Charlie Sdraulig

category

for solo tuba

2013-14

for and to Max Murray

Note

An individual in an environment, privately perceiving (or remembering perceiving) and then responding in sound;
an individual bearing the near imperceptible traces of perception and response; an individual constricting.

This is the first work is a series of pieces, collectively known as *individuals in environments*.

I would like to give a very special thanks to Max Murray for workshopping sounds and ideas over a few memorable days at Schloss Solitude in August 2013, as well as for his advice, support and encouragement throughout the compositional process.

category

Use the system for interaction on page three to navigate between the following sound categories:

A: Breath sound ⟷ B: Aeolian effect ⟷ C: Split tone ⟷ D: Squeak

Explanations of the sound categories

Always aim to use the **lowest possible breath pressure** required to produce the sounds.

A : Blow air voicelessly through a loose embouchure and without any suggestion of a vowel or consonant.
The instrument is used primarily for resonance.

B : Tighten/focus your embouchure and air stream very slightly, in order to just barely activate a pitch.
The sound of air should predominate. Always aim to produce this effect on the fifth partial unless otherwise indicated.
However, other partials or no pitched sounds at all may occur, due to the inherent instability of this method of sound production.

C : Aim to produce a split tone involving the fourth and fifth partials. At the lowest possible breath pressure, there should be a risk that the split tone will not occur. As a result, the sound itself may only occur intermittently. When transitioning to this sound category from B , a conventional pitch on the fifth partial may be momentarily produced before the split tone is activated.

D : Adopt an extremely tight embouchure, in order to produce a high pitched squeaking sound that is loosely tied to the harmonic series. Air should escape from your mouth in a manner comparable to air escaping from a balloon, when holding the neck of a balloon tightly between a thumb and an index finger. At the lowest possible breath pressure, there should be a risk that the squeaking sound will not occur. As a result, the sound itself may only occur intermittently. When transitioning to this sound category from C , emphasise the timbre of the split tone, not the harmonic series.

It is possible to conceive of each of these sound categories as being part of a single continuous trajectory that moves from a very loose embouchure to a very tight embouchure.

Transitions between the sound categories should always be as **smooth and as seamless as possible**.

When you are exactly half way between sound categories there should be an equal chance of both sound categories occurring, or an equal mixture of the sounds, if possible. When you are closer to one sound category as opposed to another, there should be a higher chance of the closer sound category occurring, or an unequal mixture of both sounds, in which the closer sound category predominates.

If you return to A or reach D , immediately transition back in the opposite direction, even if you have not chosen the appropriate 'change direction' response from the system for interaction.

Performance directions

Begin the piece at A . **Play constantly**, unless otherwise indicated.

Breaths in should always be very short and as quiet as possible.
Breaths out should always begin abruptly. Before aside ***3***, breaths out should be relatively long, consistent in length and end abruptly.

Do not depress any valves, unless otherwise indicated.

Ask and respond to the questions in the system for interaction as simultaneously and as often as possible.

After you start playing A , the first ambient sound(s) that you hear should determine your initial rate of change towards B .
It is likely that your initial rate of change will be extremely slow.

Ambient sounds are sounds that you are not responsible for creating.
Inevitably there will be sounds that you will not hear, for a variety of reasons. **Rely on your aural perception alone.**
Respond only to sounds that you hear or have heard. Respond to the slightest micro-variations in these sounds.

The audience should be as close to you as possible. Sounds from outside the performance space should be potentially audible.

When performing, **keep physical movement to a minimum**. Try to only perform the actions that are absolutely necessary for the realisation of the piece. The performance should have an unrelenting air of focus and concentration.

This piece must be **performed from memory**.

How many ambient sounds can you hear at present?

One

Is an element* within the ambient sound changing?
Yes → Incrementally alter your rate of change to match the rate of change of the ambient sound.
No → Do not consciously alter your sound in any way. At the next ambient sound, return to your previous rate of change, if appropriate.

or

More than One

Are elements within the ambient sounds changing at a relatively stable rate?

Yes
Are elements within the sounds changing at a similar rate?
Yes → Immediately alter your rate of change to match the rate of change of the ambient sounds as closely as possible.
No → Continue as before. If you are in the appropriate context, you may start an **aside**.

or

No
Are elements within the ambient sounds changing at an increasingly similar rate?
Yes → Continue as before.
No → Change direction (change the sound category/state that you are heading towards). Maintain your current rate of change.

or

None

→ Recall a sequence of ambient sounds that occurred earlier in the performance.
Try to recall both the ambient sounds themselves and the spaces in between them as accurately as possible.
Play back this sequence of sounds in your head.

