

Guests – Performance Note

Guests is a piece for freely improvising trio and directed improvising octet. The octet generally generates a collective fourth element to the trio's three individual elements but can, if required by the director or directors, remain silent or lend up to three of its individuals to the trio to make a temporary freely improvising quartet, quintet or sextet. The broad specifications of the octet's activity are determined by the director(s), and they maintain a more or less 'objective' though creative role in complementing the trio. A director cues the octet as a whole and as individuals by means of prompt cards similar to those used by John Zorn in his game pieces. White cards numbered 1-6 are shown by a director to indicate which of the piece's six 'sound fields' might be active at any given time. Each octet member has an individually colour-coded 'sound sheet' listing vertically from 1 to 6 their contributing activities to the six sound fields, and letter 'J' indicating that they should join the trio improvisation. A director might also have the opportunity to deviate from the ongoing sound field by showing individuals numbered cards of their particular colour. So, for example, if sound field 3 is in progress, a director can introduce variation by indicating a navy blue card to the bassoonist asking them to introduce their activity number 5, intermittent short/medium notes. A director can also use the coloured cards to cue discrete individual activities. So, for example, a yellow 'J' card might be shown indicating that the flute should join the trio improvisation and, at the same time, a green '6' card indicating that the clarinet should play 'busy pianissimo staccato notes'.

Players should not feel compelled to react immediately on being shown a card but should enter and proceed as they see fit. The director therefore acts as an improviser themselves with the range of activities catalogued in the score and embodied in the octet at their disposal. The players of the octet are their means of joining the trio as part of the process of improvisation.

The opportunity exists, especially if the players are familiar with one another's work and are all improvisers, for the circulation of roles whereby at a different playing the foreground trio would become part of the octet and three octet members would assume the leading role of trio. The complementary octet material is necessarily flexible and leaves considerable scope for creativity on the part of the musicians in their interactive, complementing role. Whichever sound field is in play at a given time has the textural potential to be either a background or foreground function, and there is considerable freedom and scope within this ambit. Likewise, individual elements of the sound fields introduced by the director will involve choices on the part of the individual concerned that will hopefully be sympathetic (but not obligatorily so) to the trio's activity. The members of the octet therefore have three considerations at any given time: cues given by the director; the need to integrate within the sound field; the need to blend with the trio, this being particularly important if given an individual cue with coloured number or J cards. The conventional reliance on the conductor as a guide through predetermined structures is therefore modified to enable an increased degree of self reliance on the part of the octet performers in listening to the trio and making and acting on judgements as to how to integrate with them.

The director's role therefore involves a more direct creative input than the strictly interpretative one usually called for by traditionally scored pieces. This role is indeed an improvisational one that should involve interaction with the trio by means of the octet and its individual players. This piece does not call for interpretation but for the active involvement of the director in the creative process. The octet's creative and listening skills are therefore called upon to a high degree to make the piece work effectively.

Everyone involved in a performance is therefore required to make creative judgements and decisions at different levels.

- (i) The **improvising trio** will not only have each other's material as a basis for continuity but also the shifting colours of the sound fields and individual contributions of the octet brought into play by the conductor. Their activity is determined by one another and the external material introduced by director and octet.
- (ii) The **octet's** material will be determined by which facets of the score are introduced by the director. However, although bound by the activities of the specific sound fields and their individual sound sheets, a huge range of choice as to pitch, timbral and rhythmic material exists, demanding creative initiative and integrity. Their activity is determined by the director's choices and, to a lesser extent, by the activity of the trio.
- (iii) The **director's** creative role is to bring into play the materials charted in the score by means of the octet. The director will make judgements as to which sound fields to introduce and which individuals to call upon to introduce sounds extraneous to them. As mentioned above, there is also the option of selecting an individuals to join the trio while the remainder of the octet rest. The director's activity is determined by the octet's responses and the directions taken by the trio.