general pause means, however, a substantial collective silence.

Variation: instead of tone repetitions, you may start on an agreed on tone. Letting it grow ever so slowly, adding interferences after some time, after a considerable time maybe adding embellishments such as little figures - but keep the monotony and tension!

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a good reason to choose a different one. This might depend on your assessment of section durations.

Our Way 9

SLOWLY WEAVING alternating with SUDDEN, FAST EPISODES

Keep the dialogue between the two elements in the entire section. Alternate individually, but also listen and see whether something collective turns up from time to time. If one element has been the only one for some time, the possibility of the other turning up should be kept open.



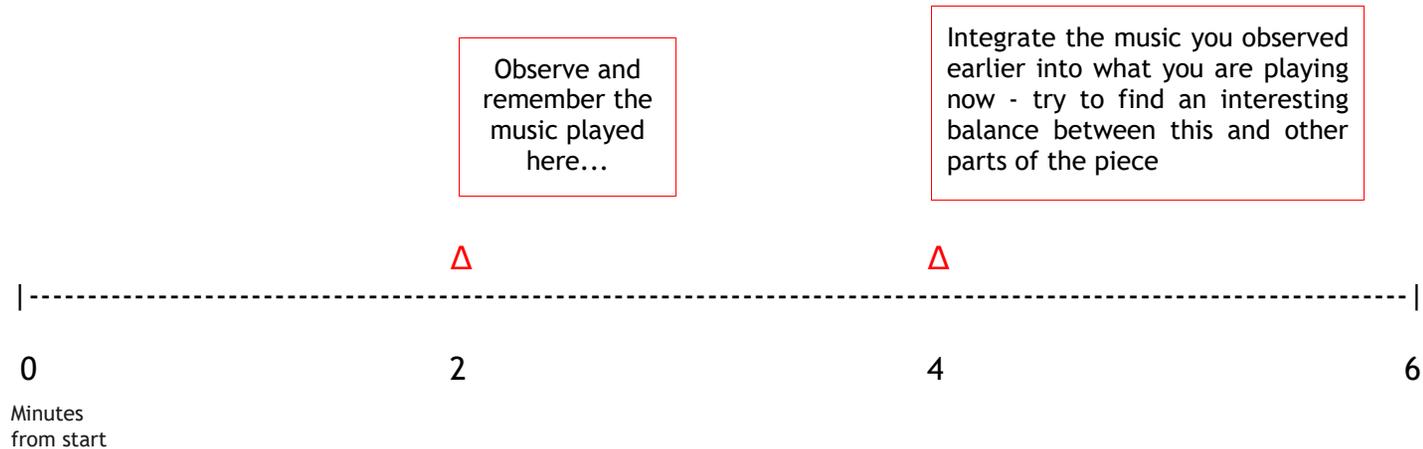
LIKE A FOGGY
LANDSCAPE ...
MOSTLY
STATIC...WITH
LIGHTS SLOWLY
APPEARING AND
DISAPPEARING



In this piece, the composer wishes to bring a collective composerly reflection into the improvised process of playing the piece: should there be one or two sections? This is solely to be determined along the way when playing out of your collective inspiration. No signs, use your ears only, and be careful about the general pause.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a good reason to choose a different one. An inclination, even collective, to extend the duration during playing is not a valid reason. It must be decided beforehand.

Our Way 10



In this piece, the composer wishes to let players experiment with a memorised sample from previous playing used as a recurring element which influences the structure of the piece.

At 4 minutes return to playing like you did at 2 minutes - you may develop it on, accentuate it, transform it, integrate it into other material, or just let be a small episode following your collective inspiration and liking. In all cases, observe what it does for the whole piece.

Duration: approx. 6 minutes unless you have a good reason to choose a different one. If you change the duration, change times for observation/integration accordingly.