

Ore

Percussion duo with speaking voices

Music by Wally Gunn, March 2016 – March 2018 Text by Maria Zajkowski, February 2016 – January 2018

Commissioned by the New Works Project and consortium members

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Tom and Debbie Shuster

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Melanie Voytovich and the New Works Project

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Instrumentation

The 'kit'

The kick drum should be shared, and fitted with a pedal beater on each side. The heads of the kick drum should be regular kick drumheads; ie, a beater head on one side and a resonant head on the other. The beater head should be punchy and staccato, while the resonant head should have a longer decay. The beater head should be played by Percussion 1, and the resonant head played by Percussion 2.

The bongos should also be shared. Ideally, a single bongo set should be mounted on a stand pipe that will clamp into the kick drum's rack mount fitting, with Percussion 1 playing the high bongo from one side and Percussion 2 playing the low bongo from the other. The bongos should be tuned a minor 3rd apart.

On the traps table

Each performer should have a metal pipe, a woodblock, an upturned small cymbal, and a small piece of scrap tin or sheet metal.

The metal pipe can be either resonant bell–like aluminium, or rusty industrial iron; so long as it is loud, rather harsh, distinctly metallic, and has a definite pitch. The pitches should be chosen to fit in with this schema:

P1 m3 P5 m7

low bongo high bongo low pipe high pipe

(The pipes may sound better if displaced to the octave above the bongos.)

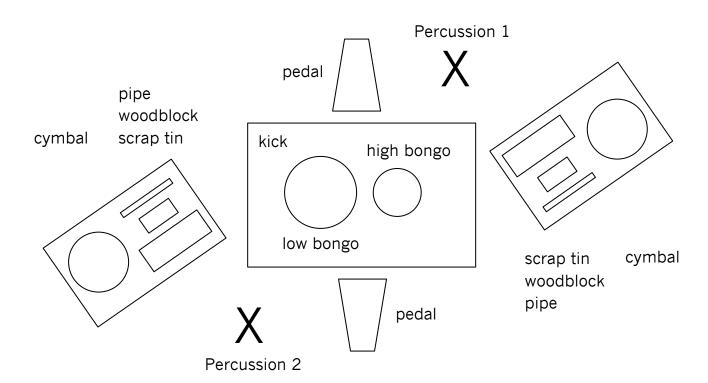
Woodblocks can be treated as either pitched or unpitched, according to performer tastes. If treated as pitched, the woodblocks should be a minor 3rd apart, and be the same pitches as the pipes, or the same pitches as the bongos.

The cymbals can be small china cymbals, upturned and balanced on foam so they are not muted, allowing for a few seconds of hissing decay after being struck.

The scrap tin could be a single small square of roofing tin (or similar material), or be a sandwich of a couple of pieces. In workshops of the piece, performers hit the flat of metal music stands, which gave a very satisfying crack. Experiment to see which gives the best, sound while allowing for clarity of the rhythmic intent.

The best mallets to use for this piece seem to be glockenspiel mallets wrapped with a very thin layer of adhesive moleskin.

Setup



Performance notes

In the voice parts, make the distinction between timbre and dynamics. The timbres vary from whispering to speaking to shouting; while dynamics range from soft to loud. In other words, there are moments when the performers are asked to speak quietly, and to whisper loudly; in these cases, the whisper should be louder than the speaking.

The words should be rendered in an understated manner, like thoughts or meditations, as if they are not-quite-formed ideas just occuring to the performer in the moment. In the score, the words are set very precisely to eighth-note rhythms. These rhythms should be used as a guide, and not followed rigidly. Avoid the instinctive tendency to speak the rhythms in a way that helps with counting and keeping time, as one might when learning the piece. Instead, try to cultivate a natural, speech-like flow to the syllables, still lightly rhythmic, that lilts above and beside the grid of percussive rhythms that drives the piece.

The piece has been written so that the speaking voice parts are never in competition with the percussion parts. While it might be possible to perform the piece without amplifying the voices, it is highly recommended that the voices be lightly amplified. Ideally, the performers should be fitted with headset mics. Amplifying the voices allows the performers to render a relaxed, intimate tone for the whispering and speaking, which is desired. Projecting the voice without amplification can result in a forced tone. If amplification is not possible, strive to maintain a relaxed and intimate tone.

The dynamics of the percussion in the piece most often function as a way to delineate layers and (instrumental) voices. For example, the bongo left hand / unaccented part should always be a very quiet pulse, while the right hand / accented part should always be very loud strikes; the greater the contrast between these dynamics, the more the single bongo skin will seem like two instruments, and thus, two voices. At its most dense, the piece requires each percussion part to perform a 5-voice texture.

Ore

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Percussion Key

