

Andrew Poppy

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PLAYING THE PULSE

Commissioned by CoMA and artistic director Darragh Morgan
for the open score project 2008

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

For any group of instruments with a minimum of two if one is a keyboard.

All instruments should aim to **PLAY ALL OR MOST OF THE TIME**. The texture should be full, saturated with tone and throbbing with the continuous quaver movement.

The quaver pulse is fundamental and played at a **STRICT TEMPO**. Although there are no drums or percussion the ideal is the kind of rhythmic experience that comes from drum based ensembles. What this means is that the sense of pulse should be physically located in the sound and playing of the ensemble rather than visually in the conductor.

All players **PLAY FROM THE FULL SCORE AND CHOOSE** which lines to play. It is possible to move between different lines but only at the beginning of a repeat.

DOUBLE BAR LINES indicate a section to be repeated.

REGISTRATION IS SPECIFIC. Only play at the pitch written. Don't transpose. Use harmonics if necessary. However a possible 8ve above or below may sometimes be specified in the score.

SLUR FROM A QUAVER means A NOTE MAY BE SUSTAINED by sustaining instruments until the next quaver while others play staccato/macarto

In the chordal pulse parts single line instrument can choose any of the specified pitches. In large groups choose a pitch not being played by a neighbour. Strings may use a double stop with an open string if appropriate.

Although the details of orchestration are open the aim is to produce an **ENSEMBLE TEXTURE**. This means that each instrument needs to balance itself in relation to others so that each individual sound contributes to the single ensemble sound. For instance trumpet should be muted and keep to the lower register where there is a single violin.

PLAY WITH LOTS OF ENERGY and with a forceful articulation. Playing repeated quavers can be tiring but work thought this. In sustained sections Wind instruments play for the length of a breath with >p< on exit and entering.

The struggle to overcome fatigue can produce an excitement in performance. Play forcefully but also in a relaxed and slightly detached way.

SECTIONS START AND STOP ABRUPTLY. Don't anticipate the change. Although a slight feeling of accumulation should develop during each section. Rest/breath when necessary. Enter or exit at the beginning of a repeat. Never drop out in the last repeat of a section.

THE REPEATS ARE AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM. Sections can and possibly should be extended to achieve the right quality of emersion or saturation.

Some of the patterns flow across the minim pulse so that the repeated melodic shapes appear to be weighted differently. Unless specifically marked all quavers should be evenly weighted.

Repetition sets up its own gravity. New patterns and shapes emerge for the listener. This can be distracting for the performer. The music should dance, flow or should sit in a groove. Play without an expressive intention.

One method of rehearsal is to play each section in an endless loop. This has the possibility of settling the pulse and of players gradually learning (the implication of) the pattern. This can contribute to a lack of anxiety about the coming change. Take pleasure in the saturation of the moment.

IF A PLAYER GOES WRONG OR GETS OUT OF SYNCH they should wait for a double down beat to be given by the conductor at the beginning of each new section

The piano (acoustic or other wise) should play as much of the whole texture as possible in the first few rehearsals and in small ensembles. Unless indicated play with lots of pedal.

All instruments are welcome including electronic keyboards, pitched percussion and multiple pianos or keyboards.

A percussion part (two floor toms with soft beaters and tambourine) may be possible in certain circumstances. Get in touch with me to discuss this.

Amplification is possible.

Have some fun!

Andrew Poppy June 2008
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