

Christopher Beardsley

Abstract

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Abstract was first performed by the Contemporary Music for Amateurs South West Group at the Liverpool Tate Gallery in October 2002

The initial inspiration for *Abstract* was Ben Nicholson's *Painting 1932*. Whilst looking at the painting the idea came to me that it would be interesting to translate the way a painting is viewed to music. So, in the same way that the eyes move over the surface of a painting, resting here and there to study some detail, it is intended that the performer's eyes should do the same with the written music. Thus, in each section the phrases can be played in any order and the "choice" of which phrase to play is simply a matter of which one the performer's eyes falls upon.

Instructions to performers

To ease performance the score contains transpositions for C, B flat, E flat, F and bass clef instruments. Phrases in any section can be played an octave higher or lower at the discretion of the performers. Ideally, *Abstract* should be performed by four players (or groups) on any melodic instrument. The minimum number of players (or groups) is two, whilst the maximum is determined only by practicality.

1. The piece begins with each player choosing a note from the four semibreves shown at the head of section one. The length of this note is indeterminate and entirely at the discretion of each player.
2. Whilst playing the long note the players should let their eyes fall at random onto a phrase within the section which should then be played using the tempo and dynamic indicated at the head of the section.
3. Within each phrase *crescendos* and *diminuendos* may be added to colour it (except in sections where a specific dynamic is shown).
4. After playing each phrase another long note (or indeed the same one) should be played from the four shown and another phrase chosen.
5. Not all the phrases in each section have to be played and some may be played more than once.
6. Each section should be performed for at least thirty seconds, at which point the "leader" or conductor of the ensemble should signal a cessation and the whole ensemble should move to the next section. Any phrase being played at the signal should be finished before moving on.
7. Section two should be performed in a similar manner to section one.
8. Sections three and five contain no long notes and therefore the players should move between phrases at random. As before, after at least thirty seconds, the "leader" should signal a cessation and the ensemble should move to the next section.
9. Section four is the only one where all the players **must** play together. Each chord should be played in turn at the tempo and dynamic indicated, with the players deciding which of the four notes to play. (It may occur, therefore, that not all four notes are actually played). Once all the chords have been played the section can be repeated, if felt necessary. The end point of this section should be decided and indicated by the ensemble "leader".
10. Once section five has concluded the whole process can, if required, begin again. Sections can then be played **in any order**, as determined by the "leader".
11. **The piece should finish with section five.** If available, each player should gradually transfer to untuned percussion during the final play through of the section. The rhythms shown in each phrase should then be performed. During this process, and after, the dynamic level should gradually rise to very loud. The ending should be abrupt when signalled by the "leader". NB If percussion instruments are not available, clapping, chanting (not singing), stamping, tapping of instruments, music stands etc. can be substituted.

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1. (Line) Tempo = Slow. Dynamic never above *p*

Musical score for the first system, showing four staves (C, Bb, F, Eb) with whole notes and flats.

Musical score for the second system, showing four staves (C, Bb, F, Eb) with eighth notes and triplets.

Musical score for the third system, showing four staves (C, Bb, F, Eb) with eighth notes and triplets.

Musical score for the fourth system, showing four staves (C, Bb, F, Eb) with eighth notes, triplets, and quintuplets.

3. (*Daub*) Tempo = Faster than section 1, slower than section 2.

Dynamic in the range *p* to *f*

Musical score for section 3, 'Daub'. The score is divided into three groups by double bar lines. Each group contains staves for instruments C, Bb, F, Eb, and Bass. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

4. (*Wash*) Tempo = Very slow. Dynamic always *pp*

Musical score for section 4, 'Wash'. The score consists of a single system of chords for instruments C, Bb, F, Eb, and Bass. Each staff ends with the instruction 'Repeat ad lib'.

The musical score is organized into four systems, each containing five staves for instruments C, Bb, F, Eb, and Bass. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. The first system features a crescendo from *p* to *f*. The second system features a decrescendo from *f* to *p*. The third system is marked *sempre p*. The fourth system features a crescendo from *p* to *f*. The score concludes with a *sempre f* marking.