

Workshop Silent Music

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Silent Music

Silent music is organised sound that in a sense denies player and instrument. It wants to be part of our aural environment. Some composers do incorporate ambient sounds into their work, as John Cage did.

Why would we want to play silent music? Because it blends easily with the sounds around us? Because it challenges our hearing? Do we think there is already too much loud music? Do we like to practice a different form of concentration? Could it be, that it stops our ego from wanting to be heard as loud as possible? That by doing so we become part of the environment?

In this workshop I want to explore some alternative ways of playing alone and together by improvising according to simple principles, such as imitation, synchronisation, transparency, pointillism, duration and dualism.

Instruments

Players may use their preferred instrument, but must be able to play **pppp**. This can be either accomplished by playing “normal” sounds or extended techniques, like wind sounds. Players may also use found objects to make soft sounds, like paper, plastic, wood, etc.

General performing principle

Play most of the time as soft as possible, like **pppp**. Sometimes **p** is allowed, according to the principles below.

Principle 1: Imitation

Imitation is a very simple principle: try to imitate another player, by imitating pitch, duration, colour/timbre, rhythm/pulse, It is not necessary to imitate all these parameters at the same time.

Improvisation: One player starts, another one joins by imitating the first. Then a third player starts to imitate the second one (while the first player perhaps stops for a while...). Etcetera. So, a player may start to play, stop playing, start again, overlap or not with another player, but always imitating the player that started just before.

Principle 2: Synchronisation

Synchronisation is about coming together in time sharing the same movement in time. It can be about pitch, rhythm/pulse, volume. Think about synchronous waves. After synchronisation comes divergence of movement.

Improvisation: 3 - 5 players start together, and during the improvisation 2 or more synchronise and diverge, then 2 or more possibly others synchronise and diverge, etc, or maybe they all synchronise and diverge.

Principle 3: Pointillism

Pointillism is about placing small points in space. Like a few raindrops falling from a tree. They attract some attention against a background of soft (organised) noise.

Improvisation: A number of players play soft sounds **pppp** and each of them is allowed to play a small **p** sound very occasionally. These might form some patterns or not.

Principle 4: Transparency

Transparency is more about listening than playing. You could say: Not playing is also playing. The idea is to really balance playing and not playing like 50% sound and 50% silence. Try to vary with sound duration, long, short.

Improvisation: A number of players play according to this principle. Any previous principle (1, 2, 3) may be used as well.

Principle 5: Duration

Duration is about sound length (not about transparency which belongs to the same family). In this case the focus is on really long sounds and really short sounds. Of course, the previous principles (1, 2, 3, 4) may be used as well.

Principle 6: Dualism

Dualism is about the relationship between the environment and you. How do you perceive your environment and how do you react (musically or sound wise)? Could the environment also react to you?

Improvisation A: Each of the players plays a short improvisation based on and related to their perceived environment using the principles. Duration: 1 to 1.5 minutes.

Improvisation B: Tutti, where every player reacts to the environment consisting of the other players. Please listen carefully. Use the principles. Stop when you feel you should stop.