How many ambient sounds can you hear at present in your recollection?

One

Are elements within both my sounds and the ambient sounds changing?
Yes → Incrementally alter your rate of change to match the rate of change of the ambient sound.
No → Do not consciously alter your sound in any way. At the next ambient sound, return to your previous rate of change, if appropriate.

or

More than One

Are elements within both my sounds and the ambient sounds changing at a relatively stable rate?

Yes
Are elements within both my sounds and the ambient sounds changing at a similar rate?
Yes → Immediately alter your rate of change to match the rate of change of the ambient sounds as closely as possible.
No → Continue as before. If you are in the appropriate context, you may start an **aside**.

or

No
Are elements within both my sounds and the ambient sounds changing at an increasingly similar rate?
Yes → Continue as before.
No → Change direction (change the sound category/state that you are heading towards). Maintain your current rate of change.

or

None

→ Continue as before. However, if you cannot recall any ambient sounds, stop playing.
Listen to a sequence of ambient sounds. Resume playing (play back this new sequence in your head, if necessary).

*Examples of elements: loudness (intensity), pitch, timbre, duration, location etc.

Asides

When you choose the appropriate response from the system for interaction in the indicated context, play the following asides.
Each aside must be **performed only once, in the specified order**. **Transitions** between states should always be as **smooth as possible**.
(If changes in direction during an aside lead you to return to an *initial state*, immediately transition back towards the *end state*,
even if you have not chosen the appropriate 'change direction' response from the system for interaction).

1. *Context*: B
On the highest partial possible, attempt to produce a relatively stable Aeolian effect.
Continue to use the system for interaction to transition between the four sound categories, as before.
When appropriate, continue to play the Aeolian effect in this fashion until you next reach C .
Revert to attempting to produce the Aeolian effect on the fifth partial thereafter.
You may then start aside 2 when appropriate.

2. *Context*: anywhere between A and B
On breaths out, alter the direction of your air inside the mouthpiece, in order to make your sound relatively bright or dull.
Avoid consciously changing your breath pressure. When brightening your sound, you may also direct some air outside of the mouthpiece.
Do not alter your position between the sound categories. However, use the system for interaction to transition between the following states:

- *Initial state*: unaltered sound.
- *Variable directions*: dull or brighten your sound. Maintaining your current rate of change, dull your sound at first.
- *End state*: the dullest possible sound.

Once you reach the indicated end state, play exactly as you were before you began this aside.

3. *Context*: anywhere between B and C
At the end of your next breath in, hold your breath for as long as possible.
From this point until the end of the piece, every breath out should be as long as humanly possible.
There should be a perceptable increase in breath length.
The latter part of each breath out should have a slightly strained and desperate character.
Continue to use the system for interaction to transition between the four sound categories, as before.

4. *Context*: A
Very slightly depress valve one, in order to very subtly dull your sound. Do not release valve one until indicated to do so.
Continue to use the system for interaction to transition between the four sound categories, as before.

5. *Context*: A
Move your mouth back and away from the mouthpiece. Avoid blowing any air into the instrument.
Without consciously changing your breath pressure, blow air voicelessly without any suggestion of a vowel or consonant.
Use the system for interaction to transition between the following states:

- *Initial state*: ⌓ a relaxed open mouth shape, as if saying 'ah'.
- *Variable directions*: tighten or widen your mouth shape.
  Maintaining your current rate of change, tighten your mouth shape at first.
- *End state*: ○ a constricted mouth shape; tight pursed lips.

Once you reach the indicated end state, play exactly as you were before you began this aside.

6. *Context*: D
Release valve one (i.e. no valves should be depressed).
Continue to use the system for interaction to transition between the four sound categories, as before.

7. *Context*: C
Employ half valves singly or in combination, in order to make your sound relatively bright or dull.
As much as possible, avoid changing the pitch content of your sound.
Do not alter your sound category. However, use the system for interaction to navigate between the following states:

- *Initial state*: the brightest possible sound.
- *Variable directions*: dull or brighten your sound. Maintaining your current rate of change, dull your sound at first.
- *End state*: the dullest possible sound.

Once you reach the indicated end state, immediately start aside 8.

8. Maintain the dullest possible sound from this point until the end of the piece.
Use the system for interaction to transition between the following categories/states:

- *Initial category/state*: C
- *Variable directions/path*: C ⟷ D ⟷ *End state*
  (after D , tighten your even embouchure further.
  At times, only unpredictable bursts of air should escape.)
- *End category/state*: a completely closed embouchure that does not allow any air to escape. Do not breath through your nose.

Once you reach the indicated end state, hold it for as long as possible. The piece ends when you cannot hold the end state a moment longer.

