hugo bell

suspended animation

for open scored ensemble (2018)

Concept

The idea behind this piece is to explore the relationship between horizontal and vertical harmony by finding ways of superimposing an existing melody on top of itself. The performers will use a pre-existing melody to construct their own parts which can either be prepared in advance, or formulated in real-time.

Preparation

Find a pre-existing melody to use as the material for the piece. Melodies which are 'chorale-like', or feature noticeable modulations are especially effective. Choose a melody which meets the following criteria:

- An even rhythm which consists of mostly one note value
- A balanced phrase structure
- A melody which moves mostly in stepwise motion
- A melody in which the **first 4 pitches are all different** – this is especially important

Parts

The piece is comprised of a **Fundamental Part** which is to be performed by one player, and **Contrapuntal Parts** which are to be performed by multiple players.

Fundamental Part

- The Fundamental Part is an **unaltered** performance of the **pre-existing melody**.
- This part will also act as a **timekeeper** to the rest of the ensemble.

Contrapuntal Parts

- Take the **first 4 pitches** of the pre-existing melody and label them **1, 2, 3, 4**.
- Arrange the numbered pitches as shown below to create two new **8 note** melodies:

Melodic Pattern A (odd-numbered parts, see next table):	1	2	3	4	3	2	1	4
Melodic Pattern B (even-numbered parts, see next table):	1	4	1	2	3	4	3	2

- Each note will be **sustained** for a certain number of beats, depending on which part you are playing.
- There should be **one performer per part**, and the parts should be organised as follows:

Part	Melodic Pattern	Duration per note	*Example Note Value when ♩ = 1 beat*
1	Pattern A	3 beats	𝅗𝅥.
2	Pattern B	5 beats	𝅝 ♩
3	Pattern A	7 beats	𝅝. ♩
4	Pattern B	9 beats	𝅜 ♩
5	Pattern A	11 beats	𝅜 𝅗𝅥.
6	Pattern B	13 beats	𝅜. ♩

- Parts should be assigned to the available instruments based on their **sustaining** capabilities. Instruments that are only able to sustain a pitch for a **short duration** should play the 1st or 2nd part, whilst instruments that are able to sustain a pitch for a **long duration** should play 5th or 6th part.
- Once the 8 note melody has been played **once**, the performer should proceed to the **next 4 notes** of the original melody and apply the same procedures to create a **new 8 note melody**.
- These steps should be **repeated** for the duration of the piece.

It is possible to create more than 6 parts if desired. Melodic patterns should alternate between A and B in every other part, and each new part should be 2 beats longer than the previous part, e.g. Part 7 would be Pattern A (15 beats), Part 8 would be Pattern B (17 beats).

Performance Directions

- All instruments must play **in time** with each other throughout.
- All players must begin at the same time on the **first note** of the pre-existing melody, regardless of whether it falls on a downbeat or not.
- The **duration** of the piece is at the discretion of the performers. If a part has been **completed** it should be repeated until the piece ends.
- The piece should preferably finish at a point when the Fundamental Part reaches the **end of a phrase**. All other instruments should **stop** playing once the Fundamental Part has finished.
- **Tempo** is at the discretion of the performers, but a **slower** tempo is advisable.
- **Dynamics** are at the discretion of the performers, but a **softer** dynamic is more effective at a slower tempo.
- All parts should have **equal prominence** in the texture.
- Performers can choose which **octave** they want to play their part in, however the piece is most effective when the range of the ensemble is relatively **narrow**, and above **middle C** (concert pitch).
- **Transposing instruments** will need to transpose accordingly.