Appendix

Partly due to the inherent unpredictability of ambient sounds, many moments of indecision will occur when responding to questions from the system for interaction. At times, performing a realisation of this piece will be astoundingly difficult. However, recognise that it is ultimately necessary to make each decision as best as you can and live with the consequences. Keep on going. All responses will necessarily be highly subjective, the questions are worded in a manner that aims to explicitly take advantage of and encourage this subjectivity. Aim to listen as actively and as sensitively as possible. You may make 'mistakes', though if each and every response to a question is undertaken in an informed, thoughtful and critical manner it is *not possible* to perceive incorrectly. I have intentionally written the piece in a way that aims to provide a safe context for these moments of vulnerability and that does not allow others to judge the decisions you make in the piece in a negative light. Each performance will chart its own somewhat unique journey through the sounds and systems.

The following exercises may be helpful when preparing a performance of *category*. All of these exercises are merely initial suggestions that you may take or leave as you wish. Feel free to create further exercises in order to address specific issues that arise in the course of practice.

Sounds (always ensure that transitions between sound categories are as smooth and seamless as possible):

- Play through the four sound categories. Adopt a *fixed* rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through the four sound categories. Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through the four sound categories. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards). Adopt a *fixed* rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through the four sound categories. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards). Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through each aside on its own, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. Adopt a *fixed* rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through each aside on its own, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through each aside on its own, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. Adopt a *fixed* rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound state that you are heading towards).
- Play through each aside on its own, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound state that you are heading towards).
- Play through the four sound categories. In the appropriate context, play through the asides in order, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category/state that you are heading towards). Adopt a *fixed* rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through the four sound categories. In the appropriate context, play through the asides in order, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category/state that you are heading towards). Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.

It may be helpful to play the sounds at a higher breath pressure at first, so that the sound are more stably and consistently produced, before adopting the lowest possible breath pressure for more tenuously sounding results.

The system for interaction is in three major parts:

(1) In the '*One*' text box you are listening to an ambient sound.
(2) In the '*More than One*' text box you are listening to the relationship between ambient sounds.
(3) In the '*None*' text box you are listening to the relationship between your sound and your recollection of ambient sounds.

Listen to ambient sounds in an environment and practice the following exercises away from the instrument:

- Listen to how elements – loudness, pitch, timbre, duration, location etc. – change or do not change within ambient sounds.
- Listen to the rate of change of elements within ambient sounds.
- How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None?
- How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*One*' ask 'Is an element within the ambient sound changing?' and respond yes or no.
- How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*More than One*' ask 'Are elements within the ambient sounds changing at a relatively stable rate?' and respond yes or no.
- How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*More than One*' ask 'Are elements within the ambient sounds changing at a relatively stable rate?' and respond yes or no. Depending on your answer, ask the appropriate question from the system for interaction and respond yes or no.

(continued on the following page...)

Listen to ambient sounds in an environment and practice the following exercises with the instrument:

- Play through the four sound categories. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards). Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast. Listen to how elements – loudness, pitch, timbre, duration, location etc. – change or do not change within ambient sounds.
- Play through the four sound categories. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards). Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast. Listen to the rate of change of elements within ambient sounds.
- Play through the four sound categories. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards). Adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast. How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None?
- Play through the four sound categories. However, also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards). How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*One*' realise the appropriate text box from the system for interaction. Any incremental alteration of your rate of change should be extremely small and subtle. Otherwise, adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through the four sound categories. How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*More than One*' realise the appropriate text box from the system for interaction, but do not play any asides. Otherwise, adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through the four sound categories. How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*None*' realise the appropriate text box from the system for interaction, but do not play any asides (*note the subtle changes in wording in this text box*). Otherwise, adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast and also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards).
- Play through the four sound categories. How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*One*' or '*More than One*' realise the appropriate text box from the system for interaction, but do not play any asides. Otherwise, adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast and also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards).
- Play through the four sound categories. How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*One*' or '*None*' realise the appropriate text box from the system for interaction, but do not play any asides. Otherwise, adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast and also irregularly *change direction* (i.e. the sound category that you are heading towards).
- Play through the four sound categories. How many ambient sounds can you hear at present? One, More than One or None? When you answer '*More than One*' or '*None*' realise the appropriate text box from the system for interaction, but do not play any asides. Otherwise, adopt an *irregularly* altering rate of change ranging from glacially slow to extremely fast.
- Play through each aside on its own, beginning and ending at the specified initial and end states. Use the system for interaction to transition between these states.
- Practice the whole piece in its entirety.